Critical Communication Theory
Power, Media, Gender, and Technology

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Contents

Acknowledgments vii

Part I: Silences and Whispers
1 Introduction: Scholarly Writing Is an Unnatural Act 3
2 The Future Is Not What It Used to Be 27
3 Paris Is Always More than Paris 43

Part II: Impertinent Questions
4 Is Information Gendered? 71
5 Is Science a Man? 103
6 What Was Artificial Intelligence? 123

Part III: Post-Ideological Ideologies
7 When the Center No Longer Holds: Rupture and Repair 157
8 Football Is More than a Game: Masculinity, Sport, and War 185
9 International News: Masculinity, Paradox, and Possibilities 211

Coda: Noble Discontent
10 A Fly on the Neck: “Noble Discontent” as Duty of Critical Intellectuals 235

Selected Bibliography 257
Index 267
In Ireland, that tiny country that has produced such literary giants as Swift, Wilde, Synge, Yeats, Joyce, and Beckett, writers are dismissed with mock disparagement as "failed conversationalists." The charge can, however, be leveled without the courtesy of the Celtic wink against many, perhaps even most, scholars. Failed conversations are, in fact, primary sources of original scholarly ideas. Scholarship begins where current language and explanatory structures falter; it culminates in a form of discourse that would bring most ordinary conversations to an abrupt end.

Scholarship tries to communicate ideas and relationships among ideas that cannot be easily said or even thought. It is usually composed for the eye, not the ear: to be read, not said. It tames the swirling winds of ordinary language into starchy monologues, parses them into major and minor propositions, and defends them with batteries of footnotes and bibliographies. Indeed, scholarly writing reaches its purest form when it tries to move beyond the messy ambiguities of language by reducing thought to numbers, formulas, diagrams, charts, and other esoteric codes.

This is an unnatural act. No one talks that way, not even us. Academic writing inverts many of the norms of conversational etiquette. It interrupts, takes statements out of context, competes, criticizes, contradicts, and insists that virtually every position except the one that its author is currently espousing is flawed or at least in some sense incomplete. Even its affirmations are frequently contentious and defensive. It can press individualism and iconoclasm to the edge of nihilism. But it can also display fierce paradigm-centered group loyalties. Paradoxically, it can sometimes do both of these things at the same time. Scholarship employs modes of reasoning that would be regarded as antisocial, possibly even pathological, if they were displayed in other social settings. Moreover, it does so in the name of higher forms of thought.
In everyday encounters, conversations fail for many reasons. We are not quick enough, knowledgeable enough, facile enough, loud enough, deferential enough, crude enough, and so on, ad infinitum. We must seize the moment or lose it. Scholarly discourse, by contrast, stops time. Recursive U-turns, which allow us to reflect, retract, and repair semantic mishaps, are rare and fortuitous exceptions when they occur in ordinary conversation. In scholarly writing, they are the rule. Not only can we return to the moment of lost opportunity, we can linger there for weeks, months, even years. We can argue with the dead, put words in their mouths, shore up their sagging theories, claim them as our intellectual ancestors, or shoot fresh arrows through their ancient hearts.

The stakes of these exchanges are actually very high, but their significance is often obscured by their familiarity. They are the grist of the academic mill: the sources of lecture notes, term papers, theses, dissertations, theories, equations, models, and the like. Yet, the troubled and troubling silences that force thinkers to seek explanations on paper are also portals to the transcendent intellectual breakthroughs that can change the way we think about, act within, adapt to, or alter the world.

Such breakthroughs are, of course, infrequent and largely unpredictable. They are, however, the goal, the raison d'être, of scholarly communication. Within the circles of failed academic conversations, discovery as well as intellectual breakthroughs are incubated. Dreary prose may multiply geometrically and even prosper within these circles; but "cultures of critical discourse" also provide the discursive spaces where anomalies, paradoxes, gaps, and evasions in prevailing explanatory frameworks can be interrogated and exposed, and new ways of seeing can take form.

Spectacular breakthroughs, for example, Einstein's theory of relativity, decoding the structure of DNA, and the big bang theory, reverberate far beyond their scholarly incubators. They make headlines and careers. They leave us all in awe at the power of the human imagination. Even the more overtly ideologically contested triumphs of social scientists and humanists, for example Marx's analysis of capital; Weber's theory of rationality; Peirce, James, and Dewey's pragmatic conceptions of truth; and Keynes or Friedman's concepts of markets can change minds, policies, and social practices.

Most scholars are, however, destined to plant more modest gardens. Yet, even we small potato growers can produce life-transforming changes, although these changes may be less audible and more incremental than those memorialized in headlines and textbooks. And we may go to our graves wholly unaware of them.

Works of acknowledged genius frequently acknowledge their own dependence on the insights of obscure tillers of the fields. Minor clarifications can prepare the ground for major ones. Teachers can teach more than they know. Students sometimes say that reading a particular scholarly article "changed everything" for them: changed their entire worldview. An amazing feat when we allow ourselves to seriously contemplate it: as little as twenty or thirty pages of print, read at the right moment, can change everything! Or seem to.

Martin Luther said print gives words wings. Once they are airborne, authors lose control over their flight paths. What the reader across the world or across the hall makes of my words reveals as much and sometimes more about her mind than it does about mine. Moreover, the consequences of being understood are sometimes as daunting as the consequences of being misunderstood. Yet, the job of the professor is to profess. A professor's publications are an archive of his or her most carefully considered professions.

DEFINING QUESTIONS AND EPISTEMOLOGICAL QUANDARIES

The archive assembled between these covers represents some provisional outcomes of my extended engagement with two questions that lie at the heart of a critical politics of communication: What do you know? and How do you know it? Simply framed but fraught with existential and epistemological implications, these probes are shorthand renderings of the concerns that have driven the "communicative turn" in contemporary scholarship. They are symptomatic of the interrogations of the current postmodern or, as some would say and hope, "post-postmodern" intellectual climate.

Consequently these are also loaded questions. Their intent is to cultivate reflexivity, and, in their best moments, to induce humility rather than to elicit definitive answers. In asking you to take an inventory of what you know, the first probe is actually pressing you to reflect on how little you know and how little can be known. It foregrounds limits: the limits of your personal knowledge and even the limits of human intelligence itself.

By directing your attention to how you know, the second probe is asking you to reflect upon the mediated nature of all forms of knowing. It is highlighting the radical contingency of knowledge: the dependence of knowledge upon communication and society. This probe encourages you to think about the ways mediation limits, filters, blocks, or distorts your access to knowledge. It raises the twin specters of censorship and hidden manipulation. It evokes caricatures of powerful men with fat cigars in hidden chambers conspiring to mislead you (and me). But it also raises more profound and intractable doubts about our reliance on sources, the technologies of communication, the politics and economics of mediation, and even the reliability of the
data supplied by our own senses. It raises a battery of related questions. Who is supplying our information? What institutional arrangements and distribution networks shape the platforms for this supply? Can we trust our sources? What makes sources trustworthy? What should we do if reliable sources conflict? What role does language play in mediating knowledge? Do the limits of our languages (and social locations) circumscribe the limits of our worlds? What is firsthand knowledge? Can we trust our perceptions? Is perception already constituted as conception? If knowledge is contingent, what is truth? Reason? How is society possible? Politics? Ethics?

My questions are the questions—the worries—that define, energize, and deeply trouble scholarship today. Every generation likes to think its problems are unique, and that its sensibility and its angst are unlike any that have come before it. Yet, all of these questions have been asked before. Indeed, in many ways, these are distinctly modern questions. What is postmodern is our period’s response to them: our hyperawareness of the epistemological implications of these questions and our agnosticism about the possibilities of providing definitive answers to them. In The Birth and Death of Meaning, Ernest Becker eloquently evokes the new awareness when he writes:

The world of human aspiration is largely fictitious, and if we do not understand this we understand nothing about man. . . . Man’s freedom is a fabricated freedom, and he pays a price for it. He must at all times defend the utter fragility of his delicately constituted fiction, deny its artificiality. . . . The most astonishing thing of all, about man’s fictions, is not that they have from prehistoric times hung like a flimsy canopy over his social world, but that we should have come to discover them at all. It is one of the most remarkable achievements of thought, of self-scrutiny, that the most anxiety-prone animal of all could come to see through himself and discover the fictional nature of his action world. Future historians will probably record it as one of the great liberating breakthroughs of all time, and it happened in ours.2

Scholarly responses to this breakthrough have filled several thousand volumes. They range from giddy embraces of aesthetic hedonism to soulful laments for the fate of a god-forsaken world. Some retreat to the new tribalism of identity politics. Some see claims of the Enlightenment, as fraudulent, a pack of ideological lies, and is­tutions of power and knowledge as opportunities to stake personal, positional, sue manifestos calling for reconstruction of knowledge, construct their own, highly individualized life rafts on a sea of floating signi­laments for the fate of a god-forsaken world. Some declare the impossibility of answering definitive questions. In this we understand nothing about man .... Man’s freedom is a fabricated free­dom, and he pays a price for it. He must at all times defend the utter fragility of his delicately constituted fiction, deny its artificiality, . . . the most astonishing thing of all, about man’s fictions, is not that they have from prehistoric times hung like a flimsy canopy over his social world, but that we should have come to discover them at all. It is one of the most remarkable achievements of thought, of self-scrutiny, that the most anxiety-prone animal of all could come to see through himself and discover the fictional nature of his action world. Future historians will probably record it as one of the great liberating break­throughs of all time, and it happened in ours.2

We have plucked from the Tree a second apple which has forever imperilled our knowledge of Good and Evil, and we must learn to know these qualities henceforth in the blinding light of our new analytical powers. Humanity has been de­prived a second time of its innocence, and driven out of another garden which was, at any rate, a Fool’s Paradise.4

The intellectual distance from Polanyi’s garden to mine is enormous and humbling. He rethinks the nature of thought. In contrast, I till much more pedestrian grounds: the weedy plots of contemporary forms of mediation. Yet, even these grounds must now be viewed differently in light of our new analytical powers. Not only must we approach them with the same weighty epistemological baggage that we would take to the high courts of philosophy. We must also recognize that these weedy plots, which are so often filled with
trivial contents, nevertheless exercise significant, even profound, influence over what and how we know.

My explorations raise more questions than they answer about the fragile fictions that make community and communication possible. These critical probes seek to expose some of the cruel fictions that fracture communities and thwart dreams of democracy. With the burden of epistemological perplexity that is now everyone’s lot, my work recognizes that some of the same fictions do both. That is, they simultaneously create and fracture community, absorbing and refracting change.

Cautionary Signal: Both/And

In an attempt to foreground and flag my attempt to keep the schizoid character of the dis-ease of contemporary thought in the foreground, I frequently invoke the awkward terminological amalgamation “both/and.” Both/and has been used by feminists to mark their—our—break with Cartesian dualism. When I use the term in my work, it signals a commitment to pursue modes of thinking that avoid the reductive binary categories of dualism, even though I know frequent relapses are inevitable because dualism is built into the very categories and structures of Indo-European languages, and possibly into our perceptual apparatus. In that sense, the both/and qualifier marks intention more often than achievement. It signals an ongoing desire to recognize the complexity, ambiguity, and paradoxical qualities of human perceptions, conceptions, and communications.

The challenge that both/and modes of thinking pose can be illustrated by considering an old truism of practical reason that many children have put to the empirical test: “You can’t chew gum and skip at the same time.” “Both/and” raises the bar for reason. It requires us to skip and chew simultaneously, knowing full well that we will frequently stumble and bite our tongues. That is, it urges us to go forward and do our work of repairing, re-making, or replacing the failed conversations of our disciplines while at the same time remaining alert to the disruptive tension that underscores the fragility of our own claims. It is a mandate for epistemological humility.

For me both/and is, or should be, much more than a conciliatory gesture. I use it to signal a friendly initiative—a handshake, if you will—in an academic language game that usually takes no prisoners. I intend it as an acknowledgment and appreciation of the fact that all arguments, including my own, are always incomplete and flawed.

Throughout this book, I probe the limits of language and the slipperiness of metaphors, yet I relish the taste of language and the magic of metaphors. I am critical, sometimes hypercritical, of mass-mediated forms, but I remain in awe of their powers and continue to dream hopeful dreams of what they could do. In short, both/and is also “Yes, but...” The primary focus of most of these essays is on language and representational practices; it is therefore, by definition, a limited plane of analysis. This focus supplements and complements more broadly based researches on cultural production and the political economy of communication, but it does not, in any sense, supersede or supplant them. To the contrary, they provide the impetus for these studies.

YES, BUT... WHAT? WHERE I ENTER THE CONVERSATIONS IN THIS BOOK

In this volume, I explore the following interrelated themes: (a) how words and ideas shape and are shaped by material conditions and human agency; (b) how Promethean myths of transcendence condition and gender contemporary thought and social practices; (c) how the gendering of thought and practices intersects with, inflects, and is inflected by other forms of social inequality, for example, race, class, nation, and the ever-fluid “et cetera,” which must always accompany inventories of injustices; (d) how metaphors incubate mythic thinking, act as agents of ideological transfer, and sanction the political linguistics that, at particular moments in history, provide more or less convincing explanations of the world; (e) how generative metaphors like the Enlightenment, the Cold War, the New World Order, globalization, and the War on Terrorism construct their flimsy canopies over our social worlds, and how the resulting structures coordinate and mobilize social resources and actions; (f) how the liberation that accompanies discovery of the transparency of our human fictions heightens our ethical and epistemological responsibilities without relieving our species of its dependence upon fictions—our need for narratives to constitute and make sense of the social world and to provide grounds for human communication and action; and (g) how the airy abstractions enumerated in this very long sentence actually manifest themselves in tangible social practices such as science, technology, information, sport, war, news, and critical scholarship.

A number of both/ands—ambivalences, conceptual inversions, and conundrums—place inconvenient demands on this agenda. Some of the repeat offenders are readily identifiable: (a) the tensions inherent in my dual commitments to critical social theory and critical feminisms; (b) the messiness that accompanies commuting among competing theoretic claims and disciplinary loyalties, which court the wrath of both disciplinary purists and the logic police; (c) the paradox or near-paradox implicit in arguing against Promethean
conceptions of knowledge while at the same time arguing for recovery of the utopian impulse in human affairs; and (d) the familiar dilemma that every scholar and every intellectual generation must come to terms with, which is how to define and perform the role of critical scholar under social conditions that almost always impose heavy tolls on those who would speak inconvenient truths to or about the powerful.

CRITICAL SOCIAL THEORY AND CRITICAL FEMINISMS

Critical social theory, as I use that compound term here, refers to a fairly broad and fluid configuration that drew its original inspiration from what has been called "the classic tradition" in nineteenth-century social thought. The intellectual heirs of this tradition include a motley array of thinkers who would never list themselves in the same playbook. Within communication and media sociology, critical social theory has exerted significant influence in four overlapping areas: (a) political economy; (b) institutional analyses; (c) what I call "media critical" theory; and (d) (with significant qualifiers) the prolific newcomer, cultural studies. While the classic tradition has produced prominent feminists, it has not generally been friendly to feminism. Feminists have found their voice in critiquing the critique. They have been the willful daughters or errant sons of a tradition that is secured in what Bakhtin refers to as "the word of the fathers."12

The cultural studies approach is an exception to this generalization. The nature of this exception requires brief amplification here because I constantly bundle my subsequent references to cultural studies in qualifiers. Gaining influence across the disciplines in the wake of feminism and women's studies and in tandem with queer studies, the cultural studies approach has provided a welcome refuge for work that places gender and/or sexuality at its center. Initial articulations of the approach, for example the Birmingham School, derived directly from and served as a "cultural" corrective to critical social theory. As cultural studies gained the momentum and experienced the heady success of a movement, however, it lost much of its critical edge. Many of its U.S. converts have been unwilling or unable to skip the skip of cultural analysis while at the same time chewing the gum of sociological analysis. The "social," as that term has been historically understood and deployed by sociologists, was the first casualty of the theory and disciplinary wars that ensued as cultural studies began to vie for paradigmatic status in the United States. Much of the scholarship that now operates under the eclectic flag of cultural studies on this side of the Atlantic is actually literary studies reborn and expanded to encompass literary analyses of the "texts" of popular culture, for example, film, television, advertising, and fashion. Except for some faint derivative Marxian echoes, poststructuralist versions of cultural studies acknowledge few debts to classic social theory and are largely hostile to its premises.13

Critical feminisms, as I use that designation here, denote feminist theories and practices that are critical of the limits of their own horizons of class, race, empire, heterosexism, generation, et cetera—feminisms that remain open to further conversations and to coalition building. More influential today in Europe, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand than in the United States, critical feminisms extend critique of "the woman question" to comprehensive and systemic analyses of the historical and sociological roots of "structures" of dominance and subordination. Some critical feminists express deep skepticism about what they refer to as the "cultural feminism" of recent, primarily U.S., feminist epistemological critiques of science and philosophy, for example, the work of Merchant, Keller, Harding, Haraway, and Bordo. I do not fully share this skepticism. I believe the feminist epistemological critique has opened up some crucial discursive spaces that have, at least in the U.S., long silenced or disabled systemic critical analyses of formidable structures of power and knowledge. I do, however, acknowledge that cultural feminism shares some of the vulnerabilities of cultural studies. That is why I emphasize my allegiances to "critical" feminisms.

Critical social theory and critical feminisms share many common commitments. Both recognize that the Cartesian dream of pure thought is an impossible dream. That is, they conceive of scholarship as a social practice, which is inextricably embedded in the historical contexts, social values, material interests, and social struggles that produce and constitute it. As a result, both approaches embrace the unity of theory and practice. Critical social theory and critical feminisms are products of the incomplete egalitarian struggles of the Enlightenment. Both fault the often unspoken exclusionary clauses in the liberal democratic visions of the Enlightenment, yet they remain committed to the project of translating the theory of participatory democracy into practice. They therefore affirm a shared sense of solidarity with the oppressed. While they recognize the "systemic" character of oppression, they also recognize that categories of oppression are fluid and require constant monitoring so that solidarity with yesterday's underdog does not empower tomorrow's tyrants. In that sense, then, both perspectives place criticism before solidarity in interventions in public life; although, to be sure, being the work of flawed humans, few of their interventions ever achieve full fidelity with this principle.

In this book, I press the discourses of critical social theory and critical feminisms into conversation with each other. That is far from an original move. Indeed, by now, if for no other reason than a generational shift, most thoughtful
people on both sides of the divide acknowledge its logic.\textsuperscript{10} If my attempt possesses any identifiable distinction, it may be its longevity and persistence: a wage of age.

**ELUDING THE LOGIC POLICE: STRUCTURAL METAPHORS**

To acknowledge the resonance of Becker’s claim that humans construct canopies of meaning over their social worlds and then take up residence under them is to embrace a form of social constructivism. It is to salute the power of words, ideas, and reason in human affairs. Yet, to insist, as I do, that social structures and material conditions also exert very real constraints on the conduct of human affairs is to cast a vote for realism. This is a both/and move that purists find untenable.

My response to this objection is both complex and (alas, poor reader) somewhat convoluted. The fundamental question, “How is society possible?”, posed long ago by Georg Simmel, remains the core question of social theory.\textsuperscript{11} I view metaphors as the long lamented missing link in sociological analysis: the dynamic force that connects individual consciousness and society and ignites lifelong struggles between them. For me, coming to terms with the powers of metaphor enables a vision of social reality, which both embraces the communicative turn in scholarship and reconstitutes a platform for structural analysis. Here is how it works.

Hard-nosed realists and idealists agree on one thing: Social structure is a metaphor. As a result, purists in both camps maintain that little will be lost if they discard the concept; however, this common conclusion is supported by conflicting rationales. To realists, metaphors lack substance; for example, you can’t see, touch, taste, or smell social structures. That is not a problem for idealists. However, idealists prefer more elegant, fluid, process-oriented metaphors that capture and amplify the fleeting qualities of human interactions and that emphasize the fragility of meaning-making and society.

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Surrendering the concept of structure to the logic police silences critical analysis of the big picture. It proscribes the use of master narratives. Moreover, it does it at precisely the historical moment when the master narratives and generative metaphors of globalization and the War on Terrorism are being deployed throughout the world to bring it into alignment with Western interests.

In this work, then, I use the term “structure” to refer to a dynamic set of institutional rules, practices, and discursively mediated meanings that are used to constitute, organize, and coordinate behavior in the world. By world, I mean that place outside of our heads where even radical poststructuralists must go to sharpen their pencils, brew coffee, cash checks, and bury their dead.

Large scale (macro) structural analysis will continue to be imperative, methodologically and politically, for as long as powerful entities such as nation-states, corporations, and the international organizations they create to represent their interests (like the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Trade Organization) continue to cultivate master narratives, policies, and practices that have profound social and environmental consequences. In short, responsible forms of critical theory will not be able to discard it for the foreseeable future.
I endorse an epistemological stance that conceives of knowledge as the unique and extraordinary achievement of embodied humans, not the work of gods. This stance rejects correspondence theories of truth that cast the scientist, poet, or scholar in the role of a privileged intermediary who speaks for God or Nature. That is, it calls mind back to the body and struggles against Western dualism. In short, it attempts to clip the wings of Prometheus. Yet, at the same time, I also support Pierre Bourdieu and Günter Grass’s recent call for a recovery of the utopian impulse in politics and human affairs. This is an audacious both/and move, which should raise the critical antenna of any serious reader. An explanation is required. In our time, utopianism has been equated with totalitarianism: with Prometheus flights of imagination that impose the ideas of one thinker, party, or vanguard on all. The twin terrors of the twentieth century, Nazism and Soviet Communism, are offered as definitive evidence. Victims of these horrors argue with persuasive passion and clarity against the “lunacies of one idea” and remind us that in the twentieth century, “the executioners’ best friends have often turned out to be writers and intellectuals.” Yet, the great achievements of human emancipation, the decline of feudalism, the birth of democracy, the formal (though not always actual) abolition of slavery in most parts of the world, the relative decline of torture as a routine tool of state-craft, the emancipation of women, and the emergence of laws and covenants recognizing human rights are all products of long and still incomplete struggles of principled people who dared to imagine something better and to commit themselves to achieving it.

To accept “what is” as all that can be is to surrender the dream of democracy and to betray the oppressed. Dreams of democracy are, however, by definition, multiple dreams that can only be achieved by means that are consistent with their ends. There are, of course, no sure guarantees that demagogues—the lunatics of one idea—will not hijack these dreams. But, in my judgment and in the judgment of many thinkers who are far wiser than me, democratic dreams and the political practices they support still offer the best defense that our anxiety-prone species has against the seductions and pyramids of totalizing systems.

And here is where both/and adds its tonic. By surrendering Prometheus delusions of certainty, we create mandates for more grounded, decentralized, community-based forms of political legitimation as well as for the more humble epistemological claims I have been affirming up to this point. In a passage that I cite repeatedly in the chapters that follow because, in my judgment, it cannot be repeated too often, Donna Haraway describes the epistemological and political challenges that we now face: "[O]ur problem is, how to have simultaneously an account of radical historical contingency for all knowledge claims and knowing subjects, a critical practice for recognizing our own "semiotic technologies" for making meanings and a no nonsense commitment to faithful accounts of a "real" world; one that can be partially shared and that is friendly to earthwide projects of finite freedom, adequate material abundance, modest meaning in suffering, and limited happiness."

In our time, the major semiotic technologies for representing the "real" worlds of politics—what are now almost universally referred to in everyday usage in the singular term "the media"—are now owned and controlled by a handful of global corporations. As a result, in the twenty-first century, how we know is more imperiled than ever before by the threat of the singular, commodified vision of powerful corporations that not only control the contents but also the conduits of our semiotic technologies: our newspapers, books, radio, television, telephony, satellites, Internet access, et cetera. In short, the multiplicity of political viewpoints that are both the means and ends of democracy are now disappearing from major media: the media that most people rely upon for most of their news and political information.

This is why Robert McChesney argues that communication scholars must play a central role in raising public awareness of the relationship between media and democracy. "Only communication scholars," he asserts, "have the resources and institutional basis to move forward with honest independent scholarship and instruction, with a commitment first and foremost to democratic values." If the field of communication does not take up this charge, McChesney warns, the lesson of the last fifty years makes it clear that "nobody else will." Unless we, communication scholars, systematically document what is missing under neoliberal (that is, privatized, conglomerate, and globalized) control of media and find the courage to imagine something better, to entertain utopian possibilities, then the unfulfilled dreams of democracy may be deferred indefinitely. Utopian visions that are produced by careful analysis of actual social conditions are not visions of "no place" or an impossible place but of a better place, a good place, which can be reached from the current place. They are "reasoned utopias." This kind of utopianism is not only consistent with the assumptions of the classic tradition of social theory; it is its mandate.

SPEAKING TRUTH TO POWER

The duty, the moral obligation, of critical scholars is to think "otherwise," to question established orthodoxies and to speak truth about and, when possible, to power. Whether they take to the streets, to the study, or to the lectern,
Chapter One

Critical theory must reopen the question of media freedom. It must recenter that problem, exposing the manner in which all kinds of freedom today hinges on issues of media censorship—of news, news interpretation, and of entertainment... It is through the mass media and through them alone that there is today any possibility at all of a truly mass public enlightenment that might go beyond what universities might elicit, i.e., beyond small elites and educated elitism. It is through the media that the system may be made to "dance to its own melody," or to expose itself. From L'affaire Dreyfus to the Watergate scandal, the powerful role of media in monitoring the management of public affairs has been notable, even if sporadic. For those who can see, it is profoundly at variance with any simple-minded stereotype of media simply as an agency reproducing the existent system of domination.26

Gouldner did not articulate a media-critical theory. That was not his project, but he does articulate a warrant for such a perspective. I believe Gouldner's insight remains fundamentally important today, even as the Internet and digital convergence compound what we mean by mass media and transform how media function. More obvious than innovative now, the implications of Gouldner's view are even more sobering. Yet, in 1978 when the flames of Cold War rhetoric were still burning brightly, his claim that "[t]he news-producing system is thus a news withholding and censoring system" was not fully appreciated. The technological and organizational infrastructures required for corporations and some states to mobilize and coordinate their power for sustained withholding and censoring across the world were still largely hypothetical. Today these infrastructures are in place. Their coordinated use to overtly censor or withhold news about specific political issues is still infrequent. But instances of this kind of state and market censorship can be identified. For example, in the wake of the attack on the World Trade Center, the U.S. government directly and (to its merit, if censorship can have merit) openly intervened in news processes, with full cooperation from U.S.-based news organizations, to prevent rebroadcast on U.S. television of videotaped messages produced by Osama bin Laden's forces, which were broadcast on Arab television. Most state and market censorship does not operate openly although they do frequently operate in tandem. For example, market censorship in the U.S. muffled debate and provided a virtual news blackout that underreported, silenced, or preempted public debates on the Telecommunications Act of 1996, as well as the NAFTA and GATT treaties. This censorship gave Congress and industry lobbyists free hands in crafting legislation that has profound global consequences. What has, however, been more common in the post-Cold War era has been saturation of news with sex scandals, trivial stories about celebrities, and high profile crime stories, combined with thin coverage of international news and highly skewed coverage...
of political protests that target globalization. In the immediate wake of the attacks on New York and Washington, mainstream media organizations placed renewed emphasis on hard news and international coverage; however, they soon returned to the ratings-centered entertainment model of news.

The central insight of media-critical theory is still not fully grasped by many sociologists who acknowledge the power of media in the social reproduction of inequalities in capitalist societies. To wit, media and mediation are practices that must be understood on their own terms and in their full (and fully nuanced) complexity. That is, as Gouldner affirms, representational practices cannot be understood simply by understanding ownership patterns, although these patterns are an important component of political economy and institutional analysis of media structures. Contradictions within the profit structures of media systems of neoliberal societies must also be understood, and, where possible, supported through alliances with cultural workers; for, as Graham Murdock and Peter Golding emphasize, media workers operate within traditions, codes, and occupational ideologies, and with personal and social aspirations that retain some autonomy despite media ownership patterns.30

Ben Bagdikian provides useful metaphors for thinking about these contradictions in contemporary media systems when he describes journalism as a "house divided." On the one side, there are those who think of journalism as a "cathedral," including reporters and editors who retain the hoary values of the Jeffersonian concept of the press as a watchdog of democracy, independent, crusading, championing the rights of the underdog. On the other side of the house is the "bank": the business offices where the bottom line rules and pressures to pander to advertisers prevail. The two sides of the house have never been as hermetically sealed as the apologists of the cathedral like to imagine; but the theoretical separation has historically served as a useful fiction that has preserved some degrees of freedom within the cathedral. It has often kept the bankers on the defensive against charges of censorship; and the struggles between the two sides of the house have allowed the commercial press in liberal societies to be both profitable and relatively free. Given the current conglomerate control and vertical integration of global media, I share Bagdikian's worry that the bank is winning the struggle, and I share his conclusion that the watchdogs bear watching now more than ever.

The tensions between the bank and the cathedral are openings to emancipatory possibilities. The mandates of media-critical theory are to reconnect analyses of cultural forms to analyses of the institutions and the political economy of communication, to form alliance with cultural workers, and to link critical scholarship to struggles for meaningful forms of social and political freedom, not just cultural freedom. That is, to recover and amplify defunct analyses of cultural forms to analyses of the institutions and the political material world.

To the contrary, I recognize that scholarship bears the weight of the world. That is, it is constrained by and embedded within the limits imposed by the "real," external, material world.

5. The both/and terminological pairing has had wide circulation in feminist critiques of binary thinking. Eve Tavor Bannet provides a useful analysis in "The Feminist Logic of Both/And," Genders 15 (Winter 1992): 1–19. For me, the "logic" resonates both within and beyond feminisms. Susan Bordo's valuable essay, "The Cartesian Masculinization of Thought," Signs 11, no. 3 (1986): 439–56, which was subsequently amplified in The Flight to Objectivity: Essays on Cartesianism and Culture (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987), has exercised significant influence over my thinking about Western dualism. I am, however, far less optimistic than Bordo is about prospects for reconciliation and a new synthesis. I think we will face the intellectual burden and awkwardness of both/and conceptual gymnastics for the foreseeable future.

6. Perception is not only conception, but it is, as Jerome Bruner has pointed out, conceived within narrative frames and categories. Moreover, cognitive science has demonstrated that the brain pads that are habitually used develop more fully than those that are dormant. See Bruner, Actual Minds, Possible Worlds (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1986).
7. Polanyi saw Personal Knowledge as an argument for a "new humility" in the theory of knowledge. Anderson tries to mediate the implications of the epistemological crises posed by new approaches to the theory of knowledge in The Truth about Truth.

8. This summarizing sentence is packed with synthetic statements drawn from many sources that are cited and examined in depth later in the book. This footnote cannot possibly catalog nor do justice to them all. There are, however, some direct borrowings that do require acknowledgment here. Obviously I draw upon and play heavily with Becker's description of the fictive character of human meaning cited earlier; see Becker, "The Fragile Fiction." Many influences have shaped my approach to metaphor from Nietzsche, Richards, Burke, and Blackman to more recent work by Bloor, Lakoff and Johnson, Steiner, and Borry. Feminist probes of language by Daly, Merchant, Haraway, Keller, Bordo, and legions of others have also been extremely important to me. Bloor's discussions of how metaphors transfer ideology into mathematics have been especially useful to my own thinking. See David Bloor, Knowledge and Social Imagery (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977). Herbert Marcuse introduced the concept of "political linguistics" in Eros: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955).


10. This mapping of the field is, at best, a tentative effort to locate a disparate set of critical inquiries in order to locate my own point of departure. There have been a number of excellent recent attempts to rethink and remap the territory of communication inquiry from critical perspectives that are far more thorough and nuanced than the shorthand I use here. See, for example, Vincent Mosco, The Political Economy of Communication (London: Sage, 1996); Armand Mattelart and Michele Mattelart, Re-thinking Media Theory: Signposts and New Directions (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992); John Durham Peters, Speaking into the Air: A History of the Idea of Communication (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999); and Dan Schiller, Theorizing Communication (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996). Mosco also provides some interesting reflections on the mapping process itself.

11. There are historical exceptions or partial exceptions, of course, for example, John Stuart Mill, Georg Simmel, and Max Weber were supportive of the feminist arguments of their times, although they were nevertheless also beneficiaries of its prevailing gender order. Socialist-feminism, of course, applied the insights of the thinking of Marx and Engels to its articulations of critical analyses of patriarchy; Engels's The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State (New York: International Publishers, 1972) contributed significantly to the development of feminist thought. The quote is from Mikhail Bakhtin, The Dialectical Imagination (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 342.

12. This claim requires some qualification. To be sure, early work in British cultural studies shared the gendered blindspot of other forms of communication inquiry.
their truces with constructionism more efficiently by describing the relationship be-
 tween communication and society as mutually constitutive, a position that is consis-
tent with my position. My added verbiage and qualifications are, however, necessary because much of the work in this book examines the roles metaphors play in those constitutive processes. As a result, my own metaphors require more interrogation.

18. In The Political Economy of Communication, Mosco, following Connell, de-
scribes his critical realist's truce with constructionism much more efficiently by de-
scribing the social as mutually constituting.

19. Clifford Geertz played a crucial bridging role, at least in the United States, in the movement from literary study to cultural studies. Long an eloquent in-house critic of positivistic approaches to anthropology, Geertz's work reads very differently as lit-
erary apology than it does as anthropological critique. Anthropologists know that the temptation to reify the concept of social structure by structural-functionalists has long been critiqued within social science even by functionalists, for example Alfred R. Radcliffe-Brown. See Alfred R. Radcliffe-Brown, Structure and Function in Primi-
tive Society: Essays and Addresses (Glencoe, Ill.: The Free Press, 1965). They know that these reflexive moves have been made away from naive realism. They also know that critical, conflict, or neo-Marxist traditions have long used the term by link-
ing it dynamically to struggles of domination and resistance. In short, they know that the term, the metaphor or heuristic model, has a much richer and more nuanced his-
tory and set of critical associations than is present in the mechanistic determinism of Marx's analytic categories of sub- and superstructure (that even Marx qualified and later criticized). Moreover, they also know that while reductive dreams have certainly prospered in all of the social sciences, the "structure" of Saussurian linguistics is but one rather specialized meaning of the term. Its failure to satisfy the reductive dreams of students of literature does not, however, mean that all other uses of the term are il-
legitimate or that social science itself has little of value to say about culture and com-
unication. Geertz has often been misused, albeit without protest, especially by Eng-
lish professors to dismiss, without investigation, the entire corpus of pre-Geertzian anthropology and virtually all structural sociology.

turalism (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974).


22. The phrase "utopianism of one idea" is from Wallace Stevens. It is cited by
Charles Simic in his powerful testament against utopian thought, "Refuges," in Let-
ters, Transits: Reflections, Essays, Identities, Languages, and Loss, ed. Andre Aciman (New York: The New Press, 1999), 134. Simic claims, "Barbarism, intolerance, and fanaticism have been the by-products of all utopian projects in this century. Inflatable theories of history and human progress brought about the most repellent forms of re-
pression. The noble-sounding attempt to make the whole of society accept a particu-
lar worldview always leads, sooner or later, to slaughter of the innocents" (133). In
my view Simic rightly equates fanaticism with claims to infallible theories of history and progress. However, his equation of all utopian thought with claims to infallibility and the reductive lunacy of one idea is hyperbolic and ahistorical. Although he cele-
bribes the individual rights valorized by Western democracies (in this case the United States), Simic ignores the history of democratic movements: of movements to expand human rights franchises, the civil rights movement, the women's movement, Man-
dela's triumph over apartheid, et cetera. Even such modest social reform initiatives like providing shelters for the homeless, crises hotline to comfort and counsel the trou-
naized, or school lunch programs require some vision of a better, more just society.

only endorse macroanalysis of national and transnational neoliberal structures and
initiatives, but also activism that exposes the human costs they extract, for example sweatshops and environmental toxicity. However, given the ways major mass media have represented this activism to date, emphasizing violence and anarchy and fram-
ing it as the work of radical fringe groups and naïve tagalongs, I am not optimi-
mistic that this activism can spark a groundswell of public support any time soon. I am, however, more hopeful about some other initiatives to counter globalization that are emerging from within the life worlds of ordinary people as the effects of global-
ization impinge upon their immediate environments and their respective pursuits of "adequate material abundance, modest meaning in suffering, and limited happiness." Most people, for example, do not want to drink water that contains arsenic or eat pro-
duce that is laced with pesticides, meat that contains growth hormone residues, or food that has been chemically altered or ratiﬁed. These bread-and-butter issues bring globalization home to the family dinner tables of ordinary people in tangible ways that
distant protests at summits of corporate and government leaders do not. For most peo-
ple, WTO, WMF, GATT, and NAFTA are vague abstractions, and big media prosper from keeping them that way. Conversely, bread-and-butter issues are mobilizing peo-
ple in many parts of the world into community-based acts of social responsibility that are also, at least in part, acts of "resistance" to reducing all values to market values.
Moreover, this resistance cuts across ideological spectrums. To cite a few examples:
European skepticism and activism against radiation of food before its long-term ef-
ects can be assessed (which, yes, is also a form of anti-Americanism); initiatives that
support recycling, which in the U.S. have popular support even when they are not cost
effective; the Slow Food Movement in Italy, which seeks to protect artisan food pro-
duction and practices and the ways of life that support them against imposition of pro-
duction standards favored by U.S. agribusinesses; and even the growing popularity of
home gardening using organic methods, reintroducing heirloom plants, and home
production standards favored by
ant experiences of scarcity. The challenge for critical scholarship is to connect the
human rights franchises, the civil rights movement, the women's movement, Man-
dela's triumph over apartheid, crises hotlines to comfort and counsel the trauma-
sweatshops and environmental toxicity. However, given the ways major mass media
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Chapter One


In his vast history of Western culture, Jacques Barzun also presents a strong argument for recovering "utopian" thought, pointing out that it has contributed much to social thought and struggles for democracy. Barzun, From Dawn to Decadence: 500 Years of Western Cultural Life, 1500 to the Present (New York: HarperCollins, 2000). In their recent book, Liberation Sociology (Boulder: Westview Press, 2001), Joe R. Feagin and Hernan Vera also remind us that until the mid-twentieth century when sociology was "Parsonized" (shaped by the objectivist interpretations and social positioning of Talcott Parsons of Harvard University), commitments to social reform and to activism on behalf of the oppressed were hallmarks of the field. Like feminism, multiculturalism, and "political correctness" before it, the conception of the intellectual as gadfly who is obliged to "speak truth to power" has recently come under heavy fire from the conservative right in the U.S. This is a curiously inconsistent move since the light has stridently claimed that privilege since the 1960s in challenging what it has insistently characterized as the "liberal" dominance of U.S. politics, academics, media, and popular culture. See Richard Posner, Public Intellectuals: A Study of Decline (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001).
