

# The Sociology of Experience

## INTRODUCTION

Dorothy Smith talks a lot about the politicised nature of experience and the need to understand the structural basis on which that politicisation takes place. What she does not do is describe her approach as a political sociology. For her, if it is a species of Sociology (as opposed a sociology defined by whom it is for), it is a Sociology of Knowledge. However, like Nancy Hartsock, Sonia Harding and other feminist thinkers of the time, the cast which she gives her work invites the epithet 'political'. It *has* a politics and is *about* the political dimensions of social life. When looked at in this way, it seems reasonable to say what Smith provides is a very particular sociological account of the politics of experience.

Our aim is to take a close look at this sociology, the principles it draws on and its likely effectiveness. We will, therefore, be homing in on just one aspect of Smith's contribution, possibly the least important for feminists in general and, perhaps, for Smith herself. We shall not be considering Smith's work as a contribution to the cause of feminism and its objectives, though we will cross reference debates in the mainstream of feminism which were taking place contemporaneously. We shall claim the overall trajectory of Smith's work is a very familiar one. Initial progress on a proposed radical sociological innovation was followed by a broadening of scope and a growth in adherents. Together with increasingly difficult to ignore omissions and contradictions in the original formulation, these developments gradually weakened the radical agenda. Eventually, its *modus operandi* as a form of sociological work became almost

indistinguishable from other conventional forms. The objective of a theory driven social revolution morphed into the local piecemeal engineering of social justice with the sociological approach adopted bearing little or no resemblance to either the original critical theory it drew on or the methodology it sought to deploy.

### Section 1. Social Epistemology and Situated Knowledge<sup>1</sup>

At the beginning of her summary of Feminist Epistemology's somewhat fractious relationship with science, Elizabeth Anderson [2020] laid out the list of complaints feminists make about mainstream Philosophy's attitude to women and the disadvantages which flow from it. The most important of these are: (i) exclusion from participation; (ii) denial of epistemic authority; (iii) denigration of 'feminine' cognitive styles; (iv) imposition of male oriented conceptions of phenomena resulting in the assessment of female conceptions as inferior; (v) foci of interests rendering female activities invisible; (vi) production of knowledge which reinforces the subordination or subjugation of women. These weighty charges are linked to a further allegation. Whilst philosophical epistemology's ostensible positioning is a concern with knowledge claims and their status as abstract and universal phenomena (Nagel's [1986] famous "view from nowhere"), in fact the viewpoint is masculine. Rather than being free from social, political, economic, historical or personal prejudice and so merely an empty shell of Cartesian subjectivity, the philosophical attitude is imbued with the patriarchal gaze of the post-Enlightenment male. Its conception of reasoning as ratiocination is held to be content free and the principles on which that reasoning works (formal logic) said to represent a distillation of the essence of rational inference. But these principles and that conception are in fact derivatives of the content over which they run. Such content is almost entirely conceived in terms of the patriarchal gaze and hence the male point of view, or standpoint as it became known, was what provided the subjectivity necessary for knowing. The Cartesian Ego is masculine.

In place of the Cartesian Ego, Feminist Epistemology wants what it calls "the situated knower". Grappling with the philosophical issues of truth, reason and justification takes place in a world where philosophers are just as engaged in the *mêlée* of social life as the rest of us. In that world, knowledge is socially distributed and socially differentiated. Priests, pedlars, pornographers, perfumers and philosophers all know (some) things those occupying other walks of life don't. In

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<sup>1</sup> This section runs over many topics also covered in *Epistemology and Feminism*. However, it comes at them with a different point of view and a different purpose.

addition, the 'interests' they have in pursuing their walks of life mean they frame the world (or, at least, parts of it) differently. Because their knowledge of the world is what shapes their interpretation of it, these walks of life encounter the world differently from each other and from the rest of us. Indeed, for some feminists what they encounter are different worlds.

At face value, this all looks a bit trite. But the implication to be drawn from its triteness is what matters for feminism. The puzzles taken up by philosophical epistemology can be traced back to the postulated distinction between appearance and reality. That distinction is a major presupposition of the post-Enlightenment male gaze. Feminist epistemology argues the structure and differentiation of knowledge and interpretation are the articulation of social forces at work in different social locations. The gender division of labour so central to modern society generates one such force, patriarchal power. As a *category*, women occupy a distinct social location to men and so acquire a distinct corpus of structured knowledge. Being a member of the category 'woman' means occupying a standpoint on the natural and social worlds; a view not available to those who do not share the standpoint.<sup>2</sup>

The first thing to note, then, is that feminist epistemology does not want to throw over everything to do with its philosophical counterpart.<sup>3</sup> It is not *that* radical. It accepts the appearance/reality distinction and it accepts its considerations apply to persons only in as much as they are categorised as 'women'. That Rosie might also be a riveter and hence have an occupation usually associated with male occupants has absolutely no bearing at all. It is Rosie qua 'woman' whom feminism insists has a distinct social location consequent upon her being female. These considerations will be important later in our discussion. What feminist epistemology wants to shift is the conception of what 'knowing' should be for Philosophy. Such claims as "there are some perspectives on society from which, however well-intentioned one may be, the real relations of humans with each other and with the natural world are not visible" [Hartsock, 1998 p. 107] make this clear. Rather than the principles of ratiocination and the machinery of formal logic, background beliefs—and hence what is taken to be justified truth—are determined by location in society. Moreover, some locations (including that of being a woman) endow some standpoints with their

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<sup>2</sup> We will not essay a view on how much any of this argument actually touches philosophical epistemology's project, except to say that it does look for all the world to be an instance of the classic philosophical ploy of premise denial. See [Chalmers 2015].

<sup>3</sup> We should note that social epistemology met with some resistance among feminists right from the start. See [Patai 1994] and [Haak 1993].

validity. The question, of course, is how that validity is arrived at. If not through 'pure thought', how is the necessary transcendence achieved?

#### RELATIONS OF POWER

The emergence of and debates over social epistemology provide one context for the initial line of work which became Institutional Ethnography. Another was Dorothy Smith's personal life. She has told the story of her Damascene moment many times. (See for example [Smith 1987 kindle loc. 139].) Finding herself newly divorced, caring for two small children, with few friends and far away from family whilst at the same time holding down a temporary position teaching Sociology at Berkeley, she came to see her experience (and that of multitudes of women like her) was barely recognised by the concepts and practices of the discipline she followed nor the institutional and organisational arrangements it operated under. To use her phrase, the discipline had eclipsed women and their concerns. The extent of this obscuring became even more clear when having moved to Vancouver, with others Smith taught a course designed to surface how far women's experience differs from the way Sociology describes their lives. The tenets of social epistemology provided an account of why this was so. Sociology offered a way of knowing about the world. Following social epistemology's line of argument, this way of knowledge expressed a standpoint, an outlook, that of the male Cartesian Ego. It abstracted from and interpreted over social experience as if from an Archimedean point floating above the social world in which that experience was located. In actual fact, its avowed objectivity was the subjectivity of the male gaze.

Smith took on the challenge of threading together a sociology of Sociology's own ways of describing the life world of experience and of showing how (in particular through the discursive practices of its texts) it produced the eclipsing she had noted. Second, she set out to re-make Sociology on a new basis, the "*point d'appui*", as she referred to it, of women's experience. This "turning" would be based on the perspective of women as embodied beings-in-the-world and not a theorised social formation conceived under the reflective interpretation of male apodictic assumptions.<sup>4</sup> Smith's new approach would construct a sociological world for women entirely different to and parallel with the conventional sociological world constructed by and for men.

During this period, Nancy Hartsock (see her [1998 ch.6]) was turning to Marx for a social philosophy of class as an analogy for a social philosophy of gender on which a critical

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<sup>4</sup> Later, Smith was to regret adopting this 'point of view' metaphor (See [Smith 1992]) and tried to distance her approach from it and Standpoint Theory. It was, alas, too late. The genie was out of the bottle.

philosophical epistemology could be mounted. It was she who coined the name 'Standpoint Theory' for it. What she finds in Marx can be summarised as follows:

1. Class position both structures and limits the understanding of social relations.
2. Since the character of their material lives (class position) are fundamentally different, the standpoints of the classes will be inversions of each other and "in systems of domination, the vision of the rulers will be both partial and perverse" [Hartsock, 1998 p. 107].
3. Since the vision of social relations held by the ruling class structures the experience of all, mere rejection of it because of its inadequacy is insufficient.
4. Articulation of the vision associated with the oppressed group must be struggled for and realised by means of scientific understanding and appropriate education.
5. The vision of the oppressed exposes the oppressive character of social relations and points to an historical "liberatory" role for that class.<sup>5</sup>

The idea of paired inverted visions located in standpoints set within relations of production is the isomorphic principle on which Hartsock's analogy rested. She replaces the social division of labour in a capitalist economy with the sexual division of labour in patriarchy. In place of capitalist and proletarian, the opposing categories are men and women. In place of the historical revolutionary mission and destiny of the proletariat in the overthrow of Capitalism, we have the revolutionary mission and destiny of women in the overthrow of patriarchal oppression.

Having set out her analogy, Hartsock offers a sweeping view of female experience such as the ways "natural cycle" of birth and death are projected and sublimated in women's own consciousness.

(The) levels of determination and laws of motion or tendency of phallogocentric society must be worked out on the basis of female experience. ....The difficulty of the problem faced by feminist theory can be illustrated by the fact that it required a struggle even to define household labor, if not done for wages, as work, to argue that what are held to be acts of love instead must be recognised as work, whether or not wages are paid. Both the valuation of women's experience and the use of this experience as a ground for critique are required. A feminist standpoint may be present on the basis of the common threads of

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<sup>5</sup> "Liberatory" is a particularly horrid neologism of Hartsock's. She also seems to assume its definition is obvious. Unfortunately, we find it philosophically opaque.

female experience, but it is neither self-evident nor obvious. [[Hartsock 1998, p. 124]

Once this work is complete

...generalising the activity of women to the social system as a whole would raise, for the first time in human history, the possibility of a fully formed human community, a community structured by connection rather than by separation and opposition. One can conclude then that women's life activity does form the basis of a specifically feminist materialism, a materialism from which to provide a point from which both to critique and to work against phallographic ideology and institutions. [ibid, p. 128].

Dorothy Smith had a much less ambitious programme. Initially, she simply wanted a sociology which could offer a radical critique of Sociology as gendered practice. Her approach rested on a number of connected propositions. As a form of knowledge, Sociology is an epiphenomenon of society's structures of domination and power. By creating an ideology of false consciousness, its function is to legitimise the interests of those who exercise such dominion. This legitimisation is achieved through the moulding of a conceptual structure and sets of analytic, investigative and operational practices.

We will examine all three assertions and the path Smith takes through them. Like Hartsock, the first (her premise) is the direct adoption of precepts she finds in Marx and Engels' *The German Ideology* [Marx & Engels, 1968]. The second licenses her adaptive inference, namely the analogising of the gender division of labour and the power structures associated with it to the division of ownership and control of the means of production which was central for Marx and Engels. The third (and here the empirical rather than philosophical cashing out of the framework is to be found) is a generalisation whose validity is to be demonstrated by her analyses of Sociology's textual working practices.

## Section 2. Sociology as Ideology

Here is as clear a statement as we can possibly get of Smith's fundamental axiom. It comes from a very early formulation and so is not loaded with qualifications and other hedges against criticism.

Social relations for the sociologists refer to the abstracted forms of normative structures held to link positions or roles, the relation between husband and wife, between positions in an authority structure, the interpersonal relations of group members, and the like. How actions of individuals are organized conceptually as relations between individuals does not yield an account of social relation "naturally." This is because

the individual is the focus. Concepts such as relation, rule or norm, etc., provide for the social process when the basis of the analysis does not. [Smith 1979, p. 317]

The postulate on which this axiom is constructed is taken from a famous passage in *The German Ideology*.

The way in which men produce their means of subsistence depends first of all on the nature of the actual means of subsistence they find in existence and have to reproduce. This mode of production must not be considered simply as being the production of the physical existence of the individuals. Rather it is a definite form of activity of these individuals, a definite form of expressing their life, a definite mode of life on their part. As individuals express their life, so they are. What they are, therefore, coincides with their production, both with what they produce and with how they produce. The nature of individuals thus depends on the material conditions determining their production. [Marx & Engels 1968 p. 3]

*The German Ideology* was one of a number of investigations Marx and Engels undertook during 1844-46. These studies applied the Historical Materialist framework Marx had derived from his studies of Saint Simon and the French socialists as well as his tussle with the idealism of Hegel. The break though came with his analysis of the writings of the English Political Economists, Smith, Say and Ricardo and via them Nassau Senior and Bentham. His argument is simple but devastating. The categories used in the accounts economists give of the workings of Capitalism are direct reproductions of (and hence themselves part of) the social reality they are attempting to describe. The economic laws promulgated are couched as 'universal abstractions' but are formed as historically located articulations drawn from the commerce (literally) of daily life. Concepts such as land, labour and capital (the 'factors' of production), the 'distribution' and 'circulation' of 'capital', the efficiency and effectiveness of the division of labour and, most of all, wages as a measure of the value of labour power used by the bourgeois economists are closely congruent with the ways these terms are used in the daily life of Capitalism.

The key for Marx is the commodification of labour. This entails a rupture in the relationship between the worker/producer and the product of (his) labour. Work is no longer an expressive relationship but an instrumental one in which the worker is positioned in the system of exchanges. As a commodity, labour which is the expression of worker's existence, has been alienated from his true Being. The idea consciousness itself might be alienated is first found in the *Theses on Feuerbach* [Marx, 1969]. Feuerbach had argued that religion was an illusion, a mysticism, promulgated by those in power to keep 'the masses' subdued. Marx agreed it was that,

but it functioned in a more subtle way. Religious tenets didn't just distract the oppressed masses from the travails of their daily existence. They provided modes of understanding by which the subjugated came to accept those travails as part of the natural or God-given social order. In making this move, Marx developed an embryonic political sociology of experience as an explication of how collective representations which contain normative accounts of social order such as religion, law, political constitutions and genres of literature, function to refract and reflect the fundamental exploitative features of the social order they describe. *The German Ideology* confronts the ideas of neo-Hegelians such as Feuerbach, Bauer and Stirner and extends the notion even further. As a result, Marx holds all historically located accounts of experience (what Marx and Engels refer to as "philosophies") can be mapped onto the power structure of society. In turn, this power structure is to be seen as an emanation of the relationships of ownership and control over the material means of production. In other words, all framing of experience is ideology; its nature constituted by a distorted metaphysics and epistemology of the social. Of course, such modes of distortion need not have arisen within the groups whose interests they serve.

Ideology is, then, something of a Russian doll notion. Marx never provided a fully worked out account of how it was to be used both as a critical concept *and* as a revolutionary one. He knew he needed to do so because the third, outer, form encompassed all modes of thinking including science and, like most 19<sup>th</sup> century intellectuals, Marx was convinced that Newtonian Mechanics had shown science properly pursued was the means to certain knowledge about the natural world. What was needed was a demonstration of how Historical Materialism's diagnosis of the contradictions of Capitalism leading to the universalising of the precarious character of working-class labour could be integrated with the theorised conception of alienation necessary to engender the revolutionary mission of the working class. Unfortunately, he never provided that demonstration. It remained an unfulfilled promise.

The preliminary status of the concept of ideology is, then, the first thing we should note. The second is that the use Marx and Engels make of it does not require ideas, theories and descriptions necessarily to be calculated misrepresentations. Now, they are not naïve. They know this happens. They know the press, politicians, administrators and other power holders spin events, are economical with the truth, and purvey fake news when they think it necessary. But that is not what is meant by ideology. Most importantly, this kind of 'messaging' is not to be confused with forms of description and argument generated by social philosophers (a term which included the Political Economists). Expressing all social relations as the exchange of commodities (objects, labour and all forms of creativity are commodities to be bought and sold) is a form of 'fetishism'. In



that they obscure the true nature of the relationships (exploitative and oppressive) and hence render them mysterious, social philosophies using those concepts reinforce the relations they describe. This, Marx says, makes them ideological. The point here is that since such philosophers are convinced by the ideas they have developed and hold to them (albeit sometimes only temporarily), the producers of ideology are themselves alienated. As individuals, they are not to be blamed for their ideas, since they too are subject to the structural power relations associated with the social organisation of the means of production. They are not traders in hypocrisy but generators of false consciousness.

In applying Marx's analysis of Political Economy to Sociology, Smith claims not to take any more from his analysis than the equation of forms of ideas and relations of power.

"Ruling class" has acquired a deposit of meaning since Marx and Engels used it in *The German Ideology* to identify that class which disposes of the means of production. I am using it here with deliberate imprecision to draw attention to the class which in various ways and from various kinds of position is responsible for the management, government and administration of this form of society [Smith, 1974, p. 258].

In the world Smith was experiencing, that class was men.<sup>6</sup> The theories and descriptions she reads, the studies and investigations of social life she undertakes and the administrative order she participates in are all components of an ideology emanating from a set of disciplinary power relations over the ownership and control of the resources and methods for producing Sociology as a body of ideas; arrangements and practices which displace and eclipse the realities of women's lives. Moreover, such ownership and control are overwhelmingly in the hands of men. Rather than false class consciousness, what Sociology produces is false gender consciousness. The metaphysics and epistemology from which Sociology is constituted, ineluctably construct the social world from the point of view of men and represent women's activities and the social relationships therein in terms of those of men.

...there is a singular coincidence between the standpoint of men implicit in the relevancies, interests, and perspectives objectified in Sociology, and a standpoint in the relations of ruling with which Sociology's objectified forms of social consciousness coordinates. Established Sociology has objectified a consciousness of society and social relations that "knows" them from the standpoint of their ruling and from the standpoint of men who do that ruling. To learn how to know society

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<sup>6</sup> Again, note the parallel with Hartsock.

from Sociology—as indeed many of us do whether we are sociologists or not, for sociological concepts and thinking constantly leak into the general currency of thinking about society—is to look at it from those standpoints. It is to take on the view of ruling and to view society and social relations in terms of the perspectives, interests, and relevances of men active in relations of ruling. It is to know ourselves thus. [Smith 1987 kindle loc. 77]

Whereas Marx attributes ideology's causation to a class structure erected on the extensive division and commodification of labour as a mode of production in capitalist society, Smith attributes it to the asymmetries created by the gender division of labour as a mode of life in modern societies. The parallels are clear. Economics and Philosophy are class ideologies in 19<sup>th</sup> century Capitalism. They and Sociology (and science and everything else....) are gender ideologies in the modern world. Note the phrasing. In this initial move, Smith is trying to open up an awareness of the possibility of alternative ways of representing things. Just as Marx did, she wants to elucidate how the dominant ways of thinking about social life and its institutions shape how we think about ourselves and our lives. And, again just like Marx, she wants to offer a *different* way of looking at those things, one which she hopes will have radical implications not just for Sociology but for the way social life is structured.

#### SOCIOLOGY'S IDEOLOGICAL PRACTICES

Since it is Sociology as ideology Dorothy Smith is confronting, it is Sociology as a way of looking at social relations she has to transform. Sociology traffics in descriptions and explanations of the social world, so it with these that she starts. The approach she adopts is to adapt the investigative method Ethnomethodology had developed in pursuing its interest in the social organisation of appearances as an interactional achievement. Just as Marx insisted on taking the ideas of Economics and Philosophy back to the real worldly settings in which they have their original home, Smith proposes to start with the real worldly settings in which Sociology gets produced.

Her first exercise is a sketch analysis of fieldwork investigation and the practices by which sociological descriptions are manufactured within them. Her starting point is the "radical indeterminacy" [Smith 1981 p.314] she says Ethnomethodology's investigations have revealed in the formulation of sociological descriptions. The work she is referring to is best exemplified by Aaron Cicourel's *Method and Measurement in Sociology* [Cicourel 1964] which examined examples of practice across the complete range of sociological method. Each of the cases he reviewed displayed precisely the same fundamental problem. To provide a systematic sociological description, be it couched as a summary of measured social facts and forces or the depiction of

patterns of culture, requires the construction of equivalence classes to which individual instances of social behaviour can be allocated. The terms or categories used to name these classes are drawn from the common culture which investigators and their subjects share. The meanings of the terms, their scope and the rules of their application (even if formally specified in protocol statements) are irredeemably open and it is a matter of 'common sense' sociological judgement as to how they should be applied.

The observer begins with unstated common-sense procedures for defining the problem, then relies on operationalised measures for formalized common-sense categories for obtaining his indicators....for treating the subjects "obvious".....responses as literal reflections of their perception and interpretation of their environments [Cicourel 1964 p.21]

This whole tangle is made complicated beyond practical management because the use of such indigenous concepts as categories in theoretical analysis proceeds without asking first how those concepts are used in their cultural settings and without providing clear rules for discriminating when the analyst is using them as theorised homonyms for analytical special purposes and when not. The result is a variety of practices which inevitably display the combination of hope-for-the-best short term practical solutions enforced by measurement by fiat.

Smith spells out the implications of this analysis for sociological method in the following way.

1. Sociological observation is to be treated as an interpretive act. The observer is not outside the setting being observed but is part of that setting and any observations made are conditioned by the fluid configuration the relationships in play in the setting.
2. In understanding what is happening around them as they conduct their investigations, sociologists must draw upon their own background understandings to make sense of "appearances". What is happening and how to characterise individual participant's engagements cannot simply be "read off" a list of *dramatis personae*. Who is whom for what are features is determined in the unfolding interaction. How sociologists resolve the 'puzzles' they are presented with in making their observations is an unexplicated resource enabling the sociological account to be constructed.
3. 'Describing' is a very particular activity and is done in different ways in different circumstances. Moreover, not all 'descriptions' describe in the same way and some 'descriptions' do not seem to be describing at all. What is to count as a description is what those engaged in the interaction take to be a description and the forms by which

such 'interactional objects' are constructed vary across situations and the relevancies, interests, objectives of those who are participating. All these features are relevant to the production and recognition of an object as 'a description'.

4. These considerations imply the idea of a complete, all-purpose, context free 'literal' description of the setting and the activities going on in it is an illusion. Modes of expression are contextually tied to the occasions and settings in which they occur. Moreover, not only can there not be a literal description, neither can there be a singular one. The concatenation of 'descriptions from different points of view' is additive only in the sense the description is an expanded composite. Just as adding numbers together does not bring one closer to the largest number, so one does not thereby get closer to a complete, exhaustive description by treating individual descriptions as 'partials'.

On this view, sociological description is a mode of *commonsense analytical reasoning* involving occasioned selection and interpretation.

With all this in place, Smith identifies what she calls three descriptive "tricks" investigators use to construct their descriptions. In her early paper [Smith 1974] she describes the process as follows.

1. Sociologists elicit information in the form of the answers to questions. Answers are extracted from the occasion in which they were given and treated as 'data' while the information given is set aside and no longer subject to consideration.
2. The 'data' so collected are coded in some theoretically relevant way by reference to a set of framing constructs. Thus, they are re-interpreted in terms of a selected range of sociological categories and then, as members of these induced categories, summarised, aggregated or patterned.
3. In turn, the patterns thus revealed are re-interpreted as the operation of societal forces, factors, drivers. This representational function provides the explanatory account of their character.

These three steps show how descriptions given in the flow of a fieldwork interview-as-a-species-of-interaction are re-constructed as abstract, theorised 'levels'. The local context of the answer as a point in a sequence of questions and answers is completely "leached out" (Smith's phrase). The description found in the answer is re-described in terms of the sociological apparatus being applied in the investigation.

One of the examples Smith offers to illustrate this stepwise abductive practice comes from her own research. With a colleague she was studying a newspaper office. During the study, it became clear "assignment" was a key concept in the organisation of activities. The term was used in many different ways on many different occasions. During discussions of what an "assignment" was, they found themselves talking of assignments as "authorizations to use and deploy the resources of the organization in the collection of news" [Smith, 1981, p. 320]. It was only on reflection they saw they too had extracted the term from its array of occasioned uses and cast it as a general descriptive procedure which could then be translated in terms of an available organisational schema. They had moved from the level of daily journalist life to that of sociological categorisation. With "assignment" as an organisational category, it became possible to talk about the object they had defined in terms of the hierarchical, organisational and power relations it stood in and expressed.

...we saw that we had landed ourselves in precisely that situation from which we had tried to move in our method of doing Sociology that our practice was ideological rather than scientific. We were in business making up our own ideological forms as methods for detaching the concept from the actual social relations it expresses (Smith, 1981 p.320)

There is a fourth re-description. The 'writing up' of the findings for presentation or publication provides another framing. The normative structures covering, for example, under what conditions sociological analysis can be published, where should it be published, for whom should it be published, what formats such publications should take, the acceptable descriptive framings to be used, the role allocated to the 'observer/author in the publication, the positioning of what is published vis a vis other prior and intended subsequent publications and so forth constitute what, borrowing from Wittgenstein, she originally called elements of "language games". However, that term was deemed too passive and insufficient for the role she wished to allocate to this fourth re-description. She came to talk of genres of these practices as "discourses" in the sense Foucault gives the term in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* [Foucault 1989].

By virtue of publication or appropriately sited public reading, a text becomes part of the literature that is Sociology. This literature is exemplary in the sense that sociologists look to what has already been done and is already identifiable as a legitimate piece of sociological work to exhibit what is recognizable as Sociology. The discourse is maintained by practices that determine who can participate in it as fully competent members. [Smith, 1987, kindle loc 1189].

Key to sociological discourse is the presupposition descriptions of social activities should be couched as trajectories of selected, designed, planned, organised, rational action, be they intentional acts undertaken by interpretive social actors or the systemic consequences of functional or world historical structural forces. What Sociology does is rationalise social life.

If we began from women's experience of the world, we would not find these assumptions built into its Sociology, since they do not conform to the organization of our experience. Characteristically for women (as also for others in the society similarly excluded), the organization of daily experience, the work routines, and the structuring of our lives through time have been and to a very large extent still are determined and ordered by processes external to, and beyond, our everyday world. [ibid, kindle loc. 1293]

As a result

Sociology provides a mode in which people can relate to themselves and to others in a mode that locates them as subjects outside themselves, in which the coordinates are shifted to a general abstracted frame and the relation of actions, events, and the like to the local and particular is suspended or discarded. [ibid, kindle loc. 1489]

### Section 3. A First Set of Considerations

Thus far, we have been largely content to lay out the arguments put forward on behalf of social epistemology and Smith's application of it as a critique of Sociology. We had a lot of ground to cover and it was simpler not to disrupt the presentation with questions, qualifications and counter suggestions. Before we move on to look at how Smith built her new "Sociology for Women" and its evolution into Institutional Ethnography, it would be as well to lay down some pointers both as a way of indicating how we will shape our assessment of the base on which her sociology has been built as well as providing markers for what it might be important to attend to when considering its empirical investigative practices.

What we have we got so far? We have a sociological theory of the structural relations of power, ideology and consciousness premised in a social philosophy (in this case a theory of history), i.e., Historical Materialism. Into that theory has been injected the gender division of labour to replace the determining character of the division of ownership and control of the means of production in Capitalist society. Attached to the resulting gendered sociological theory, we have an investigative method derived from Ethnomethodology's studies of commonsense reasoning as the social organisation of appearances or experience. From this amalgam, claims are derived

regarding the gendered character of sociological accounts of social life. The implication is Sociology articulates a gender ideology and, moreover, this articulation can be made visible for analysis in its texts.<sup>7</sup>

The first thing to notice is the origin of the initial proposal for a new sociology. This was not the *discovery* mainstream Sociology was male dominated nor that it operated on 'ideological' principles. Assertions about all that came subsequently. It was its failure to provide descriptions which matched Smith's experience as a young, divorced, immigrant, professional mother. However, it was not suggested Smith's circumstances represented a wholly new social phenomenon which Sociology had not hitherto addressed and which its current categories could not fit. Neither was it claimed that Sociology did not have categories with which to describe situations such as those in which Smith found herself. Clearly it did. It was simply Smith didn't feel those categories and descriptions *represented* her experience. This is the vital point. A criterion for the acceptability of sociological or other accounts of social life has been stipulated: how far do its descriptions accord with the experience of particular categories of social actors?

There are two things here. First, at the time Smith was beginning to develop her ideas, there were (and still are) very serious debates being carried on in the Human and Social Sciences concerning the place of 'experience-near' and 'experience-distant' concepts, 'emic' and 'etic' categories of description as well as debates about the possibility of 'methodological individualist' and 'collectivist' explanations and the causal, functional or supervenient relationships each form of explanation traded in. None of these surfaces in her account of her thinking and yet the issues these debates raised and the ways in which they were addressed are directly germane to Smith's project. This is not to say she should have adopted any of them. She could still have gone her own way with her own mix of theory and method. But they were serious debates about serious issues and her view on their relevance ought at least to have been offered. In addition, although she spends a significant amount of time laying out and interpreting the background to Marx and Engels' thinking to justify her adaptation of their theory of ideology, she spends almost no time undertaking the same work for Garfinkel's Ethnomethodology. The work of ethnomethodologists is cited but the reasoning which brought them to the positions they adopt is not. Had she done so, her nonchalant annexation of Ethnomethodology's 'method' might well have proven more problematic.

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<sup>7</sup> 'Imputation' might be a better term. Here we see glimpses of the problems identified by Arthur Child [Child 1941] to which we referred in our discussion of Standpoint Theory in Part II.

Second, there is the move to place her own personal feelings and, by extension, the personal feelings of a whole category of persons at the centre of a new disciplinary endeavour. What Smith wants is a Sociology *for* women not, it must be said, a Sociology *about* women (though, to all intents and purposes, that is what, for a while, it became). So now we have a lemma on the original rationale. It is not Smith's (or any other young divorced, immigrant, professional mother's) personal feelings Sociology must address, but those of women as a category. It is to be for women and provide descriptions which resonate with their feelings. The trouble with this lemma is there is no in-built stopping rule. If you can sustain a case that Sociology does not provide accounts which resonate with any particular category (white working class males, middle class knowledge workers, members of the Asian diaspora.....) does that mean a new sociology should be crafted *just for them*? And if not, what are the grounds for female exceptionalism? The suggestion that the experience of being a woman is a wholly distinctive is a metaphysical claim or, at the very least, a metaphysical assumption requiring not inconsiderable justification. To fail to provide that justification is to run a very significant risk. The lack of a stopping rule could cause any social epistemology to fragment.<sup>8</sup>

Third, there are the possible consequences of the metaphysics trailing behind the perspectivalism on which the justifications for an alternative view stand. The need for a new sociology is to provide an alternative (and corrective) standpoint on social life. This sounds like an open-hearted position to take. Unfortunately, the assumption these views are alternatives implies they are views on *the same phenomena*. But how do we know the phenomena *are* the same unless we assume a constancy of object under different conditions of examination? Unless that conclusion is to be a wholly speculative proposition, we have to assume there is some one way we can describe phenomena 'as they are in themselves' (to coin a phrase). But this requires the transcending procedure Marx failed to provide. Without it, it is likely what starts as the adoption of a political stance of liberal tolerance could turn into an exclusivist, authoritarian dogma; namely, that there is a correct way to see the world and a feminist epistemology and sociology for women either have or will have discovered it. Over a decade after she had set out Standpoint Theory, Nancy Hartsock [Hartsock 1998], Ch. 7] thought this was indeed happening.<sup>9</sup>

In our view, the risks we have just identified arose because of the way feminist epistemology and Smith's new sociology were constructed. In both cases, the desire to get on and

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<sup>8</sup> Which is, of course, precisely what has happened to Standpoint Theory (see *Epistemology and Feminism*).

<sup>9</sup> We trace this process in *Epistemology and Feminism*.



make devastating critiques overpowered the need for careful intellectual craftsmanship. In the rest of this section, we will pick out the most important of the issues which arose thereby for Smith's project.

#### THE CO-OPTION OF MARX

There are two key elements here: the status of the 1844-6 manuscripts within the canon of Marxist theory and their provenance. Neither is uncontested. This is more than a matter of choosing a 'scientific' Marxism over an 'Hegelian' one or taking sides in debates over 'structuralist' versus 'phenomenological' Marxism. It is well known that in later life Engels regarded these writings as 'juvenilia' and was dismissive of them. As we have said, in the *Grundrisse* Marx himself promised to lay out the relationships between consciousness, class position and mode of production, but never did.

There are two reasons these debates matter. The first is that they concern the metaphysics and epistemology which are attached to the Marxist schema. What is the set of 'real things' being analysed (collectives, individuals, forces, material objects?), how are they to be related? The second is how we come to know about them (direct experience, a scientific method, transcendental philosophy?). Clearly, taking a position on these questions matters for the claims one would want to make on their basis. Smith can't just lift what she wants out of the Marxist frame of reference without making clear where she stands on these fundamental matters. However, at this point in the development of her ideas at least, that is exactly what she did do. Much later, she returned to this collection of issues and positions her early thinking regarding Marx as follows:

I could not bring to its reading a more than elementary knowledge of the background of the period in and for which his texts were written. Nor was I familiar with the philosophical tradition out of which his work emerged. I read naïvely and closely. [Smith, 2004, p. 446]

Her intention in this later piece is to remedy the weakness of her earlier reading. She does so by working through the background to and text of *The German Ideology*. What she finds is a very different account of the nature of class and ideology to that which is usually presented. For her, Marx locates ideology in the social relations and working conditions of those whose role in society is the manufacture and processing of ideas.

Reading *The German Ideology* in this way does not support the equation of ideology with the ideas of the ruling class as has become the standard interpretation. Ideology is not to be defined as the ruling ideas of a class. Rather, it is a specific intellectual or theoretical form

emerging under historical conditions which create a distinctive working experience for members of the intelligentsia. [ibid., p. 451]

What Marx is doing, she proposes, is demarcating one form of 'knowledge work' (ideology) from another (science). She summarises this demarcation as

1. While Marxism has theories of ideology, Marx does not. His theory of the social determination of experience and thought is simply that people's experience arises in definite settings of their work and that ideological forms of thought are developed by people working in contexts in which language is experienced as an autonomous realm with power to influence or change the social.
2. For Marx, the concept of ideology criticizes a method of reasoning about society and history that treats concepts as if they were causal agents or determinants. Science, by contrast, does not take such concepts for granted as given entities but explores the actual social relations expressed in the concepts and categories on which ideology builds. [ibid p. 454]

What is missing from this positioning is any acknowledgement Marx began with a flat rejection of Hegel's ambition to transform reality by single-handedly changing the realm of thought. Marx knew an attempt at changing social reality has to involve the concerted efforts of large numbers of people and has to be conducted on the basis of a common consciousness. Productive workers were the potential universal subject, shaped into such by their practical consciousness of the stark inequities of capitalist life as those inequities were brought more clearly into view by the continuing extension and increasing intensity of the capitalist mode of production. Ideology was consciousness that could develop when people were liberated from participation in life-reproduction and thus disconnected from their practical consciousness, enabled to imagine things upside down, wrongly supposing that thought encounters reality by distancing itself from practical consciousness (the living of a life) having direct contact with material reality. Marx issued a demand that theories should prove themselves through practice, that they should be used to achieve changes in the material world. Smith wants to use Sociology as a means to change the respective positions of rulers and ruled and of men and of women, and thus the relations between them but has not demonstrated how an academic discipline can directly connect with the material reality of life-production. Without such demonstration, there remains the possibility that even such a sociology as she hoped for will remain more ideology than science.

Having developed her interpretation of Marx, Smith suggests it is possible to repurpose the “method” described in the quotation above and apply it to the social sciences. If you do so, it becomes clear the Frankfurt School, Foucault, her own work and even that of Althusser can all be seen as ploughing similar furrows. All are attempting to analyse social conditions which are present now but were not available to nor even visible to Marx.<sup>10</sup>

The objectified relations that these various theories conceptualized were effectively not there for Marx. They are now, however, pervasive and powerful, increasingly dominated by capital and still significantly androcentric as well, of course, as being ground in class and imperialist relations. [ibid., p. 459]

The subordinate clause “and still significantly androcentric as well” with its modifier is the only time the central problematic in Smith’s sociology is referenced in this analysis. And yet it is what the textual analysis has been leading to and what it is for. So, even though she provides a quite distinctive reading of Marx’s early work and scatters a number of seemingly settled pigeons on the way, the necessary grounding for a substitution of gender for class is still missing. All we are left with is the hint that were Marx to be working to-day, “of course” he would be a feminist sociologist.

Such economy of inferencing covers a multitude of Smith’s rapid conclusions. She is aware of this, of course.

“Ruling class” has acquired a deposit of meaning since Marx and Engels used it in *The German Ideology* to identify that class which disposes of the means of production. I am using it here with deliberate imprecision to draw attention to the class which in various ways and from various kinds of position is responsible for the management, government and administration of this form of society. [SMITH, 1973, p. 258]

But this just won’t do. Class has a very precise definition for Marx, a definition which underpins the conception of the proletariat as a revolutionary group capable of confronting and dissolving the illusions of ideological experience and grasping its own historical mission.

There are two things to bring out here. First, there is the centrality of surplus value, its production and expropriation. Marx himself identified the sexual division of labour as a “primitive”

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<sup>10</sup> This tendency has become even more pronounced in recent accounts of Smith’s thinking and its relationship to Marx. See [Lund 2023] for a leading example of attempting to find a Marx feminism would like to have rather than the one we have been left with.

form overtaken and transformed by Capitalism's relations of production. In addition, and this was drawn out in particular by Nicos Poulantzas [1975], not all fractions of the ostensible working class carry the revolutionary destiny of the proletariat, only those whose labour is "productive" in the specific sense defined by Marx. That is, the truly revolutionary are those whose labour leads *directly* to the creation of surplus value which can be expropriated. As categories, the petty bourgeoisie, the servant classes, shop workers, street cleaners and what today we would call those in service industries do not contribute productive labour. By the same token, when looked at as a category, neither do women.

Second, for Marx when women are excluded from the productive labour force, their work conditions limit their capacity to form a common consciousness with others who are in the same position in relation to the productive forces (but most importantly not in the same position *in* the productive forces). The working conditions of such women involve being centred on the home in caring relationships with babies and small children and hence capable of forming far fewer direct relations with other women in the same position as themselves compared with people involved in the collective labour process and spending whole days with others in the same occupational position. The housewife's working day is not defined as a fixed period. Engaging in child rearing might well be voluntary and rewarding but does not perhaps compensate for being confined at home or most of the time with little adult contact. Involvement in the responsible formation of new individuals can be seen as a social duty, losing contact with the wider world or merely the world of work might not be. The relationship between husband and wife might be analogisable with power relations with the political or business spheres but the category of 'husband' is neither an employer nor a ruler but a 'spouse'. There are very diffuse relations amongst members of household, with the ways those members treat each other being only irregularly and tenuously surveyed. The consequence of these features of women's experience is that according to Marx's explanatory scheme, only those women engaged in the production of surplus value as defined within the collective capitalist production process could be said to represent revolutionary possibility. According to that scheme, women as a social category were not capable of transcending ideology in the precisely the same way men as a social category also were not. That the male productive worker is capable of a revolutionary standpoint is a result of his position in the system of economic relationships, not because he is male.

Smith's repositioning of Marx turns almost entirely on how she reads *The German Ideology*. The problem is, as Terrell Carver put it, "*The German Ideology Never Took Place*" [Carver 2010]. Smith, along with countless others, operated on the assumption that *The German*

*Ideology* is obviously a book or at least an extensive set of connected passages which Marx and Engels developed during 1844-6. However, as Marxist scholars are very well aware...

The German Ideology is well known to have been editorially constructed from uncorrected manuscripts, which are famously eccentric and difficult to decipher [Carver 2010 p. 108]

Rather than a free standing, self-evidently integrated argument, the manuscripts seem to be a reconstruction from fragmentary drafts, notes, scribbles and other flotsam and jetsam held in the Moscow archive. In addition, they were first published in 1926 as part of the debate over conflicting interpretations of the canon which were prominent at the time (See Carver and Blank [2014] and [Carver, 2019]). By examining the relevant historical documents and the manuscripts themselves, it becomes obvious.....

The manuscript materials that were organized by Ryazanov and subsequent editors in a chapter-like way .....These sequences, known since 1924 as '1. Feuerbach', were not in fact part of the materials actually prepared by Marx, Engels and Weydemeyer for publication in April and June 1846, and so were never sent by them to any publishers at all. [Carver 2010, p. 116]

Considerations like these do not lead to the conclusion Marx and Engels's ideas as 'captured' in *The German Ideology* and the other manuscripts should simply be ignored. Rather, it imposes a burden on those who would use them. They have a duty to make clear the difficulty of attributing a completed or even well-formed schematic argument to those writings. They are, indeed, exploratory, radical and contain premonitions of what was to come. But they are also fragmentary, contradictory and elusive. Perhaps they are best treated as evidence of a compositional process in action. Two things fall out from this. If, as many including Smith have done, one wishes to synthesise this thinking, thereby giving it a coherence it does not itself display, it is important to make clear what links, straps and hooks are being added to hold the whole thing together. Second, in doing this reparative work, the volume known today as *The German Ideology* has to be treated for what it is—a particular *post hoc* re-construction produced at a particular time for very particular purposes. As much as it speaks to Marx and Engels' mode of collaboration, it also speaks to the ideological and political turmoil of Russian politics in the immediate aftermath of Lenin's death.

## FORM AND CONTENT

Smith's views evolve over time as she returns again and again to the topic of method and, in particular, how she wants to frame her *point d'appui* in order to make use of ethnomethodological methods of textual analysis. The final pivot occurs in the first chapter of *The Conceptual Practices of Power* [Smith 1990] with her consolidation of the notion of 'bifurcated consciousness' as the distinctive property of her sociological attitude. Her adoption of Marx's theory of alienation had allowed her to see the situation she had encountered in her early career was generalisable beyond Sociology. Everywhere the gender division of labour and women's roles in it acted to create two forms of subjectivity and so reproduce worlds of oppressive social relations in which women were relegated to the management of the local detail of daily life whilst men trafficked in the abstract, the general and the global. Feeding that insight back into her own experience, she could now see herself as a woman and as a trained sociologist living in two worlds and hence possessing both forms of subjectivity. This placed her and those like her in a distinctive position.

Women who move between these two worlds have access to an experience that displays for us the structure of the bifurcated consciousness. For those of us who are sociologists, it undermines our commitment to a Sociology aimed at an externalised body of knowledge based on an organization of experience that excludes ours. [Smith 1990], p. 21]

It also gives her sociology its purpose.

The aim of an alternative Sociology would be to explore and unfold the relations beyond our direct experience that shape and determine it. An alternative Sociology would be a means to anyone of understanding how the world comes about for us and how it is organised so that it happens to us as it does in our experience. [ibid., p. 27]

The purpose now is not just critique of Sociology as a mode of knowing the world but all governing modes of consciousness. The mission is to take the new way of understanding the world out into domains where women experience governing relations and thereby foster the possibility of others adopting the ambiguous, ambivalent standpoint on their local domain which women sociologists had adopted on Sociology.

The complaint Smith makes about Sociology is that it interprets over women's experience using categories of some constructed sociological theory. That it is an androcentric sociological theory just makes things worse. What she fails to notice (or is unwilling to point out) is that although her 'world view' may have a different tone, topic and vocabulary, the form used

corresponds point for point with the general structure she sees in the forms of sociology she is seeking to displace. Marx's theory of alienation is an abstracted interpretation over everyday experience. True it is an alternative account of how things come about but it is based in a particular sociological construction of reality. As a mode of sociologising, it follows precisely the same process she says Sociology in general does. If ideology is a reconstructed rationalisation of social phenomena, using that process to define the frame of reference for her method of translating the experience of the two forms of consciousness she has identified cannot help but replicate Sociology's central tendency. If the form is the same, how different will the content be?

#### Section 4. Ideology in Action

We now want to turn to the bridge between Smith's initial formulation of her new Sociology for women and its eventual realisation as Institutional Ethnography. This transition is more or less carried out in the essays contained in *The Conceptual Practices of Power* [1990]. These essays achieve three things. They extend the compass of ideology as a mechanism of power and control. They enlarge the range of ideologies to be included to allow theories and principles deployed in social policy formation and administration to be addressed. Finally, the whole frame of reference is applied to the institution of Psychiatry. At the same time, there is a relaxation in the stricture to adopt the standpoint of women. Women as a category still figure highly, often as characters in the descriptions given, but the *marginality* of particular women in the social order is what matters now. As marginalised members of a social order, women provide leading examples of how taking a point of view radically different to the dominant one can open up the possibility of engineering change in the prevailing orthodoxies constituting and shaping people's experience.

As ever, the place to start is with Smith's view of Sociology, though this time she has her eyes on a different kind of practise to the observational field research method we discussed earlier. Now it is the use of official statistics and other data.

Sociological discourse, like other social scientific discourses that provide a systematically developed consciousness of society, characteristically relies on the data generated by the state in the course of its practices of governing, [Smith 1990 p. 86]

This finding is not hers. It is a gloss on the findings of authors such as Aaron Cicourel [1968], Don Zimmerman [1969], Zimmerman and Pollner [1971] and Atkinson [1978], all of whom rely on earlier work by Garfinkel [1967]. What these studies show is how the practices of data collection and organisation carried out by state and other public agencies are taken over by, but rendered

invisible in, the formulation of sociological accounts based on them. Since for Smith, *ex hypothesi* these agencies must be ideological, there can be no doubt this makes Sociology an accomplice to ideology too. This finding adds further weight to her earlier allegation about the nature of the male gaze in sociological theory and investigation. The resources which much of 'data-driven' Sociology relies on are collection mechanisms used by state and public agencies for the accumulation of 'data' on such things as youth crime, forms of addiction, suicide, mental illness, unemployment, housing need and much, much more. These mechanisms are document production and processing systems and the social organisation of these texts as the administrative documents they are constitutes the data available in them. What is important here is that Smith sees a general ideological mechanism at work, the textual construction of facticity. She offers a schematic for how this works.

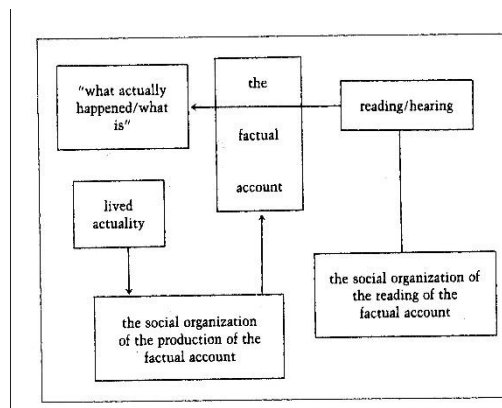


Figure 1 The social organisation of textual reality (Smith 1990 p.72)

Here we see two converging social processes: the construction of the 'facts' and the reading/hearing of the 'facts'. The ethnomethodologists she cites were pointing to the recipient-designed character of the administrative protocols for the production of documentary accounts. They are written for others who share the same sets of background knowledge and interests and hence understand how such documents are structured. In other words, they know how to read them. What the documents produce are descriptions of "the facts for all practical administrative purposes" to paraphrase Garfinkel. The sociological investigator does not read for administrative interests and purposes but sociological ones, but those interests and purposes are being served by administrative mechanisms. Hence the disjunction. It is a disjunction which, for Smith, goes even deeper. It concerns the difference between ideology and science which we discussed in regard to Marx's analysis in *The German Ideology*. The counts, measures, and other numbers and



summaries which are the stock in trade of the sociologist speak not to 'the facts of things as they are' but to administrative procedures for constituting those facts for administrative ends.<sup>11</sup>

These procedures operate to produce an administrative double bind which she represents in a reworking of her earlier schematic to fit the administrative context.

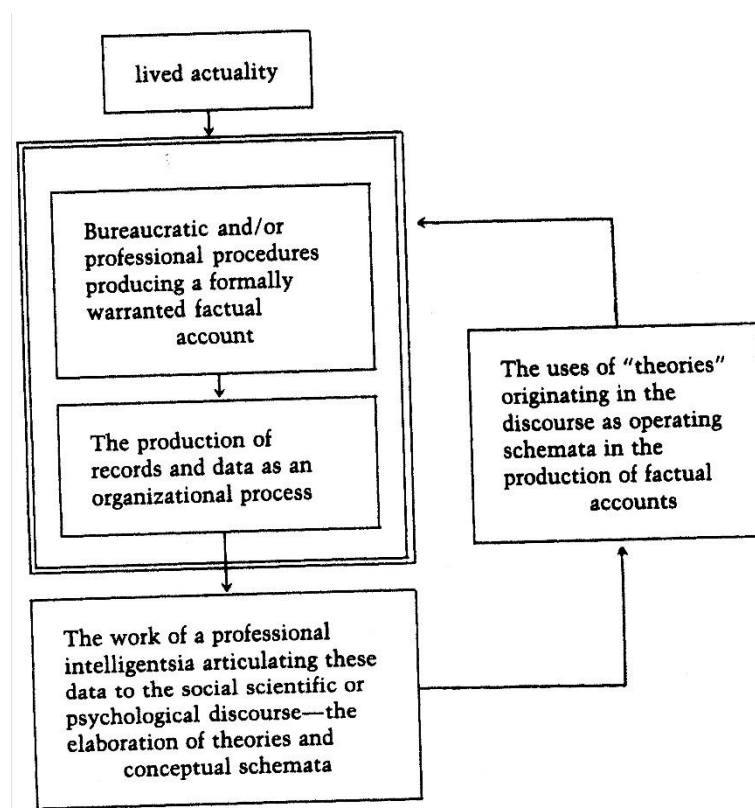


Figure 2 *The Circuit of Ideology* p. 148

Just as Marx argued that the British Political Economists relied on and deployed concepts and forms of reasoning used in the very practices of Capitalism in their 'external' and 'scientific' account of the economics of the Capitalist mode of production, so Smith is arguing sociologists and social policy analysts are doing the same thing in their analyses of social phenomena, issues and problems. The double bind comes when those analyses are taken into administrative and policy arenas themselves either as 'input' to strategy and policy formation or used as part of the career preparation and developmental practice of administrators. Courses labelled 'Applied Sociology'

<sup>11</sup> For Smith the issue is *not* Sociology's corner-cutting re-purposing of the products of administrative practices *per se* but the way such practices 'leach out' the experience of those whose 'data' is being 'captured' by the practices. What giving birth means as a lived experience for a mother and her immediate family, say, is processed into an impersonal count stripped of any direct connection to actualities it represents.

or 'Social Problems' for example, end up playing sociologically endorsed administrative constructions of reality back to students.

It is at this point in the transition that several crucial moves are made. The first is a change in vocabulary; one which has important implications. Smith now talks of 'reading/hearing' as a mode of experience rather than merely the acquisition of knowledge. It is sense-making as purposeful action; i.e., the interpretation and ordering of factuality. Second, her reliance on Ethnomethodology forces a decision over the science v. ideology disjuncture. She abandons it.

We do not suppose there is one objective account of "what actually happened" against which other accounts will be measured. [Smith 1990, p. 157]

She does not, however, abandon dualism. Instead of appearance and hidden reality, we have "primary" and "ideological" narratives. The primary narrative is based on the lived experience of those whose actions are the subject of administrative and sociological accounts. The ideological narratives are derived administrative and sociological interpretations. The major resources for accessing primary narratives are the 'oral histories' provided by subjects and participants. In these narratives lived experience is re-constituted and re-presented by those whose experience it is. This includes administrators' reflections on their experience of performing the task of building secondary narratives. The key difference between a primary and a secondary narrative is the place of experience. In the former, experience shapes the narrative. In a secondary narrative, the interpretive conceptual frame shapes the experience.<sup>12</sup>

The most extended analysis by Smith of the primary and secondary narratives within a single text is of Quentin Bell's account of Virginia Woolf's suicide. As usual, Smith is brusquely upfront about her approach.

I selected this text because I could already see in it the dim forms of a phenomenon that my analytical work will explicate. These became visible to me because I read Bell's biography as a feminist who has written critically of psychiatry. [ibid, p. 178]

Her situation as a feminist and critic allows her to give a reading to Bell's text which does not rely solely on the materials Bell presented. To use a phrase which has become far too prevalent in Sociology, it enabled her to get outside the text and reflect back on it, thereby "problematizing"

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<sup>12</sup> The same distinction but taken in a different way was central to Sonia Harding's [2009] reworking of Standpoint Theory. As such, it replaced the emphasis on "strong objectivity" prominent in her earlier discussion [Harding 1992].

Bell's biographical presentation. This is the third of the crucial moves to which we referred and follows through on the loosening of the ties of the new sociology to the woman's standpoint. It is not Smith as a woman which allows her to prise apart the narratives but Smith as a particular 'situated reader'. Anyone, male or female, who was a feminist and hence convinced of the subjugation of women and had a critical view of Psychiatry could have done the same. As we will see, in Institutional Ethnography the externalised role occupied by Smith as situated reader is mirrored in the devices which investigators deploy to step outside the local context of the organisation they are studying.

Working through the detail of Bell's text, Smith shows how the primary narrative of Woolf's experience of the early years of World War II available in the letters, diaries and other writings she left together with the documented recollections of friends and family is re-shaped into a secondary one in which events appear inevitably to lead to her suicide. The sequence of her emotions as she moves from terror at the thought of a Nazi invasion and its personal implications (the Woolfs were prominent socialists. Leonard was Jewish.), through being distraught at the destruction of their homes during the Blitz, to the euphoria of realising an invasion was unlikely, and finally to the agony of depression after she was diagnosed as mentally ill, are all extracted from the immediacy of the biographical flow in which they occurred and threaded together as yet more exemplification of what is presented as a constant theme; Virginia's unstable emotions and manic depression. Using the primary narrative as hooks, Bell is found to have constructed a schematic psychiatric diagnosis in which terms like 'manic depression' and 'emotional instability' translate Virginia's behaviour into 'objective' medical descriptions. Moreover, these descriptions are naturally associated with other descriptors such as 'potentially suicidal'. This schematic diagnosis together with the possible outcomes it alludes to are resources for projecting the culmination of events in line with Bell's account. Having convinced Virginia to be medically examined, Leonard told her she had been diagnosed as mentally ill. The next day Virginia committed suicide. Rather than the shock it was experienced as by the family, Bell's account leads us to find it all too expectable. The reader and Bell together produce the facts of Virginia Woolf's death.

## Section 5. Conclusion

For Smith, the ideological nature of such collaborative readings is a critical element in all forms of institutionalisation, not simply literature and not only Psychiatry. It forms one of the major ways power and control work to create a culture of acceptance, conformity, and subjugation in modern

society. The purpose of her sociology is to sensitise investigators to this outcome so that, just as she does with Bell's narrative, they themselves can confront this culture and reveal its transformation of primary narratives into ideological ones together with the courses of action which are set in motion thereby. Revealing this process and enabling those subjected to it to address and overthrow it, is the task for Institutional Ethnography.

The analyses of the ideological function of Psychiatry discussed in the previous section were developments of a continuing line of interest in Smith's work. It focused on the role of texts in academic, administrative and other forms of reasoning. Such interest became one of the central motifs of Institutional Ethnography as a sociology of experience construed from the viewpoint, position, *point d'appui* of those living that experience. This possibility was realised by Smith and her students towards the latter part of her career. Realising the possibility entailed moving from critiques, rationales and foundations to application and practice. At the end of this long discussion we now know what she does and does not want this new sociology to be. The question is: Is that the way it has turned out?

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