

The Pain of Politics and the Politics of Pain

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Private pain, public entertainment. Sometimes even public pain for private entertainment. We are surrounded by situations that invite us to hurt, demoralize, and devalue each other. We each inhabit ways of relating to one another that invite these acts of violence.

Thinking about the topic, "private pain, public entertainment" probably conjures images of our current cultural condition. Oprah!, Sallie Jesse Raphael, Jerry Springer, Hard Copy, Entertainment Tonight, 48 Hours - the list of television programming devoted to public discussion and scrutiny of very private, painful issues is endless. Talk radio has its own variations on this theme. Discussions about these programs is important. However, upon being asked to write about private pain, public entertainment, my own attention was immediately and viscerally drawn toward my everyday engagements within my own academic department - a department no different from most. From this initial image, I quickly broadened my reach. What about the private pain for public (and private) entertainment in organizational life in general? Why and in how many different manners do we treat each other -- our colleagues, our peers, our administrators, our staff - so poorly. What do we gain from such treatment? I do not believe the answer is deeply psychological, rooted in each individual's unique psyche. Rather, I believe that the answer is rooted in our discursive practices -- the practices we inherit and sustain in our everyday interchanges with others. Let me explain.

Our dominant, intellectual tradition is based upon a belief that the reasons for actions, beliefs, and meanings reside either inside each self contained individual (for example the various orientations that have emerged under the umbrella term, "cognitivism") or "out there" in the

external environment surrounding us (for example behaviorist approaches). While placing emphasis in different domains, these theories share much in common: they draw on the discourse of science to understand human activity. The discourse of science is predicated on the idea that language represents reality and thus through careful and controlled methods or techniques we are able to objectively and authoritatively determine the truth about any situation or issue.

Using "science" as a guide, those interested in studying human activities have attempted to demonstrate how objective observations, assessments, and analyses can be made of any human interchange. We can study, for example, how relationships develop. We can explore and demarcate the processes by which people are attracted to one another. Furthermore, we can figure out what makes some people sane and others insane. Objectivity, the one aspect that allows us to make such assessments in a rational manner, is thus what allows us to uncover the basic truth about human activity. The strong-hold of scientific discourse is also known as modernism.

Modernism

Twentieth century modernism is a continuation of the "turn to reason" associated with the Enlightenment of the late eighteenth century. Within this discourse, rationality is featured and reasoning abilities are viewed as an individual possession (Macpherson, 1962; Sampson, 1993). Modernism champions the individual. Sampson (1993) has identified this individual as self contained. Self contained individualism suggests a world populated with autonomous, intentional persons who possess the means to reason properly within the social arena. All reasoning abilities are assigned to active agents whose rationality can be measured against culturally defined standards.

But what does a discussion of modernist discourse and its cultural dominance tell us about the private pain for public entertainment that is generated in our organizational life - or in the culture at large? First, it is helpful to understand modernism as a response to the romanticist discourse that preceded it. Romanticism is considered the discourse of the "deep interior." Romanticist poetry of the 18th Century is emblematic. Here we seek to explore the depths of

one's soul, one's inner spirit. The passions, emanating from the dark recesses of one's being, are believed to spawn greatness or inferiority in persons. Unlike the modernist attempt to examine actions as the markers of internal qualities, romanticist discourse positions personal qualities as mystical, entrenched, and beyond basic comprehension.

This is, albeit, a rather cursory description of both modernist and romanticist discourse. However, to understand modernism as a response to romanticism helps me to locate our current cultural proclivity towards publicly hurting each other. This is the case because in juxtapositioning these two discursive options side by side I can see how modernist discourse has attempted to understand, explain, and uncover the mysteries of the deep interior through its major vehicle, scientific method. It is not the case that emotions, for example, have been forgotten or neglected in modernism. Just the contrary. Emotions have been operationalized into separate components that can be observed, measured, and analyzed.

Once we have a "scientific" handle on emotions, passions, and all the "messy" stuff that gets in the way of "good arguments," we can get down to business and make rational decisions about what truly matters. What is surprising to me is the insistent use of procedures to get at truth. Such an orientation requires a complete disavowal of the discursive practices that construct the procedures. Let me articulate further by calling upon two dominant (and apparently quite different) traditions in the human sciences: positivism and contemporary rhetoric.

Searching for Universals

Most rhetorical theorists and critics would identify themselves as universals apart from any positivist notions of human interchange. Positivism, drawing directly from the discourse of science, attempts to reduce human activities to observable (and therefore measurable) units that allow for control, prediction, and explanation. The caricature of the positivist is a "social scientist" in a white lab coat....although that particular image might be extreme.

The rhetorician, on the other hand, is most often thought of as a sort of "arm chair

philosopher" providing critical analyses by employing historical and contextual understandings of texts. The rhetorician's focus is on oratory and thus on dialogue. Traditional rhetoric has emphasized the immediate, relationally configured moment. Concern in each moment is with persuasion or the forming of "good arguments." As Gergen (1994) points out, rhetoric has long been concerned with the means by which language acquires its suasive power.

Traditionally, however, a sharp distinction is made between the content of a given message (its substance) and its form (or mode of presentation). Within the empiricist tradition this distinction is also used to discredit the study of rhetoric. Science, it is argued, is concerned with substance - with communicating pure content. The form in which it is presented (its 'packaging') is not only of peripheral interest, but to the extent that persuasion depends on it, the scientific project is subverted. (p. 40-1)

Yet, what we see in contemporary rhetoric is a search for universal rules to guide deliberation. Assuming that a set of procedures can organize deliberation so that it is fair and equitable is akin to the modernist discourse that permeates positivist discourses of human interchange. Despite the origins of rhetorical study, where emphasis was placed on forms of good arguments, contemporary rhetoric is fraught with techniques and procedures that are offered to ensure good arguments. Good arguments, in turn, are judged by virtue of their truthfulness, their objectivity, their ability to employ artistic means (i.e., creativity) in persuading others. We see illustrations of what I will refer to as "procedural rhetoric" everywhere in our organizational and cultural life. In the name of "good and truthful arguments," most interactants employ what they believe to be tried and true techniques for deliberation. It is in the context of deliberative rhetoric (discussions of policy) that the use of technique is most sharply noted. It is also, as I will try to illustrate, the use of procedural rhetoric that generates private pain for public entertainment.

But what is it that is painful here? The pain emerges from a sense of being "erased" as a

participant in the conversation. Surely procedural rhetoric gives all a "fair" chance to speak. However, when attention is directed toward "proper" movement through a procedure, the voice of the participants recede from focus. Procedural rhetoric invites an articulation of "stances" or "positions" that often refer to larger collectivities. In voicing a "public" opinion, the very local rationale and construction of that opinion is erased.

The use of procedural rhetoric, like positivist accounts of human interchange, privilege technique over process and in so doing delimit the range of the "rational." In other words, what is taken to be coherent, good, or normal behavior/argument is only that which conforms to those acceptable modes of interchange that employ objective procedures for determining truth. This is my point of departure for discussing the topic of private pain/public entertainment. My argument hinges on the human cost of modernist discourse: erasing the many voices that each participant carries. My own response to the problems inherent in the modernist tradition is to turn to an appreciation of the social construction of our realities which includes our identities, our policies, and our procedures for generating ways of "going on together."

Social Construction and Deliberative Processes

As a communication scholar, I am particularly drawn to the social constructionist project (particularly that version of social construction that assumes what I refer to as a "radical relationalism" [see Gergen, 1994; McNamee and Gergen, 1998]) because this project has shifted both the terrain of our understanding and its whole nature. Our analysis is focused away from the "deep" interior of the individual to "what transpires between people." Enter communication. Conversation, action, what people do together takes center stage. With conversation or dialogue as our chief metaphor, we engender some very different -- and I would argue very important and potentiating -- understandings of "mind." What does it mean to "understand," to "make meaning," to "coordinate activities," to "have knowledge," and so forth. If these activities are jointly produced in what transpires between people, then what does it mean to say "I know" or "I mean" or "I

understand?"

Realizing Differences in Dialogue

A relational understanding of human interchange places heavy emphasis on differences, on dynamically realized differences. "Whatever anything is is always defined by what it is implicitly or explicitly being compared and co-constructed with. In other words, differences rather than essences render the identities we currently experience" (Sampson, 1993, p. 86). How better to hear difference "real/ized" than to engage in dialogue - conversation where all voices are invited to speak?

Having "a say" or "a voice" typically is related to issues of hierarchy, expertise, power. Those who have been designated as knowledgeable can speak; professors circumscribe the limits of their courses. Those who have achieved status, can dictate procedures to others; CEO's decide pivotal directions for their organizations. Those who have power -- because of status, expertise, or economic resources -- can wield it over others; politicians can garner support for their favored legislation.

Many might be spurred at this point to argue that, particularly in American culture, there is equal opportunity to have one's voice heard. Those who have "earned" this privilege have done so fairly. They have worked hard (or their ancestors have) to secure the "right" to decide, to judge, to evaluate, and to legislate. This is, after all, what democracy is about. Yet, democracy, as it is largely practiced today -- particularly in academic departments -- is a concept constructed within our dominant, individualist discourse. All voices are not equally heard. When the majority votes, whose voice is being heard?

Procedures or Processes?

Here we have a dilemma. Democracy is built on principles of equal voice. "The people" can be heard. "The people" have a say. But our modernist discourse has thrust a tradition of techniques and procedures at our feet. A radical relationalism, on the other hand, suspends

procedures in favor of dialogic processes. Thus, we must distinguish between sensibilities that emphasize procedures over process. In individualist discourse, we frequently find an interest in processes of social interchange but a focus on procedures or techniques. As illustration, consider a typical psychological research program. The researcher is curious about why certain people form close attachments with their peers while others do not. While the researcher might be concerned initially with a complex set of interactional processes (e.g., history of parent/child relations, measures of self esteem, personality factors, etc.), the frequent result of such research is the generation of a set of (supposedly) definitive steps, procedures, or techniques that will ensure favorable attachments or at least accomplish some remedial work for those who have poor attachments. I, in fact, sat on a doctoral committee (as an outside member) of a Ph.D. candidate who engaged in just such a study. In the end, when asked how her research would help schools, parents, and adolescents, the candidate could not answer. More than that, she felt it not her responsibility to provide everyday people with a "translation" of her results. She did not feel in any way obligated to offer suggestions for interactive processes based on her research results. She had, however, no difficulty discussing techniques for extending the study of attachment.

Giving voice to differences in the name of equality is similarly deceptive. While democracy might be concerned initially with relational constructions of our world, the democracy we most frequently practice in our institutions, in our communities, and in our relationships is a procedural democracy. To engage simply in democratic procedures that ensure that the majority voice wins the day calls into question who that majority is. Is it those with power, with economic or political resources, with expertise? Can those who adhere to procedures rather than processes ensure that our majority is inclusive of marginalized communities, communities that are on the border because of their color, race, gender, religion, ethnicity, and social status? Is, in other words, our majority a truly representative majority?

The juxtapositioning of individualist and relational discourses creates a conversational

space within which to examine how individualism, as a discursive form, has contributed to our overwhelming fascination with technique (i.e., procedure) at risk of ignoring relational practice. Robert's Rules of Order – a decision making procedure most of us are all too familiar with from our academic contexts – serves as a useful procedure, dressed up as practice, to examine. While Robert's Rules of Order (like democratic procedures or any other conversational structuring device) can serve as a useful guide for deliberating potentially disputable topics, it can also become an incapacity. Folger, Poole, and Stutman (1993) point out that

procedures can also stifle differentiation by discouraging a direct assault on the issues . . . If two sides appear to be forming, the chairperson calls for a vote and assumes that once the vote is taken the issue is decided and the problem solved . . . only the winning side gets what it wants in this case. The members who lose the vote may be dissatisfied and withdraw from the group or be much less committed to the decision. (p. 80)

These authors point out that Kenneth Burke (1954) referred to this process as "trained incapacities" (i.e., the taken for granted implicit and/or explicit work habits and rules of a group that are repeated without question). They well illustrate the danger of attending to procedures and techniques over processes of complex human interchange. These routine ways of relating with one another, or structuring our everyday conversations and activities – precisely because they are routine and taken for granted as useful – can blind us to the problems they create. An unquestioned adherence to procedure generates only further and more adamant applications of and attendance to the procedure, itself when conversation goes astray. In other words, in the face of conflict or difficulty, the first move toward "resolution" is generally a more stringent application of procedural rules. This tendency diverts attention away from a questioning of the taken for granted – away from the very premises upon which the conversation is structured (i.e., equity, fairness, democracy). And, most significant, a focus and stringent application of procedures

guarantees divisiveness. Rather than find ways to negotiate some commonly acceptable reality, participants simply opt out of the conversation or, if they stay in it, they do so in ways that pathologize the “other side.”

Inviting/Allowing the Emergence of an Open Order

As Chair of my own department for the past eight years I have often reflected on what other resources might be available to us, as a group, in our attempts to engage in dialogue, not annihilation of disparate views. Is there any way to celebrate the relational ways in which we construct our realities? Is it possible in an academic department, for example, to engender a sense of "we-ness" in the rationale and the coherence of the decisions we make while still allowing for differences of opinion? Do we have to continue in the individualist tradition by crediting one person with an idea, a solution, a particular competency or meritorious act?

Unfortunately, the standard in such situations is to resort to something akin to Robert's Rules of Order. Here we have a way of ensuring "conversational order." The slippery slope is to equate "conversational order" with "social order." If there are rules for having conversation, we shall have an orderly community. (Is there any academic department that appears orderly???) Two problems emerge here. The first problem is embedded in the assumption that there is a social order and that it is a problem to be solved. If meaning is constructed in what we do with others, then the "problem" of the social order vanishes. Only when we have a conception of individual, private minds making meaning are we trapped in a world where "order" is difficult to achieve. In contrast, when we assume a relational construction of meaning -- that my words or actions have no meaning until you supplement them (Gergen, 1994) -- social order is no longer a problem to be overcome. Rather, what we do together is the social order. There is nothing beyond or outside of our relational engagements with each other.

The second problem has to do with assuming that the procedures or techniques for conversation will ensure a democratic, relationally sensitive dialogue. As my discussion above

points out, the implicit and explicit procedures we use in our everyday conversations do not always ensure that an appreciation for the relational configurations that give rise to our ways of making sense out of the world are at play. Consider the following. While Robert's Rules of Order gives everyone a formal procedure for speaking and participating in the conversation, this procedure is premised upon a notion of each conversational participant as a self contained individual. Each person is the owner of his or her ideas. Decisions are made based on "McNamee's motion" or "Green's amendment." It is the responsibility of each person to let these ideas out of the container; to let them be heard. Conversational procedures like Robert's Rules guarantees that "my stuff" gets out onto the table just as "fairly" as yours. Also guaranteed is the manner in which each "idea" is offered -- all motions have the same structure, each can be discussed in turn, amended, and the vote called. There is an "order" to the conversation that is touted as fair and equitable. Here we can see that despite the fair claim that Robert's Rules of Order are typically employed to secure communal understanding, the procedure is predicated on a very individualist notion of meaning.

In contrast, a focus on how participants actively create their worlds together requires a relational understanding of our social worlds. Once we begin to understand the world in these terms, we are compelled to consider how we enter into conversation with others, how our actions invite particular responses from them, how their actions invite particular responses from us, and how, in general, we jointly participate in the construction of our lived realities. We can not avoid recognizing the political dimensions of all our relational engagements with this view of participatory construction in place. We are encouraged to engage in self reflexive critique as we consider alternative options in our interchanges with others. Yet, at the same time, we are invited to broaden the scope of who participates in the conversation. We are no longer able to identify and justify participation by virtue of "tradition," "hierarchy," or "procedure" without critically questioning the genesis, coherence, and ethics of such decisions, and more important, the genesis, coherence,

and ethics of this particular way of talking.

Dissolving Difference

As we can see, modernist discourse (or the discourse of science) - whether in positivist form or in the form of procedural democracy - is divisive. If there is only one rational mode of action, only one reality that deserves recognition, only one answer that can be pursued, or only one procedure that is deemed "democratic," then when confronted with opposing views, our task is to determine which is objectively right, good, rational, etc. This is where the tools of positivism and rhetoric proclaim to help. Trained properly, the skilled social scientist (whether positivist or rhetorician) should be able to employ their associated techniques or procedures to dissolve differences. The only way to dissolve differences is to proclaim one right or rational and all alternatives as wrong or irrational (or misguided at best). In the section that follows I have sketched two illustrations of typical scenarios at my university. Each one, I believe, draws on modernist discourse and thereby resorts to a reliance on procedures or techniques to resolve differences. Following these illustrations, I will propose a set of conversational resources (not techniques) that I believe, by drawing on the relational orientation upon which a constructionist argument is built, provide us with the means for engaging in transformative dialogue.

Transformative dialogue is dialogue which recognizes differences and moves toward negotiation of ways of going on together. It is important to note here that in referring to negotiation I am not advocating consensus of differing viewpoints. Consensus silences. Negotiation and movement toward transformative dialogue, on the other hand, generates the soil upon which new meanings may be realized.

Illustrations

Case 1

A colleague recently shared the following memorandum with me (names and details have been altered):

June 10, 1997

TO: Departmental Executive Committee

FR: Donald Reynolds

RE: Sally Goodman's help with Madame Butterfly

Staging is a collaborative art. Sally Goodman is a fellow artist, and she is the only member of the Department who possesses the expertise I need to assist me at this staging of the "Madame Butterfly" production.

Sally informs me that she has received yet another offensive memorandum castigating her for "volunteering" her services to me. I do not choose to consider any help given from one Department member to another as a "voluntary" service. Production help is a necessary part of this Department's dedication to teaching and learning.

I will consider any interference with Sally Goodman's work on "Madame Butterfly" to be a hampering of my ability to function within this Department. Further interference with Ms. Goodman or with me will result in my filing a grievance under Article IX of the Collective Bargaining Agreement and a complaint with the Affirmative Action office.

I trust that this matter is now closed.

xc: Sally Goodman, Scheduling coordinator

Donna Winderman, Collective Bargaining Grievance Officer

It is fairly clear that this memo emerged from a long-standing and on-going struggle between two factions within this particular academic department. There are many stories that could be told about these warring factions but suffice it to say that over many years Sally has described herself as oppressed by others in the department who are manipulative, duplicitous and evil. Similarly, those being "warned" in this memo see Sally and the author of the memo as manipulative, duplicitous

and evil. It is also fair to say that the recipients of the memo also understand how it is that Sally and her defending colleague see the situation and while they believe the two of them are misguided in their portrayal of complex departmental relationships and politics, they understand some of the soil upon which these stories emerged. One salient story is that Sally, not a faculty member but a staff person responsible for scheduling summer stagings across the state, has longevity in the department and, over the years, has managed to help out by actually teaching university courses when the department has been in need (although she does not have the proper background or degrees in the area she has taught). Also, in earlier years, when the department was much smaller, Sally had voting rights just as the faculty did. Over the years, the department has grown and developed new operating procedures. These newer procedures are consistent with other academic departments within the university. However, it is clear that this shift has left Sally feeling pushed aside. Where she formerly had one of (if not "the") strongest voices in the department - concerning all matters - now her role is compatible with her job title, and unfortunately for her, this means no longer having privileges granted to faculty.

To return to the point of this illustration, in the memo quoted above we see deference to procedures that will ensure that justice, truth, and fairness are preserved. Justice, truth and fairness are all qualities associated with democracy. Democracy, in turn, represents acceptance and practice of the principle of equality of rights, opportunity, and treatment - most notably through the "right" to voice one's opinion. There is an emphasis in the notion of democracy on entering into conversation, being part of the public dialogue. However, as I have argued, the turn toward science in modern culture has replaced the emphasis on dialogue with an emphasis on procedure or technique. Thus, in the illustration above, rather than see opposing factions within an academic department engaging in exploratory conversations where each tries to present the coherence of his or her actions, we see a focused commitment to following particular procedures that will ensure that one's rights are not suppressed.

How can such procedures further the relationships among these colleagues? Can we imagine that those who are "put on notice" by virtue of this memo will seek further conversation, explore alternative avenues for getting along together, or will view possibilities for generative relationships in the future? Isn't it more likely that these colleagues will find themselves more firmly entrenched in their own world views? Isn't it likely that they will only widen the gap between "sides?" Isn't it the case that further conversation among these colleagues will be "more of the same?"

Case 2

Another poignant illustration can be made. About three years ago at my university the chairs of all academic departments decided to come together to fill what was seen as a void between administration and faculty. The chairs already meet monthly with the Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs and all the Deans of the University. These monthly meetings are meant to convey important information about policies, budgets, and academic aspects of the university as well as to provide detailed discussion of such topics. However, for a variety of reasons, there seemed to be little observable impact of these discussions carried forward in the form of policies, procedures, and decisions. The chairs realized that they could provide an important voice of the faculty if they recognized themselves as a viable group on campus. Thus, the Council of Chairs was founded.

Also central to this story is the fact that the campus has a faculty union and a faculty senate. Both of these bodies are acknowledged as having legislative power on behalf of the faculty; the union on issues of contract negotiation and the senate on issues of academic policy and procedure. Also important to note is that, unlike some universities, my university does not recognize department chairs as "administration" but rather as "faculty." Chairs, therefore, are part of the bargaining caucus of the faculty union and represented by the faculty senate (in fact, some chairs serve on both of these bodies).

The story relevant to the present argument begins with the formal recognition of the "informal" group called the Council of Chairs. The Council announced itself to the University community by way of a letter printed in the Faculty/Staff newspaper. In that letter, the chairs identified the concerns they had with recent policy decisions that had either been made or were in process. These decisions contained little if any "faculty input." Even recommendations made by individual chairs at monthly meetings were virtually absent in statements that came forward from the administration. The letter went on to explain that because department chairs must act on policy and are constrained by it, it seemed important for the chairs to band together in an effort to ensure that the voice of the faculty was presented in yet another forum. Additionally, unlike other groups of interested or concerned faculty, all academic chairs across all colleges and schools of the university meet monthly together as well as meeting monthly or even more frequently in some cases within their respective schools and colleges. Thus, the ability for chairs to sustain deliberation and offer commentary on a wide range of issues is much greater than that of a typical faculty member. The Council never claimed any "official" or "legislative" status. It only sought to provide another (strong) voice for the faculty. Because chairs on my campus are elected by departmental faculty, chairs are already seen as "representatives" of their faculty and thus of the majority view of their department.

What emerged from this originating moment has always struck me as curious. Most departmental faculty supported the council, ignored the council, or were ignorant of the council's formation. In other words, for those faculty engaged in campus politics - either officially or as constituents of the academic wing of the university - the Council of Chairs was a good thing. There were also faculty who ignored or didn't even know about the council. These were people who were less interested in being actively involved in campus issues and politics. What was curious, however, was the strong negative reaction of a small group of faculty - some in my own department. To them, it became important to continually note that the Council of Chairs had no authoritative

voice. Despite university policy that identifies the chair as the "elected" representative of an academic department, the Council of Chairs, because it is not listed in the by-laws of the university, has no authority to speak on behalf of faculty. Additionally, this group of faculty who see the council in negative terms, reiterate that the council has no legislative power and thus no "right" to forge policy.

These are interesting arguments. They are interesting because they are being made so forcefully when most faculty on campus feel they need not be made. The Council does not attempt to wield legislative power -- it has none. The Council does not forge policy -- it can not. The Council only offers the collective opinion of those faculty members who have been elected to represent their departments. It has always been the hope of the Council that their opinions will make a difference in how policy, procedures, and decisions are crafted at the University -- that their voice will register and help in the deliberations of all officially recognized groups. The Council represents an attempt to cross disciplinary boundaries and bring together the common interests of faculty, despite the very different "cultures" created within each unique department. To that end, it serves a generative function. It opens up yet another space where democracy can live.

However, as illustrated in the following description, even the attempts by the Council to avoid procedural democracy was thwarted. It is difficult, within an established institution, to avoid some degree of reliance on procedures. Additionally, often the Council acts in an attempt to expand the discourse but others see the Council's activities as "more of the same procedural rhetoric." This is in part because many on campus do see the chairs individually and collectively as an "authoritative voice." It is also because once "inside" the rhetoric of procedures, it is nearly impossible to see any novel forms of practice within a different frame. It is within this context that many ask why the voice of the Council of Chairs is so ardently refuted and silenced by some faculty?

One specific issue is most compelling here in our discussion of private pain/public

entertainment. In brief, at stake is faculty merit and equity pay. Being a recently unionized faculty, the executive committee of the union has spent the first eight years focusing on "across the board" pay raises that will bring our faculty salaries, on average, closer to those salaries of our comparison universities. This approach was widely accepted at first but the university has suffered from the loss of outstanding academics who were not properly recognized for their unusual contributions and thus took positions elsewhere. A movement began among faculty to urge the union negotiators to prioritize merit and equity pay in the upcoming contract. Consistent with this move, the Council of Chairs drafted a memo also urging those at the bargaining table to accept these priorities.

However, when some faculty heard of the memo drafted by the Council, they responded with outrage. What right, they asked, did an unofficial body have to send this message? The following exchange of memos illustrates the form of argument used. Note that the argument rests on issues of procedure. Also note that those opposed to the Council's memo were, in fact, in favor of the sentiment it conveyed.

(An unsigned memo that appeared in faculty mailboxes):

The Department discussed and acted on a proposal proffered by the Council of Chairs on the subject of merit and equity pay. We request that the following resolution that resulted from those deliberations be appended to any further distribution of that proposal.

Resolved: The Department opposes the proposal framed by the Council of Chairs and does not recognize the policy making legitimacy of that Council.

(The response written by the Department Chair):

By what authority does an anonymous individual or subgroup presume to make statements of policy (that speak for a larger group) on how non-authoritative bodies are not allowed to make policy statement?

I would like to point out that, contrary to the beliefs of some, the memo drafted by a subcommittee of chairs is not policy. It is simply opinion. There is no policy statement or specific procedure outlined. Any group has the right to voice their opinion and the chairs - with or without legislative voice (and we all know it is a group that does not have legislative voice) have that right too. But no one else has to agree with it. That's what our discussion was about vis a vis the memo.

As in the first illustration, we see here attempts to "win an argument" by referring solely to issues of procedure. Specifically, this argument hinges on whether or not a group has "legitimate authority" to voice an opinion. The real irony here is that the specific issue at stake -- faculty merit and equity pay -- is not a contested issue. In fact, all participants are in agreement on this central issue. Thus, we see again how employing procedures in an attempt to dissolve differences serves actually to further entrench opposing camps in their insular positions. There is no move toward transformative dialogue and the co-construction of a way to go on together cooperatively.

Private Pain/Public Entertainment

Why do these two illustrations stand out as examples of private pain for public entertainment? Here we see illustrations of "opposing" views, each firmly lodged in its own coherence, rationale, and sense of justice. If we could accept the modernist notion that there can be an objectively determined, universal truth, such deliberations would not be problematic. However, even the Greeks were wise enough to recognize that the benefit of democracy is the ability to lend local coherence in a public forum to a different view. By so doing, others are invited to consider alternatives as worthy on their own terms. By stripping democracy to the bare bones of procedure, the local coherence of any argument is pushed aside - it is not what deliberation is about. Further, I would argue that the form of procedural democracy or rhetoric that I have described here provides great delight for those who "win" and great pain for those who "lose." And, in the end, doesn't everyone lose (albeit some only after that great sense of pleasure and

entertainment)? All involved lose by virtue of ending the conversation, of losing the possibility of going on together in the co-construction of a relationship that opens possibilities for collaboration and equal (democratic) participation. As Gergen (1994) says, "...virtuous standpoints are not unproblematic; they frequently operate to reduce trust and foster alienation" (p. 81).

Resources for Relational Practice

How can we invite difference without achieving polarization? How can we have dialogue without resorting to techniques or procedures? The challenge is one of generating relational practices. Can we provide the resources for bridging or negotiating different ways of talking? Are there resources (rather than procedures) that resonate with a relational understanding of social life? Clearly, any practices offered must be general rather than specific. To that end, I offer some "conversational resources" as initiation into dialogue about processes of relationally engaged life.

My attempt is to provide some conversational resources that inspire forms of social action that are relationally sensitive. With these in hand, might we move toward an appreciation of difference, an appreciation of competing rationalities, and consequently, an appreciation for the complexity of living together? I hope that these practices will be read not as techniques or procedures but rather as openings to alternative discourses for enriching action. My desire is to present these options for action as fluid resources - not as techniques, models or conversational structuring devices. They suggest different ways of bringing multiplicity, and thus a sense of relationally constructed realities, into our everyday interchanges with others. These offerings might provoke novel resources for action that are sensitive to the particular relational settings in which we find ourselves. They may be combined, amended, transformed, and realized in a variety of ways. They are supple resources for relational life.

Expanding the Domain of Participation

If diversity, difference, "otherness," is important to achieve a fully relational sensibility, then should we not invite "interested others" into our conversation? Those others might include

economic experts, policy makers, legal officials, entire social communities or neighborhoods, school officials, and other professional and interested groups. In reference to the cases offered earlier, they might be voices of students, former mentors, “the opposing camp,” or even friends, relatives, blue collar workers, and so forth. Typically, there is an expanded web of interested "stakeholders" who go unnoticed, unrecognized as social groupings negotiate their realities. The very act of including their voices simultaneously expands the domain of participation as well as the domain of community and global commitment. Who are those typically "silent" others who might have something to say about a particular topic or issue? By expanding the domain of participation, we can create powerful fora for social reform. By bringing these voices together, the community of involved participants might co-construct an understanding of the situation that does not combat the important concerns and tasks of others involved. This could be the view adopted for the formation of the Council of Chairs. However, this can only be achieved if conversations are created within a context that respects the coherence of these multiple communities and facilitates dialogue rather than debate. Token representation from different aspects of a community (or from different communities) is not necessarily an effective manner in which to generate the polyphonic dialogue I am proposing. Including the "token others" does not generate substantive conversation among disparate groups. The attempt here is to move beyond tokenism and open the conversation to those who wish to participate.

So, how might we open the conversation to those who have a vested interest in our projects but who might not otherwise be consulted? As we extend the network of voices involved, we expand the potential for co-construction among broader communities. We can pose different questions such as, What might we do for this community, for this particular problem, for this particular effort? For whom is this a problem?, What would count as a success and to whom?, In what ways, if any, have we transformed others beyond ourselves? Who among this extended group thinks our activities are effective, transformative, successful?, Who else might have

benefitted from this conversation?, What new resources (financial, emotional, practical) might be generated as a result of this conversation? The questions we ask and the conclusions we draw are coordinated within this complex network of relations. From this process of coordination, constraining and potentiating descriptions will emerge.

Another way to invite relational engagement is to encourage ourselves to draw upon our own multiplicity. Can we ask questions, conduct observations, analyze data, and interpret "results" from our various identities: departmental member, institutional member, professional academic, researcher, neighbor, curious person, detective, gossip, care giver, community member, and so forth? Can we invite a multiplicity of voices by inviting others to assist us in our "tasks" - or by inviting those with whom we engage to think of themselves as multivocal? Could we, in other words, invite our conversational partners to bring their "internal others" (McNamee and Gergen, in press) -- the voices of their other, less obviously relevant, relationships -- into the dialogue?

Honoring Relational Responsibility

Because of our individualist orientation, we are quick to hold individuals responsible for decisions, actions, and outcomes of what actually can be seen as relationally accomplished activities. What if we embraced the notion of relational responsibility (McNamee and Gergen, in press)? Instead of identifying one person who will be ultimately responsible for what takes place in and to our communities, organizations, and relationships, what would happen if we accept what occurs as a joint production? What would we be doing differently? We might, for one, be asking different questions. Rather than inquire why a person acted in a particular manner, we might initiate inquiry into the many narratives that could be told about how that action emerged and was carried through. How do "we" react to certain events? What is "our" criterion for success? What stories do all participants - as well as "on-lookers" - have to tell about this process? What is central to each story and to each story teller? Where is the confusion for each of these stories, for each of these tellers? These questions, asked from a stance of curiosity rather than from the desire to "get

to the bottom of things" generates an understanding that is rich with relationships.

This kind of conversation/inquiry dissolves the need to "know" with certainty and instead replenishes the sense wonder and coherence amidst diversity. As different voices enter the conversation, perhaps a balance between a sense of "enough certainty" to proceed and a sense of wonder, richness, and yet-more-to-come is introduced generating an appreciation of the situation at hand. Conversations like this facilitate participants in seeing that there is, in fact, coherence and "rationality" in the actions of others. Once those actions are embedded within stories - stories that embody and construct relationships, communities, and traditions - participants are free to disagree. But the disagreement that emerges from this conversational arena is vastly different from the disagreement that emerges when we enter into conversation with certainty about what counts as right or wrong, good or bad, successful or unsuccessful. All participants have their stories of each, but who is to determine which one among all the competing stories is truly right, wrong, good, bad, successful, or unsuccessful?

There is a significant shift from our typical, modernist form of disagreement which is believed to be born out of objective determination. When the coherence of participants' stories has been invited into the conversation, a willingness to engage in processes of negotiation, compromise and transformation emerges.

Any attempt to bring together, in our deliberations and daily interchange, the groups that we represent and the relationships of which we are a part draws our attention to the ways in which we are relationally responsible.

Engaging in Reflexive Critique

The practices mentioned above can be encouraged by approaching social activities from a stance of curiosity or interested inquiry. While we often have a professional and relational responsibility to act in ways that are focused, meaningful, and ethical, we must realize that too much certainty or understanding negates the argument for relationally engaged dialogue. When we

are too certain about our approach, our answers, our analysis, we close out the voices of others as well as our own multiplicity. We fail to notice the new possibilities inherent in only fleeting details. In addition, we must respect that what constitutes generative dialogue in one community might not secure the same position in another. The rhetorical force of a particular discursive argument can vary dramatically from community to community. In other words, we must be constantly asking ourselves which discursive tradition warrants these particular questions, observations, and conclusions? Why this discourse and not another? Which community is being represented here and by virtue of its representation, which communities are being erased? This sort of reflexive critique is what relational engagement is about. Here we recognize the possibility of other discursive communities and traditions and through such recognition might grant them voice. Again, we balance the concerns for uniform clarity and coherence with those of comprehensiveness and complexity.

Dialogue as Metaphor

Finally, the relationally engaged community I am advocating embraces the term "dialogue" both practically and metaphorically. Pragmatically, it is worth pointing out that to engage in dialogue is not necessarily to be an active part of the conversation as we generally understand that term. Here I am referring to the erroneous belief many have that to engage in dialogue is to have everyone talking. Quite often, the "voice" one chooses to contribute is the voice of non-participation. These voices should be respected just as those that are "at the table" should be. To engage in dialogue does not mean everyone participates in the same way. It means that participants engage with each other in the way they feel is appropriate - which might include lack of "physical" participation. Yet this is a very active form of participation too. There is a marked difference between being invited to join and deciding not to, as opposed to not being invited at all.

Yet, dialogue is also used as a metaphor for talking about the relationally engaged community. As a metaphor it is contrasted to debate which does not attempt to provide

participants with a forum for articulating the coherence of their realities. In debate, one only tries to convince the opponent that one's position is correct, true, just. Dialogue, in contrast, attempts to engender a conversational arena where participants become curious about the coherence and rationale of alternative views and garner a genuine respect for those coherences. This is not to imply that participants will agree with or accept another's way of talking about the situation. It is to suggest, however, that their curiosity and respect make possible significantly different conversations. I would suggest that these different conversations are potentially transformative in that they provide the possibility for coordination among disparate communities. In using dialogue as a metaphor we move away from the goal of winning so readily invited by the debate metaphor. In place of winners and losers, dialogue offers us participants.

Conclusion

My argument here is rooted in a strong move toward conversation - dialogue - what people do together. With this move, we can unseat the dominant tradition in not only the study of human interaction but also in how we engage with others in our daily practice. I have attempted to fully illustrate how individualist discourse also directs our attention to issues of technique and procedure and how technique and procedure generate a sense of public entertainment in the form of "success," "winning," "the glory of defeating the opposing side." The actual living, dialogical processes by which we construct the world, the relations, the situations within which we live, are largely ignored when our attention is placed on technique. And, I have humbly attempted to initiate discussion on relational practice. Can we articulate a set of fluid, flexible conversational resources that direct our attention to relational processes of construction and away from products achieved through techniques?

The call for a dialogic understanding of social life challenges us all to generate relational understandings and practices emphasizing processes of relating over procedures for relating.

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