

Ethnobotany, Institutional Ethnography, and the Knowledge of Ruling Relations

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Important debates have arisen about commodification of knowledge as intellectual property and collective knowledge as public knowledge. New international trade rules have resulted in the exploitation and patent of centuries-old traditional Indigenous knowledges for the benefit of corporate profit (Shrybman, 1999). In view of exploitive trade rules, it is ever more evident that ethnographic research must be conducted responsibly and that it be accountable for the kinds of knowledge it produces or reproduces. Dorothy Smith's (2006) institutional ethnography (IE) and Nancy Turner's ethnobotany (EB) are starting points for my inquiry into the social organization of knowledge. Institutional ethnography and ethnobotany considered in parallel lead to some interesting possibilities for how we can understand the human condition as both natural and historical, and also for how we might inquire more responsibly into social "reality" by incorporating lessons that traditional ecological knowledge has to teach.

Knowledge is socially organized; its characteristic textual forms bear and replicate social relations. Hence, knowledge must be differently written and differently designed if it is to bear other social relations than those of ruling. (Smith, 1999, p. 94)

Important debates have arisen about commodification of knowledge as intellectual property and collective knowledge as public knowledge. Knowledge commodification is an important ethical concern for ethnographic researchers who access local knowledges and perspectives of both individual actors and groups. If ethnographic research is to be conducted responsibly, it is crucial that ethnographic research and ethnographic researchers be accountable for the kinds of knowledge they produce or reproduce. The General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs (GATT) recently added the Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) to its comprehensive list of rules for international trade, taking recognition and protection of intellectual property rights out of the province of domestic policy. The implementation of this global patent protection regime has had particularly serious consequences for traditional and Indigenous knowledges, which for the most part have not been recognized (at least by multinational corporations) as intellectual property. Indeed the new trade rules have resulted in the exploitation and patent of centuries-old traditional Indigenous knowledges for the benefit of corporate profit.

Major differences between the values and beliefs of traditional Indigenous peoples and those of the dominant society have also resulted in

tensions between traditional and modern approaches to, and beliefs about, the environment and its resources. Turner and Atleo (1998) report from their work on the Scientific Panel for Sustainable Forest Practices in Clayoquot Sound that whereas "traditional aboriginal values imbue ... resources with sacred life and personhood ... the values of the dominant society ... imbue these same resources with impersonal economic value" (p. 3). Although feminist and environmental groups have sought some sort of harmony between humans and nature, the underlying philosophies of their views are unable to account adequately for how Indigenous peoples manage relationships between people and nature. The difference is largely in how people view their world.

Although it is important to recognize differences between the views and values of Indigenous peoples and those of dominant society, it is equally important to recognize Indigenous peoples as diverse and varied in their cultural traditions and social experiences. However, there are some basic commonalities in the beliefs and values of traditional First Nations peoples, particularly among the First peoples of Northwestern North America (Turner & Atleo, 1998).¹ Nuu-chah-nulth subsistence knowledge, for example, does not refer to a minimal form of life, but rather to being enmeshed in a pattern of relationships with nature, with the environment, and with ecosystems. This view is similarly held by other traditional peoples, as well as by social theorists who argue that people do not exist as isolated individuals in a social world, but as "complex social personae, enacting cultural scripts not entirely of [their] own making" (Pfohl, in Burawoy et al., 2004, p. 115).

What people know and how they come to know it is a critical aspect of my article. I use two questions asked by Bill Carroll (2004) in his exploration of critical research strategies to guide my exploration of knowledge and the production of it: (a) How can we understand the human condition as both natural and historical? and (b) What are the implications of this understanding for how we inquire into social reality? I use the work of Dorothy Smith and Nancy Turner as a starting point for my inquiry. These two scholars approach their subjects from different though remarkably parallel traditions. Dorothy Smith (2005), coming from a sociological tradition, developed institutional ethnography as a method of inquiry, initially from the standpoint of women and later as a "sociology for people." Nancy Turner (1998, 2003), in her career as an ethnobotanist, has worked with numerous First Nations communities in British Columbia and elsewhere in the world to revive traditional plant knowledges, which help First Peoples rebuild the foundations of traditional life and knowledge in their communities. Turner and Smith have contributed immensely to understanding and valuing knowledge from the standpoint of ordinary or marginalized people, especially women. My aim is to examine the social organization of knowledge by putting Dorothy Smith's institutional eth-

nography (IE) into dialogue with Nancy Turner's ethnobotany (EB). IE and EB considered in parallel lead to some interesting possibilities for how we can understand the human condition as both natural and historical and thus for how we might inquire more responsibly into social reality by incorporating lessons that traditional ecological knowledge has to teach.

Knowledge, Social Reality, and Ruling Relations

Sociology is a broad interdisciplinary field that draws us into a long history of the social interconnectedness of relations (Feagin, 2004). Critical social research is concerned with "the relationship between the theoretical practice of the analyst and the practical practices which are analyzed" (Chouliarki & Fairclough, 2004, p. 270). This type of research is often done collaboratively with collective actors. Rather than imposing theories on their participants, critical researchers begin from the assumption that their participants know and can reflect on their own lives. In critical social research, knowledge and reality are constructed as the product of historical processes in which stories are told and retold and moral traditions established. *Social reality* is constituted through the intertwining of a group's meanings and assumptions with its practices (Pearce & Littlejohn, 1997). Theoretically, this mode of research appears well suited to the study of Indigenous ways of knowing. However, in contemporary Western society, group practices are largely organized by discourse, not by stories rooted in historical processes and the intertwining of a group's meanings and assumptions. Indeed social science discourse emerged as part of a disciplinary apparatus through which contemporary societies have come to be governed (Foucault, 1980). In contemporary Western society, discursive production and reproduction of knowledge frame what people know and how they come to know it in the distinctive forms of power that particular forms of discourse represent. Dorothy Smith (1999) calls the disciplinary apparatus that governs through discourse *the relations of ruling*.

Smith (1999) defines ruling relations as the "internally coordinated complex of administrative, managerial, professional, and discursive organization that regulate, organize, govern, and otherwise control our societies" (p. 49). Ruling relations are pervasively interconnected. They are present in manuals, guides, forms, and standards that have the capacity to mediate textually and organize the behavior of people in abstraction from local settings. Ruling relations operate by reaching in from the outside to objectify embodied social relations, making them accountable in and to the textually produced reality of professional and institutional discourse. Textual mediation conceals social relations and thus the power relations involved in processes of fitting actualities into the confines of discursively constructed realities. How things actually work or do not work is invisible in the objectified relations produced by textual representations of reality. Ruling relations accomplish and reproduce objectified relations, both in-

tentionally and unintentionally, through the extra-local coordination of multiple sites of activity made possible by professional and institutional discourse originating in texts.

The discipline of sociology has been especially effective at using socially organized forms of knowledge to turn lived social life into concepts in sociological discourse. One of Smith's (1999) projects has been to make visible the nature of the conceptual apparatus that sociology uses to separate phenomena from the contexts of the social processes constituting them. Smith's principal critique of mainstream sociology is that sociologists learn to fit their experienced worlds into the conceptual frameworks and relevances of sociological discourse, thereby excluding the standpoint of people living and acting in the everyday world. In the process, experience as it happens gets lost in its translation to sociological texts. The effect can be particularly damaging where traditional ecological knowledges are concerned. Nabhan and Trimble (1994) warn of how insidiously book learning convinces people that "predigested images hold more truth and power" than their own experience of the world.

We are losing ways of speaking about plants and animals as rapidly as we are losing endangered species. Oral traditions about plants, animals, treacherous waters, and complex topography depend upon specific vocabularies that encode particularities which may not be recognized in lexicons of commonly spoken widespread languages. (p. 106)

Smith argues that if a researcher is to avoid fitting information into a framework taken for granted as known, he or she must "know methods of inquiry beginning from a standpoint outside the relations of ruling and be able to call on a sociological knowledge put together the same way" (Laslett & Thorne, 1992, p. 96). Researchers must explore how they *know* organizational processes and how phenomena corresponding to social acts come to be accepted as such without question (Smith, 1987). Smith (Laslett & Thorne, 1992) proposes an insider's sociology in which there are no outsiders. Smith's (1999) sociology is "a systematically developed consciousness of society from within" (p. 49), which renounces the idea that a researcher can operate as an uninterested or disconnected observer. Inquiry for Smith does not begin from a discourse in the social relations of sociology, but rather from the actualities of people's everyday embodied living.

The everyday world is organized by social relations not always observable in it, although nonetheless real. Smith (1987) proposes a sociology that explores how such relations are accomplished as local practice. Smith's (2005) ontology of the social is a theory of how the social is real. The key to Smith's method of inquiry is not that the knowledge producer is anybody in particular (the sociological subject can be anyone including the researcher), but in how the knowledge producer's standpoint provides a point of entry for knowing. Because her method of inquiry is open to alternate points of entry for knowing, it is also open to alternative ways of

knowing. This has particularly important implications where Indigenous standpoints are concerned, especially where they have been ignored, dismissed, or devalued by the discrediting of oral tradition as a point of entry for knowing (Tobias, 2000; Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples [RCAP], 1996).

Institutional Ethnography:

Standpoints and the Social Organization of Knowledge

Standpoint has been defined as “a collective interpretation of a particular subject position [as opposed to] an immediate perspective automatically acquired by an individual who inhabits that position” (Weeks, 1998, p. 136). Both postmodern and feminist critiques of public discourse have called into question the notion of a single standpoint from which a final overriding version of the world can be written (Smith, 1999; Cuomo, 1998). Smith’s (1987) notion of standpoint calls into question the organization of sociological discourse in general, the location of discourse in the world, and the social relations organizing the positions of its subjects that its objectifying practices conceal. Smith’s standpoint of women does not imply a common viewpoint among women, but rather commonality is in “the organization of social relations that [have] accomplished [women’s] exclusion” (p. 78) from textually mediated ruling relations.

A difference between *knowing* arises from a subject’s direct experience and factual *knowing* constituted by externalized and objectified relations (Smith, 1990). Real social life does not happen as sociological concepts, but rather as subjectivity located in its body (Smith, 1987). According to Smith (1990), “objectified forms of knowledge [are] integral to the organization of ruling. [They] claim authority as socially accomplished effects or products, independent of their making” (p. 61). Textual realities are the product of objectified forms of knowledge or objectifying discourses that abstract realities into textual forms. “Readers of institutional texts ... encounter categories of persons and events that are not specified in terms of individuals. The reader can’t go from a given institutional text to find what [exactly in bodily form] it refers to” (Smith, 2005, p. 112). When textual realities are employed, what people know directly as individuals becomes separated from what they come to know as trained readers of texts (Smith, 1990). Texts displace the presence of agents and subjects other than as institutional categories. I explain below the particularly damaging effects this can have where Indigenous ways of knowing are concerned.

Smith’s reconstruction of sociology is “a form of knowledge constructed from the standpoint of individual experience, which explores how the particular social relations that constitute the particular world in which that experience arises have come into being and how they now operate” (Laslett & Thorne, 1992, p. 85). It makes visible not only the power relations at work in the setting under study, but also those involved in the research process itself. Smith (2005) calls her procedure for

reconstructing sociology *institutional ethnography*. "As a method of inquiry, institutional ethnography is designed to create an alternative to the objectified subject of knowledge of established social scientific discourse" (p. 10). Smith's IE initially began from the standpoint of women, not as a sociology of women, but rather a sociology for women. IE has since evolved into "a sociology for people" (Smith, 1999) and thus, I argue, into a sociology for Indigenous peoples.

Ethnobotany: A Sociology for People?

Ecofeminists have argued that just as women's issues are often undervalued or ignored, so are ecological issues and women's relationships to them and that concepts, symbols, and language of domination have been used to distort perception and subordinate both (Cuomo, 1998; Sturgeon, 1997).² The story of traditional life in First Nations communities in Canada has likewise been historically undervalued or ignored. Where First Nations culture has been given attention, the tendency has been to present the culture inappropriately as primitive or deviant (from the Euro-Canadian ideal) or to idealize First Nations people as having a special connection to nature (Turner, 2003; Berkes, 1999; Stevenson, 1999; Sturgeon; RCAP, 1996). Ethnobotany is not concerned with a special relationship between women and plants or Indigenous peoples and plants, but rather with the actual practices in and from which knowledge of plants is acquired and how plants organize social life. Ethnobotany is the study of reciprocal interactions between people and the plants in their local environments. It is the study of people's classification, management, and use of plants. It involves recording knowledge of the plant world and applying the results of studies to biodiversity conservation and community development (Martin, 1995).

Ethnobotany emerged around the same time as sociology as part of a trend in the social sciences to focus on separate aspects of human society and culture (Martin, 2001). The term *ethnobotany* was first used by John W. Harshberger, a professor of biology, in 1896. It replaced terms such as *aboriginal botany* and *botanical ethnography*. Noted ethnobotanist Richard Ford remarks that "after half a century of scientific attention and an even longer history of casual observations, the study of other people's interaction with nature finally had a name and recognition as a distinct line of academic endeavor" (quoted in Martin, p. 614). Martin explains that ethnobotany³ is really just a new term for old practices because "people have [long] been exploring the usefulness of diverse plants, animals, and ecosystems" (p. 614).

It has been suggested that traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) systems "embody the cultural diversity of the human species" (Hunn, 1999, p. 28) and that if they are lost, the future evolutionary options of humanity become limited, leaving us with the scientific truths of a global capitalist consumer society as our only option. Interest in TEK as a viable alternative

for developing human-environment relationships and resource stewardship did not emerge until the 1980s, when a combination of academic interest, new developments in environmental policy, and public frustration with the status quo brought it to the fore (Berkes, 1999). Rising uncertainty about the extent to which the earth has reached a state of environmental crisis and doubt about the availability of adequate solutions to solve a crisis have directed new attention toward understanding how people in subsistence economies use resources.

TEK has been defined as a "cumulative body of knowledge, practice and belief, evolving by adaptive processes and handed down through generations by cultural transmission, about the relationship of living beings (including humans) with one another and with their environment" (Berkes, 1999, p. 6). TEK is cumulative, dynamic, and integrated with local environments. Nancy Turner (2003) claims that one of the seldom-articulated outcomes of modern Western expansion "is the disruption of entire traditional ecological knowledge systems, including many elements of the intricate knowledge and wisdom acquired, enacted and passed down by women through generations" (p. 146). Loss of women's knowledges has been profound, and is not only evident in Indigenous societies. Witch hunts and the preference for "scientific" methods also contributed to the devaluing and discrediting of European folk knowledges, especially those held by women. Traditional women's knowledges were reproduced woman to woman. These knowledges, although neither universal nor all-encompassing, were culturally valuable, especially when combined with other teachings and strategies. Such knowledges were part of a complex, culturally mediated, and applied knowledge system that linked humans to the environment.

Traditional plant knowledge is grounded in personal experience, past observations, and conversations with Elders from previous generations (Turner, 1998). It is connected to food, lifestyles, and health. Turner and Peacock (1996) define traditional plant knowledge as "the body of knowledge held by members of any community long resident in a particular location, which guides peoples' choices and action in plant collection, processing, and use" (p. 1). It includes names and terminology, methods of collecting and managing plant resources, narratives about plants, and belief systems that define people's perspectives about plants. Traditional plant knowledge is important not only as part of a cultural heritage, but also because it holds a wealth of technical, cultural, and linguistic diversity that has ensured human survival throughout the ages. Turner (1998) suggests that plant technology is "not only useful but absolutely essential to survival" (p. 15). Indeed, because carbon-based life forms begin with and rely on photosynthesis, plants can be said to hold the essence of life itself.

In traditional communities, women's knowledge of plants often earned them high status and respect (Turner, 2003). Turner's commentary on the

reflections of a Ditidaht woman reveals some interesting sociological aspects of women's knowledge of plants, namely, the social, gendered, and intergenerational aspects of plant use and management. Turner notes that when observing and comparing the use of plant materials in various regions of British Columbia, it is important to understand cultural as well as vegetational differences. Turner (1998) does not impose people on landscapes, or landscapes on people, but rather looks at the relationship between them. She identifies how people adapted plant materials at hand to suit their requirements, noting that neither vegetation nor Aboriginal cultures honor Canadian borders. She notes that although the origin of most skills or techniques can be traced in particular cultures, it is often difficult to determine which cultural group originated particular skills or techniques. Nonetheless, although each Aboriginal group is unique, "many of them even when completely unrelated linguistically, share common cultural traits, and can be categorized at a general level into major cultural units" (p. 25).

How categorizing is done and who does it has been a contentious issue in the study of Aboriginal peoples, especially where the textual reproduction of Indigenous knowledges has been concerned (Tuhiwai-Smith, 1999). Aboriginal tradition defines and imagines *community* in multiple ways: physical (including ecological), political, social, psychological, historical, linguistic, economic, cultural, and spiritual. Aboriginal identities are similarly framed geographically, politically, and genealogically. Rather than viewing communities as sets of interrelated individuals, Aboriginal philosophies tend to view them as complex interrelated wholes (Atleo, 2004). Tuhiwai-Smith explains that "'community' conveys a much more intimate, human and self-defined space [than] 'field' [which] assumes a space 'out there' where people may or may not be present" (p. 124). One reason that cultural groups are hesitant to work collaboratively with outside researchers is that the final product often serves the interests of ruling more than those of local people. Many groups would rather produce their own projects than fit their models and methods of interpretation into objectified institutional requirements or existing norms (Tuhiwai-Smith; Williamson, Brecher, Glasser, & Schensul, 1999). The point of entry for knowing is a salient feature of both IE and EB, both of which produce a final product that implicates and draws them into textually mediated relations of ruling. The critical aspect of these two methods of inquiry is that they open a space where people, rather than concepts, are present and actively producing knowledge. Smith (1999) and Turner are committed to "finding out how things are put together, and hence to producing knowledge that represents the social as it happens," (Smith, p. 97) rather than as discursively defined (or confined) concepts. As such, they have the potential more adequately to capture the essence of *community* as understood in Aboriginal tradition.

Relationships, Power, and the Textual (Re)Production of Social Reality

A respectful relationship between researcher and informant is a key aspect of any type of ethnographic research (Greenwood & Levin, 2004; Smith, 1999; Tuhiwai-Smith, 1999; Turner & Peacock, 1996; Martin, 1995). Turner and Peacock's approach is not only respectful to the people whose knowledge they study, but also to the plants included in that knowledge. They believe that the plants themselves are an important part of the study and that they are owed respect and consideration in any kind of writing about them. For example, in their methods manual Turner and Peacock write, "Always consider the health and well-being of the people you are working with and of the plants that are important to them" (p. 8). In this example, Turner explicitly connects plant life to an understanding of the human condition. As such, we can see that they are an important part of the people's social reality. In her introduction to *Plant Technology of First Peoples in British Columbia*, Turner (1998) writes, "please understand that almost any large-scale harvesting of plant materials ... is potentially detrimental to the plants and may affect their survival" (p. 16). In her view, it is survival that constructs and organizes the relationship between plants and people.

Survival implies power, and power is a politically, socially, culturally, and ecologically constructed complex. It is conditional on a shifting diversity of knowledge, practice, and belief in which ecology plays an intentional role. Of key interest in sociology is the role played by power in the social relationships that shape the interests, sentiments, and intentions of actors (Carroll, 2004; Cuomo, 1998; Foucault, 1980; Smith, 1990; Sturgeon, 1997). Environmental sociologists argue that it is important to understand that it is not only human beings, but ecological systems that define and defend the use and distribution of power in a society (Cable & Cable, 1995). Riley Dunlap (2002) argues that environmentalists limit understanding by ignoring social factors, and sociologists limit understanding by ignoring environmental factors. Much like Dorothy Smith, Dunlap suggests that these two disciplines need to be more inclusive and less driven by the hidden assumptions of conventional theorizing.

Plants are explicitly acknowledged as having an important role in the organization of traditional social life in ethnobotany. They are seldom acknowledged in the discourse of sociology as even playing a role in the organization of social life, except in abstractions such as *nature* or *the environment*. Smith (1990) asserts that "objectified knowledge subdues, discounts, and disqualifies our various interests, perspectives, angles, and experience, and what we might have to say speaking from them" (p. 80). The benefit of the oral traditions with which Nancy Turner works is that they are sensitive to the possibility of things being known in other ways, particularly how they were known in the past or by other people with responsibility for other knowing.⁴ When people speak *about* plants, they

also speak *for* plants, as well as for the landscapes where plants are situated. In her write-up Turner (1998) accounts for a diversity of landscape, climate, and vegetation. She analyzes and organizes categories of plants according to what her respondents tell her about them: their nutrients, harvesting, processing, variety of uses, ownership/stewardship, and regional/cultural variation due to geographical/ecological influences and cultural/traditional preference. Turner's account reproduces in textual form both traditional plant knowledges and references to botanical names and categories. Turner accounts for the spatial and temporal location of all plants and examines the appropriateness of people's activities in consideration of all of these aspects (Kuhnlein & Turner, 1991). This type of information shapes the contours of *the social* in ethnobotany. The language used to describe them is implicated in relations of power.

Language and classification are imbued with and embedded in relations of power. Language and classification are important features of how researchers present the findings of their research, especially where findings are believed to represent factual accounts of knowledge. Smith (1990) explains that in factual accounts of knowledge, "we enter a relation of knowing in which it does not matter who we are or where we stand, for we constitute [the factual] as known the same" (p. 68). Where knowers are interchangeable, ruling relations generate ideology, not knowledge. Both IE and EB can be said to generate knowledge rather than ideology in that they acknowledge that the information shared by any individual, group, or community will be specific to that entity's particular role in the context of the community, culture, or environment (Turner, 2003; Smith, 1999). Moreover, IE and EB propose a final product of research that is "ordinarily accessible and usable" (p. 95) and which "will be of interest to many different segments of the population" (Turner, 1998, p. 16), especially to the particular people whose knowledge is being studied and recorded.

Although knowers for the most part are not interchangeable in IE, EB, or TEK, in one dimension of knowing, interchangeability is potentially inevitable, and this is in the reading of a textually produced research product. Smith (1990) explains that "knowing how to read, and reading a given factual text is to enter a coordinated set of relations subordinating individual consciousness to its objectification" (p. 70). In textual form, *what actually happened* or *what is the case* must be "established as capable of standing independently of the perceptions and perspectives of particular individuals" (p. 73). Textual representations of the social initiate sequences of referring that people can reliably complete in local settings. For reliable completion, the language in which a textual representation is presented must be comprehensible to the reader. An interesting feature of EB is the production of pressed specimens as a form of research product. These are specimens of plants collected for botanical identification or to

back up information associated with the plant. Turner and Peacock (1996) explain that in constructing a pressed specimen, you can “press many plants together, with sheets of cardboard between each sheet of newspaper” (p. 9). I visualize here a means of both literally and figuratively fitting a plant into a text. The literal fit is the plant itself, separated from the actualities of its life and living, pressed into a specimen frame (or framework in my imagining of it). The figurative fit is the information card accompanying a pressed specimen, which includes family, genus, species, common English name, cultural name, details about location, accompanying plants in the area of collection, use, and toxicity. The card tries to account for many ways of knowing including scientific, Western, and cultural in its naming of the plants. It also includes location, situation, and physical attributes and uses in its naming of the relations between people and plants. The framed specimen may be left in the community for local use, in which case the information card may bear other information than that on another card taken to an academic facility for use by researchers. In any case, the end product is the textualization of a plant sample. The pressed specimen is established as capable of standing independently of the perceptions and perspectives of particular individuals. Wherever this specimen and its information card are seen, it will stand in for the actualities of the plant itself and will be recognized as named on a card read by a reader.

This type of ethnobotanical work is important. Proper identification of plants is necessary for many reasons ranging from knowledge about toxicity, to medicinal properties, to food sources, to ensuring survival of traditional ways of life. My point is not to discredit this type of knowing, but to understand how *knowing* changes when it becomes textually reproduced. No matter how inclusive it tries to be, a textual reproduction can capture only finite segments of social life because social life happens as processes that cannot be well understood when abstracted from the actualities of their happening. *Meaning* is an active process. A pressed specimen does not *mean* as a plant does in its actual lived reality where voice and power can be evident to the discerning eye attuned to alternative ways of viewing social reality. The following passage by James E. Miller (1995) helps us capture the possibility of an alternative view. Consider the following scene (Figure 1).

The earth talks ... without words.
 Morning proclaims ... in quietude.
 Evening preaches ... without a syllable.
 Trees declare, fields announce,
 flowers make eloquent statements ...
 and not a sound is heard, not a sentence is formed. (p. 56)

The distinctive forms of coordination that constitute and are constituted by ruling relations are in language. There is a difference in what people



Figure 1. Photo by:

http://brianabbott.net/travels/american_tour/pictures/CRESENT3.jpg

speak from shared experiential worlds and from those organized by texts. The spoken conversation

Take[s] shape as each speaker responds to the other, whereas in text-reader conversations, one side is fixed, predetermined, and remains unchanged by the history of its readings (though, of course, a reader's reading of it may change). One "party" to the conversation is fixed and nonresponsive to the other; the other party takes on the text, in a sense becoming its voice ... and at the same time, responds to, interprets, and acts from it. (Smith, 2005, p. 105)

Smith (2005) believes that it is in concerting activity that we find meaning, language, and representation. This has important implications for thinking about what certain practices in ethnobotany—the pressing of plants into textual frames—accomplish (i.e., concerting orally transmitted traditional knowledges of particular knowers with textually mediated forms of knowledge in which knowers are interchangeable). Gary Martin (1995) suggests that "one of the goals of [ethnobotany] is to ensure that local natural history becomes a living, written tradition in communities where it has been transmitted orally for many years" (Introduction). Smith's notion of the active text is helpful for considering what a viable living, written tradition might look like. "A first step is recognizing the text as a material presence in local situations in which it is activated by a reader" (pp. 168-169). Active texts can be explored for how they make sense of the phenomena they describe and how they actively affect particular versions of the events they describe. Depending on who is doing the reading, a living written tradition can be an ever-changing text in

which people's relations to plants are part of the story, not simply in terms of naming, but also as descriptions of who knows, who names, when naming is done, and for what purposes.⁵ In this way the preservation of traditional knowledge in Indigenous communities that EB accomplishes becomes an important undertaking. Considering IE's critique of textual realities can take EB a step further.

In IE the ethnographer passes from the primary dialogue (informants' knowledge, field notes, observational settings) into the secondary dialogue (texts produced from the primary dialogue: reading and indexing transcripts or field notes) by making visible the connections to various forms of coordination that tie the work that people do to that done by others. IE produces a sort of map of the encounter, which rather than aiming "to be an objective account that stands independently of the actuality of which it speaks, refers back to an actuality that those who are active in it also know" (Smith, 2005, p. 160). Maps are not "read independently of the terrain they map ... The ethnography is to be interpreted as an explication and expansion of the work knowledges⁶ people have of the social terrain [the ethnography] claims to describe" (p. 161). IE does not try to explain what people (or plants) are, but rather focuses on concerting their doings: how what they do hooks up with what others are doing. As such it can capture through people's knowledges of plant life and the terrains on which it grows the nature of the power relations involved in changes that happen to particular landscapes, whether these be ecological, cultural, or social. IE "makes possible the expansion of ethnography beyond the local to explore and explicate the institutional order" (pp. 168-169), an order to a large extent organized in the interests of ruling relations. Ruling relations do not see the world from a standpoint in the field of everyday life, but rather from a location abstracted from such realities. The aim of IE is to enlarge the scope of what can be seen. Considering IE and EB in parallel allows us to see the value and potential of textual reproductions of social reality and the implications of a living, written tradition for explicating the broader terrain where social life is both nurtured and constrained.

Conclusion

Both Smith and Turner are concerned with inquiries into social reality that capture natural and historical aspects of the human condition. Their methods of inquiry focus on social connections and sequences of activity. IE and EB are both methods of *seeing* the social as it happens. Smith's point of entry is the textual organization of everyday life by extra-local ruling relations. IE attempts to explicate how these relations reach in from beyond the local and organize everyday life. Turner's point of entry is the relationship between landscapes and people. Ethnobotany attempts to explicate the social organization of landscapes by people and of people by landscapes.

In both IE and EB, knowledge is connected to the productive work of people. Smith's work suggests the presence of people in the textual practices of ruling relations. Turner's work implies the productive work of *creation*⁷ itself, reaching into and organizing the survival of landscapes and the beings associated with them. To the extent that IE's notion of *actual lived reality* excludes photosynthetic life-support systems, TEK teaches that Smith's work is limited, although it potentially points to how contemporary Western knowers have forgotten how to know and observe certain aspects of social reality. IE points to how certain values and ways of knowing are present or absent in how institutions textually organize social life, but has not yet provided a gaze wide enough to capture the broadest landscapes of social reality where institutions and social life are themselves located.⁸ Although IE clearly explicates how knowledge is organized by textual representations of reality and how people are present and active in that reality, IE to date has itself produced texts that overlook how mass loss of knowledge about the landscapes we live in ensures our reliance on textually organized social life.⁹

How we visualize the social can either limit or enhance how we establish and make social connections, and hence how we visualize social support systems. Although the pressed specimen attempts to speak for the landscape from which it originates, and the oral knowledge collected tries to account for the role that landscapes play in the lived reality of plants and people, the full range of social reality is lost in its translation into ethnobotany and the texts produced by it. Institutional ethnography points to how Turner's work is limited by textual representations of reality that cannot capture the broadest landscapes of social reality in which plants and plant knowledges are located. Whereas the value of reviving plant knowledges from the threat of extinction cannot be disputed, IE cautions that reliance on textual representations of that knowledge draws EB into textually mediated relations of ruling. Nonetheless, I believe that significant emancipatory potential can be found in the notion of a living, written tradition by considering IE and EB in parallel.

One of the strengths of ethnographic research is that its subject positions are often those of community members who are valued for their specific knowledge of aspects of community history and culture regardless of their level of formal education or training (Williamson et al., 1999). As such, a broader field of expertise can be made available and valued as knowledge. From ethnobotany we can learn how inquiry into social reality can change by including landscapes in our conceptualizations of the human condition. Traditional ecological knowledge teaches that when we visualize landscapes as community scholars, we begin to see the interrelatedness and value of all life forms. We gain a glimpse of the human condition as both natural and historical. Possibilities for new kinds of empowerment emerge. Institutional ethnography becomes a potentially

powerful method of inquiry for illuminating how landscapes are increasingly becoming texts on which social relations are written and overwritten. In a time of impending environmental devastation brought on by global warming, it is more important than ever that we know how to read the social realities written on the landscapes around us and how texts have been used to obscure certain aspects of them. The meaning of formal education and training changes when we take landscapes (including urban ones) into account as community scholars. We can learn to observe more closely what ignorance about the social realities of the landscapes we create, change, and affect teaches our landscapes to do. We can also learn to observe and take seriously the valuable lessons we overlook in what landscapes are trying to teach us. Responsible inquiry into social reality should ask, What social relations other than those of ruling can be found, known, and taught by landscapes and by the kinds of life living and dying in them? and How do textual representations of knowledge limit our ability to see living knowledge? I believe that institutional ethnography and ethnobotany considered in parallel lead to some interesting new possibilities for exploring social reality by integrating traditional ecological knowledge into social research.

Notes

¹By *First peoples of Northwestern North America* I refer to traditionalists among the Nuu-chah-nulth people. A common misconception about Aboriginal peoples is that they all espouse traditional values. Today many of the people who have been raised and/or educated in mainstream institutions have lost touch with traditional values and beliefs. As such, they are more likely to have adopted mainstream world views at the expense of traditional cultural standards (Daisy Sewid-Smith, in Turner & Atleo, 1998).

²Although ecofeminists have made important contributions to feminist theory and practice, certain strands of ecofeminism have also been criticized for idealizing Indigenous women as symbolic representations of ecofeminism (Sturgeon, 1997).

³*Ethno* is used to refer to how local people, as opposed to academic scientists, view the natural world. Other botanical studies include: economic botany, which identifies and characterizes economically important plants and products derived from them; and ethnobiology, the study of biological sciences as practiced in the present and the past by local people throughout the world (Martin, 2001).

⁴I am not suggesting that sensitivity is not possible in written traditions; rather, I am drawing attention to an inherent sensitivity to these types of connections in oral traditions.

⁵I am grateful to the reviewer who helped me expand on the idea of a living written tradition by suggesting this last point.

⁶Smith (2005) assumes a generous conception of work that encompasses anything that people do that takes time. Work is done under definite conditions, in particular places, and is intentional. Work is what is done by people to make institutions happen whether the doing is recognized in institutional discourse or not.

⁷By *creation* I envision the Nuu-chah-nulth conceptualization *tsawalk*, which accounts for the interrelatedness and value of all life forms.

⁸There is, however, good reason to believe that IE's gaze will expand as IE research is taken up in the interests of and by Indigenous researchers (Eastwood, 2006; Wilson & Pence, 2006).

⁹Walby's (2007) critique of IE is that it cannot entirely avoid standing outside (or taking as object) the relations in motion that its own texts attempt to map. Smith (2005, 2006)

explicitly states that IE researchers are themselves always admittedly implicated in textually mediated relations of ruling.

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