

CHAPTER 2

CONSCIOUSNESS, MEANING, AND RULING RELATIONS: FROM WOMEN'S STANDPOINT

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Introduction

I begin with what is becoming a central issue for me. It is a political issue. My method of inquiry, beginning from women's standpoint, has led me to propose a sociology that takes the everyday/everynight world as its problematic. This is the site of people's direct experiencing of the world, which is always socially embedded. I have begun to see that it is exceptional to have acquired an awareness that is the social analogue of being able at sunset to "see" the place I stand in on this globe turning away out of the sunlight and into the dark. Analogously I have learned to see where I am as embedded in social relations that do not begin and end with the scope of my daily activities, going to work, going shopping, sitting at the computer, looking up at my photograph of the Bright Angel Canyon which I once hiked down from the north rim of the Grand Canyon to the Colorado river. Somewhere I acquired a habit that I think as sociologists we may take for granted, of thinking beyond the local to its connectedness with elsewhere. I look at the labels in clothes on the rack in the store and know something of how clothes "made" in Guatemala, Honduras, Taiwan, China, Mexico come to be there and of the conditions of their manufacture. I've seen the numbers of panhandlers on the streets near my apartment in Toronto grow steadily over the past ten years. I don't know exactly where they come from, but I know that there's a connection between their presence and the increasingly endemic high rates of unemployment.

At one time many of us in the women's movement thought that those who like myself were academics were escaping from the serious business of activism. But I've come recently to believe that people don't automatically acquire a way of seeing the local world that locates it in a map of how the society is putting our lives together, and that teaching people how their daily living is embedded in and organized by social relations connecting them with the lives of multiple others at work elsewhere is itself a political practice. The investigations of such a sociology aim at making maps for people's uses -- perhaps rather partial at this stage like the early maps of coastlines made by the Mediterranean traders, but nonetheless workable. This project relates to current issues of democratic process and the exposure of North American

societies to a peculiar form of what might be called "class totalitarianism," a totalitarianism not of the state and not of terror, but of appropriation and management. "Today, a remarkable edifice of invisible control has been constructed, permitting the most far-reaching measures of social domination to escape significant public attention." (Schiller 1996: 1)

Public discourse is increasingly dominated by the standpoint of "capital" and is increasingly exclusive of alternative and particularly of progressive ways of thinking about the world (Blumenthal 1986, Messer-Davidow 1993). Of course, as members of an intelligentsia, we have our sources but diminishing power to exercise public influence. There is considerable evidence that the increasing concentration of media ownership by a very small number of corporations is consequential, both for the kinds of journalism practiced (away from investigative journalism) and for the exclusion of critical viewpoints and certain kinds of news (Bagdikian 1992; McChesney 1997; McManus 1994; Schiller 1996; Winter 1997). The mass media do not provide people with means of finding the connections between the actualities of their daily lives and what is going on in the economy or polity. This is the context in which I've come to give greater emphasis to making a sociology that maps the regions of our societies from where people live and that could be told and taught as maps for people, or as skills that people themselves could develop and use to explore the relations they are active in. This is not just a matter of getting "the facts" or of moral stories (Seidman 1992) but of developing inquiry that opens up the actual ways in which things are being organized.

This is not an applied sociology, although it could certainly be applied; the sociology I'm proposing does not observe the divide between academic (or scientific) and applied sociology. Nor am I simply proposing a sociology that is popularly accessible. Making maps to explicate social relations is technical business; making tools for people to use or maps for them to read can't be done in language that is accessible to everyone. The technical work has to be done in order to make explications that are ordinarily intelligible. It is only after we've found out how things are put together that we can tell them in a way that's ordinarily intelligible to people whose lives are caught up in them. The business here is not to solve problems, but to unfold society from the standpoint of those who are living it and bringing it into being.

The sociology I practice or am learning to practice appreciates discourse as social relations or social organization. The postmodern discovery of the "subject constituted in discourse" parallels the concept of role. It locates a positioning of the reader/writer/knower in particular ways in relation the objects of inquiry, both in terms of how they incorporate what people say and do into discursive texts and in the relations constructed with the texts themselves. There is therefore an issue of how these relations are organized and of the practices to which we become committed when we are positioned as knowers or inquirers within sociological discourse. Sociology's standard stylistic

conventions constitute subject positions, locating the reader/ inquirer outside the social world in which the text is read or written and in which she does her work, lives her life, cares or does not care about the people she investigates. The people who bring into being the phenomena with which she is concerned disappear from view in nominalizations (or similar devices), grammatical forms that repress the presence of people as agents, replacing them with nouns or noun phrases constructed from activities. They are terms such as "meaning," "interests," "cognition," "information," "communication," "organization." Presumably they have come into such general use because they have enabled sociology to create a "layer" of entities that locate actions which have become processes and have no actors and that can be entered into sentences in which they may take on the syntactic capacity of agents as well as of objects. Nominalizing enables statements to be made about general social processes without having to worry too much about what people are doing or think they're doing. Hence statements about the social are statements about relations among discursively-constituted entities, quite uncertainly related to the world that people know as it comes to hand. Insofar as people are present, they become the objects of investigation whose behavior is to be explained.

In general, sociology adopts an epistemology privileging sociological knowledge over people's experience. Forces or structures are at work behind our backs. Or purely formal theoretical constructions predict to selected bits of actuality. Theories "select[s], i.e. abstract[s], according to their own criteria of relevance to theoretical problems." (Alexander 1996). And although qualitative methods, at their best, attend to the everyday of people's lives, the product is generally subordinated to theory's regulation at the moment of coding and interpretation.

Women's Standpoint as the *Point d'Appui* for a Sociology

Working from women's standpoint as a method of inquiry has been an attempt to design a sociology with differently organized relations. Women's standpoint (as I have thought about it) is located in an historical trajectory in the history of capitalism in western Europe. Capitalism is an organization of social relations mediated by an exchange of money and commodities independent of particularities of relationships among persons and connecting multiple sites of people's work and consumption. Correlative has been a development of extensive objectified relations and organizations that are mediated by texts and that I have come to call the "ruling relations": for example, bureaucracy in Weber's account, or Foucault's conception of discourse. These, too, are organized so as to be independent of particular individuals and particularized relationships and "organize" or govern local sites of people's activities without being reducible to them.

The dynamic trajectory of these relations constituted regions of action increasingly separated from the local and particularized organization of the family-household. By the eighteenth century in Western Europe and North America, the domestic was emerging as a discrete sphere over against the spheres of business, politics, media and "knowledge." These became spheres of male activity connecting them beyond the local into national and international networks. Women did not appear there as authorized agents or speakers, nor did those who were subordinated by class and/or race. Even though a media addressed to women was emerging, women only slowly emerged as writers themselves, and then they were writers of the domestic.

Since the emergence of the women's movement in the 1960s and '70s, this division has been under attack. It had been produced and reproduced throughout the institutional structure of western capitalist societies and was built into the ways in which women participated in the world of work outside the home, whether as teachers, secretaries and typists, or industrial workers. It was present in a women's media, in the ways in which women worked in other women's households, in trade union organizations, and in the worlds of universities, science and politics. And it is, of course, still very deeply embedded in contemporary institutional processes, even though the women's movement has broken down the sharpness of the divide.

To begin in women's standpoint is to begin on women's side of the divide that had been created in this historical trajectory. It means beginning in the everydayness of a work that is situated in a particular local site in relation to particular others. It is done in the body and serves particular others as bodies. This is where discourse *happens* as something being done in time by particular people in the actual local settings of their bodily being, within which the local practices that discard biography, personal considerations, pragmatic preoccupations (Schutz) are performed and the entry to the "reality" of scientific thought is engaged. It is work that organizes consciousness in relation to the fullness of what is there and that is always and inescapably in a particular time and place. It is as an order of relations, over-against the particularized and local, that the extra-local, text-mediated, and objectified institutions of "ruling", the ruling relations, come into view (Smith 1990a, 1990b).

Of course to develop women's standpoint as the *point d'appui* of inquiry means developing and participating in a sociological discourse, but in contrast to the relations of established sociological discourse, a sociology from women's standpoint is in dialogue with the actualities of people's lives as they experience them. They are the experts of their own lives and local practices. Unlike sociologies that seek to generate a totalizing system, this sociology is always in the making. From different sites of people's experience, different social relations or different aspects of the same complex are brought into view and their organization explicated. As in Gadamer's dialogic, such a sociology is always prepared to be changed by the encounter; indeed, it must invite

encounters with what it does not yet know how to think. Such a knowledge is always indexical in the sense that, like a map, it is incomplete without the terrain it indexes (Smith 1996).

A sociology is proposed that examines and explores society and the social from where people are in the local actualities of their lives. The relations and organization of our everyday/everynight lives are not transparent (Smith 1987). Our investigations can bring them to light and make them available to people. Such knowledge does not supersede experience, but expands it, making visible how what is happening is governed or subject to the dynamic of processes arising from the multiplicity of interacting participants. The concept of the actual, as I use it here, is intended to operate like the yellow dot or arrow telling "you are here" on the map of the mall that, within the text, directs the reader outside the text. When the maps are cardboard or paper, the dot is often well worn from fingers that have performed the connection. Such a sociology aims not at explaining people's behavior, but at making visible to them the social relations in which their lives are embedded and by which their activities and the conditions of their activities are organized. Like a map, it aims at expanding, rather than superseding, people's knowledge of how the everyday/everynight world of their experience is organized. In developing such maps, it necessarily relies on what people know experientially by virtue of how they participate in the relations that enter into and shape their everyday lives.

Central to this sociology for women (I take for granted there's more than one) is a method of inquiry. Rather than insisting that theories or concepts must be in place to govern research, its focus is the actualities of people's activities or practices and on the possibilities of *investigation*, of finding out, of discovering. This is pretty much the move that Marx and Engels made in *The German Ideology*, when they rejected beginning in imagination or concepts in favor of starting with actual people and their activities under definite material conditions. This, too, is a sociology grounded in people's actual activities, but not as individual actions or courses of actions, but as they are coordinated among people (1). It takes for granted, then, that the concerting of people's activities constitutes what we can recognize and name. It actually happens and can be "observed" and analyzed. Like ethnomethodology, it orients to people's practical activities accomplishing order (Garfinkel 1986), but without prejudging that order is achieved or even aimed at. But unlike ethnomethodology, its primary focus is not with the competences of individuals or categories of individuals, but with something closer to what George Herbert Mead calls "the social act," i.e. the ongoing concerting of actual activities in definite settings.

This is what I mean by the social as the object of the sociologist's interest, expertise, and inquiry. What that concerting is cannot be separated from actions or sequences of actions, whether of one individual or many, known or unknown to one another, present or distant. The coordinating of activities may be conceived and explored at multiple levels from the intimate tuning of co-

present bodies in breast feeding or sexual activity to the macro-social relations (2) explored by Marx in *Capital* and *The Theories of Surplus Value*. In one translation of *The German Ideology* there is a passage I've found particularly useful: "Individuals always started, and always start, from themselves. Their relations are the relations of their real life. How does it happen that their relations assume an independent existence over against them? And that the forces of their own life overpower them?" (Marx and Engels 1973, p.30) (3)

As Marx clearly saw, beginning with actual individuals and their activities means taking for granted that consciousness cannot be separated from them. It is always and only theirs. The kinds of developments that I have called the ruling relations were only beginning the take-off, the results of which we live in today. Therefore, how consciousness may be objectified and still be inseparable from actual individuals was not something that Marx encountered as a matter of his own experience and observation. In our time, however, for many of us, these objectifications are integral to our working lives and not only as sociologists. The phenomena of large-scale organization, of bureaucracy, of professional organization, of administration, of academic, scientific, and technical discourses, of the discourses of the mass media, and so on, are forms of organizing knowledge, judgment and will as *external* to particular individuals. I want to go further than this in pulling beliefs, concepts, theories, ideology and so on into the same local and particular site as actual individuals live in. I discard the dual ontology, practice versus theory, and all the issues of how the latter affects the former. Rather I see that thinking, using concepts, working with theory, and so on, are also people's *actual practices* done in actual settings where people are at work, or in conversation, or whatever. There is an actual moment when a concept is brought into play as a constituent of and coordinating a sequence of action — again involving one or more people. They are practices. They happen. They can be investigated.

Ruling Relations

"Ruling relations," as a concept, is not strictly theoretical in that it is ostensive rather than analytic. It points to what became visible from women's standpoint as I've specified it, namely the extra-local abstracted relations organizing multiple sites of people's activities in standardized ways (4). Again, let me remind you that we're still talking about actual individuals, people coordinating their activities in particular local sites of their bodily being. The problem, then, is how to preserve the presence of actual people and their activities and, at the same time, reach into relations and organizations that coordinate people's activities extra-locally and in generalized and generalizing forms.

In developing an account of consciousness that takes advantage of this method of thinking, I have traced Marx's later thinking on the emergence of the economy as relations that have taken on an independent existence over

against those whose work brings them into being and "drives" them. The notion of the social relations of objectified consciousness is analogous to Marx's (1973) specification of the "object" of his investigations of capital as the specialization and differentiation of relations of dependence. Relations of dependence were originally relations between persons. He tells us that "[W]hen we look at social relations which create an undeveloped system of exchange, of exchange values and of money ... then it is clear from the outset that the individuals in such a society, although their relations appear to be more personal, enter into connection with one another only as individuals imprisoned with a certain definition, as feudal lord and vassal, landlord and serf, etc., or as members of a caste etc. or as members of an estate etc. In the ... developed system of exchange ... the ties of personal dependence, of distinctions of blood, education, etc. are in fact exploded, ripped up.... So far from constituting the removal of a "state of dependence", these external relationships represent its disintegration into a general form, or better, they are the elaboration of the general basis of personal states of dependence. Here too individuals come into relation with one another only in a determined role. These material states of dependence, as opposed to the personal states, are also characterized by the fact that individuals are now controlled only by abstractions, whereas earlier they depended on one another" (Marx 1973:164). The abstractions by which individuals are controlled are relations of exchange between people mediated by money and commodities. Differentiated and specialized, these are the relations we know as the economy.

I envisage the ruling relations and the historical trajectory of their development as an analogous process of differentiation and specialization. The ruling relations "extract" the coordinative and concerting of people's everyday/everynight activities from relations between persons and subject them to specialized and often technical development as "organization," "communication," "information," "management," and the like. They are mediated by and based in texts and textual technologies, such as print, radio, television, and more recently, electronics. The functions of "knowledge, judgment, and will" that Marx saw as wrested from the original "producer" and transferred to capital, become built into a specialized complex of objectified forms of organization and relationship. Progressively, the individuated functions of knowing, judging, planning and deciding are transferred to organization, ceasing to be immediate capacities of the individual. They are constituted as actual forms of concerting and concerted activities and can be investigated as such. "Objectivity", the focus of post-modernist critique, is only one form of objectification, although objectified organization relies extensively on text-mediated virtual realities (Smith 1990a). Forms of organization such as the stock market are objectified in the sense that they are not reducible to individuals or the actions of individuals and become, indeed, the

everyday/everynight condition, circumstance, means, and terrain of people's financial activities.

Meaning, Texts and Language

Beginning in local settings of people's activities and relying on their experience in and of those activities seems to consign us to the limitations of the local and particular, without possibility of generalization or of connecting with macro-social relations. This has been the outcome for ethnomethodology, even when it has been deployed in the study of work organization or the interface of people and machines. Even studies such as Deidre Boden's (1994) analyses of conversations in the study of formal organization have not been able to go beyond exhibiting the organizational in the conversational. They have not been successful in escaping from the particularities of the latter in ways that preserve the special merits of ethnomethodology's reliance on people's practical activities. In my view, the solution to this problem is not to be found in moving back to the nominalizations so strikingly characteristic of the study of large-scale organization and, more recently, "institutions". Rather, it is to take advantage of the commitment of women's standpoint to remaining at the level of the embodied subject and to ask, "just *how* do we encounter the "expanding" social relations, whether of capital or of ruling, in which we are active?"

We know how to respond in the case of capital. Economic relations "appear" in our daily activities as money, whether cash, credit card, cheque, bank account, etc. It is money that enters our activities into the expanded relations of exchange. Analogously, it is the text as a material object that sutures the everyday/everynight site of our activities to the extra-local organization of the relations of ruling as it is "read" by particular people in the local settings of their activity, at and during the time it is "read."

The materiality of the text and its indefinite replicability create a peculiar ground in which it can seem that language, thought, culture, and formal organization have their own being, outside lived time and the actualities of people's living — other than as the latter become objects of action or investigation from within the textual. But from the point of view of this method of inquiry, the textual mediation of these relations and forms of organization has the miraculous effect of creating a link between the local and particular and the generalizing and generalized organization of the relations of ruling, hence making the latter investigatable in a new way.

Ruling relations are characterized by a capacity to realize the same forms, courses of action, relations, etc. in the varieties and multiplicities of the local settings in which they operate and which they regulate. Indeed it is their capacity to reproduce standardized forms of control, management, communication, etc. across multiple local sites and at different times that

distinguishes them from other forms of organization or ruling. We could indeed read Weber's types of authority as analyses of the shifts from authority grounded in relations of personal dependence to the text-mediated organization of the offices of bureaucracy. The textual bases that objectify knowledge, organization, and decision-processes are essential to the ubiquity that characterizes these relations of ruling. They distinguish what individuals *are* in themselves, from what they *do* — organizationally, professionally or as participants in a discourse — thereby enabling the objectifying properties of formal organization, profession, or discourse. To investigate social relations and organization through their organizing texts, texts must be situated in the local courses or sequences of action in which they are read and come into play. (Note here that I am not distinguishing for these general purposes between printed texts, film and television, and the computer text.) It is difficult for us to get away from accepting the text in the atemporal mode that it sets up in how it contains its own internal sequence or order independent of the local sequences in which its reading (or writing) is embedded. But in fact all such reading is in and of a particular course of action and is integrally part of its organization. The notion of a course of action here isn't meant to introduce a new entity, but rather to set up an analytic device forcing the situating of a text in time and in action, rather than treating it, as it is very generally treated in sociology, as a source of information about something other than itself.

Here then is located the hermeneutic moment, discovered now as a sequence of reading/interpretation or as a conversational sequence embedded in an extended course of action, or more than one. Interpretations are to be discovered, then, in the sociologist's analysis of how interpretations are done, focusing on how they are taken up into and organize what comes next. In the same way we can begin to explore the uses of concepts, theories, etc. as standardized practices of interpreting and organizing texts that are learned and become standardized through people's participation in text-mediated discourses or large-scale organization. When I read an interview giving an account of someone becoming mentally ill (Smith 1990d), I know how to go about interpreting the text to find in it what I know how to look for. On the other hand, the text of the interview is itself organized to offer me what I need to find in order to make the reading it intends (Smith 1990c). The social, coordinative character is already there for me, as analyst, to find in practices of reading/interpretation or of writing to intend an interpretation. As sociologists we are not so much interested in idiosyncracies of reading/interpretation as we are interested in the standardized practices which enable the extra-locality and objectification of these forms of social relations.

I do not want to suggest that investigation focuses exclusively on texts. But I do want to insist on the importance of texts and particularly the technologies of replicating them as to all intents and purposes, the same. Take Hans-Georg Gadamer's hermeneutic epistemology giving central place to conversations or

dialogue in understanding. Imagine situating such conversations in their local settings among particular individuals and, I would emphasize, *in time*. The very notion of a tradition within which understandings emerge locates, from this point of view, a textual ground, although not necessarily in the technology of print. These men in dialogue are surely at work. The conversation is informed by the reading and thinking that each has done before their encounter. It is articulated to sequences of action. Each is going on to write something, to teach perhaps, to tell someone else in some way. Being changed by the conversation isn't, from this standpoint, a change in a mental state, "understanding," but a change in how each will carry on in what comes next. The focus shifts from securing the meaning of a proposition or, more loosely, what she said, or of the text, to how it is "taken up" in "what comes next." The model is of statements that can stand by themselves, have meaning by themselves, that postmodernism has criticized finds an alternative solution to rejecting the notion of stable meaning altogether. The notion of bringing background assumptions into consciousness, a procedure that Garfinkel (1967) subjects to the critique of one of his "experiments", puts things the wrong way round. It is still stuck with the text itself as the container of meaning and adopts a strategy of going around it or behind it to find out what it might mean to its readers. The approach I'm recommending here does not look for context or background to eke out the *necessary* imperfections of the text. Rather, it would investigate the ongoing world of activity into which the text is entered (and how it is interpreted and what is brought to the interpretation) that brings it into an active relation with the sequences of action in which it is engaged. Language in general, following George Herbert Mead, is not understood as carrying around packages of meaning that it deposits here and there like a cuckoo laying its eggs, but rather as entering into, selecting, instructing, coordinating diverse consciousnesses into courses of social action.

[To conserve space, we have here omitted an important illustrative case that demonstrates, through an institutional ethnography, the interrelationships between accounting procedures and actual practices]

Institutional ethnography knits together an ethnography of work organization with analyses of the textual as an organization of the local, including in the latter the text-born concepts of the interpretive armamentarium of the speech genre (Bakhtin 1986) of that region. These are the generally neglected aspects of sociological ethnographies, perhaps mainly because sociologists have not known what to do with them (6). But they are the work processes that produce organization within the ruling relations. Texts regulate; they do not program local settings of action. Textual technologies make possible a standardization of the language or image that enters and plays a part in courses of action across multiple sites of its "reading". They play their part, for example, in the fashion business as well as in pulp and paper mills, coordinating women's

images of their own and other women's bodies with the construction of markets (Smith 1990c).

I envisage not just one colossal study, but the piecing together of representations of institutional processes from the different positions it defines. Alison Griffith, Ann Manicom and I (Griffith 1984, 1995; Griffith and Smith 1987, 1990a, 1990b; Manicom 1988, 1995) have done something very like this in studies that explore the work that mothers do in relation to their children's schooling and how it contributes to the work of the primary school teacher in the classroom. Ellen Pence (1996) has used institutional ethnography to explore critically the interrelations of police, district attorneys, courts, probation officers, social workers, and so on, in relation to protecting women from abuse by their partners. This is not the cumulation of the older and now largely aborted project of a scientific sociology, but rather the piece-by-piece extending of a knowledge of how the world we live in is being put together.

Notes

- (1) In fact Marx and Engels in *The German Ideology* do give central place to "relations" and the forms of "cooperation" that go into producing people's existence; it just isn't built directly into their ontology of the social.
- (2) See I. I. Rubin's explication of Marx's theory in terms of social relations.
- (3) The passage is present in the complete version, but has been translated to be less incisive.
- (4) A friend, Frigga Haag, better steeped in Marxist theory than I, has suggested calling them the social relations of objectified consciousness.
- (5) Bruno Latour's and Steve Woolgar's *Laboratory Life* and Michael Lynch's study of a laboratory are rare exceptions. Neither, however, do the work of following up on the relational sequences that the texts coordinate.
- (6) There is other work, completed and ongoing. A useful representative collection is Marie Campbell and Ann Manicom ed. (1995).

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CHAPTER 3

THE FUTURE OF U.S. SOCIETY IN AN ERA OF RACISM, GROUP SEGREGATION, AND DEMOGRAPHIC REVOLUTION

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Introduction

In F. Scott Fitzgerald's novel, *The Great Gatsby* (1983, p. 19), several whites converse about a new book by a racist analyst. One character concludes that "the white race will be ... utterly submerged. It's all scientific stuff, it's been proved ... It is up to us, who are the dominant race, to watch out or these other races will have control of things." Another character adds, "We've got to beat them down."

Today this concern with maintaining white domination over "other races" remains strong in the U.S. and seems to be increasing. It is found not only in white supremacist groups but also among white leaders and rank-and-file workers. Republican candidate Patrick Buchanan made this statement to the 1992 Republican convention: "And as those boys [National Guard at the 1992 riot] took back the streets of Los Angeles, block by block, my friends, we must take back our cities, and take back our culture, and take back our country" (Quoted in Zukin 1995, p. 47). Buchanan is referring to the growth of the non-European population. *Forbes* editor Peter Brimelow has argued that the U.S. is facing huge immigration waves that are reducing the white core. He asserts that the U.S. "has always had a specific ethnic core. And that core has been white." A few years back, some 90 percent of Americans "looked like me. That is, they were of European stock. And in those days, they had another name for this thing dismissed so contemptuously as "the racial hegemony of white Americans." They called it "America". (Brimelow 1995, pp. 5-10, 59).

Many white analysts fear processes and actions that may make the U.S. truly multicultural. Buchanan has argued that "Our Judeo-Christian values are going to be preserved and our Western heritage is going to be handed down to future generations and not dumped on some landfill called multiculturalism" (quoted in 1991, p. A27). This view is also held by white liberals. Journalist Richard Bernstein has argued, in very exaggerated terms, that aggressive training in multiculturalism is dominant and tyrannical on college campuses. He compares campus multiculturalism to the "terror" after the French revolution in its allegedly "narrow orthodoxy" and its "occasional outright atrocity" (Bernstein