Mary Parker Follett: Toward Organizational Communication Ethics in a Flattening and Fearful World

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IN A FLATTENING AND FEARFUL WORLD

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ABSTRACT

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Dissertation supervised by Dr. Ronald C. Arnett

On September 11, 2001, terror attacks in New York City, Washington, DC and Somerset County, Pennsylvania, initiated a new global awareness and fear among citizens of the United States as well as others around the world. In this context of a flattening and fearful world described by Thomas Friedman in his two post 9/11 books, organizational communication has been responding to and participating within a widening scope of change and fear. In recognizing this tumultuous time, there’s a desire to find a constructive way forward and to consider possible theorists from other historical moments who might guide our way. This dissertation examines the life and work of Mary Parker Follett who offers meaningful insight for ethical practice in such a time as this within organizational communication.
Follett’s life can be understood through both her experiences and her writing along with the frameworks and trajectory that created context for her writing. In chapter two, a biographical sketch makes connections between the significance of Follett’s work and the timeline and people of her life. The chapter looks at four sections. The first section features her early years and life in Quincy, Massachusetts, just outside of Boston. The second section looks at Follett’s engagement at Cambridge with the Harvard Annex. The third section explores her work with neighborhood center movements, rooted in Boston’s Roxbury neighborhood, but eventually taking Follett into a larger national scene. The last section looks at Follett’s engagement with marketplace realities on both sides of the Atlantic that takes the narrative up to her abrupt death in 1933.

Chapter three explores the historical moment through six primary philosophical movements. Following in the tradition of Mary Parker Follett who moved across academic discipline boundaries, the chapter pulls from a variety of academic perspectives including philosophy, sociology, economics, politics and religion. Beginning with postmodernity, the chapter also looks at feminism and postcolonialism as broader critiques within the field of organizational communication. Lastly, post-industrialism, post-Christendom and post-Americanism, which are situated in particular fields and contexts, are explored as manifestations of the other movements. Underlying all of these areas is Thomas Friedman’s assertion from his books that the world has become increasingly interconnected and accessible.

Chapter 4 explores Follett’s writing along with the fusion of horizon with organizational communication. Mary Parker Follett was a Gestalt theory advocate.
believing that there was an invitation to understand things as a whole without diminishing the parts. The dissertation explores both the parts and whole of Follett’s work. The books and posthumously published lectures offer a glimpse of her life and engagement. Follett’s first book *The Speaker of the House of Representatives* was published when she was a student in 1898. The second book *The New State* was published in 1918 in the midst of the Great War. The third book *Creative Experience* arrived six years later. Two posthumous books were published in the 40’s: *Dynamic Administration* and *Freedom and Coordination*. These mostly featured her late-in-life lectures from after *Creative Experience* among business leaders.

The last chapter explores the fusion of horizons or intersectionality of the work of Mary Parker Follett for today’s historical moment. In what ways can her “saintly” way be understood? The chapter investigates particularly where Follett intersects with popular scholarship updates in organizational communication. The dissertation then moves toward cultivating a “conscientization” of Follett for organizational communication. Lastly, the research looks for ways that Follett might be able to illuminate a little ethical way forward. The conclusions explore some of the reasons for Follett’s relative hiddenness in organizational communication, then turns toward finding some of those reasons to serve as significant insights and impetus as to why Follett might be engaged.
DEDICATION

To my parents, Stephen and Florence Kriss, who never stopped asking.
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Since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses . . .

Let us run with perseverance. –Hebrews 11.1 (NRSV)

This dissertation emerged out of the engagement of diverse texts, communities and people. I am grateful for the opportunities to study, work and learn at Duquesne University, particularly for the encouragement and mentoring of my advisor Dr. Ronald C. Arnett, along with the dissertation committee Dr. Janie Harden Fritz and Dr. Calvin Troup. They believed when I could not and held this work in both mindfulness and prayer. I am privileged and grateful to have learned alongside them for two decades.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

“Since 9/11 we have been afraid. And when you are afraid you are not yourself.”  
—Thomas Friedman in Hot, Flat and Crowded (10)

On September 11, 2001, terror attacks in New York City, Washington, D.C., and rural Pennsylvania initiated a new global awareness and fear among citizens of the United States as well as others around the world. In this context of a flattening and fearful world, described by Thomas Friedman in his two post-9/11 books, organizational communication has found itself responding to and participating within the widening scope of change and fear (Stohl and Ganesh 721). In recognizing this tumultuous time, there is a desire to find a constructive way forward and to consider possible theorists from other historical moments who might guide our way. This dissertation examines the life and work of Mary Parker Follett as one theorist who provides meaningful insight for ethical practice in such a time as this within organizational communication.

Jean Baudrillard writes in The Spirit of Terrorism that the attacks were intended to take on the systems of organizational political power and economics in the United States. The terror plot included the destinations of both New York and Washington, D.C., centers of commerce and government, for specific symbolic reasons. The attack on the Twin Towers in New York represents an affront to both US American aggression and its flipside: compassion due to its geography, the immensity of the architecture, and the symbolic name of World Trade Center. According to Baudrillard, even American compassion is rooted in arrogance, an arrogance that does good without consultation and consideration, projecting its own version of good on others. American arrogance assumes
that the one expressing compassion knows best and looks down from a lofty perch of secured and sound decision-making (61).

Baudrillard is not the only contemporary philosopher to try to make sense of 9/11. Slovene writer Slavoj Zizek wrote in *Welcome to the Desert of the Real*, the incidents of 9/11 moved fear and conflict from the virtual realm to reality, a manifestation of projections, fears and dreams (Zizek 15, 49). September 11 dissolved any illusion that “America” was not connected to the rest of the world. The dissolution of this illusion created real pain as it broke Americans’ sense of isolation. For Zizek, it is not so much a clash of civilizations (as Samuel Huntington supposed) but a manifestation of the real in the midst of what, for many, had been illusory and unreal. This manifestation of the real brings with it a rising tide of fearfulness into Thomas Friedman’s flattening world.

While these two philosophical descriptions interpret the 9/11 events from the safety of the academy, post-2001, everyday people have repurposed their lives and reoriented their existences in response to 9/11. The Freedom Tower now rises high above lower Manhattan. Wars continue to age from Syria to Nigeria and dis-ease has crept into diverse United States and international contexts from Ferguson, Missouri along the Midwest’s Mississippi River to Fallujah, Iraq along the Middle East’s Euphrates River. This tumult seems disassociated with the 9/11 events but has been permeated by the historical moment nonetheless. Every time an airplane passenger wants to board a plane in the USA, they must remove their shoes, take off their belt and go through careful, and what can at times feel like invasive, screening.

Baudrillard’s comments that the hijackers intended to symbolically take on the systems of the United States leaves a pondering question about the ethical practice of
organizations in an interconnected world. In this flat world described by Thomas Friedman, the ethical praxis of organizations has far-reaching impact. Governments, NGOs, businesses, religious institutions and educational systems all have a part in the 9/11 story. While it is extreme rhetorical overreach to attempt to claim the ability to fix all of these systems, the significance of organizational life for seven billion persons on the planet cannot be understated. At the heart of organizational life is the significance of organizational communication. In postmodernity, in the midst of rising, crumbling and competing global organizations, questions of ethical practice in a flat world loom large (Stohl and Ganesh 717-19). In these days, organizational responses are shaped by sometimes legitimate and sometimes overblown fear. As Friedman says, we are not quite ourselves. (Hot, Flat and Crowded 10).

At the same time, this flattening world offers the prospect of intercultural communication with all of its potential and foibles; crossing boundaries of geography, ethnicity, language, and religion are everyday occurrences for our globalizing era. In the midst of this possibility is an essential disorientation with the potential to either foster ongoing learning toward human flourishing or to unleash destructive forces and fear directed at organizations and individuals who are seen to be part of systems of oppression, disrespect and offense. Those caught in the midst of a destructive response might themselves have little or nothing to do with the forces of the organizations. This makes navigating organization communication and ethical praxis within our current historical moment quite difficult (Stohl and Ganesh 735-36).

In searching for a possible response to this larger scenario, St. Thérèse of Lisieux’s “little way” provides one possible response. Thérèse believed that too many
people lived and responded out of fear. She sought to find regular, small ways to respond to fear. Thérèse believed that these small responses, lived out on a daily basis, were significant and life changing (Russell, www.littleflower.org). This dissertation is rooted in finding a “little way” forward through organizational communication ethics by examining the work of Mary Parker Follett.

Follett represents a significant possibility for ethical momentum in organizational communication as she herself writes in a time of significant cultural and economic change. Her work at the turn of the 20th century set the foundation for numerous contemporary organizational and leadership gurus; despite this influence, her “little way”—a path of walking humanities into the marketplace—represents a worthy, yet sometimes unrecognized, perspective in a time when organizations have global impact through local decision-making (Friedman, World is Flat 477). In this post-9/11 ethos of fear and disorientation, which breaks forth from illusory and virtual and into real time, Follett offers a potential path and posture through her active engagement across generations of change in the midst of rising and collapsing industrial economies.

In considering that 9/11 underlined the significance of organizations in a flattening world, Follett’s work provides valuable insights. How might organizational communication be differently rooted and respond in a time of fear that cultivates flourishing and productive communities? While there are many organizational communication theorists available, as well as many philosophers and political commentators who respond to our current historical moment, this dissertation is set to look backward toward charting otherwise in ways that might offer hopeful ethical practice in a time of change and fearfulness (Munshi, Broadfoot and Smith 120). What
happens when we go into the heart of organizational life and seek out new postures and ways of “being together” that respond to the disorientation and fear? With all of these questions at hand, and in the context of the current historical moment, this research seeks to tap into Follett’s writing, working, teaching, learning and leading at a time before organizational communication fully emerges as a field, to find within it ethical taproots for communicative praxis.

**Mary Parker Follett:**
**Finding a way forward in organizational communication in a time of fear**

“Mary Parker Follett deserves a renaissance as a philosopher of leadership,” according to Daniel Wren and Ronald Greenwood in *Management Innovators* (198). Follett was an esteemed community organizer, consultant, writer and lecturer of the early 20th century. Her work is far-reaching and integrative, crossing disciplines and setting foundations for conversations that later morphed into the field of organizational communication. She also influenced perspectives on business and leadership into the 21st century; Peter Drucker writes that Follett’s work is prophetic considering issues of power, conflict and productivity and examining areas like citizenship and social organization (8).

Mary Parker Follett offers a glimpse into a perspective silenced by the noise of singularity in modernity (Bauman 56-58). Her work is relevant enough to gain followings in popular reading and to warrant some additional work and a new wave of publication at the end of the past millennium. Her ideas are integrated into the popular work of Stephen Covey and William Ury (but unattributed) and Peter Drucker who readily claims her in his lineage. A stream of her conscientiousness flows through the pop culture management-theory books found in airport bookstores around the world.
Follett’s ideas of power particularly have emerged in areas of conflict and negotiation and her ideas for management that recognizes the significance of the person permeates many areas of the field. Though there is still relatively little written about her from the organizational communication perspective. Her work and perspective is largely hidden from (plain) view.

Follett was a critic of modernity’s totalizing function. Her own intersectionality as a woman in fields largely dominated by men at the turn of the 1900s offers an incarnational point of resistance to the metanarrative of the industrial revolution. This metanarrative emphasized the scions of commerce and the halls of the academy, and, in Euro-American settings, had the support of both government and church. Follett interrupted all of those spaces in her historic presence, her writing and her work. For some, she is a brilliant interruption; for others, she is a mere nuisance.

In organizational communication ethics during this time of Thomas Friedman’s flattening, volatile and sometimes fear-inducing global economies, Follett’s writing offers a glimpse into alternative readings of context. While not a direct affront to modernity, Follett’s work responds to questions of context, community and personhood. She is curious not just about efficiency but about creativity. She is fascinated by both freedom and organization. She is leaning toward the changes that will come with postmodernity while still believing in many of possibilities of progress and industry as is the modern project. She lives, writes and works in an in-between space. She does this work in a changing context without fear of the change itself.

Mary Parker Follett descended from New England families who arrived on the colonial shores as early as 1630, fleeing religious persecution in England (Tonn 10-11).
Her family was deeply embedded in the Yankee culture during New England’s rise in industry and both of her parents came from families who were part of the emerging mercantile class. Her father’s service in the Civil War came to have a deep effect on Follett’s growing up experience as he struggled with re-entry into life in their hometown of Quincy, Massachusetts (Gabor 47). Returning veterans and rebuilding economies shaped her context much like our own time in the United States.

Joan C. Tonn’s tome *Mary Parker Follett: Creating Democracy, Transforming Management* is the only significant available work that attempts to blend Follett’s life and writing in a way where the two commingle. While shorter biographies are included in several other books, Tonn’s volume is by far the most comprehensive. In understanding Follett’s work, it’s important to glimpse her own life experiences and the context in which her responses developed. Tonn’s work is a critical contribution toward an understanding that situates the work in both biography and timeline. As will be discussed later, much of Follett’s writing is frequently misunderstood or unattributed in current scholarships with preferences to embrace her later writing without understanding the context from which the writing and research actually emerged.

Follett lived during times of significant economic expansion and change that charted a path through the industrialization and urbanization, migration and immigration of 1868-1933. Her moment had further resonances with today: she lived in a time when organizations and communities were responding to what seemed like rapid changes in demographics (mass migration from Europe to the USA), global connectivity (World War I), quickly changing technologies (the height of the industrial revolution) and
reconfiguring workforces (into factories and large systems related to labor, manufacturing and distribution) (Barry 122).

Follett’s first book, *The Speaker of the House of Representatives*, emerged out of this context and her study of the history and contemporary realities of the US political system. The book was one of an array of responses against the formalist thought of the day that included the work of Thorstein Veblein, John Dewey and Oliver Wendell Holmes. These writers believed that the formalism of the academic pursuits and perspectives dominant in the moralistic Victorian era did little to address real needs and the particularities of “modern American life” (Tonn 81). Follett’s work leaned toward interviews and contexts compared to empirical evidence. She integrated, interrogated and reasoned through the emerging scientific theory by asking questions and seeking causations (Tonn 82). Her work crossed genres and broke ground by working integratively; she was trained in the humanities but unafraid of engaging or critiquing methods of objective science while valuing interviews and qualitative research.

With significant time spent in learning and education, Follett then turned toward community-organizing work and research in Boston’s burgeoning immigrant neighborhoods. This work would take her out of the bounds of the academy, beyond the formalist structures of the day and into the work of neighborhoods, immigrants and politics. Heavily involved with the settlement-house movements, which provided services to recent immigrants, and exploring religious perspectives to make sense of personal challenges, Follett turned toward the streets and away from the academy, a place where she felt she often was not taken seriously as a woman. In a generation of work,
Follett responded to real issues of urbanization in the United States in the turn-of-the-20th-century-version of a flattening world.

In Boston, Follett became a tireless advocate for neighborhood community centers. Surrounded by the suffrage and temperance movements, largely the focus of women’s activism at the time, Follett turned toward an intersection of private initiatives, community-building, political engagement, social services and education. These community centers provided services in school buildings for those who needed additional training, both civically and vocationally, while focusing on empowering neighborhoods in decision making and community building. Follett’s work helped strengthen this movement toward vocational training. While struggling to gain ground in Boston, Follett’s persistence, despite complex political maneuvering, cultivated a nationwide movement at the height of the 20th century’s great industrialization and European immigration into US cities. Her second book, The New State, which was published a generation after the first, is rooted in this experience of engaging with deep and complex needs. It is a response to the possibility and complication of government, democracy, community and changing contexts.

Follett’s time in Boston provided a launching pad for further work abroad and with businesses in New York City. Although she remained rooted in her work in Boston, with the publishing of her third book, Creative Experience, Follett found a broader audience and began to move across fields from business, to politics, to labor and education. She began to write about conflict and power, particularly responding to the dominance of experts and the move toward efficiency and the “otherizing” of workers in manufacturing and production. These changes in industrialization bolstered the United
States’ rising economic power through the use of systems like Henry Ford’s assembly line and an orientation toward mass consumption. Follett gained attention during the roaring 1920s when the economy rolled and grew, but her voice was lost as the Great Depression brought a halt to management innovation. Her lectures toward the end of her life marked her “as one of the preeminent contributors to organizational and management thought” (Tonn 415).

Follett would be quick to resist classification with our own historical moment. She was a woman of her own time and her own contexts. Her research was focused in her own time and space. She would suggest that our moment requires its own response. She would likely be glad to be included, however, and elated to discover that some of her ideas and metaphors have taken root in popular management and organizational life.

This project will seek to name some of those areas and to bring forward further possibilities and implications from Follett’s scholarship and engagement toward organizational communication ethics in the midst of volatile and at times fearful response (Graham, “Pioneer” 30).

**Flattening economies, rising fears and modern criticisms:**
**The historical moment in organizational communication**

The field of organizational communication faces the complex realities of institutions that are global both in their specific localities and overall strategies (Friedman, *World is Flat* 477). Communication, even within an organization, has become increasingly intercultural, with a growing acceptance of the models of cultural intelligence and competencies from writers like David Livermore (21-31). As Friedman writes, organizations that will flourish in this flattening time will simultaneously be both rooted in localities and globally innovative (*Lexus and Olive Tree* 42).
This presents an increasing stress on the understanding of organizational communication as integrative to intercultural communication; organizations are often faced with fear of difference and the impending and implicative changes wrought by flattening organizational environments (Putnam and Mumby 11-15; Stohl and Ganesh 717-19). Flattening environments represent changing values and access. Writers like Fareed Zakaria tell of a post-American world (2-5). In places like Morocco and Russia, the globalizing forces of market economies, transportation and migration represent Western incursions into believing and living otherwise. In current contexts, there are new forms of resistance to dominating totalities from the seemingly hopeful rolling Arab Springs, to the complexity of Russian reclamation of the Crimea, to the propagation of fear-inducing images related to the rise of ISIS/ISIL (Dabashi 10-12).

These changes on a global scale represent points of impact in the lives of organizations both small and large. The connectivity of the smartphone era and the wide use of social media interweave much of the world’s population. This readily-accessible interaction, while opening the possibility for new understanding, also cultivates new prospects of fear and trembling. This “fear and trembling” is not in response to the holy, as Kierkegaard intends, but is in response to a loss of identity that created by the decline of the illusory metanarrative and the vivid rise of the multiplicities of what Lyotard calls the “petite narrative” (60). The plurality of petite narratives does not necessarily mean understanding and harmony; instead these narratives open windows for new volatilities. These confrontations arise when the petite narratives encounter larger narrative frameworks, which, in the footsteps of the colonialism that dominated political practice
for much of European encounter with the world, are intent on finding new spaces and organizations to inhabit (Broadfoot & Munshi 159-161).

In the midst of the postmodern turn, the decline of the metanarrative and the rise of the petite narrative, organizational communication critical theorists are turning toward feminist and postcolonial theory. The postmodern feminist critique is so strong in contemporary perspectives that *The Organizational Communication Handbook* suggests that the theory’s hegemonic presence across the field requires some critical work against itself to be true to confronting hegemonies (Ashcraft 144). Follett’s thought offers a pre-feminist or possibly proto-feminist perspective as a woman whose voice found space in the cracks between the disciplines of her time, writing about political theory (before women could vote), working with immigrant and community-organizing efforts, staying conversant in the academy and engaging the business marketplace.

Mary Parker Follett’s work is concerned with theory-informed action or praxis. She presents cases for ethical praxis in valuation of persons who were largely often undervalued in her own historical moment. Framed by her work with immigrants, Follett eventually leaned toward what might later be identified as postcolonial praxis and the kind of culture-crossing work that would not be seen as significant in the field for at least another generation. She cobbled together threads of various disciplines within the humanities and social sciences to help lay foundational work for scholarly and popular disciplines that would later emerge. In encountering a changing Boston, she leaned in toward neighborhoods and immigrants and navigated a way forward that might allow organizations to ethically interact and move toward flourishing in a flattening and frequently fearful world.
It is not only the historical context that makes Follett significant. Today’s historical moment offers substantial space, as Hans-Georg Gadamer would suggest, for the “fusion of horizons” of Follett’s work (317). Contemporary philosophical discombobulation with the practices of modernity that Follett was beginning to question through critique and constructive practice might at least partly be assuaged through her responses and directions.

Thomas Friedman’s flattening world serves as a significant metaphor in understanding some of the globalizing forces that shape our own historical moment. In this moment of seismic shift, reorientation, turbulence and fear, (Stohl and Ganesh 717-19) communication practices are deeply affected and have the potential to be reshaped in ways that might promote or inhibit flourishing. Whether it is the loss of confidence in organizations, structures and institutions that is a hallmark of postmodernity, the decentering of the West that Fareed Zakaria and Edward Said (5-6) describe, the great economic changes that Richard Florida (15-17) and Daniel Bell (119) note in the shift from industrial to creative or information economies, or the shifts in the dominance of Western Christian faith described by Stuart Williams and Philip Jenkins, organizations and the people that inhabit them find themselves navigating difficult seas and swells, charting unfamiliar courses. There is indeed much fear in the midst of this volatility, sometimes slowly and sometimes rapidly deconstructing the remaining metanarratives of Western modernity. In the petite narrative life of organizations, where shared meaning is often constructed and extended, an ethical way forward in the midst of fear becomes essential, an ethical way forward that leans toward hope, bridled by the possibility of
routine cynicism in the face of unfulfilled expectation (Arnett & Arneson 20-25). It is with Follett that there could be a possibility in examining a “little way.”

Follett provides a meaningful response in that she resisted some of the changes that late modernity eventually privileged (for instance, Fordist organizational structures that are now readily decried in organizational communication fields) while at the same time proposing change beyond the status quo (Mumby 111). She is an imperfect guide in some ways, struggling to come to terms with all of the implications of modernity and democracy with considerably more trust in the possibility of progress than any postmodern can muster. Follett’s ways of practicing differently, although not as perturbing as some of today’s resistance scholars like Noam Chomsky, offer a praxis and consideration that humanizes while not ignoring the potential of the community, person and organization. She resists the individualism of modernity while respecting the individuality or intersectionality of each person as vital to the flourishing of the group or community. This intersectionality (a term shaped by feminists theorists) is significant in developing an understanding of how and where to cultivate ethical practice in organizations in a time of flattening economics and fear, fear which ultimately serves to dehumanize and to obscure the holiness of the human encounter with Otherness.

The challenges for organizational communication in a time of fear and flattening are legion. With constant critique and awareness of hegemonic and colonial practice, with the rise of technique and what Neil Postman calls technopolies, the navigational practice space for organizational communication is tight and complicated (Postman 51-53). Follett’s foundational work and research might establish further historical pedigree
for qualitative research that connects to a rootedness in the humanities, thus charting a “little way” forward in the organizational marketplace.

The risk in today’s marketplace of organizational communication is the loss of ground, the loss of ability to stand and maneuver in this changing space of trepidation (Stohl and Ganesh 721-25). That difficult navigational space increases the likelihood of practice and proclamation that is less than ethical, less than seeking the good, sliding toward therapeutic communication and organizational jargon that disrupts the possibility of honest, creative and generative interaction (Putman and Mumby 3-6). Embracing the rising tide of post (or hyper as some prefer) modernity’s individualism without engaging petite narratives that represent shared conceptualizations of the and the true opens wide the possibility of unethical practice while at the same time avoiding current critiques in the areas of feminism and postcolonialism (Zarefsky 217).

In our historical moment, Follett might help organizational communication ethics to gain at least a foothold or at least provide a conversations starter in rapidly changing contexts (Cheney, Lair, Ritz and Kendall 234-42). In response to the current critiques, Follett’s work is deeply rooted in her own intersectionality. This is a valuable recognition. Her work then, rooted in a pre- or proto-postcolonial and feminist understanding, looks like it might have significant implication for organizational communication that recognizes and protects the worth of persons and their experiences while respecting communal and organizational priorities. She advocates a difficult balance between the person and the whole, recognizing the co-creating relationship between a person and the community.
Follett’s path of writing and engagement might well offer a “little way” in a time of fear as described by Thérèse of Lisieux (165). It is a small way forward with potential for significant learning, not a grandiose claim to find resolution. Instead, Follett offers an honest search and a glimpse into research and posture that might allow contextual responses in a flattening and fearful time. She provides both a model of engagement and writing as well as meaningful insights. Both her work and person might help chart an ethical way forward in our own complicated historicities for persons, organizations, local and global communities.

In this flattening world context, Follett also has a significant implication for intercultural communication within organizations. Within the glocalization effect (the global is local, the local is global), organizations are challenged to communicate both locally and globally within specific and broader contexts (Friedman, *The World is Flat* 477). This effect is furthered by online communication but shaped significantly by ease of travel and ongoing global migration, challenging and reshaping ideas of identity and identification (Cheney, Christensen and Dailey 704-10). Within organizational communication in this kind of context, an ethical response must also always consider the potential and volatility within an organization itself as well as the spaces inbetween organizations or communities (Stohl and Ganesh 730-31). Follett’s writings certainly hold potential for this navigating toward ethical praxis.

**Scholarship: The five books of Mary Parker Follett**

Mary Parker Follett might best be glimpsed through her writing. While her biography itself is compelling, the books and the collections of her writings/lectures follow the trajectory of her work and questions from academy to neighborhood to politics
and boardrooms. Follett’s treatises are rhetorically convincing and interdisciplinary, comingling various areas in the sciences as well as humanities. She was interested in both the practical and pragmatic as well as theoretical and philosophical approaches. She was committed to real rather than imaginary problems. She was praxis-oriented, rooted in philosophy and marketplace, and shaped by her unique experiences in Christian faith practices and the contextual challenges of politics, gender and ethnicity.

Follett became popular through her later works; her two initial books are often minimized in research. These early works are not explicitly about organizational communication and management theory and are more difficult to understand. The books engage political realities that can seem unpopular and, at times, seem to be caught up in a detailed understanding of the whole. In understanding Follett, the easier and more popular path has been to focus on her later writing. Without delving into the earlier, longer books, however, researchers miss out on the depth of theory-informed action that Follett explores and presents. While for some, the early books represent a less-matured perspective that is first filled with her thrill of the academy and then built on the backs of her experience of working with immigrants, all of her writing is essential to developing a deeper and broader understanding of Follett’s life and work.

Engaging Follett through both stages of her research and writing, first investigating her early writing and second, the more popular work, helps us to understand her person and thought more in depth. This research is intended not only to provide a path forward that is rooted in an understanding of ethical organizational communication but also to understand how Follett herself was formed as an advocate for ethical organizational communication praxis. The value of her own personal development
cannot be understated. The effect of her intersectionality and engagement with the city, the academy and the marketplace is significant. She was a scholar, most certainly, but was also a person whose work in the academy is rooted in significant questions and critiques.

While Tonn has provided exhaustive research in understanding Mary Parker Follett’s life and work, this research will be more focused on the implications of Follett in organizational communication practice and praxis in a flattening and fearful time. It is a time similar to that which Follett herself inhabited, a time that drew her in and out of conversations in geographies as varied as Cambridge, South Boston, New York and London. It is the kind of space that organizational communicators might need to inhabit in a globalizing and fearful time for our own senses of ethical engagement (Stohl and Ganesh 730-31).

Follett’s books tell a story when read together in this kind of framework. The story provides a valuable glimpse into the postures that organizational communication might take to engage in ethical ways in various contexts. The framework of examining Follett’s work in two sections allows a deeper sense of understanding to emerge while honoring her preferred Gestalt method of operation, which recognizes the whole of the context together (Graham, “Pioneering” 25-26).

Follett’s first book, published in 1896, was largely an examination of political theory (Tonn 3). She believed strongly in cross-fertilization of the academic fields, a perspective that becomes evident in the flow of her work from business and management to communication and social work. Follett was known as willing to talk to anyone and had the uncanny ability to “really listen.” Her later work was strongly influenced by her
practical engagements, including work among immigrants in Boston through the
settlement house movements common in the day. These movements created settings to
provide resources for recent immigrants, primarily serving as hubs of social services,
acculturation and community organizing. Follett then turned that work toward the
business world, attempting to apply both what she had learned working among
immigrants and in understanding both productive and lackluster political systems to the
world of the workforce (Tonn 1-6).

While largely understated in her writing, these foundational engagements among
recent immigrants are valuable in an attempt to understand the intersection possible in
Follett’s work with intercultural communication and the kind of work necessary in a
flattening world. Although Follett was primarily concerned with the organization itself,
her writing was informed by the experience of listening and working in settlement
communities and neighborhoods. She was quite aware of their own limitations, however.
Her work and posture evidences that Follett, unlike popular-in-the-day scientific
management theorist Frederick W. Taylor, might have known immigrants by name, or at
least through a charitable understanding of their stories (Tonn 6).

1st book: Speaker of the House of Representatives:

Follett’s first book focused conversation on the role of the Speaker of the House
of Representatives. In an attempt to understand the national government that had stymied
in the years of economic growth and expansion following the US Civil War, Follett
interviewed numerous persons to learn about the roles of government and the larger US
political system. These types of conversation and interviews would become a hallmark
of her work, building on her ability to talk to just about anyone and listen well.
Follett’s book earned her some surprise recognition beyond the Boston academics where much of her work had occurred. She even gained the attention of Teddy Roosevelt, who at the time was police commissioner for New York City (Tonn 88). Roosevelt was a friend of one of Follett’s academic mentors. Her assertion, that the position of the Speaker of the House must become more accountable, was not always a popular one. The book demonstrated Follett’s penchant toward mutuality, however, and a developing understanding of the contextual limits of power while allowing effective efficiencies. This leaning toward change would suggest that Follett was breaking with the tradition of some of her New England academic elite compatriots (Tonn 89).

In her first published writing, Follett showed her hand as someone receptive to change. The first book foreshadows the remainder of her work and her future willingness to engage alongside the immigrant communities that would eventually reshape Boston first from Yankee and WASP (White Anglo-Saxon Protestant) to Catholic Irish and Italian and then to today’s multiethnic, pluralistic northern outpost of the US Northeastern megalopolis. While Follett was advocating for accountability, she also called for recognition of the roles of informal power within the government system. In this first book, she bumps into ideas and concepts that would later become central themes in her writing around areas of power, situation, role, community and individuality (Tonn 92-93).

2nd book: The New State (a generation later):

Follett’s writing flowed out of her on-the-ground experience in Boston where she witnessed ineffective government structures, burgeoning Irish immigrant populations and needs that she felt could best be met through neighborhood responsiveness (Tonn 210). In
her work with school-based neighborhood centers in Boston, she sought to create a sense of community, responsibility and solidarity (Tonn 211). Her second book, *The New State*, appeared 20 years after her first volume and was rooted in her work in neighborhoods. It garnered significant notice at the time of its release in the early 1920s but the attention largely faded away. In it Follett (*The New State*) asserts, “Representative government has failed” and should be replaced by a democracy that is union of individuals (Tonn 265-6). In this process, she suggests that learning is essential, arguing for a movement beyond passivity toward persons who create, develop and invent (Tonn 266).

In her writing, Follett was fully indebted to numerous others. She was an aggregator of ideas rooted in her own experiences and historical moment. Ironically, while Follett readily gave credit where credit was due, current pop cultural organizational theorists who seem to rely on her work rarely credit her (Tonn 267). Follett was a synthesizer, a rhetorician in her work, pulling from both the sciences and humanities, reliant on marketplace and academy, rooted in work with the poor and access to persons and places of power. Her post-World War I writing found ready audiences leaning toward hope in the Roaring Twenties.

Noticeable in all of Follett’s work is the metaphor of integration over compromise or even consensus. For Follett, group process involves the contribution of everyone. Decisions are not rooted only in a majority vote or general acquiescence, but rather are a contributing process where each person brings a sense of presence and engagement. Submitting to the will of the group is anathema for Follett. For her, group work and identity-making, or even true democratic process, means a level of engagement that hears
and values the contributions of each member involved in the process work. This does not mean that the role of a leader is devalued, however it does suggest that the role of leadership is to maintain an ethical standard in which the group process is led and valued in a way that integrates each person in the group and the decision itself (Tonn 269).

Follett does not limit participation and engagement in this process to one's own value but suggests, “We must offer fully what we have to give and ‘be eager for what all others have to.’ Both giving and receiving are required” (Tonn 270). Follett’s ethical standard is related to making space for the full presence of the other, considering the outcomes of a decision and process not only for one’s self but also in recognition of others who may or may not be involved with the decision-making. Follett suggests that something new is created in each real group process, each gathering and each integrating. This is no temporal arrogance. This is space and time made holy by honoring the other while speaking from the heart toward a collaborative outcome that considers both the gathered and the absent. This process is real in that there is no shirking of duty and there is no sham of submission. It is a costly process of engagement toward an outcome that is likely a point toward a journey of continued negotiation (Tonn 270-71).

Follett encourages a rising sense of shared responsibility rather than individual conscience. It is an interesting construct that points beyond rigid moral code to a “loyalty to the life which constructs standards” (New State 54-55). This response to the historical moment means pressing beyond the contrived individual right to one collaboratively produced in a community that is in constant response--a uniting of action, will and thought. Even in the process of being formed, a group is living out will, thought, and action. But there is more fluidity than staticity in group dynamics. The group is always
responding, always recreating its unity and a sense of loyalty and community (Tonn 272-273). “We belong to our community just in so far as we are helping to make that community, then loyalty follows, then love follows” (Follett, The New State 59).

Follett’s writing comes out assertively addressing issues of the day. Her work, rooted in her experiences in Boston among immigrants and the settlement community movement, allowed her to practice, to experiment and to wonder. She believed in ideas beyond tolerance and pluralism. She believed in integration that would allow a genuine community. She believed that individuality was created and held within the idea of group relationships. Her ideas of democracy suggested a sense of fluidity and constant response. These ideas were drawn out of examinations of the day’s political systems and quagmires. The New State is critical and foundational to understanding the remainder of her career. It is interesting to note that at the time Follett was writing The New State, she was not yet eligible to vote, as women’s suffrage had yet to arrive in the United States (Tonn 293, 301-2).

3rd book and lectures: Creative Experience and beyond:

Creative Experience is Mary Parker Follett’s last book. First published in 1924, it was perhaps her watershed book. Her ideas come into full view and the long-lasting perspectives on power and integration that are often considered the hook into Follett’s work are featured in this writing. Although integration had been a theme in previous writings, in Creative Experience the work on power with/over dichotomy is outlined and she begins to propose win-win ways to work toward conflict resolution, practically grounding her previous theoretical instincts about integration and groups in decision-making (Tonn 360).
Like *The New State*, Follett begins *Creative Experience* with a critique. She specifically addresses management by fact, data, and experts—some of the emphases of the F.W. Taylor’s Scientific Management Theory (Clair, McConnell, Bell, Hackbarth and 137-41). She takes issue with what today’s organizational theorists name as “Fordist” structures based on time-study and efficiency models. Follett applies her theories broadly, keeping focused on her ideals of democracy and relationality. She fights for the space of “experience” in this work, suggesting that decision-making is best discerned within light of experience and context rather than through officials or authorities who “know best” through scientific studies (Clair, McConnell, Bell, Hackbarth and Mathes 146-47).

Follett’s work in this book came out at the same time as an emergent field of psychology—*Gestalt* practice, which considers the whole of situation and person rather than atomistic, staticity (Tonn 366). *Gestalt* work was a response to behavioral theory and a clear ally for Follett’s attempt at critiquing and addressing the function of scientific management theories. In her tradition of considering perspectives from various fields, Follett looked to psychology to chart a creative way forward.

At the same time, far ahead of her peers, Follett began to take a look at diversity in organizational life. In *Creative Experience*, Follett is concerned that the dissolution of conflict means the dissolution of difference. In admitting diversity and allowing diversity to shape decision making and organizational life, Follett suggests an ongoing reciprocity and engagement with the difference of human experience that presents an ongoing co-creation (Tonn 284).
Creative Experience opened new worlds for Follett. The book was broadly reviewed and gained respect in popular and academic settings. She received requests for conversation and lectures. The success of this book meant that the other two collections of lectures and essays became available. It also marked a turn for Follett away from the situations of the academy and government toward the work of the marketplace. In a 1926 lecture, Follett described this distinction clearly, offering her own compelling reason for the shift, “It is among business men (not all but a few) that I find the greatest vitality of thinking today and I like to do my thinking where it is most alive” (Freedom & Coordination xi-xii).

The last decade of Follett’s life was spent talking about the metaphors that Creative Experience highlighted around power and conflict. Her lectures remained fresh and would always be integrative, considering previous publications and highlighting issue of the current context. Follett’s last decade of work found her speaking with leaders of business and economics, continuing to critique and continuing to promote a different way of doing business and leadership that laid some foundational integrative structures for organizational communication.

The posthumous collections:

Dynamic Administration and Freedom and Coordination are posthumously gathered works of lectures and writing. They feature applications of the entirety of Follett’s work along with response to specific questions and contextual challenges. Both were published in the 1940s and were printed to appeal to audiences on opposite sides of the Atlantic with coordination by Henry C. Metcalf in New York and L. Urwick in London. Both men’s names appear on Dynamic Administration as editors. The British
publication, *Freedom and Coordination*, was printed nearly a decade later. Urwick’s name appears alone as editor, although he is careful not to overlap the previous work. "Dynamic Administration" covers Follett’s lecture and writing circuit 1925-32. The publication follows the tide of interest in her work that resulted from the publication of *Creative Experience*. It also contains her last prepared paper from 1932 at the Bureau of Personnel Administration’s annual conference. This collection evidences Follett’s turn toward business and her inclusion of psychology. In her presentations, she addressed management problems. She continued to consider psychology for her scholarship in substantive ways. She addressed leadership, employees, and labor arbitration. The work begins during the height of the economic expansion of the 1920s and winds down as the Great Depression takes its toll on the creativity of business, eventually taking a personal toll on Follett as well. This compilation was published in 1940, after the Great Depression and pre-World War II. In the presentations, Follett is already concerned about Germany’s situation and the possibilities for re-emergent violence that lingered in the minds of those who survived World War I. She truly was a transatlantic writer and speaker at this point, moving between New York and other parts of New England and London.

"Freedom and Coordination" is published in 1949 in London. Of six chapters, five are from Follett’s 1933 lectures at the London School of Economics (Ulrich vii). These are seemingly Follett’s last public lecture appearances. In his edited volume, Ulrich was careful in his description, suggesting that these lectures represent a later version of Follett’s understanding of business communication and administration. This book is
important in considering Follett’s work as it follows up nearly a decade after the publication of *Creative Experience* and displays further praxis and further questions.

These last two books are considered differently in this dissertation from the first three volumes in that they do not present a “steady case.” They do feature some of Follett’s best work in her own terms, taking both the context and historical moment seriously. These final two compilations are important in considering Follett, as there are only five books in their entirety devoted to Follett’s writing; to ignore any of her work does some disrespect to Follett’s own ideas of Gestalt and wholeness. While each chapter in the last two books can stand on its own, the foundational information from her earlier writing and lectures is presented in *Creative Experience*. These ties link all three together clearly; the success of *Creative Experience* inevitably birthed the final two collections and this makes them invaluable for understanding the ongoing potential of Follett’s work. In the final two collections, she does the kind of work with her own material that will need to be presented in an ongoing way to find meaningful metaphors and guidance for new contexts and historicities.

**A significance for organizational communication ethics in a flat and fearful time?**

What is the significance of Mary Parker Follett for our time of post-everything and not yet? In what ways might Follett’s work cue us on ethical praxis within organizational communication for this flattening world in a time of fearfulness? With the resurgence of her work and influence in popular leadership theorists and writers, and with the ever-changing contexts of our postmodern, post-American, Post-Christendom, post-industrial, postcolonial intersectionality in a flattening world, how might a woman
who wrote a century ago illuminate our way toward ethical organizational communication praxis? (Makau 496-97).

In leaning in to listen to her life and work, Follett could offer a different kind of response to the changes of postmodernity and globalization. In this research, there is no postulation toward a certain conclusion, rather, a hunch or supposition, that there is something worth exploring and investigating. This is less likely in the particularities, but in the Gestalt of Follett’s work, an embrace of the whole that is understood as an early manifestation of feminist and postcolonialist critiques that come later in organizational communication. Although she would not have been aware of it at the time, Follett’s work rejects the totalizing forces of modernity in diverse socio-economic spheres while stumbling toward paths that might allow further cohesion and coalescing after her life into the postmodern interruption (Schaefer, Conrad, Cheney, May and Ganesh 450-51).

In a flattening world, where the ethics of organizations have global impact, how might Follett’s posture open a way forward? How might that way forward steady our feet to walk the uncertain paths in a fear and trembling that is expectant rather than destructive? How might that way forward provide practices that help to cultivate creativity, productivity and integration toward human flourishing? How might Follett’s interpretations of the metaphors of power, of conflict, of community and individuality, offer new insights and grounding for ethical practice? (Schaefer, Conrad, Cheney, May and Ganesh 453).

In investigating Follett’s life and writing and in glimpsing her critics and her advocates, there is a lingering, hopeful possibility of finding some points along the way toward ethical praxis for flat and fearful times. Follett’s work, while certainly contextual
and responsive to her own historical moment, and rooted in her own intersectionality, might include some points for navigation beyond the 20th Century into our own new century and millennium. The remaining chapters of this project will explore these questions further.

Chapter two seeks to understand Mary Parker Follett’s life and historical moment, relying heavily on the work of Joan C. Tonn and Charles Taylor’s framework of moral topography. This biographical sketch provides an understanding of Follett’s own time and place to frame the questions and potential implication for our own historical moment. Considering Follett’s emphasis on Gestalt and her understanding of the whole rather than disparate parts, and considering the feminist metaphor of intersectionality used frequently in organizational communication perspectives, this research would be incomplete without looking at Follett’s own situatedness alongside the possibilities of her work for ongoing interpretation in organizational communication ethics.

Chapter three examines the current state of affairs in the areas of organizational communication in order to articulate today’s historical moment. In this chapter, the research considers areas of postcolonial and feminist critique in organizational communication, specifically evaluating potential attunement or dissonance with Follett’s perspectives. The chapter also examines the influences of postmodernity along with insights from writers who describe the post-industrial, post-Christendom and post-American lenses. This chapter begins to set the stage for application of Follett’s historical work in our own time of volatile economics and rising anxieties, the flattening and fearful world.
Chapter four explores Follett’s work in two sections. The first section examines Follett’s initial two books *Speaker of the House of Representatives* along with *The New State*. Since less research explores these books, the interpretive work to understand these writings as part of Follett’s whole volume will be significant. In these first two books, separated by a generation of experience, the trajectory of Follett’s work becomes apparent.

The second section of chapter four explores the more popular of Follett’s work, *Creative Experience* and the compiled posthumously produced collections of lectures *Dynamic Administration* and *Freedom and Coordination*. While these writings feature the most popular metaphors and ideas from Follett’s scholarship, they will be examined as a part of the whole of her work, which offers a different kind of reading and understanding.

In the last chapter of the book, the research draws to a close with some cues toward why Mary Parker Follett is both hidden and helpful for organizational communication in this historical moment, constructing a “little way” through this flattening and fearful world. With many flashpoint events that are both global and local, in what ways might an organizational communication ethic be constructed (Schaefer, Conrad, Cheney, May and Ganesh 453)? The last chapter responds to those critical questions and further cultivates a sense of the significance of Mary Parker Follett’s work for the scholarship and praxis of organizational communication, recognizing its potential contribution and application for diverse perspectives within the organizational communication discipline.
It is with some fear and trembling in this flattening world, hopefully the holy kind, that this work begins (Kierkegaard 144).
Works Cited


Chapter 2

Mary P Follett: A biographical introduction and moral topography

Mary Follett’s life can be understood not only through her writing, but also in the frameworks of geography and movement that created context for her writing. This biographic sketch makes connections between the significance of her work and the timeline and people of her life. While this chapter does not intend to offer a sort of psychological profile, Follett’s own situatedness in the historical moment, including the variety of places where she learned, lived and worked, is significant; it allows a glimpse into the kind of questions that were important to her as well as the ground from which she both stood, explored and worked (Arnett 48). This intersectionality was described by Charles Taylor as a “moral topography” (“Moral Topography” 298).

The introduction provides an explanation of moral topography and offers a glimpse at the significance of understanding Follett’s life as Gestalt; throughout, certain significant parts should be attended to as valuably as the whole (Creative Experience 91). The first section looks at Follett’s early years and family life in Quincy, Massachusetts, just outside of Boston. The second section explores Follett’s first academic engagements in Cambridge with the Harvard Annex. The third section explores her work with the neighborhood center movements, rooted in Boston’s Roxbury neighborhood but eventually taking her into a larger, emerging national scene. The last section looks at her engagement with marketplace realities on both sides of the Atlantic, which takes the narrative up to her abrupt death in 1933.

Follett privileged the metaphor of lived experience (Creative Experience 134-36). To write a dissertation involving Follett, it seems significant to recognize some of her
own preferred understandings of research. With the inclusion of a biographic chapter, this sets to honor the significance of Follett’s stated role of the expert as embedded in relationships and also the significance of the person in roles of power (*Creative Experience* 3, 20-21). The introduction explores the significance of the metaphor of moral topography as a lens for viewing Follett’s life.

**An introduction: Mary Parker Follett as a moral topography**

Charles Taylor offers the metaphor of moral topography as a way of glimpsing the significance of biographical work. He understood that the self is constructed through various encounters; these encounters create a sort of map of the intersections of a person’s life. Taylor wrote, “Being a self is existing in a space of issues, to do with how one ought to be, or how one measures up against what is good, what is right, what is really worth doing. It is being able to find one’s standpoint in this space, being able to occupy it, to be a perspective in it. This is what Heidegger was getting at in his famous formulation about Dasein that its being is ‘in question.’” (Taylor, “Moral Topography” 298). Contemporary researchers in the US, China, and Mexico agree that the construction of moral topographies can assist in developing more complete responses to ongoing complex issues in our historical moments. When analyzed through the lens of moral topography, Follett’s biography offers an additional source of insight to understand and navigate a way forward within organizational communication that recognizes the significance of working toward good, right and just responses (Bing 1-2; Briones 487; Sass 321-22, 27).

Taylor stated further, “My main thesis is: that the self exists essentially in moral space by means of a master image, a spatial one. And that is what I invoke as speaking
of a ‘moral topography’ of the self” (Taylor, “Moral Topography” 300). For Follett, this moral topography—shaping encounters that extend from a difficult childhood to a final sickness and death—offers a sense of Gestalt, a wholeness within Follett’s story that was consistent yet responsive, even emerging “in question” or, as Follett might say, in relatedness.

Taylor asserts that the “self” is a spatial reality. This spatial understanding is related to place and geographic position in which relationships are also shaped in the particularities of those geographies. As Martin Buber wrote in I and Thou (62), “All of actual life is encounter.” Taylor adds, “My own identity crucially depends on my dialogical relations with others” (“Recognition” 34). In understanding Taylor’s framework, the topography is then constructed dialogically. For Follett, these dialogues undergird and advance her work. The geographies not only ground research on her theories but give a sense of how ideas and possibilities are shaped from question and encounter. In the next section, the research will highlight the significance of the contexts and historical moment for Follett as a background of examining life and moral topography.

**Mary Parker Follett: Contexts, topography and situated within historical moment**

This biographical sketch of Follett, then, is a series of encounters shaping a complex moral topography. While this biographic background could be a launching point for psychological interpretation, it is not presented as such. Rather, the biography provides context for a rich life, for groundbreaking and significant work and for a glimpse into the way that organizational communication responded to difficult realities. This complex and varied topography is key to understanding Follett — not so much to
comprehending her theories, but to glimpsing her reactions to the good and right of her day and to seeing how her responses to that good shaped her seemingly discontinuous career.

Follett had an unusual capacity to move her work between a variety of contexts. While always rooted in her experiences in the academy, she found ways to approach and engage in community organizing and politics. Her varied interests in labor, economics and management, paired with her web of relationships surrounding the elite communities at Cambridge, helped make connections for her work to move into business, professional, and industrial settings. Follett’s integrative work and movement toward praxis offer a significant model and case study, surely imperfect but decidedly interesting. Her work is less restless than it first seems and more a seamless flow between the varieties of context that were part of her life; these contexts help to establish the significance of her contributions to the foundation of organizational communication.

Biographers don’t agree on the beginning of Follett’s narrative. A common approach is to describe Follett as born into privilege and moving toward the margins and the otherness of the working class. She was educated at a predecessor of Harvard. Her initial work was among other established educational communities. She had access to the political and intellectual elite of Boston (Graham 14). When framed this way, the significance of her story appears to be in the trajectory of her leaving privilege to join in the working class struggle, which then lands her back in places of privilege in the marketplace. It does indeed make a good story.

The significant biographical work of Joan Tonn, however, portrays a more complicated struggle for Follett and her family. Tonn’s research is the most exhaustive
available and portrays a convoluted but more realistic framing of how Follett arrived in her situatedness. Rather than an undulating trajectory from privilege to solidarity to influence, Tonn’s research examines frustrations and invites a deeper look at motivation, loss and possibility. Tonn’s research is essential to understanding Follett beyond the surface levels of what might make for a good story.

Up until Tonn, the biographic research on Follett is thin. Most researchers contend only with Follett’s ideas, alongside a few of her quirks, but inadequately address the whole of her life and work. Tonn sees the significance of Follett’s life and explores the integration of her work into her life and her life into her work. This is ultimately interpreting Follett through her own lens, in which she argues that work and life should be integrated into a whole but also understood as valuable in parts (Creative Experience 103). While both a public and private person, there’s a deep connection between Follett’s work and her life. Tonn’s assemblage of biographic material presents this reality in ways that no other previous research did. Her book is essential to understanding the significance of Follett for organizational communication as it shows how Follett responded to varieties of contexts with, first, similar methods of inquiry and, then, development of theory.

Follett’s work and thought was shaped through encounter. Born into a rapidly industrializing New England, though not puritan herself, she existed in a context that was definitely shaped by Puritan values (Tonn 12-13). These stayed values were increasingly disrupted with the rise of large scale manufacturing and the waves of immigrants who would help drive the wheels of industry. Follett was drawn to encounter both people and
their changing contexts, moving out of an academic cave and into social work and then, eventually, consulting with those in the corner office or boardroom.

According to Graham, Follett was always a voracious learner; what Follett was not able to learn on her own, she quickly accessed through a network of relationships in Boston. As both a driven learner and a student granted access to some of the highest esteemed locales in the academy, Follett was able to publish early in her career. Her first book, *Speaker of the House of Representatives*, was published while she was still a college student (Graham 13-15).

Follett’s voracity for learning and her willingness to access what she didn’t already know through her network of relationships rendered Follett’s writing full of examples that are both theoretical and practical. As she moved into different settings, Follett engaged without fear but with a sense of intention and focus. Her ability to learn in encounter opened possibilities for working and learning alongside diverse people and situations.

The venues and geographies of Follett’s life serve as a possible framework for understanding both her personality and character and the environments and encounters that shaped her work and perspectives. This chapter divides her life into four significant movements: growing up in Quincy, engaging with the academy at Cambridge, encountering the city in Roxbury and walking toward the marketplace and the world.

**Part 1: Family life and struggle @ Quincy**

This section explores the earliest parts of Mary Parker Follett’s life including how her birth after the Civil War in New England at the far reaches of Boston’s bustle shaped her life. The early years were more tumultuous than stable for her. However, the
significance of the academy and education emerged even in the midst of difficulty. Follett’s early life, even as it related to the academy, was shaped by interactions with a growing immigrant population that was reaching as far as her own neighborhood (Tonn 12-13).

Born into a mercantile family in Quincy, Massachusetts (just outside of Boston), in 1868, Follett was the eldest daughter of Charles Follett and Lizzie Baxter Follett (Tonn 12). Her academic pursuits were buoyed by her family’s wealth and resources (Wren & Greenwood 194), but her early life was also a complexity (Vimchur 324-25) of privilege and addiction, expectation and unsteadiness.

Follett’s father was a Civil War veteran, one of the early volunteers from Quincy to serve in Virginia and eventually at the significant battle of Gettysburg. With sickness rampant during the war and intense battlefield experiences, whiskey was readily available as a drug of choice to manage pain that was both physical and psychological. Mr. Follett had easy access to alcohol in his years away from Quincy and, surprisingly, upon return to Massachusetts following the war’s end, found it even more accessible in a Quincy that had become increasingly open to alcohol consumption (Tonn 10-15).

Follet’s mother, Lizzie, grew up within a wealthy, legacy Quincy family who traced their lineage back to arrival in the Bay Colony in the late 1600s. The Baxters bought property early and established a store that would serve the growing community. The region’s population swelled with an influx of Irish immigrants, testing the town’s capacity to handle both growth and diversity but bolstering the family business. Lizzie was 26 when Charles Follett returned to Quincy with some degree of respect and repute because he had volunteered for the war and lived to tell about it (Tonn 7-9, 12).
The Baxters, a prominent family in town with an eldest daughter who was nearing the time when it was too old to get married, found a fondness for Charles Follett even though his family was not as financially well-off. Charles and Elizabeth were married at the Unitarian First Church of the Presidents, where the Baxter family owned two pews, in 1867. Charles and Lizzie lived in a house owned by the Baxter family. It was an eventful first year of married life: in addition to the birth of their daughter Mary, Charles started and sold a small business and then began commuting into Boston by train for work (Tonn 11-13).

Married life was difficult for Charles and Elizabeth. Charles struggled with an addiction to alcohol and frequently was lost to the family as he worked between Quincy and Boston. During a period of reconciliation, a second daughter, Annie, was born; but she died at four months due to cholera. Cholera was considered an unbecoming death, a disease commonly believed to be related to dirtiness and inebriation. Young Mary spent her earliest years in the tumultuousness of her father’s struggle with addiction and his inability to hold steady work, culminating in her grandfather’s decision to put most of Charles’s inheritance in a trust so it would not be squandered. Charles left the family again for a time but returned to Quincy in the midst of a temperance revival in 1876, pledging to remain sober (Tonn 14-15).

Charles Follett’s new sobriety meant some stability for the family. They began to take in boarders (considered a lower-class practice), and Charles found a job working in shoe and boot manufacturing. Mary, meanwhile, began to excel in academics; Charles took pride in his reserved, but seemingly precocious, daughter. In 1877, a son, George, was born. In 1879, with the death of Mary’s grandmother, Lizzie’s father invited his
daughter to return home to care for their larger home and grounds. The family obliged (Tonn 15-18).

Mary’s early education occurred in the private schools of Quincy. With a rapid rise in the Irish immigrant population, public schools were considered overcrowded and sub-par. Mary’s earliest schooling was at the Greenleaf Street school, affiliated with Quincy’s historic First Unitarian Church. She gained a reputation as a serious and astute student, entering the newly established Thayer Academy in town for high school at the age of 11. At Thayer, she developed important friendships and gave her first speeches. It was an important time and place for shaping and learning. Notably, her first public presentation was on the role of classmates in education alongside that of teachers, a radical departure from educational thought at the time and from what she experienced in her work and relationships at Thayer. She graduated in 1884 (Tonn 12-13, 17, 25-6).

In 1885, Mary’s grandfather Daniel Baxter (who owned the home where the family lived) died. Seven weeks later, Mary’s father, Charles, died from pneumonia at the age of 43. Mary’s mother was seemingly ill-prepared for the path of single parenting, and the confusion over the division of the Baxter estate left her unsteady and unsure of the future. Mary assumed the role of taking care of her younger brother and supporting her mother during the time of crisis (Tonn 31-32).

Mary found a respite in correspondence studies for several years, taking classes through The Society to Encourage Studies at Home. The society, established by Anna Eliot Ticknor, was based on a British model but focused on individualized studies for women who wouldn’t have access to educational opportunities otherwise. Ticknor sought little publicity for the initiative, but it grew nonetheless to over 700 students.
Some saw the movement as revolutionary, but Ticknor sought to downplay the hubbub and focus on the concept of strengthening the role of women in the home. Follett began the course of study when she was eligible at the age of 17 and continued for two years, aiming toward an admission to Harvard in 1888 (Tonn 34-38).

Follett’s life was shaped by her experiences at Quincy, and she remained connected to the community there for much of her life. The move toward the academy at Cambridge was a significant and yet small step. The next section looks at the move for Follett toward Cambridge. This move is both symbolic and real in ways that further shaped her understanding and engagement with the world.

**Part 2: Engaging the Academy @ Cambridge**

From the struggle of family life in Quincy, the primary scene for Follett’s life shifted about 15 miles north toward Cambridge, home of Harvard University and its affiliated schools. First this section looks at her experiences in Cambridge through the Annex. The second section looks at the significance of Follett’s study in England. The third section looks at Follett’s return to Boston and her initial foray into teaching in the city. During this phase of life, Follett built on and cultivated new relationships that would be important for the rest of her life and work.

Very few women attended college in the late 1800s. For many, further education was a bit unseemly and disruptive within the social structure. For Mary Follett, however, the lure of the academy remained. When a former Thayer instructor, Anna Boynton Thompson, went on to study and work at the Annex at Harvard, Follett found connection and new possibilities (Tonn 38-41). According to Liebmann, Follett “had the benefit of the best formal education available to women in her time or subsequently” (159-60).
Follett began at the Collegiate Institute for Women at Cambridge in 1888 and continued studying toward graduation for a decade in a time frame described as “Harvard’s Golden Age.”

*Study at Cambridge, the Harvard Annex*

The Annex at Cambridge was a unique entity. Women were not particularly welcomed on the campus of Harvard and were encouraged to stay away from Harvard Yard unless absolutely necessary. Despite being in a time of significant educational reform, Harvard’s president thought that women would be “splendid assistants.” Women students were ushered away at times when he was moving about campus (Tonn 43-45). Many women came to the Annex to learn from Harvard professors who had offered to teach the same courses to women that they taught on the all-male campus. Most women who came intended to be teachers and to fill the burgeoning roles available in public high schools around the country while landing some sense of self-sufficiency as well (Tonn 45-46).

Albert Bushnell Hart became significant for Follett as a student focused on history (Liebmann 163). Hart was among the first academicians known for a specialization in the emerging field of United States history. He was a traditional faculty member at Harvard who also agreed to teach at the Annex (Tonn 46). Hart was amazed by the students at the Annex and was impressed particularly by Follett. Hart initiated a series to offer space for publication for the women of the Annex. He imagined that their work was and would be valuable. He also suggested that Follett could likely go on to receive a PhD. He was confident in the work and students at the Annex (Tonn 51-52).

Hart encouraged Follett to work toward publication of her in-class projects.
While still a student in 1896, she published *The Speaker of the House of Representatives*. This book examined the political issues of the day and the democratic experiment in the United States. Hart thought that she’d likely go on to become a foremost expert on the subject (Tonn 51-52).

**Studying at Newnham in Cambridge, England**

After her first year at the Annex, Follett traveled with her former teacher Anna Boynton Thompson to Cambridge, England, where she studied at Newnham College for a year. Newnham was similar to the Annex at Harvard, a women’s school within the sphere of other Cambridge colleges where only men were admitted. This campus setting proved to be more hospitable to women, though, than had been Harvard’s Cambridge. The dorms and relative sense of stability were markedly different from the barely marginal existence of the Annex at Boston (Tonn 53-55).

Follett valued the interaction with students and the faculty at the Cambridge schools who were with female students. She continued studies in history and political behavior. She particularly was engaged with historian Henry Sidgwick. Sidgwick was well-liked by students at Cambridge but was overshadowed nationally by colleagues at Oxford. Follett found resonance with Sidgwick's ideas and was likely shaped by his pragmatic but deeply analytic approach (Tonn 61).

The time at Newnham seemed especially life-giving for Follett. She spoke of the time “as a milepost and turning point” (Tonn 61). Follett seemed particularly grateful for her time with Sidgwick, to whom she later wrote a letter of appreciation. She wrote, “Perhaps . . . the best way a pupil can thank her teacher is in trying to give to others something of what she herself has received” (Tonn 64).


*Back to Boston*

Upon return to Massachusetts, Follett was invited to offer lectures in political science in a private school in Boston. Researchers are unsure at which school these lectures took place, but they think it was most likely one established by Pauline Agassiz Shaw, an educator who advocated coeducational classrooms and hands-on learning (Tonn 64-65). Seemingly, these lectures opened new possibilities for Follett. She was then offered a teaching position in one of Ms. Shaw’s schools, a position she held for several years while continuing to work on refining the material that would become *The Speaker of the House of Representatives* (Tonn 68).

In those years, Follett cultivated a long-term relationship with Isobella Briggs. Briggs was headmaster at the school where Follett was hired and 20 years older. The relationship was an intimate friendship that was disrupted when Ms. Shaw decided to close the school. Though Briggs and Follett made plans to relocate to Vermont together, Follett changed her mind and returned to live with her mother in Quincy (Tonn 98-102). She pushed on to finish coursework at what by then had become Radcliffe College and received her undergraduate degree in 1898, summa cum laude (Tonn 109). After her graduation, her hunger for knowledge led her to study German and French in Europe (Liebmann 159).

There is noticeably missing information in this part of Follett’s life. The name of the first school in which she worked is never given. There is little written about her post-graduation trip to study German and French. Surprisingly, Follett’s life as a college student, as a woman in Cambridge, doesn’t seem to be particularly well-documented. But upon her return, Follett began to engage the city differently through her work and
relationships. In her move into Boston’s neighborhoods, she became an increasingly public figure. It was a several decades long process and period of time.

**Engaging and cultivating community in Boston**

From 1898 to 1900, Follett retreated to Briggs’ Vermont home. Though there was a period of separation after Shaw’s school closed and Follett’s graduation, Briggs would remain an important part of Follett’s life. Briggs helped Follett process her work and thoughts. She became essential in the way that Follett viewed the world (Tonn 101).

While Follett’s academic experience meant relocating toward Boston, Cambridge was quite different from other parts of the city. In between Cambridge and Quincy was the then recently developed and working class community at Roxbury. This would become an important context for Follett’s leadership development, eventually gaining her national exposure in the neighborhood/community center movement alongside which she had become impassioned (Tonn 204).

After graduation from Radcliffe, Follett took time away for language study and reflection in Europe and Vermont with Ms. Briggs. The two returned to Boston and began to engage in the work of social service agencies in the city (Tonn 124). Follett’s interest was piqued by the rising tide of Boston’s immigrant and working-class population and how their resettlement was shaping both the city and its emerging suburbs. This would be the focus of her work for a generation (Liebmann 161).

Follett was not alone in her focus. At the time, young, college-educated women and men across the United States were being drawn from their privileged statuses toward work in struggling neighborhoods. For women, the movement offered the possibility of “public leadership and professional yet womanly work” (Tonn 122-24). Jane Addams
and her Settlement House movement followed patterns from England, where the rise of industrial neighborhoods resulted in new, complicated urban challenges as well as possibilities. Follett struggled with some of the movement’s particularly feminine qualities, feeling that it gave women a sense of moral superiority while binding them to traditional roles. She was interested in something different that recognized women’s capacity for hard work, rationality and independence (Tonn 124).

During this time, Follett was so immersed in the complexities of her work in Boston’s Roxbury neighborhood that she published very little material. Roxbury, understood as “a streetcar suburb,” grew rapidly after the Civil War and became a diverse neighborhood without a core sense of community; Follett observed that the people who lived in Roxbury identified with neither the city nor their neighbors. Jean Quandt suggests that Roxbury presented a challenge to developing new communication practices and praxis; the layout and the desire to leave behind the problems of other areas in the city meant that communication was difficult and reluctant. For Follett, Roxbury was compelling because of its diversity of working-class and poor folks; the challenge presented by this diversity was that it did not necessarily mean more communication across difference. Instead, each group remained mostly communicatively isolated and separate in the midst of this relocation (Quandt 38-39).

Follett’s initial work in Roxbury began with the establishment of debate teams for men. While a fascinating choice, Follett rarely backed away from the challenges of working as a woman in male-dominated settings. She began the debate teams for Irish young men moving into the neighborhood, cultivating an activity that would strategically bring men into the community centers to discuss and debate the political questions of the
day (Tonn 125-127). At the time, there was significant debate around immigration, with increased opposition to the rising tide of Catholic migrants. Follett hoped that the centers would help cultivate sympathetic and responsive citizens who might be able to make decisions together.

Follett became a champion and spokesperson for the community center movement that spread throughout Boston. She helped open and advocate for community centers throughout the city before World War I, emphasizing that schools could be open into the evenings to cultivate civility and “mutual understanding among groups, and creating a local framework for integration of churches, trade associations, lodges and youth groups” (Quandt 40). The movement seemingly flourished for about a decade.

While the neighborhood work continued and Follett cultivated a sense of civic responsibility among young men, the suffrage movement also pushed forward. Mary Follett may have had many great ideas about politics, but women were still not eligible to vote. Follett had focused attention on other things while recognizing that those who she considered male peers were rising to roles in leadership in politics and the academy. Even as others around her worked for women’s suffrage, Follett had very little to say about the struggle—a noticeable silence, according to Tonn (129-32).

Follett’s work in the neighborhood was primarily focused on overcoming apathy and inertia (Quandt 40). Her ideals included high levels of engagement and decision-making for those who would be most affected by the processes of change that went beyond the metaphor of compromise. In Roxbury, she worked with residents to develop a sense of integration and identification among diverse people. She hoped these community center contexts would cultivate a different kind of political reality by linking
both persons and groups together. For Follett, individual flourishing was not possible
without “total, ceaseless involvement in the common life” (Quandt 40-42).

The community center movement spread across Boston with Follett as both an
evangelist and champion. She believed the centers both provided meaningful services
and helped to build community. Follett helped the centers become places where
vocational connections could be developed and where a sense of participating in a larger
democracy could be cultivated. Despite numerous funding-related threats, the centers
persisted. Follett helped to open numerous centers across Boston and saw herself as a
chief encourager and advocate for the movement both locally and nationally (Tonn 224-
28, 234).

As the movement grew, gaining strength in both the Northeast and Midwest, in
rural and urban settings, it gained political attention. After nearly a generation of focused
work in Boston, Follett’s performance platform began to expand. She attended the first
national conference for social center development in 1911, where United States
presidential candidate Woodrow Wilson was a keynote speaker. Follett had ready access
to Wilson’s economic advisor Louis Brandeis in Boston, although it seems she avoided
involvement with Wilson’s election process (Tonn 235-38).

Over the next years, the growth of the community centers provided more and
more opportunities for Follett to interact beyond Boston. She began to present more
frequently at national gatherings related to the community center movement. She valued
the relationships that this cultivated with colleagues and spent more time in New York
City as the national community center movement seemed to gain a center of gravity there
(Tonn 243-44).
In 1917, Follett experienced a critical turn in the topography of her life. She was diagnosed with cystic kidney disease at the age of 49, the physical illness that eventually resulted in her death. There was no known cure, and this chronic illness would occasionally resurface, affecting her work and relationships (Tonn 248). It was also early in that year that Pauline Agassiz Shaw died. Shaw had been a key supporter both financially and emotionally; and without a patron, Follett felt increasingly vulnerable financially and untethered in her profession. Shaw’s family disengaged with ongoing funding for Follett. In the meantime, Follett decided to write her second book to chronicle her encounters with the social center movement (Tonn 254-54).

After 20 years of little publication and a year of focused work, Follett’s second book, *The New State*, was published in 1918. The book grew out of the struggles that Follett faced during her intense engagement in the community center movement, which included “intractable ideological and personal conflicts, regional struggles for power, challenges to freedom of speech” (Tonn 235). Follett seemed to publish most often around specific questions and encounters, attempting to understand and work out both the problems and possibilities of what she was facing. The book was not intended to be the launching of a national career but to be a commentary on what had already been occurring in her work and her observations. The book’s publication, however, served as a meaningful marking of Follett’s shift to consultation beyond Boston as she was increasingly involved with the national organization and its flourishing and struggle. *The New State* marks the end of Follett’s patronized life in Boston. Though still deeply connected to the social center movement in the city and nationally, Follett’s book began to find new audiences, especially among philosophers and eventually business and
management leaders. Responding to this interest, Follett began a turn toward new venues and settings for inquiry and possibility (Tonn 304).

**Into the marketplace and the world**

In the last section, Follett’s move into the city to begin working with the neighborhood movement served as an opening metaphor. Her work in urban neighborhoods gave Follett a wider set of access and material for reflection. After 18 years of work with the neighborhood center movement that was both local and national, Follett found resonance beyond what she expected in areas of business and organizational life.

For the last years of her life, Follett became more engaged in the work of business consulting alongside the academy. She sought places where change might come faster and found that she had a quick mind and that her insights were applicable to the marketplace. In the 1920s, she began moving beyond her neighborhood orientation into consulting with retail (Filene’s Departments Stores, now part of Macy’s) and manufacturing companies both in England and New England (most frequently Dennison Manufacturing in Boston). She found resonance with economists in the League of Nations and then landed a significant, lasting engagement with the Bureau of Personnel Administration in 1925 in New York. Beginning in 1926, she joined a series of management conversations at Oxford (Liebmann 174-75).

In the meantime, she continued regular teaching and lecturing, including working with Henry Cabot at Harvard to develop a “seminary”: a year-long program of lectures and engagements on social ethics intended to build interdisciplinary conversations (Tonn 428-30). She also built connections with Syracuse University in their attempt to keep
conversations alive and healthy between the emerging social science fields (Tonn 420-21). Follett’s ideas came to be understood as interdisciplinary in the academy, while her work in the marketplace was lauded by those mostly concerned with management and planning. It was an active period of lecturing and interacting in New York, Boston, London and Geneva.

It was also an intensely emotional period in her life. Follett was still struggling with physical wellness, symptoms from her chronic health issues. In early 1926, her longtime partner and confidant Isobel Briggs died. Briggs’s death affected Follett’s productivity and engagement with others for years. She began to rely on the friendship of Henry and Ella Cabot as caretakers and confidants as well as collaborators (Tonn 412). By the early 1930’s, a new relationship with Katharine Furse in London meant that Follett spent much of her last years traveling between London and Boston. These significant relationships provided relational rooting for Follett on both sides of the Atlantic (Tonn 458-59).

The publication of Creative Experience in 1924 helped launch Follett into new settings. Creative Experience, which Tonn (328-29) describes as a stormy and productive collaboration with Eduard Lindeman, is not so much a culminating work as a clarifying work, aiming for more accessibility and a broader application. Follett was convinced that she needed to develop new theories of group process and new possibilities for encounter. Her work with Lindeman took her toward the social sciences, although she never abandoned her humanities training, even with this publication.

The final years of Follett’s work and her willingness to walk into the marketplace from the spaces of community organizing and development are notable. Follett pursued
an interplay between business and the academy. This is a significant contribution that helped provide space for what would come in areas of communication at the intersection of marketplace and classroom. Much of Follett’s better-known writing comes from this period of her work, which provided learning handholds for future research on leadership, decision-making and power.

At the same time that Follett was traveling so extensively, she was battling her ongoing illness. Regular bouts of pain and the effects of her cystic kidney disease caused her to seek more frequent rest. While she seemed to be at the peak of her career, she was in her 50s; and her body was struggling to keep pace (Tonn 340-49).

By the end of her life, Follett was largely adrift. She had no home in Boston or Vermont, having given up housekeeping in the States for the relationship with Furse in London (which was not a smooth one). Follett was traveling alone to Boston when she died as a result of complications from surgery. She was 65 years old. After a simple funeral, her ashes were taken to Vermont and spread where she and her partner Isobel Briggs had often retreated to a more private life together (Tonn 488-90).

**Considering the significance of a life: situated in a historical moment**

The four-part movement that is Follett’s life offers an understanding of the parts that make up the whole. While there is some blur between each of these time frames (for example, Follett lived in Quincy for a stretch of time while she is finishing her schooling and possibly editing her first book), the categories offer topographicalities and localities that assist in interpreting her life. After being shaped in the early years of Quincy, learning in the academy at Cambridge, engaging the city of Boston through the
neighborhood center movement and later life influences with business leaders on both side of the Atlantic, what is the overall Gestalt for Follett’s professional life?

Follett’s life is peculiar. She did not hold ties to any particular academic institutions, although her world was shaped both by her experiences at Cambridge and her access to the world and wisdom of Harvard. As a result, she sometimes felt like she needed to defend her movement toward marketplace practitioners in the areas of manufacturing and commerce and away from her rooting in Cambridge’s academic orientation. Yet Follett insisted that the immediacy of application and the relevance of the ideas and possibilities of commerce were what intrigued her. At one lecture, she asserted that, in her work, she preferred to associate with business leaders and teachers who resonated with both the necessity and practicality of her writing and speaking (Urwick xi-xii). Much of her thinking came at the time of a collapsing economy and the emerging conflicts of labor and management in both the United States and England. These unfavorable conditions and engagements later helped to bury Follett’s work for decades (Tonn 491-92).

Follett persisted in being cantankerous in her work and outlook. She insisted on movement toward integration rather than compromise and on developing workers—not to eliminate the need for unionization but out of response to both work and the worker (Creative Experience 239-46). Follett’s frequent presentations emphasized the significance of leadership. She encouraged a reorientation of leadership from one who gives orders and relies on a certain personality type to the significance of the role itself. Follett seemed to believe that at least some elements of leadership could be learned and cultivated, which was a departure from common theory of the time (New State 230).
Follett’s work came at the rise of Frederick W. Taylor’s *Principles of Scientific Management* which asserted that adults were all basically grown-up children (120) in need of oversight. Taylor’s theories were dominating the emerging workplace at the time. Follett lectured with the Taylor Society numerous times and traveled often Philadelphia, where she consulted on ways to create healthier workplaces. Follett was not immediately critical of Taylor; however, her work did not rely on the same progress narrative rooted in science (Clair, McConnell, Bell, Hackbarth and Mathes 138-40, 146-47).

Her suggestions seemed to go far beyond Taylor’s while, at the same time, recognizing the depersonalizing nature of work that Taylor suggested might be important. For Follett, this depersonalization was actually empowerment while Taylor’s implementation seemed to suggest atomization and possibly even exploitation (*Freedom & Coordination* 22).

Follett’s work in the immigrant communities of Boston seemed to remain in the forefront of her mind as she worked with business leaders, although she didn’t specifically mention those experiences in that work (Tonn 394). While Taylor assumed that the rise in productivity that could be brought about by scientific management would result in great abundance, Follett was quick to point out that, 15 years after the theory’s popularization, the demands of workers had becoming increasingly strident rather than subdued. She remarked that, since the superfluous abundance had not yet come, it was necessary to begin working on new models that would lead to further business integration and innovation (Tonn 404). Regardless, Follett continued to work within the framework of the Taylor Society with writing and presentations that helped develop influential
relationships with other management leaders who were both practicing and writing
(Follett, *Freedom & Coordination* 1-15).

Friendships were important for Follett. She frequently collaborated with younger men who she saw as having promise and worked often with male colleagues who had more established roles in business, the academy and politics (Tonn 52). These varied relationships with presenters and authors gave Follett’s life a future. Some of these younger colleagues perpetuated her work further and helped to edit posthumous documents into accessible formats. Follett’s brilliance continues to be carried on in the work of contemporary writers in the areas of relevant and immediate practice in business, leadership and management; these men often carry forth her ideas without recognizing their lineage and sometimes pass them off as their own. Follett’s work remains hidden for many in the fields that she helped to shape (Tonn 492).

Follett’s significance for communication is in her trailblazing organizational work. She insists in her later writings and presentations that how organizations interact and communicate matters. While Follett’s goal is somewhat obscured, she seems to suggest that the reason for implementing change is not productivity or profit but for the sake of the human condition; this seemed to be good enough reason to change and implement different ways of doing things.

There is no distinctly high calling in Follett’s writing, however. While she practiced her own forms of religiosity, Follett’s focus was passionate but not religious. Instead, her approach is humanistic with a belief that people mattered and that value was expressed best through democratic organization processes. She insisted that the ways that work and life were organized might illustrate how people could be treated
respectfully and honorably. This offers some of the most foundational rationale for organizational communication practice and praxis. This is why Follett’s work, writing and perspectives offer possibilities for organizational communication even now, with a still palpable sense of immediacy, relevance and practical application.

Recognizing again Charles Taylor’s moral topography (“Moral Topography” 298), the places where Mary Follett lived, worked, and built relationships undoubtedly shaped her life and thought. The right, good and just response emerged for Follett in each situation with a sense of the inherent value of people, of just and right economies and organizations, of communities. This moral topography gives a sense of the contour and depth of Follett’s work. The topography also offers a way to understand the limits of her work within the historical moment while opening further conversation for the implications of contemporary historical moments and encounters.

While this chapter focused on the moral topography and, to some degree, the particular intersectionality of Mary Parker Follett, the next chapter explores more specifics of the contemporary historical moment. Follett is, in many ways, a forerunner of the work that emerges in contemporary organizational communication, though often she’s unrecognized in the background of what is yet to come. The importance of understanding Follett’s life is an attempt to honor much of what has been unrecognized in her work and the resonances with contemporary problems and opportunities in the areas of organizational communication.

In the next chapter, the dissertation will turn away from Follett toward understanding the challenges and possibilities of today’s historical moment. Follett was situated in a time of great change with some parallel to our contemporary times of rapidly
changing industries and organizational systems, with increased capacity for travel, with rapid growth of urban areas, with large scale immigration into the United States and an uneven global economy (Barry 122). The research begins to explore the possibilities of Follett’s work by looking at primary philosophical metaphors for the way the current historical moment emerges and is organized or, perhaps, even disorganized. In exploring these metaphors of situatedness, there will be an attempt to understand the implications, challenges and possibilities for organizational communication as well.
Works Cited


Chapter 3

An era of posts- and critics:

Perspectives on organizational communication in the historical moment

This chapter explores the historical moment through six primary philosophical movements. Following in the tradition of Mary P. Follett, who moved across distinct academic boundaries, this chapter pulls from a variety of academic perspectives including philosophy, sociology, economics, politics and religion. Beginning with postmodernity, the chapter then will also look at feminism (Ashcraft 127-50) and postcolonialism (Broadfoot and Munshi 151-171) as broader critiques within the field of organizational communication. Lastly, post-industrialism, post-Christendom and post-Americanism, which are situated in particular fields and contexts, will be explained as manifestations of the other movements. Underlying all of these areas is Thomas Friedman’s assertion in his two books *The World is Flat* (3-51) and *Hot, Flat and Crowded* (5-10) that the world has become increasingly interconnected and accessible.

Within the discussion of each post and critical encounter is a primary interpreter. While each of these interpretive perspectives may not be recognized as the most significant researcher in the area, the diversity of voices and their perspectives has been considered. This chapter looks at postmodernity through the interpretation of Stanley Grenz, a theologian who attempts to describe postmodernity in accessible frameworks, and at recent articles on feminism and postcolonialism that come from the most recent *Handbook of Organizational Communication* (127-71). The other three areas feature Daniel Bell, Stuart Murray and Fareed Zakaria, the pre-eminent authors around the metaphors used in postindustrialism, post-Christendom and post-Americanism.
These varieties of posts, of afterwards, along with the feminist critical theory are best understood in the light of what Vaclav Havel describes as the end of the modern period. Havel remarked in a speech in Philadelphia in 1994, “I think there are good reasons for suggesting that the modern age has ended. Today, many things indicate that we are going through a transitional period, when it seems that something is on the way out and something else is painfully being born. It is as if something were crumbling, decaying, and exhausting itself, while something else, still indistinct, were arising from the rubble” (“Transcendence in a Postmodern World”). While the speech is over 20 years ago, Havel’s words offer a helpful framework for understanding the variety of posts as a sort of afterwards along with the rise of critical theory. We are at the end of something, the scholarship and critical theories, recognize this which pushes academic approaches in this historical moment toward deconstructive responses rather than constructivist. The post (afterward) theories observe and at times advance that things are crumbling and decaying. Hopefully they also can begin to point us toward what is to come.

The last portion of the chapter looks at the milieu that these varieties of metaphor create for a contemporary condition in organizational communication (Stohl and Ganesh 721-25). Janie Harden Fritz’s professional civility provides a meaningful lens in glimpsing practices and postures necessary for healthy and productive organizations in what might be otherwise a difficult and sometimes fearful context (Fritz 203-5, 208). At the same time, the call to civility is complicated by diverse global perspectives that continue to call for increasingly locally defined practices, expectations and even epistemologies (Rodriguez 17).
**Introduction**

Situating Mary P. Follett as a predecessor for Organizational Communication

Organizational communication appeared as a field in the twentieth century, coming into further focus in the tumult of the complications of postmodernity. In a time of institutional distrust and the loss of metanarrative, it is not surprising that the whole meaning and possibility of organizations has come into focus. In what ways do we organize and communicate? In what way is this ethical, just, good or even necessary? (Stohl and Ganesh 735).

Mary Parker Follett’s writings foreground the emergence of organizational communication as a field of study. Her work in the areas of humanities, business, academia, social sciences and social work suggests that the context for the emergence of organizational communication was complex—particular and universal. This complex origin provides a glimpse of organizational communication’s historical moment: the moral topography, not of a person, but of an emerging discipline in the midst of a time of change.

Much of what is contemporary organizational communication lands in the fields of the “posts:” postmodernity, postcolonialism, poststructural feminisms, postindustrialism, post-Americanism, post-Christendom. Readily recognizable as after modernity, the everything-yet-something nature of organizational communication is wedged between and emerging within times of great change. With the underlying philosophical framework of postmodernity, other significant “posts” have developed that shape writing and research within organizational communication and practice. The field remains at a unique intersection between practice and praxis, encompassing airport best-
sellers, academic social science research and in-depth questions of ethics and philosophy in a time of shifting realities.

Additionally, the development of organizational communication is and was shaped by the question and possibility of feminism (Ashcraft 127-44). Follett’s gender is undeniably significant in her own historical moment and remains significant in our time as well. She was an unusually early theorist, which leads to immediate connections, or at least questions, related to her work birthing feminist perspectives within the field. Although it is beyond the scope of this research, future writers and researchers might want to attend to the intersection and topographical possibility of queer theory and organizational communication due to Follett’s relationships with other women. Nevertheless, for the sake of this research, there is an essential connectivity between the ways that Follett works and researches that serves as a significant predecessor in the field.

While organizational communication may have been birthed out of Follett’s feminism, it has significantly developed through both feminist and postcolonial critique, which according to Ashcraft, is actually the dominating viewpoint of the field in the contemporary historical moment (144). Other viewpoints, while not distinctly rooted in organizational communication but rather coming from areas of critical theory and social science, still help to situate the emerging work in the field and represent further possibilities for research. The following research on the six “post” movements create a vibrant and chaotic interpretive landscape for organizational communication (Ashcraft 127-44).
All of these influences, when taken together, form a picture of the future of organizational communication. While recognizing postmodernity as organizational communication’s ultimate context and feminism and postcolonialism as the du jour critique in much of the field, the shaping possibilities of the other three “posts” in the realms of politics, economics and religion offer a textured topography that allows a more particular understanding (Ashcraft 144, Broadfoot and Munshi 166-68). These nuances challenge contemporary application to work at further integration beyond the academy, beyond the tropes of airport marketable paperbacks, and into the intersections of academy, economics, neighborhood and places of worship. This interpretation can be done in a way that would have resonated with Follett’s research, focusing on contemporary historical moment realities, questions, problems and possibilities.

**Considering Postmodernity**

While much could be written from many perspectives on postmodernity, this research relies primarily on the integrative interpretive work of theologian Stanley Grenz. Postmodernity has gone from threatening to passé within the academy: its initial assault on the uniformity of modernity has moved to permeating academic research, although still largely a word absent from everyday conversation (Taylor and Hawes 99). While the average person on the street may be unaware of the influences of postmodernity, however, its manifestations shape settings as diverse as worshipping communities, neighborhoods and marketplaces.

The differences between modernity and postmodernity are at times opposites but in other ways continuations. Zygmunt Bauman writes, “This part of history now coming to its close could be dubbed...the era of hardware or heavy modernity, ‘the larger is the
better’ kind of modernity” (113). He writes that it was a time of conquering space, of larger factories, of the routinization of time (113-15). He suggests that the new era (what others call postmodernity) is fluid, an orientation toward software and a time when bigness is a disadvantage (118-21).

Grenz describes postmodernity as beginning in deconstruction. This sense of deconstruction is rooted in the work of philosophers like Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault and Richard Rorty. This philosophical deconstructionism suggests that texts mean more than what they say and more than one thing, and that they privilege difference over uniformity (Grenz 5-6). Grenz says, “It asserts that the world has no center, only different viewpoints and perspectives” (7). This decentered, multipolar context is both enriching and challenging in that there is much communication, many perspectives that can make it difficult to discern shared vision or shared epistemologies.

Grenz also suggests that there is a postmodern mood. This mood is ultimately one that questions epistemology. Grenz’s understanding of postmodernity is as a challenge to objectivity, arguing for a move beyond an Enlightenment or single way of knowing and an abandonment of the “myth of progress,” the belief that everything is getting, and will continue to get, better and better. In this postmodern way of knowing, truth is also in question. The truth is no longer out there in a beyond but rather is constructed collaboratively. Grenz further suggests this communal understanding works to reorient modernity’s individualism (Grenz 7-8).

Grenz sees the postmodern outlook as directly at odds with the modern. He suggests that postmodernity arrived on July 15, 1972, in St. Louis, Missouri, with the implosion of the Pruitt-Igoe housing project, considered a landmark of modern
architecture (Grenz 11-12). The building was dynamited at 3:32 that summer afternoon and became an architectural symbol of the end of modernity. The buildings were designed by Minour Yamasaki, the same architect for the twin-towered World Trade Centers in New York City that were destroyed on September 11, 2001 (Rimer, “Minour Yamasaki Dies”).

Grenz goes further to describe the postmodern phenomenon with several metaphors. He describes a postmodern conscience not only as one that has ceased believing in the metaphor of progress but also as an outlook that is inherently more pessimistic. This consciousness recognizes the fragility of human and earthly life (Grenz 13). Postmodernity posits to interpret life as integrated persons with communally shaped truth rather than individualized. Grenz writes that these communally shaped truths then give rise to larger senses of plurality and relativism, which suggests that the truth of one community need not dictate the truth of another (Grenz 14).

This plurality does mean that people may live in self-contained groups. While aware of difference, they may live within a group that has common language and identity. Grenz points out that this understanding of plurality with its group-centeredness is quite different that the plurality of late modernity that was highly individualized (Grenz 15).

Grenz suggests that the postmodern ethos has little center, little shared between its varied groups beyond geography (20). There is no longer a single utopic pull, but instead a celebration of diversity with ideas of juxtaposition and collage becoming the framework of understanding (Grenz 20). These realities then emerge in the varied humanities fields of art, theater, architecture and writing, and in the varied forms of pop culture carried through systems of technology.
Certainly, then, these realities emerge in the varied contexts of organizational communication. With postmodernity as bedrock, the deconstructive or reconstitutive work of other epistemologies has clear space to emerge. With the lack of a single center or a metanarrative, the practices of small communities and organizations become foregrounded. In what ways will people and their varied truthful communities and systems relate, produce, seek, and create?

Within that framework of postmodernity, arising as critiques of the perceived errors and hegemonies of modernity, come two critically shaping features of organizational communication in the historical moment. With its ready embrace of diversity, the postmodern ethos, if it is to consider ethical practice at all, calls into question the perceived wrongs of singled-story modernity in its privileged epistemologies and hierarchies. Questions of ethics in organizations become significant, then, as truth is defined or determined in relatedness. With the truth no longer “out there,” the truth is often defined from within. While these newly recognized small communities acknowledge that a diverse world exits, the language and practices of small communities often complicate intergroup communication.

Organizational communication flourishes in the contexts of postmodernity, becoming a field that does not simply dictate truth, but discovers and interprets truth. Without readily agreed overarching objectivities, defining and shaping practice and praxis becomes both a significant problem and a significant opportunity (Seeger and Kuhn 168). The place of leadership, the practices of ethical communication and the ways that relationships are built across difference all become fields of conversation, research and essential reframing.
Organizational communication must then also be able to critique itself. In research that is rooted in praxis and aiming toward ethical practice, two clear standpoints for consideration emerge: feminism and postcolonialism. Feminism is privileged in this research for the obvious potential connection with Follett’s gender. Postcolonialism is privileged out of consideration for the globalizing nature of organizational communication in Thomas Friedman’s flattening world (*World is Flat* 5). In recognizing the nature of small, collaboratively shaped, truth-seeking communities (Grenz 110), what kind of possibilities for relating across the chasms created by language and truth-claims might emerge that create human flourishing in the marketplace, the global village and the academy (McLuhan and Powers 83-85)?

**A fusion of horizons: Feminism**

One of the key questions that might be considered in research dealing with Mary P. Follett is her own feminism. Is she a feminist? While a response might be readily accessible and arguable, this research will not set out to prove her feminism as much as to offer a way of considering the intersections between her work and contemporary feminist research and perspectives.

In this dissertation feminism is privileged because the research examines the work of a woman who was working in fields largely seen as contentious for women particularly in areas of politics and business. This writing is then an attempt to understand Follett as a possible forerunner in feminist critical theories in respectful relationship with the contemporary historical moment. Kathleen Ianello’s research in organizational communication offers a window into what feminism may be attempting to also
deconstruct. She explores feminism as a possible post-hierarchal approach to decision-making (20-21).

Seyla Benhabib writes of a perceived alliance between postmodernity and feminism (17-18). However, she asserts that while they may have similarities, postmodernity can be a threat to ongoing feminist critique in the departure of a utopic vision (Benhabib 20, 29). The threat then becomes feminism with what eventual purpose in mind. Benhabib isn’t content with an impact that is only within localized narratives (26). Her feminism is broader and the loss of “the wholly other” that she sees in a utopic vision renders feminist critique less influential overall (30).

Perspectives on feminism are as varied as the persons who express them, and, as is true with respect to postmodernity, the field seems to have many contextual and contested ideas. There are, however, privileged intersectionalities, and this research reaches back to some of the earlier scholarship in the field to glimpse some key principles in areas around feminism and organizational communication. A more adequate description could be that there are many feminisms that exist, including womanist (African-American women) and mujerista (Latina women) interpretive work.

The Feminist Case Against Bureaucracy addresses issues of modernity in its critique, so it fits squarely within the postmodern stream yet clearly addresses the issues from a post-structuralist feminist perspective as it deals with the shared issues of colonization. Kathy Ferguson writes, “While bureaucracy has existed in other times and places, the expansiveness of bureaucratic discourse and institutions is virtually synonymous with the birth of modernity” (30). Ferguson examines bureaucracy, which
she says colonized individual lives in areas like family, education and sexuality. She also comes out as a steady critic of capitalism (30).

For Ferguson, the connection of feminism with organizational life becomes readily apparent:

‘The good life’ for individuals has come to be defined largely in organizational terms...While this is not consistent with the still-existent imagery of the successful individual entrepreneur, it is not surprising; since well-being in capitalist society has always been couched primarily in material terms, it is logical that as material resources are virtually controlled by conglomerates, individual happiness would also come to be identified with organizational life (45).

Ferguson fears what she calls a “technical society,” which she roots in the idea of technical civilization from Jacque Ellul (34). In this technical society, increasingly defined as communal postmodernity (if we are to understand Grenz’s interpretation), educational systems urge persons to join the society without reflection “on the real place of such activities” (45). Ferguson seemingly suggests that this communal definition, although accompanied by late modernity’s heightened individualism, creates a toxic mix in which the individual is subsumed into the interlocking bureaucracy (45).

The identification of this bureaucracy is seemingly ethereal. In trying to describe the actual struggle, quick interpretation could render an understanding of bureaucracy as “the man” which can be an overarching sense of male-oriented and structured hegemony. The implication of this bureaucracy is clear in its intertwining with economic systems: “Bureaucratic capitalism separates us from others without freeing us, resulting in
isolation rather than autonomy; it ties us to roles and rules rather than to people, weighting us with connections that deny community” (Ferguson 157).

The case against bureaucracy pivots here. “Feminism is not compatible with bureaucracy. Bureaucracy can be resisted, but not on its own terms” (Ferguson 180). Ferguson recognizes that women will, out of necessity, work within the great bureaucracy or bureaucracies, but she suggests that there must be other ways of practicing that honor women and feminine epistemology (181).

At this point, Ferguson’s writing intersects with Mary Parker Follett. Follett, who rarely concerned herself with fights for suffrage but who walked readily into meetings with male business leaders and developed debate clubs for Irish men, was recognized for her work but offered a quick rebuke. Ferguson suggests that the early work of women in the 1920’s, including Follett, was lost due to materialism and rationality; ultimately, it was lost to modernity, the great bureaucracy (181).

Much research on Follett recognizes that her work falls out of favor during the depression and is lost in the events of World War II. Ferguson writes that, like Follett, much of the activity of early women activists and scholars was lost to the cult of rationality, subjugated to the frameworks of the times rather than finding pathways that led to a new way of knowing and being known. Here Ferguson would agree with Follett, that a focus on women’s rights would itself be inadequate (Ferguson 182). Ferguson would suggest, however, that Follett’s work in administration in the great bureaucracy meant she was a sellout and that her work in administration, although unusual, actually did little to better position women toward a different kind of flourishing.
Follett undoubtedly worked within the bureaucracy. She was unafraid to enter discourse within the academy or with the scions of industry. Ferguson is concerned that the very language of bureaucracy does a disservice to feminist perspectives. Follett and Ferguson do agree in another area, however, in an understanding of a participatory democracy (174). This is work that the two share as a priority and remedy.

Was Follett a feminist? That seems a stretch in the way that Ferguson describes feminism. She writes, “Real social change comes about when people think and live differently. Feminist discourse and practice offer the linguistic and structural space in which it is possible to think, live, work and love differently, in opposition to the discursive and institutional practices of bureaucratic capitalism” (Ferguson 212).

Current research suggests that feminism has gotten a much larger hearing than at the time of Ferguson’s publication. According to Karen Lee Ashcraft, postmodern feminism represents the dominant perspective in organizational communication in this historical moment and may itself have become an emerging bureaucracy that needs to be challenged (144). Ferguson foresaw this possibility in the 80s: “Women need power in order to change society, but power within bureaucracies is not change-making power. The organizational forms and discourse of bureaucratic capitalism institutionalize modes of domination that recreate the very patterns of oppression that feminism arose to combat” (203).

In her article in the most recent Handbook of Organizational Communication, Ashcraft notes that the inclusion of a chapter on feminism is surely a sign of the rise of feminism’s significant influence within the academy as a whole and its excursion into areas of organizational communication as well (127). She writes that gender studies,
primarily empirical, opened the space for conversation about feminism in organizational communication (Ashcraft 128). Ashcraft develops a helpful heuristic to understand the ways that feminism has affected the study of organizational communication. She readily admits that the lines between the varied feminisms are not always clearly delineated and that the interactions are both “admittedly chaotic and distinctively nimble” (Ashcraft 128).

The first area of feminism that emerges is what Ashcraft calls “liberal feminism.” Liberal feminism, according to Ashcraft, is ultimately conservative. It is based on gender studies, often within organizations. It considers questions like glass ceilings. Liberal feminism does not set out to undermine Ferguson’s bureaucracy but rather to change it slowly, bit by bit. It is not revolutionary and does not seek to understand or even create space for multiple feminisms. It is a modern approach, a singular whole, that organizational communication theorists eventually found dull when it comes to critique. Liberal feminism lingers in the area of study, however, because it helps set the stage for many concepts that come from the social sciences, relying on theories and empirical studies that offer, at times, convincing evidence and important foundational work for the other forms of feminism to follow (Ashcraft 128-9).

The second wave of feminism in organizational communication is framed as “cultural feminism.” While liberal feminism focused on the equal treatment of women, cultural feminism seeks to have women treated differently, on their own terms. It is in many ways more disruptive but less aggressive. Cultural feminism confesses that there are distinctly feminine epistemologies, or “ways of knowing.” This led to further study in organizational communication around gender, and to the recognition of the
intersectionalities that shape persons and organizations in ways that are not limited to
gender. It is a more nuanced view of feminism and its interrelatedness. While liberal
feminism reflects modernity, cultural feminism reflects the postmodern turn. Cultural
feminism does not seek a sameness of gender equality but rather recognition of equity in
what is also different (Ashcraft 130-34).

The third movement of feminism, according to Ashcraft, is standpoint feminism.
Standpoint feminism rejects sameness, privileges difference, deals with social location
and suggests that the differences between women are as fundamentally significant as
those between men (Ashcraft 34). Standpoint feminism believes that the specificities of
intersectionality offer the possibility for significant cultural critique and rejects the senses
of sameness that emerge within earlier forms of feminism. Standpoint also further
recognizes the interlocution of historical moment and considerations that some
researchers connect with Marxism like class, labor and organizational interplay (Ashcraft
135). Standpoint feminism can be highly individualistic (“no one else is like me”) which
makes it seem disengaged from organizational communication. Standpoint theory
privileges the organizational settings that shape the person, including the overlap of
social location, and even the varied topographies of human existence. Unique to
standpoint theory, Ashcraft points out, is a sense of materiality, of recognizing the body
itself and its situatedness (137). Within organizational communication, standpoint theory
might be quick to join in Marshall McLuhan’s assertion that the medium is also the
message/massage (Fiore and McLuhan 8-10). While previous forms of feminism in the
communication field privilege the communication itself, standpoint theory moves toward
a holistic *Gestalt.*
Post-structuralist feminism arises out of similar approaches as standpoint feminism, rooted in materiality, emphasizing difference and a distinct anti-masculine bent. While difference is privileged in both standpoint feminism and post-structuralism, post-structuralist feminism takes aim at what it perceives to be masculine worlds and structures, with an intent to critique and an assertion that women are best equipped to reimagine different and new ways of organizing (Ashcraft 138).

Ferguson’s book on bureaucracy lands squarely in the field of post-structuralist interpretation. Interlocking organizational social constructs not only create identity but also serve as modes of oppression that must be disentangled. Only post-structuralism is the serum that might move toward freedom. At the same time, in an increasingly diverse world, this gendered binary has its limitations (Ashcraft 138).

While there is no clear association with Follett in any of this material thus far, her perspectives fall readily within some of the categories. Poststructuralism critiques women’s ways of knowing and reacting, saying that those ways of behaving are actually the result of oppressive bureaucracies. Follett would seemingly agree with this. She, too, was uncomfortable with the subordination of distinctly womanly ways of behaving or responding. At the same time, her orientation toward change was similar to the first wave of feminism in which change seemed to come from within the system and structures already available or at work. Feminist organizations are identified as always dealing with issues of hierarchy and power (Ianello 42), features similar to Follett’s interpretation and work.

Was Follett anti-bureaucratic? She was most definitely not anti-masculine. If bureaucracy is understood per Ferguson as an interlocking hegemony, Follett did not
fight that battle. In her attempt to reimagine bureaucracy, however, was an attempt to understand organizations and organizing differently in ways that were participatory, somewhat egalitarian, and definitely more collectivist.

Postmodern feminism, the dominant interpretation in our historical moment, relies on much of the post-structuralist interpretation but with several more nuanced interpretive moves. Postmodern feminism suggests that gender is an unstable construct, formed primarily in discourse. This discourse then helps to situate a person, though more fluidly and temporally than permanently, as there is ongoing interaction between the person who occupies her own particular intersectionality and her context. The person does not have knowledge because of situatedness but embodies knowledge that comes from this intersectionality. This introduces an ongoing discourse around knowledge and power (Ashcraft 141-43).

The anti-bureaucracy movement of post-structuralism is turned on its head in postmodern feminism. In this wave, there is no intersectionality, nor is there a limiting and complex bureaucratic interlocking; instead, postmodern feminists suggest an intertextuality that is more of an inextricable relatedness than an overlapping (Taylor 112). It was seemingly a welcome turn for scholars in the field who found that the discourse, the very act of communicating, as essential in this framework (Ashcraft 141).

This intertextuality can be understood in the literature on three primary levels. A micro level looks at “the everyday production of gender/difference in organization” (Ashcraft 142). A meso level looks at the form and structure of the organization and how it creates difference. A macro level looks at the relating between organization and culture that creates the inextricable intertextual reality (Ashcraft 142). Key to the research on the
micro level is the concept of enacting gender: exploring the ways that gender is both constructed and transgressed. This research is on the individual level. In meso research, the interest is on how the organization itself shapes gender or difference. Macro level postmodern feminist scholarship is interested in interplay and intertextuality. It is much more ethereal and broad, a switch from studying organizational communication to an exploration of the communication of organizing (Ashcraft 143).

In some ways, postmodern organizational systems and feminism look the same. This is a critical and substantive point of awareness. In understanding the current state of organizational communication, postmodern feminism has emerged as a key articulation in the field. There is little difference in postmodern approaches and postmodern feminist approaches from the post-structural realm. These follow closely some of the areas of inquiry and response for Follett, contending with the kinds of issues and possibilities that she addresses and considers. While Follett’s research still relied on some of the metaphors and sources of modernity, her approaches also seem to lean unknowingly toward the postmodern and feminine practices of integration (which may come close to some sense of intertextuality). Follett recognized that difference provided a certain degree of potential for organizations.

While the connection with feminism and its needed exploration may be readily apparent because Follett herself is a woman working early in male-dominated areas, the connection with postcolonialism has much more to do with some of the other rising “posts” explored later in the chapter. While postcolonialism relates to postmodernity in similar ways to feminism, particularly in how it responds to difference, it has other implications for this research. While Follett forces the conversation about feminism
because of her early contributions as a woman, postcolonialism is a necessary exploration because of the current historical moment. Recognizing the rises, ebbs and flows of a global economy, the implications of global migration and the observations of global weather change, research on organizational communication cannot ignore the emerging globalized realities (Clair, McConnell, Bell, Hackbarth and Mathes 66-67).

If this chapter were written a generation ago, the process would have considered more the implication of globalization. Now a generation into globalization, with rising economies and interconnected lives related to economy, postcolonialism offers a critique both to the last epoch’s globalism (colonialism) and offers an opportunity to redefine the possibilities and challenges for organizational communication (Clair, McConnell, Bell, Hackbarth and Mathes 66-67). This study emerges within the field of postmodernism for sure, but has its own post-structuralism and desire to recreate, transform, to be recognized and to move toward new expressions and discourses. (Broadfoot and Munshi 167, Spivak 1)

Feminism as a primary form of critique examines the bureaucratic and considers the hierarchal in organizational life in ways that are primarily oriented around gendered identities. While a dominant perspective at this time in organizational communication, it is a highly interpersonal model. In a time of a flattening world, this research sets also to look at implications of intercultural communication in the field of organizational communication. Postcolonial criticism represents a pathway of intercultural criticism. In the world that McLuhan and Powers describe in The Global Village (84-86) as well as through the encounters that Follett experienced in the early 20th century in rapidly changing neighborhoods, intercultural communication and its critical perspective warrant
significant investigation for consideration of ethical organizational communicative praxis in a flattening and fearful world.

**A fusion of horizons: Postcolonialism**

“Postcolonialism is relevant for the study of management and organizations…because of a massive transformation during the last few decades of the overall context in which contemporary organizations operate,” writes Anshuman Prasad (33). Prasad further explains that the implication of postcolonial studies is related to the massive shifts in economic output to Asia with the “global concentration of economic activities…slowly but surely moving away from the West” (33). The growing significance of postcolonial considerations suggests related necessities for organizational communication from changes in labor, communication technology, environmental degradation, and the rising recognition of the gap between rich and poor.

What is the significance of postcolonialism? In the centuries of interaction between what Prasad calls the West and the non-West, patterns of relating have been established that can be revisited, discourses changed to include perspectives that were not previously considered admissible or noticeable (Prasad 31). There can be a reevaluation of the change in method and barometrics. Prasad suggests that postcolonial postures defamiliarize organizational practice and discourse, allowing something new to emerge. Even the new, however, is often rooted in the context sometimes previously shaped by the expectations of the West. Postcolonialism allows for an emergent understanding of management and communication that is not based on Western ideals and principles (32). Prasad hopes that the process of defamiliarization that is essential in postcolonialism allows new responses to emerge to problems previously unnoticed or unseen (29).
In what ways does postcolonialism manifest itself? Edward Said’s *Orientalism*, published in 1975, is considered a seminal event in the emergence of postcolonial perspectives. Said’s writing creates a space for postcolonialism to emerge. He asserted that the West and the Orient are constructs projected by Western colonizing that need to be revisited and reconsidered; this perspective opened the pathway for other scholars, thinkers and students to respond. He wrote, “Every European, in what he could say about the Orient, was consequently a racist, an imperialist, and almost totally ethnocentric” (204). It is a tough and direct critique.

Said and other postcolonial theorists after him attempt to remove the measure of Western ideals from places in the non-West. He suggested that Western writers saw the non-West as in need of redemption, reconstruction and attention from the West. While Said did not want to cut off the interactions between the West and non-West, he wondered how the discourse might change (Said 206).

In the exploration of postcolonial approaches in the *Organizational Communication Handbook*, Broadfoot and Munshi acknowledge that it is hard to package postcolonialism. Its nature is blurred between disciplines and application. Their writing attempts to offer a handhold and meaningful points of connection through identifying shared significant concepts and key thought leaders or theorists (Broadfoot and Munshi 150-53). Their three outlined commitments of postcolonialism offer a helpful glimpse into the posture for understanding the significance for organizational communication and the possible intersection with the work of Follett in the field.

The first commitment is to disrupt and re-imagine organizing space. Postcolonial work is always about geography and location. It has a spatial orientation to relatedness. It
calls into question the idea of nation-state as primary identifier, reconsidering boundaries often drawn by Western powers (Broadfoot & Munshi 154). While this ultimately questions nationalism, the foregrounded issue is ultimately more about definition and relatedness. Tribal identities often take precedent over imposed boundaries. In contemporary conflicts, the Kurdish example in Syria, Turkey and Iraq is a readily accessible manifestation. Postcolonialism undermines national boundedness not for a globalized cosmopolitanism, but for the sake of local communities with long histories and senses of belonging that are defined irrespective of national boundaries (Broadfoot & Munshi 151, 161).

Postcolonial perspectives are concerned about reciprocities, recognition and relationships (Broadfoot & Munshi 151). Much of late modern organizational communication focused on business relationships and efficiency models. Organizational communication was considered ultimately pragmatic and normative, attending little to nonstandard practices or other ways of understanding and interpreting (Broadfoot & Munshi 156). Postcolonial organizational communication considers the possibilities of resistance rather than efficiency. Rather than submitting to F.W. Taylor’s scientific management structure, postcolonialism seeks to resist those ways of knowing reliant on science and incognizant of the diversity of story, structure and experience of colonized peoples (Broadfoot & Munshi 156).

Postcolonial organizational communication is ultimately resistant, not to change per se, but to evaluation and decision making that is not respectful of context and community. It is language-as-resistance both within organizations and between organizations. Rodriguez writes:
Epistemological conquest is about our imposing our view of the world on others by way of imposing how we perceive and make sense of the world on others. It is making people think like how we think. By being able to impose how we perceive and make sense of the world on others we also change what these people view as good, decent and beautiful. Now we define and dictate what is good, decent, beautiful (17).

Postcolonial critiques then advocate for localized decision-making and evaluation.

This second area of priority has a political orientation that irritates traditionalist understandings of organizational communication, pulling outside political issues into the context of other organizational systems. This is indeed challenging for organizational communication when the desire to create heterodox orthodoxy can exist both within and beyond (Broadfoot & Munshi 157-59).

The third commitment is around education, decolonization and epistemologies. These commitments seek to redefine structures that resist new ways of doing or knowing simply because they are not following what might be considered Western cultural mores and values. This restructuring can include language resistance, simple resistance of structural forms or seeking to tell or understand alternative histories. It is a commitment with both broad and sometimes subtle implications. This moves beyond simply resisting to actions of redefining and creating alternatives (Broadfoot & Munshi 160-1).

Postcolonial postures exerted in organizational communication represent a formidable challenge. Within a stream similar to feminism, postcolonial approaches open new possibilities for organizational communication both within and outside of organizations. This tactic might serve to generate new potential in a fearful and flattening
world. It is an essential approach to defamiliarization, and the framework offers a way of understanding intercultural resistance while opening possibilities for new understanding.

The postcolonial move does not intend to comfort those of European descent who work in organizational communication. Postcolonialism is an interlocution, a foil, but it is significant to note that it is also a way of engaging intercultural conflicts peaceably. In a time when global neighbors are sometimes as accessible as those down the block, postcolonial pathways provide possibilities for understanding, for focusing frustration and for reevaluating organizing metaphors and work in organizational communication settings.

**Interlude: Onto the contextual realities**

While recognizing the significance of postmodernity and privileging feminist and postcolonial critical perspectives in organizational communication, this research will briefly explore three additional areas of cultural phenomena, observations that are particularly influencing and shaping both global and local process. Echoing the title of the book *How does a poem mean?* by Ciardi and Williams (10), these metaphors explore how the changing nature of postmodernity, feminism and postcolonialism play out and are (Taylor and Hawes 105). In looking for ways that the theories might “mean,” it is important to examine the emergence of metaphors in the economic, religious and political spheres in this historical moment. While the three key theorists explored here-Daniel Bell, Stuart Murray and Fareed Zakaria-are not exhaustive in their orientation, they will represent how postmodernity and its organizational communicative outcomes manifest in performative ways in a flattening and often fearful world.
Daniel Bell’s postindustrialism presents the rising information age and the shift in economics that comes alongside the flattening world (Bell 41-45). Stuart Murray’s post Christendom (2-3) coupled with the rising of Philip Jenkins’ Next Christendom allows a glimpse of understanding the change in posture of religion in the West (Jenkins 112-13). Fareed Zakaria’s commentary could be understood as postcolonial in nature in his situatedness of understanding the United States and by proxy the West from Said’s non-West (Zakaria 1-4; Said 5-7).

These three areas and metaphors can be understood as significant in the United States because they suggest then how the flattening world might have unexpected consequences broadly in organizational life from economics to religion to government. The significance for inclusion of each of these three writers is related to their lack of anxiety. Bell, Murray and Zakaria are able to suggest and name the current crumbling states that Havel tells of in his 1994 speech but then begin to turn toward hopeful responses and spaces for ongoing productive work in the midst of change. The three authors also are born across the spheres of Western influence: Murray in the UK, Bell in the United States, Zakaria in India. Those representations in a postcolonial world give breadth of understanding a globalizing trajectory from the UK to the United States to India in a fearful, flattening world.

**Contextualities: Postindustrialism**

Daniel Bell’s epoch- and ground-breaking venture in social forecasting framed a conversation that continues now through the work of contemporary researchers like Richard Florida, who names what has emerged since Bell’s postindustrialism as a creative economy (15-17). The framework of contemporary fluidity and conversation,
Bell’s work began to lay necessary foundation for today’s remade cities and workplaces. This might be exemplified in Pittsburgh, a city that, over a span of fifty years, has journeyed from a topography of steel mills hugging riverbanks to one of sprawling technological office parks with bike trails and green spaces along those same rivers (Savage 244-47). While primarily an economic perspective, there is no doubt that this shift has huge influences in communities and politics and, paired with changes in technology, cultivates a space for new conversations within organizational communication as well.

Bell’s original tome, published in the early 70s, offered a glimpse of the coming change; in the anniversary volume, published 25 years later, he reviews the significance of change, privileging several areas that had substantially shifted. First, Bell writes that the move begins with a shift from manufacturing to services, which is a shift from heavy industry to clean industry. This then means changes in occupation and the character of work to technical and professional, away from skilled (trades) and semi-skilled laborers (Bell xv). He highlights, thirdly, a shift in property ownership and education which suggest a rising social mobility, a movement away from inherited wealth, which occurs due to rising entrepreneurship and the social fluidity that education provides in geographic movement and professionalism in occupational possibilities (xvi). Fourth, Bell notes a change in understanding financial capital and human capital. The primary significance of this shift is the change from singular (modern) ways of understanding capital as money or land to recognizing the currency of social capital: access to significant opportunities and possibilities that have varying levels of gatekeepers and entry points.
Bell points out that technology both provides better access to a broader system but is also then a tighter gatekeeper. Without access to technology, the connection to social capital can become even more difficult (Bell xvi). This leads to Bell’s fifth shift: the understanding of technology. In the world of 1999, the widespread shifts of a readily accessible world wide web had not yet emerged, but Bell recognized that something was about to change. He suggested that what was coming to the fore was “intellectual technology which uses algorithms, programming models and simulations in the running of the new high technology” (Bell xvi-xvii). Bell anticipated well.

This change in technology led to his sixth critical point: infrastructure. Bell noted that industrial society required “Ports, railroads, highways, trucks, airports.” (xvii) Postindustrial realities require different infrastructures that focus, not on moving products, but on communication. Bell notes that these new communicative infrastructures “form a complex adaptive system that is the foundation of the electronically mediated global economy” (xvii). This document is being written from Philadelphia where the largest building between New York and Chicago is under construction by Comcast. Comcast moves information and ideas in the same way that this historic Pennsylvania Railroad moved products. Comcast is the largest company to be based in Philadelphia since the Pennsylvania Railroad (Armstrong, “Comcast: Not your traditional Philly firm”, www.philly.com).

The last area of change is the shift in postindustrialism to knowledge value-based economies. This represents a move from Marxism and theories of labor to theories of knowledge that then are co-constructed. This co-constructed knowledge is the seed of innovation and further drives the postindustrial economy and framework. Knowledge
becomes the fulcrum on which the postindustrial economy pivots. While collectively produced, Bell recognized that leading theorists in the knowledge economy (contemporary equivalents would be Facebook’s Mark Zuckerberg, Microsoft’s Bill Gates and Apple’s Steve Jobs) might be owed something more for a kind of “social rent” (Bell xvii). In 1999, those kinds of figures did not yet have iconic status. In today’s culture, it is possible that the “social rent” that Bell was describing might be understood as a revered celebrity status. This is the best rent our society can offer, along with our loyalties, millions of dollars in business and a copious amount of time spent on platforms or devices created out of knowledge coalesced by these kind of leaders. These are the “interlocking parts” of postindustrialism or the possible “intertextuality,” depending on your standpoint theoretical perspective.

Bell writes that all of these shifts have significant implication, ultimately cultivating Friedman’s flat and fearful world where geographic distance becomes a different proposition oriented around time instead of space (xlviii). He suggests that global cities rise in prominence due to the orientation of the economic system, that then privilege the communication and situatedness capacities of places like New York, London, Singapore, Tokyo and Hong Kong (xxiii).

The entry point for this post-industrial economy based on knowledge then becomes higher education. This has significant importance for the future of the academy, although the rapid change in technologies might also re-shape how the academy functions in space and time (lxv). For organizational communication, this is the privilege of a primary realm of function and also means that a healthy tethering with the academy remains likely. Due to the fluidity of technology, however, it will be worth paying
attention to the rapid spillover of technological change into the implications for specific geographies and contexts as well.

Bell recognizes this postindustrial space as a techno-economic realm driven by knowledge (lxxxi). He notes that while this economic and knowledge integration is occurring, there is an increased recognition of political fragmentation. He writes that the greatest points of impact will be around areas of work and education, squarely placing all of these arenas within the broad provinces of organizational communication. Bell is right to predict in 1999 that the world’s historic religions would somehow play into this emerging understanding of postindustrial society. It is a quick mention, but in a departure from modernism and positivism, Bell confesses that religions have outlasted empires and ages. He recognizes a significant space for religions in the ongoing techno-information age (lxxxiii).

While Bell does not seem to recognize postcolonialism in his writing, his acknowledgement of political fragmentation seems to acknowledge the postcolonial effort. Though Bell suggests that this techno-economic system will have space for significant roles for women who have access to the higher education gateway, it may well open itself to the poststructuralist feminist critique that it is creating a new bureaucracy of interlocking systems, ones with not-always readily apparent glass ceilings (Bell lxxxi).

Bell’s material on postindustrialization further suggests significance in exploring the roles of religion in the knowledge or information age and the exploration of the role of nation in a flattening world. Recognizing western situatedness, looking to critique the dominant understandings of research and writing within the US American cultural purview, the next section turns toward exploring a world without historically dominant
world views. Without fear, this research will investigate understandings of post-
Christendom and post-Americanism through the eyes of optimistic writers who believe
that there is an invitation for both Christians and US Americans to somewhere other than
oblivion in this flattening global age.

**Contextualities: Post Christendom**

Stuart Murray’s *Post-Christendom* provides another valuable insight into the
particularities in which postmodernity manifests. Murray, a British researcher, writes that
Post-Christendom is a time “in which central features of the Christian story are unknown
and churches are alien institutions whose rhythms do not normally impinge on most
members of society.” He suggests that in the British context, Post-Christendom is a time
where the narrative and symbols of Christianity have passed out of public and cultural
understanding. The Christian story then becomes largely unknown (Murray 2).

While this perspective could be contested in the US context, and is by writers like
Isaac Villegas and Ron Adams who caution a too-quick willingness to declare
Christendom dead in their article “Post-Christendom or Neo-Christendom?”, Murray’s
work is widely accepted in Europe where he is the primary scholar writing exploring the
metaphor. Murray does admit, “We are not quite there yet. We are in a lengthy
transitional phase. Christendom took years to develop and will not collapse overnight”
(3). The changes are slow and episodically noticeable.

Murray writes that the post-Christendom shift is a first: a demise in Christian
cultural influence without persecution or the emergence of a new clear religious story. He
suggests that the change may be abrupt or lengthy and may have different characteristics
in different places (19). Murray orients the arrival of post-Christendom around seven primary movements (20):

- First is the movement from the center to the margins. In the previous era of Christendom, the church is situated at the center; in post-Christendom, the church is perched at the cultural margin.

- Second is the demographic shift from majority to minority. In Christendom, Christians are the demographic majority and in post-Christendom, Christians are a minority presence.

- Third is the movement from settlers to sojourners. Christianity transitions away from comfort within a Western cultural context to a discomfort in which Christian faith is not at home, but rather, in some ways, discordant from the surrounding culture. This creates a sense of migration, of Christians as “aliens and strangers” in a land that was once their home.

- Fourth is the movement from privilege to plurality. In the past, Christian perspectives, values, and even schedules were culturally privileged and honored; in post-Christendom, Christianity loses this privilege, becoming one among a variety of religious and irreligious perspectives.

- Fifth is the shift from control to witness. Instead of dictating social, cultural, and economic norms, Christianity is at its best when Christians tell stories and model practices that offer the clearest illustrations of the implications of its own story.

- Sixth is the movement from maintenance to mission. Christian communities no longer maintain an economic and numerical base of dominance, enabling them to focus only on sustaining the status quo; instead, Christian communities will only
survive by presenting their faith in an environment that is, at best, nonplussed by Christian perspectives and, at worst, possibly hostile to Christian engagement.

- Seventh is the shift from institution to movement, a change that is significant for organizational communication. The institutional, or possibly bureaucratic, church cannot remain inactive and expect growth or a position of honor within the historical moment; instead, the church must operate more fluidly and responsively to a diversity of contexts.

Post-Christendom can easily be perceived as a threat to the Christian church or the implication of decline and failure (Murray 21). Instead, Murray advocates “eschewing nostalgia and welcoming the challenges.” He suggests that rethinking the influence of the Enlightenment and understanding the implications of postmodernity will likely be just the beginning. He goes on to suggest that there is a necessary engagement in re-imagining economics, organizational structure and particularly communication patterns (Murray 261, 264, 273).

The establishment of a Christian empire has most often been attached to the conversion of Constantine in the fourth century, a united Christendom that lasted about a millennia. While Constantine opened the possibilities of Christendom, according to Murray, “its main architect was Augustine” (75). Augustine realized that the posture of the church previous to its acceptance in the empire had largely been unprepared for the shift. Murray suggests that Augustine “believed his context required accommodation and reinterpretation” (79). Murray writes that Augustine was wrestling with five key shifts.

First, the distinction between the church and the world had become blurred. Second, Augustine was cultivating an understanding that the church community may
contain what Jesus in the Gospels calls both “wheat and weeds,” or believers and unbelievers. Augustine’s third concern was an emphasis on grace (Murray 79). Fourth, he was seeking a way to unite the church across the diverse movements of the empire. Finally, Augustine realized that the official acceptance of Christianity by the reigning government meant that Christians could now be appointed to places of authority and needed guidance on ethical practice (Murray 80).

While not responsible for Christendom in its entirety, Murray asserts that Christendom’s framework relies on Augustine’s biblical interpretation of both the Old and New Testaments (80). On the foundation of Augustine’s thought, Christendom developed slowly, over many years, just as it has taken many years for the decentering and deconstruction of our current historical moment. There were numerous outcomes of the move toward Christendom, some of which remain (Murray 83). While Murray has a long list of these outcomes, a few deserve to be highlighted: Christianity becomes the official religion of the empire, which means that all citizens are assumed Christian or Jewish (83). An established orthodoxy of belief clearly and increasingly divides the world into realms of Christendom and heathendom (Murray 83-4). Christian faith is upheld by laws and Christian practice is imposed by rule, sometimes with violence (Murray 83-4). Sunday is officially designated a holiday with obligatory church attendance (Murray 84).

The beginning of the fragmentation that led to post-Christendom began with the split between the Eastern (Orthodox) and Western (Catholic) churches in 1054. The Protestant Reformation in the 1500s only furthered that fragmentation with the establishment of a plurality of European Christendoms (Murray 145). Murray suggests
that as these Christendoms emerged, they were attached to growing national identities and scattered geographies. This decentering set up the current post-Christendom context, which, along with other dominating cultural movements, is a response to both the Enlightenment and “the impact of industrialization and urbanization on traditional beliefs, postmodernism, pluralization and fragmentation” (Murray 179).

Two additional factors contribute to the decline in Christendom. The flourishing of many “small Christendoms,” denominations like Baptists, Quakers and Methodists, presents a challenge to a singular Christian story (Murray 184-85). In addition, the modern mission movement that has cultivated what Philip Jenkins calls the “Next Christendom” which is based on the demographic shift of Christian population majority from northern and western dominated Christianity to Latin America, Asia and Africa (112-13), which, while seen as extending the influence of Christendom, has also served to bring about its ultimate demise. This global movement of mission workers who carried the weight of Christendom to Asia, Africa and South America eventually brought about a collapse of the organizational system as it was known. Understanding the power of Buber’s “all of real life is encounter” (62), these real encounters with people around the world could not allow the church to remain the same. According to Wilbert Shenk, “The dark shadow of Christendom considerably complicated the missionary’s task by making it difficult to see the situation fully, but in the long run, Christendom itself could not survive in the crucible of missions” (21).

In Stanley Hauerwas’ After Christendom, he begins to point to the communicative challenge of a post-Christendom context. He writes that the challenge is to begin to articulate and describe faith on terms other than that of the dominant culture. After
generations of relying on the cultural context to frame an understanding of Christianity, Hauerwas writes that modernity did not allow a distinctly Christian narrative to emerge, but that the Christian narrative was instead framed by an understanding of the West (8). This caused a false equivalency in which the Western story and Christian story were unhelpfully fused.

This mission movement, combined by Jenkins description of a rising Global Christian movement and Murray’s clear outline of the de-centering of the Christian story from the Western narrative, means a new way of narrating and telling the historic Christian story must emerge (Hauerwas 8-9). This is both challenge and possibility for Christians.

In postmodernism and post-Christendom, the progress of Christianity and the progress of humanity are no longer linked. Faith in the ultimate victory of “faith” no longer grounds society as a whole. Ann Morisy suggests that the rapid decline of a trust in progress has brought about a sense of dystopia. She writes that the Western world is now in a “post-postmodern period characterized by the chill of anxiety and fear” (3). In this period of “posts,” Morisy encourages a critical response during this time “when the world is worried rather than optimistic.” In this direction, Morisy suggests that there is a way of “enacting hope” that is both lonely and urgent (16).

The challenge for historic Christian organizations, as well as now seemingly secular organizations birthed out of and steeped in Christian ethics and traditions, in a post-Christendom context relates to enacting hope in ways that are authentic, while recognizing both the loneliness and the urgency that will entail. Hauerwas’ work underlines that this work will require a different path than the one the church in the West
has been accustomed to following. Murray writes that it will require both intention and the recognition of his outlined seven movements. Post-Christendom compels new communication in a time when the metanarrative, at least conceptually, is passé. The realities of fragmented communities, multi-modal and intercultural communication, along with dis-organized religion privilege the local and the authenticity of encounter even within organizational communication systems (Morisy 11-12).

**Contextualities: Post-Americanism**

In the midst of the rise of postmodernity and postcolonialism is also an economic reality, brought about somewhat by postindustrialism. While seemingly threatening, the metaphor of Post-Americanism is a way of understanding both the fearful and flattening world. With the strikingly symbolic attack and collapse of the Twin Towers in New York which Baudrillard offers as a metaphor of US arrogance and compassion (61), a shifting world order continues to emerge.

Fareed Zakaria writes that *The Post-American World* is not as much “about the decline of America but the rise of everyone else. It’s about the great transformation taking place around the world, a transformation that . . .remains poorly understood” (1). Zakaria outlines three significant shifts that have reshaped life across the world over the last five hundred years to set up this time of the rising of the rest (1).

The rise of the Western world through colonial exploration coupled with the industrial revolution began in the late 1400s and accelerated through the 1800s. Zakaria writes that this movement created the modern world with the recognizable features of science and technology, commerce and capitalism and both the industrial and agricultural revolutions (1).
Out of the rise of the Western world came the rise of the United States in the late 1800s. According to Zakaria, the United States became the most powerful nation since Rome, with an unrivaled global dominance that winds out the 20th century. This global dominance was previously unheard of in modernity (Zakaria 2).

Zakaria highlights a third shift that he frames as “the rise of the rest.” This is mostly economic but also symbolic (Zakaria 2-3). While the rise of the rest is dominantly recognizable in the economic field, other cultural dimensions are also moving to multiple polarities away from Americanism, including industrial, financial, educational, social and cultural perspectives (Zakaria 4). This shift should not be mistaken as anti-Americanism, Zakaria is quick to point out. Instead, it has many implications: rising fluidity of corporations and capital, the shift from a singularly dominant US military, and the rising possibilities of non-nation-state organizations like those resistant to the West (those who perpetrated the acts of 9/11 or ISIS) but also international organizations like the European Union and World Trade Organization that act beyond the boundaries of nation states (Zakaria 5).

Zakaria suggests that the rise of the rest also brings about an assertion of identity. This assertion can be nationalistic but may also follow religious, linguistic or ethnic groups that have existed far longer than the nation state (41). The rise of localized identities, coupled with access to technology and media, means that the non-West is revisiting its narratives and dissecting assumptions (37). In an exemplification of populist postcolonialism, new alignments between countries are emerging that bypass the United States or the West as a mediating force (Zakaria 39).
The rise of the rest is an outcome of American policy, ideas and action. The United States has advocated open markets and global competition. While this movement is growing in countries around the world, in the United States there is an increasingly fearful posture to innovation, immigration and globalized economic realities (Zakaria 60). Zakaria writes, “Just as the world is opening up, America is closing down. Generations from now, when historians write about these times, they might note that, in the early decades of the twenty-first century, the United States succeeded in its great and historic mission—it globalized the world. But along the way, they might write, it forgot to globalize itself” (Zakaria 61). This seems a serious charge.

Zakaria points out that there is contention around whether modernization is actually separable from Westernization. He writes, “So much of what we think of as modern, is at least outwardly, Western” (87). From sports, to government, to economic structure and holidays like Christmas and Valentine’s Day, much is rooted in the West and even in Christian practice (Zakaria 87-88). These practices have shaped organizations and businesses as well (Zakaria 90).

“Will the future be modern or Western? The only simple answer is yes” (Zakaria 99). Zakaria points out that each context will be its own reality. Zakaria further explores the rise of China and India in particular, remarking that this should not be considered so much the “rise of Asia,” as “Asia” is a Western construct (Zakaria 99). One particular example in the non-West interpretation of China is in the area of religion. The interpretation of God and/or the role of God is quite different in China compared to settings where Abrahamic faith is a cornerstone (Zakaria 122). Zakaria suggests that the more accurate Western equivalent of Confucianism might actually be the Enlightenment
Confucianism is best understood as not a religion but a philosophical posture that has a distinct “sense of ethics, morality and justice” (Zakaria 122, 125). Some Enlightenment writers hoped that they might be able to learn from Confucianism (Zakaria 122, 125). The intentionality of Abrahamic traditions that often drives religious missionary movement is largely absent from China, which is often content just to be itself (Zakaria 125).

Ethical practice and organizational behavior in China can be challenging for Western businesses to understand. Ethical practice is not responsive to disembodied principle but rather to relationship; this practicality results in what appears to westerners as circuitous and complicated relatedness in organizations (Zakaria 125-26). With a more situational ethic, these practices can make it difficult for Western businesspeople to learn and interpret (Zakaria 125).

India, by contrast, is a bottom-up context compared to China’s centralized top down planning (Zakaria 130). India is also the world’s largest democracy, which allows for even further chaos but also a mostly stable government (Zakaria 156). Without centralized planning, the consumer is in charge (Zakaria 152). Zakaria suggests that India is both three Nigerias and several Silicon Valleys when considering it’s economics and population (149).

India is dominated by Hindiusm, which Zakaria identifies again as more a philosophy than a religion (169-71). Hinduism helps forms a highly individualized culture with distinctions of worship that are particular to the family or even the person (Zakaria 169-70). Hinduism can readily absorb other religious worldviews without threat (Zakaria 171), but, at the same time, the ability to fit many varieties of religious
experience within the Hindu story means that the country is constantly negotiating relationships. Despite this, the Indian mindset is usually “to live and let live” (Zakaria 172).

These two contexts further illustrate the connections between faith, economic and government in interpreting the flattening world. Zakaria works with China and India as the most populous counties in the world that also can be perceived as challenges to the United States in global jockeying. However, both are diverse nation-states, much like the United States, with vast differences within them. They are both similar and quite different from each other in their Asian-ness and share some similarities with the United States as well (Zakaria 61).

Zakaria goes on to explore how the United States can identify possibilities in a time of the “rising of the rest,” or global flattening. “Higher education is America’s best industry,” Zakaria writes (207). He further outlines the advantage of the U.S. higher education systems’ high rankings and the high percentage of investment in education within the Gross Domestic Product, a number which doubles both Japan and Europe. He writes that new advanced university systems take time to develop and, for now, the dominance of U.S.-based higher education is unmatched (Zakaria 208).

He further writes that “America’s secret weapon” is actually ongoing immigration (Zakaria 212). While in Europe and Japan, the existing population continues to age and has had difficulty integrating new arrivals, “America’s edge in innovation is overwhelmingly a product of immigration” (Zakaria 213-15). In 2010, nearly half of the PhDs in the United States were completed by foreign students. As long as those students remain in the US, innovation remains foregrounded in the US economy (Zakaria 215).
Zakaria writes, “Immigration also gives America a quality rare for a rich country—hunger and energy” (215). Immigrants continue to arrive in the United States, often performing difficult and monotonous jobs for relatively low wages in an attempt to move toward a better life. While in the United States there has always been agitation around immigrants, whether Irish, Italian, Chinese or Latino, the economy relies on them. The United States has continually been able to integrate each wave into the mainstream of culture and life, bringing energy and drive that is usually absent in mature and aging economies (Zakaria 215-6).

Still, the shift of status for the United States in a postcolonial, postmodern context is difficult to navigate. While the United States still maintains significant points of influence, the economic rise of the rest remains disorienting. Though immigration may continue to help bolster a smart and technologically savvy nation, the rest of the world continues what the United States has helped to initiate through participation with a global economy (Zakaria 215). With the rising of large economies like India and China which Zakaria highlights along with others across Asia, Africa and Latin America, this is indeed a different time (1-5).

The United States has an opportunity to respond differently in recognizing the rise of the rest, the flattening and fearful context. Zakaria writes, “this new role…involves consultation, cooperation, and even compromise. It derives its power by setting the agenda, defining the issues and mobilizing coalitions. It is not a top-down hierarchy” (258). Instead, the U.S. role, as Zakaria defines it, is assumed in coordinating the conversation. He points toward U.S.-based multinational corporations as models that have moved toward joint ventures rather than “managerial imperialism” (Zakaria 258).
Zakaria insists that the United States must move beyond the fears of a post-9/11 context. Moving beyond fear is a move toward interaction and recognition that even the tightest securities and quickest responses cannot eliminate all actors who might launch violent incidents. At the same time, he invites the United States to return to a confident, open and inviting posture, “a country wide open to the world, to the future, and to anyone who loved it” (Zakaria 284). This confidence is a bold response in the midst of fear and flattening economies in the midst of the rising of the rest or the nonWest.

**The historical moment in organizational communication**

While postcolonialism and feminism represent only two approaches in the field of organizational communication, these approaches are significant in looking at Follett and in understanding the historical moment. Organizational communication in postmodernity is an array of perspectives. Poole and Lynch (223) write that the multiplicity of available viewpoints and their varied levels of both overlap and contentiousness do not always mean integration; they do, however, mean discourse, which bodes well for the field well into postmodernity (223).

This discourse, with its multiple standpoints, helps provoke and produce quality scholarship that remains, in theory, an essential part of the conversation around critical, empirical and post-positivist research. While only two of the critical areas are mentioned here, they are representative of the ongoing theoretical moves and the struggle to continue to define and redefine efficacious research in organizational communication. Poole and Lynch (223) suggest that it is not the integration of the theories but the lively interrogation and rigorous questioning that will serve to build ground in the field’s continued emergence.
Understanding postmodernity’s intention to collage rather than connect, feminism’s recognition of the situatedness of a particularity, even a theoretical particularity, and postcolonialism’s invitation to investigate vigorously the spaces in between establishes contemporary researchers within a situation with multiple interrelated theoretical constructs that will allow for a spirited and even hopeful conversation. The challenge remains in establishing a toughness of posture: not a toughness in a sense of impermeability, but a sense of resilience in being able to survive multiple affronts and questioning interactions (Bhabha 1).

Poole and Lynch write, “While it seems unlikely that any position will win the day, the many options…can give us guidance in the practice of scholarship, as we are confronted with problems that indicate the need to combine, work between, or even integrate perspectives. This rich set of approaches greatly increases the possibility that the fruits of research on organizational communication will be substantial, rather than just a smile hanging in the air, with no cat at all behind it” (223).

In Poole and Lynch’s evaluation, there are several significances worth noting. Any triumph of a single epistemology would at this point represent a return to modernity. As Ashcraft notes, however, there are times (and the time might actually be now) when the dominance of some critical theories in the field might require a re-examination of their approaches to maintain a sense of integrity with the posture itself (144). With postmodern feminism appearing as a significant voice within organizational communication, it becomes important to avoid hegemony through the interplay of postcolonialism, further drawing into question and toward integration. This is the kind of integration that Mary Parker Follett also suggested might be essential for organizational
communication, an integration that is not compromised with a sense of loss but what Virgilio Elizondo calls the mestizaje process of blending multiple streams and voices so that the new can emerge and possibly even transcend difference (100).

In the midst of these interrogative approaches, Janie Harden Fritz offers a glimpse of how these heated conversations both about organizational communication and due to the pluralizing multiplicities of standpoints within organizations might continue to be productive not just contentiousness. Fritz holds out hope for a constructivist professional civility that honors both persons and productivity (12). Fritz’ interpretive work offers a valuable metaphor in considering the contentious conversations and rigorous debate necessary to steward vibrant organizational communication ethics and approach.

The civility that Fritz outlines privileges the work, the place and the people (208). While clearly establishing the virtue of civility; civility itself is not the end game. Fritz hopes that professionalism might be renewed through “interactive manifestations of constructive symbolic action” (208). These interactions are then significant in finding a way forward that is beyond critique.

Privileging a posture of civility is an interpreting otherwise in the midst of the cacophonous, fearful and contentious nature of the contemporary environment of organizational communication Martin Buber’s “narrow ridge” metaphor offers a meaningful way to understand how civility might emerge in the midst of Havel’s unraveling and not yet-ness. Among all of the islands of standpoints, Buber calls for a connective ridge “bridging the chasm of opposing camps by opening up the possibilities of dialogue between persons” (Arnett 31). This narrow-ridge openness is not devoid of
perspective, but rather has a listening posture open to the possibility of change through encounter with the person and ideas of another (Arnett 31).

While these possibilities might open hopeful ways forward, organizational communication is definitely in a time of challenge. The historical moment requires the sages from the past to respond to our contemporary times alongside our contemporary interpretations. In the next chapter, the books of Mary Parker Follett will illuminate a path forward in harmony with both Fritz’s hope of civility and the narrow ridge that Arnett highlights from Martin Buber.

This civility is built around levels of respect, across communal and organizational life. The narrow ridge comes into view through Follett’s work to navigate the differences of her own time, between the academy and the marketplace, between the landed and immigrants, responding to both the possibilities and challenges. As Arnett writes, “the narrow ridge embodies a third alternative assuming a genuine responsibility for oneself and the other” (36). In that relatedness is the life of organizational communication—a responsibility for both oneself and the other.

In their work on “Decolonizing Communication Ethics” Munshi, Broadfoot and Smith, suggests the significance of a narrow ridge-like space. They describe it as more than innocent space, but rather a space that “enables, facilitates, references, activates, frames and gives voice to the values and practices of all peoples so that they can engage in the world” (128). This space then doesn’t privilege new voices necessarily but attempts to include and legitimize different perspectives. (Munshi, Broadfoot and Smith 128).

The work then for organizational communication is to create these kind of spaces, where ethics can emerge through the in-between. Bhahba describes it as “in-between the
claims of the past and the needs of the present” (219). It’s a space where the real encounter Martin Buber suggests might happen, the place where real life emerges. This is the challenge and possibility for organizational communication in our own historical moment where the old is passing away and the new hasn’t yet totally emerged (Havel, “The Need for Transcendence in the Postmodern World”). In the next chapter, the research will explore further Follett’s implications both for her historical moment and the contemporary time. There is much space for Follett’s work to enrich an understanding of the potential of these spaces in-between.
Works Cited


Chapter 4

Engaging the books of Mary Parker Follett

In the previous chapters, this dissertation has explored both the biographical background of Mary Parker Follett and has then followed this biography with a more in-depth exploration of the elements of the historical moment and its fusion of horizons (Gadamer 317) with the current state of organizational communication. This chapter explores the situatedness of Follett’s books, looking at historicity and context along with the fusion of horizon with organizational communication. Lastly, this chapter sets out to explore the possible meaningful further implication for organizational communication in the current historical moment considering Follett’s work.

Mary Parker Follett was an advocate for Gestalt theory, a doctrine of wholes (Creative Experience 91). She believed that there was an invitation to understand things as a whole without diminishing the significance of the parts (Creative Experience 103). In this chapter, this dissertation will explore the parts along with an attempt to glimpse the whole. The books and the posthumous lectures offer a glimpse of her life and engagement, and of what she would call the circular relating of her life with the areas where she lived, worked and engaged in her own sense of moral topography, as discussed in Chapter 2.

Follett’s first book The Speaker of the House of Representatives is to some degree an outlier in approach to the other two. The New State is a natural bridge between topic areas, although much closer in presentation to the later Creative Experience. Creative Experience then becomes the launch point for the lectures that were posthumously edited into Dynamic Administration and Freedom and Coordination.
Each of these three books represents a different sort of engagement. The first book is clearly rooted in the life of the academy. The second book is centered in the neighborhood movement. The third book is an unintended pivot toward the marketplace where Follett spent most of her energy in her last years. The last two books evidence her engagement with the marketplace and business, which she saw as in accordance with her previous decades of work. For Follett, integration of these diverse fields of research and application were invigorating and a welcome challenge related to the work she advocated in integration (Urwick xi-xii). The following sections will examine the books in the order of their publication.

**The Speaker of the House of Representatives**

This section of the chapter explores Follett’s first book. The book analyzes the rise to power of Henry Clay as Speaker of the House, in the context of the post-Civil War challenge of navigating the role of the often-divided and unproductive U.S. legislative body. In this book, Follett’s preliminary and lingering ideas that current representative democracy is not functioning begin to emerge.

Follett’s meticulous research style is evident in the writing. It is an early form of her scholarship, quite different from what will come in the second generation of her work. In this publication, she is tied closely to precise research methods that might offer credibility to her work. Her later work relays more on the credibility of her own experiences; what she described as “lived experience.”

After the exploration of the book and its historicity, the next section will move toward interpreting the significance of this first publication for Follett. While this book is probably the least-quoted and the least-connected to the remainder of her material, it
remains key to understanding the scope of her work. Follett’s willingness to engage politics shows a willingness to move into what was often considered a man’s field of work, almost unfeminine. Follett was likely aware of this and she moved into these areas anyway.

Engaging historicity

Published in 1898, Mary P. Follett’s first book, *The Speaker of the House of Representatives*, was written while she was still a student at the Harvard Annex. This several-year-long project emerged out of her close mentoring relationship with Albert Bushnell Hart. Hart, who cultivated the early study of U.S. history, offered students a list of research possibilities annually for more thorough and extensive work. Hart encouraged students to examine different functions of government and was known to emphasize that government institutions were a “growth not a creation” (Tonn 69).

Follett took on a frequently suggested research topic framed around the function of the House of Representatives. The House was notoriously chaotic and problematic (Tonn 69). There were delay tactics like extensive roll calls that went on for hours (Tonn 70). The problems were deeply seated in the House and following coursework on constitutional history, Follett delved into the challenging research of re-imagining the House toward a more stable and productive future (Tonn 70).

Tonn highlights that cycles of economic growth and recession characterized the last decades of the 1800s. There was rapid industrial growth along with the development of national railroad systems. Immigrants continued to stream into the United States and settlers continued to migrate west, displacing indigenous groups along the way. There
was significant population growth across the country, much of which occurred in urban contexts as well (Tonn 70-71).

These rapid changes meant that the House had a massive volume of issues to address from trade and economics to social questions and political complications. In the midst of all of this shifting, the government was also stymied because of a divided government. Single party control of the presidency and the legislative branch occurred rarely. Instead, there was often a split, with Democrats controlling one branch and Republicans the other (Tonn 71).

The role of the President was weakened during the period of Reconstruction following the Civil War (Tonn 72). Congress began to occupy more space, processing more numerous and more complex issues in a changing time. The increasingly powerful legislative branch, however, could not achieve a sufficient level of cooperation to actually run the country (Tonn 73).

Much of the work of the legislative body had been divided up between committees. These committees multiplied to respond to the increasing flow of legislative needs. The committees then became largely ineffective, unresponsive and politicized through systems that seemed akin to patronages along with jealousy and power plays (Tonn 73).

Follett’s work entered onto this scene. Neither the executive nor the legislative portions of the government were functioning optimally. The Speaker of the House of Representatives was seen to emerge as a strong position with deep political impact. Critics and scholars began to suggest ways of reshaping that would improve balance and flow (Tonn 73-74).
Woodrow Wilson suggested a parliamentary structure as a fix. Several Harvard scholars, including Follett’s mentor Hart, would eventually critique this proposal with varying levels of vehemence. Follett stepped into this friendly contestation after an incident in which the Speaker of the House implemented new rules for voting in the legislature, revealing the level of power invested in the role (Tonn 75-77).

Out of this conversation, Follett crafted a paper reviewing Henry Clay’s House speakership. She presented this at the 1891 American Historical Association gathering. Follett was one of two women in the program. Her paper was submitted in competition with another one of Hart’s students, W.E.B. DuBois. She asserted that the position of the speaker had, over the long haul, been a political one. In contrast to the prevailing ideas of the day that the current speaker had wielded the first political actions, Follett placed her analysis on a careful review of “the records” (Tonn 78).

This presentation asserted that Henry Clay was unusually situated personally to carry out his task. Follett presented an analysis of his full character, both positive and negative leadership attributes. This provided the foundation for the book. The project expanded. Through Hart’s publishing connections, she found a contract with Longmans in 1895. According to biographer Tonn, “Follett knew that a woman did not have the luxury of offering undocumented observations and arguments. If her work were to have any credibility, it would have to be seen as scientific in its analysis” (80).

Follett constructed her research fearlessly. She interviewed numerous men who had personally had contact with the work of the House. Finding these persons and interviewing them was not only good research, it also represented moving across the divide of gendered behaviors. Follett seemed to do it boldly (Tonn 81).
In early research, Follett relied on interviews and inductive investigation. Her writing was considered part of a movement against formalism among the ranks of Thorstein Veblen, John Dewey and Oliver Wendell Holmes. This research no longer assumed *a priori* but instead expected through scientific investigation to discover facts and then utilize inductive reason. Some in the movement were also quite aware of cultural difference and were also interested in moving between the barriers of emerging academic disciplines (Tonn 81-82). The book received decent reviews, particularly regarding Follett’s diligent research (Tonn 82).

**Engaging the text: Speaker of the House of Representatives**

In this section, there will be a less extended analysis of the book, but rather an attempt toward concise summary and highlights while recognize the *Gestalt* and significance of the material. Of Follett’s five books, this book is clearly the outlier, although in some ways it is also foundational to the questions that Follett explored. Much of this book is particularly focused on the issues of the day rather than larger interpretive or extrapolative considerations for organizational communication.

*Speaker of the House* begins with a historic analysis from the Tudor period in England to the establishment of Congress at Philadelphia, primarily attempting to trace the position of the Speaker of the House of Representatives as a role through a sense of historicity. Worth noticing is Follett’s willingness to connect the life of England and her colonies in the Americas. Just a few years before this publication, Follett had spent time studying at Cambridge in the UK. She was readily aware of the connections that will continue to be important for her life’s work.
Follett also begins in this chapter a commentary on “power,” which emerges significantly later in her work. The role of the Speaker in the colonial days was held in place by the force of the particular member rather than the role itself. Later, Follett criticizes such personalized levels of power and influence when they take precedence over the role of Speaker (House 17-18).

The second chapter examines the function and structure of the House of Representatives. In this chapter, Follett explores the selection of the Speaker. She notes that in the absence of a clear candidate, the process becomes mostly a political struggle. She writes, “the choice of a speaker depends less upon his qualities as a moderator, his experience as a public man, and his personal character than upon the complex interplay of political factions striving for mastery of their own party” (House 33). Follett further investigates the specific selections of Speakers, noting that they are usually more complicated and contested when the House majority numbers are nearly balanced. She does note, however, that this had been happening less frequently (Follett, House 63).

The third chapter looks at the personal element of the role. In this chapter, Follett explores the work and postures of several Speakers of the House, particularly Henry Clay, whose actions were among the impetuses for the book. She notes several shifts that Clay brought forth. “First, the increase of the Speaker’s parliamentary power; secondly, the strengthening of his personal influence; and thirdly, the establishment of his position as a legislative leader” (House 71). The significant change was a move from seeing the Speaker as moderator to understanding the role as that of a leader and as one that conferred an advantage on the speaker’s party (Follett, House 71-72).
The fourth chapter examines the sources of power in the speakership role and the specific responsibilities of the role. Follett is fascinated in this chapter by the “speaker’s prerogatives” (122). One of those prerogatives is the respect that goes with the role (124). The remainder of the chapter is devoted to the specific actions allowed by the speaker’s role. This chapter further highlights Follett’s ongoing interest in “role” or “function” apart from the personality of the person playing the role.

The fifth chapter deals with a particularly problematic issue; the role of voting when serving as speaker. The particulars of this chapter are notable for the extensive amount of research that Follett offered in exploring the situation in the U.S. House, and also the particularities of how individual states dealt with this issue (House 155). Follett notes again that Henry Clay introduced different practices in the area of the speaker’s vote (House 152).

The sixth chapter deals with what Follett asserts is the role of the speaker in maintaining order. As Tonn wrote, this had become particularly problematic after the Civil War. Follett characterizes this as the speaker’s most difficult role. She writes, “It requires a thorough knowledge of parliamentary law and of the rules and practice of the house, with promptness, energy, firmness and great tact” (House 171-72). Follett begins in this chapter to explore some early ideas on interpersonal conflict. Although it is early in the formation of her ideas, there is one phrase, “restore harmony” (172), which gives a possible indication of later work that will emerge around ideas of difference and conversation in the midst of conflict.

The seventh chapter looks at what had become a particular problem in the time, obstructionism. Holders of minority viewpoints had simply not been attending sessions
where they knew they might lose to avoid providing a quorum for voting (Follett, *House*
179-80). This conversation was included in the book only for historical purposes, though, because new legislation had already eliminated the problem (Follett, *House* 216).

The eighth chapter examines the role of power and committees. The speaker has the challenge and responsibility to construct committees that have the right political balance in areas including party, geography and power (223). Follett suggests again that the committees had grown steadily since the 1880s with the rapid changes within and needs of the country (246). She writes further that the House “is no longer the legislative power, but it is not even the maker of legislative power, it is but the maker of the real maker, the Speaker” (247). This might be the clearest declaration thus far about Follett’s concern that the role of the speaker is too vested with power.

The ninth chapter explores power as based in the speaker’s ability to confer recognition. This recognition is the process of allowing someone to speak from the floor. Follett remarks that this has long been a complicated and “haphazard affair” (*House* 251). With many people wanting the floor, the speaker has been charged with limiting it to a reasonable conversation (Follett, *House* 251). Within the historical moment when Follett was writing, however, there was apparently an uptick in the desire to talk. A new rule was passed in 1870 that allowed the Speaker to subjectively recognize who he wished to speak (Follett, *House* 251). This new practice allowed the Speaker to minimize the perspectives of those he may dislike. Follett says that recognition is one of the most difficult ongoing political realities. Increasingly, Follett points toward the challenge to how the role is established and in relationship to power and a highly personalized effect (Follett, *House* 269).
The tenth chapter explores the issue of power as a political leader from the Speaker’s role. Follett seems increasingly to note the power that is lodged in the role of the Speaker. She highlights that the speaker also has another important role as part of the Committee on Rules (House 273). Follett also notes explicitly the tendency of the role to personalize power (House 272). She goes on to explain further the complication of having the speaker no longer serve as primarily a moderator, but rather as party chief (House 271). At the end of the chapter she further mentions the complication of leading the House while recognizing that the speaker as voting participant may also have been opposing the viewpoints of other members (House 294).

The last chapter looks at the speaker’s place in the U.S. political system of the historical moment. This is a chapter of advocacy. All of the work before is built tightly together to help establish the case that Follett wants to present here. Follett attempts to situate the role of the speaker in relationship to other roles of government, ultimately landing just lower in dignity that the presidents (House 297). Follett notes that early on the speaker was paid double the amount of other house members so as to have funds to entertain and get to know the other representatives (House 298).

Follett’s extensive work in this book was itself a process of raising awareness of the power of the role and its increasing responsibility (House 309). Follett believed that authority and responsibility should never be separated. Her research was an attempt to work at yoking those two things, not by removing power from the role, but by adding accountabilities. While Follett recognized the disdain for the rising power in the role, she was ready to accept possibility that power paired with accountability might allow movement beyond the chaotic and stuck system of the day (House 315).
The Speaker of the House of Representatives and its historical moment

While the book had some positive reception and provoked conversation at its time of publication, this is the least noted of Follett’s books. In this section, this dissertation explores what made this book work and not work as well. In what ways does this influence the *Gestalt* understanding of Follett’s work? Lastly, what are the possibilities for engagement in the contemporary historical moment?

This book is dense: dense with details, dense with research. It is historic in orientation and the only Follett book not readily available in print now. A public domain copy is available but it has not been repackaged for mass audiences.

The writing style in this book is different from that of Follett’s others. The footnotes are heavy. At the same time, Follett’s vigorous mind is working in these pages. Her analysis is thorough and insightful. She is implementing the best of the academic research as she knew it from the Annex. She is also covering her tracks as a woman writing in an area and institutional space that is not yet ready for the fullness of a woman’s lived experience as admissible research or argument.

Tonn writes, “Much of the brilliance of Follett’s analysis is due precisely to the fact that the author was a woman, because it was Follett’s position as a woman in late 19th century society that forced her into the role of ‘political outsider’” (90). Tonn goes on to explain that because Follett did not have access to the political scene other than an array of disparate resources, she was able to think creatively about the role and the experience. This impeccable empirical research allowed her to theorize confidently (Tonn 91).
Follett’s research suggested a centralizing of power in the role of the speaker. She sought to yoke both responsibility and power, although she was not able to clearly articulate paths of accountability for the speaker role. Follett was more comfortable with this shift than the parallel work of Woodrow Wilson, who suggested somewhat similar resolutions (Tonn 90-91).

Follett’s concept of power in this role diverged from that of Wilson. She insisted that the role of informal power was largely ignored, given short shrift. Wilson preferred more formalized, centralized systems that might be led through rhetorical skill and intellect. Follett was more aware of the nuance of time in the setting and seemed to recognize both the personal and positional authority of the role. She would encourage the speaker to use his or her own relationships and social capital to influence decisions and process (Tonn 91-92). At the same time, she sought deeply to depersonalize the roles. It was a strange balance.

Wilson and Follett also disagreed on how the power of the role of the speaker was gained. While Wilson asserted that the role meant usurping the power of others, Follett saw it differently. She did not assume that power necessarily was removed from others by the importance of the role. Follett was far more interested in finding a shared or collective will or good. The fluidity of power meant that the situation relied on helpful use of power related to role. She asserted that the House was strong enough to also hold its leader in check (Tonn 92).

*The significance of Speaker of the House of Representatives, then and now*

The significance of this book rests in its early publication from Follett’s emerging mind. Her capacity to write within the standards of the academy while yet doing creative
work as a twenty-something woman are to be noted particularly due to her limited access to the political scene. The book foreshadows later issues of significance for Follett like power, authority and responsibility. It has clear connections to her later work and in some ways evidences the continual work that Follett engaged over the thirty-plus years she considered relevant and significant questions in diverse contexts.

Follett’s work here is a particular analysis. Her capacity to create a coherent argument through bricolage represents significant and valuable work. Although it takes 20 years for Follett to publish again, *The Speaker of the House of Representatives* is essential in understanding her lineage and movement as a writer and thinker. Through an invitation into research from her Cambridge colleagues, this book was published before she received her actual degree. As Tonn writes, Follett’s outsider nature helped create a better-constructed story for others to consider (90). Follett, the organizational communication godmother, was at one time an emerging twenty-something scholar, too.

There is much in between the space of the first book and its rootedness in academic research and the second, *The New State*. Follett, approaching 50, published a second tome responding to the next generation of political issues. Although 20 years older and with a much broader network of relationships and experience, Follett seemed a bit apprehensive at times in publishing her womanly ideas (Tonn 265).

Follett’s first book had been met with occasional criticisms for her willingness as a woman to write in an area of contemporary political issues. Follett accumulated years of wisdom and experience with work in Boston among immigrants and with the community center movement, as well as teaching and working with the national
community center movement. She moved ahead, this time more boldly, into the contemporary political complexities (Tonn 265).

_The New State_

In exploring Follett’s second publication, this dissertation will focus on the context and historicity of Follett’s life and work. Following background that situates the text into context, _New State_ will be explored in its three parts. This will not be an attempt to provide in-depth analysis, but rather summary work that gives a glimpse of the publication and its potential relationship with organizational communication in both Follett’s historical moment and the contemporary time.

For 20 years, Mary Parker Follett did not publish anything recognized as academic work. As mentioned in Chapter 2, this generation-long period was a move of focus from Cambridge into the bustle of working class Roxbury, situated between Quincy where Follett grew up and Harvard Yard. Although only a few miles away from either Quincy or Cambridge, Roxbury is a world away in social geography. This neighborhood rooted Follett’s two decades of work, along with the growing neighborhood center movement across the city and the country. This time and experience served as the platform and foundation for her second publication. While the first publication is clearly rooted in the academy, the second is rooted in the metaphor of neighborhood.

There is a clear shift in Follett’s writing between _The Speaker of the House of Representatives_ and _The New State_. The second book no longer assumes that the US’s large-scale, representative democracy is the best or most significant expression of democracy. It had already been seen as problematic in her first book twenty years earlier and, in this second book, Follett appears to have shifted focus entirely. After a generation
of working in neighborhoods with diverse communities, Follett is suggesting that local expressions of association have the primary locus of significance for governing and community (Mattson xxxix).

These shifting ideas relate to Follett’s own moral topography. There is a changed phenomenological focus of attention for Follett from Cambridge and Harvard to Roxbury and Boston. Her research follows that path. The primary questions of the academy provided a way of framing ideas rooted in a different epistemology where Follett needed to prove herself through exacting notes and research. The next 20 years orient Follett differently in a world of lived experience. The debate clubs at Harvard are quite different from the debate clubs Follett initiated at Roxbury.

In these different contexts, however, the prioritization of learning remains. At Harvard, the metaphor of learning is understood as a primary organizing principle. In Roxbury and in community centers around the country, Follett is convinced that a democracy is not a right to be received or a static goal but a learning process (New State 9). As cities across the United States received thousands of mostly European immigrants, the demographic makeup of the country changed. Immigration fueled a rise in Catholicism and an increasing number of languages from across Europe. These shifts challenged the idea of what it meant to be American (Barry 122).

The New State was reprinted five times in the 1920s, but then it largely faded from view. The book engages the emerging social science research of the day. Follett takes a quite different track in presentation with this second book, however. It is not a tightly woven empirically-evidenced approach. There are minimal citations. Tonn suggest that the nature of the book, while more bold in naming the problems of the
historical moment, was more hesitant in naming an actual response (Tonn 266-67). Follett’s twenty years of lived experience empowered her to see, while changing her ability to give expert answers. This book is clearly a move toward what will become her more popular next work, *Creative Experience.*

Follett suggests that representative democracy has essentially failed. She asserts that a new way forward must be imagined. Follett suggests that it will take all of the disciplines to imagine a way forward, co-informing one another. Follett refers to very specific incidents in detail in ways that easily lose contemporary readers. The book has a flowing style between disciplines including biology, psychology, political theory, philosophy and psychology (Tonn 267). In this book, Follett demonstrates some of the key possibilities and problematics of organizational communication in that it flows between a variety of disciplines. Follett refused to be narrowly defined and is unwilling even to tie herself into a historicity in this book, which does not do the kind of exhaustive historic work as the *The Speaker of the House of Representatives* (Tonn 267).

There are three primary sections to the book. These sections illustrated Follett’s desire to integrate group processes toward a whole. This integration is contrasted with compromise. Much of this work emerged from the community center movement and a sense of developing understanding about how new immigrants and the working class might become both more fully self-governed and participate in the larger social context (Tonn 268).

Follett’s interpretation in *The New State* has a postmodern orientation in that the emphasis is on localized groups. In these local groups, Follett asserts, people learn how to participate in functioning groups. Democracy is not given but rather learned (Follett, *New
In some ways, this is an affront to the republic’s understanding of governance by rule of law which she sees as inadequate and non-functioning in representative democracy (Tonn 268).

*The New State* has far reaching application with concepts landing in the areas of ongoing feminist research on power, as well as integration in negotiation theory that is picked up (and non-attributed) by popular writers like William Ury and Roger Fisher, who produced top-selling books like *Getting to Yes* and even inhabit some of Follett’s actual examples. Both share the fertile ground of Harvard for their writing contexts, however Fisher and Ury do not attribute the ideas back to Follett (Mansbridge xx-xxii).

**Situating the text and context: The New State published at the end of the Great War**

Follett opens the book with a bold introduction. She has what, in today’s terms, might be understood as swagger: she comes out strong. After 20 years of working with community centers and with a rising sense of influence, maybe it is pure confidence. She kicks off the book, “Representative government has failed. It has failed because it was not a method by which men [sic] could govern themselves…Government by the people must be more than a phrase…Politics must be vitalized by a new method. ‘Representative government,’ party organization, majority rule, with all their excrescences are dead wood” (Follett, *New State* 4-5).

The conversation begins with two critiques. The problem Follett suggests is that neither the reality of democracy nor representative government have yet been fully identified. While there are critiques regarding democracy, Follett writes, “We have not yet tried democracy. We have not even a conception of what democracy means. That conception is yet to be forged out of the crude ore of life” (*New State* 3). She pushes
toward a more authentic democracy that recognizes the significance of ongoing learning and self-governance.

The second critique is toward individualism. Again Follett suggests that the “individual” has thus far been poorly understood. “Our particularism—our laissez-faire, our every-man-for-his-own interests—has little do with true individualism, that is, with the individual as consciously responsible for the life from which he draws his breath and to which he contributes his all” (New State 3). Follett sets out to remedy this isolated individualism by attaching the individual to a meaningful group.

Follett battles the atomization and human devaluation of Taylor’s Principles of Scientific Management (42-44) and the Fordist-understandings of the day that see the individual only within the context of the assembly line. Instead, she moves toward a group identity in which the fullness of the individual is made known. Follett responded to critics who suggested that this was somehow mystical rather than democratic. She insists, “Today we see that every man (sic) must count for infinitely more than one because he is not part of a whole, a cog in a machine, not even an organ in an organism, but from one point of view the whole itself” (New State 6). Follett insists that there is a Gestalt to understanding the individual as situated within a larger context. This is also a moment perspective perpetuated in postmodern feminist theory that says the person is even more than her or his own intersectionality.

The New State was published the same year as the armistice between the United States, the United Kingdom, France and Germany that ceased aggression on the western front in Europe. Following after the significant influx of immigrants to the United States, the rapid growth of cities, the streams of the Great Migration of African Americans from
the rural south into the industrializing north, the rise of industry and the rapid expansion into the West, the end of World War I introduced challenges of a different kind to the country, pushing hard on government systems and understandings (Barry 122). Follett recognizes a sort of failing, or at least an inadequate, state system.

In what she calls the “group organization movement,” Follett is asserting a more human group organization system, something that is not mechanistic but yet very intentional. The movement “rests on the solid assumption that this is a man-made not a machine-made world, that men and women are capable of constructing their own life, and that not upon any socialism or any utopia can we rest our hearts, but only on the force of a united and creative citizenship” (New State 8). This non-utopic viewpoint foreshadows a postmodern turn toward a different way of understanding an interlocking bureaucracy. This is not bureaucracy as hegemony, however, but rather interlocking or integrative shared life.

Follett further writes, “Politics have one task only—to create” (New State 9). The purpose of this creativity is to create rights (rather than to give rights), that is, not only to give the right to free speech but to create and learn speech that is free (New State 9). Follett asserts that we must learn and create together in our political realities.

In contrast to the postmodern critique, Follett is nervous about pluralisms. While pluralism recognizes the vitality of differentiated groups, Follett suggests that a rising pluralism that subsumes the individual into groups does not make sense of what to do with diversity. Some pluralists “lose the individual to the group;” writes Follett. Others “abandon the state for the group” (New State 10). Follett is quite discontented with those
losses and what, for her, seemed like an inadequate understanding or working through of the complexity of intersecting relationships (New State 10).

Follett does not outline The New State as a final attempt to construct a new state; she simply offers some particular suggestions. She writes, “In Part 1, we shall try to find the fundamental principles which must underlie the new state; in Part II we shall see how far they are expressed in present political forms; in Part III we shall consider how they can be expressed” (The New State 11). It is clear that Follett is on the path toward political reform based on what she has seen. In the book’s introduction, she attempts to name the problem; each section then goes on to respond to some possibilities without a definitive full answer.

In the next sections of this dissertation, the research will follow each of the parts of the book, looking toward summarizing Follett’s work rather than full in-depth analysis. This includes an attempt to understand the Gestalt as Follett suggests even in her own writing without ignoring the smaller parts as they comprise the whole.

**Part 1, The New State**

Follett’s introduction of The New State sets up the creative task of a non-static democracy. This first part of New State then looks at the process of learning democracy that cultivates loyalty through “interknitting” unity (Follett, New State 35). Follett goes on to define an understanding of individuality in relationship to group or social experience (New State 67). She further explores the differences between types of assemblages of people from group, to crowd, to herd, to the ambiguity of numbers (Follett, New State 88).
In Part 1, Follett asserts that the study of democracy should not be on the institutions of government but rather on the relationships between people (New State 19). Follett outlines the usefulness of studying group dynamics because democracy is learned (New State 22). If democracy is learned behavior, it is learned in the context of community. She describes relationships as like a game of tennis: the game emerging between the two players is one where they are mutually dependent on one another to respond and shape the game (New State 25). Based on this understanding, Follett distinguishes between the majority idea and the group idea. The majority is what occurs when there is an aggregation of individuals; a group idea is the interplay of conversation and creative engagement between people and places (New State 28-29).

A shared sense of identity is not a like-response but possibly a diversity of responses in conversation. Follett writes, “The core of social process is no likeness, but harmonizing of difference, through interpenetration” (New State 34). It is not a process of accepting or rejecting ideas or persons but of “interknitting” (New State 35). “Unity not uniformity must be our aim. Differences must be integrated, not annihilated, nor absorbed” (New State 39). This is less like postmodern pluralism and more like the mestizaje process that Virgilio Elizondo describes (117-119). Elizondo describes this process as quite painful but also as the only real outcome of authentic democracy.

Follett defines sympathy as the feeling experienced by these interpenetrated groups. Sympathy requires relationships. This is quite different from altruism; sympathy is cultivated within a related environment (New State 47). In this process, Follett outlines the development of ethics and morality. First, morality or rightness is created together rather than followed (New State 52). Second, a development of right and wrong is
cultivated through ongoing interaction. The idea of conscience develops through relationships (Follett, New State 55).

The development of a group has certain elements. Follett outlines the metaphor of purpose, saying that purpose does not exist before the sense of group exists. Purpose is negotiated over time and in relationship (New State 54-55). Loyalty emerges as we learn to love what Follett calls “the Beloved Community.” She writes, “We belong to our community in so far as we are helping to make that community; then loyalty follows, then love follows. Loyalty means the consciousness of oneness” (New State 58-59). The interpenetrating relationships create and, in an ongoing way, cultivate the relationship that means a sense of affinity and belonging (Follett, New State 59).

After defining the group, Follett goes on to describe the individual. She writes, “Individuality is a matter primarily neither of apartness nor of difference but of each finding his [sic] own activity in the whole” (Follett, New State 67). Follett writes that humans do not understand themselves primarily through “eccentricities” but through “the work that we are doing with others and what is expected of us, the people we are going to play with when work is over and the part we are going to take in that play, the committee meeting we are going to attend and what we are going to do there” (New State 67). Follett emphasizes a Gestalt way of knowing. The individual is known through the group, or in her own words “the society,” and the society is known through the individual (Follett New State 67). The relationship is circular and interpenetrating.

Society is then formed not by a coming together of individuals in social contracts or majority rule but as an organic whole with interrelated and co-creating parts and the flux of relationships (Follett New State 75-76). The self/other relationship is redefined in
this understanding. Follett suggests that “every decision of the future is to be based not on my needs or yours, nor on a compromise between them, but on the recognition of the community between us” (New State 79). Follett here invites a provocation of thinking for the whole; for example, writing during The Great War and the Spanish influenza epidemic, she mentions that humans have become aware of how the health of the whole is a shared concern (New State 80). She also recognizes the altruistic acts of some of the scions of industry in working to provide better working environments with showers, lectures and recreation, but she says this is not enough because it is based only on an individualistic altruism, not a recognition of shared relationships that produces sympathy (Follett New State 80).

While Follett acknowledges the individual’s struggle, she also resitutes the idea of the group. She makes a clear differentiation between a group and crowd. Follett suggests that crowds promote sameness and discourage thinking. Crowds are unison; groups are harmonies. “A crowd does not distinguish between fervor and wisdom. A group usually does” (Follett New State 86). She also points out the difference between a crowd and a mob. Follett says that crowds can be provoked toward both positive and negative actions. Mobs are when a crowd’s emotion is carried to an extreme (Follett, New State 88). Beyond crowds and mobs, there are also herds: simply numbers of people. These are groups of increasingly larger numbers of people with decreasing coherence or sympathies (Follett, New State 89).

The section ends with a more particular look at the idea of progress, which was still a primary motivating metaphor for Follett (New State 93-110). Follett also explores the particularities of group in a variety of work and government settings, then develops a
further idea of the relationship of contract and community, highlighting changing immigration policies and postures. In this particular section, Follett displays her approval or acknowledgement of the benefit of immigration in the way that she analyzes it (New State 106). She follows the principles that the United States had followed related to immigrants: first there was amalgamation, which meant assimilation; second came building separate colonies and neighborhoods with different organizations that allowed each immigrant group to maintain their sense of identity; lastly, as World War I had served to abruptly halt most immigration to the United States, came an idea of community. This meant a process of “a mutual permeation of ideals” that would be enriching for both recent immigrants and long-settled citizens (Follett, New State 106). In considering this, Follett and Zakaria would agree. The United States is a better country and better version of itself with the ongoing creative energy of immigrants (Zakaria 212-16).

While the first part attempted to name the working deficiencies of U.S. representative democracy as the Great War wound down, Part II moves on to suggest changes that might help a more authentically democratic democracy flourish. There is a ready correlation between the assessment of what is not working and the prescriptive understanding of what must change.

**Part II, The New State**

Following on the heels of the challenges of Part I, Part II begins to move toward possible responses and movements toward flourishing democracy. With the previous section’s highlighting of definitions of individuals and the relationship of groups, the
second part moves toward implications for rights, relatedness and rule by majority. There is a move in Part II to understand the changes necessary at the governmental level.

The second section focuses on the changes that Follett saw as necessary to embrace a group principle in the historical moment of the time. Follett kicks off *The New State, Part II* with a redefinition of the application of the inalienable U.S. Bill of Rights. She writes, “If my true self is the group-self, then my only rights are those which membership in a group gives me” (*New State* 137). Rights flow from the relatedness of the individual to the whole rather than the individual within the whole (Follett, *New State* 137). Follett goes further to explain that the individual and state are not in hierarchy relationships but rather “the state must be the people” (*New State* 140). This means that the individual and state are in a co-defined relationship.

Follett further asserted that the new state will flow from its people. “It must ‘control’ our life by expressing it. The state is always the great yes, not the great no. Liberty and restraint are not opposed” (*New State* 141). Follett goes on to suggest that relinquishing the concept of individual human rights allows the best movement forward in developing a new idea of the state. She wrote further, without much clarification, that there may even be a need to release the idea of national rights. This may have been related to the emerging League of Nations which would come after the end of the Great War but was part of a political philosophy conversation at the time both in England and the United States (Dubin 288-91; *New State* 141).

Follett goes on to debunk ideas of U.S. democracy. She takes aim at the idea of “rule by majority,” which she considers inadequate, and suggests instead the “rule of the crowd,” or the concept of rule by all (*New State* 142, 149). Real democracy is “everyone
building the single life, not my life and others, not the individual and the state, but my life bound up with others” (Follett, *New State* 156). This integrated life is where meaning flows and interpenetration allows an ongoing conversation to emerge, a conversation that defines the good, moral and just. Follett admits that this is a “spiritual unity” (Follett, *New State* 156).

This section’s analyses contain some of the most pointed connection with postmodern feminism readily visible in Follett’s work. Follett points toward a possible early understanding of intertextuality where meaning is at the intersection and is actually embodied in the person. The idea that “there may even be a need to release the idea of national rights,” which Follett did not expound upon at all, hints at a coming globalization that allows the emergence of postcolonial criticism (*New State* 141). These are both readily visible and fragmented preceding ideas for organizational communication that are now part of the live conversation in the contemporary historical moment.

Follett’s integrating idea of democracy is intended to hold a diverse and complicated nation together in a globalizing time, when the world is coming to the neighborhood and the boys from the neighborhood are being sent back into the world as part of the Great War through military service. Even the arrival of the deadly global Spanish influenza epidemic, beginning in Kansas and spreading along transport lines alongside troop movements in 1918, likely influenced the idea of the impossibility of an isolated existence (Barry 173-75). Follett still believed in the possibilities of democracy, yet believed that they were still untried in their fullness (*New State* 3).
In Part II, Follett suggested what sorts of things might need to change to more fully realize the U.S. democratic possibility. In Part III, she transitions toward an explanation of specific methods for such possibilities. In considering all of these recommendations, the somewhat chaotic background of the Great War along with rapidly growing and changing cities must be considered as key elements of the textual situation of her work.

**Part III, The New State**

In the previous section, Follett highlighted what would need to change in order to realize a flourishing democracy. In Part III, Follett’s research examines the realities of urbanization and depersonalization. While Follett fought depersonalization in roles in the workplace, she believed that neighborhoods allowed fuller relationships to emerge. These layered relationships then created more textured people who would ultimately be better democratic citizens.

Follett ended her work in the book by examining two primary organizational methods for a co-created democracy. She began with her experience in neighborhood organization, coupled with the rapid urbanization of the United States along with the waves of immigrants and population growth. Follett wrote about life in the city, describing how “There is no line where the life of the home ends and the life of the city begins. There is no wall between my private life and my public life” (*New State* 189). Follett is pushing to recognize the paradox of urban life as both connected and increasingly depersonalized. This rapid industrialization and urbanization represented the first time in U.S. history that the majority of population would live in cities (Barry 122).
Other thinkers at the time were grappling with this change in orientation and work as well (Hershberger 216).

Holding to the idea that she seeks to cultivate sympathy, Follett notes the variety of professional relationships that emerge in the city—doctors, landlords, shopkeepers—that serve as a regular and essential part of urban life. Despite their interdependency, people in those relationships remain unknown to and distant from one another (New State 190). Follett seeks more than disconnectivity. She believes professional and personal lives are diminished by not having broader connection. She writes, “I am a worse lawyer, a worse teacher, a worse doctor if I do not know these wider contacts” (New State 191). Follett believes that those relationships could be dynamically interpenetrating, mutually informing toward the creation of community.

In the neighborhood organization system, people are constantly in conversation and interaction (Follett, New State 192). Follett asserts that the neighborhood allows the best opportunity for change and for real encounter. She quickly admits, however, that neighborhoods would not be the only way to allow organization or to permit relationships to emerge. Other organizations—religious, labor, fraternal, professional—would remain important (Follett, New State 197-200). These multiple layers might exist within and beyond a neighborhood.

Follett outlines five primary ways to cultivate a neighborhood consciousness. She writes, “Rows of houses, rows of streets, do not make a neighborhood. The place bond must give way to a consciousness of real union” (Follett, New State 204). The five paths to a neighborhood consciousness include: regular meetings about real problems; genuine discussion at the regular meetings; learning together; taking more responsibility for the
neighborhood and lastly establishing “regular connection between the neighborhood and city, state and national government” (Follett, *New State* 204-05). In this part, Follett asserts that her neighborhood/community centers movement exemplifies these possibilities (*New State* 205). Follett further explains each of these movements more in depth before asserting the possibilities of loyalty beyond political party as primary identifier. She suggests that without healthy neighborhood interactions, the significance of party alignments remains paramount. Follett writes, “Political parties and business interests will continue to dominate us until we learn new methods of association” (*New State* 221). Noteworthy here is that later in life Follett turns toward business leaders as a more invigorating way to move toward change (Urwick xii).

Follett next addresses areas of leadership, remarking that “American democracy has always been afraid of leaders” (*New State* 227). She points out that the constitutional systems often deny clear leadership, which has led to “undefined and irresponsible leadership” (Follett, *New State* 227). Follett writes that leadership that serves a true democracy would emerge from neighborhood groups. This kind of leadership would be flexible and changing (*New State* 228).

Follett believes that the “power of leadership is the power of integrating. This is the power that creates community” (*New State* 229). She has high hopes for leadership but it is important to recognize the fluidity of the role and the separation of force from the role (Follett, *New State* 230). Follett insists that democracy cultivates leadership rather than suppressing it (*New State* 231).

Follett asserts that neighborhood organizations might eliminate political party alignments (*New State* 242). Neighborhood groups then become the building blocks for
larger systems at different levels: from city to county to state to nation (New State 255). The neighborhood becomes the essential community for working out political identities.

The last sections of Part III features the concept of pluralism. For Follett, for the most part, pluralism is a problematic. Her concern with pluralism is that it is not mutually forming. It denies reciprocally-shaping relationships. Pluralism emphasizes the role of the group over the possibility of mutually transformative relationships for the individual. Follett wrote, “Pluralism is the dominant thought today in philosophy, in politics, in economics, in jurisprudence…therefore we must consider it carefully” (New State 270).

She further explores the implications of political pluralism and the limits of federalism. Follett examines the ideas of guilds and intersectionality. Guilds were rising in conversation for representing individuals in the democracy with their own sense of vocation and a willingness to let that membership become the primary organizing factor when there are many other elements left to examine. Follett insists that these varied identities do not exist solely in isolation and context. Rather, there is an intersectionality between them that is personalized but connecting with others through the varied roles and responsibilities (Follett 292).

Follett writes that the Civil War, which was over just before her birth, decided what kind of federal government the United States should have. This was a federalism that allowed an interpenetration between state and federal government, always in conversation (New State 298-99). Follett explores the possibility of vocational or professionally-based groups that might exist to cultivate democracy. It is clear, however, from her experiences that she sees the neighborhood groups as offering a more distinct
possibility for forming democracy by bringing diverse people together, working things out in real and frequent encounters (Follett New State 321-22).

In this section Follett addresses numerous issues related to pluralism. She writes out of an assumption of a “unified state” (New State 258). This unified state occurs through acts of integration. With post-modernity’s pluralistic bent, it is hard to read and interpret within the viewpoint of our postmodern pluralism-friendly orientation. Follett has much that is meaningful to contribute toward understanding a constructivist viewpoint, however. For her, this construction relies on the basic neighborhood relationship.

This pluralism critique is readily resumed by feminist theories. With increasing pluralist isolation, the individual never finds herself or himself in relationship to others. Pluralism creates self-referencing groups. Without integration, there is no authentic democracy.

*Part IV, The New State*

In Part III, Follett explored the challenges of pluralism in the U.S. context. Part IV highlights the role of the federal government in a complex and contentious time. Citizenship is discussed as an ongoing challenge and possibility, daily and hourly. Follett begins to consider how the idea of neighborhood-based democracies might emerge on a global level.

Follett calls for the federal government to be more than just a coordinating agency. She charges the federal level with upholding and portraying a level of morality (New State 333). Follett asserts, however, that “the state accumulates moral power only through the spiritual activity of its citizens” (Follett, New State 334). She further writes
that the state is only moral when its members contribute toward that morality on a daily basis (Follett, *New State* 335).

For Follett, citizenship is enacted on a daily and hourly basis. She saw the crisis of World War I, and the threat to self-government brought on by global imperialism, as providing a moment of clarity and opportunity (*New State* 338). She hopes to focus on the possibilities of the moment to build further on the strength of the national neighborhood community center model, believing that it was best to learn and practice democracy frequently and face-to-face with those we see often (Follett, *New State* 339).

Follett spent some time analyzing the “world state” of her own historical moment. As was mentioned before, she wrote this book during the time of the Great War in Europe. The United States was likely just emerging from the experience of Spanish influenza. England and Ireland in 1916 had renewed what would be a decades-long battle over Irish sovereignty (Barry 122). Follett has some strong assessments. This dissertation will stick with her own words rather than attempt to mediate. She writes about Europe, “There is no way out of the hell of our present European situation until we find a method of compounding our differences” (Follett, *New State* 344). She further writes that war will continue to be waged “until we see the value of differences, that they are to be maintained not blotted out” (Follett, *New State* 344). Follett here strangely foreshadows the rise of the German Third Reich, which over a generation later in Europe attempted to blot out human difference. She further writes, “The white-man’s burden is not to make others like himself” (Follett, *New State* 344). This sounds like postcolonialism!

Follett in this section pushes for more than tolerance (which she calls intolerable). She pushes beyond pacifism, saying we cannot simply turn the other cheek and live
among our enemies (Follett, *New State* 344). Instead, Follett invites toward disarming the enemy through mutual understanding (*New State* 345). She also advocates (or at the very least wanders toward) the possibilities of the League of Nations that would emerge in 1920 and eventually become the United Nations. (Follett, *New State* 352).

In her world state, Follett wonders what peace might take. She recognizes that learning to reconcile difference is long, arduous work. Follett writes, “From war to peace is not from the strenuous to the easy existence; it is from the futile to the effective, from the stagnant to the active, from the destructive to the creative way of life” (*New State* 358).

In the last section, Follett attempted to tackle the fraught relationships between nations, foregrounded in the historical moment of her time. At the time of her writing, it is not likely that the war was quite over. Follett imagines possibilities of new kinds of relationships between nations. At the end, however, she confesses that “We need a new faith in humanity, not a sentimental faith or a theological tenet or a philosophical conception, but an active faith in that creative power of men [sic] which shall shape government and industry, which shall give form equally to our daily life with our neighbor and to a world league” (Follett *New State* 360). Follett’s last assertion is somewhat lofty, although still rooted in what she knew and had worked among for a generation: neighbors. Follett suspects that if much of the world could be reorganized around the kind of relationships she had experienced, it would be better than the warring madness that seemed to engulf nearly all of her known world at the time.

Follett’s *New State* carries the themes of her ongoing work. It was the turning point in both the return to a public writing life, but also a significant turn toward writing
for publication without feeling the weight of needing to prove herself to colleagues at Cambridge. The book was popular but had nowhere near the impact of her third book on the direction of her career. There is only six years between these two publications.

**Creative Experience**

Although there was only a six year gap between publication of *The New State* and *Creative Experience*, the times had substantially changed. The Great War had ended. Women's suffrage had passed in the United States. The U.S. economy was booming and large cities were expanding rapidly. The Roaring Twenties meant a superfluidity of wealth and growing American industry as the US became the world’s largest economy. It was a time when business leaders often had the space to think and is considered a time when business leaders may have been open to more creative business and economic planning (Metcalf and Urwick 26-27).

First published in 1924, Follett’s third book, *Creative Experience*, was her watershed, gaining her a broader audience, and launching a more intense time of speaking and consulting (Tonn 359-60). *Creative Experience* came out of a collaborative working relationship with Eduard Lindeman. Follett became acquainted with Lindeman through their work in the national community centers movement. Their relationship was known for being both stormy and productive (Tonn 329). Lindeman and Follett worked together but went on to publish two separate books, each under their own name.

Lindeman was a generation younger than Follett. By 1920, he had become a professor of sociology, although he never earned a doctoral degree. He grew up in an immigrant family with ten children and had few formal educational opportunities but managed to enter a special baccalaureate program at Michigan Agricultural College,
graduating at age 26. He was involved with organizing young people’s clubs through the Congregational denomination, working in agricultural extension programs and, eventually, for the YMCA in Chicago (Tonn 329-30).

Lindeman felt that the extension services programs were ultimately materialistic rather than holistic. Disappointed that the program did not consider the farmer in relationship to the plants and land, he decided to leave (Tonn 330).

After parting with the Midwest, Lindeman landed at North Carolina College for Women as a professor. While living in the South, he earned the ire of the Ku Klux Klan for treating his housekeeper like a family member. In 1921, he published *The Community*, a book that focused on community organizing. Follett apparently was so impressed with the book that she made the trip to North Carolina to find and recruit Lindeman. She wanted him to work in the Northeast and offered to find him financial benefactors (Tonn 330). Lindeman fascinated Follett.

This collaboration was tumultuous; a tense working relationship between them resulted in both Lindeman and Follett taking sick at different times. The collaboration ended with the publication of *Creative Experience* and the release of Lindeman’s book *Social Discovery*. Despite its difficulty, the relationship remained amiable, much to Follett’s credit. After her death, Lindeman wrote, “She asked questions which led to the future and hence revealed to me the prophetic nature of her thought” (Tonn 359). Lindeman would prove to be only one of Follett’s many collaborators; she valued these collaborative relationships and worked diligently to sustain them.

*Creative Experience* was well-received and made a significant impact in areas of understanding and defining power (Tonn 360). The book’s popularity resulted in a push
for Follett to write another book, this one around the issue of conflict. Although Follett agreed with her supporters that conflict should be the topic of her next work (Tonn 387), Creative Experience would be the last of her books published during her lifetime. All other publications are posthumous compilations of Follett’s work, mostly lectures.

The next three sections will look at the different parts of the book. The introduction and Part One are areas of primary interest for the dissertation. Part Two of the book has a different feel although it still represents the ongoing growth of Follett’s ideas and application. The bulk of the space will be devoted to exploring the first parts of Creative Experience.

Introduction

In the introduction of Creative Experience, Follett openly criticizes the judicatory nature of conflict resolution along with the focus on expert fact-finding within organizational life (Tonn 360). The book’s introduction starts off with a volley of critiques addressed toward the social sciences, fields which Follett suggests make strong assertions without providing definitions or challenging assumptions. She writes, “The greatest need of today is a keen analytic, objective study of human relations” (Follett, Creative Experience ix). Follett follows this assertion by admitting that any situation is changed by its observers; therefore, no study can be entirely objective. She suggests instead the role of “participant-observers,” researchers who participate in numerous new experiments “in making human interplay productive.” These experiments could then take place across a broad array of disciplines and contexts (Follett, Creative Experience xi).

The challenge of social relations, according to Follett, is always power. This power is not stagnant or objective, but rather created and fluid (Creative Experience xii-
Power, then, can shape the collective life but must also include care for the individual. She writes, “What we care for is the productive life, and the first test of the productive power of the collective life is its nourishment of the individual” (*Creative Experience* xiii). In this way, Follett points toward an integration that cultivates productivity but also honors the individual; or perhaps this could be better framed as honoring the individual while creating productively (Clair, McConnell, Bell, Hackbarth and Mathes 152).

Although she usually prefers philosophy, Follett explains, in *Creative Experience* she slants her writing toward psychology. This unusual emphasis underscores a developing field of social psychology that Follett sought to highlight in its relationship to philosophy: the newly emerging theory of *Gestalt*. She also suggests that she has entered other fields of study beyond her own familiarity in order to develop a broader sense of understanding (Follett, *Creative Experience* xvii). Here Follett charts a path for the future of organizational communication broadly and at intersecting points between humanities and social sciences.

**Part I, Creative Experience**

Follett does substantial work in the first part of *Creative Experience*. The first part of the book examines some key metaphors. Much of what is known about Follett comes from this book. Follett looks at the role of expert alongside the community. She introduces her ideas of circular response, integrative behavior and power-over/power-with. Follett also explores *Gestalt* theory explicitly and the significance of lived experience.
In the first chapter of *Creative Experience*, Follett expresses her frustration with society’s reliance on the knowledge of experts over lived experience. Her criticism also takes aim at the preference for objectivity, as though experts who have accumulated facts somehow know best without any context or lived experience (*Creative Experience* 3). While Follett was ready to confess a place in the cultural mix for the expert, she suggests there has not been a sufficient conversation about the place or role of the expert within the whole. Instead, the expert reigns supreme, which Follett considers the abdication of responsibility for the rest of the community or organization (*Creative Experience* 4).

Follett writes, “We need experts, we need accurate information, but the object is not to do away with difference but to do away with the muddle” (*Creative Experience* 6). While lack of accurate information makes it difficult for persons to discern the situation, Follett wanted the expert simply to use his or her knowledge to inform the decision-making, which, when processed by the group, can then honor difference. She explains further, “The object of accurate information is not to overcome difference but to give legitimate play to difference” (*Creative Experience* 6). Follett uses the example of figuring out if something is a snake or a stick. The clear discernment between us of the pronouncement by an expert that a given object is a snake allows a different set of responses to emerge. This accurate information allows a clear conversation to emerge (Follett, *Creative Experience* 6). Follett suggests that the accumulation of accurate information does not create a narrower field of possible responses, but rather opens the possibilities for conversation once there is an accurate description of the object or situation at hand (*Creative Experience* 7).
In the second chapter, Follett contends with the legal processes of the day. It is here that Follett introduces *Gestalt* theory, which she calls “circular behavior.” The holistic approach of *Gestalt* promotes that law is both social and personal. Follett advocates for interrelatedness between the individual and the whole, an interpenetration that moves toward integration rather than coordination (*Creative Experience* 50).

Follett makes a strong assertion here. “The judge must understand the life of his day, but he can live life for no one. Not in the wisdom of the judge nor the facts of the expert nor the ‘will of the people’ but in life itself do we put our trust” (*Creative Experience* 51). The judge, then, is able to discern outcomes based on principles, precedent and particularities (Follett, *Creative Experience* 51).

The third chapter focuses on psychological understandings, introducing the essential work of *Gestalt*’s circular responses, which Follett frames as the place of experience (*Creative Experience* 53). Follett insists that circular response is easily recognized in both social and individual behaviors. Relatedness is never static but always responding, one entity to another (*Creative Experience* 61).

Follett writes, “In the very process of meeting, by the very process of meeting, we both become something different. It begins even before we meet, in the anticipation of meeting” (*Creative Experience* 63). She writes further that response is always relating. Even when someone changes behavior related to someone else’s response, that response is in the process of changing. This reflects a complex interpenetrating relationship that is always emerging and becoming (*Creative Experience* 63).

Chapters four and five look more deeply at the concept of *Gestalt*. In chapter four, Follett asserts that all behavior must be understood within the whole, which includes
context and interrelatedness (*Creative Experience* 79). Follett saw the rise of *Gestalt* in psychology as a much-needed corrective (*Creative Experience* 91) but she also cautions against the use of the *Gestalt* idea that the whole is always more than the sum of the parts. Follett prefers to state that the whole is different from the sum of the parts rather than superior (*Creative Experience* 98). She urges the understanding that the whole is never static but always responding (*Creative Experience* 101). She further asserts that the parts of the whole must continue to be valued and understood as being in process, rather than abandoned or ignored for the sake of attending to the whole (*Creative Experience* 103).

Follett finishes chapter five with a reminder that the circular response is “the deepest truth of life” (*Creative Experience* 116). She implies something here that seems more expansive than she usually projects. Follett defines the creative experience as participating in the creating act, of recognizing that the powers that created the universe are present in the ongoing shaping and creating humans do through their existence (*Creative Experience* 116).

Chapter six explores the idea of adjustment. Follett asserts that in this adjustment is a creativity as well. This creativity can emerge even in conflict if conflict is understood as interweaving to bring persons into circular relating. In light of this experience, adjustment is the ongoing circular response to conflict and the realization that conflict is never simply “you versus me,” but is always more complex and interrelated (*Creative Experience* 129).

Chapter seven explores an understanding of experience and verification. Experience is understood as a creative practice rather than an objective verification. The
objective encounter is shifted by the presence of an individual, therefore it can never be objective (Follett, *Creative Experience* 133). Follett writes, “Life is not a movie for us; you can never watch life because you are always in life” (*Creative Experience* 134). There is no way to step out of life, only to be within it. As a result, change comes out of experience and is in the doing or living of life (Follett, *Creative Experience* 143).

Chapter eight attempts to define the relationship between “percept” and “concept.” Follett writes, “Life is an organizing process” (*Creative Experience* 145). We organize by percepts, which are rooted in experience, and concepts, which are not defined outside of us but defined by our relationship with the concept itself. Our life experiences shape concepts in ongoing ways along with the variety of precepts (Follett, *Creative Experience* 145-46).

In chapter nine, Follett works with “experience as creating.” Here she begins to outline an understanding of “integration” (*Creative Experience* 156). Follett suggests that difference is to be expected as communities work at integration and is a challenge not to be avoided. Integration is a response to that difference that is beyond the temporary fix of compromise (Follett, *Creative Experience* 162-63). Integration of activities often outpaces integration of thought or the mind. The integration of activities can then lead to the integration of persons (Follett, *Creative Experience* 176-77).

Chapter ten is likely the portion of the work with the most far-reaching impact of Follett’s work with seminal conversations around the understandings of power. In this chapter, Follett explores and gives names to a variety of understandings of power. Follett writes, “Power is the legitimate, the inevitable, outcome of the essential life-process” (*Creative Experience* 193). She outlines “power-with” as what power “should mean in
politics or industry” (Follett, *Creative Experience* 187). Power-with allows a sense of circular relating. Power-over is used when there is not enough time to bring educational processes into play (Follett, *Creative Experience* 190). The conversation that Follett initiates in this chapter goes on to be included in numerous areas of research including conflict and negotiation theory, organizational leadership and business management.

**Part II, Creative Experience**

The second part of *Creative Experience* is quite different from the first. Part II returns to the primary subject that Follett addressed in her first book, *The Speaker of the House of Representatives*. Part II of *Creative Experience* looks more at government particularities, although there are jewels that have broader implication. Even in Tonn’s exhaustive research on Follett, the second part of the book receives minimal attention, clearly overshadowed by the significance of the other 200 pages (Tonn 360+).

At 100 pages, the second section is half the size of the first part of the book. The specifics serve to illustrate the possibilities for Follett’s larger theoretical work. The information in these chapters does not have the far-reaching impact of the first part of the book and has less applicative information. Thus for the purpose of this dissertation focused particularly on organizational communication, the summaries for each chapter are included for information rather than consideration for significance and implication. These chapters are more rooted in the particularities of Follett’s historical moment without holding as much sway for contemporary conversations. The following paragraphs are the condensed synopses of the book’s Part II.

Chapter eleven looks at the idea of consent in democracy. Follett does not trust the idea of government by consent. She instead describes a model of government that
understands everyday life and is shaped by everyday activities (Creative Experience 197).

Chapter twelve examines the concept of “a participant electorate.” Follett suggests that minds could be trained to act together and to provoke socially-appropriate action. She does not want to glorify the concept of “we the people” but seeks to find ways to develop and create people and democracy rooted in the experience of localized interpenetration (Creative Experience 211, 216).

Chapter thirteen looks at the dynamics of representation. Follett has already declared in The New State that representative democracy has failed, so it is no surprise that she takes aim at representationalism. Follett questions whether representative leadership is actually considered real leadership in its communities (Creative Experience 247).

In chapters fourteen through seventeen, Follett contends with a variety of legal issues. She asserts that law should be uniting interests and be socially creative (Creative Experience 271). Follett explores the extremes of pragmatic and conceptual jurisprudence (Creative Experience 277). She points toward life as having the focus of the law, life that is constantly circularly related (Creative Experience 290). The last chapter in this topic area in this section looks at law and psychology. Follett asserts that “a ‘dynamic psychology’ and a ‘creative jurisprudence’ rest on the same foundations” (Creative Experience 299). These sections on law suggest that Follett is interested in a more creative and interweaving structure for law and justice. In the decades following, it is clear this has not particularly emerged.
The last chapter is among the most compelling in Part II for consideration in our historical moment of a fearful and flattening world. In this section, Follett explores conflict again. For her, experience means an encounter with diversity. She asserts that many people want to get rid of conflict and that this attempt to purge a community of conflict is a squelching of diversity. Conflict often reveals difference and for Follett “fear of difference is dread of life itself” (*Creative Experience* 301). Instead, that very conflict is creative (*Creative Experience* 300-1). This chapter contains some easily quotable passages.

Follett insists that democracy is co-created in an ongoing way. She writes, “No reform will be successful which tries to circumvent life instead of facing it. I believe in no happy (or unhappy) land where expert or leader can overcome diversity” (*Creative Experience* 301). For Follett, this is good news, an essential message to let the diversity of life experiences emerge and to foster creative citizenship out of those experiences.

This last short chapter in Part II served particularly to open the conversation toward conflict which was the next book that Follett intended to write, particularly after the swells of attention that *Creative Experience* provoked. This was to be Follett’s last book, however; all other material from her lectures was published posthumously, edited by colleagues (Tonn 387-88). Her *Creative Experience* opened up many more conversations for Follett. In her last years of life she was in great demand, with frequent lectures in New York and London. Although her physical wellness sometimes seemed compromised, Follett was well-liked and remained brilliant. The focus of her work shifted to the marketplace and she moved toward studying business management (Tonn 387-88). Follett died unexpectedly in 1933 in Boston following surgery.
Posthumous Books

This section looks at the background of the last of Follett’s publications: Dynamic Administration and Freedom & Coordination. Though Follett’s death marked the cessation of new work, her colleagues insured that the remaining fragments of material coalesced into publishable form.

Mary Parker Follett’s abrupt death in 1933 left a lot of her work remaining in presentation formats. There was no additional book visibly in process, although Follett had suggested through her last years that her next book was to be focused on the study of conflict (Tonn 397). She was still working mostly on material that flowed from what she had published in Creative Experience. Although Follett had slowed down in her last year due to a rocky relationship and occasional illnesses, she remained largely productive until her death at the age of 65.

Follett’s posthumous editions are the curatorial work of her colleagues on both sides of the Atlantic. Dynamic Administration was edited by Henry Metcalf and L. Urwick, published in the United States in 1940. Freedom & Coordination was published later (1949) in London with Urwick alone as the editor. Although these two documents share some information but no actual speeches, Freedom & Coordination is much shorter, focusing on lectures given at the London School of Economics in 1933 (Urwick, “Preface” vii). Urwick’s preface confesses a level of tension with his previous publication and co-editor, who was concerned that the publication of these additional essays would confuse researchers.

One example of this tension appears in Freedom & Coordination, where the first item is a reissued publication from a lecture at the Taylor Society in New York from
1926. Urwick explains that he chose to include it in this volume because the article was not readily available in Great Britain at the time. He asserts that the other publications included in *Freedom & Coordination*, although similar to those in *Dynamic Administration*, show further development in Follett’s ideas because of the late dates of presentation and contextualization (Urwick vii).

Even in *Dynamic Administration*, Metcalf and Urwick write that the articles are somewhat repetitive since they were from a variety of contexts over several years. They suggest, however, that the repetition actually shows a “consistency of thought,” even though the principles and metaphors changed and shifted (29).

These posthumous books do not offer a coherent narrative: they are episodic. They complement Follett’s other volumes, however, as valuable curations that offer a continued glimpse of the way that Follett’s work built following the popularity of *Creative Experience*. Since Follett was still largely productive until her death in 1933, the very irregularity of the compilations reflects the abruptness with which Follett’s work ended. With these essays, there is a larger sense of loss, of wondering where the work would have gone in the following years after encountering and reading her ongoing application in both New York and London.

Tonn does not include an analysis of the posthumous books in her biographical work on Follett. Although Tonn includes some discussion of Follett’s presentations, her work does not articulate an understanding of them as a whole. The *Gestalt* understanding of the posthumous publications could be seen as a challenging collage, although some themes are clearly repeated.
Without the clarity of narrative trajectory evident with these last two texts and following the lead of Tonn, the books are not included in full summary format in this dissertation. Instead, with the inclusion of scholar Andrea Gabor’s work, there is an attempt to understand the whole of the posthumous books. While these books offer important insight into what Metcalf and Urwick call the continuing development of Follett’s work (28-29), the value in understanding the overall *Gestalt* is well articulated by Gabor.

Andrea Gabor provides valuable summaries of the work of *Dynamic Administration* and *Freedom & Coordination* in her work *Capitalist Philosophers*. Gabor highlights that most of the work collected in the books was created during Follett’s four-year-long engagement with the Bureau of Personnel Administration in New York following the publication of *Creative Experience*. Gabor highlights five primary hallmarks that emerge in these posthumous volumes (56).

The first theme in *Dynamic Administration* and *Freedom & Coordination* is authority and “the law of situation.” Follett redefined the idea of authority, which she insisted came out of knowledge and experience related to function rather than hierarchy. This privileging of experience was part of Follett’s struggle to return responsibility to workers closest to the situation rather than from the arbitrary orders of leadership that were hierarchical and disconnected (Gabor 57).

In these last lectures, Follett propagated further her metaphor of power-with that had previously emerged in *Creative Experience*. This is the second significant theme Gabor identifies. Follett sought a depersonalized power that was not coercive but
alongside, contrasting further with power-over (Follett, *Freedom & Coordination* 26). In this power-with was the possibility of true and productive cooperation (Gabor 57).

The third theme is around leadership and decision-making as a continual process. Much of what Follett discussed in this area revolves around the locus of authority (Gabor 57-58). Authority is not given as much as earned or created in relationship, with experience as an epistemology. As a result, leadership is somewhat fluid but essential. According to Rosabeth Moss Kanter, Follett understood that “a leader is one who sees the whole situation, organizes the experience of the group, offers a vision of the future and trains followers to be leaders” (Gabor 58). Leadership is about freedom and coordination. Follett insisted that individuals must have the space to flourish, which, for her, meant freedom.

The fourth metaphor Gabor identifies is constructive conflict. Follett believed that diversity of opinion was generative and the threshold of creativity. Conflicts were opportunities for further integration rather than problems to be solved through outside force (Gabor 58-59).

The last key theme in the posthumous books is the role of labor, a pressing issue in Follett’s historical moment. In these published conversations with business leaders in New York and London, Follett had to address the rising influence of the labor movement. While Follett sided readily with the working class and the immigrants she encountered in Roxbury, she was not a ready labor movement advocate. She did, however, have sympathy (emerging out of relationships, as her own definition would suggest) with the environment and context that was provoking the rise of the labor movement. Much of her writing suggested ways that the relationship between labor and management might be
redefined. Follett was one of the first theorists to give value to the worker and this was worth noting (Gabor 59). She saw how new methods of organizing, leading and working could have benefits to both leadership and workers that would improve relationships and productivity (Gabor 60).

These last two books are not swan songs but helpful compilations that extend a common understanding of Follett. Her last years of work were embedded in both the life of organizations and the academy. She gained a following among business leaders even as she continued to maintain her reputation and relationships with those in academia, particularly at Syracuse and Harvard. Follett provides a significant model of walking the humanities and social sciences, the disciplines of the academy into both the neighborhood and the marketplace.

**The Significances of Follett and Her Writing**

This section explores why Follett often remains hidden while glimpsing possibilities for connection in the current historical moment. Follett’s work confronted what became the dominant organizational model for the middle of the twentieth century. Then for several decades her material was essentially lost. Around the turn of the millennium, there was a renewed period of interest and publication, which has since mostly waned, regarding Follett’s life and work. Authors like Fisher and Ury, Stephen Covey and Peter Drucker, who rely on Follett for background information, continue to be best sellers in books for popular management and negotiation, however.

“Had Mary Follett been born in the 12th century she would have been a saint and possibly a martyr,” Urwick writes. “She was born and lived at the conjunction of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and remained all her life a quiet, modest and
unobtrusive spinster lady. She had a passion for knowledge of her fellow men and women that she might be of service to all of them, and no taste for power or prestige at all” (xv).

With that kind of congenial reputation and recommendation, why is it that Follett’s writing falls in and out of favor? While Follett agreed with F.W. Taylor’s assertion that productivity had to be optimized, she disagreed with his methodology. She resisted the mechanized approach of production that situated workers as both expendable and depersonalized. Follett believed that workers, whether managers or assembly workers, were primarily human. With the drive toward production around World War II and the rising fear of both German and Japanese regimes, the expedience of hierarchical leadership won out (Graham 28-29).

In *Mary Parker Follett: Prophet of Management*, Graham outlines reasons why she believes Follett remained buried throughout the 20th Century. The fifties produced an emphasis on management personality while Follett emphasized role. In the sixties, the movement toward understanding organizations overshadowed interest in management personalities and these systems were considered separate from one another. Follett insisted that the individual and the organization were interpenetrating (Graham 28-29).

Situational theory came in vogue in the seventies. Situationalists had a stronger sense of the uniqueness of each situation and the interplay of the individuals and context. The understanding was more of a *Gestalt*, although likely an episodic *Gestalt*. While there is much that this perspective and Follett’s work hold in common, her work remained in the background (Graham 29). Graham implies that some level of communicative static continued to keep Follett’s work from entering the fray.
Graham suggests that the nineteen eighties brought about a broader systemic thinking in which episodes and actions were understood within the context of relationships and connections. It was the beginning of contemporary conversations about the interrelatedness and responsivities that Follett profiled. Yet, still there is little mention of her work (Graham 30). The communicative static continued.

Follett re-emerged in the nineties. Graham suggests that this reemergence came at a time that paralleled the period of economic growth and the development of systems that occurred in the early twentieth century (27). The shift from the Pennsylvania Railroad and Bethlehem Steel and Ford to Comcast and Intel and Apple created a historical moment that invited an invigorated conversation around how large systems are organized, led and managed. Follett’s work flourished in books, articles and other publications for around a decade. The culmination of the renaissance is Tonn’s volume, a biography that Metcalf and Urwick called for fifty years earlier in their introduction to *Dynamic Administration*. They wrote, “Someday, it is hoped, a complete volume will be devoted to an honest and sympathetic interpretation of the life and works of Mary Parker Follett” (Metcalf and Urwick 20). In 2003, their hope was finally fulfilled.

Most of Follett’s books have been re-issued recently. *The New State* was reprinted in 1998. *Dynamic Administration* and *Creative Experience* were both reissued in their entirety by a Connecticut publisher in 2013. *The Speaker of the House of Representatives* and *Freedom & Coordination* are more difficult to find, although all of the chapters of *Freedom & Coordination* are included in *Mary Parker Follett: Prophet of Management*, published first in 1995. The comparative frenzy of publication that occurred from the nineties into the early two thousands has waned. Ignored during the
time of the Great Depression and World War II, Follett is lost again in our own difficult economies and ongoing war on terror. Could it be that in times of fear Follett falls quickly out of favor?

For the contemporary historical moment, Follett continues to provide worthwhile challenges and potential. Her work is a compelling model of interdisciplinary practice and fearless learning that moves readily between neighborhood, marketplace and academy. In the next chapter, this dissertation will suggest some possibilities and purposes for Follett’s thought in the search for organizational communication ethics during these flattening and fearful times. Follett will again be considered in a U.S. context with questions about immigration, growing cities, the changing nature of work and the re-evaluation of national identities. Within this new, yet strikingly similar landscape, Follett might be able to light the way beyond fear and organizational inertia (Lawrence 295).
Works Cited


Chapter 5

Finding an ethical little way for organizational communication
in flattening and fearful times

In the previous chapter, the dissertation explored the available printed work of Mary Parker Follett. In this chapter, the dissertation turns toward application. Looking again to Ciardi and Williams’ metaphoric question, “How does a poem mean?” Ciardi and Williams assert it means within the reality of lived experience. (Ciardi and Williams 2-3). Through this interpretive framework, what does Mary Parker Follett mean in the fusion of horizons (Gadamer 317) or intersectionality of today’s historical moment? In what ways can her “little way” (almost “saintly way” according to Urwick xv) be understood?

This chapter will explore areas within organizational communication where Follett intersects particularly with popular scholarship updates. The chapter then goes on to explore reasons that Follett’s work might be hidden or not privileged in contemporary organizational communication. Following that, the dissertation will make a rhetorical turn toward advocacy, of cultivating a conscientization of Mary Parker Follett for within organizational communication particularly within Friedman’s metaphor of a fearful and flattening world (10). The last section will explore possible illuminating ways forward that can be gleaned from Follett both implicitly and explicitly.

The whole of the dissertation rests a bit on the fulcrum here of so what? While resting somewhat on the process of academic research as conscientization as Freire explains (109), there must be more than awareness of Follett’s research and its genealogical impact within organizational communication scholarship. Follett herself
would assert or insist that even a posthumous encounter would mean the opportunity for changed lived experience.

**The significance of Mary Parker Follett in postmodernity**

This section looks to situate the significance of Mary Parker Follett in postmodernity. Follett though often recognizedly continues to shape popular management and conflict and negotiation approach conversations. She offers “a little way” that is humanizing in a time of rapid flattening as Friedman suggests (10) and rising fears and disorientation through the “rise of the rest” (Zakaria 2-5). Follett’s continued emphasis on the significance of relationships and how that shapes meaningful life offer a significant posture for negotiating and interpreting Follett’s work within many streams of postmodernity’s historical moment to the complex, competing and vigorous conversations occurring that continue to shape organizational communication.

Popular management researcher and writer Peter Drucker writes that “Follett had many important things to say on many of the major topics in the management field—on leadership, for instance. Every one of her comments is fresh, pertinent and insightful, but her true importance lies in her vision” (8). Drucker has been quick to recognize the influence of Mary Parker Follett, although he himself has proclaimed that her influence has gone largely unattributed. In the resurgence of interest in Follett’s thought around the turn of the millennium, he wrote that Follett imagined the field of management before it existed. While Follett was before her time in this way, she did not develop a fully systematic philosophy of management, presumably because she would have thought such a thing or approach to be arrogant (Drucker 8).
Despite this lack, there is much to Follett’s work that contributes toward the shaping of a “little way” forward of action in a time of fear, to echo Thérèse of Lisieux, during Lyotard’s time of petite narratives (Lyotard 60). While Follett might have opposed some aspects of postmodernity, including its loss of utopic vision (Benhabib 29), she would have identified with and cherished the complexity of discerning how to build communication between the multiplicities of narratives.

Follett likely would not have presumed to solve problems quickly, says Drucker (7). She opposed expert intrusions and would not have wanted to be one herself (Creative Experience 28-29). Instead, she affirmed that relationships matter (Kanter xvi) and it is out of relatedness that communities and organizations produce and create. Follett’s work is ultimately a call out of ill-defined individualism, or atomization, toward creativity and generativity. This is a call out of Plato’s cave and shadows into light, sun, moon and stars to realize a more complicated relatedness.

With these assertions of connectivity in postmodernity, the next section examines the significance of Follett’s work in organizational communication. These key areas exhibit the ongoing reasons that Follett’s work continues to surface in varied disciplines and remains important for the vigorous ongoing conversation of organizational communication. Follett would be glad for these comments to come from the business realm and to percolate back into the neighborhood, the academy and even the town hall or the European Union at The Hague or the United Nations in New York.

**The five senses of Follett & implications for organizational communication**

In the next section, British businessman, Peter Parker, suggests that Follett’s work left five significant marks for ongoing interpretation. The first mark is that business and
society are interpenetrating. The second mark suggests that Follett’s interdisciplinary work was critical and illuminating. The third significance highlights Follett’s privilege of the humanness of experience and organization. Fourth, Parker remarks about the ongoing significance and recognition of Follett’s work in international business. The last mark Parker highlights is the significance of reciprocating relationships (Peter Parker 282-90).

Parker begins by suggesting that Follett’s primary influence was in fostering the sense that business and society are interpenetrating. Businesses do not exist as separate from the surrounding society but instead exist within an interaction with the rest of the culture. Businesses are, however, “micro-societies” in which ethical behavior and communication are created together, often more significantly than in the life of the home (Peter Parker 283-85). This assertion is foundational in understanding the other four marks due to the perceived significance of interplay and interconnectivity.

With this assertion, Follett creates room for organizational communication’s significance. If businesses are micro-societies, or their own petite narratives (Lyotard 60), there can be ways of guiding and understanding them. There is room for ethics to emerge if those ethics are created through interpenetration, as Follett would say. Organizational communication ethics are important not only because they influence the space of their own petite-narrative workplace, but because that workplace also exists within and interpenetrates the larger culture beyond. Follett would say that they are never separate. The ethics of an organization are always constantly in a relationship of circular behavior with broader society.

Parker’s second sense of Follett’s influence is the importance of her interdisciplinary work. Follett was relentless in her learning and her willingness to delve
into new spaces. Drucker suggests she noticed the significance of leadership and management as a separate focus within a variety of settings (8). Follett integrated empirical evidence, qualitative conversation, input from psychology, and her rootedness in the humanities of history and philosophy. She included contemporary issues of social life and explored new models of social psychology (Peter Parker 285).

Maybe it was easier for Follett to accomplish this before the distinction of discipline areas had been worked out in modernity. Follett’s zeal to explain and to develop what Parker calls a “holistic” approach, however, offers a way of thinking that cross the boundedness of the academy while respecting the academy’s potential contributions to lived experience.

Parker highlights Follett’s third contribution as her sense of humanity. Follett does not as much decry F.W. Taylor’s *Scientific Management* as show a different way of managing. Parker remarks that very little of her material includes charts or statistics. Instead, she is intent to examine behavior. Follett took her own contexts seriously and used them readily as both examples and as the setting in which to explore research (Peter Parker 286).

Parker suggests that other theorists would do well to learn from Follett, who “never hid behind a bewildering display of statistics and abstract models” (286). This tendency is a “little way” forward for organizational communication to turn toward the marketplace, the mosque, temple, synagogue or church, to turn toward neighborhoods and neighbors to discover both the human encounter and lived experience that might illuminate and valuably contribute to human flourishing (Volf 12). Parker notes that Follett still did empirical research and was willing to land at a conclusion, yet it was rare
for her to offer perfected prescriptives (Peter Parker 286). This further evidenced the way she privileged human experience over even her own research.

The fourth sense in which Follett continues to be relevant is in the field of international business. Follett worked actively both in the United States and the United Kingdom. Parker writes, “Human and social factors are intensified in any global company. The relatively short hop across the bridge between America and Europe has proven to be anything but a cakewalk; the hop, skip and jump to cross Europe with Southeast Asia and China will call for a whole new set of muscles” (288). Parker asserts that Follett’s work will serve as foundational for working across cultures (288).

In the current fearful and flattening world, Follett’s privileging of human relationships and social contexts provides a hopeful response. For organizational communication, the practices of intercultural communication both within and beyond organizations will continue to be challenging and shaping. Follett cracks open the conversation to encourage dialogue that is more than simply postcolonial but also respectful of the postcolonial critique. In today’s context, Follett would listen to the voice of the worker, whether the campesino picking tomatoes in Mexico or the Chinese farmer drawn into a mega-city to make both simple and complex products for global research. While she would be sympathetic to these workers’ plights and working conditions, Follett would not lose sight of productivity and the ways in which the economy keeps moving.

Finally, Parker privileges Follett’s emphasis on reciprocating relationships. Follett understood that businesses have a social element. These social requirements suggested that businesses had obligations to the community beyond mere economic
contributions. Follett was not content with contributions out of the largesse of wealth. Instead, she asserted that work in and of itself would be the greatest contribution to life in both its productivity and organization (Peter Parker 289-90).

Parker suggests that the Gestalt of Follett is easy to ascertain, that the relatedness of her contributions leads to a point of clarity. Follett’s theme, her “little way,” Parker asserts, is a path of reconciliation. If humans agree to participate in this reconciliation as either order-givers or order-takers, they will receive more when they recognize that they are in their context together (290).

For organizational communication, this ethic of reconciliation and mutuality may need some convincing. Even Parker admits that it feels somewhat romantic (290). These are moves toward ideals, a pull to ethical practice in the midst of much change, much fear. Follett’s reciprocating relational ethics provide a clear space in which to write and research and in which human practices, organizational practice and cultural practice interplay together to form actual lived experience.

While Parker gives a launching point for conversation from another area of practical discipline, contemporary areas of organizational communication provide a fusion of horizons opportunity for consideration. The next section of research relies on the most recent edition of *The Handbook of Organizational Communication* to provide a venue for situating Follett’s connection and importance for research in organizational communication in our own historical moment.
Hidden in plain view:

Follett in the emerging areas of Organizational Communication

This next section explores the fusion of horizon with Follett’s writing and contemporary organizational communication as evidenced in several chapters from *The SAGE Handbook of Organizational Communication*. The following sections of the dissertation provide summaries and highlights from each of several newly included sections. These four chapters on power and resistance, difference and organizing, incivility and engaged scholarship provide meaningful glimpses into the ongoing relevance and potential of Mary Parker Follett’s almost-century-ago writing as both potential background and foreground within the ongoing research areas for this historical moment. Each of the following sections will examine a chapter and offer points on question and intersection for consideration.

“Section 5: Organizations, Stakeholders and Conflict” in the 2014 edition of *The SAGE Handbook of Organizational Communication* was an entirely new section not included in previous versions. Steven May notes that all of the chapters represent emerging areas of organizational communication. While he recognizes that this emergence means that the research is rapidly changing, upon review, many sections of these new chapters look like they have been pulled from the topic areas of Mary P. Follett (May 589).

May writes, “In each of these chapters, this shift is more evident in the centrality of communication, less as a variable in past *Handbooks*, and more as a constitutive function of power, difference, destructive behavior and engagement” (589). May further suggests that scholars have responded to calls for more communication-based research:
“Conceptions of power, for example, have transitioned from early explanations of power as the exercise of political influence in organizations to power as a substantive and constitutive feature of organization life” (589). In contrast to how previous research sought to manage conflict away, more recent research has gone further, seeking to remove the barriers that keep difference from emerging in conflict. Questions of difference have taken more space and time in areas of research (May 589-90). In many ways, it seems like the research is finally catching up to the approach advocated by Mary Parker Follett, who wrote almost a century earlier.

The relevance of Follett to each of these chapters in the Handbook is somewhat stunning. In other ways, the question could be asked how it is possible that the field has overlooked the work of Follett for years; has organizational communication simply not known about Follett’s work because it was hidden and because it was just outside of the boundedness of the discipline, or has it intentionally been ignored? It appears as if Follett still might be able to speak easily to contemporary research and questions. Section five of the handbook outlines several areas to which Follett directly speaks. The following sections of the dissertation explore those areas more fully.

“Power and Resistance in Organizational Communication”

Heather Zoller’s “Power and Resistance in Organizational Communication” examines “a diversity of theoretical, methodological, and topical approaches to the study of power and politics” (595). Her work builds on a broader overview from the previous edition published in 2001, but emphasizes the last decade’s primary research areas and contentions (Zoller 595).
Zoller highlights that researchers have responded to the 2001 call to engage in more communication-centered studies in the areas of power. In the last decade, the scholarship has begun to explore “the mutually constitutive role of communication, power and organizing, signaling the centrality of power and politics to organizational communication research as a whole” (610). Zoller further calls for research in areas that understand the construction of power through communication in organizational contexts. These are areas that Follett clearly discusses, particularly in *Dynamic Administration* (95-116) but also in *Creative Experience* (179-94).

This chapter describes the need for further exploration of meaning-centered research that looks at “lived experience.” This kind of research invites the expert or the organizational communication scholar to reorient themselves toward the human lived experience as Follett would have suggested (*Creative Experience* 21). It is an invitation that Ruth Behar explores in *The Vulnerable Observer*, inviting the researcher to find themselves in relationship with the observed (25-27). Zoller suggests that this kind of research, essentially ethnographic research, can help explain more “nuanced theorizing and more recognition of tensions, contradictions and paradoxes of organizational life” (610). This kind of research, like Follett’s, will include a variety of research methods including qualitative research along with quantitative (Zoller 610).

Zoller asks other questions about power dynamics that intersect readily with Follett’s work. In considering the place of “engaged scholarship,” Zoller suggests looking at specific issues regarding labor, climate change, racism, patriarchy, globalization, social justice and U.S. politics. She wonders in what ways organizational communication theory, even its conversations about ontologies and epistemologies,
might serve as an element of social change. At the same time, Zoller admits that there are no particular shared values to advocate from within the organizational communication field. This marks what Benhabib suggested in her *Feminist Contentions* is a sense of loss of utopic visions in postmodernity, which means it can be difficult to advocate toward anything from a critical theory after modernity’s dissolution (29-30). In Zoller’s assessment, however, there is not even a sense of the nostalgia of Benhabib; the fullness of postmodernity is appearing and there is no acknowledgment of a narrative lost (Berman 10).

Follett’s scholarship was what would today be defined as engaged, rooted in her experiences primarily in neighborhoods. She used lived experience frequently and told stories often. She advocated for new ways of understanding group identity, although interestingly, she does not seem to have a clear narrative of her own beyond that of the modernist projects of progress (*Freedom & Coordination* 38) and the concept of democracy, which is a primary organizing metaphor for her work as she writes in *The New State*, “Democracy is the fullest possible acceptance of the single life” (156).

As Zoller goes on to suggest, although conversations regarding values which provoke vigorous scholarship (as defined also by Poole and Lynch 217-223) could help to produce the best work in the field, those conversations must come from multiple perspectives and sometimes work through strong and different convictions (Zoller 611). Follett would agree. Through these differences, the conflicts might find a new way forward. She writes, “Fear of difference is dread of life itself” (*Creative Experience* 300). This fearfulness can mean that we are not ourselves. None of us. (Friedman 10).
Zoller expects that there will be ongoing heated conversation related to what might actually result in or be defined as an improvement in organizational life (611). In response to this contestation, this lack of shared narrative, these varieties of standpoints, Poole and Lynch suggest two primary frameworks within organizational communication that might serve to bring people together (229).

One approach is a search for a transcendence that attempts to cut across the array of diverse theories. This transcendence attempts to go “meta” above the levels of the other theories. Poole and Lynch suggest that this theory is integrative but problematic. Transcendence, they write, is more a process than a static viewpoint. It also survives only in an understanding of duality of viewpoint and object (221).

Their second described approach is seemingly the one into which they settle as the reality of the historical moment. In this approach, the variety of perspectives and theories are accepted, but with an assertion that the conversation among perspectives produces better scholarship. This is a postmodern approach that recognizes the egalitarianism of each petite narrative, each “little way.” This approach is as broad a Gestalt as Follett would write and it is in that sense of a wholeness in which each is significant that important scholarship emerges (Poole and Lynch 221; Follett, Creative Experience 103). This conversation, though, is not integration “nor overlapping nor complementary” (Poole and Lynch 221).

For organizational communication and for the variety of perspectives in conversation, Follett would indeed advocate a sort of integration. While this may seem modernist, Follett likely would assert that integration is not only possible but is always in process. This perspective may seem to echo Poole and Lynch’s transcendent
understanding, yet would also assume that process is created from within. Follett writes, “In the very process of meeting, by the very process of meeting, we both become something different. It begins even before we meet, in the anticipation of meeting” (Creative Experience 63). This is part of Follett’s understanding of circular process. It is her assertion that even in the very interchange of ideas and perspectives is actually the possibility of response, which means ongoing change.

Follett writes, “We can see this clearly in conferences. Does anyone wish to find the point where the change begins? He [sic] never will!” (Creative Experience 63). This ongoing change or law of reciprocal relations is key to understanding Follett and a possible “little way” in allowing the differences of experience to do more than co-exist while not expecting them to change. Follett believes that all relating is response and that all response is relating. This means any interchange is ultimately “I plus the interweaving between you and me meeting you plus the interweaving between me and you” (Creative Experience 63-64). For Follett, the context is never static, but is rather reliant on the historical moment, the geographic context and the particularities of the people who are meeting as well as the particulars of another in the moment responding to the me who is in the moment responding to the other and on and on (Creative Experience 63).

This chapter offers a clear engagement of Follett’s metaphors of circular or reciprocal relating which Peter Parker (289-90) suggests is one of the ongoing marks in areas of business management along with the key Follett metaphors of power-over and power-with (Creative Experience 179-94). The next chapter in the Handbook then contends further with area that Follett writes about particularly in Creative Experience.
In the next section of the dissertation Patricia Parker further explores issues in difference and organizing.

“Difference and Organizing”

In this section, the research will summarize Patricia Parker’s proposal to map future areas of research for organizational communication. She privileges four areas for research on difference (619). Parker also then suggests these areas might be helpful for one another for interpretation (or, as Follett might say, “interpenetration”). Parker then goes further with the hope of provoking a generative, creative conversation that might be more constructivist from these diverse working areas around difference in conversation (637).

Patricia Parker sets out to propose a map for future scholarship in organizational communication around the area of difference in her chapter in *The SAGE Handbook of Organizational Communication*. Parker privileges four areas in the study of difference within organizational communication. Two of these areas were studied previously in chapter 3 of the dissertation in more depth. She highlights “critical/postmodern feminism, critical theories of race, postcolonial theories and transnational perspectives” (Patricia Parker 619). These areas have received more attention outside of the organizational communication stream. Previous issues of the handbook explored areas of diversity and communication within multinational companies but did not explore areas of race, transnational or postcolonial theory or criticism. Parker asserts that the four highlighted theories offer a way of situating difference within the organizational communication field (619-20).
Parker highlights critical areas in her chapter of each of these four ways of interpreting difference. Possibly more interesting for these purposes, is her assertion that the various streams might and have co-informed one another in their frameworks, providing insights that allow new ways of interpreting while remaining even in the same stream. Parker writes, “Several authors point to ways forward, emerging from the connections between and among these approaches that signal spaces of commensurability” (635). This commensurability suggests, for example, that postcolonial theory might inform critical race theory or feminism might inform postnational perspectives. Follett would call this kind of work interpenetrative.

Parker outlines some implications for these primary areas of practice in understanding difference. She suggests that the perspectives provide tools as well as pathways to develop a sort of public intellectualism that could lead to actionable steps. The frameworks also offer a way of understanding multiple viewpoints and allow for a shifting set of criticisms to emerge. Finally, these frameworks allow scholars to understand perspectives different from their own. This might make space for more reflective practice that can inform both ongoing research and engage more inclusive pedagogy that would increase the diversity of perspectives in the field (Patricia Parker 636).

Difference remains significant in the field of organizational communication (Patricia Parker 636). Mary Parker Follett helped kick off the conversation early on in 1924 with an understanding of difference connected to conflict. For Follett, the attempt to eliminate conflict was the attempt to eradicate difference or diversity (Creative Experience 301). This attempt to eliminate difference is Emmanuel Levinas’ totalizing
into the same plasticity (Totality and Infinity 22). It can also be understood as Lyotard’s attempt to resist totalizing (xxii-xxiv). It is the work of postmodernity but also the ethical practice of organizing to meet difference and not to seek to eliminate but rather to continue to learn from it (Arnett 156-57).

Parker calls for a new way of understanding and situating the critical theories of difference. She proposes a “creative revolution’ where we imagine and do difference as a generative rather than deconstructive project” (637). This is indeed a revolution that Follett would be glad to propagate. This creativity, as she understood it, comes in the encounter. It emerges from the conflict or meeting of difference. This creativity is not ethereal but generative and productive. It is also challenging.

Follett would celebrate the disruption of the status quo that Parker offers (637) because she also suggests that disruption has a significant role. Follett writes, “It must not be supposed, however that I ignore the part of disintegration with the creative process” (Creative Experience 178). Follett assumes that there may have to be some degeneration to get to a new and creative integration (which is certainly always her goal). This integration is a coming together and mutual transformation in relating. Follett admits that disintegration is a “process of life” and mentions that it should be further-developed lest a “superficial optimism” would emerge or be perceived in her own work (Creative Experience 178).

This generative call from Parker is an invitation to work at Follett’s integration, to let the varied perspectives in the conversation on difference to become part of one another. The nature of this invitation confesses that disruption might at times be necessary to gain a further sense of integration. Follett mentions the breaking away of
the American colonies from Britain as one of these disruptions. She also ponders whether the suppression of Germany following World War I might also be a generative disruption; history would likely judge otherwise here. Nonetheless, Germany’s response to this suppression shows the potential of disruption to move people in a multiplicity of directions: the integration of Germany’s isolation or humiliation resulted in disruptive power (Follett, *Creative Experience* 178).

This section is particularly pertinent to Follett’s work in understanding the possibilities for a postmodern context. Follett would intend diversity to be creative, which means sticking around in conversation and relating long enough to move from enemy to mutuality (*New State* 344-45). Follett’s work as a woman, early in areas proximic to organizational communication, might privilege her in speaking to some of these areas and in offering a pathway for integrated conversation.

While the two previous chapters of the *Handbook* seem to look at larger macro areas, the next area chapter focuses on more micro and interpersonal behaviors in organizational contexts. This section appears newly in the handbook and seems different than the previous two. However, it continues the effort to engage difference in ways that allow generative and healthy organizations to continue to flourish. Unsurprisingly, it’s an area that can also be seen from within Follett’s work as well. Today is not the only era of incivility.

“*Incivility, Destructive Workplace Behavior and Bullying*”

While much of the human existence occurs within the boundedness of organizational life, not all organizational life is actually life-giving (Kassing and Waldron 643). This section is new to the handbook, gathering the rising tide of research into
deconstructive behaviors in organizational life. Kassing and Waldron explore particularly emotional tyranny and bullying (645). While seemingly disconnected from Follett’s work, she offers some valuable insights into the role of power that relate to the ongoing areas of destructive behavior.

The third chapter in this new section, “Incivility, Destructive Workplace Behavior and Bullying” represents new research into the negativities of workplace behavior. Kassing and Waldron admit that this is a rapidly growing area of research that is also addressed in areas of management and organizational studies (643). While much of our life identity and meaning is found from within organizations, organizations also represent spaces that at times can be threatening and hostile (Kassing and Waldron 643).

Kassing and Waldron explore these toxic organizational behaviors classified primarily under the framework of understanding the manifestations of incivility communicatively. While the authors acknowledge a variety of levels of incivility possible in the workplace, the two significant metaphors explored are emotional tyranny and bullying (645). Acknowledging that these are only two varieties, Kassing and Waldron write that even “‘unintended’ incivility can fray the bonds of mutual respect that make communal life functional and sometimes rewarding” (645). All the more if the actions are consistent and intentional.

Emotional tyranny is framed either as emotion used by powerful members to elicit a response that is destructive or as a wide array of negative and harassing behaviors in the workplace with varying levels of intensity (Kassing and Waldon 645). These practices in communication include a variety of terms. “Grinding” is considered ongoing effort to wear down a targeted individual emotionally. “Ridiculing” attempts to humiliate another
person. “Vanquishing” removes positive emotions and replaces them with the desired emotion preferred by the abuser, usually fear. “Guilting” manipulates emotion or behavior by playing off senses of responsibility (Kassing and Waldron 646).

The most significant topic that the chapter addresses is workplace bullying. While there are various situations that allow bullies to emerge, often the worst bullying comes from someone who is higher in organizational hierarchy toward someone lower within a workplace system. This can include teasing, isolation, and public criticism as well as physical threats, from invading personal space and shoving to more heated and/or intimate exchanges (Kassing and Waldron 647).

After much exploration of the areas of bullying, two primary trends are emerging. Significantly, research is recognizing that organizational response to bullying is critical, however, there is more work needed to address areas of bullying in order to mediate the damage to persons and organizations (Kassing and Waldron 655). Kassing and Waldron recognize that the treatment of the bully and the victim has significant impact on the health and wellness of both organizations and the individuals who live, work, exist within them. At the same time, there is little research examining the process of healing and restoring individuals and systems when destructive behavior has emerged or occurred (Kassing and Waldron 656-57).

The process of working through restoration, forgiveness and even reconciliation may seem disconnected from the work of communication, however the measurable outcomes of this kind of work point toward meaningful and quantifiable results when attempted. Processes of forgiveness have rarely been implemented, likely due to the moral nature of understanding forgiveness. At the same time, organizations are
increasingly exploring what a posture of forgiveness might look like and how it might be
carried through (Kassing and Waldron 660). Follett resounds with this work of
reconciliation from the *New State* recognizing that is it difficult and long process toward
integration (*New State* 358).

Kassing and Waldron’s chapter acknowledges the vast practical resources
available in areas of destructive behaviors. They suggest that organizations will need to
be responsive to these areas as individuals in organizations often cannot. Kassing and
Waldron write, “Most of us spend considerable amounts of time in and around
organizations. As a consequence, we benefit and we suffer. The push and pull of
organizational life will remain, but ideally, over time, it will become less oppressive and
more uplifting as a growing group of scholars collaborates to address the problems of
incivility and destructive behavior” (661). Here the authors seem to have great hope that
more scholarship will actually make a tangible problem somehow better.

With each of the *Handbook’s* new chapters, this dissertation has sought to identify
the problem or possibilities at hand and how it intersects with Mary Follett’s work.
Kassing and Waldron’s chapter is situated differently. Did Follett talk about workplace
bullying or civility? She did not.

Clearly, however, Follett has something to say about power. The power
relationships described in Kassing and Waldron’s chapter are named in her work on
power included in *Dynamic Administration*. Follett asks, “What is power? Is it
influence? Is it leadership? Is it force?” (*Dynamic Administration* 96). Follett was intent
on learning about power and insistent that power be considered in conversations about
organizational life.
Follett understands power as shared and that it is co-constitutive. The toxicities of destructive behavior represent power-over practices. Interestingly, however, the outcome of the research that Kassing and Waldron examine shows that the destructive behavior, if accepted within the organization, becomes toxic to the whole, suggesting the co-constructed nature of power along with the effects of the small on the organizational *Gestalt*. The agitator of destructive behavior in an organization receives power from the organization that refuses to confront it. The person who is harassed or victimized recognizes that it is the environment they are both participating in that allows this person to remain in his or her practice of tyranny or bullying.

In this setting Follett’s work becomes quite insightful. She is aware of the possibility of abuse of power-over. She asserts that healthier practices of power look like power-with. She insisted that bosses and leadership had to reimagine their own roles. This power is constructed together, not conferred. The destructive behavior, then, must be challenged from within the organization to enable the organization to continue toward creative productivity (*Creative Experience* 187).

In many ways, in her challenge to Taylor’s *Scientific Management*, Follett is challenging incivility. Follett asserts that persons are human not machine (Clair, McConnell, Bell, Hackbarth and Mathes 144-45). Stephen Carter writes, “Civility requires that we express ourselves in ways that demonstrate respect for others” (162). This seems among the most basic of understandings, some of the kinds of things that Follett taught at her very early debate clubs for Irish men in Roxbury. This learning to express ourselves civilly opens up the possibility of the hard work of integrating difference together (Conrad 2). Communicating in ways that recognize the humanity of
others seems like very basic activity for organizational communication ethics. However, organizational life is challenged then by those who do not participate in a co-creative ethic. In a time of contentious conversations, in a fearful and flattening world, there is definitely work to do.

The next chapter turns from macro-level to meta-issues within the field of organizational communication. What are the ways that we teach and engage toward constructing democracy? Like Follett, it seems that organizational communication has an a priori sense of understanding communicative situatedness to in some ways contribute to the ongoing democratic experience. In a way of recognizing the struggle in dealing with power and difference both within the field and beyond, the *Handbook* looks for an incarnated response that might invigorate academy and neighborhood.

*“Engaged Scholarship and Democracy”*

In the last chapter in the new section of the *Handbook*, there is both review and advocacy toward engaged scholarship. While reviewing the history of engagement for organizational scholars, Dempsey and Barge advocate a new way of engaging both neighborhood and marketplace with a particular understanding of the possibility of cultivating democracy rooted in the work of John Dewey. Mary Parker Follett is a possible early model of engaged scholarship with work in neighborhood and marketplace along with the academy. She was aware of Dewey as a contemporary (Tonn 278).

This chapter begins with an assertion that there is increasing concern for the relevance of the academic world beyond its own walls. Dempsey and Barge write that organizational communication since its inception in the 1930s and 40s was always engaged pragmatically toward application. The authors suggest, however, that today’s
historical moment creates an increasing demand on the scholars of the field and on the field itself to engage the diverse constituencies that make up the bodies of academic communities (Dempsey and Barge 665).

The chapter outlines the various turns in organizational communication beyond the classroom. In the 1940s, organizational scholars assisted the U.S. war effort by helping to organize Allied efforts. In the 1950s, there was a turn toward agriculture following the resettlement of the vast numbers of servicemen into everyday life. Communication scholars were often connected to land-grant universities with ready access to agricultural concerns (Dempsey and Barge 665).

The 1960s-80s took a different kind of turn toward actionable scholarship. These areas included more research on management and organizational practices as well as connections with the U.S. space program initiatives. By the 1970s, there was a turn toward understanding that the classroom could also be a genesis for social change. With the publication of Freire and a new understanding of pedagogical approaches, communication scholars joined the movement away from what Freire described as the “banking model” (109) of giving knowledge to knowledge-less students to a more conversational flow between student and teacher. These changes also opened up the conversation to increasing diversities and application of critical theory work into the field and the academy (Dempsey and Barge 666).

The chapter identifies the 90s and the turn of the millennium as a time when critical scholarship invited, and maybe even forced, a reposturing within the academy to move toward engagement around areas of social justice (Seeger and Kuhn 181). Dempsey and Barge (666) suggest that the field is resurgent particularly around the
critical theories of feminism and postcolonialism. With these changes, Dempsey and Barge identify organizational communication as well poised to cultivate conversation about the possibilities and pitfalls of engaged democracy (666). This is squarely the work that Follett was writing about in the early 20th Century.

Dempsey and Barge describe engaged scholarship as having three primary understandings. First, engaged scholarship is “committed to utilizing the resource of academic inquiry for practical concerns and useful ends” (Dempsey and Barge 667). This means that scholarship is motivated by real social problems and should navigate toward a possible response (667).

Secondly, engaged scholarship “functions as a mode of scholarly inquiry” (Dempsey and Barge 667). While adhering to systematic methods for building knowledge, engaged scholarship is committed to creative discovery with an eye always on a practical response. Engaged scholarship is more than the sum of the research and the outcome alone, so it is instead a process, a Gestalt (Dempsey and Barge 667).

Lastly, engaged scholars care about epistemology: the way that knowledge is created and owned matters. Information is constructed collaboratively and, when possible, shared in ownership. The entire process of research is an attempt to engage from design, to solicitation of information, to feedback, to publication (Dempsey and Barge 668).

With those practices in mind, in what ways might engaged scholarship help move toward recovering democratic practice? Dempsey and Barge highlight the understanding of early democratic communication practice rooted in the work of John Dewey in 1916 (676). Dewey was a contemporary of Follett. Dewey (81-99) advocated for what Follett
actually did, which included the cultivation of democratic practice through debate and speech. Follett’s work in the neighborhood centers and some of her first work outside the boundedness of Cambridge and into Roxbury included debate clubs for young Irish immigrant men (Tonn 133).

Dempsey and Barge note that the communication discipline has a long history of service toward cultivating democratic communication. Symbolic evidence includes the lead article in the first issue of *The Quarterly Journal of Speech* that focused on the role of community forums to cultivate decision-making capacities (Lyman 1-8). Engaged scholarship has high expectations of engagement and collaboration. It is not a community as a data collection site. It is not simply volunteerism. It is not providing answers like an expert to a community. Engaged scholarship “sees the process of scholarly inquiry as being fundamentally about the cogeneration of collaborative models of governance” (Dempsey and Barge 667). Engaged scholarship usually focuses on social problems and serves to work alongside underprivileged communities (Dempsey and Barge 667).

By this definition, Mary Parker Follett often modeled engaged scholarship. This engagement was broad, ranging from Irish immigrant debate clubs to the personnel association meetings in New York City. While not always among the underprivileged, her work sought to create a context that reflects the “engaged scholarship” in democratic communication. It focused on the ideals of reciprocal relationship (or circular response), which is what engaged scholarship brings to the foreground (*Creative Experience* 68-69).

Dempsey and Barge (677-78) go on to highlight three guiding assumptions for democratic communication in their chapter. Each one of them could have been birhted
through the writing and work of Mary Parker Follett. First, they say, democratic communication recognizes difference and attempts to connect with those beyond the academy or at the very least in other areas of discipline. The approach then recognizes the potential of conflict. For Follett, difference was usually recognized through conflict (Creative Experience 5-7).

Secondly, democratic communication is based on questions and shared theorizing. This shared theorizing is intended to explore meaning and experience moving toward an action response (Dempsey and Barge 678). Follett believed in this method as well, largely de-emphasizing the role of the expert and highlighting the potential of lived experience. While the expert had a role of clarification, the expert’s role was often discerned in the community of the conversation (Creative Experience 3-30).

Finally, according to Dempsey and Barge, “engaged scholarship as democratic conversation enlarges participants’ capacity to manage difficult conversations in a productive manner” (678). Engaged scholarship is a thing of its own. Like the debate teams of Dewey and Follett’s day, the role of the scholarship is to assist in building a capacity to create floatable argument and to explore meaningful decision-making. The conversations themselves are an outcome, however the intent is actually to enable ongoing contribution to the vigorous debate of the postmodern conversation with its multiple standpoints, strong opinions and attempts to cultivate sympathies.

These conversations are not only happening within organizational communication fields but also beyond in the marketplace, in worshipping communities, and in the academy. Democratic communication is at attempt to provoke a civil conversation.
Although these days it might seem like a losing battle, the challenge and invitation remain (Dempsey and Barge 680).

Dempsey and Barge offer an invitation and in Follett there is a case study or model to consider. This last chapter in the new Handbook section holds particularly close affinity to the possibilities for Follett’s work in contemporary organizational communication. In these fearful and flattening days, organizational communication scholars have the opportunity to model how to ethically walk into neighborhood and marketplace, bringing capacities that Follett would suggest may help illuminate but are illuminated anew in relationships where difference emerges that allow new relating and new levels of cooperation (Creative Experience 21-29). In the next section, the dissertation will further explore the possibilities that Mary Parker Follett might help illuminate in today’s historical moment.

**Situating Mary P. Follett in Organizational Communication in this Historical Moment: Stumbling Across Significances**

Mark Parker Follett’s work is easily applicable and connected to recent scholarship and the provocations toward scholarship that come from The SAGE Handbook of Organizational Communication. However, she remains largely distanced from the academic and engaged scholarship of organizational communication. This section explores both the reasons why Follett has likely remained a bit obscured and the compelling reasons why organizational communication ethics should at least develop a consciousness of her work.

These four areas in a new section in The SAGE Handbook of Organizational Communication offer a glimpse of the many significant and “little ways” that Mary Parker Follett undergirds much of contemporary organizational communication. Her
name, however, does not appear once in the book’s entire bibliography. What keeps her from being recognized or attributed?

Stumbling blocks for Follett in the field of organizational communication

Mary Parker Follett doesn’t get a mention or bibliographic note in the most recent Handbook of Organizational Communication. The next section explores the possible stumbling blocks for Follett’s inclusion with the academic field. These stumbling blocks have served to keep Follett seemingly hidden in plain view.

Primarily, Follett’s work is dense and particular. Although her material becomes lighter over time, the movement from The Speaker of the House of Representatives to the posthumous volumes shows not a decrease of intensity but an increasing capacity to write in ways that were more accessible and less empirically detail-driven. The privilegedness and priority of lived experience in relationship to her own scholarship becomes evident over the fullness of time in her work.

While The Speaker of the House of Representatives appears as an attempt to prove herself in the academic world, Follett’s 20 years of publication silence allowed her to gain confidence beyond the academy in other areas. This confidence helps the reader and, likely, the listener in lectures. Follett finds multiple ways to build cases, to create a narrative, to both critique and respond.

The particularities in her work are largely unpopular. Follett’s critique of individualism and representational democracy hasn’t fit well in popular zeitgeists. As evidenced in some of the summaries from chapter 4, Follett’s attention to detail can leave the reader swamped and at a loss, forgetting some of the pertinent and important information shared otherwise.
Secondarily, though not in order of significance, Follett was a woman ahead of her time. While Peter Drucker insists that Follett’s work was not limited because of her gender (2-4), Rosabeth Moss Kanter is sure that it was (xvi-xvii). In Tonn’s biography, there is only a single mention that Follett felt frustrated when others seemed to take her male peers more seriously than her, that their ideas were advanced more often, and that they had the opportunity for attendance at Harvard. Regardless, Follett would not use her gender as an excuse; she was much too hard on herself (Urwick xv).

Because her scholarship is hidden then, it has become easier for others to utilize her work without attribution. While Follett’s ideas land in popular books on management her name doesn’t. When examining Follett’s contemporaries, like often recognized and attributed Taylor and Dewey, it seems difficult not to imagine that some of the loss of recognition would be related to gender dynamics. Follett, if mentioned at all in textbooks, will sometimes get a glancing mention as a “woman in the field.”

Third, there is limited recognition of scholars within organizational communication for Follett’s work as within the field. While there might be a cacophonous conversation within the field of organizational communication, the field is not germinated and lived out broadly. This limits the inclusion of pertinent scholarship that is often just beyond the reach of organizational communication. As Follett illustrated in her work and as is true for the broad applicative possibility for organizational communication, there is much to be learned through interaction with other theorists with proximic work. Follett was too early to be considered in the field and her re-emergence in the 90s came posthumously. The rise of many gifted organizational communication
scholars has seemed to limit the view of others who speak into the ongoing work, either from the past or the contemporary moment.

Organizational communication has both a broad and narrow way. There is much to be explored in areas of critical theory, philosophy, religion, business, sociology, and psychology, yet organizational communication as a discipline must remain something particular or risk being nothing particular at all. It seems sometimes those risks lead to an apprehensive approach to material that helps illuminate organizational life and communication in ways that might be helpful. This may also be the result of pluralism as both Follett (284) and Benhabib (29) worried that has occurred even within the discipline area itself, creating a difficult space to connect across theories, research methods and perspectives (Poole and Lynch 221-23).

**Stumbling blocks as significances**

Recognizing these three seeming stumbling blocks, what might be done with Mary Parker Follett in organizational communication? What can be learned from her? In what ways does she matter for the work and research of the historical moment? In many ways, the reasons that become stumbling blocks for including Follett provide insights into why she is significant for organizational communication.

*The density and particularity of her work provides a basis for understanding praxis-oriented research and application.* Her models portray the shifts in understanding engaged scholarship across disciplines and contexts. Poole and Lynch would classify Follett’s work as having an outward orientation and the two suggest that this will be a significant research posture for the future of organizational communication.
This outward approach includes a willingness to explore other disciplines and to engage beyond the academy (219).

**Follett’s writing as a woman provides a way of hearing the emergence of the field as well as academic writing in a different way.** While, as Drucker (2-4) remarked, Follett wasn’t the only woman doing this kind of work at the time, she is one of the very few who has written and published in ways that allow us to glimpse her work and enable to connect through a sense of historicity to our own historical moment. While Follett might be proto-feminist at best, Patricia Parker (635) suggests a need to read the work of different perspectives so that they might inform our own to give new tools and open the possibilities for new epistemological approaches.

**Lastly, organizational communication scholars would do well to engage beyond their own fields of knowledge.** Poole and Lynch suggest that this will both help invigorate the ongoing conversation and allow more common ground to be discovered among researchers. Follett isn’t far afield, but she’s slightly askew. Including writers like Follett and even popular business writers who are influenced by Follett could be valuable conversation partners for those of us who work mostly within the parameters of the academy.

**Finding an ethical “little way” with Mary Parker Follett**

While it’s surprising not to find Follett mentioned or referenced frequently, that alone isn’t enough reason to advocate for including her within literature and study more frequently. Given that particularities and maybe even quirkiness are a challenge to embracing Follett, it may also be that her particularities make her unique and significant enough to warrant further attention. Could it be that she could be a patron saint of
organizational communication, a doctor of the field like her contemporary Thérèse of Lisieux? (Urwick xv).

Follett offers some important lessons from her own life. These lessons are not only in the application of her written material but also in her approach to scholarship. It is in the *Gestalt* of Mary Parker Follett that we might find some invitations toward practicing otherwise or differently, as Kanter suggests (xvi).

**Follett’s life offers a model of interdisciplinary engagement.** With work in a variety of fields and attentive to different ways to do research, Follett represents someone who kept learning (seeking after what she did not know) and adapted multiple times. When she found resonance with business leaders at the end of her life, she found ways to do work that met their practicalities. Early in life, when rooted in the academy, she followed the work of her mentor into U.S. history and political analysis through her first publication. With *The New State*, she sought to explain much of what she was learning in her work with neighborhood centers, both in their localities and in the larger emerging national system.

**Follett illuminates ongoing learning and relationships in ways that invigorate organizational communication conversation for today.** Conflicting views and the *Gestalt* matter, although Follett would insist on finding interactive space that does not allow disinterested or non-integrative engagement. Follett believed that all relating had a potential energy that was found in the conversation together. Her fearlessness in learning and modeling an academic dialogue offered a path for difficult yet civil conversation beyond the academy. This path is through engaged scholarship, but also modeled in the way that conversations occur and even scholarship is developed and conferred around.
Follett reminds us that civility is important not only because it is polite but because we ourselves are also made in conversation.

**Follett reminds that lived experience matters and decenters the role of the expert.** In pursuit of the academy, scholars can be readily content to disengage and assume a detached expert role. This does not diminish the value of the expert role, or the rigor and energy required to maintain proper standing in the academy. Instead this decentering is about situatedness. Follett insists that even experts will find themselves in light of relationships (*Creative Experience* 21, 29) and if those relationships are through engaged scholarship, that found-ness might occur often among marginalized people.

**Follett offers an invitation to humility.** She writes, “Humility . . . is never claiming any more than belongs to me in any way whatever; it rests on the ability to see clearly what does belong to me. Thus do we maintain our integrity” (*Creative Experience* 157). Follett is writing about humility in the context of defining the inadequacy of compromise. She would assert that compromise is always futile and temporary. In her framing of humility, one knows what is known and does not claim any more. There is clear boundary on limitation and real permission of authentic confidence. This is a lovely balance. Follett would say that it is a creative balance that allows something to emerge that is both generative and inventive (*Creative Experience* 156-60).

This humility provokes a level of integrity. For Follett this integrity was an ability to enter conflicting situations of difference as well as to continue to change through circular relating. In circular relating, a person was always in the process of becoming, never static (Follett, *Creative Experience* 75). The veritable historical moment meant a constant shaping and reshaping. This humility resonates with the
challenge of finding an ethical path for organizational communication in postmodernity
(Taylor and Hawes 114).

**Situating the dissertation in the historical moment with Follett**

In reflecting on Follett’s work of humility that upholds integrity, this dissertation
sought to find a way to navigate within organizational life in the midst of large scale and
global problems. The opening frameworks wonder what the possibilities for
organizational communication ethics might be in a post 9/11 world, in a flattening world,
in a fearful world. It may seem quite peculiar to delve back into a Victorian era to find a
way forward. However in both her particularity and peculiarity, in her saintly status
(Urwick xv), Follett offers meaningful consideration in her own intersectionality and
ability to converse with our own.

Keeping to the framing of Lyotard’s petite narratives, this research has only
sought to find a “little way,” in the tradition of St. Thérèse of Lisieux toward meaningful
active engagement that wasn’t without struggle yet offered a path that was then illumined
for others through everyday existence. Thérèse was a contemporary of Mary Follett.
They were both single women living in a time of tumultuousness. Both were trying to
find a way forward in fearful times that privileged lived experience.

Thérèse turned toward God but also action. She wrote, “Love proves itself by
deeds, so how am I to show my love? Great deeds are forbidden me. The only way I can
prove my love is by scattering flowers and these flowers are every little sacrifice, every
glance and word, and the doing of the least actions for love (Thérèse 165).

For Thérèse, the “little way” was enough. Similarly, for Follett, there was a
humanistic hopefulness that also emerged through human effort: “Experience may be
hard but we claim its gifts because they are real, even though our feet bleed on its stones. No daily experience must be translated into conceptual pictures but into spiritual conviction” (Creative Experience 302). These words are among the last she would write in book form, coming from a section she calls “experience as evocation” in Creative Experience (300-02).

The best working metaphor for what this dissertation offers to the field comes from Paulo Freire as “conscientization” which he defines as “deepening the attitude of awareness characteristic of all emergence” (109). In this research, the aim to find a way through the fearful and flattening times has meant looking at a single life, a single theorist who died (probably heartbroken), who worked with immigrants, who was the daughter of a recovering alcoholic veteran, whose ideas are often used but rarely attributed in the academic fields. Yes, this is deep irony. The way through a fearful and flattening global moment is illuminated by a single, peculiar and particular life.

This conscientization is about Follett’s work. It is an attempt to raise awareness, to give honor, to notice both relevance and possibility for Follett’s work in organizational communication. This “little way” in a fearful and flattening time is simply a way, not the way, and as a reader or researcher reads Follett they themselves may be changed through a real life encounter (Buber 62). That is what Follett imagined, probably better than she would have imagined as her theories and work have taken on a life much larger than she herself could have projected.

Follett’s themes are not perfect. Her life was interesting but not grandiose. There was indeed, “blood on the stones” of her own life experience. Her research, however,
served as foundational for much of what would come afterward in broad areas of negotiation theory, organizational communication and leadership studies.

The “little way” forward in this time of little narratives may be to follow in the footsteps of Follett, to work in between the academy and the neighborhoods and the office towers (maybe the Bluff, the Hill and Downtown) and to do this without fear but with great anticipation and eagerness. As Follett wrote, “I see no golden age of the past or in the future, but I believe in the possibilities of human effort, of disciplined effort, in truth, . . . of faithfulness” (Creative Experience 303).
Works Cited


