II. LITERATURE REVIEW: THE INTERSECTION OF CULTURE, POWER AND LANGUAGE IN THE FORMATION OF MEANING

INTRODUCTION

By the 1980's a number of organizational theorists, dissatisfied with previous attempts to explain or predict what we did in organizations and why we did it, began to focus on culture and symbolism. No longer satisfied with describing what organizations were and what happened within them, theorists moved from describing organizations as structures—as things or fixed entities—to describing organizations as processes—from organizations to organizing, as one theorist described it. They took different approaches, drawing variously on positivist, interpretive, and critical theories within the wider rubric of modernism or, much more recently and still peripherally, postmodernist theory to buttress their arguments about why this area should be studied and how it should be understood. Over the course of the decade they segued from a focus on culture as a variable in organizations; to organizations as cultures; to the intersection of culture and power in the creation and recreation of organizational reality; to a refocusing on organizational culture as organizational symbolism, and particularly focusing on language; to organizational culture as equivalent to organizational ideology; to organizations as strategies of discourse, the nexus of power and knowledge expressed in language. The debate ultimately concerns questions of meaning, and centers on whether meaning is consensual or whether it is contested; whether it is the reflection of the underlying structure or whether meaning forms structure; whether meaning resides in the exchange of information and is therefore fixed or whether it is constructed by human actors, mediated by power and therefore in a constant state of flux; whether meaning reflects an objective reality or creates the only reality we can know.

All of this, of course, is important to the study of the organizational newcomer—how are we as theorists to understand how we come to know? Are organizations sets of rules and roles which can be communicated—taught to and learned by—the neophyte as empty vessel, or are we all inextricably involved in the creation of conflicting realities, or discourses as Foucault would have it, within which not only our organizations but we ourselves are created? Within these two statements lie very different ideas about the self, about organizations, about power and about language, with very different consequences for how we might understand the organizational newcomer.

OVERVIEW

In their study of organizations Britan and Cohen (1980) advocate the open systems approach adopted in the 1970s as more conducive to the cultural study of organizations than the closed system approach characteristic of the Weberian bureaucracy, but the positivism and determinism of the open systems approach is criticized by Kilduff (1986) and Pettigrew (1985), criticisms which also surface in an article by Smircich (1983) on organizational culture. Smircich (1983) points out that the issue is whether culture can be understood as a manipulatable variable or as a metaphor for organization itself—prefiguring the later emphasis on symbolism and on language—and how the latter approach can best be understood in terms of the various streams in anthropological theory as transposed to organizations. In a later article Meyerson and Martin (1987) look at culture as it is understood by a number of theorists and point out the differences between those who deem culture as something that is shared, monolithic, and thus manipulatable, and those who understand culture in the organization as something that is much more ambiguous: not as seamless, a shared

understanding, but as a web characterized by groups who come together and split apart according to the issues confronted.[1]

Riley (1983) and Pettigrew (1985) point out that if organizational theory is going to be more than a functionalist, positivist apology for management, it must focus on the intersection of culture and politics—on power—in organizational theory. Drawing on Anthony Giddens' theory of structuration, Ranson, Hinings and Greenwood (1980) focus more sharply on power and symbolism. They examine the intersection of power and "the provinces of meaning", with its implicit focus on language in the creation of organizational reality, as an "order of domination", harking back to Weber's notion of the organization as an iron cage. This emphasis on language as "a guided interpretation of reality" is explored from a critical communications perspective by Kersten (1987) and Deetz (1987). Alvesson (1987), like Burawoy (1979) and Thompson (1989), draws heavily on the Marxist humanism of Habermas and Marcuse and emphasizes that worker consciousness and workers' understanding of the organization—of the culture—must be located materially, in the actual conditions of work, and adds a long explication of ideology as understood within this perspective. Mumby (1988), who draws on both Habermas and Giddens, takes this intersection of meaning and power in the construction of ideology still further, equating organizational symbolism or ideology with organizational culture. In Mumby's conceptualization ideology rather than culture becomes the metaphor for organizations, but ideology still acts to deform culture, and the Marxist ideal of an undeformed culture or reality remains. Clegg (1989) rejects the traces of Marxist humanism which underscore Mumby's concept of ideology and cultural deformation, instead formulating his arguments regarding language and power within the anti-Enlightenment critique of postmodernism, in particular the poststructuralism of

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[1]However, in a later article by Barley et al (1988) in ASQ the practitioners' view of culture as a manipulatable variable is deemed more influential in the academic journals than culture as a metaphor for organizations.

Foucault. He maintains that it is the nexus of power and knowledge expressed in

language, or strategies of discursive relations in poststructuralist terms, which are our

organizations. As newcomers what we come to know are these strategies of discursive

relations, this nexus of power and knowledge within which we are constituted and which

constitute what we know. It is this progressive privileging of language in the study of

culture intersected by power which I will focus on in this review of the literature.

ORGANIZATIONS AS CULTURES

As anthropologists studying formal organizations, Britan and Cohen (1980) trace

our understanding of organizations since Weber and locate the possibility for an

anthropological approach, or a focus on culture, to the study of organizations in the

open systems theory of the 1970's. They point out that organizations in Weber's terms

were understood as closed systems: as logical, rational, efficient, hierarchical, and as

focused on formal structure and on the goals of rationality, efficiency and effectiveness.

The informal structure was equated with the irrational, and it wasn't until the 1970s

ushered in the open systems approach[2] which attempted to understand organizations

more dynamically and less as a collection of formal rules, that an anthropological

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[2]Morgan and Smircich (1980) describe open systems theory in Darwinian terms, where survival of the fittest and power operating as a form of exchange characterize the social polity. They point out that in open systems theory "reality is seen as a concrete process. The social world is an evolving process, concrete in nature, but ever changing in detailed form. Everything interacts with everything else and it is extremely difficult to find determinate causal relationships between constituent processes. At best, the world expresses itself in terms of general and contingent relationships between its more stable and clear cut elements. The situation is fluid and creates opportunities for those with appropriate ability to mold and exploit relationships in accordance with their interests. The world is in part what one makes of it: a struggle between various influences each attempting to move toward achievement of desired ends. Human beings . . . influence and are influenced by their context or environment. The process of exchange which operates is essentially a competitive one, the individual seeking to interpret and exploit the environment to satisfy important needs and hence survive. Relationships between individuals and environment express a pattern of activity necessary for survival and well-being of the individual" (p. 491).

approach which would "consider two related domains of social actions that go far beyond mere formal rules: the informal social system and the relations between an organization and its environment" (p. 14), was possible.

Although Britan and Cohen criticize organizational theory prior to this development of the open systems approach for its inability to deal adequately with the informal structure of the organization as well as its environment, they take for granted the separation of formal structure and informal structure within the organization and the separation of the organization from the environment. Both Kilduff (1986) and Pettigrew (1985) criticize the determinism of the open systems approach and its positivism and functionalism, and maintain that culture in the study of organizations is best understood either interpretively, to Kilduff, or critically, to Pettigrew. Kilduff points out that although "the organization as open system has been the dominant model in the field of organizational studies since Thompson's 1967 influential synthesis of competing theories" (p. 159), that model has been challenged by those who argue that "the field must move beyond the constraints imposed by the mechanical and organism metaphors underlying open systems theory . . . [to] a cultural model of organization emphasizing the use of language and the creation of shared meanings" (p. 159). However, in a review of *Organizational Symbolism* (Pondy et al., 1983), Kilduff notes that the majority of the essays included in the book are still functionalist in orientation: they "focus squarely on the system-maintaining functions that symbols can perform in organizational settings" (p. 162).

This issue of how culture is to be understood, as a manipulatable variable or as a metaphor, is directly addressed in the introduction to a special issue on organizational culture in *Administrative Science Quarterly* (1983). Jelinek, Smircich and Hirsch emphasize that culture should be understood as a metaphor for the dynamic process of organizing, rather than for the static concept of organization. They stress the dynamic nature of culture, stating that "culture—another word for social reality—is both product

and process, the shaper of human interaction and the outcome of it, continually created and recreated by people's ongoing interactions" (p. 331). To them, culture as a metaphor "focuses our attention primarily on the processes and artifacts of organizational sense-making" (p. 337)[3]. We are all intimately involved, then, in the symbolic construction of our reality—of our culture, in other words—a theoretical move which brings both symbolism and process firmly to the forefront.

Smircich's article in the same issue of *Administrative Science Quarterly* (1983) is valuable for its clarification of the various ways that culture is understood theoretically, first in anthropology and then as that theoretical understanding is applied to organizational theory. In her analysis she draws parallels between five areas in anthropology and in organizational theory: between Malinowski's functionalism and classical management theory, where cultures and organizations are viewed as

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[3]This emphasis on organizational sense-making builds on earlier works, in particular Harold Garfinkel's (1967) focus on skillful accomplishment and Karl Weick's (1979) on enactment. As Gareth Morgan (1986) points out, "shared meaning, shared understanding and shared sensemaking are all different ways of describing culture". He then asks if culture is to be understood as "rule following or enactment" (p. 128)? To Harold Garfinkel, "the most routine and taken-for granted aspects of social reality are in fact skillful accomplishment . . . . We can say that the nature of culture is found in its social norms and customs, and that if one adheres to these rules of behavior one will be successful in constructing an appropriate social reality" (p. 128-129). However, as Morgan notes, culture is more than rule following--how do we know which rule to follow?--and Weick's theory of enactment attempts to answer that question. To Weick "we implicitly make many decisions and assumptions about a situation before any norm or rule is applied. Many of these assumptions and decisions will be made quite unconsciously, as a result of our taken for granted knowledge, so that action appears quite spontaneous. And in most circumstances, the sense-making process or justification for action will occur only if the behavior is challenged". This process by "which we shape and structure our realities" is a "process of enactment", where "we take an active role in bringing our realities into being through various interpretive schemes" that we employ in order to make sense of our world (p. 130). By emphasizing that "we accomplish or enact the reality of our everyday world" we then understand culture not as a static variable, as a possession that an organization has, but as "an ongoing, proactive process of reality construction . . . . an active, living phenomenon through which people create and recreate the worlds in which they live". Organizations, then, are in essence "socially constructed realities that rest as much in the hearts and minds of their members as they do in concrete sets of rules and relations" (p. 131).

instruments which fulfill human needs; between structural functionalism in anthropology and contingency theory where cultures or organizations are considered adaptive; between shared cognitions and shared knowledge, reflected in ethnoscience in anthropology and in cognitive organizational theory; between symbolic anthropology and symbolic organizational theory, where cultures and organizations are understood in terms of shared symbols and meanings and where she herself stands, and finally, between the structuralism of the anthropologist Levi-Strauss and transformational organizational theory, both of which emphasize respectively that culture and organizations are manifestations of unconscious processes (p. 342).

Smircich stresses that her research focuses on uncovering knowledge structures, or those rules and regulations which make possible working together, and that therefore in symbolic anthropology and its counterpart in symbolic organizational theory, the research task is to interpret "the 'themes' of culture—those postulates or understandings declared or implicit, tacitly approved or openly prompted, that orient and stimulate social activity" (p. 350). However, Smircich's—and others'—emphasis on the notion of culture as shared meanings has been criticized from a number of perspectives. These criticisms do not focus on the cultural metaphor itself but on the notion of consensus and the implication for manipulation, the lack of ambiguity, and more pointedly, an insufficient regard for power, a view underlined most recently by van Wolferen (1990) in his study of Japan's political industrial system. Donnellen et al. (1986) have stated that Louis (1980), Van Maanen (1983), Pfeffer (1981), Smircich and Morgan (1982) and Smircich (1983) conceptualize organizations "as systems of shared meanings" in which "organizational members act in a co-ordinated fashion as a result of sharing a common set of meanings or interpretations of their joint experience (1986, p. 43), leading to charges that this idea of a shared meaning can be used manipulatively by management. The "cultural engineering" approach of Peters and Waterman (1982), Sathe (1982) and Kilman (1982) provokes Berg (1985, p. 282) to

note that the holistic approach which culture promises is undermined by a reductionist emphasis on basic values, shared understandings and norms. Similarly, Kilduff (1986) criticizes Pfeffer for viewing with equanimity "management's manipulation of symbols to increase employee tractability" (p. 161). Alvesson (1987) maintains that Peters and Waterman, like Argyris and McGregor, far from challenging "technological rationality . . . on the contrary . . . reinforce it". Despite their humanistically oriented organization theory, it is "the raising of organization and business efficiency which constitutes the indisputable guiding rule" of their work (p. 234). Meyerson and Martin (1987) examine this notion of shared meaning, emphasizing that although they share the idea of culture as metaphor, they are skeptical of its monolithic and consensual sense. They explore this notion of consensus and instead suggest ambiguity and a dialectical relationship better characterize culture within organizations, pointing out that "all cultural members, not just leaders, inevitably and constantly change and are changed by the cultures they live in" (p. 642), and that culture is a web of negotiated interests rather than a seamless cloth of shared meanings.

CULTURE AND POWER

What is ambiguity and negotiation in the structural contingency framework of Meyerson and Martin (1987) becomes power in Pettigrew's (1985) radical structuralist analysis of culture and power in the study of organizations. His emphasis on the intersection of culture and power is based on his criticism of much of organization theory developed since Weber: for its willingness to adopt the perspective of management, "for its simple-minded positivism where organizational life ends up being 'analysed, paralysed and reduced to a series of quantifiable variables' . . . [for] the crude attempts to develop organizational laws, [and for] the unduly deterministic nature of structural contingency theorists" (1985, p. 28). Instead, Pettigrew calls for an historical, contextual and processual inquiry into organizational dynamics where culture

and the human actor take pride of place rather than the static account characteristic of systems analysis. This interest in exploring the dynamic rather than static nature of organizations and his rejection of positivism and functionalism in favour of an historical, contextual and processual inquiry likewise leads Pettigrew to emphasize the importance of power, politics and culture in understanding organizations. Drawing on Weber's concept of legitimacy, Pettigrew explains that:

> The acts and processes associated with politics as the management of meaning represent conceptually the overlap between a concern with the political and cultural analysis of organizations. A central concept linking political and cultural analysis is legitimacy. The management of meaning refers to a process of symbol construction and value use designed both to create legitimacy for one's actions, ideas and demands, and to delegitimise the demands of one's opponents. Key concepts for analysing these processes of legitimisation and delegitimisation are symbolism, language, belief and myth. (p. 44)

Pettigrew goes on to point out that it is these concepts which help us to make sense of organizational life, which allow us to understand and thus to act upon a reality which we have created. But rather than leave this conceptualization at the level of a collectively agreed upon culture, Pettigrew argues that if "this unitary concept" is to be given "analytical bite", power must be added in order to fully understand the role of culture and organizations (p. 44).

ORGANIZATIONS AS THE SYMBOLIC CONSTRUCTION OF REALITY: CULTURE, POWER AND LANGUAGE

In an article that more pointedly makes the link between power and culture in the symbolic creation of reality, Riley (1983) explores the nature of the power structures in the organization and illuminates a dialectic often overlooked between culture and

organizational structure, or "the product and process of organizational members' sense making through their ongoing interactions" (p. 333). To Riley, these "'Master structures' [sic], the organization's political themes and images that embody deeper layers of meaning and norms for member behavior, are reflected in individual descriptions. Structure and symbols are seen as both the medium of communication and the outcome of interaction" (p. 333). Riley goes on to explain that structuration—"the process by which the power structure is created"—is linked to the process of culturation described by Berger and Luckmann (1967). These structures are "created through images and the symbolic order", and "express the commitments of the past, institutionalized in power arrangements, and persist into the present by affecting people's behavior. People's behavior, so structured and constrained, recreates the structures that in turn guide thought. Exactly so is culture created, and so does it shape the processes of its subsequent recreation" (p. 334).

Ranson, Greenwood and Hinings (1980) prefigure Riley's approach in their analysis of power and culture, drawing heavily on Anthony Giddens' (1979) theory of structuration and his attempt to reconcile the dualism of agency and structure in the creation and recreation of social reality. Concerned with exploring what they believe to be a false dichotomy between the notions of formal and informal structure in organizational theory, a false opposition between the organizational structure and the interpretations of the organizational members, they uncover the dialectical relationship of the organizational members in creating and recreating the structures of the organization, structures which are the embodiment of their provinces of meaning, mediated by power—or what could be termed institutionalized ideology. This analysis of structure as the institutionalization of power arrangements they label, following Weber, an "order of domination". To Ranson et al (1980), "Power holders have constituted and institutionalized their provinces of meaning in the very structuring of organizational interactions so that assumptions, interpretations and relevances become the generalized

interpretive frame, the cognitive map, of organizational members, an interdependence of power and meaning . . . better conceptualized as an 'order of domination'" (p. 8-9). Meaning, then, as expressed in language is a guided interpretation of reality.

This intersection of meaning—Smircich's symbolic construction of reality—and of power is approached from a critical communications perspective by Kersten in "A Critical Interpretive Approach to the Study of Organizational Communication" (1987). Kersten maintains that the study of organizational culture as the symbolic construction of reality and the field of organizational communication share a similar linguistic focus, although the field of organizational communication itself contains some sharply different theoretical approaches to communication. In her description of conventional organization theory, for example, Kersten argues that communication is either limited

> to the transmission of work-related information for the purpose of maintaining existing structures or to motivational processes at the interpersonal and group levels, which also serve to maintain the existing conditions. Communication as a process is reduced to an information transmission activity that takes place in conformity with structural dictates for organizational efficiency and effectiveness, because this is the view of communication inherent in the organization theories adopted by the field. (p. 136)

In an argument that reprises many of the previous criticisms of organizational theory as a whole, Kersten analyses the major problems with the conventional view of communication. It does not take into consideration that through "communication we create our social world and construct meanings for the objects and events around us" and that meaning is purposeful, "simultaneously constructed", and "sustained over time" (p. 137). To Kersten communication is not about the efficient exchange of information by abstract individuals to meet organizational goals; it is instead about the "meanings and interpretations that form the basis for these interactions" (p. 137). She goes on to point out that using the first view of communication "we are left with elaborate and

detailed descriptions that, at best, reflect existing organizational structure and their impact on the ways in which people communicate. How people come to create interpretations of and meanings for their own and others' communicative behavior and how and why these behaviors are sustained over time is not, and within this framework, cannot be explained" (p. 137). Instead, within this framework the "overriding concern" (p. 138) is with the efficiency and effectiveness of the organization, resting on the "assumption of shared goals, or harmony of interests" between management and workers which "places the field in a position of concealing real conflict and contributing to the perpetuation of conditions of inequality" (p. 139).

To reconceptualize communication in organizations in order to deal with these theoretical lacunae means to reassert "the nature of communication as epistemic, processual and telic", or to emphasize "the creation of meaning and knowledge", and its constitutive and purposeful nature (p. 140). And, following Habermas, it also involves the recognition that since "communicative interaction does not take place under free, voluntary and equal conditions" (p. 144), it therefore leads to "a system of 'systematically distorted communication'" (p. 145). Kersten argues that we should therefore concern ourselves with "a conceptualization and realization of the 'ideal speech act' . . . [which] can be described as that situation in which social and organizational arrangements are not derived from unequal power differentials but rather occur on the basis of a political process that is arrived at through a domination free communication process" (p. 147).

In a similar argument which focuses on the intersection of language—primary in the creation and recreation of social reality—and power, Stanley Deetz stresses its ideological nature: how "an organization's language may direct, constrain and at times distort members' thoughts and perceptions" (1986, p. 168). This creation and recreation of social reality through language is temporal, rooted materially, and contested:

Less dominant groups vie for increased power through changing the preferential

power of social definition. Both processes of changing definition and processes of

order maintenance and extension are not as innocent as they might seem at first

glance. While they may appear as friendly negotiations of better ways of

describing things, they are connected to and interact with various material

determinants of power within the organization. The issue is one of preferred

expression and thus preferential expression of group interests. (p. 170)[*]

Not only is language an area of contestation; it has the power to "hide or

highlight"—language, then, as a guided interpretation of reality. In much of

organizational theory too little attention is paid to "the potentially restrictive and

detrimental consequences of particular language systems", too much to the consensual

nature of language, to agreement, and how agreement is achieved (p. 173). To Deetz

we need to move beyond literal analysis of language, as understanding metaphors only

as a "figurative overlay on literal speech that might enhance its rhetorical effect",

without understanding how "metaphors contribute to the structure of order" (p. 181),

or as J. B. Thompson explains, without understanding the links between language and

power. As Thompson points out, "In using language we are constantly engaged in

extending the meaning of words, in producing new meanings through metaphor, word-

play and interpretation, and we are thereby also involved, knowingly or not, in altering,

undermining, or reinforcing our relations with others and the world". Thus, to focus on

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[*]As J.B. Thompson (1984) notes in his study of ideology, "Ideas circulate in the social
world as utterances, as expressions, as words which are spoken or inscribed. Hence, to
study ideology is, in some part and in some way, to study language in the social world . .
. . It is to study the ways in which the multifarious uses of language intersect with
power, nourishing it, sustaining it, enacting it . . . . To explore the interrelations between
the language and ideology is to turn away from the analyses of well-formed sentences or
systems of signs, focusing instead on the way in which expressions serve as a means of
action and interaction, a medium through which history is produced and society
reproduced. The theory of ideology invites us to see that language is not simply a
structure which can be employed for communication or entertainment, but a social
historical phenomenon which is embroiled in human conflict" (p. 2).

language "is to study, in part, the ways in which these collective, imaginary activities serve to sustain social relations which are asymmetrical with regard to the origins of power" (1984, p. 6). We think within the words we use, and thus to Deetz the central question becomes "If particular metaphor structures are present, whose and which interests do they serve? If metaphors guide thinking in one way rather than others, who stands to gain from that direction and who tends to lose. . . . What is the relationship between power and economic interests and the selection and perpetuation of metaphors" (p. 181)?

IDEOLOGY AS AN ALIENATING INTERMEDIARY: MARXIST HUMANISM AND THE LABOUR PROCESS THEORISTS

Ranson, Greenwood and Hinings (1980) and Riley (1983) draw on Gidden's theory of structuration—and ultimately on Weber—in their attempts to explain how power shapes our understanding of what organizations are, and how that guided interpretation of reality is expressed in language as an "order of domination"—the outcome of the symbolic creation and recreation of reality intersected by power. Kersten (1987) and Deetz (1987) likewise focus on language and power. However, labour process theorists like Burawoy (1979), Thompson (1989) and Alvesson (1987), operating within the tenets of Marxist humanism, locate worker consciousness much more firmly in the material world—that how we understand the world is shaped by what we do, the basis for the Marxist understanding of class consciousness, the mixed consciousness of the oppressed, and the role of ideology as an alienating intermediary in creating false consciousness. In their work organizations are ideologies which alienate workers from their true selves. Burawoy, Thompson and Alvesson all focus on the material base of worker consciousness, emphasizing worker consent as well as worker resistance, although Alvesson in particular takes pains to explore the dialectical relationship between

modernization and that form of rational consciousness which seeks to understand modernization at the same time as it itself is shaped by it.

In *The Manufacture of Consent* Burawoy (1979) argues that the study of ideology must remain focused on work itself in the production of worker consciousness. He stresses that in "the manufacture of consent" workers "make out"—they make the job more bearable—but by doing so they also play management's game. As he notes, "one cannot play a game and question the rules at the same time; consent to rules becomes consent to capitalist production" (p. 161). What Burawoy's emphasis on the manufacture of consent allows for is a dialectic; it would be woefully one-sided to see only worker resistance and management coercion. As Thompson notes, "it would be unwise to present the course of events in terms of a whole transformation of the conditions for conflict and coercion. The ability of capital to organize consent depends in reality on the context of productive activity" (p. 168).

Similarly Thompson argues that ideology "constitutes a lived experience, not just an imposed set of ideas" (p. 154). It is, however, a lived experience that has been ignored, "either because of the stress laid on the changes in the structural features of work, or because traditions of resistance have been emphasized at the expense of day to day reproduction of consent" (p. 154). He points out that in the workplace "it is not just things that are produced, but relations between people. As these relations concern the functioning and distribution of ownership, control, skill, power and knowledge, we are also talking about the production of ideas about these relations" (p. 154). To Thompson, although a number of labour process writers are drawn to Gramsci and his idea of hegemony, "that the control of a ruling class is based on the permeation of a whole system of beliefs, morals and values through the cultural and ideological apparatuses of society and state", the focus must remain on the "wider political terrain" (p. 157) of the workplace in the production of consciousness.

Operating within this same focus on the larger material context, Alvesson (1987) in *Organizational Theory and Technocratic Consciousness: Rationality, Ideology and the Quality of Work* analyses ideology and the ideological nature of much of organizational culture and organizational symbolism research. His view of ideology is based on both Marx and the Frankfurt critical theorists like Marcuse and Habermas: ideology is formed by the elite for their benefit and is furthered by the process of modernization (p. 187). As he points out, his area of analysis is not "political economy and class supremacy but the form of rationality which permeates modern, mainly capitalist society as a result of the culmination of the Enlightenment, [which] changed in time into a positivistic and technocratic view of knowledge, subordinate to capitalism and possessing totalitarian features" (p. 10)[*]. Like Habermas, he is concerned with the recapturing of rationality for emancipatory purposes. To Alvesson, organizations are "alienating intermediaries, which serve to mystify human beings in their attempt to comprehend and appreciate the nature of the totality in which they live" (p. 19). Therefore the research task is to "demonstrate the sources of alienation within a totality, which converge in a organization context. It provides a systematic critique . . . by identifying the factors which impinge upon and dominate human consciousness in the form of seemingly objective social forces over which man [sic] appears to have no form of direct control" (p. 20). Ultimately we are alienated from our true reality by the distorting influences, rooted in capitalism, of modernization, distorting influences which are embodied in our organizations.

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[*]Wendy Brown points out that "Marcuse before Habermas, and Weber before Marcuse identified as the most ominous feature of a fully 'disenchanted age' not an immaculate nihilism but a form of nihilism in which 'technical reason' (Marcuse), 'means-end rationality' (Habermas) or 'instrumental rationality' (Weber) became the dominant and unchallengeable discourse framing and ultimately suffusing all social practices" (Brown, 1991, p. 66).

And it is this ideology of modernization which is also embedded in "organizational culture (-symbolism)" theory (p. 188). Alvesson argues that our present interest in research into organizational culture/symbolism is historically situated: it is the result of the effects of modernization, or "the technocratization and destruction of the traditional cultural patterns" (p. 200); the focus on culture and symbolism indicates "an effort to counteract disintegration problems in society" (p. 201), as does the focus on ideology per se (p. 202).

In order to provide a better understanding of what he terms "technocratic consciousness", Alvesson describes the various views of ideology. To Alvesson there are two basic views of ideology current in the literature; he agrees with neither. In the first view, ideology is understood "as consisting of false beliefs and the person holding an ideology as being the victim of delusions. Ideology and irrationality go together. . . . The other view conceptualizes ideology as a set of assumptions and values about the world. Here the term has a 'neutral' meaning and stands for a frame of reference" (p. 145). It is this second view which has found favour because "the ideal of a value free study of social phenomena, a clear separation between science and ideology, between 'truth' and false beliefs is viewed by more and more scholars as totally unrealistic" (p. 145). In other words everyone has an ideology, and since everyone does, power is unimportant. In counterpoint to both these views, Alvesson explores the nature of ideology within a critical perspective, which focuses on power, and quotes from the analyses of Geuss, Giddens (1979) and Held (1980).

Geuss' analysis of ideology as used by the Frankfurt School locates three versions: the positive, where ideology "corresponds to human beings' existential need of meaning in life and/or social needs of fellowship, social solidarity, communication and capacity for productive cooperation" (p. 147); the descriptive, where ideology is understood as a world view, and is "studied in a purely descriptive way"; and the pejorative, where "ideology is viewed as beliefs and forms of consciousness that are misleading, false or

distorted. The distortion is of a systematic kind and rooted in social conditions. . . . and is an obstruction for the rational discussion of how the unrepressed social life could be organized" (p. 146).

To Alvesson, rather than maintaining a tenuous theoretical opposition between truth and falsity, a positivistic dualism, this final "view of ideology does not place ideology in a kind of state of opposition to science or objective truth. Ideology is rather placed in relation to the way sectional interests tend to dominate social conditions" (p. 147). As Giddens (1979) states, it is this view of ideology which lends itself to a critique of domination (p. 147), a view elaborated by Held, who

> . . . emphasizes that the Frankfurt School regards ideologies as forms of thought which, due to dominance factors in society, express a limited and distorted view of reality. Ideologies are not, however, merely illusions. They are embodied and manifested in social relations. . . . Ideologies can express 'modes of existence'. Therefore, ideologies are often also packages of symbols, ideas, images and theories through which people experience their relation to each other and the world. The degree to which ideologies mystify social relations or adequately reflect distorted social relations (but thereby mystify the possibility of non-distorted social relations) is a question for inquiry in particular cases and contexts (p. 150).

The critical theorist is thus concerned specifically with revealing how ideologies distort social relations, and therefore is concerned not simply with description, with world views or frames of reference, but with critique. In particular, the critical theorist is concerned that she or he not contribute in any way to "reproducing, legitimizing and reinforcing the prevailing social order and the rationality, aims and conditions of power on which this is based, by further developing, refining and reproducing the ideologies of the dominant groups" (p. 155). That society is constructed unfairly, and that it is the duty of the researcher to expose that, is a given.

In critical theory ideology is not false beliefs as opposed to a true, scientific and objective reality. As Alvesson stresses, his concern is with social conditions, and how these "social conditions (primarily under late capitalism) influence ideas, political discussions, forms of rationality, and needs, as well as to what extent and in what way the rational considerations of individuals with regard to needs, the satisfaction of needs and liberation from 'unnecessary' repression are disturbed by the social conditions (p.150). He wishes to liberate us from the ideology of rational technocracy, the technocratic consciousness which has distorted our understanding of the world in ways that continue to benefit the elite, and which continues to maintain a pernicious social system.

However, there is nothing which would indicate that these various analyses of ideology by Burawoy, Thompson and Alvesson stray very far from what could be termed a Marxist humanist understanding: that ultimately ideology obscures a better reality from which we are alienated by the very presence of these ideologies. Only a classless society, and for Alvesson, like Habermas, incorporating a rationality free from technocracy, would be completely free of ideology. Until that state is reached, our organizations operate as ideologies which alienate each of us from our own true natures. We are caused harm not only because our production is stolen from us, but because our knowledge of our condition is systematically distorted.

ORGANIZATIONS AS IDEOLOGICALLY BASED MEANING FORMATIONS

Dennis Mumby (1988) undertakes to explicate how organizational communication, expressed in language, is systematically distorted to benefit those in power. As a organization communications theorist, he is concerned with how language forms our reality, but he is also concerned with how language deforms our reality—the reality which we create and recreate on a daily basis, and which we call our place of work, but which exists in words. However, he is unwilling to leave the origin of that deformation at the level of the individual, and like Alvesson, whom he draws on, he secures it to a material base. In doing so he attempts to give power an ontology that it lacks in the work that focuses on language as the expression of power but leaves power attached only to individuals who somehow group together to create an 'order of domination'. Thus, drawing on Smircich and the symbolic construction of reality, but understanding organizing from within a Marxist humanist perspective, he analyses organizations as "ideologically based meaning formations" (p. 127), or as the symbolic creation and recreation of organizational reality through narrative, mediated by power, and materially based. Our understanding of the world arises from what we do; we express that understanding in language, but that understanding will be deformed in conditions where relations of power are asymmetrical. Only when conditions are symmetrical will our understanding be undeformed.

As Mumby explains, we produce meaning through communication, and like Deetz and Kersten, he emphasizes that communication is processual rather than representational, and that culture is therefore both formed and deformed. To Mumby, "meaning is neither conveyed through communication, nor is it the product of individual interpretation or an objectively existing entity outside of social interaction. . . . Communication is thus not simply the vehicle for information, but rather is the very

process by which the notion of organizing comes to acquire consensual meaning. Organizing is therefore continuously created and recreated in the act of communication among organizational members" (p. 14-15). However, this process of cultural formation is not the only process: cultural deformation also exists. As Mumby points out, "power is exercised in an organization when one group is able to frame the interests (needs, concerns, world view) of other groups in terms of its own interests. . . . As such, the exercise of power is intimately connected with organizational sense-making, which in turn is largely delimited by the communication process" (p. 3). And, as he goes on to note, this process of cultural deformation is ideological, in that "one of the principal functions of ideology is to represent sectional interests as universal, [meaning that] the dominant social groups can maintain their dominance only if their interests are accepted and appropriated universally, even if these interests merely confirm other groups in their subordinate position" (p. 42).

Mumby points out that "organizational reality is socially constructed", but more importantly he stresses that "the construction of this reality cannot be separated from the deep power relations that constitute the material conditions of an organization. . . . The material infrastructure of institutional practices mediates in the way that the 'texts' of such institutions (stories, myths, etc) are interpreted or given meaning by organizational members" (p. 129). This is not only about "the ability of social actors to construct their own reality"; it must be recognized that these considerations are framed "within the context of questions of power and ideology" (p. 129). And as he notes further, the act of interpretation, the way that the organizational members attach meaning to their understanding of the 'texts', is always political—it cannot be detached. To Mumby,

> The interpretive act is one of deconstruction and resistance, struggling against the
> framing of the world that the text tries to impose on one. The dialectic between
> reader/listener and text that produces meaning is therefore fundamentally political,

as is the act of interpretation. It is through the interpretive process that we make sense of our world, and it is through this same process that our social world is reproduced. Meaning and interpretation, domination and discourse, are thus inextricably linked. (p. xvi).

Mumby carefully explores how these ideologically based meaning formations are created and sustained, and begins by addressing how these are formed intersubjectively. To Mumby, we make sense of our world with others: "the process by which an event becomes meaningful is rooted in and framed by intersubjectively shared patterns of discursive and behavioral practices . . . ensuring the culture's continued reproduction". By intersubjectivity, Mumby stresses that he does not mean how a particular point of view "becomes shared by others" or how the subjective becomes objectified, replicating the duality of Cartesian thought. Instead, drawing on phenomenological and hermeneutical thought, Mumby maintains that "intersubjectivity recognizes that meaning arises in the interaction between subject and object" (p. 10), between who we are and what we know. He goes on to state that "implicit . . . in the concept of sensemaking is the idea that the relationship between members of an organization and their organizational culture is fundamentally reciprocal. Members' behavior both frames and is framed by organizational reality. . . . the process of sensemaking is therefore partial and ongoing, rather than complete and fully constituted. What is considered 'real' is contingent upon the constantly shifting relationship between social actor and organizational environment" (p. 11). Reality, in other words, is dialectical.

Mumby goes on to point out that not only are these meanings formed intersubjectively, but contrary to the notion that they arise spontaneously and consensually, they are

rather the product of the vested interests of particular organizational groups. Power is exercised by such groups not only in the control of organizational resources . . . but also to the degree that they are able to frame organizational

reality discursively in a way that serves their own interests. . . . the dominant interests are taken on uncritically as the interests of all organizational groups. Ideology is thus conceived not simply as a set of beliefs, but as a materially located meaning system that constitutes the social actors' organizational consciousness (p. 157).

Just as he is at pains to structure a materially rather than ideally based sense of organizational meaning, Mumby is also careful that language be understood as not merely the symbolic representation of an objectified reality. To Mumby symbolism, or communication, of which language is a part, *is* organizational culture—it is not a representation of it. It is through the constant employment of symbolism, rooted in material reality, that culture is created (p. 12). Symbolism in organizational culture is not an abstract notion. It is not separate from organizational culture, according to Mumby, unlike the prevailing view, which "seems to be in favor of a representational view of the relationship between the symbolic and reality", or symbols as "representative of a reality that already exists independently of its symbolic form" (p. 13). Instead of this separation between the abstract nature of the symbolic and concrete reality, Mumby draws on phenomenological and hermeneutic traditions and stresses that

meaning is produced in communication . . . meaning is neither conveyed through communication, nor is it the process through which meaning is created and, over time, sedimented. Communication—as an institutional form—articulates meaning formations which, when habitualized over time, provide the background of common experience that gives organizational members a context for their organizing behavior. Communication is thus not simply the vehicle for information, but rather is the very process by which the notion of organizing comes to acquire consensual meaning. Organizing is therefore continuously created and recreated in the act of communication among organizational members. (p.14-15)

In Mumby's view, the words we use structure how and what we understand; they do not exist in isolation from the reality of the organization itself. They are the reality.

Mumby understands communication, then, not as the rational, neutral exchange of information, exchanged objectively (p. 6), and understood in its symbolic, abstract sense, but as the metaphor for organizing. In Mumby's conceptualization it is mediated by power, and therefore ideological. To Mumby, ideology is not individual values and beliefs—it cannot be understood without reference to power. Instead "it is rooted in the everyday practices of social actors", in

> the process by which social actors are interpellated (addressed) and the means by which their sense of consciousness of the social world is constituted. Ideology functions to articulate a sense of the world in which contradictions and structures of domination are obscured, and the particular interests of dominant groups are perceived as universal interests and hence actively supported, even by oppressed groups . . . ideology manifests itself and is expressed principally through various discursive practices, and the analysis and critique of ideology must make explicit the connection between relations of domination and systems of signification. (p. xiv-xv)

Ideology is the linchpin, then, between the symbolic construction of reality, and power.

Mumby links communication, power and the formation of ideology and what he terms the deformation of culture to storytelling, or organizational narrative. Although Mumby recognizes that communication is not completely synonymous with language, he maintains that for him "speaking and writing [are] the principle modes of communication in an organizational context", and thus the "organizational narrative [is] one of the principle symbolic structures that shapes reality for organizational members" (p. 15). He stresses that these organizational stories or narratives are not to be thought of simply as "an information conduit for organizational members. Stories do not simply tell people about what goes on in their organizations; rather, they should be examined in

terms of their role in creating perceptual environments for organizational members . . .

[stories] play a fundamental role in the creation and recreation of organizational reality"

(p. 18). He notes that storytelling itself is not to be equated with ideological formation;

however, it is a particular kind of signification which "lends itself well to the maintenance

and reproduction of certain meaning formations. When such meaning formations

function to reproduce the interests of particular groups to the exclusion of others, then

narrative functions ideologically" (p. xv). It is in the exploration of organizational

narrative, then, that we come to understand organizational cultures as ideologically

based meaning formations.

ORGANIZATIONS AS STRATEGIES OF DISCOURSE: THE POSTMODERNIST RECONCEPTUALIZATION OF POWER AND LANGUAGE

Whereas Mumby's analysis rests, somewhat uneasily, still within the tenets of

Marxist humanism in his emphasis on ideology and cultural deformation, implying a

referential point and a self aware human agent, Stewart Clegg (1989) launches his study

of power, knowledge and organizations well within the tenets of the postmodernist or

anti-Enlightenment critique. In particular he draws on the French philosopher Michel

Foucault and his privileging of language as the expression of "strategies of discourse"[*],

where power and knowledge intertwine. Clegg argues against any fixed or

transcendental reference point from which knowledge can be either discovered or

understood, against the notion of the unified self-aware human agent or subject who

must separate himself [sic] from the object to be known, and against any notion that

either power or knowledge can be fixed in and of itself. Instead, he understands power

[*]I prefer Patti Lather's (1991) definition of discourse as a "word used to signify the
system of relations between parties engaged in communicative activity and a concept
that is, hence, meant to signal the inescapably political contexts in which we speak and
work (p. vii).

not as a thing separate in itself—power as sovereign—but as inextricably part of knowledge, expressed in language. This nexus of power and knowledge in language become "strategies of discursive power, where strategy appears as an effect of distinctive practices of power/knowledge gaining an ascendent position in the representation of normal subjectivity" (p. 152). We are constituted in language, we are defined and limited through language, by what "poststructuralists term 'discursive practices': practices of talk, text, writing, cognition, argumentation, and representation generally" (p. 152), a move that positions language securely in the forefront at the same time as it privileges flux and indeterminacy. Nothing is fixed, not power, not knowledge, not language, not subjectivity, because the fixed and unified humanist subject has been shunted aside. In this conceptualization organizations cannot be anything other than indeterminate; what we can know is recursive. We are constituted within strategies of discourse just as strategies of discourse constitute what we can know. There is no position of privilege from which we can know—both the subject and the referential position disappear, and discourse takes its place. Mumby's idea of the formation and deformation of organizational culture through ideology can no longer hold—there is no possibility of a position free from power, no organization which at some point can be free of ideology, no organizational narrative which is uncontaminated, and thus not ideological.

    In poststructuralism power is understood as all-pervasive rather than sovereign; it is constitutive in the construction of meaning through language. Hence there cannot be a point from which one may judge what is ideological, or decide what is cultural formation, or cultural deformation. Ideology disappears into discourse; strategies of discourse may be points of resistance or points of domination—no discourse is inherently one or the other, no discourse is inherently ideological, or not ideological. As Clegg points out in his examination of meaning, language and power, although early linguists like Saussure argued that meaning or signification was fixed in language by

social convention, later theorists like Derrida argued against that position, and maintained that there were

> . . . no fixed signifieds or signifiers. Instead, meaning exists in the difference between relational terms to which current representations will remain contextually and historically stable but with every reason to think that they will shift. Power will thus be implicated in attempts to fix or uncouple and change particular representational relations of meaning, a thrust which develops most explicitly from Foucault's historical ontology of some of the subjectivities which have been constituted through practices of power and knowledge. The knowledge that is used to structure and fix representations in historical forms is the accomplishment of power. (p. 151-152)

Nothing, then, is fixed, neither these representations, nor subjectivity, nor power itself. Fixity is the accomplishment of power; it should not be confused with power itself, which can both position and fix. Power is not transcendent; neither does it exist as the arm of the state, as the reification of "disciplinary practices"; nor is it sovereign. As Clegg points out,

> If there is no given elective affinity between discourse, practice and interests, then power cannot be understood as a 'single, all-encompassing strategy'. Power will be a more or less stable or shifting network of alliances extended over a shifting terrain of practice and discursively constituted interests. Points of resistance will open up at many points in the network. Their effect will be to fracture alliances, constitute regroupings and reposit strategies. . . . Central to Foucault's conception of power is its shifting, inherently unstable expression in networks and alliances. Rather than the monolithic view of power as a "third dimension" incorporating subjectivities, the focus is much closer to Machiavelli's strategic concerns or Gramsci's notion of hegemony as a "war of manoeuvre, in which points of resistance and fissure are at the forefront". (p. 152)

Clegg explores organizations as "strategies of discourse", where flux and indeterminacy are privileged, and where power and knowledge, inseparable, are expressed in language. In his conceptualization, unlike Mumby's, there is no position outside of power, no possibility of organizational discourse free of ideology, ultimately no position free of totalitarianism, whereas the idea of ideology used by Mumby and Alvesson rests on its opposite—that there can be a place which is non-ideological, that there exists the possibility of an organization free from deformation. Instead of power nowhere in the organization—the criticism of Pettigrew and the critical theorists of the Frankfurt school—power is everywhere—the postmodernist critique of Foucault. Culture formed by words, organizations that are words, become in Clegg's formulation, organizations which are words that cannot separate themselves from power. We are created—and create—within this nexus of power and knowledge. The iron cage of Weber, the bars of which at least we can see, becomes the normalizing institutions of Foucault where we are imprisoned within ourselves by ourselves.

CONCLUSION

Like many others in organizational theory, dissatisfied with positivism, but critical of interpretivism for its inadequate analysis of power and its inability to deal with gender power relations, I have looked for other theories which would illuminate rather than occlude the process by which we humans organize, and how relations of domination and subordination are constructed and maintained in these organizations. Critical theorists posit a different understanding of human actors than positivism or interpretivism and stress how through social and symbolic interactions, mediated by power and materially based, these human actors create and recreate the organization. We don't so much acquire knowledge about the organization, as we participate in the creation of that knowledge of what the organization is—quite a different understanding about

knowledge, human nature and power. In this understanding, communication in organizations becomes the formation of meaning through symbolic interaction and is ideological in the sense of being constituted by dominant groups. The Marxist labour process theorists and the anti-organization theorists situate the organization in the larger society—they add the social context—and stress that human understanding is rooted in a material base—our understanding of the world is shaped by what we do. To use Dorothy Smith's (1987) phrase, they understand the organization as a "node in the relations of ruling", thus explicitly focusing on power as domination, and on both worker resistance and on "the manufacture of consent" (cf. Burawoy 1979, Alvesson 1987, Thompson 1989).

However, postmodernists have criticized the labour process and critical theorist conceptualization of the nature of ideology, knowledge and power. As Clegg makes quite clear in his discussion of language and power in organizations, or more precisely, organizations as strategies of discourse, there is no place which is transcendent, no person, no knowledge, no theory free from relations of power. Neither is there a true self from which we can be alienated by organizations as ideologies, as dominating discourses which ipso facto depend on the ideal of a non-dominating discourse and the self-aware subject.

But neither the modernist nor the postmodernist theories of power and language in organizations speak clearly about gender power relations, which has repercussions for understanding how women and men create and recreate the organization, and how they make sense of it. Much of the work reviewed is based on the illusion, shared by both the abstract individual of liberal and positivist thought and the Marxist worker, of asexuality, although in the theories themselves both the abstract individual and the worker are actually male. And in much of postmodernist writing, the self disappears altogether, to be replaced by language or discourse. In postmodernism gender itself is seen as a social construction in language, a position that is problematic for the study of gender power

relations. In postmoderism, like liberalism and Marxism, women disappear. However, it is both women and men who daily create and recreate organizational reality, who experience this reality, and who through organizational narrative, attempt to express their understanding of that organizational reality. Recognizing that it is actual women and men in organizations—that 'man' is not a gender neutral term, and conversely that it is not only women who have a gender—adds a complexity to organizational theory—both modernist and postmodernist—that has been either ignored or denied, a situation which has done little to illuminate how we constitute and how we experience organizational reality, and much to occlude and obscure (cf. Calas & Smircich, 1990). Since organizations cannot escape the consequences both epistemologically and ontologically of the sexual/gender division of labour and the constitution of relations of domination and subordination which that entails, those theories which occlude rather than reveal these consequences and thus which cannot contribute to a better understanding of the constitution of this reality, are inadequate. That leads me to ask a still more basic question which will also be explored in the next chapter: In essence, how gendered is what we know about organizations, how gendered is how we have gone about that knowing, and what are the implications for an organizational theory that can illuminate how both women and men come to know an organization?