

Diversity Management: Dialogue, Dialectics and Diversion

Astrid Kersten

Keywords: Critical Theory, Diversity Management, Race Dialogue

Abstract

This paper uses Habermas' model of dialogue and the public sphere to provide a critical examination of organizational diversity management. The paper argues that in spite of the dialogic and inclusive claims made by the diversity movement, its basic framework and methods serve to limit and repress productive dialogue on race rather than produce effective organizational change. The diversity movement represents an important ideological strategy that seeks to re-assert the privacy of the corporate sphere and its employment decisions, making its emergence a significant element of the general social-political attempt to manage and contain racial conflict and social contradiction.

Introduction: The public sphere, discourse and race

The importance of critical theory is that it challenges us “to explore and articulate the ways in which conditions of social, economic, and political domination limit, distort and depreciate discourse regarding contested public issues” (McClure, 1996, p. 488). Habermas’ (1989) concept of the *public sphere* is central in this project, for it offers an ideal-typical image of a society in which issues of public importance are explored, debated and resolved through open and undistorted dialogue among the citizenry. This image of the public sphere not only presents a normative ideal; it also provides a conceptual model for critically analyzing the ways in which current and historical discourse is exclusionary and/or distorted by examining such factors as “the procedural dimensions of formal inclusion, the degree of political participation, of the quality of discussion, the range of issues, and finally, and most important, of how the presuppositions of those public debates are really institutionalized” (Habermas, 1992, p. 467).

A key question in this project has been how to effectively understand the impact of institutions because corporations have come to usurp, limit and dominate the public sphere, depriving people of access to decision-making in areas that affect them (Deetz, 1992; Fraser, 1989; Goodnight, 1987; McClure, 1996). A central historical, structural and ideological move in all of this is the very manner in which corporations came to designate themselves as a “*private sphere*” immune from public discourse, accountability and intervention (see Kersten and Sidky, 1997). Add to this the increasing amount of privatization and the general disengagement of the state, and key public concerns like employment, pollution, education, and housing are both formulated with corporate concerns in mind and decided upon by the corporations themselves, effectively eliminating public discourse as well as the public sphere itself.

Race relations are particularly interesting in this regard for not only is there a long history in the U.S. of distorted public discourse over race, in which racial ideology and structural injustice collided with a public rhetoric of social equality. In recent decades, this has also been one of the few areas in which society has exerted claims of public interest *over* private, corporate concerns. Using legal mandates like Equal Employment Opportunity and Affirmative Action, organizations have been forced for the past 35 years to address racial inequities through changes in their employment practices, making the organization one of the sites directly expressive of the political struggle over race and equality and the dialectical forces shaping this struggle. These legal requirements have generally been viewed as negative external pressure, infringing on corporate freedom of decision-making and not surprisingly, they have failed to bring about major changes in racial employment patterns (Hacker, 1997). Black unemployment is still significantly higher than white unemployment. There are major salary differentials and with the exception of a few “protected categories” like police and firefighters, black representation in other professional and managerial groups has remained the same over the past four decades.

Recently, anticipated changes in the labor market indicating that the workforce of the future will consist largely of so-called “minority groups” like women, immigrants and racial minorities have added additional external pressure (Johnston and Packard, 1987). This has led the Society for Human Resource Management and other management organizations to declare diversity as the number one issue facing their field. It has also created a flurry of books, training manuals, exercise materials and diversity consultants offering to help organizations deal with the “diversity dilemma” (see e.g. Gentile, 1996; Golembiewski, 1995; Jackson et al., 1992; Thomas, 1991, 1996). The diversity movement is hailed by many as a positive change, in which organizations voluntarily engage in a process of systemic cultural transformation designed to eliminate any further forms of exclusion. This development coincides with a general change in the political climate seeking to reverse many of the legal mandates of the previous decades, most notably Affirmative Action.

Since the diversity movement represents a significant departure from previous approaches, it is important to critically examine the way in which it functions, politically, ideologically and operationally. This paper uses Habermas' notions of the public sphere and dialogue to provide such an examination. Since Habermas relies both on the possibility and the transformative capacity of dialogue, the paper begins with a critical exploration of the meaning of race dialogue and the structural and ideological limitations that affect the process. The paper argues that dialogue is only possible and effective *if* it manages to break through the ideological and structural parameters that define our racial positioning in society. Using this model as a normative and conceptual ideal, the paper explores diversity management's claim that it presents an effective framework for dealing with race and other differences in the organization. Following a discussion of diversity management strategies and concepts, the paper argues that in spite of the dialogic and inclusive claims made by the diversity movement, its basic framework and methods serve to limit and repress productive dialogue on race. Diversity management, it is argued, must be understood as the mediated outcome of the dialectical tensions that exist around issues of race, organization, equality and society. Rather than resolving these tensions, the diversity movement represents an important ideological strategy that simultaneously seeks to re-assert the privacy of the corporate sphere and its employment decisions and contribute to the general social strategy of managing and containing racial conflict.

Race dialogue: A critical perspective

In multicultural societies the coexistence of forms of life with equal rights means ensuring every citizen the opportunity to grow up within the world of a cultural heritage and to have his or her children grow up in it without suffering discrimination because of it. It means the opportunity to confront this and every other culture and to perpetuate it in its conventional form or transform it; as well as the opportunity to turn away from its commands with indifference or break with it self-critically and to live spurred on by having made a conscious break with tradition, or even with a divided identity. The accelerated pace of change in modern societies explodes all stationary forms of life. Cultures survive only if they draw the strength to transform themselves from criticism and secession. Legal guarantees can be based only on the fact that within his or her own cultural milieu

each person retains the possibility of regenerating this strength. And this in turn develops not only by setting oneself apart but at least as much through exchanges with strangers and things alien. (Habermas, 1994, p. 132)

In the above quote, Habermas highlights the emancipatory interest that is central to critical theory and the essential importance of realizing this emancipatory interest through dialogue and critique. In this part of the paper I will use Habermas' concepts of dialogue, communication ethics and systematic distortion to develop a critical model of race dialogue. The point here, however, is not to suggest that racial issues and tensions are resolved by dialogue alone, by mere talk so to speak. Rather, it is to suggest that a critical model of race dialogue will assist us in developing a theoretical, analytical and processual awareness of the structural, ideological and interactional tensions that constitute the dialectical landscape of race relations in organizations. Thus, instead of assuming that race dialogue is a possible and unproblematic process, I argue that it must be seen as a struggle in which the central problematic concerns the difficulty we have in really hearing the voice of *the racial 'other'*, above the noise of structural inequality, the pain of exclusion, the denial of racism and the daily impact of a culture that is full of racial ideology.

Habermas' central goal in working with dialogue is "to bring about the conditions of rational participatory democracy, in which existing needs can be critically assessed and transformed. For only by publicly discussing our needs can we begin to assess their impact on the lives of others. And only by assessing their impact on the lives of others, can we determine their rationality, or compatibility with the general interest of all concerned". (Ingram, 1990, p. 147). Thus, public discourse seeks to establish a rational consensus that can be accepted by all as a universally binding norm thereby providing the foundation for meaningful social change. The process becomes problematic however, to the extent that it "seeks to bring social norms into harmony with *rational* interests which may not have yet found popular acceptance" (Ingram, 1990, p. 147). Meaningful dialogue in this sense requires a critical deconstruction of ideological constraints operating on the existing consensus on interests and needs. This is particularly essential for race dialogue.

Race dialogue is not only a struggle over competing interests; it is also and perhaps more fundamentally, a struggle over competing realities. To the extent that the dominant discourse denies the very existence of racism, any attempts at social or organizational discourse “stutter” (Jackson, 1997) and get stuck on what appear to be fundamentally different and incompatible definitions of reality. And when the dominant discourse declares the “race problem” as managed or even solved, while racial minorities continue to experience the pain of daily racial injustice, there is little common ground for dialogue. Habermas of course would argue that common ground needs to be created rather than assumed and that it is the dialogue process itself that serves to create such a consensus. I would argue, however, that we need to examine the ideological constraints as a *pre-condition* for dialogue.

Dialogue of any sort assumes at its minimum that participants have the capacity to understand and acknowledge their own worldview and express it competently. It also assumes that they are able to grasp the worldview of the other and through discourse, develop some kind of common language and common ground. Thus, Habermas (1981) notes that the communicative actor (must be) “equipped with three world-concepts” (self, other and social) and be able to apply them reflectively, suggesting that: “(t)he success of the communicative action depends on a process of interpretation in which participants come to a common definition of the situation within the reference system of the three worlds” (p. 119).

This brings into focus the initial set of issues involved in race dialogue and ideological constraint. Beginning with the first element – an understanding of our own world concept – Habermas and many others have pointed to the difficulties involved in grasping the deeply seated nature of the assumptions and presuppositions that underly our worldviews. Quoting Wittgenstein, he describes world view assumptions as “certainties”, elements of worldview that are “anchored in all my questions and answers, so anchored that I cannot touch them” (Wittgenstein, 1969, p. 16). Certainties, convictions, and assumptions are

essential to understanding dialogue, if for no other reason than the fact they are rarely reflected upon, problematized or questioned. To the extent that the Other in dialogue shares our worldview (See Carr and Zanetti, 1999), dialogue does not appear problematic to us for the self, the other and the social spheres overlap fairly easily, allowing us to hear, understand and respond appropriately.

When there are major differences in perspective however, communicative action becomes difficult and problematic, requiring interpretation, discourse, reflection and mutual critique in order to create a shared social world. Dialogue then asks for three things: (1) a critical and reflective understanding of one's own world. (2) an emphatic grasping of the world of the Other, and (3) the shared building of a joint world, based on an undistorted social consensus. Thus, Habermas notes that "(e)very consensus rests on an intersubjective recognition of criticizable validity claims; it is thereby presupposed that those acting communicatively are *capable of mutual criticism*" (p. 119). Is this attainable in a society as racially divided as ours?

Dialogue between different publics requires multicultural literacy - the ability to hear and engage in discourses that may be radically different from our own (Fraser, 1990). Ramsey (1998), following Arendt (1985) argues that multicultural literacy is akin to a critical understanding of the Kantian requirement of impartiality, involving *radical plurality*: "taking .., as many perspectives into consideration as possible" (1998, p. 461). Thus, "impartiality is obtained by taking the viewpoint of the other into account" (Arendt, 1985, p. 42) and "seeks to multiply the perspectives for which it will be held accountable" (Ramsey, 1998, p. 461). Such an attempt includes not only the willingness to critically examine one's own worldview, but also the necessity to be open to and be transformed by the potentially radically different worldview of the other. Key elements in this process, among other things, include: (1) the need to be aware of and critically de-construct existing ideological and structural relations of inequality; and (2) the need to be aware of the impact of ideological and structural inequality on the dialogue process. As Fraser (1990) points out, it is not

sufficient to merely “bracket status differentials and to deliberate ‘as if’ they were social equals” (p. 62). The assumption of social equality does not make it a given reality.

While blacks are required to reproduce “white consciousness” as a condition of participation in society, and continuously find their own consciousness contested in day-to-day interactions, no such requirements exists for whites who can assume the naturalness of their reality without consequences or repercussions. As McClaren observes, “(b)eing white is an entitlement, not to preferred racial attributes, but to a raceless subjectivity. That is, being white becomes the invisible norm for how the dominant culture measures its own civility” (1991, p. 244). In this sense, U.S. society not only reflects racism structurally through its patterns of exclusion and marginalization. It also reflects racism in the subtle patterns of everyday reality, that take white norms of behavior, interaction and perception as its not-so-subtle standards for normality, beauty, properness, professionalism, and everything else (Essed, 1992).

In short, rather than assuming the possibility and viability of race dialogue, we need to recognize that the cultural parameters of the context have already succeeded in constructing, invalidating and excluding the racial other, a process that must be actively deconstructed if dialogue is to realize its transformative and emancipatory potential. For organizations, this means coming to terms with “whiteness”, the extent to which one’s daily life world is “colored” by a racial ideology that simultaneously obscures and naturalizes white dominance and “through which whiteness establishes its social, cultural and political hegemony” (Shome, 1996, p. 503; see also Gallagher, 1995; Nakayma, 1994; Sleeter, 1993, 1994). Furthermore, there is a critical and moral obligation to be open to and informed about the worldview and experience of the racial Other. And finally, it requires a willingness to be transformed in the process of constructing a shared reality. This first set of issues really establishes a set of *pre-conditions* for race dialogue based on the simple model of dialogue itself.

The second set of issues affecting race dialogue has to do with process and context, specifically the fact that racial dialogue requires an awareness of the many ways in which discourse norms are contaminated by white (male) standards and practices. This is a particularly important point from a critical perspective, for it questions our cultural construction of “competent participants”. All too often, racial dialogue is shut down when the discourse becomes “too emotional, direct, aggressive, personal, irrelevant, unstructured, historical and unproductive” in the judgement of white participants, a judgement that in many ways is directly reflective of *white* discourse norms.

Thus, Gutmann (1994, p. 8) states: “full public recognition as equal citizens may require two forms of respect: (1) respect for the unique identities of each individual, regardless of gender, race, or ethnicity; and (2) respect for those activities, practices, and ways of viewing the world that are particularly valued by, and associated with, members of disadvantaged groups, including women, Asian-Americans, African-Americans, Native Americans, and a multitude of other groups in the United States”. In this sense, Habermas (1994) comments that “(a) correctly understood theory of rights requires a *politics of recognition* that protects the integrity of the individual in the life contexts in which his or her identity is formed” (p. 113).

Relatedly, it is important to develop an awareness of the structural context of racial dialogue. To the extent that structural relations of inequality define and shape the position of the parties in the dialogue, the process is subject to *systematic distortion* and communicative action becomes strategic action designed to maintain relations of domination. Put simply, race dialogue in the context of structural inequality will tend to reproduce those relations, unless there is a radical willingness to subject those very relations to critique. As Fraser (1990) observes: “(i)nsofar as the bracketing of social inequalities in deliberation means proceeding as if they don’t exist when they do, this does not foster participatory parity. On the contrary, such bracketing usually works to the advantage of dominant groups in society and to the disadvantage of subordinates. In most cases, it would be more appropriate to

unbracket inequalities in the sense of *explicitly thematizing* them – a point that accords with the spirit of Habermas’ later ‘communicative ethics’ ” (p. 64; emphasis added). The presumption of color blindness in other words is less productive than the explicit recognition and thematization of existing discriminatory relationships.

In the next part of this paper, I will use the critical model of race dialogue developed above to evaluate diversity management movement as the most recent organizational response to the issue of racial inequity. In particular, I will evaluate its claim that it is capable of effectively addressing issues of racism in the organizational context by creating an organizational culture and rhetoric that allows for meaningful dialogue on race.

Diversity management: Dialogue or ideology

The tolerated Others are by definition present within our “sphere of influence”. They are part of our “world “(society, nation, neighborhood) but only insofar as we accept them. That is, the tolerated Others are never just present, they are positioned. Their belonging in the environment in which they come to exist is always a precarious one, for they never exist, they are *allowed* to exist. (Hage, 1994, p. 28, emphasis added)

The way society deals with differences is always political in the sense that it ‘positions’ the racial other (Cavanaugh, 1997). How does “diversity management” position the Other and what are the social, political and ideological implications of its positioning for the prospect of meaningful race dialogue and the establishment of racial equality?

Diversity management differs from previous approaches to discrimination in 4 important respects. First, diversity management advocates a systemic transformation of the organization as opposed to the singular emphasis on recruitment/selection that was characteristic of the older methods. Following a diversity audit of the company culture and its workforce statistics, the organization develops a 3 to 5 year diversity plan that includes

taskforces, extensive training programs that focus on teambuilding, cooperation and mentoring, and sometimes hiring and promotion plans. In general, the stated aim of these diversity efforts is to change the organizational culture in such a way that it becomes an open, welcome and supportive environment for all people. Whether diversity management truly accomplishes this remains open to question. For instance, a contested issue in the literature is whether diversity management efforts should be evaluated using numerical indicators (i.e. the extent to which it succeeds in increasing minority and female representation at different levels in the organization) and whether management should be held accountable for diversity management by incorporating diversity goals as a part of the organization's formal goals and reward structures.

Diversity management is also different in its rhetoric. Diversity is not presented as a negative, external mandate but as a positive and voluntary effort on the part of the organization, using celebratory and harmonious imagery like the orchestra, the salad bowl or the patchwork quilt, each enriched by the differences of its component parts. While this imagery is rhetorically attractive, its exact operational meaning is somewhat confusing, especially when it is contrasted with the reality of organizational norms of unity, conformity and teamwork – images that are much less tolerant of differences in general, let alone differences related to “identity politics”.

The third difference is that diversity efforts are justified with economic rather than legal arguments. Thus, it is argued that diversity will make the organization more competitive in the labor market, allow for better recruitment and retention of qualified employees, create higher levels of productivity, creativity and group synergy, and generate more effective conflict management in the organization. As Prasad, Mills, Elmes and Prasad (1997) point out, the fact that there is little hard evidence to support these economic arguments has done little to reduce the corporate enthusiasm for diversity management. And this of course, may have a lot to do with the fact that this kind of instrumentalist logic is consistent with what critical theorists would refer to as the general “eclipse of reason”

(Horkheimer, 1947/1996), technical rationality mode of reasoning that is prevalent in organizations today (Deetz and Kersten, 1983). Diversity management is not seen as a goal in and of itself, to be justified through some appeal to idealistic notions of justice, equality or fairness. Rather, it is an instrumental goal designed to enhance the overall effectiveness of the business itself which becomes problematic particularly when the interests of diversity collide with the interests of organizational efficiency.

Finally, contemporary diversity management approaches use what is called an *inclusive* definition of diversity in which any and all differences are considered as part of the diversity project. This is reflected in corporate diversity definitions like: “all the ways in which we differ” (Pillsbury); and “Diversity in the workplace includes *all differences* that define each of us as unique individuals. Differences such as culture, ethnicity, race, gender, nationality, age, religion, disability, sexual orientation, education, experiences, opinions and beliefs are just some of the distinctions we each bring to the workplace. By understanding, respecting and valuing these differences, we can capitalize on the benefits that diversity brings to the Company” (Ford Motor Co.) (Hayles and Russell (1997, pp. 11-13). By considering *all* people as “equally unique”, diversity management seeks to appeal to a broad audience but this appeal comes at the cost of avoiding and minimizing structural and institutional issues of race, ethnicity and gender discrimination. Diversity management in this sense is (and must be) constructive and pleasant, include everyone and offend no one: a heavy burden to bear under any condition but certainly when one seeks to deal with race relations in organizations!

Looking at diversity management from the prevailing perspective, it appears like major progress and major change: organizations voluntarily and cheerfully take on the task of creating a diverse and welcoming environment that is supportive to all different groups of people. In this regard, it is very tempting to join the bandwagon and view diversity management as the final answer to our longstanding national and corporate problems or racism and exclusion. However, as Prasad and Mills (1997) and others have argued, there is a real “*shadow side*” of diversity management: diversity programs have not proven to be

effective in eliminating workplace discrimination; there is no serious scholarly study of the impact of diversity management; the diversity literature ignores the reality of white rage and the white male backlash; organizational monoculturalism and the related issue of institutional resistance to diversity remain unaddressed and/or are underestimated; the literature fails to deal with the rising resistance to acculturation; and finally, diversity is commodified.

The central thread in all of this is that diversity management is too simplistic. It presents a model that is relational rather than structural in nature, emphasizing training, communication, mentoring and teamwork and excluding the more fundamental issues of structural equity and accountability. This fails to take into account the deeply rooted nature of racial problems and ignores the extent to which such efforts are influenced by both the organizational and societal context. As a result, extensive diversity efforts have been implemented in organizations, but yet exclusion, conflict, harassment, marginalization, problematization, and many other painful experiences continue to exist on an everyday basis (see e.g. Essed, 1992; Cose, 1993; 1997). To the extent that the diversity literature and diversity interventions do not seriously examine or address these problems, the real issue of racism (and other forms of systemic discrimination) becomes trivialized and minimized. Furthermore, diversity theory fails to locate racism in the very structure, ideology and process of the organization and the wider social culture at large. Rather, it presents a deceptively simple and cheerful remedy that covers rather uncovers the problem at hand, an approach that ultimately may do more damage than it does good.

In spite of the celebratory rhetoric of diversity management, assimilation is still the prevalent norm in organizations, requiring minorities of any kind of adjust and adapt to white male standards (Rose, 1997). The racial (and gender) basis of these standards is sometimes difficult to discern since they are no longer presented to us in a clearly racialized form. Organizational cultures are still characterized though by the basic assimilation themes of organizational fit, conformity, team play, adaptation, adjustment, the importance of the

whole over the parts, and the primacy of efficiency, effectiveness, quality and whatever other overriding goals the organization may wish to insert into that picture. In other words, when the organization invites people “of difference” into its culture, it is the people and not the culture that is made to change. Dress codes for example are not constructed as racial or even as gender issues in the organization. Instead, they are presented as neutral, necessary and meaningful elements of the organizational culture, symbols of professionalism, expressions of courtesy to the customer, and so forth. The extent to which existing dress codes in fact reflect a particular, historically constructed, racialized reality is made invisible in this presentation as is the extent to which adaptation to the dress code may mean much more in terms of identity loss to certain, non-white, non-male, non-European, non-US or non-Christian groups of people.

Similarly, organizations may have become more flexible with regard to accommodating “female” needs in relation to child bearing and rearing. However, instead of changing the very decidedly male notions of career and commitment, they have developed separate “Mommy tracks” that may allow women to meet family needs but also effectively derail them from the corporate promotion track. Likewise, the common organizational tendency to designate certain positions (Affirmative Action Officer, Diversity Manager, Community Relations) as minority positions, leaving all others by implication to whites, recreates within the organization the same kind of structural segregation that exists in society at large. As Cose (1993) points out: “What this logic has meant in terms of the larger corporate world is that black executives have landed, out of all proportion to their numbers, in community relations and public affairs, or in slots where their only relevant expertise concerns blacks and other minorities. The selfsame racial assumptions that make minorities seem perfect for certain initially desirable jobs can ultimately be responsible for trapping them as others move on” (p. 65).

Diversity management’s “inclusiveness strategy” that incorporates white males as one of the many groups to be considered is very telling in this regard. Instead of recognizing and

dealing with the reality of racism, this strategy accommodates the dominant group by using the rationale that “dealing exclusively with race and gender often causes disengagement on the part of those who most need to face race and gender issues” (Hayles and Russell, 1997, p. 13). This parallels the social political shift in recent American history that seeks to portray everybody equally as ‘minorities’, evident most clearly in the “white ethnic” movement. It also, and similarly, minimizes and denies the real differences in historical and contemporary experiences, and the extent to which “color blindness” is not and never has been a reality in this society.

Farmer (1965) clearly captures the problem in this by observing: “(W)e (Blacks) learned that America simply couldn’t be color-blind, it would have to become color-blind and it would only become color-blind when we gave up our color. The white man, who presumably has no color, would have to give up only his prejudices. We would have to give up our identities source(p. 87). Diversity management, like previous strategies, not only fails to critically examine the racialized nature of organizations, it also denies the reality of the racial Other.

By presenting a pluralist strategy that celebrates diversity for the ‘common economic good’ while ignoring the structural and cultural racial biases that exist in the organization, “an apparent unity is imposed upon and subsumes inherent contradictions and conflicting economics and political interest within and between racial, sexual or class groupings” (Carby, 1980, p. 64). This, according to San Juan (1992), results in “a normative pluralism that effectively eliminates those cultural and political differences which it claims to be respecting in the first place. At the same time it disallows the view that inequality (stemming from the allocation of privileges and privations through invidious racial categorization) is historically and socially constructed” (p. 140). Finally, it ensures that the ideology of race is reproduced even “by academic ‘liberals’ and ‘progressives’ in whose version of race the neutral shibboleths *difference* and *diversity* replace words like *slavery*, *injustice*, *oppression* and

exploitation, diverting attention from the anything-but-neutral history these words denote” (Fields, 1989, p. 141).

In summary, rather than presenting a new dialogical movement around differences, diversity management represents a new version of a much older racial ideology that seeks to obscure real inequities in favor of a rhetoric of equality. In this sense, diversity management both reflects and responds to changes in the larger social and political context. The emergence of diversity management has coincided with a general regressive change in the social climate that has included a political and a judicial withdrawal from a commitment to racial equity, as reflected in the renewed political debate around affirmative action, the judicial narrowing of affirmative action application, and the continued struggle around EEO funding. It is reflected also in the larger social conflict around race, erupting in the form of increasingly hostile “talk show” rhetoric, the white male backlash, a growing sense of white impatience around “a long since resolved issue” and very concretely in increasing incidents of racial hatred and violence. It is important that we understand and recognize this larger context for organizations are never an isolated site of racial or class conflict but rather, they are expressive of the conflicts existing at the social/political level of society. The emergence and popularity of the diversity management movement can thus best be understood as the outcome of ongoing dialectical tensions that exist in our society – structural, economic, ideological and rhetorical in nature – and rather than resolving these tensions, diversity management offers a new ideological and mediated cultural response designed to contain, restrain and obscure the fundamental racial inequalities that are inherent in our society.

Lastly, diversity management can and should also be understood as part of the general corporate attempt to reclaim the privacy of its hegemonic sphere, a move that is also consistent with recent changes in the political climate. By presenting diversity management as a voluntary attempt on the part of the organization to carry out the social mandate of non-discrimination, organizations re-assert their independence and autonomy, thereby averting claims of public accountability and control, another interesting strategic move in

the overall struggle over race, power and hegemony. Diversity management thus effectively presents a diversion strategy that operates on multiple fronts to avoid rather than to create dialogue and meaningful organizational change.

Diversity and dialogue: Possibilities for change

It was argued above that diversity management is political in its ideological project of aiming to neutralize race and gender (Acker, 1992); it is also political in its denial of the racial basis of the organizations that positions people both ideologically and structurally. Meaningful change in organizations fundamentally requires that we refocus diversity management by developing a critical approach using the models of discourse and dialogue. This project developed in detail elsewhere (Kersten, 1999) consists of three key elements: (1) understanding the organizational structure and culture as racial constructions; (2) recognizing the need to thematize rather than minimize racial issues and differences; thereby (3) developing the conditions for undistorted racial dialogue.

The denial of race, racism and the racial basis of organizational culture has forced much of the racial conflict underground. Many years of anti-discrimination legislation, combined with the more recent diversity approach have taught organizations to present a face of "political correctness" that avoids any overt racial conflict or expression. To the extent that neither the power structure nor the culture have been affected in any real, substantial sense, these efforts have not altered, but merely diverted the location and expression of the conflict. Diversity management in this sense has effectively (though temporarily) absorbed the tensions and contradictions, setting the stage for a continued struggle for meaningful equality and change. A critical model of race dialogue can be helpful in this struggle by showing how meaningful change requires a long term commitment to work through deeply seated and ideologically constrained differences in personal as well as organizational worldviews. This commitment includes the need to deconstruct seemingly productive and pleasant, yet ideologically distorted images like those

provided by diversity management. A critical understanding of race dialogue also points out that dialogue is never meaningful without action and structural change. Finally, it reminds us that organizations must be made accountable to the community at large, retaining not only the image but also some of the political realities of Habermas' concept of the public sphere.

References

- Acker, J. (1992), Gendering organizational theory. In A. Mills and P. Tancred (eds.) *Gendering Organizational analysis*, Sage, Newbury Park, CA, pp. 248-260.
- Arendt, H. (1985), *Lectures of Kant's Political Philosophy*, (R. Beiner, ed.), University of Chicago Press, Chicago:
- Carby, H. (1980), "Multi-culture", *Screen Education*, 34, (Spring), pp. 62-70.
- Carr, A., and Zanetti, L. (1999), "Metatheorising the dialectics of self and other: The psychodynamics in work organisations", *American Behavioral Scientist*, Vol. 43 No. 2, pp. 324-345.
- Cose, E. (1993), *The Rage of a Privileged Class*, Harper Collins, New York.
- Cose, E. (1997), *Color-Blind: Seeing Beyond Race in a Race-Obsessed World*, Harper Collins, New York.
- Deetz, S. (1992), *Democracy in an Age of Corporate Colonization: Development in Communication and the Politics of Everyday Life*, State University of New York, Albany.
- Deetz, S. and Kersten, A. (1983), Critical models of interpretive research, in Putnam, L. and Pacanowski, M. (eds.), *Communication and Organizations*, Sage, Beverly Hills, pp. 147-172.
- Essed, P. (1992), *Understanding Everyday Racism*, Sage, Newbury Park.
- Farmer, J. (1965), *Freedom - When?* Random House, New York.
- Fields, B. (1989), Slavery, race and ideology in the United States of America, *New Left Review*, pp. 95-118.
- Fraser, N. (1990), Rethinking the public sphere: A contribution to the critique of actually existing democracy, *Social Text*, 25, pp. 56-80.
- Fraser, N. (1989), *Unruly Practices: Power, Discourse and Gender in Contemporary Social Theory*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis.

- Gallagher, C. (1995), White construction in the university, *Socialist Review*, 24, pp. 165-187.
- Gentile, M. (1996), *Managerial Excellence through Diversity*, Waveland Press, Prospect Height.
- Goodnight, T. (1987), Public Discourse, *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, 4, pp. 429-431.
- Golembiewski, R.(1995), *Managing Diversity in Organizations*, University of Alabama Press, Tuscaloosa.
- Gutman, A. (1994), Introduction, in Gutmann, A. (ed.), *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, pp. 3-24.
- Habermas, J. (1994), Struggles for recognition in the democratic constitutional state, in Gutmann, A. (ed.), *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, pp. 107-148.
- Habermas, J. (1992) , Further reflections on the public sphere, in Calhoun, C. (ed.), *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, MIT, Cambridge, pp.
- Habermas, J. (1989), *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, (Burger, T. and Lawrence, F. trans.), MIT Press, Cambridge.
- Habermas, J. (1981), *The Theory of Communicative Action*, Beacon Press, Boston.
- Hacker, A. (1997), *Two Nations: Black and White, Separate., Hostile and Unequal* (2nd ed.), Ballantine Books, New York.
- Hage, G. (1994, Winter), Locating multiculturalism's other: A critique of practical tolerance, *New Formations*, 24, pp. 19-34.
- Hayles, R. and Russell, A. (1997), *The Diversity Directive: Why Some Initiative Fail and What to Do About It*, McGraw-Hill, New York.
- Horkheimer, M. (1996), *Eclipse of Reason*, Continuum, New York.
- Ingram, D. (1990), *Critical Theory and Philosophy*, Paragon House, St. Paul.
- Jackson, J. (3/31/1997), Why race dialogue stutters, *Nation*, 264, 12, p. 3.
- Jackson, S. and associates (1992), *Diversity in the Workplace: Huamn Resource Initiatives*, Guilford, New York.
- Johnston, W. and Packer, A. (1987), *Workforce 2000: Work and Workers for the 21st Century*, Hudston Institute, Indianapolis.
- Kersten, A. (1999), The struggle for race dialogue, Paper presented at the Annual Conference of the International Communication Association, San Francisco, CA., May 1999.
- Kersten, A. and Sidky, M. (1997), Keep off! Private! Enter at your own risk! (De)constructing the organization as a private sphere, in Rahim, M., Golembiewski, R. and Pate, L. (eds.), *Current Topics in Management, volume 2*, JAI Press, Greenwich, CN, pp. 287-304.
- McClaren, P. (1991), Decentering culture: Postmodernism, resistance and critical pedagogy, in Wyner, N. (ed.), *Current Perspectives on the Culture of Schools*, Brookline, Boston, pp. 232-257.

- McClure, K. (1996), The institutional subordination of contested issues: The case of Pittsburgh's steelworkers and ministers, *Communication Quarterly*, 44, 4, pp. 487-501.
- Prasad, P., Mills, A., Elmes, M., and Prasad, A. eds.) (1997), *Managing the Organizational Melting Pot: Dilemmas of Workplace Diversity*, Sage, Thousand Oaks.
- Prasad, P. and Mills, A. (1997), From showcase to shadow: Understanding the dilemmas of managing workplace diversity, in Prasad, P. et al. (eds.), pp. 3-30.
- Nakayama, T. (1994), Show/down time: "Race", gender, sexuality, and popular culture, *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, 11, pp. 162-179.
- Ramsey, R. (1998), Suffering wonder: Wooing and courting in the public sphere, *Communication Theory*, 8, 4, pp. 455-475.
- Rose, P. (1997), *They and We: Racial and Ethnic Relations in the United States*, Mc Graw-Hill. , New York.
- San Juan, Jr. E.(1992), *Racial Formations/Critical Transformations: Articulations of Power in Ethnic and Racial Studies in the United States*, Humanities Press, New Jersey.
- Shome, R. (1996), Race and popular cinema: The rhetorical strategies on whiteness in *City of Joy*, *Communication Quarterly*, 44, 4, pp. 502-518.
- Sleeter, C. (1993), How white teachers construct race, in McCarthy, C. and Crichlow, W. (eds.), *Race, Identity and Representation in Education*, Routledge, New York, pp. 157-171.
- Sleeter, C. (1994), White racism, *Multicultural Education*, 39, pp. 5-8.
- Thomas, R.R. Jr. (1996), *Redefining Diversity*, AMACOM, New York.
- Thomas, R. R. Jr. (1991), *Beyond Race and Gender*, AMACOM, New York
- Wittgenstein, L. (1969), *On Certainty*, New York.