Power: Interpersonal, Organizational, and Global Dimensions
Wednesday, 30 November 2005

TOPIC: Professional authority and cultural hegemony continued: Deconstruction and postmodern/ post/structuralism.

II. Second example, reading.
Gary Peller – "Reason and the Mob" shows how **hegemony** works
- tries to lay bare for the reader a lot of things usually hidden and esoteric
- tries to show that the difference between reason/sentiment, truth/myth, mind/body, knowledge/superstition are deeply embedded in our culture and are taken for granted, a culture that is itself a product of the Enlightenment period - beginning in 16th century continuing for several centuries - about creating the 'light' of reason/ truth/knowledge. (Note: labels for historic periods, processes are creations after the fact by observers/ scholars.)
- the text begins with a stream of consciousness depiction of the moment when we come to believe the dominant Enlightenment teaching of the aforementioned dichotomies – Peller argues that the distinction between each of these is a **political process, with social hierarchies attached to different sides of each pair**

Peller offers a **deconstructivist argument,** in which he takes apart that which has been layered, that which we take for granted and don't notice. Further, he tries to show how oppositions are buried in texts, oppositions that constitute uncritical values, assumptions. We cannot separate knowledge and truth from the action of constructing it – **knowledge/truth is made, all attempts to re*present* a truth work through a medium/method**.

All representation has to have a medium and a method – Peller discusses the one embedded in **language and writing**. All of our methods of representation have **biases** – they are not without politics, there is interest and social action.

His argument is that there is "**no objective reference point separate from culture and politics"** (p. 29). Science, economics, philosophy – all are 'texts' (malleable human creations), to be read and interpreted. What has been presented as knowledge/truth/objectivism/reason are actually the effects of a particular form of social power, the victory of a particular way of *representing* the world *that presents itself beyond interpretation* but as (unvarnished, unconstructed, transcendent) truth itself.

> If what separates the rational from the irrational is the claim that the rational approach is able to purify itself of ideology and mere social conventionality, the deconstructionist wants to challenge reason on its own ground and demonstrate that what gets called reason and knowledge is simply a particular way of organizing perception, communication, a way of organizing and categorizing experience that is social and contingent but whose socially constructed nature and contingency have been suppressed. When the particular way that knowledge and legitimacy have been organized is rejected, the traditionalists see an abyss of meaning, and therefore charge that the deconstructive stance is "nihilist." (Peller 1985: 30)

Peller wants to show the **politics behind our systems of knowledge**.

On p. 30, Peller presents a paragraph by a professor of religion at UVA who is writing about deconstruction and why he believes it has created a crisis in humanistic studies. Here, Peller unpacks another author's critique.

deconstruction = unpack embedded assumptions, binaries

Deconstruction has become a style/ism: **post-modernism** (a style) vs. **post-modernity** (a social formation, a mode of society, particular organization)

In "Reason and the Mob: The Politics of Representation," Gary Peller dissects Nathan Scott's argument. He presents a paragraph by Scott that he proceeds to deconstruct. Here is Scott's paragraph:

> Today of course, the enterprising anti-humanism of the post-Structuralist movement is in full tide, and it presents us with the great example in contemporary intellectual life of the new *trahison des clercs*. This phrase forms the title of a once famous book by the French critic Julien Benda, which was first published in 1927, and in English the phrase is best rendered as the "betrayal of the intellectuals" .... [Benda] was moved to advance the rather extravagant charge that the typical intellectuals of the modern period identifying themselves with class rancor and nationalist sentient have abdicated their true calling in the interests of political passion: instead of quelling the mob and beckoning it toward true community, they have joined the mob, concurring in its lust for quick results and adopting its devotion to the pragmatic and the expedient.... And it is his fiercely reproachful term that appears now to be the appropriate epithet for the intellectual insurgency that is currently sowing a profound disorder in the...humanities. (Peller quoting Scott 1985: 30)

Gary Peller is arguing that all knowledge embeds claims of power, illustrating by deconstructing Scott's text which claims to be knowledge (about other scholar's knowledge practices).
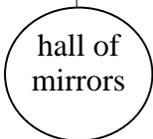
Scott's text about crisis in knowledge

hall of mirrors

Scott is right about the "profound disorder sown in the humanities" in the 1980s, and this persists today, (local e.g. plan to change the GIRs, the SHASS requirements in particular. Most professors were brought up during the "intellectual insurgency" – many remain opposed to notion of 'core' courses, deny a core that is not a political/cultural construction.)

Peller says Scott's paragraph embeds **binary oppositions**:
- **mob:** *disorder + desire*, passion, rancor, sentiment, lustful, immediate, pragmatic, insurgency, expedient
- **intellectual:** *order + reason*, dispassion, neutrality, discipline, ideal, long-term

What are the unarticulated assumptions? Peller says what is hiding is that the mob characteristics are those of *animals*, while those of intellectuals are *human* characteristics. Reason is equated with the delaying of desire, with discipline and control.

The meaning of a text is slippery!

Reason is supposed to **"quell" the mob** – this is associated with **power and coercion**, even though Scott doesn't say acknowledge that. Scott wants it to be neutral, yet he wants to "quell" the mob. How do you do that? By discipline, control, force, coercion? Reason regulates power,

reason can trump power, regulates passion – it's a **technology of control**.

If Scott doesn't like the coercion the mob, he likes the coercion of reason. Intellectuals are like the mob, possessing coercive power – if reason can quell the mob, there's power here!

But just as soon as we begin to feel that we have gotten a hold of this determinate meaning of Scott's argument...another time or place.

The **deferment of desire** and gratification equates to **disciplining ourselves –** we become productive citizens, whereas the image of the *un*productive is the mob, reflecting the idea "they just do what they want!" Recall Nike, "Just do it!"

Scott invokes the idea of the mob as passionate, all for sentimental nationalism, wanting the people to rise up. Intellectuals are for order, dispassion, true community, discipline, nothing so partial as nation, but ephemeral, diffuse as community.

Law is the system for **containing violence**, all of force/violence shall be allocated through this process. If you act outside the law and you are violent, you are brought in. Only the agents of the law are allowed to do violence. *Passion/violence get contained on social level through the law.*

Reason can quell desire only by becoming a desire:

> But once we see reason as the regulator of passion, as a technology, we also realize that reason is constructed out of social power. The notion of reason regulating desire to "appropriate" times and places exposes the ways that reason embodies social choices about what is appropriate or inappropriate. With respect to sexuality for example, regulation might occur according to the Victorian notions of propriety or according to "our" modern permissiveness. (Peller 1985: 92)

Law is not a system of logic but the result of political contest. Peller emphasizes that it's about a **set of power struggles**, not logic. This is true of texts too – there are **embedded struggles** going on.

Reason is desire that has become **institutionalized as good sense**. Like the mob, reason promises a **coerced social order** based on a particular social desire. In contrast to the sharp, qualitative distinction we began with, here **reason and passion** appear simply as different points on a **spectrum**: *neither* concept refers to anything positive or substantial. Thus we have **indeterminacy** – there is no determinate distinction between reason and passion!

Peller describes what has been defined as a mob:

Our earlier model of the **irrational, threatening mob** was a lynch mob. But when we look again at the ways that social history has been constructed, we find a multitude of contexts where there has been an attempt to identity the mob as lustful, emotional. In each one of these characterizations of the mob, the dominant group projects **animalistic characteristics** onto the mob. But this can be turned around – the lynch mob quelled the primitive aspect they believed inherent in the black male. Peller asks us, how do we **distinguish bad mobs from good mobs**?

The text offers no stable definitive reading – we can offer contradictory readings of the same

text. Peller is arguing that there is an "**active participation of the interpreter in constructing the meaning**: the interpretation was not neutral and passive, but rather depended on the sense that the reader brought to the text, on the **conceptual language** that the reader already possessed." (Peller 1985: 93).

"...this critical interpretation showed how the rational, determinate sense of the argument actually depended on an initial, non-rational association between reason and particular cultural and political visions of social life." (Peller 1985: 94)

Scott's argument is that power should be located in professional, reasonable, disciplined actors. Peller says Scott's argument is subverted because Scott claims to speak without politics, as the dispassionate intellectual with a place for **reason outside of politics and power or ideology** (which is regarded as bad/false knowledge). Peller turns this back – opening a space for creative interpretation and alternative politics.

> The significance of the deconstructive practice is not simply to reveal the constructed nature of what gets taken as fact, knowledge and truth as opposed to opinion, superstition and myth. It is an important practice because in our social world, these **claims to truth** have played powerful political roles in the construction of our social relations – in the ways that those in power have **justified their power** and those out of power have been made to feel that their powerlessness is their own fault and inadequacy. (Peller 1985: 95)

Peller shows the powerless that they have been duped, that they shouldn't believe the story they have been told (about labor, factories, regulation with which he began the article) – it's **hegemony**!

This kind of deconstructionist scholarship and the 'cultural war' it produced in the humanities and social sciences in the 1980s/90s continues to some extent today, but no longer so much as a contest between alternative epistemologies, as a battle, but as the substance of what students are taught, that is, that there is no determinant meaning, that all is politics, that identity is key to experience, interpretation, truth.

Peller is demonstrating to us that all of our reason is not reason – there is always something that is non-rational. We have made a **hierarchy** in Western society of **privileging reason over desire** and we don't recognize this privileging of reason (e.g. legitimate/expert authority as the dominant form of power). It's not based on reason – just a choice that is non-rational (historic development).

This is part of a larger movement in scholarship – post-structuralism/post-modernism. It is called *post* because it comes after Weber, Marx, etc. who posited a structure to society/social relations, a foundation. Also a commitment to and belief in possibilities of universal scientific knowledge. The contemporary post-modern, post structuralist scholars claim that social structure those modernist scholars observed and described in their work (whether production or nature of social action or rationalization), is *not* knowledge, but simply a particular point of view. The dream of a social science is, in this post-structural enactment, a niche in the market place of ideas, opinions, preferences, just like Nikes vs. Adidas, Starbucks vs. Peets, latte grande vs. espresso.

One can perhaps best illustrate and explain the meaning of these difficult terms by looking at the history of architecture, as both production and commentary. A visual exegesis of styles of production and representation.

Classical Period (earliest architecture)**:**

To the right: Palace of Minos – (1500 BC) the structure of the building is supported by columns, very **functional**. This eventually became a style – architects used it structurally at first and then developed it stylistically (note the stylistic resurgence of columns in the Temple of Amun at Karnak, pictured directly after).

Image of Palace of Minos removed due to copyright reasons.
http://intranet.arc.miami.edu/rjohn/ARC%20267/Greek1_2002.htm

Image of Temple of Amun at Karnak removed due to copyright reasons.
http://www.culturefocus.com/egypt.htm

Image of the Parthenon on hill removed due to copyright reasons.
http://www.answers.com/topic/parthenon

Image of The Citadel at Sargon II removed due to copyright reasons. Image from Professor Silbey's slideshow presentation.

To the left: The Citadel at Sargon II (Khorsabad) – columns have become square but are still functional, an arch holding up the entrance doorway

To the right, above: Parthenon on hill (500 BC), Greece. (Image courtesy of Wikipedia at the following url).

To the right, below: La Maison Carrée (1st century BC) in Paris and a close-up of its Corinthian column, the most elaborate and highly formed of the Greek columns

Image of Corinthian column of La Masion removed due to copyright reasons.
http://www.livius.org/a/france/nimes/nemausus2.html

Below: The three types of Greek columns

Image of The three types of Greek columns removed due to copyright reasons.
http://www.threes.com/cms/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=20&Itemid=42

Images of La Maison Carrée
removed due to copyright reasons.
http://www.utexas.edu/courses/classicalarch/images3/maisoncarree.jpg

Medieval Period:

To the left and right: Notre Dame – functional ribs hold up the building necessarily *progress*, just *change*. There more and more complicated structures, buttresses.

Image of Notre Dame, exterior removed due to copyright reasons.
http://homepages.ius.edu/Special/Galena/France2001/france.htm

(1200) not are e.g.

Image of Notre Dame, interior removed due to copyright reasons.
http://www.francedirect.net/article3 .html

Why were Gothic churches taller and narrower? Because they were while symbolizing the cross to inspire in the common people humility, awe before God; to feel puny. This purpose was built into these cathedrals. At the time, people were living in huts but the **church was built as such to instantiate its power**, i.e. "you are nothing before God" (A deconstructivist/ or critical scholars would emphasize the embedded power in the structure.)

Image of Cathedral in Milan removed due to copyright reasons.
http://www.gruppoartema.it/ milan,%20art%20and%20faith.htm

To the left:
Cathedral in Milan

To the right:
Duomo of Orvieto

Image of Duomo of Orvieto removed due to copyright reasons.
http://www.orvieto.ch/

Enlightenment Period:

Images of Palaces at Versailles removed due to copyright reasons. Image from Professor Silbey's slide show Presentation.

Palace at Versailles (late 1600s) – height of the Enlightenment with Weberian rationality and emergent capitalism. Now it is **the *state* that builds its palaces** (instead of the church).   There are embedded meanings and symbols that went into the engineering of the palace as well! Logic, systematic, rational

calculation basis of state power.

Neoclassicism and Romanticism:

Image of The Pantheon removed due to copyright reasons. Image from Professor Silbey's slideshow presentation.

To the left: The Pantheon in Paris (late 1700s) with the same continuous forms of structure and function from those first Egyptian and Greek temples

To the right:
Brandenburg Gate in Berlin

Image of Brandenburg Gate removed due to copyright reasons.
http://www.cs.vu.nl/~ast/ photos/germany/001.html

But now came a radical change…

Art Nouveau:

To the right: Stairway and window in Brussels and Vienna.

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The art nouveau style offered a **new iconography** of architecture, capturing **modernity and modern capitalism beyond the church, beyond the state palaces.**

The beginnings of Modernism with the **first skyscrapers:**

Image of the Marshall Fields removed due to coypright reasons. Image from Professor Silbey's slideshow presentation.

To the left: Marshall Fields in Chicago

To the right: Wainwright in St. Louis

Architects were able to build these because they had learned about steel. It's not the stones holding up the buildings anymore, it's the **internal structure** of steel.

Image of Wainwright removed due to copyright reasons. Image from Professor Silbey's slideshow presentation.

Modernism:

Image of Frank Lloyd Wright house removed due to copyright reasons. Image from Professor Silbey's slideshow presentation.

To the left: Frank Lloyd Wright design, Robie House, Chicago Illinois, in the Prairie House style.

The goal was to strip away design to get to the **essential elements.** Modernism is like science and it means to be like science in architecture/art; its aim is to find the elementary particles in architecture.

To the right:
The high-point of modernism was
Philip Johnson
(1930s) and his
Glass House (1949)

Image of Glass House, exterior removed due to copyright reasons.
http://www.nationaltrust.org/magazine/archives/arc_news_2005/012605.htm

Image of Glass House, interior removed due to copyright reasons.
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For the modernist architect like Johnson, the glass house is equivalent to atomic theory/quantum mechanics. The focus was the essential elements of the house (shelter from the elements, unadorned), goal was to find the essence! Modernism was this search for the **truth of the thing**.

Image of Lever House removed due to copyright reasons.
http://www.nyu.edu/classes/finearts/nyc/park/lever.html

To the left: The Lever House on Park Avenue

To the right: High-rise apartment houses on Lake Shore Drive in Chicago (by van der Rohe)

Image of Lake Shore Drive apartments removed due to copyright reasons.
http://www.artviews.org/chen.htm

With modernism there's no decoration anymore! The steel – the essence – is now on the *outside*. As such, it was letting the inside be the outside. There was purity of form. With modernism, **form and function are the same**.

Then came yet another change: the post modern.

Image of Philip Johnson skyscrapers removed due to copyright reasons. Image from Professor Silbey's slideshow presentation.

To the left:

1st photo – The Citicorp skyscraper and **redefines convention**. A building doesn't have to be rectangular!

2nd photo – Johnson designed the AT&T Headquarters. It resembles an 18th century case clock, what we call grandfather clock. In a way, it's meant to be a joke. But there is more…

Everything has writ on it multiple meanings. (For example, why was the World Trade Center bombed? It was one of the most prominent capitalist symbols.)

To the right: The TWA terminal at JFK airport designed by Ronald Saari.

Image of Philip Johnson skyscrapers removed due to copyright reasons. Image from Professor Silbey's slideshow presentation.

Johnson is saying that this is 1980 but this could be an 18th century clock – **time and space have collapsed, the distances of space and time have eroded, the past is present.**

Post-Modernism:

What modernists produced, post-modernists reappropriated. Science has allowed us to span time and space, collapse it. "I am a high-rise office building in Manhattan, but I'm a

Chippendale clock, a Greek temple simultaneously."

To the right: Buildings are built with the tops of English houses, skyscrapers topped with the design of French chateaus, Greek temples.

Images of Post Modern Buildings removed due to copyright reasons. Image from Professor Silbey's slideshow presentation.

Images of Post Modern Buildings removed due to copyright reasons. Image from Professor Silbey's slideshow presentation.

To the left: Columns have made a stylistic resurgence, e.g. the building at the corner of Boylston/Clarendon in Boston.

Post-modernism aims to place the *messageS* on the surface.

Deconstructive readings of architecture/architects are to buildings as Peller is to Scott.

To the right:
There is a discontinuity/disjuncture with post-modern designs, e.g. adobe-like houses with old-fashioned elements and even with industrial elements, all in the same structure.

Images of Post Modern Buildings removed due to copyright reasons. Image from Professor Silbey's slideshow presentation.

The Diagram and the Becoming Unmotivated by the Sign by Architect and Architectural critic Peter Eisenmann talks about how the text [the sign] is **unstable**, how the **reader brings a meaning to the text.**

Image of Stata Centre removed due to copyright reasons. Image from Professor Silbey's slideshow presentation.

To the left: Post-modern buildings such as the Stata Center (top), Simmons Hall (bottom). Why should a building be square? It's **only** convention. Technology permits us to do something else.

Below: La Grande Arche de la Défense (on the left), an office building that mirrors the Arc du Triumph (on the right) at the other end of the Champs Elysées. The center has been

Image of La Grande Arche de la Defense. Removed due to copyright considerations.
http://www.aviewoncities.com/ gallery/showpicture.htm?key= kvefr0344&dir=paris&tpe=city

Image of Arc du Trimph removed due to copyright reasons.
http://www.blsart.com/gates.html

Image of Simmons Hall removed due to copyright reasons.
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evacuated from the building (just as with Simmons Hall and Stata Center).

Post-modern message: the thing is not what it seems to be – the sign is unstable

Images of Post Modern Buildings removed due to copyright reasons. Image from Professor Silbey's slideshow presentation.

The question becomes – is this a style? Post-modernism certainly is a style in architecture. Are we in a different place now? What is this social formation that they might be expressing? What is the mode of production? It **collapses time and space, decontextualizes, takes us out of our environment.**

Post-modernism is playful, is not meant to be serious. It also intends to make the reader unstable. The text itself is not stable! Peller's argument about knowledge is the same argument that the architects are making. What does this have to do with **power**?

Moral of the story: Live in your world critically. [Re]interpret the world and what is considered "normal." Notice the play of power in creating a taken for granted world.

Change has become a value in itself, the rejection of tradition/convention. Science is about imagination/risk-taking – it's also a statement of where power lies now. For example, Frank Ghery's designs convey the message of democracy. Look at the interior materials of the building, look at the spaces where people work.

With epistemology, there's always a message even when people claim there is no message, thinking it is essential truth. The argument about power is that there's **always a subtext – power is never entirely on the surface.**

Photo Sources

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Arc de Triomphe:
http://www.blsart.com/gates.html