3.7

Some Dare Call It Power

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Historically, the precursors of modern 'organization' consisted of the medieval guild structure – a simple tripartite structure (Offe 1976). One entered the organization at the base as an apprentice. Having served one's time as an apprentice, during which the rudiments of the knowledge base appropriate to the guild were learned and practised, one became a journeyman. A journeyman plied his trade peripatetically, honing his skill and knowledge with new masters as he travelled, and, if fortunate, slowly acquiring some capital.[1] With capital and the right connections, established during the apprenticeship and the journey, journeymen might one day become masters in their own right. The master oversaw everything: if not masters of the universe, they would at least profess monopoly mastery over a licensed sphere of skills in a particular locale, and thus enjoy a parochial mastery. Of course, conditions would vary from workshop to workshop: some masters would be excellent guides to the apprentice, passing on skill, knowledge and learning generally. Others might be petty tyrants, incapable of creating learning other than through fear. Within the general form, different personalities, to use a contemporary concept, would infuse the relationship with a different ethos.

Guild structures were task-continuous status structures, in which obedience to a wide range of technical rules was required from all individuals (Offe 1976). Superordinates differed from subordinates 'merely in terms of greater mastery of the rules and greater ability, knowledge and experience in production' (1976: 25). Here, power clearly derived from ownership and control of the means of production, supported by the power of surveillance. Important too was knowledge, with power also deriving from

knowledge of the means of production – from 'mastery'.

Modern organizations did not so much evolve from guild structures as pass them by. They grew not out of the absolutist soil of mercantile feudalism, with its monopolies in trade and industry, so much as in its interstices, where, frequently, the displaced and dispossessed carved out artisanal and industrial niches for themselves (Hall 1986). As organizations grew larger, skills became increasingly fragmented and specialized, and positions became more functionally differentiated. Strategies were developed to steer a common path for the organization by centralizing power and enveloping the potentially troublesome and plural sources of identity that had arisen with the division of labour. Modern organizations were thus designed to function as if they were a unitary organism. It is because they are composed of a multitude of unique components that this design is promoted against, or in spite of, their non-unitary form.

These are 'task-discontinuous status structures' (Offe 1976). Unlike the guilds, the status structure and the functional structure are no longer mapped precisely on to each other in a universal sphere of organization knowledge. Tasks are fragmented, skills are diverse, and knowledge is differentially codified, held and valued. Typically, according to labour process theorists (e.g. Braverman 1974), knowledge is divided between that which is more valued, which is generally more esoteric, abstract and related to mental rather than manual labour, and that which is less valued, more mundane and related to manual labour. Implicit in these distinctions is the notion of contemporary organization. Some jobs have been designated

as supervisory, while other posts exist to execute orders derived from superordinates. Hence power is structured into organization design.

In such a design, the issue of 'organization obedience' is central to the discussion of power (e.g. Mintzberg 1983; Hamilton and Biggart 1985; also see Etzioni 1961; Weber 1978; Assad 1987; Kieser 1987). Power has typically been seen as the ability to get others to do what you want them to, if necessary against their will (Weber 1978), or to get them to do something they otherwise would not (Dahl 1957). This seemingly simple definition, which presents the negative rather than the positive aspects of power, has been challenged, amended, critiqued, extended, and rebuffed over the years but, nonetheless, remains the starting point for a remarkably diverse body of literature.

But that is where the synergy and convergence end. There are, in fact, a multitude of different voices that speak to power. The result has been a variety of contradictory conceptualizations. The confusion has been exacerbated because the two loudest voices to emerge – the functionalist and the critical (to use simple categorizations) – rarely communicate with each other. The former has adopted a managerialist orientation whose underlying assumptions are rarely articulated, much less critiqued. The result has been an apparently pragmatic concept, easy to use but also easy to abuse. The latter has confronted issues of domination and exploitation head on but appears increasingly to be less relevant to those seeking to achieve collective action.

The aim of this chapter is to explore these different voices increasingly heard in the literature on power and to forge a reconceptualization of power as the medium necessary for responsible, collective action. The first section explores the historical development of these two voices. It discusses the broader heritage of Marx and Weber concerning power, followed by the early management work on power. The second section shows how subsequent developments built on the respective approaches, in many respects drawing them further apart. An analysis of more recent work shows how the different voices have continued to grow apart.

THE FOUNDING VOICES

This section examines some of the key work that provided the foundations for the current work on power and politics in organizations. Broadly speaking, the impetus came from two, quite different directions. The older tradition stems from the work of Marx and Weber. Obviously, with such a parentage, this body of work has focused on the existence of conflicting interests and has examined power as domination. As a result, it has addressed how power becomes embedded in organizational structures in a way that serves certain, but not all, interest groups. The second tradition developed more centrally within the field of organization studies itself. In contrast to the work on power and interests, this body of work has taken for granted the way in which power is distributed in formal organizational structure and, instead, examined how groups acquire and wield power *not* granted to them under official arrangements.

Power and Interests in Organizations

One approach to the way in which power is structured into organization design has derived from work on class structures (see Clegg and Dunkerley 1980: 463–82 for a discussion of the key literature). In as much as conceptions of interests depict the arena of organizational life in terms of the leitmotif of 'class' and its social relations, they will be attuned to the general conditions of economic domination and subordination in organizations, as theorists of the left from Marx onwards have defined them (see, for instance, Carchedi 1987: 100 for an identification of these conditions).

Marx (1976) argued that class interests are structurally predetermined, irrespective of other bases of identity. They follow from the relations concerning the ownership and control of the means of production. While relations concerning production, property, ownership and control have inscribed the key social relations of capitalist modernity (Clegg and Dunkerley 1980; Clegg et al. 1986), few scholars accept this deterministic view today.[2] The first writer to render Marx's view more complex was Weber, who considered relations *in* production as well as relations *of* production.

Weber acknowledged that power was derived from owning and controlling the means of production, but he argued that it was not reducible exclusively to the dichotomous categories of ownership and non-ownership of the means of production, as proposed by Marx. From Weber's perspective, power also derived from the *knowledge* of operations as much as from ownership. Organizations could be differentiated in terms of people's ability to control the methods of production, as influenced by technical relations of production, and embedded in diverse occupational identities from which grew the subjective life-world of the organization. In this way, Weber emphasized the forms of identification and representation of which organizational members actually made use,

rather than simply assumed that their view of the world was merely a 'false' consciousness.

Weber's insights indicated that all organizational members had some creativity, discretion and agency to use power (although some more than others). In the view of Marx and much subsequent theory, there is little room for discretion and its opportunities for strategic agency. Economic conditions regulate the context in which labour is sold and capital raised and, at the outset, two classes are defined: those who possess capital and those who do not. The latter own only their own creative, differentially trained and disciplined capacities that they are obliged to sell on the labour market. But, once sold to bureaucratic organizations (Clegg 1990), labour has the opportunity to use those capacities creatively in 'certain social relationships or carry out forms of social action within the order governing the organization' (Weber 1978: 217). So, by factoring in the differential possibilities for creativity, it becomes clear that organizational members have some control over their disposition to exercise power, both to challenge and to reproduce the formal organization structure in which differential powers are vested, legitimated and reproduced. Thus organizational 'structures of dominancy' do not depend solely on economic power for their foundation and maintenance (1978: 942).

In this way, labour power represents a capacity embodied in a person who retains discretion over the application of that capacity. From the employer's point of view, the employee represents a capacity to labour which must be realized: these are the conditions of effective management. Standing in the way of realization is the embodiment of potential power in the capacities of the people hired, who may be more or less willing to work as subjects ruled by managerial discretion and control. Always, because of embodiment, the people hired as labour will retain ultimate discretion over themselves, what they do, and how they do it. Consequently, a potential source of resistance resides in this inescapable and irreducible embodiment of labour power.

The gap between the capacity to labour and its effective realization implies power and the organization of control. The depiction of this gap is the mainstay of some Marxian traditions of analysis, particularly of alienation (Schacht 1971; Geyer and Schweitzer 1981; Mézáros 1970; Gamble and Walton 1972). Management is forever seeking new strategies and tactics through which to deflect discretion. The most effective and economical are thought to be those that substitute self-discipline for the discipline of an external manager. Less effective but historically more prolific, however, have been the attempts of organizations to close the discretionary gap through the use of rule systems, the mainstay of Weberian analyses of organizations as bureaucracies. Such rule systems seek to regulate meaning to control relations in organizations through the structure of formal organization design. Thus, a hierarchy is prescribed within which legitimate power is circumscribed.

In summary, this founding research focused on the way in which power derived from owning and controlling the means of production, a power that was reinforced by organizational rules and structures. Weber's work provided for more room for strategic manoeuvre than Marxian views. As a result, workers had options and possibilities to challenge the power that controlled them. However, as we shall see, these options proved to be far from easy to exercise due to more sophisticated strategies on the part of dominant groups.

Power and Hierarchy in Organizations

As the section above demonstrates, power in organizations necessarily concerns the hierarchical structure of offices and their relation to each other. Particularly (but not exclusively) the field of management has tended to label such power as 'legitimate' power.[3] One consequence of the widespread, if implicit, acceptance of the hierarchical nature of power has been that social scientists have rarely felt it necessary to explain why it is that power should be hierarchical. In other words, in this stream of research, the power embedded in the hierarchy has been viewed as 'normal' and 'inevitable' following from the formal design of the organization. As such, it has been largely excluded from analyses which have, instead, focused on 'illegitimate' power, i.e. power exercised outside formal hierarchical structures and the channels that they sanction.

One of the earliest management studies of such power was that of Thompson (1956), who researched two USAF bomber wings. The work of the USAF personnel was characterized by highly developed technical requirements in the operational sphere, for both aircrew and ground crew. While the aircrew possessed greater formal authority than the ground crew, the latter were in a highly central position within the workflow of the USAF base relative to the more autonomous aircrew. The aircrew depended upon the ground crew for their survival and safety, which conferred a degree of power on the latter not derived from the formal design of the base relations. Thompson attributed the power of the ground crew to their technical competency *vis-à-vis* the flight security of the planes and the

strategic position it accorded them because of the centrality of concerns for the aircrew's safety.

Other writers confirmed Thompson's (1956) view that it was the technical design of tasks and their interdependencies that best explained the operational distribution of power, rather than the formal prescriptions of the organization design. Dubin (1957: 62), for example, noted how some tasks will be more essential to the functional interdependence of a system than will others, and the way in which some of these may be the exclusive function of a specific party. Mechanic (1962) built on this argument, extending it to all organizations, saying that such technical knowledge generally might be a base for organization power. In this way, researchers began to differentiate between formally prescribed power and 'actual' power, which was also regarded as illegitimate.

> research workers have seldom regarded actual power . . . [but] have stressed the rational aspects of organization to the neglect of unauthorized or illegitimate power. (Thompson 1956: 290)

Other researchers were to echo this distinction as they followed in Thompson's footsteps. Bennis et al. (1958: 144) made a distinction between 'formal' and 'informal' organization. In the formal organization there resides 'authority', a potential to influence based on position; while in the informal organization there exists power, 'the actual ability of influence based on a number of factors including, of course, organizational position'.

Another important study was carried out by Crozier (1964), which focused on maintenance workers in a French state-owned tobacco monopoly. Their job was to fix machine breakdowns referred to them by production workers. The production workers, at the technical core of the organization, were highly central to the workflow centred bureaucracy that characterized the organization. The maintenance workers were marginal, at least in the formal representation of the organization design. In practice, however, the story was very different.

The production workers were paid on a piece-rate system in a bureaucracy designed on scientific management principles. Most workers were effectively 'deskilled'. The bureaucracy was a highly formal, highly prescribed organization: there was very little that was not planned and regulated, except for the propensity of the machines to break down, and thus diminish the bonus that the production workers could earn. Hence, to maintain their earnings the production workers needed the machines to function, which made them extraordinarily dependent on the maintenance workers. Without their expertise, breakdowns could not be rectified or bonus rates

protected. Consequently, the maintenance workers had a high degree of power over the other workers in the bureaucracy because they controlled the remaining source of uncertainty.

Management and the production workers were aware of this and had attempted to remedy the situation through preventive maintenance. But manuals disappeared and sabotage sometimes occurred. The maintenance workers were indefatigable in defence of their relative autonomy, privilege and power. Through a skilled capacity, the result of their technical knowledge, they could render the uncertain certain. The price of restoring normalcy was a degree of autonomy and relative power, enjoyed and defended by the maintenance workers, well in excess of that formally designed for them.

Crozier's (1964) study was a landmark. He had taken an under-explicated concept – power – and had attached it to the central concept of the emergent theory of the firm – uncertainty. A central feature of organizations as conceptualized in the 'behavioural theory of the firm' (Cyert and March 1963) was that they attempted to behave as if they were systems. Yet, they did so in an uncertain environment. The ability to control that uncertainty thus represented a potential source of power.

After Crozier (1964) the field developed rapidly. A theory emerged, called the 'strategic contingencies theory of intra-organizational power' (Hickson et al. 1971), which built on these ideas. At the core was the idea that power was related to uncertainty, or at least to its control. More formal survey methods were used, instead of grounded research, in which a series of hypothetical scenarios were presented for evaluation by departmental managers. In this way, those functionally specific personnel were identified who used esoteric technical knowledge to control uncertainty and thus increase their power relative to the formally designed hierarchy.

The change in methodology helped produce a formal functionalist model. The organization was conceptualized as comprising four functional sub-systems or sub-units. The sub-units were interdependent, but some were more or less dependent, and produced more or less uncertainty for others. What connected them in the model was the major task element of the organization, which was conceptualized as 'coping with uncertainty'. The theory ascribed the balance of power between the sub-units to imbalances in how these interdependent sub-units coped with this uncertainty. Thus the system of sub-units was opened up to environmental inputs, which were the initial source of uncertainty. Sub-units were characterized as more or less specialized and differentiated by

the functional division of labour, and were related by an essential need to reduce uncertainty and achieve organizational goals: 'to use differential power to function within the system rather than to destroy it' (1971: 217).

According to this model, power is defined in terms of 'strategic contingency'. Strategically contingent sub-units are the most powerful, because they are the least dependent on other sub-units and can cope with the greatest systemic uncertainty, given that the sub-unit is central to the organization system and not easily substitutable. The theory assumes that the sub-units are unitary and cohesive in nature whereas, in fact, they are more likely to be hierarchical, with a more or less problematic culture of consent and dissent. To be unitary, some internal mechanisms of power must exist to allow such a representation to flourish, silence conflicting voices, and over-rule different conceptions of interests, attachments, strategies and meanings. The theory assumes that management definitions prevail but research suggests this is not always the case (Collinson 1994). Nor can we assume that management itself will necessarily be a unitary or cohesive category. For it to speak with one voice usually means that other voices have been marginalized or silenced. In other words, the strategic contingencies theory provides very little about these aspects of power because it does not challenge existing patterns of legitimacy.

Similar to the strategic contingencies view of power, in terms of theoretical approach, is the resource dependency view. It derives from the social psychological literature that Emerson (1962) developed and which was implicit in Mechanic's (1962) study of the power of lower-level participants. Examples include French and Raven (1968), Pettigrew (1973), Pfeffer and Salancik (1974) and Salancik and Pfeffer (1974). Information (Pettigrew 1973), uncertainty (Crozier 1964), expertise, credibility, stature and prestige (Pettigrew 1973), access to and contacts with higher echelon members and the control of money, rewards and sanctions (French and Raven 1968; Benfari et al. 1986) have all been identified as bases of power. All resource lists are infinite, however, since different phenomena become resources in different contexts. Without a total theory of contexts, which is impossible, one can never achieve closure on what the bases of power are. They might be anything, under the appropriate circumstances.

Possessing scarce resources is not enough in itself, however, to confer power. Actors have to be aware of their contextual pertinence and control and use them accordingly (Pettigrew 1973). This process of mobilizing power is known as politics (Pettigrew 1973; Hickson et al. 1986), a term whose negative connotations have

helped to reinforce the mainstream view that power used outside formal authoritative arrangements was illegitimate and dysfunctional. It was the dichotomous nature of power and authority that created the theoretical space for the contingency and dependency approaches. The concept of power was thus reserved primarily for exercises of discretion by organization members which were not sanctioned by their position in the formal structure. Such exercises are premised on an illegitimate or informal use of resources; while the legitimate system of authority, on the other hand, is taken for granted and rendered non-problematic.

Two Voices Compared

The comparison of this early work on power reveals two diverging streams of research. The former, developed from and sustained by the work of Marx and Weber, adopted a critical look at the processes whereby power was legitimated in the form of organizational structures. For these researchers, power was *domination*, and actions taken to challenge it constituted *resistance* to domination (see Barbalet 1987). The mainstream management work saw power quite differently: existing organizational arrangements were structures not of domination but of formal, legitimate, functional *authority*. Power was, effectively, resistance but of an illegitimate, dysfunctional kind. In other words, in studying 'power', the founding voices speak to different phenomena, and from quite different value positions. The Marxist/Weberian tradition equated power with the structures by which certain interests were dominated; while the management theorists defined power as those actions that fell outside the legitimated structures, and which threatened organizational goals.

VARIATIONS ON TWO THEMES

Subsequent work was designed to enhance and extend these foundational ideas. In so doing, it served to widen the gulf that had already grown between the two voices that had appeared. These voices were directed principally at their own constituencies, not at bridging the gulf through dialogue across the divide.

Strategies of Domination: Manufacturing Consent

The various constituent parts of the critical literature began to probe the means of domination in

more detail. The heritage left by Weber provided a theoretical basis for reflecting on resistance by subordinate groups. But, why was there so little resistance and why did these groups so often consent to their own subjugation? Equally puzzling was the prevalence of passivity, which was so much more marked than revolutionary fervour. Marx had predicted that the individual acts of resistance to their exploitation would meld into a revolutionary challenge to existing power structures by the proletariat who peopled the base of most large, complex organizations. Yet, clearly, such dreams of a proletarian class consciousness had failed to materialize.

One writer who addressed this issue, through a somewhat circuitous route, was Steven Lukes (1974). He traced the developments in the study of power made in the political sciences. Early studies had typically focused exclusively on the decision-making process (e.g. Dahl 1957; 1961; Polsby 1963; Wolfinger 1971). Researchers analyzed key decisions that seemed likely to illustrate the power relations prevailing in a particular community. The object was to determine who made these decisions. If the same groups were responsible for most decisions, as some researchers had suggested, the community could be said to be ruled by an elite. The researchers found, in contrast, that different groups prevailed in decision-making. Such a community was termed *pluralist* and it was hypothesized that America as a whole could be considered a pluralist society.

Some writers began to question the pluralist assumption that decision-making processes were accessible, and non-participation reflected satisfaction. Doubt about the 'permeability' of the US political system was prompted by the civil rights movement and the backlash to the Vietnam War (Parry and Morriss 1975). The pluralists were criticized for their failure to recognize that interests and grievances might remain inarticulate, unarticulated, and outside the decision-making arena. Consequently, conflict might well exist even if it was not directly observable (e.g. Gaventa 1980; Saunders 1980). The focus on formal decision-making was also criticized because of its assumption that access to it was equally available to all organizational members.

Researchers started to examine how full and equal participation was constrained. Schattschneider argued non-participation might be due to:

the suppression of options and alternatives that reflect the needs of the non participants. It is not necessarily true that people with the greatest needs participate in politics most actively – whoever decides what the game is about also decides who gets in the game. (1960: 105)

Building on this insight, Bachrach and Baratz (1962; 1963; 1970) developed the concept of a second face of power – a process whereby issues could be excluded from decision-making, confining the agenda to 'safe' questions. A variety of barriers are available to the more powerful groups to prevent subordinates from fully participating in the decision-making process through the invocation of procedures and political routines. The use of these mechanisms has been termed non-decision-making, because it allows the more powerful actors to determine outcomes from behind the scenes. This work highlights the fact that power is not exercised solely in the taking of key decisions, and that visible decision-makers are not necessarily the most powerful.

Lukes (1974) argued that Bachrach and Baratz's model did not go far enough because it continued to assume that some form of conflict was necessary to stimulate the use of non-decision-making power. Their focus was very much upon 'issues' about which 'decisions' were made, albeit 'non-decisions' (Ranson et al. 1980: 8). Lukes maintained, however, that power could be used to prevent conflict by shaping

[people's] perceptions, cognitions, and preferences in such a way that they accept their role in the existing order of things, either because they can see or imagine no alternative to it, or because they view it as natural and unchangeable, or because they value it as divinely ordained and beneficial. (1974: 24)

The study of power could not, according to Lukes, be confined to observable conflict, the outcomes of decisions, or even suppressed issues. It must also consider the question of political quiescence: why grievances do not exist; why demands are not made; and why conflict does not arise, since such *inaction* may also be the result of power. We may, then, be 'duped, hoodwinked, coerced, cajoled or manipulated into political inactivity' (Saunders 1980: 22).

It was this use of power that helped sustain the dominance of elite groups and reduced the ability of subordinate interests to employ the discretionary power they possessed:

Power is most effective and insidious in its consequences when issues do not arise at all, when actors remain unaware of their sectional claims, that is, power is most effective when it is unnecessary. (Ranson et al. 1980: 8)

In this third dimension, Lukes focused attention on the societal and class mechanisms which perpetuated the status quo. These relate to Gramsci's concept of ideological hegemony (Clegg 1989a) – where 'a structure of power relations is fully legitimized by an integrated system of cultural and normative assumptions'

(Hyman and Brough 1975: 199). According to this view, the ability to define reality is used by dominant classes to support and justify their material domination, thus preventing challenges to their position.

Another stream of research on this issue came from labour process theorists (e.g. Braverman 1974; Burawoy 1979; Edwards 1979), who examined the day-to-day minutiae of power and resistance, built around the 'games' that characterize the rhythms of organizational life (Burawoy 1979). Studies (e.g. Edwards 1979) also considered the historical patterns that structure the overall context of power, from simple, direct control premised on surveillance; through technical control based on the dominance of the employee by the machine, and particularly the assembly line; to fully fledged bureaucratic control – Weber's rule by rules. This tradition focuses on the dialectics of power and resistance in relation to phenomena such as gender, technology, ethnicity, managerial work and other aspects of the structuration of work and its organizational context (Knights and Willmott 1985; 1989; Knights and Morgan 1991; Knights and Murray 1992; Kerfoot and Knights 1993).

More recently, the notion of 'organizational outflanking' (Mann 1986: 7) has been used to provide another answer to the question of why the dominated so frequently consent to their subordination. Rather than seeing this phenomenon as either denial on the part of the oppressed or outwitting on the part of the elite, this view focuses on the relative collective powers of the participants. Organizational outflanking can be thought of in at least two related ways. One of these concerns the absence of knowledgeable resources on the part of the outflanked. The other concerns precisely what it is that the organizationally outflanked may know only too well.

First, let us consider the absence of knowledge: ignorance. Frequently those who are relatively powerless remain so because they are ignorant of the ways of power: ignorant, that is, of matters of strategy such as assessing the resources of the antagonist, of routine procedures, rules, agenda setting, access, informal conduits as well as formal protocols, the style and substance of power. It is not that they do not know the rules of the game so much as that they might not even recognize the game, let alone know its rules. Ignorance also often extends to a lack of knowledge of other powerless agencies with whom one might construct an alliance. Here resistance remains an isolated occurrence, easily surmounted and overcome. As long as resistance remains uncoordinated it can easily be dealt with by

defeat, exile or incorporation, even though the antagonists might easily outweigh the protagonists if they could only connect. One step further from isolation is division. Time and space may be ordered and arranged to minimize interaction or even render one group of subordinates invisible to another (Barnes 1988: 101). Complex divisions of labour may achieve this as may the extreme experience of competition. Examples of the latter might be the arrangement of concerted action within an organization in such a way that it is experienced in individual rather than collective terms, through competitive individual bonus systems of payment or through other mechanisms for constructing an egocentric environment.

Secondly, organizational outflanking on the basis of knowledge operates in so far as individuals, who may know what is to be done, also know that the costs of doing so outweigh the chances of success or the benefits of succeeding. The necessity of dull compulsion in order to earn one's living, the nature of busy work, arduous exertion and ceaseless activity as routinely deadening, compulsory and invariable: such techniques of power may easily discipline the blithest of theoretically free spirits when the conditions of that freedom become evident. In this way, outflanking works against certain groups either because they do not know enough to resist – or because they know rather too much concerning the futility of such action.

Strategies of Management: Defeating Conflict

The mainstream management literature took a different approach: instead of concerning itself with the use of power to prevent conflict, it focused almost exclusively on the use of power to defeat conflict. In fact definitions explicitly linked power to situations of conflict that arise when groups and individuals seek to preserve their vested interests (e.g. Pettigrew 1973; 1985; MacMillan 1978; Pfeffer 1981a; 1992; Narayaran and Fahey 1982; Gray and Ariss 1985; Schwenk 1989).

> From the definition of power, it is clear that political activity is activity which is undertaken to overcome some resistance or opposition. Without opposition or contest within the organization, there is neither the need nor the expectation that one would observe political activity. (Pfeffer 1981a: 7)

These definitions evoke the idea of a 'fair fight' where one group (usually senior management) is forced to use power to overcome the opposition of another (perhaps intransigent unions or dissident employees). Such a view is reinforced

by the definition of politics in terms of illegitimacy. A common definition of politics in the management literature is the unsanctioned or illegitimate use of power to achieve unsanctioned or illegitimate ends (e.g. Mintzberg 1983; 1984; also see Mayes and Allen 1977; Gandz and Murray 1980; Enz 1988). It clearly implies that this use of power is dysfunctional and aimed at thwarting initiatives intended to benefit the organization for the sake of self-interest.

> Distilled to its essence, therefore, politics refers to individual or group behaviour that is informal, ostensibly parochial, typically divisive, and above all, in the technical sense, illegitimate – sanctioned neither by formal authority, accepted ideology, nor certified expertise (though it may exploit any one of those). (Mintzberg 1983: 172, emphasis removed)

These definitions ignore the question: in *whose* eyes is power deemed illegitimate, unsanctioned, or dysfunctional? Legitimacy is usually defined in terms of the 'organization', when writers really mean the organizational elites, i.e. senior management. Thus managerial interests are equated with organizational needs, and the possibility that managers, like any other group, might seek to serve their own vested interests is largely ignored (e.g. Watson 1982).

Existing organizational structures and systems are not neutral or apolitical but structurally sedimented phenomena. There is a history of struggles already embedded in the organization. The organization is a collective life-world in which traces of the past are vested, recur, shift and take on new meanings. In Weber's terms organizations already incorporate a 'structure of dominancy' in their functioning. Authority, structure, ideology, culture, and expertise are invariably saturated and imbued with power but the mainstream tradition has taken the structures of power vested in formal organization design very much for granted. The focus is on the exercise of power within a given structure of dominancy. Such an approach focuses only on surface politics and misrepresents the balance of power. It attributes far too much power to subordinate groups who are chastised for using it; while the hidden ways in which senior managers use power behind the scenes to further their position by shaping legitimacy, values, technology and information are conveniently excluded from analysis. This narrow definition (see Frost 1987) obscures the true workings of power and depoliticizes organizational life (Clegg 1989a). It paints an ideologically conservative picture that implicitly advocates the status quo and hides the processes whereby organizational elites maintain their dominance (Alvesson 1984). Mechanisms of domination such as leadership, culture and structure are

usually treated in this mainstream literature as neutral, inevitable, or objective and, hence, unproblematic (Clegg 1989a; 1989b; also see Ranson et al. 1980; Deetz 1985; Knights and Willmott 1992; Willmott 1993).

Thus the functionalist perspective has equated power with illegitimate, dysfunctional, self-interested behaviour. These definitions have raised an interesting question concerning what happens when there is no conflict: does power simply cease to exist or does it turn into something else? If so, what does it become? Clearly, according to this work, only 'bad guys' use power; the 'good guys' use something else, although the literature is not clear on exactly what. This issue becomes even more problematic when the broader management literature is factored into the equation. Much of this work does not focus on power *per se* and, so, does not bother to define it. Nevertheless, power is an integral part of the discussion. For example, work on leadership advocates the use of charisma by managers. Writers assume (usually implicitly) that managers will automatically use it responsibly to achieve organizational objectives, even though much of what we know about charismatic power comes from studying such leaders as Hitler, Mussolini, and Pol Pot! So, adding up the streams of functional, managerial work the assumption is that managers use power (or something like it) responsibly in pursuit of organizational goals, while everyone else uses it irresponsibly to resist those objectives. Potential abuses of power by dominant groups are downplayed, while those who challenge managerial prerogatives are automatically discredited by the label 'political'. In this way, ethical issues associated with the use of power are shielded from view, rendering this approach ill-equipped to deal with matters of abuse and exploitation.

In summary, work carried out in the 1970s sought to refine the bases laid down by the founding figures. In each case, however, they built on each body of work separately; little was done in the way of bridging. This is partly due to the apparent reluctance of many management researchers to refer to the broader body of social sciences of which they are a part, and the seeming indifference of sociologists and political scientists to the study of organizational, rather than societal or class, processes.

A BRIDGE TOO FAR?

A few studies did offer the prospect of bridging the two worlds. However, as the following discussion demonstrates, their ideas were not

readily adopted by the larger body of function-
alist literature, which remained committed to
existing conceptualizations. At the same time,
developments in the critical field were devoted
explicitly to rejecting functionalism, not accom-
modating it. As will be discussed, these devel-
opments were also to challenge many of the
modernist assumptions embedded in the critical
literature.

Managing Meaning: the Creation of Legitimacy

One issue that did, finally, attract attention
within the management literature was power
as legitimation (Astley and Sachdeva 1984).
Political scientists had long recognized the
advantages of creating legitimacy for existing
institutions, thereby avoiding the necessity of
using more coercive, visible forms of power
(Lipset 1959; Schaar 1969; Roelofs 1976; Roths-
child 1979). Legitimacy can also be created for
individual actions, thus reducing the chances of
opposition to them. Edelman (1964; 1971; 1977)
pointed out that power is mobilized not only to
achieve physical outcomes, but also to give those
outcomes meanings – to legitimize and justify
them. Political actors use language, symbols,
and ideologies to placate or arouse the public.

> Political analysis must then proceed on two levels
> simultaneously. It must examine how political
> actions get some groups the tangible things they
> want from government and at the same time it must
> explore what these same actions mean to the mass
> public and how it is placated or aroused by them. In
> Himmelstrand's terms, political actions are both
> instrumental and expressive. (Edelman 1964: 12)

In this way, in the manner described by Lukes's
(1974) third dimension of power, the process of
legitimation prevents opposition from arising.
The advantages of creating legitimacy had not
gone completely unnoticed, even in organization
studies.

> Stable organizing power requires legitimation. To be
> sure, men can be made to work and to obey com-
> mands through coercion, but the coercive use of
> power engenders resistance and sometimes active
> opposition. Power conflicts in and between societies
> are characterized by resistance and opposition, and
> while the latter occur in organizations, effective
> operations necessitate that they be kept at a
> minimum there and, especially, that members do
> not exhibit resistance in discharging their daily
> duties but perform them and comply with directives
> willingly. (Blau 1964: 199–200)

The functionally oriented management literature
had, however, largely ignored this issue.

One writer who attempted to draw legitima-
tion processes into the management fold was
Pettigrew (1977). His work on the management
of meaning explicitly addressed how legitimacy
was created.

> Politics concerns the creation of legitimacy for
> certain ideas, values and demands – not just action
> performed as a result of previously acquired
> legitimacy. The management of meaning refers to
> a process of symbol construction and value use
> designed both to create legitimacy for one's own
> demands and to 'de-legitimize' the demands of
> others. (1977: 85)

He acknowledged that political actors define
success not always in terms of winning in the
face of confrontation (where there must always
be a risk of losing), but sometimes in terms of
their ability to section off spheres of influence
where their domination is perceived as legitimate
and thus unchallenged (Ranson et al. 1980;
Frost 1988). In this way, power is mobilized to
influence behaviour indirectly by giving out-
comes and decisions certain meanings, by
legitimizing and justifying them.

Pfeffer (1981a; 1981b) considered a similar use
of power when he distinguished sentiment
(attitudinal) from substantive (behavioural) out-
comes of power. The latter depend largely on
resource dependency considerations, while the
former refer to the way people feel about the
outcomes and are mainly influenced by the
symbolic aspects of power, such as the use of
political language, symbols and rituals. Pfeffer
(1981a) argued there is only a weak relationship
between symbolic power and substantive out-
comes: that symbolic power is only used *post hoc*
to legitimize outcomes already achieved by
resource dependencies. In this way, Pfeffer
stops short of acknowledging that power can
be used to prevent conflict and opposition. In
fact, there is an inconsistency in Pfeffer's
arguments: if symbolic power is effective
enough to 'quiet' opposition *ex post*, why not
use it *ex ante* to prevent opposition from arising
in the first place? The only factor preventing
Pfeffer from reaching this conclusion is his
refusal to acknowledge the existence of power in
situations other than those characterized by
conflict and opposition (1981a: 7).

The work of these writers and others (e.g.
Clegg 1975; Gaventa 1980; Ranson et al. 1980;
Hardy 1985) offered an opportunity to merge
the management 'school' with the more critical
work on domination. The bridge was never
made, however, for a number of reasons. First,
the idea of using power to manage meaning and
create legitimacy was never taken up to any
great extent by North American and other
mainstream, functionalist writers, who continued

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to focus on dependency and define power in terms of conflict and illegitimacy (e.g. Mayes and Allen 1977; MacMillan 1978; Gandz and Murray 1980; Narayaran and Fahey 1982; Mintzberg 1983; Gray and Ariss 1985; Pettigrew 1985; Enz 1988; Schwenk 1989; Pfeffer 1992). Pfeffer's (1981a) prevarication is, in fact, indicative of the entire field. The idea of managers using power in this way threatens to open up a can of worms for a perspective grounded in managerialism. Rather than delve into the power hidden in and mobilized through apparently neutral structures, cultures, and technologies, the vast majority of researchers preferred to continue to view these constructs as apolitical management tools. For example, most mainstream writers on organizational culture have gone to considerable lengths to avoid any association with power and politics (see Smircich 1983; Izraeli and Jick 1986; Mumby 1988). Cultural change is presented in neutral terms that suggest that it is to everyone's advantage (see Willmott 1993). Weiss and Miller (1987) explore this issue in an interesting exposé of how widely cited articles have 'doctored' the definitions of ideology to avoid any political connotations. (Also see Beyer et al. 1988 and Weiss and Miller 1988 for the resulting debate on the matter.)

A second barrier to bridge building was the fact that a new stream of work was rapidly moving to challenge sovereign views of power and, in so doing, questioned not only the functional perspective, but also the modernist assumptions that underlay much of the critical theory, as the following sections discuss.

Power and Discipline

The rule systems that made up Weber's bureaucracy have, more recently, been reinterpreted under the auspices of 'disciplinary practices' derived from Foucault (1977).[4] Writers influenced by this tradition refer to 'micro-techniques' of power. Unlike rule systems, these techniques are not ordinarily thought of in terms of the causal concept of power (the notion of someone getting someone else to do something that they would not otherwise do). Rather than being causally observable social episodes, they represent ways in which both individual and collectively organized bodies become socially inscribed and normalized through the routine aspects of organizations. In this way, power is embedded in the fibre and fabric of everyday life. At the core are practices of 'surveillance', which may be more or less mediated by instrumentation. Historically, the tendency is for a greater instrumentation as surveillance moves from a literal supervisory gaze to more complex forms of

observation, reckoning and comparison. Surveillance, whether personal, technical, bureaucratic or legal, ranges through forms of supervision, routinization, formalization, mechanization, legislation and design that seek to effect increasing control of employee behaviour, dispositions and embodiment. Surveillance is not only accomplished through direct control. It may happen as a result of cultural practices of moral endorsement, enablement and suasion, or as a result of more formalized technical knowledge, such as the computer monitoring of keyboard output or low-cost drug-testing systems.

The effectiveness of disciplinary power in the nineteenth century was linked to the emergence of new techniques of discipline appropriate for more impersonal, large-scale settings in which the *Gemeinschaft* conditions whereby each person knew their place no longer prevailed (see Bauman 1982; Foucault 1977). Previous localized, moral regulation, premised on the transparency of the person to the gaze of the community, was no longer viable. So, new forms of state institution emerged in which new forms of control were adopted, and later copied by the factory masters. No grand plan caused these institutions to adopt similar forms of disciplinary technique. The process is perhaps best seen in terms of the pressures of institutional innovation (Meyer and Rowan 1977; DiMaggio and Powell 1983). People copied what was already available; hence they created their own world in isomorphic likeness of key features they already knew.

Machiavelli once observed that 'Men nearly always follow the tracks made by others and proceed in their affairs by imitation, even though they cannot entirely keep to the tracks of others or emulate the prowess of their models' (1961: 49). This view captures much of the sense of contemporary institutional theory, an organization theory with clear parallels to Foucault's (1977) work (see Scott 1987). Disciplinary techniques had been readily available in the monastic milieu of religious vocation, the military, institutional forms of schooling, poor houses, etc. Their effectiveness had been established during the past two centuries. Practices of institutional isomorphism thus tended to reproduce similar relations of meaning and membership as the basis for social integration in other organizations. Because certain forms of technique were already available and known they had a certain legitimacy which enabled them to be more widely dispersed than they might otherwise have been (e.g. Meyer and Rowan 1977).

Such forms of control, whether direct and personal or more mediated and instrumented, changed commonly held notions of private individual space. In the medieval monastery

there was very little. As industrialization developed from 'putting out' to the 'factory system' the definition of this space was transformed in secular organization life as well. At a more general level, one may be dealing with the development of disciplines of knowledge shaped almost wholly by the 'disciplinary gaze' of surveillance, as Foucault (1977) suggests was the case of much nineteenth century social science, particularly branches of social welfare, statistics and administration. Organizationally, the twentieth century development of the personnel function under the 'human relations' guidance of Mayo (1975) may be seen to have had a similar tutelary role (see Clegg 1979; Ray 1986). Individual or collective bodies may be discriminated and categorized through diverse tactics of ratiocination. Mechanisms are often local, diverse and uncoordinated. They form no grand strategy. Yet, abstract properties of people, goods and services can be produced that are measurable, gradeable, assessable in an overall anonymous strategy of discipline.

In this way, then, sovereign notions of power (which underlay both modernist and functionalist approaches) were challenged. Power was no longer a convenient, manipulable, deterministic resource. Instead, all actors operated within an existing structure of dominancy – a prevailing web of power relations – from which the prospects of escape were limited for dominant and subordinate groups alike. Previously, power had been characterized in a number of ways but each required one to 'take sides'. For the functionalists, their side was that of the managers: resistance to their power was illegitimate. For the critical theorists, resistance was a good thing: it was an opportunity for creative human agency, particularly that associated with subjugated identities such as workers, women, ethnic minorities, to reassert itself against domination. An implicit morality was in play in both perspectives, and each was an affront to the other. Foucault's views and those directly influenced by him were different. Power does not involve taking sides, identifying who has more or less of it, as much as seeking to describe its strategic role – how it is used to translate people into characters who articulate an organizational morality play. Much of this work adopts a principled indifference to the sentiments attached to those parts; instead the thrust is strategic, descriptive and empirical.

Power and Gender in Organizations

Work on gender helped support the view that power in the organization should be represented as a total, rather than partial, picture. Early contributions on the role of women in organizations were Kanter's (1975; 1977) and Janet Wolff's (1977) articles. Kanter's case studies were probably the first ever to take gender seriously, in terms of the numbers, power and opportunities open to men and women in the corporation. Both as members of the organization and in the supporting roles that women play outside organizations as 'company wives', women were systematically subjected to power that was frequently implicit, tacit and unconscious. Wolff's (1977) article was concerned less with the tacit hegemony within organizations and more with the ways in which women's positions in organizations were inseparable from their broader social role. This perspective was to be developed later in the work of Gutek and Cohen (1982) who coined the idea of 'sex role spillover', the carrying over of societally defined gender-based roles into the workplace, whereby the sex roles associated with the demographically dominant gender become incorporated into the work roles. The armed forces and nursing are probably the best examples of polar opposites in this respect.

By the 1970s, scholars were increasingly aware of the gender blindness not only of organizations but also of organization studies (see Mills and Tancred 1992 for a brief overview). Major works were reassessed in terms of how their contribution to the literature was often premised on unspoken assumptions about gender or unobserved and unremarked sampling decisions or anomalies in gender terms (Acker and Van Houton 1974). For example, Crozier's (1964) maintenance workers were all men while the production workers were all women. As Hearn and Parkin (1983) were to demonstrate, this blindness was symptomatic of the field as a whole, not any specific paradigm within it.

A peculiar irony attaches to this, as Pringle (1989) was to develop. Gender and sexuality are extremely pervasive aspects of organizational life. In major occupational areas, such as secretaries and receptionists for example, organizational identity is defined through gender and the projection of forms of emotionality, and indeed sexuality, implicated in it. The mediation of, and resistance to, the routine rule enactments of organizations are inextricably tied in with gender since not only is behaviour defined as organizationally appropriate or inappropriate, but its appropriateness is characterized in gendered terms. Neatness, smartness, demureness take on gendered dimensions (Mills 1988; 1989; Mills and Murgatroyd 1991). Rather than challenging these taken-for-granted assumptions, the gender bias inherent in the study of organizations has helped to preserve the status quo. How else could the vantage point and

privileges of white, usually Anglo-Saxon, normally American, males have been taken for granted for so long (Calás and Smircich 1992)?

Functionality attaches to dominant ideologies: presumably that is why they dominate (Abercrombie et al. 1980). Repression is not necessarily an objective or a prerequisite, but often is simply a by-product of an ideology that maximizes the organization's ability to act. Masculinist ideology has long been dominant in the majority of organizations. Certain male identities constituted in socially and economically privileged contexts routinely will be more strategically contingent for organizational decision-making, and for access to and success in hierarchically arranged careers (Heath 1981). But, organizations do not produce actions that are masculinist, so much as masculinism produces organizations that take masculinist action. Often they do this without anyone even being explicitly aware of it. In such a case the decisions that characterize organizational action will be a result, not a cause, of ideology. Organizations may be the arenas in which gender politics play out, and, as such, suitable places for treatment through anti-discriminatory policies. But, such 'solutions' may address only the symptoms and not the causes of deep seated gender politics. Attacking their organizational expression may suppress these symptoms but it is unlikely to cure the body politic, behind which there is a history of living, being and (dis)-empowering in a gendered world that is tacit, taken for granted and constitutive of the very sense of that everyday life-world.

Power and Identity in Organizations

People's identities are not only tied up in their gender or sexuality, any more than in the type of labour power that they sell to an organization. People in organizations are signifiers of meaning. As such they are subjects of regimes of both specific organizational signification and discipline, usually simultaneously. Identities premised on the salience of extra-organizational issues such as ethnicity, gender, class, age and other phenomena provide a means of resistance to organizational significations and discipline by forming limits on the discretion of organizational action. Who may do what, how, where, when and in which ways are customarily and, sometimes, legally specific identities, which are prescribed or proscribed for certain forms of practice. Embodied identities will only be salient in as much as they are socially recognized and organizationally consequent.[5]

Accordingly organizations are structures of patriarchal domination, ethnic domination and

so on. Clearly such matters are contingent: most organizations may be structures of class, gender, or ethnic dominancy but not all *necessarily* are. Too much hinges on other aspects of organization identity left unconsidered. In specific organizational contexts, for example, the general conditions of economic or class domination may not necessarily be the focus of resistance or struggle. More specific loci of domination may be organizationally salient; after all, divisions of labour are embodied, gendered, departmentalized, hierarchized, spatially separated and so on.

As a result, organizations are locales in which negotiation, contestation and struggle between organizationally divided and linked agencies are routine occurrences. Divisions of labour are both the object and the outcome of struggle. All divisions of labour within any employing organization are necessarily constituted within the context of various contracts and conditions of employment. Hence the employment relationship of economic domination and subordination is the underlying sediment over which other organization practices are stratified and overlaid, often in quite complex ways. This complexity of organizational locales renders them subject to multivalent powers rather than monadic sites of total control: contested terrains rather than total institutions. It is in these struggles that power and resistance are played out in dramatic scenes that those approaches influenced by Foucault (1977) seem best able to appreciate, because they are not predisposed to know in advance who the victorious and vanquished *dramatis personae* should be. Rather, the emphasis is on the play of meaning, signification and action through which all organization actors seek to script, direct and position all others. In this way, the fragility of unified interest 'groups' is emphasized and the simplistic nature of pluralistic (much less dualistic) approaches to power relations is countered.

Power and Resistance

Any superordinate member of a complex organization is only one relay in a complex flow of authority up, down and across organization hierarchies. Ideally, according to functionalist views, such relays should be without resistance; there should be no 'problem' of obedience. Rarely, if ever, is this the case as organization researchers have long known (Coch and French 1948). Consequently, obedience cannot be guaranteed, despite the search for a secular equivalent to divinely inspired obeisance because of the complexity and contingency of human agency. Instead, resistance is pervasive as organizational actors use their discretion. It is

the ability to exercise discretion, to have chosen this rather than that course of action, which characterizes power, both on the part of power holders, those who are its subjects, and on the part of those who are its objects.

Important implications flow from the relationship between power, resistance and discretion. Power will always be inscribed within contextual 'rules of the game' which both enable and constrain action (Clegg 1975). Action can only ever be designated as such-and-such an action by reference to the rules which identify it. Those rules can never be free of surplus or ambiguous meaning: they can never provide for their own interpretation. Issues of interpretation are always implicated in the processes whereby agencies make reference to and signify rules (Wittgenstein 1968; Garfinkel 1967; Clegg 1975; Barnes 1986). 'Ruling' is thus an activity: it is accomplished by some agency as a constitutive sense-making process whereby attempts are made to fix meaning. Both rules and games necessarily tend to be the subject of contested interpretation and, although some players may have the advantage of also being the referee, there is always discretion and therein lies the possibility of resistance.

Here we confront the central paradox of power: the power of an agency is increased in principle by that agency delegating authority; the delegation of authority can only proceed by rules; rules necessarily entail discretion; and discretion potentially empowers delegates. From this arises the tacit and taken-for-granted basis of organizationally negotiated order, and on occasion its fragility and instability, as has been so well observed by Strauss (1978). Matters must be rendered routine and predictable if negotiation is to remain an unusual and out of the ordinary state of affairs. Thus freedom of discretion requires disciplining if it is to be a reliable relay. Whether this is achieved through what Foucault referred to as 'disciplinary' or some other mode of practice is unimportant. In any event, discipline occurs not so much by prohibition and intervention into states of affairs, but through the knowledgeable construction of these states of affairs which enables subordinates to minimize the sanctions directed at them by superordinates.

> [Actors] must recognize that the output of appropriate action which they produce is what minimizes the input of coercion and sanctioning which they receive. (Barnes 1988: 103)

In this way, power is implicated in authority and constituted by rules; rules embody discretion and provide opportunities for resistance; and, so, their interpretation must be disciplined, if new powers are not to be produced and existing powers transformed. In fact, given the inherent indexicality of rule use, things will never be wholly stable, even though they may appear so historically (Laclau and Mouffe 1985). Resistance to discipline is thus irremediable because of the power/rule constitution as a nexus of meaning and interpretation which, because of indexicality, is always open to being refixed. So, although the term 'organization' implies stabilization of control – of corporate and differential membership categories across space and across time – this control is never total. Indeed, it is often the contradictions in the evolution of regimes of control that explain their development (Clegg and Dunkerley 1980). Resistance and power thus comprise a system of power relations in which the possibilities of, and tensions between, both domination and liberation inevitably exist (Sawicki 1991: 98). Politics is a struggle both to achieve and to escape from power (Wrong 1979; Hindess 1982; Barbalet 1985; Clegg 1994a). The definitional distinction between power and resistance signifies 'qualitatively different contributions to the outcome of power relations made by those who exercise power over others, on the one hand, and those subject to that power, on the other' (Barbalet 1985: 545). In other words, according to this view, power is substantively different from resistance.

This view involves a reconceptualization from the duality of power (domination) *or* resistance (liberation) that had existed in sociological literature (e.g. Giddens 1979; 1982). It challenges the views of sovereign power which, at their furthest reach, embraced the fiction of supreme 'super-agency' while denying authentic sovereignty to others: an overarching A imposing its will on the many Bs. Concepts of the ruling class, ruling state and ruling culture or ideology overwhelmed the consciousness of subjects, thereby creating false consciousness (and explaining the absence of Marx's revolutionary predictions). In this way, writers like Lukes (1974) accepted the problematic of 'hegemony' (Gramsci 1971) or 'dominant ideology' (Abercrombie et al. 1980) and presumed to know, unproblematically, what the interests of the oppressed really were. The practical implications of these analyses were clear: good theory would replace bad theory; good theory would enable the realization of real interests.

Foucault (1980) sounded the death-knell of sovereign power with his distrust of the very notion of ideology. Criticisms concerning the empirical problems in *measuring* real interests (e.g. Benton 1981) were replaced by a more fundamental challenge. Foucault regarded ideology as a term of 'falsehood' whose relational opposition to a 'true' concept of 'science' can never be too far away. By demonstrating that

the 'truths' and 'falsehoods' of particular discourses have been constituted historically, he showed that no assumption of reality can exist as anything more than its representation in language. Language cannot *mask* anything, it simply *represents* possibilities. Claims to know the real interests of any group, other than through the techniques of representation used to assert them, cannot survive this reconceptualization of power.

Power/Knowledge and Emancipation

The recognition that resistance was implicated by power has not led to an acknowledgement of enhanced prospects for emancipation. The space and ambiguity in which resistance is fostered do not lead to a transformation of prevailing power relations; they only reinforce those power relations. This is the sobering implication of the Foucauldian-influenced tradition. The death of the sovereign subject was accompanied by the killing of originating sources of action: none were to inhabit the poststructural world.

The pervasiveness of power relations makes them difficult to resist. Prevailing discourses are experienced as fact, which makes alternatives difficult to conceive of, let alone enact. Indeed, resistance often serves only to reinforce the existing systems of power (Clegg 1979; Knights and Willmott 1989; Knights and Morgan 1991). In addition, the production of identity confers a positive experience on individuals which leads to the reproduction of the power relations, not their transformation (Knights and Willmott 1989; Knights and Morgan 1991). Finally, while all actors are, to some extent, captured in the prevailing web of power relations (Deetz 1992a; 1992b), those advantaged by it are, usually, in the best position to develop strategies (such as outflanking, managing meaning, manipulating culture, choosing technology, etc.) that will protect their position.

Another blow to emancipation came from Foucault's attack on modernist assumptions that with knowledge comes 'truth', i.e. a situation free from power. Instead, argued Foucault, with knowledge only comes more power.

Truth isn't outside power, or lacking in power: contrary to a myth whose history and functions would repay further study, truth isn't the reward of free spirits, the child of protracted solitude, nor the privilege of those who have succeeded in liberating themselves. Truth is a thing of this world: it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint. And it induces regular effects of power. Each society has its regime of truth, its 'general' politics of truth: that is, the type of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; and the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true. (1980: 131)

In other words, salvation does not lie in understanding. The modernist idea that demystifying processes and structures of domination would help the subjugated to escape from them was shaken to its roots.

Despite the protestations of those who contend that Foucault's work is compatible with the idea of resistance (e.g. Smart 1985; 1986; 1990; Sawicki 1991; Alvesson and Willmott 1992), opponents argue, with equal fervour, that his work is antithetical to notions of liberation and emancipation (e.g. Hoy 1986; Said 1986; Walzer 1986; White 1986; Ashley 1990). These writers argue that the Foucauldian attack on agency removes the possibility of using power for particular objectives, especially the possibility of the powerless achieving empowerment. Whatever the result of this debate, one outcome is sure: opposing camps have engaged in a highly theoretical, intellectual struggle concerning matters of ontology and epistemology (Clegg 1989a; Nord and Doherty 1994).

The debate is polarized around two apparently conflicting epistemological positions: modernism with its belief in the essential capacity of humanity to perfect itself through the power of rational thought and postmodernism with its critical questioning, and often outright rejection, of the ethnocentric rationalism championed by modernism. (Cooper and Burrell 1988: 2)

What is ignored in this absorbing – but somewhat esoteric – discourse are the practical matters of overcoming barriers to collective action and devising concrete strategies of resistance (Nord and Doherty 1994).

Thus those with the greatest case for emancipation have been largely ignored. The functionalist literature does not consider them to have a cause: the power embedded in organizational structures and processes is not power, much less domination. Those who dare to challenge it are irresponsible and irrational, if not downright subversive. The critical literature that derived its focus from its concern with underprivileged groups (e.g. Freire 1992) has, with the loss of faith in Marxist formulae, distanced itself from its former constituents. Once the struggles of resistance occupied a central place; now they revolve around sterile debates conducted in obfuscatory language.[6]

FROM CACOPHONY TO CHORUS?

Researchers have long noted the confusion that exists concerning the definition of power. It is no wonder when we consider the many different voices that have spoken on power. Depending on who is studying it, what they are studying, and why they are studying it, these voices are often looking at different phenomena or, at the very least, looking at the same phenomenon through very different lenses. Power has been both the independent variable causing outcomes such as domination, and the dependent variable, in this case the outcome of dependency. Power has been viewed as functional in the hands of managers who use it in the pursuit of collective, organizational goals, and dysfunctional in the hands of those who challenge those goals and seek to promote self-interest. Power has been viewed as the means by which legitimacy is created and as the incarnation of illegitimate action. Power has been equated with the formal organizational arrangements in which legitimacy is embedded, and as the informal actions that influence organizational outcomes. It has been seen as conditional on conflict and as a means to preempt conflict. It has been defined as a resource that is consciously and deliberately mobilized in the pursuit of self-interest – a resource that has failed to be used by those (such as women and workers) whose self-interest has been ascribed to them – and as a system of relations that knows no interest, but from which some groups inadvertently benefit. It has been seen as an intentional act to which causality can be clearly attributed, and as an unintentional, unpredictable game of chance. The study of power has meant a behavioural focus for some researchers, and attitudinal or hegemonic factors for others. Power has been berated for being repressive, and lauded for being productive. Small wonder, then, that there is little agreement!

This range of conceptualizations has, in general, coalesced around two very different streams of research, each of which has little to say to the other and each of which defends its own borders, thereby influencing the process of social inquiry. In the functionalist approach, power is a political 'disorganizing' tool used by opponents of managers. Sometimes, power is used by managers but only to repel these illegitimate attacks. This body of work adopts an unquestioning managerial perspective, and assumes that power is a malleable, useful resource, which is 'good' when used by managers and 'bad' when used against them. The alternative, critical approach has viewed power as a means of domination and resistance to it as an emancipatory tool. Starting out with a modernist perspective, it has recently been struggling to incorporate postmodernist

ideas. Ironically, the power/knowledge concept of Foucault has robbed this body of work of much of its emancipatory power, and many writers (e.g. Alvesson and Willmott 1992; Knights and Vurdubakis 1994) seem to be struggling to give the postmodern adaptation back its modernist edge. The majority of the work is, however, highly theoretical, often ignoring the practicalities of developing strategies for resistance and liberation.

Perhaps it is time for both functionalists and critical theorists to pause. Maybe the practical, ethically situated and socially contexted uses of power need thinking through? The quotidian round of organization life has its own drama, its own theatricality, its own epistemologies, ontologies and methods, as Callon and Latour (1981) have demonstrated. It is not only through the moral play of functional legitimacy and illegitimacy versus critical opprobrium and approval that power is analyzed. The time is ripe to treat all forms of power play, including its theorizing, as moves in games that enrol, translate and treat others in various ways, in various situated moralities, according to various codes of honour and dishonour which constitute, maintain, reproduce and resist various forms and practices of power under their rubric. There is no reason to think that all games will necessarily share one set of rules, or be capable of being generated from the same deep and underlying rule set. Power requires understanding in its diversity even as it resists explanation in terms of a singular theory.

A theory of power does not, and cannot, exist other than as an act of power in itself – in attempting to rule out other understandings of phenomena in favour of a universalistic explanation, as Hobbes recognized almost at the outset. Such a power theory of power is unreflexive: it cannot account for itself, and any theory of power that cannot account for its own power cannot account for very much at all. This is the hermeneutic circle within which post-Foucauldian approaches to power leave us. The door marked 'general theory of power', whether fashioned critically or conventionally, seems to lead us back into a reduced version of the circle with a perspective that renders many organizational phenomena invisible or unimportant, particularly the concerns of the people whose lives frame the circle. One way out of this impasse is to explore the circle more completely and to investigate the relations and meanings that constitute it, by listening more carefully to the voices that normally populate it (e.g. Forester 1989) and unmasking the researcher who enters it.

This approach advocates more empirical study of local struggles, focusing not on a monolithic conception of power, but on the strategic concerns raised by Machiavelli (1961) or the

war of manoeuvre highlighted by Gramsci (1971). We can learn much about power by deliberately selecting 'transparent' examples that illuminate the processes we wish to explore (Eisenhardt 1989). In this way, we can expose the variety of marginalized voices by, for example, examining how different women in different cultural and social situations are affected by different aspects and manifestations of gender discrimination (see Sawicki 1991; Kerfoot and Knights 1993). We can deconstruct prevalent disciplinary practices as in accounting (e.g. Knights and Collinson 1987). We can reveal how organizational practices contribute to the subjectivity and subjugation of employees (e.g. Knights and Willmott 1992); or contrast the characteristics of a Foucauldian web of power with existing conceptualizations of sovereign power, as in the case of fragmented refugee systems (Hardy 1994). We can amplify previously silent voices or herald voices of resistance. In so doing, we may privilege certain discourses (resulting in a temporary elitism: see Chapter 1.7 by Alvesson and Deetz in this volume) but, nonetheless, a space is claimed for voices that might otherwise be lost. By listening to the stories that people tell, we learn about how certain voices come to be silenced and how resistant subjects are constituted (Clegg 1994b).

We must also acknowledge the researcher's arrival within the circle, not as a neutral observer, but as an implicated participant. This requires a greater awareness of who the researcher is and where he or she comes from. Researchers must make clear how they access and interpret 'subjectivities' and outline methodological protocols (Collinson 1994; Clegg 1994a). We must expose both our analytic interpretations and our theoretical assumptions to the same kind of analysis. In this way we are in a position to identify the 'danger' of particular practices whether in the situation under study or in the very act of studying itself. For Foucault, freedom lay in bringing to light the anonymous historical processes through which any and all subjectivity is constructed, in questioning and reevaluating our inherited identities and values, and in challenging received interpretations of them (Sawicki 1991). By exposing ourselves and our work to this kind of genealogical analysis (e.g. Knights and Morgan 1991), we become more aware of how we are also prisoners in a web of power that we have helped to create.

NOTES

1 In the early days of the guild structure the use of the masculine gender would have been less acceptable, but, as Rowbotham (1975: 1) notes, 'Separate organisations developed to protect the masters, and the terms of entry became formalised. It was consequently more difficult for journeymen's wives to be formally involved in the workshops, or for the master's wife to supervise the apprentices, and less customary for widows to take over from their husbands.' Thus, the emergence of power in premodern organizations had a gender bias built into its historical development; women were progressively screened out from the emergent organization form.

2 Marxist models have been premised on a series of capitalist/worker polarities, e.g. exploitation versus non-exploitation; productive versus non-productive; wage-earners versus revenue receivers (Carchedi 1977). Class was assumed to be the most salient base for identity. Recent empirical research in this tradition suggests that associational aspects of society, such as personal support for sports clubs, are more important (Baxter et al. 1991). Consequently, the empirical grounds for attaching credence to Marxist analyses of organization power as principally class power seem poorly grounded. Instead, the means of production are considered to be only one part of the picture: interests are variable, and dependent on organizational mechanisms of representation and outflanking (Mann 1986).

3 As interpreted from the Weberian concept of *Herrschaft* by Parsons (Henderson and Parsons 1947).

4 The concept is derived from Foucault but is implicit in Weber (1978) and labour process theory (see Littler and Salaman 1982).

5 Forms of embodiment such as age, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, religiosity and handicap are particularly recognizable as bases which serve to locate practices for stratifying organization members: this is evidenced by their being the precise target of various anti-discrimination laws.

6 Obviously, researchers do directly consider subjects of oppression and their work has produced claims, for example, that womanhood and ethnicity are new universal subjects of oppression. Such studies do, however, run into the 'old' problem of imputation of interests to subjects whose empirical behaviour confounds the interest assumption. In this direction lie new quagmires of morality, signposted as 'political correctness'.

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