# V. FEMINIST/POSTMODERNIST PRACTICE


In this chapter I wish to develop a feminist/postmodernist methodological approach to the question of how new members come to know and understand—to make sense of—organizations as places where knowledge, power and gender intersect to construct us as members of that organization, where the meaning that we attach to our experiences as newcomers is expressed in discourse, meaning that is therefore a site of political struggle.

In feminist/postmodernist practice knowledge is not discovered through the application of natural law by the detached and unbiased observer; there is no knowledge, no reality that is only hidden, a reality which we may uncover if we only know "the way". In feminist/postmodernist practice neither rationality nor science nor epistemology itself are accorded a position of privilege.  Nothing is transcendent, nothing can stand outside relations of power, not the observer, not knowledge, not transcendent justificatory appeals to universality, objectivity, impartiality, not our "grand narratives", the stories we tell ourselves to make sense of a world which we ourselves have created.

Both positivism and interpretivism, quantitative and qualitative analysis are rooted in Enlightenment epistemology: all agree that there is an absolute grounding for knowledge, whether it be objective or subjective[*], all posit "the subject as an autonomous individual capable of full consciousness and endowed with a stable 'self' constituted by a set of stable characteristics such as sex, class, race, sexual orientation" (Lather, 1991, p. 5).  Interpretivists have attacked the idea of the objectivity of truth or knowledge or reality, but they have not attacked the idea of the subject, the other side of the dualism.  Absolutism and essentialism have remained, if no longer in the idea of

---

[*] To Lather (1991), following Habermas, knowledge claims are generated and legitimated three ways in Enlightenment epistemology: through prediction (positivism), understanding (interpretive, naturalistic, constructivist, phenomenological and hermeneutic inquiry) and emancipation (critical inquiry and action research) (p. 7).

objectivity, certainly in the idea of subjectivity.  Modernism has exhausted itself, unable to think beyond the unifying certainty: to Patti Lather (1991), "not only positivisms, but also existentialisms, phenomenologies, critical theories: all . . . [are] rife with subject-object dualisms, telelogical utopianisms, totalizing abstractions, the lust for certainty, and impositional tendencies tainted with colonialism and foundational vanguard politics" (p. 88).

Furthermore, Susan Hekman (1990) argues that the human sciences maintain that absolutism and essentialism in their construction of the subject as male, the object as female, replicating the male/female duality which informs Enlightenment epistemology.  To Hekman, because "the separation between subject and object, knower and known are central requirements of the scientific enterprise", the Enlightenment conception of science "defines it as an inherently masculine enterprise" (p. 120).  Hekman argues that women cannot be subjects for two reasons: in Enlightenment epistemology "the active, knowing subject that is essential to science has been defined as exclusively masculine", and secondly, "women cannot effect the distance between the knower and the known that is the hallmark of the scientific method" (p. 120).  Thus, she states, "women, who can only be objects, do not fit into the subject centered discourse of the human sciences . . . [which is] why the activity of women has not been conceptualized by the human sciences since their conception" (p. 92).  But postmodernists challenge both the "true" knowledge of the natural sciences as well as the separate but equal stance of the humanists, that if objectivity could be absolute grounded truth, so could subjectivity.  They challenge not only the privileging of the natural sciences but the privileging of rationalism; more radically, they challenge the privileging of the hierarchical dualities which inform Enlightenment epistemology.  In particular, postmodernism challenges the constitution of the subject as male, the object as female which Hekman argues is

inherent in the epistemology of Enlightenment thought, and therefore inherent in the methodology of the natural as well as the social or human sciences[1].

Thus, instead of the methodologies of the Enlightenment which confine women to the status of object, I draw on the intersection of feminism and postmodernism and the interruptions and disruptions which their intersection neccessarily involves. Instead of the certainties of unitary truth undergirded by the humanist subject, I will focus on "'regimes of truth' [and] the deconstruction of the binary, linear logics of Western rationality . . . foregrounding ambiguity, openness, and contingency" (Lather, 1991, p. 23) and the unsettling presence of women which traditional organizational theory attempts to evade or repress.

Thus it is in strategies of discourse, where power, knowledge and gender intersect—I add here to Foucault's conceptualization—embedded materially and constantly shifting in a Derridean state of flux, where we express what we know in the organization. Our talk, our stories, what we say to each other at work, expressed discursively—in language—embedded materially, in what we do, shaped by gender power relations, is what we know about the organization.

It is not, however, questions of knowledge which concern me, knowledge which can be acquired, a fixed amount of information that can or cannot be exchanged between the newcomer and the old hand, so the more the newcomer learns about the organization, the more the newcomer progresses on her or his way to becoming an old

---

[1]To Hekman, "the contemporary researcher who studies women's social or political roles is adhering to the subject/object dichotomy that has informed the social sciences since their inception: the social scientist is the knower (subject), the object of his study is the known" (p. 94). These categories "exclude women and thus their experience becomes invisible" (p. 95). She goes on to argue that "because women cannot be subjects they also cannot be actors in the social scene. Women who cannot act cannot create a social life, they cannot constitute knowledge or reality" (p. 95). Like Flax, she maintains that the dichotomies of the Enlightenment are central to "constitution of the social sciences. The desire for an objective knowledge of the social world rooted in the knowing rational subject is the basis of the epistemology of the social sciences" (p. 96).

hand.  Instead, it is questions of meaning which concern me, meaning that cannot be fixed except as an expression of power.  It is the meaning that we attach to what we think we know, that nexus of power and knowledge that is put into play through the material and gendered conditions of our lives, that concerns me.

This question of meaning rather than questions of knowledge, of truth or falsity, has methodological implications.  If questions of meaning are always political, does that mean that everything is relative, that without the certainties of the absolute it is impossible to construct a 'grand narrative', a story through which we understand the world, a story that promises us hope and justice?  To both Hekman (1991) and Lather (1991) all truth/falsity oppositions are displaced by the postmodern critique, oppositions which include the oppositions of relativism/absolutism[2], but that does not mean that all discourses are "'equally arbitrary'".  Lather points out that

positionality weighs heavily on what knowledge comes to count as legitimate in historically specific times and places.  The world is spoken from many sites which are differentially positioned regarding access to power and resources.  Relativism foregrounds the shifting sands of context, but occludes the play of power in the shaping of changing structures and circumstances. . . . In sum, fears of relativism and its seeming attendant, nihilism or Nietzschean anger, seem to me an implosion of Western white male, class-privileged arrogance—if we cannot know everything, then we can know nothing. (p. 116)

As Gayatri Spivak points out, the anti-Enlightenment critique of the postmodernists does not entail the abandonment of a coherent, causal account of the world with an eye to who holds power, only the abandonment of the totalitarian impulse that lies in the

---

[2]To Lather, relativism presumes "a foundational structure, an Archimedean standpoint outside of flux and human interest. . . . Relativism is an issue if a foundational structure is ignored. . . . If there is a foundation, there is something to be relative to, but if there is not foundation, there is no structure against which other positions can be objectively judged" (p. 114).

construction of the perfect narrative, where there is no space for doubt.  To Spivak, a 'grand narrative' is a companion, not a means to an end, a final solution.  By leaving a space for doubt, for those other voices that are inevitably silenced when one person speaks and not another, we resist the totalitarian impulse inherent in perfection, in closure.  To Spivak, the totalitarian impulse resides there, not in the construction of a coherent, causal account of the world which we construct to help us make sense of the meaning we attach to our experiences.

In the feminist/postmodernist methodological approach, experience, like knowledge, is not something that can be discovered, not something that a person, by "getting in touch with", provides an invariate source of knowledge.  Experience, like reality, is not fixed.  Neither is the subject "the coherent, authentic source of the interpretation of the meaning of reality" (Weedon, p. 8).  Our knowledge of the world is not our unmediated experience of the world revealed through transparent language.  Experience is mediated by gender/power relations; we attach meaning to our experiences, meaning that is expressed discursively and is thus a site of power and knowledge.  As Elizabeth Weed (1989) has noted in another context, what arose from the feminist consciousness raising of the late 1960s and early 1970s is that our desires, our thoughts may be constructed elsewhere; they are not ours alone.

If the meaning we attach to our experiences is mediated by power, if our subjectivity—who we are—is constructed by relations of power and knowledge and gender and embedded materially, then my task is not to uncover invariate experience, to prove that this knowledge of this experience and guaranteed as authentic by this subject, and unmediated by power, is knowledge more pure than other knowledge.  My task is not to uncover whose knowledge is more pure, whose subjectivity is more authentic, whose experience is more likely to illuminate a reality that can only appear the brighter the light.  It is not whose knowledge, whose experience can be relied on to produce the truth of the situation, but how relations of gender, of power, of knowledge

construct us as subjects, and in constructing us, construct the organization itself.  How are relations of domination and subordination constructed between the men and the women who work in the organization, and how are those relations of gender and power understood by the newcomers?  What meaning, expressed as strategies of discourse, do they attach to these relations?  Like Foucault, but going beyond Foucault, I argue that there is no knowledge of the organization, no meaning that can be attached to what the organization is, which can stand outside of relations of gender, power and knowledge.

Thus the main question in this feminist/postmodernist methodological approach is how to explicate these relations of domination and subordination, these relations of ruling, to use Dorothy Smith's term, without silencing those people who spoke to me, without silencing their voices.  I can no more transcribe their voices without the insertion of myself than they can speak in a transparent language that does nothing other than reveal their perfectly authentic reality.  In using language, we each attach our own meaning.  That act is political.  I cannot, any more than the people who spoke to me, stand outside those relations of gender, of power, and of knowledge which construct us all.  All I can offer, like Spivak, is to put all my cards on the table, to say 'there they are', to recognize that cinema verité is still only a pretense, that the only reality is the one we create together.

What I can offer then, is not objectivity, impartiality, universality—transcendent criteria which depend on the idea of a fixed and discoverable reality—but respect.  Like any biographer, I present a story full of political nuances, but I have an obligation not to misrepresent their stories through silence.  Caught on the fulcrum of always politicized meaning, knowing that between me and them we create politicized meaning, my obligation to them in my explication of their entering into and attaching meaning to the construction of relations of domination and subordination is respect, not exploitation.  But like Edward Said (1979) talking about the Orient as nothing other than a resource for the West, how can I hear and speak for, without using them merely as a resource?

How can I incorporate that respect into my writing? To Said, the first step is to recognize exteriority and its implications; the second and third are to use strategic formation and strategic location as ways of forcing to the surface exteriority, forcing us to confront our inextricable involvement in the discourses of power and knowledge. As he explains:

> Orientalism is premised upon exteriority, that is, on the fact that the Orientalist, poet or scholar, makes the Orient speak, describes the Orient, renders its mysteries plain for and to the West. He is never concerned with the Orient except as the first cause of what he says. What he says and writes, by virtue of the fact that it is said or written, is meant to indicate that the Orientalist is outside the Orient, both as an existential and as a moral fact. The principal product of this exteriority is of course representation. . . . The dramatic immediacy of representation . . . obscures the fact that the audience is watching a highly artificial enactment of what a non-Oriental has made into a symbol for the whole Orient. My analysis of the Orientalist text therefore places emphasis on the evidence, which is by no means invisible, for such representations as representations, not as natural depictions of the Orient. . . . The things to look at are style, figures of speech, setting, narrative devices, historical and social circumstances, not the correctness of the representation nor its fidelity to some great original. (1979, p. 20-21)

To deal with exteriority, where a projected image is rendered an objective fact, a representation of the real, where power resides in this hidden transformation, Said recommends "strategic location, which is a way of describing the author's position in a text with regard to the . . . material he [sic] writes about, and strategic formation, which is a way of analysing the relationship between texts and the way in which groups of texts, types of texts, even textual genres, acquire mass, density, and referential power among themselves and thereafter in the culture at large" (Ibid, p. 20). This is a double focus. I must ask myself, how have I been positioned in regard to the material I wish to

write about? I must recognize that I myself am no more fixed as an entity constructed within the iron triangle of sex, class and race, a source of truth defined by those determinants, than were those I talked to. I must ask how have I, as well as how have those who have spoken to me, been constructed within a nexus of gender and power and knowledge that has, at least partially, both positioned them and me, and both articulated and constrained what they and I have had to say. I cannot emphasize enought that the focus is not on the speaker or the writer as truth teller but on the relations themselves as they are put into play by the speaker or the writer.

In recognizing that there is no dispassionate observer, no uninvolved subject who exists beyond either reason or desire, no transparent language nor transcribable, discoverable reality, I do not wish to suggest that nothing can be written other than a polemic. I wish to point out instead that since nothing is free from relations of power, however expressed, I wish to focus on the construction of these relations of power, to explicate how these relations of power are constructed in the organization, to focus on how things come about in the way that they do. How might I achieve that?

According to Dennis Mumby in his modernist study of how organizations are defined by talk and shaped by power, in order "to generate insight into the way that human agents go about making sense of their world", we need to develop "a picture of the social world 'from the actor's point of view'", using thick description, or the "in situ description of a particular social context" (p. 144). But in her construction of a method to explicate relations of power, Dorothy Smith (1990) goes beyond the phenomenological and its assumptions of the all-knowing fully present subject to focus on "the relations and practices that arise in and only in the actual activities of actual people", on the sensuous materiality in which we live our lives (p. 34). By focusing on what people do, by remembering that thought has "no existence other than it arises in what people do" (p. 38), we maintain our focus on sensuous materiality at the same time as we grapple with differences in power and what it means, both to the theory we

are writing within and to our own involvement in it.  As Smith stresses, concepts do not

arise out of thin air; we are not disembodied thinkers operating solely within the realm of

Hegel.  Instead, "concepts . . . are available to be thought about because their character

and the distinctions they make apparent are already structured in actual social relations"

(p. 40).  We bring down how we think about what happens, and how we think about

what happens to us, from the firmament, and tie it to our lives as we live them,

remembering that they are inseparable.

Smith points out that we can do this by maintaining what "people say they think"

in "the actual circumstances in which it is said", and in the "actual empirical conditions of

their lives".  We do not separate these actual individuals from these circumstances and

conditions, turning them into pieces of data, who only exist to carry the theory.  We do

not "detach" these ideas spoken by these people from them, and then "arrange them to

demonstrate an order among them that accounts for what is observed".  Neither do we

"change the ideas into a 'person', that is, set them up as distinct entities (for example, a

value pattern, norm, belief system, and so forth) to which agency (or possible causal

efficacy) may be attributed".  We don't "redistribute them to 'reality' by attributing

them to actors who can now be treated as representing the ideas" (p. 43-44)[3].  To

---

[3]In her explanation, Smith (1990) draws on a description of a methodological approach
in sociology which does precisely what she maintains we must not do if we wish neither
to create a tautology nor subvert the subject: "Zetterberg is telling us how to take
something that people actually said and make it over so that it can be treated as an
attribute of an 'aggregate'. The process of getting from the original individuals who
described, judged and prescribed to the end product of 'social beliefs', 'social valuations'
and 'social norms' goes something like this: 1. Individuals are asked questions,
presumably in an interview. 2. Their answers are then detached from the original
practical determination in the interview situations and from the part the sociologist
played in making them.  They become data.  Note that the questions are not data.  The
data (the recorded responses) are coded to yield 'descriptions', 'evaluations', and
'prescriptions' . . . . 3 . . . . [Statistically manipulate] the data to find the 'central
tendencies' . . . 4. The original individuals are now changed into the sociologist's
aggregate.  Their beliefs, their values, and their norms are now attributed to this
'personage' as 'social beliefs', 'social values', and 'social norms'. It is then perfectly

Smith the first rule is to preserve the subjects, not to make them disappear by using terms like "formal organization" or "bureaucracy", not to forget that they are situated locally and historically, not to forget that they are situated in the actualities of their daily lives. Primacy belongs to the sensuous materiality of our daily lives, not to the conceptual order as if it sprang from Zeus' head. To Smith, we must remember Marx and his insistence "on returning to what people do, on seeing how social forms are produced by actual living individuals" (p. 57).

In Dorothy Smith's account, what we must do as researchers is to preserve the integrity of the social actors, not as alienated objects to be studied by dispassionate observers, but as subjects located in their own experiences, "while exploring and explicating" the power-based relations of the organization itself (1987, p. 111). As Jeffner Allen has pointed out, by focusing on discourse rather than on truth, we rid ourselves of every form of subject/object split, including that split between what is termed the researcher, and the subject who is objectified by the researcher. By recognizing my own inextricable involvement in this political process of creating meaning, I hope not to free myself, that is, to achieve transcendence, nor to presume that through self-reflection I can disengage myself from the will to power as I pursue knowing, but to recognize that I exist, as Dorothy Smith points out, on the same plane as those who agreed to talk to me, all inextricably involved in the discourses which shape us as they shape our understanding of the world.

However, to Smith, as well as to Mumby and Ranson et al. (1980), research into what she terms "social relations as actual practices . . . does not involve substituting the analysis, the perspectives and views of subjects, for the investigation by the [researcher]" (1987, p. 161). As Mumby points out, the description of the social context does not remain at the level of the "language and concepts naturally employed

_____

within the bounds of ordinary sociological thinking that social beliefs, norms and values be treated as causing behavior . . . ". (p. 45)

in that context" (1988, p. 146) by the social actors.  A feminist/postmodernist approach demands of the researchers that they move beyond description, critique or emancipation to explication and evocation.  If we understand the organization in Foucault's terms as "strategies of discourse", then my role as an organizational researcher is to focus on the strategies of discourse as they create and recreate asymmetrical gender power relations, and to remember, as Pringle (1990) points out, that "all discourses are produced from and themselves occupy sexually coded positions" (p. 180).  I am not interested in revealing or discovering reality, or in proving someone's experience is more truth revealing than someone else's.  I am interested in how strategies of discourse both position us and create us in what we term our organizations.  How do we come to know what we ourselves create?

Mumby explicitly focuses on organizational narrative in his analysis of the methodological approach best suited to the critical examination of the organization as ideology.  To Mumby narrative as a "particular discursive practice is not simply a neutral purveyor of information; rather, the act of storytelling is a political act that has consequences for the reproduction of organizational reality" (p. xv).  It is "one of the principle [sic] symbolic structures that shapes reality for organizational members" (p. 15).  However, to Mumby the usual approach to the study of organizational narrative is "descriptive".  The research, which focuses on the discovery of the "shared systems of symbols and meaning . . . constituted and revealed in workers' routine communicative life" (p. 16), is based on the premise that "symbol systems [are] the most visible manifestations of organizational structure—they reflect the unconscious, taken-for-granted rule system that enables an organization to function coherently" (p. 15), a functionalist approach disavowed by Mumby (p. 16) as well as by myself.  In the crisis of representation which is postmodernism, an ambivalence and "uncertainty about what constitutes social reality" (Lather, p. 1991, p. 90) is at odds with any strategy like narrative realism that seeks to uncover the real.

Instead, I will focus on the creation and recreation of relations of domination and subordination through strategies of discourse. As members of the organization we come to know the organization as we participate in the creation and recreation of the organization through narrative. When we speak to each other we are involved in this creation of the organization—when we repeat our memories of these conversations we are repeating how we have come to know these organizations. These conversations—initially with our colleagues, and later with the researcher—are our own way of putting into words what it is we know about the organization, our way of attaching meaning to our experiences, meaning which is but a temporary retrospective fixing, in Derrida's words. In this, our subjectivity, our experiences and our meanings which we attach to our experiences, meanings which we call knowledge of the organization, are all mediated by power and gender. Our words are neither the transparent nor the murky reflection of a reality, that if we could just achieve the proper distance we would be able to understand and reflect accurately. Our words, as we recreate our understanding of our involvement in that organization, are our understanding, our meaning. There is no reality that is better understood by others by virtue of their place. Each person makes that journey into the unknown in terms of her or his frame of reference, and that understanding is shaped by her or his involvement in the organization, mediated by power and gender. What people say, how they assign meaning to their understanding of the organization, is intimately and ultimately political, just as it is materially embedded and shaped by gender, and it is that process which feminist/postmodernist practice illuminates.

## STEPS FOR CARRYING OUT THE METHODOLOGY: THE METHOD

Organizational narrative in the creation and recreation of domination and subordination through communication, or strategies of discourse in Foucault's terms, a place where language is the terrain "where differently privileged discourses struggle via confrontation and/or displacement" (Lather, 1991, p. 8), is my focus.  The role of the researcher in a feminist/postmodernist study is, in Smith's terms, to explore and explicate how meaning is attached to the social relations within the organization, social relations which are mediated by knowledge and power and gender, materially based, and expressed discursively.  As a caveat, it should be remembered that I as the researcher have no intention of attempting generalizations, no a-historical predictions or universalizations; I do not presume to undertake the positivist's or interpretivist's role of uncovering a foundational reality, whether objective or subjective.  Instead reality is subject to multiple meanings, multiple readings, multiple interpretations where power, not reason, is the ultimate arbiter, where I am as positioned in relation to the dominant discourse by the links between power and gender and knowledge as those who talked to me and of whom I write.  As Patti Lather (1991) reminds us,  to write in the postmodern is to be evocative as opposed to didactic, to displace extended argument by "'a much messier form of bricolage [oblique collage of juxtapositions] that moves back and forth from positions that remains skeptical of each other though perhaps not always skeptical enough'", where ambiguities "proliferate rather than diminish meanings" (p. 10), where research practices need to be "viewed as much more inscriptions of legitimation than procedures that help us get closer to some 'truth' capturable via language" (p. 112).

In that sense then, the method became a series of unstructured talks with four newcomers, two male and two female, to various organizations [the organization itself not being the focus].  I wanted equal numbers of men and women, not to compare them,

not to do a form of norm and deviation research, in Cameron's (1985) words, but to replicate what we face in our society and in our organizations: men and women working together and the complex implications that has for theory that is written by and based on men's experiences. I am a woman writing from a feminist perspective who has deliberately chosen to write about both women and men, in the same equal numbers as prevails in our larger society. I don't wish to pretend that all women speak for the generic "woman" or the the generic "human" [and just who might that be?], or that all men speak for the generic "man" (which presumably includes women, but actually cannot), or to attempt to achieve a synthesis of viewpoints, the idea of synthesis residing in the notion of opposing dualities which I specifically eschew.

These were not so much conversations or interviews between two people—both words inadequate for a feminist/postmodernist study which places gender/ power relations in the forefront[4]—as the provision of a place for them to speak. The newcomers themselves provided the structure of the talks. After asking the initial question I said as little as possible; I did not wish to direct what these people said to me about their coming to know the organization. That does not mean that I assumed either the "passive non-interventionist" stance of ethnography or the "rhetorical and ideological innocence" of the emancipatory critiques (Lather, p. 96)—both are

---

[4]Following Nancy Fraser's (1987) comments on the notion of conversation in Habermas, and how it denies gender power differences, conversation does not seem to be the right word, and neither does interview, with its overtones of the subject/object duality which characterizes the acquisition of knowledge in Enlightenment thought, and which implicitly excludes women from the position of the subject who knows, relegating women only to the known (cf. Hekman, 1990). To Lather (1991) "As a mode of knowing the interview technique is an exemplary strategy of traditional humanism since such a device inscribes fundamental humanist values (that is, liberal pluralism, unmediated knowledge, participatory democracy, consensus among free subjects in the very practices it claims to be studying). . . . The focus of the interviews (unitary, sovereign subjects) reaffirmed the belief that people contain knowledge (they are self present subjects) and all that one has to do to have access to that knowledge is to engage in 'free' and 'unconstrained' discussions. . . . The interview technique is, of course, an exemplary instance of what Derrida has called the desire for presence, which is an effect of the dominant logocentrism in the academy" (p. 112).

dependent on the assumption that I can abstract myself from these relations of power and knowledge and gender which I wish to explicate, which of course I cannot.  I asked if they could describe for me in as much detail as they could remember conversations—the organizational narrative of Mumby, the discourses of power and knowledge of Foucault— which helped to develop their understanding of the organization and the meaning they attached to that understanding, the temporary retrospective fixing of meaning which to Derrida is the site of power.  This had two parts, and I told the people who were speaking to me how I was going to approach this before we began, so they knew.  When they first spoke to me, I asked simply "How did you come to know the organization?"  This "speaking to me" about how they came to know was taped and transcribed, and given back to them to read.  I told them at this point that they could add anything they liked, clarify anything, or cross anything out that they did not want used.  At this juncture there was the opportunity to talk about what they saw in the transcript.  In the second part, I asked them to speak about "How other people see you in the organization?"  This "speaking about" was again taped and transcribed, and given back to them, and they again had the opportunity to cross anything out, to add anything, to clarify anything, and to talk again about what they saw in the transcript, now that some time had passed.  In the third part, I read and reread their transcriptions, recognizing that both of us were involved in a political dance of meaning, that in what they said, and what I thought they said, lay power.

It is from these transcriptions, then, that I tried to arrive at a sense of how they came to know and understand their particular organization, this ambiguous, materially-based socially constructed reality-in-flux, these strategies of discourse, where gender, power and knowledge, embedded materially, all intersect.

## CRITERIA FOR A FEMINIST/POSTMODERNIST STUDY

In this section I will develop the feminist/postmodernist position that all criteria reflect time and place and political position, and as such, must be subjected to the same skepticism, the same doubt that is accorded any other possibly transcendental position. As Linda Nicholson (1990) has written, there are no criteria which can be justified outside their historical place, no criteria which can stand outside their own metanarrative. Reason, objectivity, impartiality, universality, generalizability—all are confined within Enlightenment dualities, all seek to justify, as both Dorothy Smith and Anthony Giddens have noted, a tautological argument. They all work to ensure the removal of the observer from the social context at the same time as they work to ensure the discovery of the "correct" reality; they all work to remove the knower from the known. But, if all criteria represent some aspect of power, how can we, in Seyla Benhabib's terms, not simply validate the status quo by declaring all criteria suspect and therefore maintaining in power that which already is? The answer lies in Spivak's contention that since it is impossible for either any person or any theory to stand outside relations of gender and power and knowledge, the politics of decentering, of deconstruction, of remembering our own privilege and the privileges of others, and thus of the necessity to both deconstruct the margins of our own and of other's privilege and to reject closure in favor of doubt as we use metanarrative as our companion, as a place of enablement, rather than as "a declaration of war", must be applied to any criteria which we would use. The politics of deconstruction are not the politics of modernist thought, which rely on oppositional dualities to decide what is knowledge and what it is not. The deconstruction of oppositional dualities are displacements of all the violent hierarchies which structure our thoughts: truth/falsity, absolute/relative, all that which has given us certainty in a world that can never be certain. But as Patti Lather (1991) points out, to say that if we cannot know everything then we can know nothing is to

miss the point.  In a world of flux and indeterminacy, nothing can be understood or known as either/or; that is itself seen as a discursive strategy which seeks to legitimate itself outside of time and place.

The criteria which is implicit in feminist/postmodernist theory, rather than acting as a transcendental category, as a way of justifying truth and truth speaking and ultimately reality itself, is a form of analysis which seeks to deconstruct the centre, to deconstruct the confining dualities of Enlightenment thought, and to recognize our inevitable involvement in discourse, where power, gender and knowledge meet.  The question is whose speaking voice will these criteria provide a place for, and whose speaking voice will they silence?  At the same time, however, as we recognize our own inevitable involvement in discourse, feminist/postmodernist theory cannot reject, as Spivak points out, the onto-phenomenological moment inherent in feminism/postmodernism.  This moment draws on critical theory as defined by Marx in 1843 as "'the self-clarification of the struggles and wishes of the age'", struggles and wishes which shed "light on the character and bases" of domination and subordination (Fraser, 1987, p. 31). Recognizing our own inevitable involvement in relations of power and knowledge does not mean that exploring and explicating how things work is beyond us.  It is not a question of who is right, who is wrong, who is rational, who is emotional, who has a grasp of reality, who does not, but, in Dorothy Smith's term, "how things work, how our world is put together, how things happen to us as they do" (Smith, 1990, p. 34).  Or, to add to both Mumby and Foucault, in an understanding where organizations are defined by words, how we ourselves both create and are created by words, how strategies of discourse, embedded materially, both position us and are resisted by us.  This focus does not deny the self or materiality, as Foucault would have it.  It does not presume that the self is wholly created within discourse, Flax's perceptive criticism of Foucault, nor ignore materiality, Dorothy Smith's criticism.  Instead, and within these criticisms, it

focuses on where we work as defined by words, rooted in the actualities of our daily lives there, and amenable to explication.