COUNTER-EXPERTISE AND THE POLITICS OF COLLABORATION

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> The new cultural politics of difference are neither simply oppositional in contesting the mainstream (or *male*stream) for inclusion, nor transgressive in the avantgardist sense of shocking conventional bourgeois audiences. Rather, they are distinct articulations of talented (and usually privileged) contributors to culture who desire to align themselves with demoralized, demobilized, depoliticized and disorganized people in order to empower and enable social action and, if possible, to enlist collective insurgency for the expansion of freedom, democracy and individuality. This perspective impels these cultural critics and artists to reveal, as an integral component of their production, the very operations of power within their immediate work contexts (i.e. academy, museum, gallery, mass-media). This strategy, however, also puts them in an inescapable double-bind—while linking their activities to the fundamental, structural overhaul of these institutions, they often remain financially dependent on them (so much for "independent" creation). For these critics of culture, theirs is a gesture that is simultaneously progressive and co-opted ...
> Cornel West, *'The New Cultural Politics of Difference'*

How did university students strategize their own expert authority in the struggle to democratize Taiwan? How have women respected differences among themselves on issues surrounding reproductive technology? What tactics have critical race theorists relied on, while working in governmental agencies that claim to have overcome racial prejudice?

Each of these questions is taken up by essays in this issue, which collectively and comparatively articulate a politics of collaboration. Etymologically, to collaborate is to collect, or colour, labour

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(*col-* + *labour*). In practice, collaboration draws people with different interests, perspectives and skills into a synchronized effort to accomplish something that could not be accomplished individually. To work, collaboration must turn diversity into a resource. A politics of collaboration is, then, a politics of difference.

Collaboration can be nefarious. One collaborates with an enemy, especially with an enemy occupying one's own country. One also collaborates when one works within an organization that collects together people of different backgrounds and persuasions, turning pluralism into a strategic resource. We work with the latter sense of 'collaboration', although we are aware that the projects we describe can involve alliances and strategies that some would characterize as unseemly. And we do want to retain the tension and sense of intrigue that the term collaboration invokes, as a reminder that collectivity is not only difficult to produce and strategize, but that it can also marginalize and alienate.

Unlike terms such as collegiality, camaraderie or patriotism, the term collaboration marks the difference between those who work together rather than their sameness. Collaboration recognizes that counter-experts are indeed experts, which means that they cannot straightforwardly identify with the demoralized, depoliticized and disorganized people with whom they work. Collaboration stresses the *labour* of working across difference, the *un-easiness* of the counter-expert's responsibilities. These responsibilities are uneasy in a double sense. They involve difficult and demanding work, intellectual as well as political. And the counter-expert's responsibilities are uneasy in that they require that sense of apprehension or trepidation necessary for critical re-examination and re-questioning of cherished assumptions, self-evident ideas, or naturalized alliances.

☐ *Collaborating race and violence?*
Gerard Fergerson's essay demonstrates the trepidation of counter-expertise at the US Congressional Office of Technology Assessment (OTA). The essay is about Fergerson's attempt to work as a cultural critic within an institution itself needing overhaul. Our quotation from Cornel West aptly describes his position, in part; Fergerson's own financial dependence was of minimal significance. More significantly, Fergerson thought that the initiative taken by the OTA

to address urban youth violence was very important, even while recognizing how its medicalizing methods tended toward racialization of both problems and proposed remedies.

Fergerson went to the OTA committed to bringing problems of race into public discussion. The OTA, known as 'one of the more progressive agencies on the hill', had a staff and an agenda overtly sympathetic to many of Fergerson's concerns. The institutional authority of the OTA promised to provide a place to stand that was not simply oppositional but none the less aligned with demoralized, depoliticized peoples. The place Fergerson found to stand was beset by double-binds of many kinds. He found that reference to race itself could become a racializing device, legitimating crude statistical correlations while obscuring the effects of class, gender and social context. Refusing the determinism of biological explanations, he soon realized how easily cultural explanations play into new, equally deterministic ways of 'blaming the victim'. Consideration of violence as a public health issue was far from straightforward; Fergerson was caught within competing constructions of race, violence and remedy, and knew that every move of his own would entangle him in what needed critique.

Like other essays in this issue, Fergerson's essay provides an analysis from within everyday institutional constraints, rather than from a theorized or aestheticized distance. The effect is humbling. Working within the politics of race, reproduction or toxic exposure, we must speak a language uncomfortably close to the language of those whom we challenge. Meanwhile, it is clear that our choice of words and categories does matter and that our turns of phrase to secure legitimacy could become part of the problems we try to solve.

The message is harsh: real-world politics corrupt purist progressivism in ways much more difficult to engage than suggested by commentary on campaign finance reform or on the 'swinging doors' between regulatory agencies and the industries they regulate. The message is not, however, about the need for refusal or transgressive avante-gardism, though the call for new political idioms is sounded throughout. Instead, these essays point to possibilities emergent from creative mingling of critique and practice, each constrained by the other. Complicity and double-bind are inevitable.

The authors of these essays do not try to speak from a privileged stance of authority that allows political assertion to rise above the

problems it is meant to solve. Nor do these authors claim easy identification with their co-workers. The challenges they describe do not result from failed attempts at either neutrality or solidarity. Their goal is not to stand either apart or within, but alongside, aligning themselves in ways that respect different positions, different kinds of expertise and new ways of assuming political responsibility.

☐ *(In)directing counter-expertise*
The essay by Michael Fortun describing his work at the Institute for Science and Interdisciplinary Studies (ISIS) draws out the challenges of collaborative alignment with particular force. ISIS is a non-profit organization formed to reconfigure the role of science in building a democratic society. The uniqueness of ISIS lies in the way it links different kinds of people and different forms of knowledge to generate innovative responses to social problems. Scientists talk and listen to citizens who are involved in toxic waste clean-up, efforts to respond to environmental illness and a range of other problems involving complicated technical and scientific issues. Intellectuals from the humanities and social scientists are also in the conversation, as are public officials, artists, media professionals and others.

The goal of ISIS is not only to provide citizens with knowledge they lack, but to create multiple feedback loops that continually modify the practice of science, while redistributing crucial access to scientific authority. This complex goal could not be achieved if scientists and other experts claimed to 'identify' with the problems citizens face. In Fortun's words, 'ISIS works not through easy, direct identifications but through the uneasy, indirect linkages of the "and"'. Different kinds of issues, people and knowledge are strategically juxtaposed rather than conflated. ISIS is involved in redefining and revitalizing expertise rather than simply opposing it.

Each account of expertise in this volume begins at the local level, detailing the quotidian, often paradoxical, contexts of specific confrontations between theory and practice. Certain themes recur, illustrating a crisis of authority throughout progressive political initiative. Within the shifting landscapes described, positioning of the intellectual is difficult. Organizations themselves have been repositioned in response to new cultural forces and political–economic contexts. Social roles within organizations are often hard to define, much more

to enact. Specialized skills are clearly required, but made suspect by critiques of expertise and method. Technoscience operates as both resource and problem, challenging habitual ways of making and legitimating crucial decisions. Styles of commitment are questioned, within emerging awareness that new models of ethics must accompany other forms of change.

The momentum in these accounts is not toward final solutions. Instead, these accounts privilege the persistently un-resolved, dis-eased character of contemporary engagements with political issues, acknowledging the infinite regress that confronts all attempts to locate final truth, comprehensive moral standards and effective forms of responsibility. The challenge is to dwell for a while in the cracks of these engagements, working toward a tentative language of description that turns dis-ease from pathology to site of revisionary possibility.

■ WORKING DOUBLE-BINDS

Intellectuals are both constrained and enabled by the critical perspectives they bring to work in 'the real world'. When carried out within organizations, the work of intellectuals is further complicated, requiring continual negotiation of the social, conceptual and rhetorical forms that shape an organization's definition of itself, and position it within broader worlds. When the organization's work is overtly inflected by the issues and logics of science and technology, things are complicated even further, requiring continual attention to how technoscience operates as both resource and problem. Intellectuals working within the politics of technoscience, within organizational contexts, are therefore double-bound in multiple ways. Their simultaneous responsibilities to rigorous intellectual critique, to certain political values and to organizational effectiveness often end up in conflict, and demand creative strategizing rather than simple adherence to received ideals.

Through a series of case studies this issue tracks how these conflicts operate, in specific instances, in diverse social spheres. The central metaphoric image that we encouraged people to address is that of the 'double-bind'. Other equally inexact images might have been appropriate, as they too project situations of disjunctured, unresolvable contradiction wherein intellectual habit must be ques-

tioned at every turn. Postmodernism. Deconstruction. Cultural critique. The Differend. We want the metaphor of double-bind to evoke traces of each of these, providing a space for detailed description which does not devolve into the factional disputation that so easily captures critical discussion. The goal is to rely on the metaphor of double-bind to consider the need for new conceptual and social forms *within* progressive initiative.

☐ *Locating ethical agents*

We have found productive references in the communicational theories and approaches developed by Gregory Bateson and colleagues in the 1950s and 1960s. Originally trained as an anthropologist, Bateson had some prior interest in 'problems of classification in the natural sciences' and took as a new 'point of departure' (for a proposal to the Rockefeller Foundation) Russell and Whitehead's *Principia Mathematica* (1910). Where Russell and Whitehead analysed the classification of abstract logical statements and the paradoxes that they often entailed, Bateson and colleagues were more interested in the actual operation of such statements and their paradoxes in 'real world' contexts. One example is the statement that a therapist might make to a patient, or a parent to a child: 'I want you to disobey me'. To obey the statement is to disobey it; to disobey it requires obeyance.

Situations of unresolvable contradiction that tax the imaginations of ethical agents especially interested Bateson. They provide a lens for observing experiences produced by established rules and systems, yet not adequately described in standard explanations of how these systems function and change. The concept of double-bind is thus a point of entry, allowing researchers to 'research the unresearchable'. A double-bind situation is not equated with situations of difficult choice, resolvable through reference to available explanatory narratives. Instead, 'double-bind' denotes situations in which individuals are confronted with dual or multiple obligations that are related and equally valued but incongruent. The individual urgently wants to respond appropriately and thus fixates on the cross-cutting demands, realizing their contradiction all the more with every move to accurately understand what is being asked and how obligations can be fulfilled.[1]

The demands of a double-bind situation are relayed through messages coded by different logics, operating within different fields of reference, which often deny the existence of other conceptual orders. Contradiction is concealed from within, even while it shapes how messages are received. The effect is disquieting. The individual is confronted with alternatives that are equally valued and equally insufficient in themselves. An additive strategy is not an option. Every operation of one alternative undercuts the operation of the other. When one option is privileged, the other is discounted. Moreover, the experience of contradiction and impasse cannot be communicated. There is no meta-language capable of rationalizing the disjuncture, making double-bind 'comfortable to reason' and coherent articulation.

Double-bind situations create a persistent mismatch between explanation and everyday life, throwing the ethical agent into modes of subjectivity marked by sensibilities of constraint rather than freedom. Constraint binds, but does not foreclose all possibility of movement. Constraint can be engaged strategically, working within rather than in denial of contradiction.

The story of Ulysses provides a classic allegory. Having himself tied to the mast so he might hear the Siren's song, Ulysses relinquished control in an attempt to maintain control. He is roped in, knowing this is the only workable strategy for sailing through dire straits, chafing all the while at his willing participation in such a crazy, constricting scheme.

To be bound is, then, at times necessary. To be bound also entails being obligated, tied in and tied to some Other or other: an ideal, a movement, a collective, a deadline, a person or community. To be in a double-bind is to be doubly obligated, multiply and impossibly responsible, while dependent on imperfect schemes and unreasonable alliance.[2]

☐ *Reproducing double-binds*
Beth Britt's essay in this issue illuminates the operations of double-bind with great detail, illustrating both the contradictions she has confronted as a feminist working at the intersection of law and new reproductive technologies, and the contradictions faced by the infertile women who are her informants. Britt's opening passages describe

how she is often expected to represent a feminism that unifies around 'our bodies', opposed to 'their science'. 'Their science' is identified with a patriarchal order that has medicalized infertility to subject women to domination by physicians and pharmaceutical companies. By unifying feminism around the supposedly shared experience of women's bodies, such expectation overlaps with discourses that label the infertile as abnormal; it also suggests that motherhood and family building are essential experiences in a woman's life. Meanwhile the feminism expected of Britt runs counter to both her own conception of feminism as a 'politics of difference' and to the position taken by women active in securing resources for the treatment of infertility, many of whom resent any identification with feminism because of its links to pro-choice positions on abortion.

In her work with infertile women, Britt was, at times, excluded— because she was not 'one of them' (i.e. infertile) and was assumed to be incapable of the empathy necessary to be an ally and advocate of their cause. She has remained caught within competing definitions of feminism, of women's welfare, of the grounds of collectivity, and of the connection between advocacy and academic research.

Like other essays in this issue, Britt's essay details the conundrums produced when the need for a 'single rule of judgment' co-exists with unresolvable differences of perspective and interest. Britt also emphasizes the way marginality creates its own margins. One example is the way some women secure access to infertility treatments via legal definitions of reproductive rights that exclude poor women and 'socially infertile' women (because they are not in heterosexual marriages).

Paradoxes in the operations of marginality recur throughout the stories told in this issue. The result: persistent mismatch between explanation and everyday life. The essays here dwell on this mismatch, exploring the ways double-bind situations provoke both duress and critically new ways of engaging political problems. The challenge is to understand how double-binds emerge, frustrate, and, at times, dramatically transform relationships—moving understanding and communication to qualitatively new levels.

■ QUESTIONING ORGANIZATIONS

Double-binds are 'real world' conundrums, fraught with moral import. In these essays they are created and sustained by work within organizations. Our conception of an 'organization' is multifarious. In some essays, the organization productive of double-bind is a literal, social body in which intersubjective exchange is materialized and often routinized. In others, the 'organization' is a broad discourse such as feminism, which constrains and obliges from afar, but with a viscerality that undercuts all claims that distance provides for neutrality. Throughout the essays, organizational affiliation produces multiple connections and demands, as well as a kind of 'middle space' well-suited for analysing the complex social linkages and the indistinct or contradictory operations of logic that characterize work at the intersection of technoscience and politics.

By situating personal, political dilemma within organizational frameworks we hope to avoid existential musing, aestheticized abstraction and other approaches that dull comparative perspective. Our commitment to comparative perspective is practical. Working within double-binds, particularly when acknowledged as such, fosters a desire for explanation and solution. These essays avoid grand theorizations, which are either of little utility, or are themselves mechanisms of coercion. Comparison provides an alternative means of making connections, learning across difference rather than through theoretical homogenization.

The questions we have engaged to foster comparison are multiple and wide-reaching. One set of questions addresses the construction and enactment of social roles for intellectuals in organizations. What motivates individuals to affiliate with an organization in pursuit of political ends? How was the organization structured, and how was 'the intellectual' positioned within it? What styles of leadership operated, or were seen as legitimate? Where, in daily practice, did the demands of intellectual work seem in conflict with organizational agendas? How did the organization evaluate itself, and to what extent were intellectual perspectives considered relevant? How did the organization deal with internal dissent, particularly when provoked by conceptual conflict, or impasse?

Another set of questions explores how political organizations

generate new theories, methods and rhetorics responsive to the particular demands of the projects with which they are involved. How did the organization strategize its own legitimacy, with different constituencies? How were alliances with other organizations initiated and sustained? In what ways did positivist articulations of science serve as a resource or constraint? In all, how have conventional models of ethics, knowledge production and social production served, or failed, the situations they were meant to describe and ameliorate?

Finally, we ask how intellectuals in organizations locate the responsibilities and rewards they incur in their interminably doubly bound positions. How were conceptions of 'responsibility' articulated? In what ways can allegiance be demonstrated, without reifying citizens, victims or communities? What allowance is made for criticism in practical initiatives for social change? How has experience within specific organizations provided insights that contribute to intellectual discussions about structure, agency, and other key categories?

■ INTERPRETING POLITICS

The essays in this issue, and the political engagements they describe, are guided by theoretical perspectives often judged as abstract and distant from practical initiatives for social change. Such judgements fail to acknowledge the dramatic material effects of the ways we conceptualize and talk about the world. The essays here describe these effects and the interpretive and rhetorical skills necessary to engage them effectively. Contributors continually seek modes of analysis and action appropriate to specific contexts. Methodological rigour remains important, but is evaluated according to circumstance rather than by generalizable standards.

Within academia, we are challenged to produce new forms of empirical work responsive to the changing conditions of late modernity. The proposals made by George Marcus and Michael Fischer in the mid-1980s remain evocative, challenging researchers to link interpretive and political–economic perspectives for purposes of cultural critique. In their conception, cultural critique is a continually comparative effort that uses understanding of different experiences to destabilize and revitalize our own efforts towards a more

humane society. Ethnography becomes a means to imagine social alternatives, disrupting conventions that have become naturalized and therein resistant to change.

Identifying the difficulty of bridging micro- and macro-levels of analysis, Marcus and Fischer challenge us to find a way to 'represent the embedding of richly described local cultural worlds in larger impersonal systems of political-economy' (1986, p. 77). For ethnographers, disciplined to track detail at the micro-level, 'the task lies ahead of reshaping our dominant macro frameworks for the understanding of historic political-economy, such as capitalism, so that they can represent the actual diversity and complexity of local situations for which they try to account in general terms' (1986, p. 88).

Others have pursued the linkage between macro- and microperspectives for similar purposes. Organizational theorists, for example, increasingly consider micro-perspectives important to counter macro-models that inadequately account for what they observe in the worlds they study. They recognize that 'studies of organizational and political change routinely point to findings that are hard to square with either rational-actor or functionalist accounts' (Powell and DiMaggio, 1991, p. 3). Attempting to reduce the distance between macro-theories and micro-experience, the 'new institutionalism' in organizational analysis usefully develops a 'middle space', situating organizations at a 'meso-level', between individuals and interorganizational, societal institutions (Powell and Dimaggio, 1991).

While continuing to draw upon disciplines more accustomed to macro-level analysis, the new institutionalists develop microperspectives by learning from disciplines such as cultural anthropology, which emphasizes not only the local details, but also the interpretive and symbolic substance of everyday life. They argue that interpretive analysis fosters methodological pursuit of multiple levels of analysis, because issues of meaning and culture pervade individual, organizational and interorganizational interactions. Sociologists Friedland and Alford, for example, link analytic levels and explanatory variables because all 'are necessary to adequately understand society. Each is equally an abstraction and a reification; each is implicated in the other; none is more "real" than the other' (1991, p. 242).

These new institutionalists generally recognize that interpretive

perspectives are an important component of descriptive accuracy, but they often deny that an interpretive approach has a role in constructing political alternatives. For example, Friedland and Alford argue that 'one of the most serious drawbacks of almost all interpretive approaches in cultural anthropology and in the text-based hermeneutical analyses of society is that they lack politics' (1991, p. 253). Cultural and interpretive forms of analysis are said to 'focus on power, but without agency, without conflict', such that 'dominant discourses are not contested' (Friedland and Alford, 1991, p. 253).

This critique of interpretive perspectives is familiar; we hear this claim not only from new institutionalists but also from scholars within science and technology studies. It nonetheless lacks descriptive accuracy. As these essays demonstrate, interpretive perspectives provide important tools for political organizations, both in constructing themselves and in constructing their interface with broader worlds. The utility of interpretive perspectives is due, in part, to social, cultural and political economic changes that require continual revision of how politics are understood and strategized. Whether within environmentalism, new labour initiatives or response to developments in medicine, the discourses that sustain most contemporary political initiatives emerge in the process of political engagement. Issues remain subject to multiple definitions and thus can be strategically interpreted to foster social alliance, media uptake or accommodation to logics of law.

Strategic interpretation of political issues becomes all the more basic to progressive initiative as corporations become a central focus of concern, due to their strategies of knowledge production as well as of economic production. Corporations now hire their own rhetoricians and interpretive experts to help them seem green, women-friendly and committed to technological excellence. Progressive political organizations can hardly count on 'the committed heart', or the predictable placard dividing the world into categories into which no one really seems to fit. Nor is strategic response as simple as damning any and all commercial enterprise, as well as all expertise created within it. As these essays demonstrate, formation of new social alliances, often across divides that once seemed rigid, is as important, and tricky, as formation of new modes of representation.

☐ *Interpreting labour*

The essay here by Todd Cherkasky illustrates how strategic response has been mobilized in the North American labour movement, where the importance of interpretive approaches is strikingly clear. Cherkasky's essay focuses on his role at the Work and Technology Institute (WTI), which works to implement 'high performance work systems' through 'labour–management partnerships'. WTI's goal is to help labour advocates respond to a globalized economy in which wages and job security are linked to fast-paced technological change. This goal pushes WTI to develop models for implementing new technologies that protect labour interest, while responding to management claims that increased productivity is dependent on automation.

There are complications on every front. Management continues to resist WTI's arguments that effective 'partnerships' require strong unions, more equality between production workers and engineers and fair compensation when workers assume increased responsibility for process and product quality. Meanwhile, some labour representatives also resist many of WTI's approaches, insisting that 'partnership' is simply another term for co-optation and that automation is not negotiable, and should be resisted with well-established adversarial approaches.

At WTI, interpretation is required at every turn. Assessments of new political–economic realities escape the descriptive capacity of indicators such as the GNP, which cannot represent the process and effects of deterritorialized capital flows or the changing role of 'national' economies and governmental planning. Strategies for protecting job security are formulated within claims that aggressive bargaining could provoke companies to shift production off-shore, to Third World countries where governments are eager to be as flexible as possible. Attempts to replace obsolete Taylorist organizational models require the design of less hierarchical work systems that can be supported by both labour and management. These efforts to focus attention on design alternatives and the creative potential of worker participation displace entrenched assumptions about the inevitability and pace of technological change—assumptions which are likely to be shared by most of WTI's constituencies. In everyday practice, researchers develop interpretive strategies to provide models for workplace transformation that are both simple enough to communi-

cate broadly and complex enough to actually guide necessarily innovative initiatives.

Cherkasky's essay demonstrates how attempts to solve political problems are riddled with diverse, often competing understandings of how change happens and can be evaluated. It also shows that while linkage between interpretive traditions of scholarship and practical organizational work is often indirect, crossovers *are* materialized more and more often—often involving scholars who fit uneasily, if at all, within traditional bastions of progressive thought and rhetoric. In the past, the intellectual in the Union hall was, stereotypically, a Marxist dedicated to the Truth of historical materialism. Today, she may well be a reader of Luce Irigaray and Avital Ronell, as well as Marx.

Shifts in the location of interpretive work are due, in part, to developments in feminism and critical race theory that foreground how interpretation and representation are constitutive of power, creating practical work at the level of language.[3] These theoretical developments compel high awareness of different ways that power operates, undercutting the scientistic logics of recognizable progressive paradigms. Whether within academia or social movements, such scientistic logics claim direct, causal connection between theory and social change, relying on models in which ideas, institutions and political actors behave in predictable ways via readily apparent and simple mechanisms. Interpretive approaches are less direct, but are increasingly recognized as more tuned to the realities of strategic political engagement.

Donna Haraway's insistence on appropriating 'objectivity' and 'rationality' as strategic resources for feminism is one example of theoretical insight that has driven interpretive intellectuals into work in 'real world' contexts, where interpretive skills are deployed in very hands-on efforts toward social change (Haraway, 1991, pp. 183–202). Many of the essays in this issue describe similar appropriations, emphasizing the significance of negotiating the terms through which politics are engaged.[4] From a distance, haggling over the meaning of terms such as 'ecology' and 'flexibility' can seem an enactment of semantic trivia. Closer scrutiny reveals how such haggling produces political possibility, and provides a heuristic for assessing the continually changing landscape within which political articulations are heard and institutionalized.

Witness the material effects of corporations going green and becoming flexible, through Total Quality Management and rhetorics of 'partnership'. Witness the effects of medicalizing infertility, through strategic production of clinical definitions for phenomena once discussed in terms of morality rather than physiology. Witness how different rhetorics of science and expertise can be deployed, with very 'real world' effects on the allocation of resources for environmental clean-up or urban renewal. The essays here both describe and actively engage the interpretive challenge embedded within these effects. Acutely aware of forceful macro-trends emergent from technoscientific change, globalization and institutional power, they stay 'close to the ground', to illustrate how interpretive work at the micro-level enables constructive intervention in both intellectual and explicitly political arenas.

■ RISKING IDENTITIES

The work sketched here shows that to study technoscience requires an immersion in worldly material–semiotic practices, where the analysts, as well as the humans and non-humans studied, are all at risk—morally, politically, technically, epistemologically. Science studies that do not take on that kind of situated knowledge practice stand a good chance of floating off screen into an empyrean and academic never-never land. 'Ethnography' in this extended sense, is not so much a specific procedure of anthropology as it is a method of being at risk in the face of practices and discourses into which one inquires. To be at risk is not the same thing as identifying with the subjects of study; quite the contrary. And self-identity is as much a risk as the temptation to identification. One is at risk in the face of serious nonidentity that challenges previous stabilities, convictions, or ways of being of many kinds. An 'ethnographic attitude' can be adopted within any kind of inquiry, including textual analysis. Not limited to a specific discipline, an ethnographic attitude is a mode of practical and theoretical attention, a way of remaining mindful and accountable. Such a method is not about 'taking sides' in a predetermined way. But it is about risks, purposes and

hopes—one's own and others'—embedded in knowledge
projects.

Donna Haraway, *Modest_Witness@Second_Millennium*
FemaleMan©_Meets_OncoMouse™[5]

Collaborative politics complicate identification—with one's own past
and social position, with all those with whom one works with and
with all ideological blueprints. Serious non-identity is one effect of
immersion in worldly practices that cultivate pluralism as a strategic
resource. The risks are particularly great, and necessary, in times of
dramatic change—when sensibilities of crisis proliferate yet differ
from locale to locale.

At some of the sites described here, primary focus is on the
profound change that has accompanied the globalization of pro-
duction and trade, and exceeded the explanatory capacity of avail-
able models of political-economy. At other sites, the primary focus is
on the limits of available organizational models, which promise but
are unable to realize collaboration across class, race and gender
divides. Work at all of the sites engages the promise, and corrosive
effects, of technoscience. Debates over the role of technoscience
complicate the role of experts, revitalizing related debates over the
relationship between knowledge, power and democratization. Ex-
perts must work to learn new modes of political engagement, within
new configurations of power, which defeat existing ways of thinking
about political work.

Sensibilities of crisis are particularly acute at the individual level,
where the intellectual must continually position herself against
conflicting demands and expectations. This self-positioning in-
tensifies as the intellectual moves across organizational domains,
which often demands change in both the style and substance of
one's rhetoric, adherence to different protocols of conduct and
re-imagination of one's own authority. Movements across class, race
and gender divides can be particularly difficult, and often demand
justification for the various shifts of presentation and perspective
involved. Essays in this issue describe translations between policy
domains and community groups, between academic and lay audi-
ences, between middle-class and subaltern activists and between
feminists of different perspectives.

☐ *Risking democratization*

Dikoh Chen's confrontations with the dilemmas of self-positioning have been particularly charged. In his essay here he describes his work within movements working to democratize Taiwan during the late 1980s. His work was most locatable within the student movement, but crossed into work with grassroots environmental groups, which created opposition within the student movement itself.

Within the student movement, the shared enemy was the campus Offices of Didacticism, which represented the martial law regime of the ruling Kuomingtang (KMT) government. The KMT regime defined itself as the defender of modern civilization in opposition to the barbaric communist rule across the Taiwan strait. Students challenged the KMT on its own terms, through reference to the 'universal values' of bourgeois liberalism which the KMT itself professed. Embarrassment of the ruling regime was therefore an important strategy, but relied on the role of student-intellectuals as patrons of the people and as the 'Conscience of Society'.

At the same time, Chen and his colleagues defined democracy in terms critical of liberalism, passionately wanting to challenge all forms of social hierarchy. But challenging hierarchy sometimes ran against attempts to become a strategic resource for rural and working class communities. Ironically, many of the problems resulted from skill deficits, coupled with skill availability. Especially at the outset, many students lacked the social skills necessary for effective organizing at the community level; but they were very adept organizers of information, expertise and the press—which meant that their work for community groups, to be effective, had to invoke the very authority structures that they wanted to challenge.

Then there were the efforts to take revisionary history to the villages, offering a picture of Taiwan in which suffering and oppression were always countered by resistance. This revisionist history had to be cobbled together then presented as 'tradition' to villagers, many of whom were the age of the student's grandparents. And the presentations had to be in Taiwanese, requiring Chen and other students to stutter through, constantly translating from Mandarin, the 'official language' and the one in which their schooling had taught them to express ideas.

Chen and his colleagues worked toward a 'vernacular' democracy. But, like others in this issue, Chen readily admits that a

purely indigenous strategy was neither possible, nor desirable. Chen aligned himself with disempowered people who were not perfect exemplars of radical egalitarianism. The 'populist politics' of the opposing wing of the student movement nonetheless had to be challenged, because they became an effective tool for dissolving people's power rather than supporting it. Chen could not completely identify with either 'the people' or 'the students', and was left to work without a consistent, collectively sanctioned blueprint. Familiar concerns about the legitimacy of one's work continued to haunt him.

Like other essays in this issue, Chen's essay suggests similarities between the challenges within collaborative politics and those emphasized in discussions of research ethics. Concern about consent and misrepresentation. Concern about unintended consequences and the availability of infrastructure for long-term, corrective evaluation of one's work. Concern about the obligations that arise in research interactions, and about what constitutes a legitimate return offering for research cooperation.

These concerns are difficult enough within conventional research practice; within collaborative politics they all but implode. Mertonian credos certainly do not suffice; nor do standardized ethics of expertise.[6] Work within collaborative politics is far from disinterested, and can never claim universal validity. Peer review and verification is usually not an option. Most working within collaborative politics operate outside peer communities, conventionally conceived. Their work is intersubjectively evaluated, but by people with different skills, different backgrounds and often different perspectives on what constitutes a valuable contribution to any given effort.

In some ways, the challenges faced within collaborative politics are similar to those faced in interdisciplinary contexts within academia. Protocols for evaluating rigour differ, often dramatically. Modes of constructing meaning are vehemently contested. Differences between fraud and interpretive dissent become muddled, as do differences between expertise and specialization. Like interdisciplinarians, those working within collaborative politics often feel that their expertise has become so dispersed as to become almost useless. They find themselves embedded within and thus responsible for multiple discourses, none of which can be handled as thoroughly as specialization would demand. Sensibilities of competence and accomplishment seem forever forestalled, *ad infinitum*.

Specters of infinite regress haunt the work of collaborative politics. Rarely is it possible to 'see the products' of one's work, or even imagine a direct connection between one's own contribution and the smallest shift of resources or culture. Change is dispersed beyond easy perception; knowledge of efficient linear movement from problem to solution remains elusive.

■ STYLING ENGAGEMENT

When one takes a rational or aesthetic distance from oneself one gives oneself up to the conveniently classifying macrostructures ... By contrast, when one involves oneself in the microstructural moments of practice that make possible and undermine every macrostructural theory, one falls, as it were, into the deep waters of a first person who recognizes the limits of understanding and change, indeed the precarious necessity of the micro-macro opposition, yet is bound not to give up.

Gayatri Spivak, *In Other Worlds:*
Essays in Cultural Politics, p. 89

The collaborative politics described in these essays involve different styles of engagement, with words as well as with people. Questions about the mode of representation appropriate for a specific context or task are always highlighted. Inevitably, the style of representation chosen seems inadequate. Attempts to take responsibility for problems that do not directly affect oneself often show signs of paternalism. Attempts to initiate new approaches to entrenched problems often efface the perspectives of those who have addressed the problems in the past. Attempts to describe the complexity of problems often test the limits of comprehensibility, particularly when one's descriptions are intended for diverse audiences, operating within very different fields of reference.

Styling one's engagements within collaborative politics is caught by double-bind. One must choose a style, recognizing its incongruence with all that is valued. The challenge is to recognize that any mode of representation inevitably involves mismatch, then choose the mode of representation most able to engage the task at hand. In some instances, modeling or categorization is necessary, despite the

reductions involved. In other instances, less formalistic modes of representation work best, allowing one to gesture at that which cannot be articulated and to question one's own descriptive efficacy.

In this issue the mode of representation relied on is that of the personal essay. In most cases, the author is the protagonist. The authors tell their own stories, foregrounding the roles they played in creating the political conundrums described. Other essays are told through more peripheral narration. Authors focus on stories about others, allowing readers to learn by inference how the stories have affected their own perspective and life history.

Our intent is not simply to privilege the biographical. The personal essay is one, provisional means of beginning an analysis at the level of experience, within lived dilemmas which call upon us to question all available explanations of how the world works. The goal is to juxtapose multiple levels of analysis, spanning from everyday experience at the micro-extreme to historical trends and political–economic contexts, questioning every move, every articulation and every system in which we are embedded.

Relying on the personal essay form to question obsolete systems is not new, but does seem to have particular relevance now. In his introduction to a collection of personal essays, Philip Lopate describes how the essay's 'unmethodological method' has been utilized across time, from Montaigne and Bacon, through the Frankfurt School, and in different cultures. His commentary on Adorno is relevant here:

> The modern German philosopher Theodor Adorno saw rich, subversive possibilities in precisely the 'anti-systemic' properties of the essay. In our century, when the grand philosophical systems seem to have collapsed under their own weight and authoritarian taint, the light-footed, free-wheeling essay suddenly steps forward as an attractive way to open up philosophical discourse. (Lopate, 1995, p. xliii)

Earlier in his introduction, Lopate emphasizes how the essay is an experimental form that allows authors to interrogate their own ignorance and limitations, recognizing that whatever representation they offer, either of themselves or of the world, can never be complete. Authors of the essays in this issue, working within collapsed social and philosophical systems, open up progressive

discourse with anti-systemic approaches—while admitting their own distance from 'the whole truth'.[7]

Gayatri Spivak elaborates on ways narrative forms affect an author's ability to tell 'the whole truth'. She does not argue that either first or third person narration should be privileged, that micro-level analysis obviates the need for macro-theorization, or that literature can do the work of politics. Instead she reminds us how oscillation between forms carries the critical project. No one form can tell the whole truth, but forms cannot be merely aggregated either. Instead, we must bounce between forms, allowing a return to the seemingly comprehensive narration of the third person 'with its ground mined under'.

The challenge, according to Spivak, is to work within the exigencies of a given form, within an effort to 'strive moment by moment to practice a taxonomy of different forms of understanding, different forms of change, dependent perhaps on resemblance and seeming substitutability—figuration—rather than on the self-identical category of truth' (1987, p. 88).

☐ *Engaging the Bhopal disaster*

Spivak links the importance of oscillation between different narrative forms to the particular challenge of reporting on the unreliability of categories one depends on for understanding, description and legitimization. She also hints at the reciprocal relationship between disruptive writing tactics and new forms of social collaboration.[8] Both these themes are central to the essay here by Kim Fortun, about her work with the Bhopal Gas Affected Working Women's Union.

Fortun's work in Bhopal was in the context of the out-of-court settlement of the Bhopal case, which she helped the Women's Union challenge. Their strategy worked to 'unsettle' the medical categorization scheme through which the legal settlement was legitimated. This strategy involved constant trafficking between different languages and narrative forms, to produce representations of Bhopal appropriate for different social contexts. Fortun had to move between different orderings of the problems, recognizing that the organizing principles appropriate for one domain were incongruent with those appropriate for other domains, and never congruent with 'the whole

truth'. If shaped for intervention in Supreme Court proceedings, representations often relied on syllogistic logics that could directly engage official statistics. Other representations highlighted the treason in translating the continuing tragedy of disaster into linear logics of cause, effect and proof. The challenge was to return again and again to comprehensive narration of the problems and lessons of Bhopal, 'with its ground mined under'.

The collaborative politics necessary in Bhopal were difficult to sustain, depending on as many styles of social as narrative engagement. Middle-class activists attempting to use their expertise to legitimize the perspectives of gas victims had to invent social roles that simultaneously relied on and undercut their own authority. In organizing themselves, gas victims relied on a paternalistic model even while challenging the paternalistic structure of both the litigation and rehabilitation through government hospitals. Efforts to write differently were mirrored by efforts to configure social relations differently, depending on conventional structures of authority and legitimacy even while attempting to undermine them. The oscillation produced discord, doubt and, at times, paralysis. The challenge was to use the oscillation between different social and narrative forms as a way of knowing, recognizing double-binds as real contradictions, and as provocations to innovate.

☐ *Justifying collaboration*

Our argument here draws on a basic premise of critical feminism and race theory: to respect difference in social engagements one must accept the validity of different ways of speaking and writing. Further, one must acknowledge social, conceptual and rhetorical differences not only as 'social facts' constitutive of inequality but also as vital resources for thinking and acting in ways consonant with the ethical challenge of democracy, itself recognized as differentially defined.

In other words, it is not enough to simply respect difference, claiming to be feminist by accepting the legitimacy of 'feminine' styles of engagement. The challenge is to let the difference 'get to you', engaging the dynamics of difference to question one's own legitimacy. The goal is not to silence oneself but to recognize how legitimacy operates off the production of margins, even within the most well-meaning enterprises. Socializing and writing in different

forms can become a way of both recognizing and reconfiguring how power operates.

What is often forgotten is how powerfully reciprocal writing and sociality can be. It seems no coincidence that those who claim that 'a good argument is a good argument' are often those who do not take responsibility for complex understandings of how power operates within social engagements, hierarchically positioning *all* actors—including those with the best of overt intentions. Engagement with different forms of writing affects the subject who writes, creating schisms that disallow certitude but have the potential to reconfigure how we position ourselves among others. Radically new social alignments may result; a politics of collaboration begins to seem possible. Double-binds remain inevitable.

Lyman Wynne elaborates on the challenge, commenting on the theoretical and practical work accomplished through sustained engagement with the double-bind, suggesting that we may be able to 'see things both more clearly *and* through a glass more darkly':

> I am convinced that efforts to escape quickly from double binding situations, and therapeutic efforts to facilitate a quick escape, may forestall the opportunities to transform and enrich relationships. Despite the anguish which may be associated with the struggle, the rewarding opportunity for creative transformation of experience may be only possible by *not* escaping double binds for long periods of time (Wynne, 1976, p. 249).[9]

Wynne's argument points to the unstable grounds on which work toward a politics of collaboration must be carried out; he also points to great potential. The essays in this issue attempt to map this potential. Epiphany often comes from acknowledgment of double-bind; authors detail the contexts productive of both dilemma and tentative understanding, exploring new operations of power, new social forms and new ways of imagining the social and conceptual field in which politics operates.

In the essays here, the biographical becomes a prism for viewing the world, askew. Keen sensitivity to the power of double-bind is imperative; uncut, personal experience easily becomes grounds for identifications and entitlements that undermine attempts to build collaborative social forms. Keen sensitivity to the need for new

narrative forms is also key; conventional inscriptions of what is politically correct operate off exclusion, accruing their arguments by marginalizing all questionable moments within their own practice. That which cannot be categorized is not addressed; contradiction is ignored; doubt, irrelevant. In sum, within conventional theorizations of politics, sensibilities of double-bind cannot be accommodated; a politics of collaboration cannot be written.

Our argument is that a politics of collaboration will never be written with finality, but can be approached. The challenge is to critically engage new associations between people, linking micro- and macro-processes to turn pluralism into a strategic resource.

□ *NOTES*

1. Our description here is drawn from various essays collected in Sluzki and Ransom (1976). For an abbreviated description of how double-bind situations are constituted, see in particular the reprint of a 1960 essay by John Weakland, 'The Double-Bind Hypothesis of Schizophrenia and Three-Party Interaction' (Weakland, 1976). The essay by Anthony Wilden and Tim Wilson, 'The Double Bind; Logic, Magic and Economics' (Wilden and Wilson, 1976) is also particularly useful, as evident in the following clarification: 'A true double bind is not simply an awkward situation in which "we are damned if we do and damned if we don't" for this usually amounts to no more than a choice between the lesser of two evils. Neither is it simply a binary opposition or contradiction, for here it is possible to make a stable choice between one side or the other, and the two sides may differ in real or apparent value. Nor is a double-bind equivalent to the 'horns of a dilemma', where one is presented with a choice between conflicting alternatives, both of which are similarly unfavourable. A true double-bind—or a situation set up or perceived as one—requires a choice between two states which are *equally valued* and so *equally insufficient* that a self-perpetuating oscillation is engendered by any act of choice between them. ... It is the result of the fact that one *must* choose, and moreover choose between incompatible alternatives' (p. 276).

2. Sharon Traweek (1988) has provided us with an important example of work with the concept-metaphor of double-bind, even if with little overt reference, which is itself instructive. Her book *Beamtimes and Lifetimes: The World of High Energy Physics* was written to reach diverse readers, including both physicists and social scientists. By her own accounts, work toward this task caught Traweek within a residing double-bind: To talk about physics in new ways, to different kinds of readers, she needed to produce a text which was both 'accessible' and very carefully textualized. One strategy Traweek used mapped Bateson's theories of different ways of learning across the tropes of metaphor, metonymy, synechdoche and irony, to provide an 'unsayable' structure to the book's form and argument.

The textual grid created by this mapping exercise guided Traweek's efforts to nest multiple layers of description within passages that read as 'just stories'.

3. It is difficult to assess how engagements between politics and scholarship have changed across time. It does seem that intellectual activism today often has a different motivational structure than that of the 1960s. One possible explanation may lie in changes in the sociality of research, driven by globalization and other processes that link issues and people, which could once be studied in ways relatively disengaged from controversies over power. In the past, operations of power made visible through research could be attributed solely to local processes. Scholars did not see themselves as producers of the problems they described and therein could find a certain repose in modes or representation which valorized disinterest. In contemporary contexts, such response is much less possible. Every local situation is inflected by broad forces of economy and culture, which can be traced to our own identities and lifestyles. These forces bear comment, because they bear our own names. In sum, it may be that contemporary research embeds scholars of all perspectives in domains wherein credos of disinterest break apart, compelling and obliging strategic engagement with the politics of what one studies. Recognition of one's own name in the operations of the farthest village may, however, be dependent on exposure to certain theoretical literatures, particularly those concerned with postcolonialism and other topics that complicate easy differentiation between 'good guys' and 'bad guys'.

4. Sally Merry (1992) has described similar appropriations in the anthropology of law, within efforts to account for transnational processes in the analysis of local legal phenomena. Merry argues for re-engagement with concepts of legal pluralism, despite the fact that previous reliance on pluralism as an analytic category failed to explore the interaction between different legal systems and thus failed to account for power inequalities among them. In Merry's account, pluralism can be used as a heuristic for exploring the mutually constitutive nature of different legal systems, and for extending 'what counts' as legitimate foci of study—to include a range of informal normative ordering systems. She goes on to emphasize how theories of unequal but mutually constitutive legal systems lead to new questions: How do these systems interact and reshape one another? To what extent is the dominant system able to control the subordinate? How do subordinate systems subvert or evade the dominant system? In what ways do the disputation strategies of subordinate uses reshape the dominant system? Merry's questions are of particular interest here because they seem of equal relevance to the production of good scholarship as to the production of good political strategy.

5. Donna Haraway (1997, pp. 190–191). A footnote attributes this conception of ethnography to discussions with Susan Harding, to the essays collected in Downey *et al.* (forthcoming) and to an essay by Arturo Escobar (1994).

6. In outlining the normative structure of science as well as the 'institutional imperatives' of science (universalism, communism, disinterestedness, and organized skepticism), Merton (1973) in effect prescribes scientific norms to save science and rationalism from 'intrusions' of other institutions (e.g. religion, state policy, economy). Merton's functionalist goals and methodology, however, neglect

examining how science works in 'real world' contexts and thus offer little assist-
ance with the concerns of collaborative politics.

7. Many of the accounts here are informed by critiques of representation that have
shaped cultural studies. None, however, disavows engagement with the mimetic
tradition. Naive positivism is generally reproved, as are notions of social construc-
tion which work only to prove the truth of social construction itself. Throughout
these essays, mimesis persists as a difficult desire. In some instances, this is a result
of engagement with informants who desperately need more, better representation,
rhetorical as well as political. In other cases, the desire to contribute to the
ethnographic and historical record continues to motivate.

8. Spivak is elaborating on Margaret Drabble's *The Waterfall*, a story about Jane's
love affair with James, her cousin Lucy's husband. Rivalry between women is not
the theme, though it does create one of the story's many double-binds. Instead,
Drabble explores the 'conditions of production and determination of microstruc-
tural heterosexual attitudes within her chosen enclosure'. The question, in short,
'why does love happen?'. The literal enclosure is a middle-class home where Jane
delivers a baby, without the father's presence, by choice. Lucy and James care for
Jane, and something new begins. James is given 'the problem of relating to the
birthing woman through the birth of "another man's child"'. The relationship
cannot be legalized, nor defined in terms of James's 'possessive ardor toward the
product of his own body', since the child is not 'his'. Jane is left to narrate the
story, which cracks as it shifts from third to first person narration. Jane has to
admit that her third person narration hasn't really told the truth, or hasn't told
enough, and now must acknowledge that the qualities she has staked out 'are
interchangeable: vice, virtue: redemption, corruption: courage, weakness: and
hence the confusion of abstraction, the proliferation of aphorism and paradox'.
Propelled by the ill-logic and double-binds of her affair with James, Jane has to
shift between first and third person narration to make her story hold. But, in the
end, Jane gives up, failing to engage the inadequacy of conventional rules and
modes of description as an opportunity to create new understandings of what is
sensible and virtuous. According to Spivak, 'The risk of first person narration
proves too much for Drabble's fictive Jane. She wants to plot her narrative in terms
of the paradoxical category—"pure-corrupted love"—that allows her to *make* a
fiction rather than try, *in* fiction, to report on the unreliability of categories'. Had
Jane persisted, dwelling within the double-binds rather than trying to avoid them,
she could, perhaps, have forged a narrative form particularly appropriate for
representing the unconventional social collaboration in which she was entangled.
Spivak points to the implications: 'To return us to the detached and macrostruc-
tural third person narrative after exposing its limits could be an aesthetic allegory
of deconstructive practise' (1987, p. 89).

9. Note Spivak's parallel articulation, of how the womb, conceived as workshop,
becomes a place where pain is a 'normal' site of creative production: 'I would like
to suggest that in the womb, a tangible place of production, there is the possibility
that pain exists within the concepts of normality and productivity. (This is not to
sentamentalize the pain of childbirth.) The problematizing of the phenomenal

identity of pleasure and unpleasure would not be operated only through the logic of repression. The opposition of pleasure-pain is questioned in the physiological "normality" of woman' (1987, p. 80).

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