

*The Word and the World: Explorations in the Form of Sociological Analysis.* By Michael Mulkay. Winchester, Mass.: Allen & Unwin, 1985. Pp. xiii + 262. \$29.95 (cloth); \$11.95 (paper).

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At the end of his inaugural lecture a century ago, the great medievalist N. D. Fustel de Coulanges waved away the applause, saying it is "not I who speak, but history which speaks through me." His ploy had the intended effect—the applause redoubled—but the epistemology was dubious even then. Nowadays, and outside a tenure meeting, few could be found who would argue that history or society or biochemistry can be merely reported, in a wholly transparent language. Yet, as Michael Mulkay says in his dazzling book, *The Word and the World*, "the discourse of much sociological research . . . is founded on a nineteenth-century con-

ception of the relationship between . . . scientific discourse and the world" (p. 12).

Mulkay will have none of that. He has invented a new form of discourse, the postmodernist novel melded with sociology. And a charming novel it is. *The Book* (only the largest role among 30 or so in a drama of scholarly discourse) analyzes in detail a dispute between two biochemists named "Marks" and "Spencer." ("Spencer" is Peter Mitchell, who in 1978 won the Nobel prize in chemistry for the work under dispute.) The main subject, however, is sociology itself, the sociology of science in particular, and most particularly that "strong programme" advancing through British sociology of science in recent years, of which Mulkay leads a brilliantly literary wing.

Mulkay's main point about sociology might be called stylistic, though not "mere" style. What he calls the "analytic dialogue," which "allows for more than one voice," is better for sociology, he argues, than the "empiricist monologue" in which academic argument is conventionally couched. "However appropriate the empiricist monologue may be for the natural sciences, and that itself is a matter of dispute, this analytic form is in many ways the least suitable for sociological analysis" (p. 9). Mulkay is arguing that a sociological analysis worth its Latin should see society in more ways than one.

Sociologists in fact already see more than their rhetoric permits them to speak, seeing doubts and ironies but speaking findings, mainly self-evident. Mulkay's program is to come out from behind the mask of science, without loss of face. The sociology of science has been doubly masked: a scientific study of a scientific myth. The British sociologists and American historians of science are changing all this. The right approach is Merton's *On the Shoulders of Giants*. Mulkay takes it, standing on Merton's shoulders and occasionally on his face, in a Shandean post-script.

About the way the biochemists argue for one or another theory of oxidative phosphorylation Mulkay has much to say, because he has done the sociological homework. The book is tough-minded, though the study of texts is more suited to literary than to statistical methods. Mulkay performs rhetorical analyses of professional papers, personal correspondence, speeches, and interviews, and he went so far at one point as to invite the disputants to the University of York to settle matters under the eye of the sociologist. Mulkay takes a clinical view of the scientific conversation. He sees its pathologies—as does "Spencer" himself most clearly among the biochemists—and wishes to be of assistance.

It is going to be difficult. The "epistolary dialogue," for example, the standard form of communication between scientific opponents since Newton and Hooke, works poorly. Its tactics, as Mulkay shows in convincing detail, parody the norms of H. P. Grice's conversational implicature or of J. Habermas's *sprachethik*: "Rule 11: Use the personal format of a letter . . . but withdraw from the text yourself as often as possible so

that the other party continually finds himself engaged in an unequal dialogue with the experiments, data, observations and facts.”

Like many participants in the rhetorical turn, Mulkay is not aware that he is continuing a rhetorical tradition born in Sicily and Athens. He does bring the good news of that modern rhetoric, literary criticism. The realist novel of the 19th century put forward a claim to being a nontext similar to that of the empiricist monologue, a claim to being the thing itself, life as lived, Nature as she is. The life of the biochemist, and of the sociologist, Mulkay is arguing, is not so easy as this—or so dull.