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Dorothy E. Smith, born in 1926 (and about whom biographical information is scarce in the public sphere), has become during the last 15 years or so, from her lifelong academic position in Canada, one of the most often cited feminist sociological theorists. She has long worked in the Department of Sociology and Equity Studies in Education at the University of Toronto. Her first theoretically important work appeared in 1987 when she was 61, *The Everyday World as Problematic: A Feminist Sociology*, and, interestingly enough, bears more theoretical kinship with the Frankfurt School critique of modern life than with the more usual feminist sources of ideas. The difficulty that some readers have had with this book stems as much from this theoretical inspiration (recalling the thorny prose of Adorno and Horkheimer) as from the complexity of her ideas themselves. Her later works include *The Conceptual Practices of Power: A Feminist Sociology of Knowledge* (1990) and *Text, Facts and Femininity: Exploring the Relations of Ruling* (1990). Her latest work, *Writing the Social: Theory and Investigations* (1999), illustrates a slight shift into textual analysis rather than examination of social life more directly.

Smith is commonly grouped with several other feminists (Sandra Harding, Nancy Hartsock, sometimes Patricia Hill Collins) as what have come to be called “standpoint theorists.” The argument they put forth, from different perspectives to be sure, is that traditional epistemological arguments, going back at least to Descartes, imply a sovereign “ego” that somehow exists above the fray of social power relations and the claims of social class and gender distinctions. They point out that this is an illusion, that one person’s “common sense” or normal way of perceiving the world—say, that of a privileged white academic philosopher—is very likely at odds with the viewpoint of that great majority of humans who do not partake of that particular worldview or experience the world through that existential lens. This argument, of course, has infuriated traditional epistemologists, and has even come under attack by some women social theorists, too (e.g., Susan Hekman), yet it has certainly changed the nature of argument about what is “true” and what is not in discussions of the social sphere. Smith wrote that she is concerned with “practices of thinking and writing . . . that convert what people experience directly in their everyday/everynight world into forms of knowledge in which people as subjects disappear and in which their perspectives on their own experiences are transposed and subdued by the magisterial forms of objectifying discourse” (*Conceptual Practices*, p. 4). The selections below give evidence of Smith’s insistence that women’s perceptions are different from men’s.

SICA, ALAN (Ed.), 2005. SOCIAL THOUGHT: FROM
THE ENLIGHTENMENT TO THE PRESENT.
 BOSTON: PEARSON.

THE EVERYDAY WORLD AS PROBLEMATIC, 1987

The critique of established sociological frameworks from the perspective of women's location leaves us with the problem of the structure of the sociological relation as it was described above. It does not, as such, serve to design for us a method of proceeding that offers an alternative to the concepts, relevances, and methods of a discourse that, in its very use, organizes and shapes our work into its own forms and intentions regardless of what we mean to do. We must see this problem, I believe, in how our work returns to, is aimed at, and is repossessed by knowers who are participants in the discourse or in other domains of the ruling apparatus, rather than knowers who are members of the society anywhere in it. Suppose then we began to devise a sociological enterprise not directed primarily toward the discourse and its knower, but capable of providing a sociology for women. We might attempt to develop for women analyses, descriptions, and understandings of their situation, of their everyday world, and of its determinations in the larger socio-economic organization to which it is articulated. Then indeed we would be thinking about how to do a sociology relocating the sociological subject. Such a sociological enterprise presents an alternative conception of a science to that which depends upon a knower theoretically located in an Archimedean, that is, a purely formal space. It is a sociology whose knowers are members of the society and have positions in it outside that abstracted ruling apparatus—as an understanding of the bifurcating consciousness shows us everyone does—and who know the society from within their experience of it as an everyday world. Their experience locates for us the beginning of an inquiry. This is to constitute the everyday world as problematic, where the everyday world is taken to be various and differentiated matrices of experience—the place from within which the consciousness of the knower begins, the location of her null point.

Such a sociology would aim to make available to anyone a knowledge of the social organization and a determination of his or her directly experienced, everyday world. Its analyses would become part of our ordinary interpretations of experience and hence part of experience, just as our experience of the sun's sinking below the horizon has been transformed by our knowledge that the world turns and that our location in the world turns away from the sun—even though from where we are it seems to sink. The sociological knower, then, is not the sociologist as such. The work of the sociologist is to develop a sociology capable of explicating for members of the society the social organization of their experienced world, including in that experience the ways in which it passes beyond what is immediately and directly known, including also, therefore, the structure of a bifurcated consciousness.

Rather than explaining behavior, we begin from where people are in the world, explaining the social relations of the society of which we are part, explaining an organization that is not fully present in any one individual's everyday experience. Since the procedures, methods, and aims of present sociology give primacy to the concepts, relevances, and topics of the discourse, we cannot begin from within that frame. This would be to sustain the hegemony of the discourse over the actualities of the everyday experience of the world. It is precisely that relation that constitutes the break or fault disclosed by the women's movement.

An alternative is to turn this method on its head and to make the everyday world the locus of a sociological problematic. The everyday world is that world we experience directly. It is the world in which we are located physically and socially. Our experience arises in it as conditions, occasions, objects, possibilities, relevances, presences, and so on, organized in and by the practices and methods through which we supply and discover organization. It is necessarily local—because that is how we must be—and necessarily historical. Locating the sociological problematic in the everyday world does not mean confining the inquiry to the everyday world. Indeed, as we shall see, it is essential that the everyday world be seen as organized by social relations not observable within it. Thus, an inquiry confining itself to the everyday

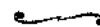
world of direct experience is not adequate to explicate its social organization.

One way in which the sociological discourse, has maintained its hegemony over experience has been by insisting that we must begin with a conceptual apparatus or a theory drawn from the discipline, if only because to embark on inquiry without such a conceptual framework exposes us to the wild incoherence of "history" or of the actualities of people's worlds. I am not suggesting, of course, that sociology can be done without knowing how to do it and that we can approach our work with a naive consciousness. Indeed, I believe sociology to be rather more difficult than it has been made to seem. But the implication that the actualities of the everyday world are unformed and unorganized and that the sociologist cannot enter them without a conceptual framework to select, assemble, and order them is one that we can now understand in this special relation of a sociology constituted as part of a ruling apparatus vis-a-vis which the local and particular, the actualities of the world that is lived, are necessarily untamed, disordered, and incoherent. But we can begin from a different assumption when as premises we begin with the activities of actual individuals whose activity produces the social relations that they live. Social phenomena are products of action and interpretation by actual women and men. Rational order itself, order itself, as ethnomethodologists have pointed out, is an accomplishment of members of society. The order, coherence, rationality, and sense of social situations and relations are an active work done prior to the presence and observational work of the sociologist. Further, her work itself is inseparable from such a social relation and in its preliminary phases must be constrained by the enterprise of explicating an organization of relations that is there prior to her inquiry and is to be discovered in its course. . . .

The everyday world is not fully understandable within in its own scope. It is organized by social relations not fully apparent in it nor contained in it. This is the social organization of the sociological problematic in the actual work and practices of real individuals. Earlier forms of society do not have this double character. In simpler social forms, the character and organization of the everyday world are fully visible. The ethnographic

techniques of the anthropologist have depended upon this visibility. . . .

The way in which events occur, their odd property or senselessness if our knowledge of them is confined to the everyday world, is not so very extraordinary. It is not out of this world. On the contrary, such events are part of a continual process transforming the environment of our lives, transforming our lives; notice next time, in this context, that hole in the ground so soon to become a high-rise apartment, a gymnasium. Events occurring in this way are happening around us all the time. If we care to, we take them for granted. They are normal features of our world. If we cease to take them for granted, if we strip away everything that we imagine we know of how they come about (and ordinarily that is very little), if we examine them as they happen within the everyday world, they become fundamentally mysterious. If we allow them to stand there as Vonnegut does, they do not make sense within the domain of the everyday world. This is what I mean by a problematic implicit in the social organization of the everyday world.



WRITING THE SOCIAL: CRITIQUE, THEORY, AND INVESTIGATIONS, 1999

The Ruling Relations

A Sociology from Women's Standpoint. The sociology for women I propose begins in the actualities of women's lived experience. Its aim is to discover the social as it comes into view from an experiencing of life that is not already defined within the ruling relations. It does not speak only of women. Rather, it seeks a sociology, a method of inquiry, that extends and expands what we can discover from the local settings of our everyday/evernight living.

The standpoint of women establishes a place to open inquiry that begins with a consciousness

located in a particular local site. Hence it problematizes the move into transcendence, the ego that slots into subject positions defined and determined discursively, bureaucratically, administratively, managerially, etc. The theories, concepts, and methods of the discourses in which we participate as intellectuals constitute the objectified standpoints through which we are related to the world as if we stood outside it. The experience of those whose particularizing work in relation to children, spouse, and household forms their consciousness is obliterated. I used to find, using standard sociological approaches, that we'd begin with the honest intention of doing research that was oriented towards people's interests and from their viewpoint, but that in doing the work inexorably, it seemed, our good and competent knowledge of how to do valid research led us into producing accounts which objectified them from a standpoint in the ruling relations. To reconstruct sociology as inquiry into the social from a standpoint in people's everyday experience means reconstructing its methods of thinking.

A sociology from women's standpoint in the local actualities of our everyday lives must be put together quite differently from the traditional objectifying sociologies. Committed to exploring the society from within people's experience of it, rather than objectifying them or explaining their behaviour, it would investigate how that society organizes and shapes the everyday world of experience. Its project is to explicate the actual social relations in which people's lives are embedded and to make these visible to them/ourselves.

This means a sociology beginning in a world of activity, the doings of actual people, and finding the social as the object of sociology's inquiry into how their activities are concerted and coordinated. It explores the social from within the same everyday/everynight world as we experience in its living. The subject/knower of inquiry is not a transcendent subject but situated in the actualities of her own living, in relations with others as they are. Whatever exists socially is produced/accomplished by people 'at work,' that is, active, thinking, intending, feeling, in the actual local settings of their living and in relationships that are fundamentally among particular others—even though the categories of ruling produce particular others as expressions of its order.

Thus the knowing subject of this sociology is located in a lived world in which both theory and practice go on, in which theory is itself a practice, in time, and in which the divide between the two can itself be brought under examination. The entry into text-mediated discourse and the relations of text mediated discourse are themselves actual as activities and the ordering of activities. They happen—always in the time they occurred in and during the time they perdured. Concepts, beliefs, ideas, knowledge, and so on (what Marxists know as consciousness) are included in this ontology of the social (see chapter 1) as practices that are integral to the connecting and coordinating of people's activities.

Thus, discourse, and the ruling relations in general, are, ontologically, fields of socially organized activity. People enter and participate in them, reading/watching/operating/writing/drawing texts; they are at work, and their work is regulated textually; whatever form of agency is accessible to them is accessible textually as courses of action in a text-mediated mode. Society is emphatically, from this viewpoint, *not* an ensemble of meaning. The social *happens*; included in the happening/activities are concepts, ideologies, theories, ideas, and so forth. Their deceitful stasis is an effect of how the printed text enables us to return to them again, find them again, as if nothing had changed. But each such iteration is the actual local practice of a particular individual, reading just where she is, for just the what-comes-next that her reading initiates.

In projecting inquiry into social relations coordinating multiple local sites of activity, the investigation of the text-mediation of social relations is foundational. The reason is this: the standpoint of women locates us in bodily sites, local, actual, particular; it problematizes, therefore, the coordination of people's activities as social relations organized outside local historical settings, connecting people in modes that do not depend on particularized relationships between people. The ruling relations are of this kind, coordinating the activities of people in the local sites of their bodily being into relations operating independently of person, place, and time. In putting in question the making of the extra-local and extra-personal ruling relations, women's standpoint does not proclaim them invalid, but rather recognizes the extra-locality of

relations as itself a social organization of actual people's practices. In these relations, the particularity of individuals, their actual situation and site of work, the ephemerality of the lived moment, and so on, disappear; their disappearance is itself an accomplishment of what particular people do, in their actual situations and sites of work, as they live, are active, and experience the evanescence of lived time.

From this standpoint, the ruling relations themselves, including the social organization of knowledge, are problematized for investigation. They too exist in the ongoing concerting of actual people's activities in the particular local sites of our bodily being. How can consciousness operate as if it had no body and were not located in a particular local site, in place and time? What are the specific forms of social relations that provide for the subject's modes of being and action in and through texts? How is it that language and discourse appear as if they were autonomous systems, forgetting the irremediably local historicity of speakers, readers, and writers? How can we take up post-structuralism's discovery of how discourse speaks through us and beyond our intended meaning, while at the same time avoiding its solipsistic confinement to discourse? . . .

Returning to Gender and Women's Standpoint. In delineating the ruling relations, I have focused on the texts as integral to an ontology of capital in contemporary society. Traditional social science ontologies, conforming to disciplinary divisions, write a sharp separation between the social and economic. The version of the social that I have put forward above follows Rubin (1973) in breaking with this practice. The ruling relations as a text-mediated organization of relations extend into the economic sphere and can be investigated as accomplished by and organizing the activities of actual people. It is important, however, to keep in mind that the ruling relations are a more general dimension of the organization of society, extending into its systems of discourse, science, mass media, large-scale organization of all kinds, professional organization, and so on.

The historical trajectory of the ruling relations, from their fragmentary beginnings in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to their increasing comprehensiveness and complexity in

our own time, has been profoundly gendered. In the middle classes, in particular, gender relations were radically reorganized. The dual consciousness that I experienced, one located in the objectified ruling relations and the other in the particularizing work of childcare and home, is located in this trajectory. The experiencing of these two kinds of consciousness cuts across historical time. Experience is always now and hence embedded in an historical trajectory, coming into being dialogically in the discourse of its time. Historically the division between these two worlds of work and consciousness has been gender-organized. The emerging capitalism of seventeenth-century Europe reorganized women's and men's relation to the economy; indeed, it brought into being the economy as a discrete and specialized system of relations mediated by money. Among the middle classes, the domestic setting became sharply differentiated from the relations of capital and of the public sphere (Davidoff and Hall 1987, Habermas 1989), so that forms of consciousness became differentiated by gender. While women remained at work in the particularities of domesticity, men, particularly of the middle classes, were active in businesses that connected them to the impersonal, extra-local dynamic of the market, and in the clubs and coffee-houses of Europe and the saloons and places of public assembly in North America (Ryan 1993), and, as readers, in the journals, newspapers and books that constituted the discourse of the public sphere. 'The new world of political economy necessitated a new sphere of domestic economy' (Davidoff and Hall 1987: 74).

This, of course, was only a beginning. The gender divide that emerged among the middle classes widened and deepened as the powers, technologies, and scope of the extra-local organization of the relations of the economy, the state, and public discourse increased, while the domestic sphere became increasingly ancillary. This is the historical trajectory of which my experience of these two consciousnesses was a moment.

These foundations to the ruling relations grounded in capitalist social relations, created a radical division between the spheres of action and of consciousness of men and women. The peculiar out-of-body modes of consciousness of the nascent ruling relations required a specialization of subject and agency. The formation of the

dle-class male subject in education and ideology aimed at creating that extraordinary form of modern consciousness that is capable of agency in modes that displace or subdue a local bodily existence. Rousseau's *Emile* designs an educational regime aimed at creating the autonomous male subject of civil society. His complement is a woman equally highly trained, but not for autonomy. It's her role to sop up the bodily needs that are residual to the masculine project; she is never to appear for herself or as herself in the zone of civil society that is his preserve.

During the nineteenth century, in particular, the barriers excluding women from participating as subjects and agents in civil society were policed by parents, educators, and the spokesmen of the public sphere. Middle-class women might be actively deprived of education, particularly of education that would give them the skills needed to participate in the discourse of reason—opportunities to learn philosophy, mathematics, and science. Books were taken away; women who read were told they would go mad if they didn't desist; women of knowledge were ridiculed publicly. Later in the century, as education for women became institutionalized, it was as a gender-differentiating system. In Germany, for example, the rise of an administrative class of civil servants was complemented by an educational system for women emphasizing preparation for the domestic sphere in which the rearing of men was central (Kittler 1990). As universal public educational systems were established in the late nineteenth century in both Europe and North America, they were also created as gender-differentiating sys-

tems, developing for the sons of the middle class the moral and intellectual capacities they would need in order to act as agents in the field I'm calling the ruling relations, and among women the skills and ideologies of subordination, passivity, and modes of agency restricted to family, home, and neighbourhood.

The women's movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s was a radical break with this formation of the social consciousness. It created, at least momentarily, a breach between the objectified text-based modes of consciousness of the ruling relations, and what had been formed and institutionalized for middle-class women as their place. Here, then, was a contradictory site of consciousness for women, bridging the intellectual functions of the ruling relations and the local particularizations of women's domestic sphere—woman as mother, as housewife, as neighbour, as sexual partner or object, at work, at play, in sex. It may be indeed that the increasing scope of the ruling relations progressively supersedes differentiations of persons on the basis of bodily being that locates them in particular local sites and in particularized relations, and that the women's movement in North America and Europe seized upon the possibilities, ironies, and frustrations emerging in this situation to seek a remaking of the relations of public discourse. Certainly the standpoint of women systematizes an historical bridging across the historical gap. This sociology traverses it from this, women's side, beginning in the local particularities of people's lives. It seeks to redesign knowledge of the social, recognizing that it is in and of the same world as the one we live in.