

HOLDING CONTRADICTIONS: MARCUSE AND THE IDEA OF REFUSAL

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, the author considers the implications of refusal in the context of dialectic and depth psychology. What does it mean to refuse? What are the personal and psychological costs of refusal? Marcuse suggested that refusal could lead to greater possibilities for action. The author suggests that those in the field of public administration can participate in the “Great Refusal” by learning to think more dialectically, thus disabling the Western principle of non-contradiction and permitting the simultaneous acceptance of contradictions, in both theory and practice.

In this symposium, we have been asked to consider Marcuse’s idea of The Great Refusal, and its relevance to the field of public administration. The idea of refusal is one that I have found compelling for some time. Refuse what? What does it mean to refuse? Does refusal make me a negative, cranky, difficult, and contrarian person? Some who know me might already be nodding their heads in affirmation. But that leads me to ask: under what circumstances is refusal an affirmative act? What connotations are created by considering the act of refusal linked with the gender of the one refusing? What subliminal connections are made as a result of the spelling and pronunciation of the word, which can mean either an act of denial (*refuse*) or garbage (*refuse*), depending on the context?

In this essay, I would like to consider refusal in the context of dialectic and depth psychology. Our Western “principle of non-contradiction” dictates that contradictions (a and not-a) cannot logically exist simultaneously. Therefore, when we encounter contradictions, we are tempted—indeed, instructed—to resolve them at any cost. I link these two perspectives to the public servant by suggesting that one important critical “refusal” can be learning to “hold” contradictions until their resolution emerges organically.

REFUSAL: THE POWER OF NEGATIVE THINKING

Marcuse, in the 1960 Preface to *Reason and Revolution*, extolled dialectic by pointing out the power of negative thinking. He argued that the function of dialectical thought is to break down the self assurance and self contentment of common sense, to undermine the sinister confidence in the power and language of facts, to demonstrate that unfreedom is so much at the core of things that the development of their internal contradictions leads necessarily to qualitative change (1960, p. ix). In his opinion, “The power of negative thinking is the driving power of dialectical thought, used as a tool for analyzing the world of facts in terms of its internal inadequacy” (1960, p. viii).

Among other things, Marcuse was reacting to the work of Freud, particularly Freud’s *Totem and Taboo* (1913) and *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930), in which Freud explores the relationship between civilization and the individual. In *Totem and Taboo* Freud describes his theory of the primal murder of the father by his sons, an episode that he imagines represents the founding act of civilization (the contract among the brothers, in which they mutually agree to renounce their claim to unfettered sexual and aggressive drives in return for the benefits of an ordered social life). This establishment of prohibitions (against incest and against patricide) is, in Freud’s view, the essential condition: the “constitutive act through which a law-governed social world is created, namely, *the oedipally structured social ontology of civilization* [italics added]” (Whitebook, 1995, p. 22).

What does it mean to reject this social world? Joel Whitebook (1995) suggests that there is an important distinction between the radical reformer and the transfigurative utopian. The radical reformer accepts the basic structure of society, but objects to the unequal distribution of prohibitions and renunciations. A transfigurative utopian, however, rejects the entire oedipally structured framework at its foundations. Horkheimer and Adorno, in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1944/1972), critiqued Freud’s analysis by arguing that, in order to conquer the external world (create civilization), humans first had to conquer their inner worlds—that is, they had to transform themselves into disciplined, purposive agents of a bureaucratized and administered society. Horkheimer’s and Adorno’s basic thesis was that the domination of the inner world ultimately made emancipation impossible. They tried to imagine a utopian transfiguration of civilization but, ultimately, could not envision any alternative in which the regressive features were not more disturbing than the prospect itself. It is this theoretical cul-de-sac that has challenged critical theorists ever since (Whitebook, 1995; Zanetti, 1997).

In his book *Eros and Civilization* (1966), Marcuse attempted a reply to both Freud and the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* by taking on the role of transfigurative utopian. In particular, he was concerned that individuals’

deeply internalized alienation (“surplus repression”) allowed easy manipulation of consumer preferences (“introjection”). Marx had been concerned about false consciousness; Marcuse, drawing on psychoanalytic theory, argued that alienation had so deeply pervaded human personality that it could not be easily expunged. This deeply internalized alienation was a function of the ever-tightening links between political economy and culture—a linkage that resulted in one-dimensionality (Agger, 1992; Carr & Zanetti, 2000; Marcuse, 1964).

In a recently-translated work, *Some remarks on Aragon: Art and politics in the totalitarian era* (Marcuse, circa unknown/1993), Marcuse tried to explain why intellectual oppositions become ineffective and impotent. A key concept in this explanation was the notion of the “estrangement-effect”—terminology coined by Bertolt Brecht and originally used in the context of describing theatrical productions. In the paper on *Aragon*, Marcuse argues that the estrangement-effect becomes an artistic-political device only to the extent that the estrangement can be maintained “to produce the shock which may bare the true relationship between the two worlds and languages: the one being the positive negation of the other” (p. 187; Carr & Zanetti, 1999, 2000).

This estrangement-effect is at the heart of dialectical thinking. Dialectical thinking is destructive, but the destruction re-emerges as a positive act (see Marcuse, 1960, p. ix). Estrangement produces emotional disturbance, turmoil, and discomfort. It runs counter to prevailing attitudes and modes of thought. But this estrangement is part of a necessary process. It creates the conditions for seeing the world anew, in the form of the synthesis. In a passage that I particularly love for its evocative imagery, Jameson (1971) writes:

There is a breathlessness about this shift from the normal object-oriented activity of the mind to such a dialectical self-consciousness—something of the sickening shudder we feel in an elevator’s fall or in the sudden dip of an airliner. That recalls us to our bodies much as this [dialectical transformation] recalls us to our mental positions as thinkers and observers. The shock is indeed as basic, and constitutive of the dialectic as such: without this transformational moment, without this initial conscious transcendence of an older, more naïve position, there can be no question of any genuinely dialectical coming to consciousness. (p. 308)

In the tradition of Hegel, Jameson then points out that:

But precisely because dialectical thinking depends so closely on the habitual everyday mode of thought which it is called on to transcend, it can take a number of different and apparently contradictory forms. So it is that when common sense predominates and characterizes our normal everyday mental atmosphere, dialectical thinking presents itself as the perversely hairsplitting, as the overelaborate and the oversubtle, reminding us that the simple is in reality only a simplification, and that

the self-evident draws its force from hosts of buried presuppositions [italics added]. (Jameson, 1971, p. 308)

(Aha, I think: so I was not incorrect at the beginning of the article. Those who refuse are, indeed, viewed as difficult and “perversely hairsplitting.” Those who refuse cause discomfort in others. They are not appreciated for disrupting the smooth flow of things, for challenging the validity of “common sense.” They upset the apple cart, create a tempest in a teapot, make a fuss over nothing. Are they never satisfied, these miscreants?)

In thinking and working dialectically, can react to that estrangement-effect in several ways. We can ignore it as irrelevant, a distracting detour from issues of “real” importance. We can reject it as perverse, dismissing it as simple exercise in almost-adolescent shock tactics. Seen through a dialectic optic, however, the estrangement-effect is a negation, an important component of the advancement of knowledge. The surrealist and postmodernist formulations of the world engender the estrangement-effect, and thus articulate the negation of prevailing views, of mainstream or self-evident “truths.” In so doing, these formulations provide crucial reflexive and illuminating moments (Carr & Zanetti, 2000).

But these moments are fragile and easily overpowered. The estrangement-effect can only be maintained to the extent that it continues to reveal the prevailing order in its opposition and (simultaneously) the opposition in the prevailing order—that is, to the extent that it maintains a dialectical tension.

My own approach to dialectic echoes, in many ways, Adorno’s “negative dialectics” (Adorno, 1966/1973). In this master work, Adorno’s goal was to formulate a post-Hegelian dialectic that did not culminate in a final synthesis or conceptual unity, but which provided a reflective openness that *infinitely postponed the moment of closure*. What is problematic is the tendency of modern human reason to culminate in self-enclosure or self-sufficiency, elevating human subjects to a position of mastery or domination in and over the world. Adorno’s dialectic is negative in the sense of nonaffirmation: with the claims of linear teleology and systematic unity cast aside, human reason is no longer an instrument of domination but instead assists in the emancipation of social phenomena from conceptual restraints (Dallmayr, 1997).

Marcuse called for us to refuse the terms of such a society. But did he appreciate the cost of such refusal? I turn to this question in the following section.

THE PERSONAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL COST OF REFUSAL

What is the cost of refusal? This, I think, is the most difficult aspect of refusal: understanding and accepting its personal and psychological cost. It is, I would argue, the most authentic conjoining of theory and practice. It is not

utopia, if we equate utopia with human freedom, and in turn equate this freedom only with light, happiness, and carefree bliss. Freedom must acknowledge both the light and the dark.

I turn now to a discussion of refusal from the perspective of depth psychology. I find a clear affinity between critical theory and Jungian psychology, and believe that the combination of the two ontologies is particularly explanatory of the concept of refusal. It is this idea of overcoming binarisms and reconciling opposites that I find is so resonant in both critical theory and dialectical logic. Jungian psychology, like critical theory, refuses to comply with the principle of non-contradiction. Traditional (or formal) logic dictates that two contradictory elements can never be true together (see, for example, Popper, 1963), but traditional logic, because it focuses on empirical (mostly quantitative) representations of reality, necessarily builds on arbitrarily constructed foundations. At some point, the logic is abstracted from reality (formalized).

But dialectical relationships do not express simply existence and non-existence; they also recognize the other possibilities available in the whole. For example, “the dialectical contradiction of “a” is not simply “non-a” but “b,” “c,” “d,” and so on—which, in their attempt at self-assertion and self-realization, are all fighting for the same historical space” (Arato & Gebhardt, 1982/1993, p. 398). Horkheimer gives other examples of such dialectic logic and suggests we need to think in terms of substantive opposites rather than formal/logical positivist/logical empiricist ones to help in understanding our assumptions. He gives an example of the contradiction to “straight” which formal logic might seem to suggest is “non-straight”, but Horkheimer offers other negations: “curved”; “interrupted”; and “zigzag” (see Arato & Gebhardt, 1982/1993). Another example, pertinent to the discussion in this paper, might be to recognize that there are multiple negations to power: resistance, powerlessness, and quiescence, all of which have different relationships to power and consequently different dialectical resolutions (Zanetti & Carr, 1998).

Depth psychology also rejects simple binarisms. For Jung, the primary task of life was to learn to recognize, and come to terms with, those multiple aspects of our selves that contaminate our perceptions of others (our shadows). Recognizing our weak or dark traits (those we often try to project onto others) helps us develop a fuller understanding of our interpersonal relations. This cyclical process, called *synchronic individuation*, requires us continually to mediate between our conscious and unconscious, appreciating the paradox and, especially, appreciating the discomfort it produces (Young-Eisendrath, 1995). It is not at all dissimilar to overcoming the estrangement-effect—only the aspects we find to be so discomforting are not in the outside world, but in ourselves. We must, to echo one of the themes of David John

Farmer's paper in this symposium (2003), learn to "deal with our own shit."

Individuation is an important process of psychological development for both women and men. But it is also the process of recognizing and understanding one's own contradictory nature, identifying and balancing the conscious and unconscious impulses. An individual must first learn to develop meta-cognitive abilities—the ability to think about one's thoughts, feelings, and states of being, looking at oneself from a third person perspective, and engaging in a dialectical relationship with one's self. The personal awareness that comes through individuation permits *disidentification* with childhood complexes and a withdrawal of projections (Young-Eisendrath, 1995).

An essential component of individuation is the process of coming to terms with one's contrasexuality—that is, our unconscious opposite-sexed personality. The contrasexual other both constrains and defines the self. As Young-Eisendrath says, "The way I act and imagine myself as a woman carries with it a tandem meaning of what I imagine to be male and masculine, what I see as human but 'not-woman'.... The same is true for the feminine other in the male psyche" (Young-Eisendrath, 1995, p. 24). Each sex carries envy, jealousy, idealization and fear of the other sex, emotions that form intrapsychic barriers, especially when the two sexes interact. What connotations, therefore, are created by considering the act of refusal linked with the gender of the one refusing?

Recently, I published an article entitled "Leaving our Father's House: Micrologies, Archetypes, and Barriers to Conscious Femininity in Organizational Contexts" (2002). In the course of writing that article, I often mentioned the title to management and administration students and asked for their interpretation and response. The students often associated the meaning with growing up, being on one's own, taking on adult responsibilities. Occasionally a student took a more human resource management approach, making a connection with being treated as an adult in the workplace, with a commensurate level of autonomy.

What *did* I mean by the phrase "our fathers' house"? Who is the father? I borrowed this phrase from the work of Marion Woodman, who suggests that the phrase offers us meaning on multiple levels. As my students suggested, the phrase refers to a coming of age, in which we become recognized for our capacity to make mature and responsible decisions. Following this motif, the phrase suggests an ability to evaluate information according to our own values, not simply following rote teaching or instruction. This ability requires critical and reflective thinking, and not a little courage, as well. Fathers typically occupy positions of remote awe. Challenging (refusing) such a person is sure to cause a significant degree of trepidation.

On another level, with reference to the discussion of Freud earlier in this article, our fathers' house is the house of patriarchy, with its values of rational

thinking, domination, discipline, and control. We are all children of this culture, and all trained as professionals and intellectuals in this culture. Our work emphasizes the work in our heads (logos), and scorns manual, embodied labor. We become trapped in our intellectualized defenses, unable to connect to the dark, erotic, earthy shadows of our bodies (Woodman, 1992).

Archetypally, “father” has still another meaning. Outwardly, the fathering personifies the dominant content of a culture’s collective consciousness. Internally, he usually possesses a godlike wholeness, solar brilliance, and spiritual insight (Woodman, 1992, p. 11). The father’s house is also the house of tyranny and fear. Hollis (1994) suggests that we, as a culture, live in Saturn’s shadow. Saturn was the Roman god of agriculture and as such was associated with generativity (productivity). Astrologically, the influence of Saturn is thought to produce a demanding, judgmental, uncompromising, joyless nature; possibly even making one selfish, narrow-minded, and cruel. According to mythology, Cronus, the earlier Greek incarnation of this entity, was the son of Uranus and Gaia. Uranus was born of Gaia and later became her sexual partner. From this incestuous union came all living things. Uranus feared the potential of his children to destroy him and devoured them at birth as a preventative measure. Gaia, however, persuaded Cronus to attack his father, and he did so, castrating Uranus (from whose severed phallus Aphrodite was later born). But Cronus/Saturn did not overturn his father’s tyranny; he simply replaced his father in the position of tyrant. When Cronus and his consort Rhea produced children, Cronus devoured them. Only Zeus survived – to become equally fierce and tyrannical.

In examining the process of repression, Marcuse extends Freud’s theory of the Oedipus complex (Marcuse 1955, pp. 91–92). Marcuse highlights how repression is reproduced within the individual but also simultaneously points out how the individual unwittingly becomes a willing participant in the continuation of his/her own servitude. Repression is reproduced both within and over the individual—thus, repression is in this sense both a psychological and political phenomenon. In other words, the replacement of the parent by society and the laws, which preserve its administration ensures obedience. The same psyche that hindered the revolt against the parent similarly discourages revolt against society (Zanetti & Carr, 1998).

In depth psychology, *archetypes* are the contents of the collective unconscious; innate, inherited patterns of psychological performance linked to instinct. Jung viewed archetypes as potential psychic energy inherent in all the typical human life experiences—energy activated uniquely in response to each individual life (Hart, 1997, p. 90). An archetype is not a fixed image or fully-developed picture (like a photograph), but rather a kind of shadowy primordial form, the content of which is filled by an individual’s personal life

experiences. Jung wrote that there are as many archetypal responses as there are situations in life.

Archetypes are universal—humans in various cultures possess the same basic archetypal images—although our individual responses to them are entirely unique. We unconsciously introject (internalize) the power of these archetypal figures. In the absence of individuation, these patterns and images remain intact at an infantile level (Woodman, 1990, p. 18). When archetypes are activated, they manifest themselves in behaviors and emotions (Samuels, 1997).

To get back to the subject articulated at the beginning of this section, what is the personal and psychological cost of refusal? What happens when we challenge the dominant traditions by refusing to comply? What subliminal connections are made as a result of the spelling and pronunciation of the word, which can mean either an act of denial (*refuse*) or garbage (*refuse*), depending on the context? The voices of the oppressed throughout history give us a good indication, but I focus here on the voices of women and women's relationships with their bodies.

Considering that we must live and function in the cultural context of patriarchy, it may seem surprising that the archetype that causes most anxiety and fear is that of the mother, not the father. Biologically, we all experience our primal relationship with a woman. When this relationship is warm and nurturing, we are more comfortable with life. Where the primal experience is conditional or painful, one feels the ontological wound and frequently seeks to project this pain onto the world at large.

Wounding in the primal relationship can, of course, affect women and men alike. But because men also face the need to separate from the Mother and transcend the mother complex, additional wounding is both necessary and inevitable. Hollis confirms: "The power of the feminine is immense in the psychic economy of men" (Hollis, 1994, p. 30). Yet throughout their lives, a man must continue to confront the feminine on three levels: with an outer woman (or the feminine side of a gay partner), in his relationship to his own anima, and in his relationship to the archetypal world (Hollis, 1994).

Contemporaneous with the evolution of the modern world was a notion of social Darwinism. Many of us are at least passingly familiar with the invocation of social Darwinism, or the idea of survival of the fittest, to justify market forces and a capitalist society. A less familiar aspect of social Darwinist thought, however, addressed the roles of the sexes. The invocations of social Darwinism went beyond the well-explored idea of public and private spheres, specifying the functions of both sex and abstinence in the perpetuation of the social order. Such a sociological view of the world colored organizational evolution in ways that have gone largely unrecognized.

Of particular relevance here is the fascination of late nineteenth and early twentieth century scientists (and social scientists) with anthropomorphizing the mating rituals of the animal and insect kingdoms, and the correlations these scientists drew between sexual abstinence and economic success. It was believed that every individual entered life with a certain store of "vital essence." In men, this vital essence was contained in the semen, having been distilled from the blood. Men of a certain class were counseled to refrain from frequent emissions, since each ejaculation drained a bit more of a man's vital essence—essence that would otherwise be retained as an internal secretion and used to build a stronger mind and body. The brain in particular was viewed as the repository of such concentrated essence (Dijkstra, 1996).

The man who did not "waste" his vital essence in frequent and/or indiscriminate ejaculations (either through "self abuse" or with a partner), therefore, could expect greater intellectual acumen, which would contribute to financial success, which would ensure his place in the ruling plutocracy. "The man who held on to his semen could expect to see his capital grow—and capital, as [William] Sumner never tired of pointing out, was the lifeblood of the evolutionary elite" (Dijkstra, 1996, p. 59). Loss of semen, by contrast, led to loss of money, loss of manhood, and loss of self.

Bearing these beliefs in mind, it is little surprise that, around this time, women began to be portrayed in both scholarly and popular culture as deadly: capable, through the means of seduction and wile, of draining a man of his vital essence and leaving him a mere dry husk of his former self. Women, of course, also contained vital essence, which was distilled in the womb rather than in the testes. But women did not have the same ability to retain concentrated essence in the brain, because so much was unavoidably lost in the monthly menstrual flow.

Drawing on examples observed in the insect world, these seminal (sic) philosophers and scientists perpetuated the belief that sexual women preyed upon men in the same manner as mantises and spiders. Graphic descriptions of sexual cannibalism revealed a deep-seated gynophobia:

Like the cephalopoda, his contemporaries, he [the white-fronted dectic, a type of grasshopper] has recourse to the spermatophore; yet there is mating, there is embracing; there are even play and caresses. Here are the couple face to face, they caress each other with long antennae.... The male disentangles himself and escapes, but a new assault masters him, he lies flat on his back. This time the female, lifted on her high legs, holds him belly to belly; she bends back the extremity of her abdomen; the victim does likewise; there is junction, and soon one sees something enormous issue from the convulsive flanks of the male, as if the animal were pushing out its entrails....

The female receives this leather bottle, or spermatophore, and carries it off glued to her belly.... She breaks off little pieces, chews them

carefully, and swallows them.... The male has begun to sing again, during this meal, but it is not a love-song, he is about to die; he dies. Passing near him at this moment, the female looks at him, smells him, and takes a bite of his thigh. (Gourmont, in Dijkstra, 1996, p. 67)

Prominent sociologist Lester Ward also took the view that, in the lower orders of nature, the primary function of the male was sperm-bearer, a “mere afterthought of nature” (Ward, in Dijkstra, 1996, p. 68). Evolutionarily speaking, human males had been able to overcome the accessory roles played by their insect counterparts, but Ward’s description of mantis love left little doubt about how slippery the slope toward reabsorption was:

A few days since I brought a male of mantis carolina to a friend who had been keeping a solitary female as a pet. Placing them in the same jar, the male, in alarm, endeavored to escape. In a few minutes the female succeeded in grasping him. She first bit off his left front tarsus, and consumed the tibia and femur. Next she gnawed out his left eye. At this the male seemed to realize his proximity to one of the opposite sex, and began vain endeavors to mate. The female next ate up his right front leg, and then entirely decapitated him, devouring his head and gnawing into his thorax. Not until she had eaten all of his thorax except about three millimeters did she stop to rest. All this while the male had continued his vain attempts to obtain entrance at the valvules, and he now succeeded, as she voluntarily spread the parts open, and union took place. She remained quiet for four hours, and the remnant of the male gave occasional signs of life by a movement of one of his remaining tarsi for three hours. The next morning she had entirely rid herself of her spouse, and nothing but his wings remained. (Ward, in Dijkstra, 1996, p. 69)

The primary drive of females was reproduction, pure and simple; after survival of the species was ensured, males were superfluous. Thus feminine principles came to be viewed as fatal [the “vagina dentata of primal instinct” (Dijkstra, 1996, p. 71)]; masculinity was regarded as the triumph of cunning and intellect over nature.

This ontological belief was reflected in much of the art, literature, film, and popular culture of the era. Women were often portrayed as frighteningly seductive vampires, spiders, ferocious bears, and skeletons—death personified, in other words. The work of Alfred Kubin (1877-1959) was particularly graphic in this regard. The early films of Theda Bara and Louise Brooks capitalized on the vampire/vamp theme, with great success. Misogynist and gynephobic themes were also reflected in the work of many of the surrealists as they dismembered the female body or turned it into an object. The self-consciously sexual woman was dangerous—a threat not only to an individual male, but to the survival of the species, as well.

Writing as a contemporary of Sumner and Ward, the feminist Charlotte Perkins Gilman observed that the effect of patriarchal authority was to remove

women from most of the energizing (i.e., public sphere) effects of natural selection, reinforcing only their sexual attractiveness. This sets up a vicious cycle. “Woman’s economic profit [value] comes through the power of sex-attraction” (Gilman, in Hollinger & Capper, 1989, p. 44); in a situation of perverse irony, women must be sexually attractive in order to survive economically, yet this sexual “success” is experienced as predatory by the men who control the economic resources.

This perversity is mirrored in the organizational context. If women were considered dangerous in the relatively narrow confines of the home, imagine the thought of such women moving into the workforce. Now men faced a double threat: women who sought to drain their vital essence in the bedroom, and women who wanted to drain their lifeblood in the board room as well. Archetypally speaking, the image being constellated was terrible and frightening—picture the cannibal witch of the Hansel and Gretel fairy tale, or the awesome dark destructive power of the Hindu goddess Shiva. As Hollis (1994) points out, “*one oppresses what one fears*” [italics added] (p. 35)—assuming, of course, that one has the power to oppress in the first place. A deeply-rooted misogyny thus persists in our culture (Woodman, 1990, p. 9).

Women who refuse to accept this culture—who function as Whitebook’s transfigurative utopians—often find themselves the targets of physical, emotional, economic and financial retaliation. Women’s bodies are the repositories of society’s somatophobia—they are both refused and refuse. Shildrick and Price write:

The association of the body with gross, unthinking physicality marks a further set of linkages—to black people, to working class people, to animals, and to slaves.... Whilst all such marginalized bodies are potentially unsettling, what is at issue for women specifically is that, supposedly, the female body is intrinsically unpredictable, leaky and disruptive. (1999, p. 2)

Kristeva (1982) observes that this somatophobia constitutes a kind of psychic violence—not just repudiation, but something more damaging. Because the female body is not “sealed and self-sufficient” (Shildrick & Price, 1999, p. 7), women are perceived to have the capacity to defile and contaminate (menstrual blood being the most common image). To the extent that women refuse the oedipally structured social ontology of civilization, they are not just *excluded* others, but *dangerous* others.

I have used the example of gender here because I can relate personally and because this happens to be the topic of some of my ongoing research, but the personal and psychological cost of refusal is high, regardless. In his book *Whistleblowers: Broken Lives and Organizational Power* (2001), Fred Alford draws a chilling portrait of those who refuse.

HOLDING CONTRADICTIONS IN PUBLIC SERVICE

Returning to the theme of the father's house, I suggest there is little question that public administration is an edifice constructed in the image of the father's house. Rao et al. (1999), building on the work of Acker (1990), argue that there is a "gendered substructure" within organizations—public and private—that supports this edifice. In the first place, a "monoculture of instrumentality" prevails in most organizational contexts. This monoculture focuses on narrow, often quantitative targets at the expense of broader needs and goals. The implementation of performance-or results-based management and evaluation systems precludes an appropriate appreciation of the qualitative, relational, "invisible" activities of organizational success.

Second, Rao and co-authors note that in most organizations, power is viewed as a limited resource. Consequently, power—whether derived from one's position, one's agenda-setting capabilities, or a more hidden form¹—is used for exclusionary purposes. One of the purposes to which this power is put is in perpetuating the split between work and family (i.e., between the public and private spheres). The socialization in organizational settings—including the expectations of performance, the creation of myths and symbols, patterns of dominance and subordination, and the pronouncements of gender-appropriate behavior—supports and reinforces the assumption that work is separate from the rest of life, and that work has the primary claim on the worker. From these expectations, the image of the "ideal" employee is formed—and that employee is not encumbered by family obligations. Needless to say, women, who continue to be responsible for home and family needs even when they are employed full-time outside the home, tend *not* to be these ideal workers (Rao et al., 1999).

Finally, the identity of this "ideal" employee is fueled by the myth of the heroic individual (see especially Denhardt, 1981). Consider the images of traveling "road warriors," of traders with "killer instincts," and of salesmen who "penetrate" markets. Much of business and organizational "folklore" abounds with stories of the crusader who battles against tremendous odds to resolve a crisis—while the worker who manages her work smoothly, thereby avoiding crises, is relatively invisible and taken for granted (Rao, et al., 1999).

Furthermore, the "hero's quest" is a journey that is an integral aspect of a male's psychological journey. Men must "undertake the heroic task of leaving the mother and becoming masters of their own destiny" (Hollis, 1994, p. 105). I want to emphasize, however, that *masculinity is not synonymous with patriarchy*. Nor is a patriarchal ontology the sole province of men; women are quite capable of being equally patriarchal, and my argument is not, and has never been, about overturning the hierarchy (women on top) or extolling feminine ways of knowing at the expense of the masculine.

Let me refer back to the characterization of Adorno's negative dialectic: infinitely postponing the moment of closure. Administrators trained primarily in technical approaches may recognize tensions and contradictions but do not know how to respond to them (Zanetti, 1998). If anything, they rush to resolve the contradiction—making decisions to bring “closure” much too soon.

Public servants already walk a fine line. They are, as I have noted elsewhere (Zanetti, 1998), neither fish nor fowl—citizens, yet still accountable to the citizenry. It might be that those public administrators who seek to refuse might best be called “tempered radicals” (Meyerson & Scully, 1995, p. 586). Tempered radicals are individuals who identify with and are committed to their organizations/institutions, yet who also consider themselves part of, or allied with, some group, cause, or ideology that is fundamentally different from (and possibly at odds with) the dominant culture of their organization/institution. Tempered radicals recognize and experience tensions and contradictions between the status quo and alternatively postulated views. Speaking sociologically, these persons exhibit *ambivalence*. Ambivalence involves expression of both sides of a dualism, in contrast to compromise, which seeks a middle ground and therefore may lose the essence of both (all) sides. In an ambivalent stance, the clear positions of the oppositions are retained (Meyerson & Scully, 1995).

The personal and psychological costs of refusal cannot be underestimated. Those who choose to speak up are often punished (Alford, 2001). Archetypally, such individuals are scapegoats—those chosen to bear the burden of the sins of the collective, and then banished. I do not suggest that public administrators ought to play the societal role of scapegoat (although in practice I believe they often do). And, as agents of the state, public administrators are certainly not positioned to play the role of radical revolutionaries.

However, I do suggest that public administrators might participate in the “great refusal” by learning to think differently. Specifically, I suggest that public administrators learn and practice the art of holding contradictions; that is, by refusing to rush the resolution of contradictions in the policy implementation process. Ambivalence is not considered a virtue in our goal-oriented society. We feel a push to decide, define, clarify, and categorize. Americans in particular value efficiency and decisiveness, enabled by logocentric, instrumental reasoning and technical expertise. So we sort, we prioritize, and, above all, we act. The *process* used to resolve a dilemma is unimportant except to the degree to which the process streamlines the decision-making even further.

But, as Alford (2001) notes, drawing on Foucault's notion of capillary power, the traffic between the margin and the center is a two-way street (pp. 131–135). Those who refuse are often banished to the margins. Yet, as

they are marginalized, “the power that moves [them] there makes a brief appearance at the center of society, reminding us of its existence” (Alford, 2001, p. 131). So it is with contradiction, so it is with dialectic, and so it is with refusal. To the extent that we, as public servants, and as the teachers of public servants, protect the space for refusal and contradiction, we postpone the one-dimensionality Marcuse feared.

ENDNOTE

1. Hidden power in this context corresponds with Lukes’ (1974) “third dimension of power” in which subjects are unaware that their wants and desires are being manipulated. Power is exercised to ensure that only certain ideas are accepted as “normal”; these ideas become entrenched in the form of self-evident truths and therefore are seldom, if ever, questioned. Those who do question these “truths” are often labeled deviant and anti-social, among other things (Ackroyd & Thompson, 1999; Lukes, 1974; Rao et. al, 1999).

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