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On the Politics of Theorizing in a Postmodern Academy

ALTHOUGH POSTMODERNISM developed more as a critique of Enlightenment humanism than as a guide to political practice, its virtue has been to force attention to the power dimensions of knowledge development and use as an integral part of knowledge content. Against the Enlightenment assumption that all sciences aim toward an eventual unified and liberating totality, postmodernist critiques have alerted us to the enormous diversity among knowledge developments and practices, as well as to the power relations among them. These critiques have blurred the cultural boundaries between technoscience and popular science practices, calling into question the absolute legitimacy of the former while bringing attention to the latter.

A central feature of postmodernist criticism is the claim that scientific knowledge in contemporary Western societies is undergoing a process of delegitimation. It is too often forgotten that Jean-François Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition* (1984) is subtitled *A Report on Knowledge* and that it was a report submitted to the Conseil des Universités du Québec at the request of its president. Postmodernist critiques of scientific knowledge generally assert that important cultural shifts occurring in the contemporary world are transforming the grounds for certified knowledge. As Andreas Huyssens (1984:5) put it, "There is a noticeable shift in sensibility, practices and discourse formations which distinguishes a postmodern set of assumptions, experiences and propositions from that of a preceding period."¹ Lyotard summarized the change as a growing "incredulity toward metanarratives" (1984:xxiv).

Telling his story in the conceptual framework of language games, Lyotard recounted how science in the modern project pursued the ideals of enlightened freedom

by means of embedded metanarratives that grounded the legitimacy of scientific activity. These narratives portrayed society as a whole on the road toward emancipation of the human race or the development of the human spirit. Apologists for science have made scientific knowledge an obligatory step in the pursuit of human emancipation by claiming that it would provide the grounds for a rational and just society with growing wealth for everyone through industry. Modernist science has failed to deliver on its promise, however, and the metanarratives of emancipation no longer help people make sense of social life.

Claims about modernity, as elaborated by Lyotard and other writers, distance science from emancipation by linking it to three different sets of hegemonic relations: relations between the West and the Rest, relations within the West, and relations between humanity and nature. These critiques apply to both academic theorizing in general and cultural anthropology in particular.

It is argued that rather than being the vehicle of human emancipation, the modern West has been an expansive, imperialistic civilization that has used its scientific and technological capabilities and its account of progress to conquer other peoples and refashion them in its own image. Peoples whose cultural roots were not in Europe have been assigned inferior identities in Eurocentric terms such as *primitive*, *underdeveloped*, *less developed*, *developing*, *third-world*, or *the Rest*.² The substance of this critique can be traced back to crises in the modernization theory of development, which dominated academic and policy circles during the early post-World War II era. Emergence of Latin American dependency theory pointed out the role of colonialism in underdeveloping third-world countries, exploding the assumption that all countries can follow pathways toward Euro-American styles of industrial democracy. A new appreciation of other peoples and their cultures has followed, together with an awareness of the relativity of foundational principles of knowledge, rationality, justice, and the like.³

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In cultural anthropology, ethnographic accounts of culture, society, and humanity have constituted anyone who is not Western, white, male, and middle class as among the subordinate Others. The search for ethnographic objects to describe contributed to the scientific creation, appropriation, and exploitation of the peoples studied. The strategy also elevated the ethnographer to an unwarranted position of dominance.

It is further argued that the outcomes of modern "progress" are full of ambiguity and contradiction. First, by focusing on societal improvement through technological development, the progress metaphor assumes a homogeneity that has hidden internal relations of domination, class, race, gender, and sexual orientation.⁴ Second, valorizing scientists as cultural elites who create progress through constant change undervalues knowledge production in popular domains. Although science has refused legitimacy to any forms of knowledge not based on its own cultural premises, such as separating body and mind, presuming fundamental order in nature, and limiting knowledge to truth understood as prediction and control, the boundaries between science and nonscience are not always so clean.⁵ Third, relations of domination and subordination prevail within institutionalized technoscience. Feminist critiques of science have led the way in bringing attention to other worlds and other voices that have for too long been silenced. Starting with biographies of forgotten women scientists and then gaining force with accounts of the systematic exclusion of women from positions of authority within science, feminist critiques have challenged the epistemological core of scientific activity by finding its assumptions to be gender-based.⁶

Cultural anthropology has helped reproduce hegemonic relations through forms of theorizing that presume homogeneity. Theories of culture, kinship, class, race, and deviance have all tended to presuppose elite perspectives and, hence, elite power and authority. Anthropological studies in Western societies have routinely taken white, middle-class positions as representative of broadly shared cultural presuppositions.

Finally, it is argued that at the heart of all postmodernist criticism lies the "crisis of representation" (Rorty 1979), which critiques the Enlightenment separation of humanity from nature and thought from reality. A discourse or text does not stand for, or represent, a reality independently and unproblematically but plays a formative role in constituting the reality it represents. As philosophical analysis has found itself unable to establish independent grounds for certifying true knowledge, the concept of representation has become more compelling as a power relation than as a simple bridge between human knowledge and reality "out there." Accordingly, scientific texts constitute both the reality they represent and the authoritative selves of scientist authors. The history of science as a unified account of progress in knowl-

edge becomes a story of diverse sciences using the image of progress to protect their authoritative statuses. While modernist science and technology may have delivered substantial benefits to humans, they have also produced an ecological disaster and threaten to erase humanity from the face of the earth in a nuclear holocaust. These would be ultimate acts of (self-)destruction; but, leaving aside these threatened catastrophes, science and science-based technologies contribute in many ways to current world environmental problems, distributing them unequally between the powerful and the powerless.⁷

Postmodernist critiques of cultural anthropology have focused on the problem of representation in the writing of ethnographic texts, situating past practices squarely in the camp of modern science by deconstructing their poetics. An ethnographer's claim to be an objective representative of native cultures is an assertion of hegemonic power legitimized by literary conventions that create the appearance of objectivity. The author disappears from the text in order to convey the impression that the natives speak for themselves, omitting the ethnographer's intervention in the activity reported and the writing strategies used to select and organize the materials. Claims to empirical accuracy cannot be true universally since description itself is an author's construction.

In sum, the contemporary cultural situation has revealed an intimate connection between knowledge and hegemonic power in the practices that constitute the sciences. Categories of knowledge that belong to the modern spirit are impotent and misleading in their accounts of contemporary social behavior. Neither theorizing the historical struggle in Marxian terms nor articulating the reality of underlying structures of society to explain patterns of social relations can capture the new social and cultural situation (Boyne and Rattansi 1990). As Zygmunt Bauman (1991:33) has argued, "the differences that set the postmodern condition apart from modern society are profound and seminal [ovular?] enough to justify (indeed, to call for) a separate sociological theory of postmodernity that would break decisively with the concepts and metaphors of the models of modernity and lift itself out of the mental frame in which they had been conceived." Although critical analyses of science and technology in Western society are by no means new and can be traced back at least to 19th-century romanticism, the transition to postindustrial society has legitimized the critique of industrial society to an extent not before permitted.⁸

Together these critiques establish the connection between totalizing theory and totalitarian power. If science is deeply implicated in the rise and decline of modernism, then to insist on thinking about human experience and the world in modernist terms is to claim totalitarian control. Once the relation between modes of knowledge and forms of hegemonic power is exposed, the Enlightenment project of emancipation, if it can be salvaged at all, cannot be

pursued without substantial rearrangement. Knowledge *of* is always knowledge *for*. Almost all efforts at constructing postmodernist ways of knowing thus aim at avoiding the totalitarian impulse of modern rationality.

Refiguring the Legitimacy of Knowledge

Postmodernist critiques of science, including critiques of anthropological science, have generally adopted one of two strategies to imagine nontotalitarian activities of academic theorizing. The first preserves the authority of science by finding in scientific practice inherently destabilizing moves that undercut the dream of total knowledge. Proponents often suggest that a postmodern science is developing, requiring epistemological categories of its own, by which they usually mean nonlinear mathematical models such as chaos theory and fractal geometry. The presumption is that theories of irreversible processes and entropy in thermodynamics, indeterminacy and probabilistic causality in quantum mechanics, and chaotic systems provide new metaphors for both understanding and bridging the gap between the natural and social worlds. These metaphors describe self-regulating systems that shift in unpredictable ways and give rise to unrecognizable new order. As T. R. Young (1991:298) puts it, "The dynamics of chaos provide a theoretical envelope into which assumptions of post-modern knowledge processes and politics fit." Although no single image has become generally accepted, all the proposals have fragmentation, partiality, dynamism, and contingency as characteristic features. Although this strategy poses an epistemological challenge to deterministic theorizing in science, it also reaffirms the traditional authority of science by simply replacing one account of reality with another while preserving the established politics of academic theorizing. Conceptually, this version of postmodern science actually works to fulfill one of the more radical claims of modern science, the mathematization of everything, by appealing to the value of nonlinear models as the primary new source of insight. Politically, it reproduces modernist theorizing by preserving institutionalized technoscience as the authoritative source of new metaphors. In the midst of offering hope to the social sciences that they can become truly scientific, this strategy also keeps them in the subordinate role of exegetes who extract nuggets of social truth from chaos mathematical models.

Cultural anthropology has participated in this strategy only in one limited, albeit significant, sense. To adopt the strategy entirely would be to champion the discipline as a science. Instead, cultural anthropology has always held the sciences and humanities in productive tension by maintaining an ambiguous position between them. The anthropological version of this inherently destabilizing strategy appears in the more subtle device of viewing all

accounts as partial, or, as it were, fractal in their conceptual contents. James Clifford's introduction to *Writing Culture* (Clifford and Marcus 1986) summarizes the volume's challenge to totalizing ethnographic knowledge with the metaphor "partial truths." Although Clifford clearly was not appealing to chaos theory for insight, he did follow its political strategy by eschewing the rejection of knowledge and adopting a literary trope that maintained the authority of truthfulness. Now appearing with greater frequency, the statement, "the following is a partial account" is supposed to absolve the author in advance of the sin of making totalizing claims. While the strategy implicates the observer in the observation, it provides no conceptual resources for grappling directly with the power dimensions of that participation. Too easily reproducing a sharp separation between knowledge and power, it can serve as a legitimizing tack in an ethnography that may be little changed otherwise.⁹

The second postmodernist strategy for refiguring the legitimacy of knowledge poses a foundational challenge to scientific authority. Arguing that rejection of the totalitarian impulse must be built into the very practice of academic theorizing, versions of this strategy usually advocate replacing hegemonic power relations with egalitarianism. The strategy thus both resists and subverts the authority of science by celebrating diversity and advocating pluralism, often in aesthetic terms. Lyotard (1984:61), for example, finds hope in paralogy, or pleasurable acts of resistance through creative language moves in the pragmatics of knowledge:

To speak is to fight, in the sense of playing, and speech acts fall within the domain of a general agonistics. This does not mean that one plays in order to win. A move can be made for the sheer pleasure of its invention. . . . Great joy is had in the endless invention of turns of phrase, of words and meanings, the process behind the evolution of language on the level of *parole*. But undoubtedly even this pleasure depends upon the feeling of success won at the expense of an adversary—at least one adversary, and a formidable one: the accepted language, or connotation. [Lyotard 1984:10; emphasis in original]

An implicit hope is that celebrating pluralism will bring into existence egalitarian methods and practices that will transform the politics of academic theorizing and work toward restoring the harmony in nature that modern science and technology have threatened to destroy.

Debates over this strategy, however, remain caught within an Enlightenment problematic by relying on the practices of agonism, the politics of rebuttal. Rebuttal is a common conceptual and political strategy in academic theorizing, shaping interaction in the form of claim and counterclaim, or point and counterpoint, as participants present and defend theoretical voices by explicitly or implicitly silencing competing voices. The status of any particular voice rises and falls as it becomes heard or falls silent. Rebuttal also depends upon distinguishing knowl-

edge from power, as science from politics, for perhaps the best way to silence an academic voice is to show its content to be political rather than scientific.

Proponents of the second strategy have fallen victim to the politics of rebuttal by contrasting and seeking to replace hegemonic power relations with their polar opposite, egalitarian pluralism. The most trenchant critiques of postmodernism attack an uncritical pluralism that seems not only unrealizable in practice but also suggests that anything goes and, hence, nothing matters. That is, acts of resistance and subversion guided only by a plea for pluralism appear to presume a hopeless relativism and so degenerate into an untenable nihilism. Clearly, anyone who holds such a position must be motivated by political rather than scientific considerations, a conclusion that is reinforced when proponents celebrate pluralism on aesthetic grounds. Postmodernist theorizing gets stuck because it calls for diversity in knowledges yet, hampered by the rigid image of absolute equality, does not lay out the internal features of this diversity in anything but nonknowledge terms and cannot formulate programs for getting there. Debates over this strategy thus tend to reduce to fruitless polarized battles over relativism, nihilism, and hidden agendas as participants reproduce the modernist model of scientific authority by either defending it or dissolving it away.

Debates over postmodernism in cultural anthropology have centered almost exclusively on this second strategy, applied to ethnographic writing. The emphasis on literary tropes leads the postmodernist critics of ethnography to vest the potential for change in a search for egalitarian strategies of authorship, especially forms of dialogic writing. Rebuttals have generally taken two forms. One form defends the authority of anthropological knowledge by criticizing this strategy as external to the knowledge-producing enterprise, either as a degeneration into relativistic nihilism or a pure act of politics that is unrelated to knowledge content. In other words, feeling their voices silenced by the postmodernist critique, the rebuttals counterattack with a similar denial of voice. Just as postmodernist critiques of traditional ethnography show it not to be scientific in order to condemn it as hegemonic politics, so do they become vulnerable to the same condemnation by avoiding the trappings of science in their attempts to refigure knowledge.¹⁰

Another form of rebuttal in cultural anthropology chastises postmodernism, not for being political but for possessing and not acknowledging its hegemonic politics. Appearing primarily in feminist reactions, this rebuttal has been more a consequence of trying to ensure that subaltern voices are heard than an attempt at silencing a competitor, yet the effect can still be rebuttal. The claim is that postmodernism is an updated defense of patriarchy appearing just when women and non-Western peoples have begun to speak for themselves and contest global

systems of domination (see Hartsock 1987). For example, a prominent critique of *Writing Culture* maintains that excluding feminist voices exhibited the political content of "strategies that preserve male supremacy in the academy" (Mascia-Lees et al. 1989:17). Feminist theorizing, by contrast, not only has had more experience than postmodernist theorizing at grappling with the political contents of academic theorizing, it has also operated without hidden agendas by basing itself on the political objective of overcoming patriarchal oppression: "Feminist theory differs from postmodernism in that it acknowledges its grounding in politics" (1989:20).

This type of reaction performs rebuttal when it provides no pathways for exchange. That is, postmodernist theorizing has little political space for responding positively when such responses must face the unsavory choice between acknowledging their grounding in patriarchy and issuing a defense that risks supplying further evidence of a hidden patriarchal agenda.¹¹ Although this form of rebuttal can claim moral authority, it does not reimagine academic practices apart from a demand to terminate hegemony in the name of absolute equality. A denial of voice from below is still a denial of voice. While it can work well as resistance, it does not theorize reconstruction in ways that take account of diverse power relations within and among forms of resistance as these work to replace hegemony.

The Strategy of Partnering

But consider what happens when feminism does not position itself as grounded in politics.¹² Just because feminist theorizing about knowledge has drawn its confidence and passion from a historically prior political movement, the women's movement, this does not mean that the politics of the women's movement must provide the logical foundation for the conceptual contents. The image of grounding one's theorizing on a clear politics brings a distinction between politics and conceptual contents, or power and knowledge, back in through the side door unnecessarily, making it easier to reject such theorizing agonistically as purely political. An alternate view, as yet undertheorized, is that conceptual contents and political positioning go together. For the politics that provides a grounding for conceptual theorizing itself depends upon conceptual theorizing, the analysis of patriarchal oppression. Positioning politics as one dimension of theorizing rather than as its foundation, or its product, can help replace the oppositional politics of rebuttal with exchange relations among postmodernist theorizing, feminist theorizing, and other forms of theorizing that seek to recognize politics as a regular component of academic theorizing.¹³

A recent series of papers on feminism and postmodernism aims at replacing the politics of rebuttal with positive exchange by constructing meaningful dialogue. Barbara Babcock (1993:64) regrets "not only the misogyny of the academy but also its agonistic style." Deborah Gordon (1993:115) argues that some political differences must be seen as "genuine" and "productive" in order to overcome "the easy polemic between 'academics' and 'politics.'" Micaela di Leonardo's article (1993:76) characterizes her essay as "a telegram from the loyal opposition." Vicki Kirby (1993:132) calls for enhanced collaboration between anthropological and interdisciplinary feminism because "we must learn to engage the political 'otherwise.'" Patricia Sharpe and Frances Mascia-Lees (1993:87) place feminism, humanism, and postmodernism in direct conversation and invite readers to "reflect on their own allegiances to the various and competing discourses that help structure the academy today." The authors of these essays seek modes of theorizing that contain both the conceptual and the political contents they desire.

Finding it important to go beyond the image of conversation into practices of exchange, we suggest the language and practice of partnering as a third conceptual, political, and historically specific strategy that draws on postmodernist critiques of technoscience to refigure the legitimacy of academic theorizing. This strategy has three related moments. First, it envisions acts of academic theorizing as undertaken in partner relations with their interlocutors in collective, but temporary, negotiations of knowledge production. We are thinking of partnering not as a market activity, a business partnership, but as a variety of activities of exchange among committed cohabitants, married or otherwise. Academic theorists live together.¹⁴ Second, the image of partnering distinguishes between the concepts of totalizing theory and totalitarian domination, viewing every act of theorizing as implicitly totalizing in content, but not necessarily totalitarian in effect. In other words, a totalizing act of theorizing does not necessarily commit the sin of fascism, and a partial account is not necessarily absolved in advance. If we understand theorizing as a relational activity that involves a variety of patterns of exchange, then even totalizing theory depends on other theorizing for its value and need not seek control to have merit. All theorizing is totalizing in the sense that it depends for its insights on a metanarrative, or background story, that builds a world within which its interpretations have meaning and power. Chaos theory, for example, presupposes a world of instability and disequilibrium, while a theory of partial truths depends on a world of situated observers with localized visions.

The metaphor "temporary" does better than "partial" at describing the limited claims of totalizing theories participating in exchange relations. Put in general terms, theorizing reveals itself as a historically specific activity

when changing circumstances reduce its value. In anthropology the linear evolutionism that thrived during the 19th century could not account for a 20th-century world of nation-states. Likewise, the structural functionalism of the forties and fifties lost its relevance in a sixties world of rapid change, and a seventies symbolic anthropology could not maintain its holistic image of cultures in a contemporary world where the production of hybrids appears more the rule than the exception. Today, theories of postmodernism vie with theories of late capitalism over how to interpret the contemporary scene. At some point, both will fall silent in the face of changing circumstances. Arguably, each step has been a historically specific improvement, but to label the whole as progress is to suggest that later forms of theorizing would have been appropriate, indeed an improvement, in earlier periods. Yet it seems unlikely that, say, structural functionalism would have played well in the 19th century, or postmodernism in the forties. Totalizing theory is thus also temporary, connected to changing circumstances.

Third, the image of partnering focuses attention on the power relations between academic theorizing and theorizing in popular domains by accepting the postmodernist premise that knowledge is never simply knowledge of something, it must also be knowledge for someone. It asserts that theorizing neither can nor should be a proprietary feature of academic work. Much theorizing, in fact the major proportion of theorizing, takes place outside the institutionalized Western academy. Applying once again the idea of committed cohabitation, empowering forms of nonacademic or popular theorizing makes partnering a promising approach to pursuing the egalitarian project of postmodernism.¹⁵ It takes full advantage of the egalitarian thrust in the expression and engagement of difference by construing egalitarianism as a diversity of historically specific practical tasks of identifying, reducing, and/or removing inequalities in complex power relations, rather than the absolutist task of replacing total domination with total equality. It seems likely that if power relations both inside and outside of the academy actually ever began to approach equality, other desires and priorities would gain influence.

The image of partnering thus encourages one to look for ways of factoring into one's own thinking the views of one's opponents, without necessarily seeking a consensus that is often unrealizable. Rather, by taking for granted the legitimacy of one's opponents, partnering shifts the goal from simply advancing one position within an academic forum to advancing academic debate as a whole, thereby helping the academy better serve nonacademic theorizing through new knowledges.

Because the terms *academic theorizing* and *popular theorizing* are decidedly Eurocentric in origin, we offer them only as an initial set of guideposts to be surpassed by other work. In any case, rather than trying to theorize

everything in advance and asking others to follow, we seek to elaborate partnering by means of partnering. We want the exchange. A key, we think, is to focus on relations among forms of theorizing. Nevertheless, following these particular guideposts helps reveal the stakes by directing attention to four different sets of partner relations, both within forms of academic theorizing and between academic theorizing and popular theorizing. We illustrate how partnering may help in rethinking and living these relations in new ways by offering brief discussions of a set of common questions that engage these relations in sequence and implicate academic theorists as being also popular theorists. Other discussions would serve as well. We invite you to initiate them.

Partnering between Academic Disciplines: Beyond the Politics of Unity

Suppose someone asks, "Can differences among sciences be described as cultural differences?" It seems possible to do so, whether culture is being treated as static structures of meaning within cultural wholes or as the production of meanings within power relations. A benefit, we find, of disentangling totalizing and totalitarian theory is that it refigures the teleological image of theorizing as moving progressively toward a unified totality into historically specific images of totalizing theories in ever-changing modes of exchange. Both academic and popular theorists have long given science the enjoyable status of "a culture without culture" (Traweek 1988:162). However, someone who accepts that diversity among the sciences is not simply a temporary state of immature development but is rather the result of productive activities will find also that the phrase "within science" no longer marks out a definitive territory. The differences among the disciplines will then no longer appear to be short-term aberrations; instead, one may begin the task of accounting for the historically specific production of cultural borders and modes of exchange.

A question of science policy that has been debated and decided upon recently is, Should the United States Congress have funded the superconducting supercollider because research in particle physics is more important than research in other sciences? Having raised it, we note at once the Enlightenment teleology the question contains and ask participants in the discussion to examine it. Someone who accepts this teleology of knowledge conceives of physics as the foundation of all other forms of science. As a prominent MIT physicist once put it, "All science is either physics or stamp collecting." Physics, in this view, is the scientific discipline that identifies basic building blocks in mathematical terms and pushes the limits of the infinite and the infinitesimal at the same time. Next in importance comes chemistry, followed by biol-

ogy, while the still "immature" social sciences lag far behind. Yet the benefits of research in chemistry and biology—in disease control, new industrial processes, and new commodities—are much easier for the nonscientists among the public to value. Chemists and biologists thus tend not to need Enlightenment teleology to justify the allocation of resources to their fields. On the other hand, research in physics, especially particle physics, provides relatively few utilitarian benefits, thus physicists may justify their need for research funds by calling upon a quasi-religious desire for cosmological knowledge.

Here national governments may step in and provide a great deal of money to basic research in physics, justifying the expense by claiming that developments in physics, the basis of all the other sciences, create the necessary foundation for progress toward generally accepted social and national goals. The availability of funding for basic research in physics, in turn, may depend upon whether funding officials believe that physics is the most important scientific discipline because it is the most fundamental. At the same time, however, the gaps between the scientific disciplines loom large and seem unlikely to narrow. Physicists and chemists, for example, imagine different worlds: the world of elementary particles versus the world of the periodic table. Rather than promising a unified totality, theorizing in each of these disciplines is totalizing in its own right, and prospects for unification seem distant at best.

Someone who adopts the partnering approach might be able to justify building the superconducting supercollider on the basis of the cosmological knowledge it would provide, without alleging that this knowledge would be foundational. However, working from this approach, one might find it inappropriate for primary support to the project to come from one nation only, since presumably other nations could benefit from this knowledge as well. An international science foundation might be a more appropriate source of support for cosmological projects. We think the United States Congress, in canceling the superconducting supercollider project, was beginning to evaluate the cosmological benefits of particle physics against the utilitarian societal benefits promised by other disciplines. However, the continued dominance of the Enlightenment teleological model of the sciences, which gives research in particle physics a higher value from the outset, is preventing this position from being theorized explicitly.

Another question often raised is, Is basic science more important than applied science? This distinction between "basic" and "applied" rose into prominence after World War II to legitimize the nonutilitarian activities of academic theorizing in the hope that such activities would someday lead to useful outcomes. Contemporary advocates of the distinction have had difficulty dealing with the growing evidence that the vast majority of scientific research today falls better in the category of applied sci-

ence, most of which has industrial rather than governmental support.¹⁶ Yet little public discussion has taken place about replacing it because, in our judgment, no sufficiently plausible alternates have been put forward. However, someone who adopts the partnering strategy might argue that all sciences are applied in the sense that they provide knowledges that inform popular theorizing, and thus that the academic enterprise is better understood as something other than an autonomous activity of basic knowledge. Taking the position that knowledge *of* is also knowledge *for*, one could focus attention on exploring how the basic-applied distinction has figured in power relations among forms of theorizing and examine alternate strategies for configuring those same relations.

Partnering within Disciplines: Beyond the Politics of Rebuttal

Partnering within disciplines raises many questions about the forms of interaction prevalent in disciplinary activities. One such question might be, Is it possible to discuss disciplinary politics openly at a professional meeting? As most anyone knows who has listened to the question-and-answer period of an academic presentation, the existing model of political relations imagines an agonistic competition for dominance and control. Battlefield metaphors tend to apply routinely. As we work to establish and maintain professional reputations, probably all of us have internalized to some degree a need to stake out a position and defend it to the best of our abilities while weakening other positions through a variety of conceptual and political strategies, whether on the podium, in the audience, or out in the corridors (Latour 1987). Our citations in published works tend to label allies to encourage, or to pick out enemies to defeat. We are aware that hegemonic control of an academic discourse brings respect, rewards, and successful careers at top universities. Public expression of confusion, uncertainty, and deference to those below becomes a privilege of the elite.

But, from a partnering perspective, if academic combatants live, travel, and die together, they can also be seen as constituting one another in partner relations. The names Marx, Durkheim, and Weber have traveled together for a century as theoretical opponents in advanced courses on social theory. That the three could be characterized as sharing an implicit compact became possible only through a theoretical transition to postmodernism. From this perspective all three appear as illegitimate totalizing metanarratives. In the same way, other sets of names that have depended on one another and could be seen as bound by their polarized opposition in transient partner relations include Newton and Leibnitz, Darwin and Wallace, Freud and Piaget, Boas and Spencer, Chomsky and Skinner, Kuhn and Popper, Lévi-Strauss and Rad-

cliffe-Brown, Mead and Freeman, Sahlins and Harris, Lyotard and Habermas, and Haraway and Latour.

Working through the implications of the partnering strategy can offer some specific ways to reformulate the politics of rebuttal. A first step might be for each of us to recognize and treat our allies, our opponents, and indeed our students as partners whose respective legitimacies are outcomes from shared processes of exchange. We could then search for specific ways to acknowledge these differences in academic practices, from including others on panels and in volumes to looking for ways of accommodating competing perspectives in our work rather than ignoring or rejecting them. If we recognize that all parties to any dispute will be gone tomorrow as new theorizing evolves in changing circumstances, then silencing others can become a form of self-destruction. Our allegiance could shift from the individual theoretical position to the theorizing process as a whole. If the concept of progress in theorizing could be reformulated as the construction of new exchange processes appropriate to changing circumstances, then critiquing our own positions from other points of view would be not only a desirable way of advancing them, but also an important step in adapting knowledge production to changing circumstances.

A second step, which would motivate the first, could be to shift the explicit goals of academic theorizing from producing authoritative, truthful knowledge to producing knowledges that inform popular theorizing in desirable ways. We use "popular theorizing" as an umbrella concept to cover all forms of nonacademic theorizing, including what has been called folk knowledge and common sense, thoughts about why apples fall from trees, why tax increases are a good or bad idea, why adolescent boys want sex, and why one should feed a cold and starve a fever. If we begin to think about exchange processes in academic theorizing as what brings any given position into relations with popular theorizing, then the academic exchange process helps shape how the individual position establishes and serves its constituency. For example, the epic debate between idealism and materialism in Western academic theorizing produced a continuity in popular theorizing about human action. More important than the academic question, Is human action shaped by structures of thought or structures of material reality? was the metanarrative in both positions that human action is shaped by transcendent structures. Idealism and materialism rose together, thrived together, and are now declining together in the face of a massive shift in metanarratives from structure-based accounts of human action to agency-based accounts of human and nonhuman action. When viewed from the perspective of partnering, changes in academic theorizing intersect changes in popular theorizing.

A third step in reformulating the politics of rebuttal could be to teach and write explicitly about how the

politics of theorizing contributes to the conceptual contents of knowledge claims, including one's own. Taking this step might help us move beyond more narrow, sometimes sterile, images of research methods to theorize and teach corridor talk, the means of production of our knowledge: how to get grants or jobs, how to build and maintain contacts with informants and colleagues, how to build records of teaching and publications, and so forth.¹⁷ Attempting to provide accounts of power relations in academic theorizing would encourage us to get beyond counterposing hegemonic and egalitarian relations, to positioning different acts of theorizing in all their political complexity and to factoring power dimensions into our evaluation of that work. It would mean always answering the question, Whose knowledge is it?—but without reducing knowledge contents entirely to political contents. Assessing relations among forms of theorizing on both conceptual and political grounds, we might ask, What kinds of exchange does it reflect or encourage? How is this knowledge positioned in power relations? How does it relate to current or past theories, agendas, or situations? How can we best inform popular theorizing? Or, How might different theoretical approaches inform popular theorizing differently?

Academic and Popular Partnering in Western Contexts: Beyond the Politics of Diffusion

The partnering strategy raises questions about the relations between academic theorizing and popular theorizing. A question now asked with increasing frequency is, From where do scientists get their metaphors? Someone who follows the Enlightenment teleology of science's relation to the domain of popular theorizing may be likely to view this relation as unidirectional: science creates knowledge, knowledge diffuses to the public, and the public utilizes it. From this perspective, one is led to argue that the event of knowledge production involves in some sense an act of creation, which invites destructive debates over whether or not this act is really one of contingent construction, a private production of order from disorder.

Someone trying out the partnering strategy could seek to avoid these entrenched positions by calling attention to the flow of metaphors in both directions between academic and popular theorizing. From this perspective, academic theorizing would not simply educate the public cognitively or enroll the public politically but could be seen as contributing new metaphors to popular theorizing. At the same time, popular theorizing could be seen as contributing new metaphors to academic theorizing. Think of the military metaphors incorporated into Darwinian models of the survival of the fittest, the gender metaphors in Francis Bacon's account of modern science gaining control over nature, the religious metaphors built

into classical economic models of the invisible hand, and the metaphors from Western political individualism written into mechanical theories of forces as isolable, individual, and autonomous.

By suggesting that every academic theorist is also a popular theorist, the image of partnering encourages us to examine the relations between the two rather than dissolving one into the other. How do the lives of academics creep into their disciplinary images and how do their disciplinary images creep into their lives? A common practice among senior scientists approaching retirement, for example, is to proselytize their disciplines by extending theories to interpret world problems. One of us recently attended a talk in which a renowned biologist used evolutionary metaphors of fitness to identify and promote those cultural beliefs from around the world that he considered worth saving and expanding. From the perspective of partnering, one's personal life and professional life are always connected. The very act of separation then becomes a problem worthy of investigation.

Another question about the relations between academic theorizing and popular theorizing might be, Do popular science magazines just report science or do they do science as well? Once again, someone who adopts an Enlightenment strategy could get caught in an endless debate, this time over whether popular magazines diffuse knowledge into lay terms or are simply advertisements that mobilize public support for basic science. Someone who adopts a partnering strategy just might be able to escape the terms of this debate by viewing popular science magazines as another scientific activity, another place where science is done. By treating popular thought as activities of theorizing, this strategy encourages one to view people as doing science in their everyday lives all the time. Brushing one's teeth twice a day and going to the dentist twice a year, calculating the cost of groceries, figuring out what is wrong with the car, choosing foods to eat, fertilizing the lawn, or integrating expert guidance into our intimate relations, we could see ourselves as engaging in acts of theorizing outside the institutional boundaries of technoscience in ways that fit science into our lives and selves, rather than simply applying its conclusions. Such practices might also include well-established and highly organized forms of alternative science, such as alternative medicines, astrology, parapsychology, and various New Age sciences (Hess 1993). From a partnering perspective, these practices would appear not as degenerate activities of theorizing but as theoretical activities that gain their meaning and power in relation to corresponding forms of academic theorizing, from whose limitations they often draw their energy.

In a similar fashion, one could view explicit acts of popularization as fashioning the selves of readers by doing the theoretical work of fitting. Popularization would become a critical activity of knowledge development that

involves figuring out how to build relations between some new mode of academic theorizing and diverse existing modes of popular theorizing. *Popular Science*, *Scientific American*, *Omni*, and the Discovery Channel would all become intensely interesting activities that hide complex negotiations between academic theorizing and popular theorizing.

Another question we have all likely faced at various points in our careers is, How should I explain to my family what I do as an anthropologist? Based on what the two of us have done, we venture to guess that, in responding to such questions as, "What do anthropologists do?" or, "What good is it?" most of you probably say things like, "Anthropologists study how people behave . . ." or "Anthropology differs from sociology in that. . ." In other words, we claim that anthropology makes crucial and distinctive contributions to a scientific understanding of human behavior. While this approach might get us a modicum of legitimacy in families that wonder how we get away without doing "real work," it probably also ends many conversations by throwing up a barrier that can make others feel dumb. Someone trying out the partnering strategy might advocate attempting to describe how anthropology has helped in the past to inform popular theorizing and might continue to help in the future. That is, one could try to explain how one's work contributes to their theorizing rather than point to one's membership in an elite academy.

Consider, for example, the popular travels of the culture concept. This anthropological concept worked its way into popular theorizing beginning in the 1920s and 1930s, through Margaret Mead's *Coming of Age in Samoa* and Ruth Benedict's *Patterns of Culture*. By competing with Enlightenment models of progress that placed everyone in a hierarchy of development, the concept of culture argued for a greater level of tolerance for differences in the world. Today, however, many anthropologists have argued that the culture concept actually inhibits the coexistence of differences by treating cultures as wholes with essential characteristics. The rise of ethnic nationalism and contemporary debates over multiculturalism provide cases in which events of popular theorizing use the culture concept for exclusionary political objectives. Many anthropologists now find themselves scrambling to identify concepts that might serve the same political function that the concept of culture served earlier, but now in order to account for the production and distribution of cultural hybrids in the context of global power relations. Telling stories such as this one to one's family might be riskier than retreating to the elite refuge of academic theorizing because it grants legitimacy to family members as theorists, but the strategy also raises the possibility of bringing anthropology far more deeply into family theorizing than claiming expertise likely permits.

A question that now regularly inhabits the platform at national meetings is, Can I be both an anthropologist and an activist? From an Enlightenment perspective, activism is acceptable if one bears the truth and is simply working to overcome barriers to its recognition and acceptance. However, this attitude can invite agonistic battles over who bears the truth, for the legitimacy of any activism would depend on an assessment of who stands for the truth. In this context, someone might view the potential benefits of activism to be outweighed by its risks, not to mention its temporary epistemological value.

Someone who adopts a partnering strategy might be able to reduce some of these risks by arguing that if you are an anthropologist, you are already an activist. The key move is that knowledge claims always have power contents. From this perspective, academics would always be seen as activists within academic institutions, for the establishment of authority and circulation of power in these institutions would be connected directly to the processes of knowledge production they were supposed to guarantee. Academics would also become activists in popular theorizing by adopting theoretical positions that situate them politically in popular worlds.

Taking this position could also lead to a proposal with more difficult and far-reaching implications; that is, if one's work always has political dimensions and implications, why not then allow one's politics more explicitly into one's work? Such a move would not be contradictory conceptually, but it would likely exact a significant political cost: the appreciation and acceptance of political diversity within academic theorizing. Assuming one's goal was not to transform the politics of academic theorizing in a way that rendered the academy indistinguishable from political institutions, then being an activist in an academy built on partnering could involve accepting political diversity in the same terms as conceptual diversity. That is, one would accept the burden of criticizing both one's conceptual claims and one's politics from the perspectives of others. It would not be enough, for example, to allow one's Marxist, liberal, conservative, anarchist, feminist, or antiracist leanings to ground and shape one's conceptual work—a process that likely happens all the time now, subverting the Enlightenment model. Rather, being an activist would involve the more threatening, but potentially more effective, move of placing one's political commitments in jeopardy, making them vulnerable, in the same way that one placed one's conceptual claims in jeopardy. Not only might the conceptual content of one's work adjust by participating in such exchange processes, but so might one's political commitments. This would not mean that one had to accept the value of perspectives that promoted hegemonic relations, for such could be contested in both conceptual and political terms, but it could mean accepting the risk of greater ambivalence.

Academic and Popular Partnering in Non-Western Contexts: Beyond the Politics of Transfer

A question that has long engaged anthropological research is, How should I go about studying knowledges in non-Western societies? Someone who follows an Enlightenment strategy might interpret this question in terms of a policy of knowledge transfer, for example, the replacement of local superstition with verifiable knowledge. Along with other Enlightenment positions, this one tends to invite rebuttal. Over the years, many anthropologists have been delighted to participate, devoting careers to documenting ways in which local knowledges function as distinct, effective cultural forms. In this case, what the strategy of partnering has to offer is a call for help in retheorizing the critical relations and strategies involved.

The distinction between academic and popular theorizing in the partnering model loses much of its efficacy when applied to non-Western contexts, for academic theorizing is likely to be as much a hybridized development as popular theorizing. Yet it is arguable that even nonacademic theorizing in non-Western contexts probably stands in complex relations with Western academic theorizing. For someone who adopts a partnering strategy, one starting point is to get beyond popular binary distinctions, such as the West versus the Rest, or traditional versus modern, and then explore relations empirically with an appreciation of differences and an openness toward new metaphors. Rather than taking for granted either the content or the superiority of Western academic theorizing, one could explore the power relations among different forms of theorizing in order to understand the exchanges that are currently underway. The trickiest move, however, would be to figure out ways to allow one's own theorizing to enter into exchange relations with the alternate forms of theorizing one encountered, in the same spirit and with the same commitments that might guide one's attempts to replace the politics of rebuttal within the Western academy. All this means overcoming the limitations built into the distinction between academic theorizing and popular theorizing.

In sum, the strategy of partnering aims at transforming the academy in postmodernist terms, knocking down the walls around institutionalized technoscience without dissolving away the enterprise of academic theorizing. Rather than defending science in traditional terms or replacing it with an aesthetic celebration of difference, understanding forms of theorizing as partners in temporary exchange relations could reposition academic theorizing as theorizing within society, rather than as creative acts by brilliant individual minds that have implications for society. Elaborating this strategy, or others like it, could allow us to make explicit the power dimensions of our work without fear of putting ourselves outside the

bounds of legitimate academic discourse. And most importantly, by calling attention to the relations between academic theorizing and popular theorizing, the strategy of partnering could offer hope for producing an academy that serves society as a source of valued knowledges without helping to produce and reproduce hegemonic relations.

Notes

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1. A variety of indicators are adduced as testimony to the fact that significant changes are indeed occurring, such as the emergence of postindustrial society (Bell 1973; Jameson 1984, 1989, 1991), consumer society (Baudrillard 1975), trends in urban architecture (Jencks 1985), flexible modes of capitalist accumulation (Harvey 1989), informatics and communications (Lyotard 1984), and mass and pop culture (Adorno 1973; Benjamin 1968[1936]; Grossberg, Nelson, and Treichler 1992).

2. See, for example, Said 1978 and Amin 1989.

3. For a survey and evaluation of the debates on modernization and dependency theory, see Blomström and Hettne 1984.

4. Horkheimer and Adorno 1972[1947] was an important early work in this regard.

5. See Dolby 1982 and Gieryn 1983 for accounts of the demarcation of scientific and popular theorizing. For an interesting defense of popular theorizing as theorizing from a literary critic, see Christian 1987.

6. Some important earlier contributions included Bleier 1983, 1986; Cowan 1983; Fausto-Sterling 1985; Harding 1986, 1987; Haas and Perrucci 1984; Keller 1983, 1984; Merchant 1980; Rositter 1982; Rothschild 1983; and special issues of *Signs* in 1976 (Vol. 1, No. 3) and 1978 (Vol. 4, No. 1). We are arguing implicitly that feminist critiques of technoscience share the same terrain as postmodernist critiques of technoscience. Confrontations between the two have taken place over the alternate forms of theorizing they propose. See below for further discussion.

7. See, for example, Goonatilake 1991; Harding 1993; Rodney 1982; and Van Sertima 1986.

8. In the 20th century, for example, noteworthy critics have included Edmund Husserl 1970[1936]; Martin Heidegger 1977[1954]; Jacques Ellul 1964[1954]; Herbert Marcuse 1964; Sigfried Giedion 1969; Theodor Roszak 1969; Lewis Mumford 1970; and Ivan Illich 1975.

9. Haraway (1991) is an exception. Although Donna Haraway uses the language of partiality in searching for a feminist, anti-racist objectivity, her metaphor of situated knowledges challenges the authority of truthfulness by viewing all knowledge as positioned. For her, "partial" means "positioned" and "contested" rather than offering a partial truth. Still, we would like her to expand the relational content of situated knowledges.

10. The postmodernist critiques in anthropology do go beyond ethnographic writing to include political economy (for example, Marcus and Fischer 1986). The unfortunate title of *Recapturing Anthropology* (Fox 1991), along with parts of the editor's introduction, suggests that the volume adopts this strategy, critiquing postmodernism to recapture anthropology's authority. In our view, this work is better described as picking up and extending postmodernist insights by giving attention to other political dimensions in the production of anthropological knowledge.

11. The subsequent comment in Kirby 1991 and reply in Mascia-Lees et al. 1991 alert readers to be careful of oversimplifying any positions in feminism and postmodernism. In this case, both arguments exhibit a politics of rebuttal that reproduces sharp opposition while, at the same time, inviting us to identify and explore the axes of difference that blur the boundary between them.

12. This attempt at explicitly reformulating the politics of academic theorizing pulls in the same direction as much ongoing research and writing both inside and outside of anthropology. For example, by exploring and critiquing connections between the production of knowledge and the production of power, many recent works in cultural studies of science, technology, and medicine, feminist criticism of science and technology, and science and technology studies (STS) seek alternative politics of theorizing that overcome relations of domination and subordination within and because of technoscience. In addition, many researchers not working specifically in science and technology are searching for new ways of using their academic work to confront and seek change in hegemonic power relations, thus directly reimagining the politics of academic theorizing through changes practiced of research and writing.

13. The now enormous literature on feminism and postmodernism provides important places to go to think through new politics of theorizing. Nicholson 1990 is a good starting point, along with a browse through Routledge's entire list.

14. We are grateful to the reviewer who pointed out that the image of committed cohabitation is "a white, middle-class ideal . . . that, as women's positions in these relationships suggest, works to hide inequalities and abuses of power." We see the danger of narrowness here, but even in everyday language partners can be more than two, be of various sexual orientations, develop a variety of styles of commitment, and extend partnering to some areas of life but not to others. Because the key assumption in partnering is that each position presumes the legitimacy of others in principle, we mean the practice to be

multidimensional, constantly involving work, and having varying power dimensions at the capillary level. We worry that the image of commitment may be limited by its individualistic overtones, but it does emphasize the mutual dependence of alternate modes of theorizing. It is a start; help us do better.

15. Christian 1987:52, for example, in critiquing poststructuralist theorizing as elitist, points out that "people of color have always theorized—but in forms quite different from the Western form of abstract logic."

16. In policy-making circles, the distinction between "basic" and "applied" science is largely ignored. For example, a recent comprehensive review of science policy by the Office of Technology Assessment of the U.S. Congress (1991:3–4) pointed out that policy decisions rarely take this distinction into account because "divisions of research funding into these categories are often unreliable."

17. Gary thanks Joseph Dunit and Sharon Traweek for long discussions about corridor talk. See Downey, Dunit, and Traweek, in press, for a first attempt at writing about corridor talk.

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