

## I. INTRODUCTION

During the 1980's I spent several years as a teacher working in Chinese universities, and that experience called into question all my unacknowledged assumptions about how women and men come to know the organization. How do we figure out what we think the organization is all about and our position within it? How do we struggle to both find our place, and prevent ourselves from being pushed into place, some place where we don't want to be? I came back to Canada determined to explore how women and men come to know an organization new to them, at the same time as they try to create a place for themselves within it.

I knew I would approach these questions from the point of view of a Canadian at the end of the twentieth century, as a feminist, and as a socialist. My own coming of age as a feminist and as a political being coincided in 1968 when Trudeau came to power in Canada, and matured over these last two decades as Canadians have struggled with difference and how to accommodate it, a struggle which we have defined in this country in terms of language. Our particular struggle with difference has had theoretical ramifications for me as we here in Canada have attempted to develop political, organizational and feminist theories which can both illuminate how we live, and answer the question, how shall we live? Embedded in those questions are theories about human nature, about knowledge and about power, theories, like all theories, which are products of a particular time and place. In Canada we have our own historical caveats: if not like Germany, attempting to recapture rationality in the face of Auschwitz, if not an imperial power like America but a colony, in a country where language rather than race defines us, then where are our theories situated? Out of which set of historical circumstances do they grow, and what are the conditions of the present day which they attempt to illuminate? The fragility of the politics of allegiances versus the politics of identity, a

conundrum on which both feminism and political theory focus, has a painful resonance for Canadians, both historically and at present.

Given this historical context, that I might focus on language, and on the intertwining of power and knowledge when I consider the question of how we come to know the organization is evident; what may be less evident is that I believe that we can not talk about either language, power or knowledge without talking about relations between women and men. More precisely, I maintain that we can't talk about any of these questions without talking about gender power relations, or the asymmetrical power relations between women and men which prevail in our society as a whole and in our organizations themselves. It is within this larger rubric of gender power relations that I position the question of how we come to know the organization.

How we understand human nature, what it means to be human, what counts as knowledge, our definitions of power and language, all obviously affect how we understand the way women and men come to know the organization. These understandings are expressed as political and economic theories which provide the pilings upon which we build our theories of organizations. How might these theories illuminate how women and men come to know the organization? I look at four: liberalism and Marxism, both falling under the rubric of modernism, postmodernism, and finally feminist theory as it grapples with each of these political theories in turn. What do each of these theories have to say about the self or the subject, knowledge, language and power?

Liberalism, the dominant viewpoint in American organizational literature, is a theory which emphasizes the (freely choosing) isolated individual, where individual differences in power are understood as either dysfunctional or irrelevant. It is a theory where gender power differences can be safely ignored. Marxism influences some of the European organizational literature, and as a theory which writes oppression into history, cannot be overlooked. However, although I agree with the concept of the socially embedded

individual, class as an analytical category cannot illuminate women's lives. And both liberalism and Marxism share, in different ways, their Enlightenment or modernist heritage. Both emphasize a fixed reality which can be discovered and a fixed consciousness, both privilege rationality and link rationality to "rational man"—sites of power that are then deemed natural, and thus unanalysable. The very nature of modernism consigns woman to the position of Other, the Other which is also the lesser.

The postmodernist critique of modernism, of the certainties of the Enlightenment that link reason and progress to human happiness, seems to be a theory which can illuminate the crisis of authority—including the right of men to rule over women—of the late twentieth century. Neither God nor the man of reason nor the dualistic epistemology of the Enlightenment upon which the man of reason depends go unchallenged by postmodernism. In ways that postmodernism itself sometimes shies away from, it holds up the workings of power to our scrutiny, whether by stating that knowledge—pure truth in modernist thought—cannot ever be separated from relations of power, or by exposing the "violent hierarchies" or the oppositional dualities of the Enlightenment as self-imposed ordering structures which confine, degrade and repress as they order, the fundamental opposition being that of man to woman.

Postmodernism can be helpful to my project in its focus on the deconstitution of Western metaphysics and the confining dualities of the Enlightenment, and on the inextricable intertwining of knowledge and power. It attempts to grapple with the questions of who speaks for whom about what, of how knowledge is produced and for whose benefit, of how relationships of power and knowledge are constructed and maintained through language. To the postmodernists, or at least those affected by Marxism (cf. Weedon, 1987), knowledge, while socially embedded and materially rather than ideally based, is not fixed in the sense of being unchanging. Knowledge is the understanding of the world by women and men who exist materially; it is mediated by power, it is not outside of power; it cannot be acquired through opposing the subject

who knows to the object to be known. These understandings, these discourses of power and knowledge, to use Foucault's term, are expressed through language. As such, each discourse must be constantly subjected to what is termed "decentering the margins": that is, who speaks for whom and from what position of power, or what might be termed the analysis of the politics of location. To the postmodernists, every question is historically situated and political; there are no absolutes, no universals, no abstract universal 'man' with an unchanging consciousness positing universal laws about a fixed reality that can be rationally known—there is no knowledge which can stand outside relations of power. Instead, competing realities are constructed by women and men in language, mediated by power, and situated historically.

However, when I ask the question, How do women and men come to know an organization? I need a theory which can bring together ideas about knowledge and power, about language, and about gender. Postmodernism, as a theory about power, about language, and about the intertwining of knowledge and power in discourse, is very helpful to feminism, but it is not a theory which explicitly theorizes about gender and gender power relations other than tangentially: in postmodernism the self becomes solely an effect of language or discourse, and the effect of gender on the self, and the issue of gender power relations, disappears. If I am going to talk about women and men rather than just using a more obtuse version of the abstract individual of liberalism or the abstract worker of Marxism I need a theory that recognizes gender, one that can account for the production of asymmetrical gender power relations, relations which are dominant structuring principles in our organizations. Thus I propose the intersection of theories of postmodernism, in particular the deconstruction and deconstitution of Western metaphysics of Derrida and the discourse analysis of Foucault, with theories of feminism, in particular the writings of Spivak (1990), Probyn (1990), Weedon (1987), Hekman (1990), Flax (1990) and Smith (1990). Spivak, Probyn, Weedon, Hekman and Flax have all attempted to put feminism into conversation with postmodernism, but not

to achieve a synthesis or a dialectic, and certainly not a marriage, with its patriarchal overtones. Furthermore they recognize that these masters of philosophy are probably no more friendly than any of the previous notables, so they are carefully skeptical. Nevertheless, they have all seen advantages to a conversation between feminism and postmodernism. In particular they have all seen liberation in the deconstruction of Western metaphysics, as its internal coherence depends on our exclusion. And they have all noted that postmodernism serves to remind feminism of the dangers of essentialism, of the totalitarian position constructed through oppositional dualities, that in its emphasis on flux and indeterminacy, on the shifting discourses of knowledge and power, postmodernism serves to remind feminism that women are made, not born.

However, what Flax in particular takes issue with is the construction of the self as solely an effect of language or of discourse, which she understands as just another way of privileging male rationality as well as reconstructing a hidden opposition which postmodernism purports to displace. To see the self solely as an effect of language or discourse is to deny the effect on who we are through our relations with others, as well as to deny the effect of art, for example, or empathy. And not least, it serves to remove a place for resistance, necessary if power is to be understood as anything other than a shifting site of domination. The focus in postmodernist theory on power or language or the two together to the exclusion of any theorization of the self which recognizes gender or gender power relations, or in Dorothy Smith's critique, a focus which also excludes the material, as Smith maintains Foucault does, is a focus that needs to be placed in intersection with feminist theory. An inadequately theorized self and a narrow conceptualization of power is not one which can be helpful to my project of understanding women and men as they come to know the organization.

Thus it is in the intersection of feminism and postmodernism, or a feminist/postmodernist approach with a focus on the intersection of discourses of power and knowledge and of gender, gender which is not solely an effect of language or

discourse, that I explore how women and men come to know an organization new to them. My focus is on organizations as competing discourses of knowledge and power which are materially based and historically situated. We are involved in the creation of these competing discourses and we are created by these competing discourses, although we are not totally an effect of language or discourse, following Jane Flax. In this understanding, then, there is no concrete organizational reality which can be ascertained from a safe distance, the Archimedean standpoint of the dispassionate observer. Instead, reality is defined by the meaning that organizational members attach to those competing realities which they create and recreate with each other in the process of talking to each other. Neither the subject, nor the meaning, nor reality itself is fixed. All are areas of contestation. As organizational newcomers, we do not learn about a fixed reality. We are all involved, some more, some less, depending on the power that we have, in the creation of a reality that is not fixed, a reality in flux, composed of competing versions embedded in the differences in power of the women and men involved in the creation and recreation of that reality--what we sometimes, if we have power, get to call truth.

## PURPOSE OF STUDY

How do new members come to know the organization in which they work? This question is based on an understanding of organizations as discourses of power and knowledge, where what newcomers come to know is inseparable from relations of power and gender, relations which are embedded materially. The statement that organizations will be understood as discourses of power and knowledge rests on several assumptions: that organizations are episodic and unpredictable, that they exist in a constant state of flux and indeterminacy and cannot be determined or defined by the self-aware, fully present human agent, that rationality and purposefulness are a masquerade for the disciplinary practices of gender and power and knowledge which are our organizations and within which we are created and positioned as organizational members.

Within that larger understanding of the organization, then, how do new members come to know and to understand not only the explicit and implicit rules and regulations, superficialities which strike us first and dominate the surface of an organizational culture, a popular metaphor for organizations in the 1980's? More precisely, how do they participate in the on-going creation and recreation of symbolic realities through the formation of meaning, a participation that is mediated by power (Mumby, 1988; Ranson et al, 1980)? How are newcomers both positioned by and created within what Foucault (1979) calls strategies of discourse, or the inextricable intertwining of power and knowledge? I maintain that 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.

Moreover, how do these women and men make the transition from outsider to insider, words which resonate with the implications of the intersection of power and knowledge, words to be deconstructed to reveal the repression inherent in their opposition? How are some condemned to remain as outsiders, while others begin as

newcomers and become old hands, the insiders whose discursive strategies dominate organizations always in flux, where the repressed other always returns? How are relations of gender and power and knowledge put into play in these organizations which are themselves discourses of power and knowledge? Organizations, like the societies of which they are a part, are "socially constructed along gendered lines" (Blackmore, 1989, p. 106). What do these conditions of gendered social existence mean to the women and men as they come to know the organization?

Our bureaucracies "are the major ways through which hierarchical relationships of power and authority are erected and maintained" (Britan & Cohen, 1980, p. 2), an insight into the political nature of organizational cultures and its implications for understanding gender power relations that is shared by a number of organizational theorists, sociologists and political scientists (Alvesson, 1987; Blackmore, 1989; Deetz, 1987; Ferguson, 1984; Kersten, 1987; Mumby, 1988; Pettigrew, 1985; Ranson, Greenwood & Hinings, 1980; Smith, 1987; Thompson, 1989). Within this political and cultural understanding of organizations, it makes sense to understand culture in organizations not statically, as a manipulatable variable, nor as monolithic, uniform, or shared, nor as a fixed reality about which one can learn or where one assumes roles, but dynamically, as the ongoing creation and recreation of social realities, mediated by power, and expressed symbolically.

In a pronounced linguistic turn, Dennis Mumby explicitly focuses on the intersection of power and culture as symbolic meaning in his study of communication and power in organizations. To Mumby, organizing is best understood as the creation and recreation of power-based meaning formations, or as the creation of ideology, through organizational narrative (Mumby 1988). Stewart Clegg (1989) goes one step further, removing the last links of language to a fixed reality which the concept of ideology embodies, and advances Foucault's strategies of discourse, where language assumes the pre-eminent place in the process of organizing, where our organizations become an

effect of language, of discourses of knowledge and power, discourses within which we are created. How, then, do women and men new to an organization come to know these ambiguous, materially-based socially constructed realities, these discourses of knowledge and power, that both create and recreate gender power relations in the larger society, of which they are a part?

## SIGNIFICANCE

Martha Glenn Cox, in "Enter the Stranger: Unanticipated Effects of Communication on the Success of an Organizational Newcomer" (1987), writes that "the precise aspects of speech and behavior that communicate membership or exclusion are relatively understudied" (p. 37). This is one of the very few studies which I have reviewed that deals even tangentially with my topic, although Cox takes a structural-functionalist perspective, quite different from mine. My research study does not focus on the positivist goals of increasing the success of the organization through increasing rationality and efficiency, particularly by creating the conditions by which the flow of information, understood neutrally, is facilitated. It focuses instead on understanding how women and men come to know the organization, and how relations of domination and resistance are created and recreated in the organization, expressed through organizational narrative, and mediated by power.

But all of this involves the reconceptualization of organizational theory from a feminist perspective. Traditional knowledge in organizational literature assumes that what organizations are and what happens there are "free of, uninformed by, and unshaped by" gender and gender/power relations (Morrison, 1992, p. 4). But I maintain that women are the unsettling presence in organizational literature, that both our unseen presence and our unnoted absence impoverishes the discourse as it leads to evasions and repressions, including the polite repression of extending maleness to women, like the Egyptian queen with her false beard. Of the literature that has been written about women and organizations, most falls within the prevailing structural-functionalist perspective which inherently marginalizes women, rendering them invisible (Calas & Smircich, 1989). Little has been written about how women and men might construct "organizational reality through interpretation and interaction in relation to gender and sexuality", although what has been written indicates that "women and men experience

organizational life differently" (Sheppard, 1990, p. 141). Nor has there been much written about gender and power: in her critique of theory and educational organizations, a critique which could apply just as easily to the field of organizational theory, Jill Blackmore (1989) observes that: "the focus is on social control, hierarchy and bureaucracy rather than the recognition of the reproduction of gendered dominance as a set of power relations as a significant phenomenon" (p. 114). In particular, this focus is not reflected in the organizational theory written in the United States, from which Canadians draw heavily. It reflects the liberal political and economic assumptions on which it is based, assumptions which deny the relevance of gender and gender power relations and which operate to consign gender to the margins as a rapidly irrelevant individual attribute. If, following Foucault, all theories are discourses of power and knowledge which are historically situated, and specific to time and place, we in Canada have a different history, we are situated differently in terms of time and place, than the countries we draw on so uncritically. I write as a self-consciously—but not all-knowing, fully present—Canadian woman, who has been shaped by both my own history, and the history of my country.

This study is of significance for Canadian organizational theorists in developing our own understanding of organizing and organizations, embedded as we are in a very different history and in a different understanding of human nature and of social relations. It is particularly significant because it looks at women and men in organizations in terms of gender power relations, and how those asymmetrical relations of power between women and men are created and maintained through strategies of discourse. I have attempted to put into conversation feminist theory and postmodernist theory to better understand how we come to know organizations in the way that we do, and what that means for understanding how asymmetrical gender power relations are maintained. My position here is to be evocative rather than to explain or to reflect; I wish to challenge, to interrupt, to displace the violent hierarchies which structure our thoughts so we can

think in new and different ways. To quote Toni Morrison, I want to extend the study of organizational theory into

what I hope will be a wider landscape. I want to draw a map, so to speak, of a critical geography and use that map to open as much space for discovery, intellectual adventure and close exploration as did the original charting of the New World—without the mandate for conquest, I intend to outline an attractive, fruitful and provocative critical project, unencumbered by dreams of subversion or rallying gestures at fortress walls. (1992, p. 3)