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4 Beyond Science: Humanities Contributions to Communication Theory

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THE phrase "beyond science" should be understood in a non-transcendental sense. There is no doubt a version of the term "science," as it was employed by Hegel and Vico, in which we can never be "beyond" science so long as we are engaged in some aspect of knowing. While I endorse this larger usage, that is not the way the term is employed here. It is my challenge to address scholarly work that brings special competencies to the study of communication—competencies that are not "scientific" in the usual empirical sense of that term. Perhaps it is one sign of advancement in the study of communication that increasing specialization and reflective speculation can exist side by side. Even if aesthetic, historical, and philosophical inquiries into communication practice never quite yield the empirical confirmation that "normal" science has sought, there is some agreement that nonscientific approaches still admit to tests of rigor, insight, and heuristic value that might benefit the discipline generally.

Some additional qualifiers may help clarify the intent of this chapter. First, I will argue that theory in human communication is a sufficiently underdeveloped enterprise as to require the concerned reflection of communication scholars from many different perspectives. But this does *not* imply that scientific theory may properly be debunked on purely aesthetic or political grounds alone, any more than a criticism of communication may be cast aside as unscientific. The price of intradisciplinary detente has been to grant that standards of adequacy, while communicable across perspectives, are—at least for now—incommensurable. Second, the categories I will use for interpretation are designed to distinguish among certain levels of analysis in the *nonscientific* study of communication. They are not intended to be exhaustive; there are no doubt many nonscientific approaches to this topic that are outside my range of familiarity. Third, I am not a scientist; this means that actual ranges of application to scientific research must be confined to a layperson's intuitions.

I will be confining my attention to touchstone studies that either typify a perspective or break new ground. The works discussed here should invite closer attention to the many worthy studies that have been left out.

At least three large clusters of research type offer important alternative perspectives to social science scholarship in communication. These include *philosophical* approaches, which would ground or extend understanding of some critical feature of communication through an identifiable school of thought. There are also *aesthetic-allegorical* approaches. Here we may find the closest fit to actual communicative form: how the process works. Suppositions about structure, explanation, and performance are guided by traditions of taste and judgment. Theory in this area is rich with implications for scientists as well as aestheticians. Finally, there are *interpretive and critical* approaches, in which the experience of communication, as discourse and text, tends to be framed, recreated, and qualified in light of certain derived or invented norms. There is a great deal of literature here, of highly variable quality. For the most part, this chapter will focus on work from the first category (i.e., philosophical approaches) that clearly intersects with investigations on other conceptual levels of analysis.

How is this work best evaluated? In keeping with the enlightened pluralism discussed earlier, I would dismiss out of hand the supposition that it *cannot* be evaluated. We invoke nonempirical standards of gradation all the time when it comes to our scholarly enterprises. When a would-be scholar's research program is confronted with the question "Why?" more than once, it is probably time to return to the drawing board. Among the standards we might wish to consider are the following:

- (1) Analytic consistency: Does the work derive from a consistently formulated theoretical position?
- (2) Methodological rigor: Is the method of investigation formulated precisely, and applied carefully? Could others employing the method find approximately the same things?
- (3) Intuitive credibility: This standard addresses the pertinence of humanistic research to actual communicative practice. The issue is whether there might ever be sufficient discrepancy between research formulations and actual practice as to require revising the formulations.
- (4) Heuristic value: Here we would be concerned with the generalizable implications of research for a host of other inquiries, scientific and otherwise. It is not usually the aim of humanities research in communication to formulate comprehensive laws or universal principles. Still, such research should at least allow for some additive insight about the object of study. But the best answers to this last question must come from others.

CONCEPTUALIZING COMMUNICATION NONSCIENTIFICALLY

There is a stage in experimental research where the investigator is instructed to "operationalize" the constructs, so that these might be tested in a controlled setting. We all know that when constructs are reduced to empirical components other nonempirical features of their definition are set aside. It is difficult to determine whether the end result, in each case, is an improvement (rigor triumphing over fuzzy thinking) or a corruption (ideas replaced by things). One justification for a broad nonempirical construal of communication is that it might allow us to attend more closely to this definitional process, to see what is gained and lost in the search for empirical grounding.

Central to my own approach is the idea that human communication is simultaneously a *process* and a *practice*. It is, as the old saw goes, the transformation of matter into energy with symbolic significance. It is something that happens involuntarily, and something that we do, with malice and wisdom aforeshadowed. This double aspect of communication becomes apparent whenever we are reminded of something we habitually do in conversation or in public settings (e.g., play with our tie, punctuate utterances with some familiar verbal crutch). When these things are drawn to our attention, we are likely to react with embarrassment or annoyance. Here is something we should be able to control and monitor, but have not. And now we are on our guard, anticipating and screening our every thought, until the habit is purged. In this example, communication has never abandoned its status as a process; but through the phenomenon of self-reflection, we are able to attend to aspects of the process as a form of conduct.

From the perspective I am sketching, it would be pointless to consider one side of this vision to be more advanced or sophisticated than the other. To the extent that interests are reflected in all forms of inquiry, there is bound to be some strain between method and object of study where communication is concerned. Since communication is something that all of us, in practical experience, *do*, we will always be actors and spectators simultaneously. If certain aspects of our communicative behavior are open to the explanations afforded by lawlike regularities, higher-order communicative skills are only acquired through the mastery of rules and pragmatic competencies. Certain broader interpersonal and even cultural communication patterns may ultimately reduce to constructs localized in intrapersonal, perhaps physiological components. But equally sound is the intuition that there is an emergent dimension of communicative meaning—a dimension that may contextualize the most idiosyncratic behavioral traits, that could be larger than the sum of its

parts. To hold communication accountable as a *process* is to subscribe to generalizable standards for adequacy of explanation in the scientific community. To hold communication accountable as a *practice* is to ask equally pertinent questions about the fidelity, reliability, and quality of what we are saying.

Since we are actors and spectators at the same time, there will always be a reflective domain of our own communication practice that will be—in principle—outside our purview of explanation. This reflective domain involves our own communicative performances as scientists and scholars. This is one of the things Weimer (1977) and Campbell (1975) are up to when they analyze rhetorical characteristics of the scientific enterprise. More “radical” versions of the same approach (Cohen, 1972; Gouldner, 1973; Weimer, 1983) announce that *all* scholarly investigations of any kind (“pure” science, social science, whatever), involve certain language-bound aspects of subjectivity in their very attempt to establish foundations and first principles, select objects of study, and so forth. When practicing scientists are met with this allegation, however, their usual response is, “Yes, that is correct . . . and now, what were we talking about?”

The response is one with which I sympathize. While it may be helpful to remind ourselves that we are, after all, choosing to look at things a certain way when we do science (or art, for that matter), this revelation is far from a conclusive debunking of the enterprise. All that is learned is that science is itself a practice that often finds it most useful to look at things a certain way, to bracket the practical aspects of its subject, to treat communication—in short—as a process. To that extent, the science of communication commits to the paradox of employing technical means and interests to study a social subject. Communication science is therefore a line of inquiry that will always be leaving something out. Rigor and regularity of explanation, the “view from nowhere” described by Nagel (1986), is always obtained at a price: that we are, in actuality, somewhere doing something all the while. We need to be reminded of this fact every now and again, but once reminded there is not much more to be said. The contributions of science to our understanding of communication need no further defense from me. And once we have realized that communication will always have aspects that elude full scientific elucidation, perhaps the momentous implications of this fact may be set aside in favor of asking our central question: How may nonscientific research paradigms help to enrich and deepen our overall picture of communication?

THE MAIN APPROACHES

The primary category of research that is useful to my own overview includes what I would call philosophical approaches. Since Western philosophy traces its modern origin to a sense of “dialogue,” the philosophical investigation of communication would seem a natural union of method and object. However, the term “philosophy” these days is no clearer a mark of commonality than is the nomenclature of our own discipline. Not only is there the much-discussed cognitive paradox concerning what philosophy itself is *about*, there is also the tendency of philosophers themselves to announce, with something akin to exhilaration, the “end of philosophy.” Whatever branches and tributaries of the humanities remain are, if anything, further from a language of discussion than before. To expect approaches such as these to enrich our subject, then, requires that we look beyond what they actually do and reflect somewhat on what they say.

The general areas that seem most fruitful to our overview are hermeneutics and phenomenology, semiotics and structuralism, Marxism and social theory, and nonrational philosophy (or deconstruction). Bluntly put, what most of these approaches *do* is to establish certain foundational principles (or postulates) about communication on more or less a priori grounds, and then jump directly to one of the several levels of analysis overreviewed in this volume. The level of analysis (whether intra-, inter-, network, or system structure) is then interpreted or read almost entirely through the lens afforded by the postulates. Through such an inference practice, philosophies of communication are able to appear internally consistent to fellow adherents, but more or less unintelligible not only to communication scientists but to other philosophies of communication. This, at any rate, is what they do. What they say is something else again.

HERMENEUTICS AND PHENOMENOLOGY

While not technically the same thing, both hermeneutics and phenomenology offer themselves as interpretive methods designed to expand upon the ways in which any object of inquiry comes to acquire meaning. From this deceptively simple beginning, however, come a host of differing lines of development and “doctrines” for each root method. From classical to religious to ontological to critical hermeneutics; from radical empirical to transcendental to Heideggerian phenomenology to whatever is left thereafter. (This is not the place for a whirlwind tour.) It is worth noting first that both hermeneutics and phenomenology

have fastened upon some aspects of communication as primary objects or illustrations of their philosophical quest. Second, while it may not always seem to be worth the price of understanding, both branches of inquiry have something important to say to the scientific study of communication.

A perceptive essay by Sloan (1971) traced the origin of the concept of hermeneutics from Biblical scholarship to what he had hoped would be a prominent place in the interpretation of literature. Since that groundbreaking essay scholars in a variety of disciplines have found hermeneutics to provide a particularly useful means for highlighting neglected features of communication. Specifically, hermeneutics draws our attention to the problem of meaning as two or more actors leave the subjectivity of self to encounter the "worlds" of another. Gadamer's monumental *Truth and Method* (1975) initiated this line of influence by applying the metaphor of conversation to the interpretation of literature. His correlate had more interest, however, for students of the neglected art of conversation. Among Gadamer's insights about conversation was that we are "less the leaders of it than the led," that conversation is not something that we plan, but rather something that we "fall into." What Gadamer is after, it seems, is a theory of critical interpretation that is not cut short by the use of judgment as an arbitrary instrument. In at least three respects, Gadamer's paradigm of conversation may be valuable to interested communication scientists:

- (1) His notion of "text" is communicative in ways that may help enrich our concepts of message analysis.
- (2) He allows for the possibility of an agent-centered theory of communication, without presupposing that the stages of communication are all tactically controlled.
- (3) He does not rule out any contextual layer of meaning, as a possible dimension of understanding (Gadamer, 1976).

This much having been said, Gadamer's intent and method are surely alien to the traditional social science precepts of prediction and control. Also, this formidable contemporary thinker has a disconcerting habit of presenting what theorists of social cognition regard as active attribution processes in the passive voice. So, we "are led," meaning "speaks itself through us," and so forth. Ultimately, Gadamer begins with some foundational principles of communication and is led to the destination he had in mind all along: the comforting refuge of contemplative aesthetics. For rhetoricians, the book on Gadamer is too easily closed. What he finds comforting in the real setting of interactants, others may find unsettling and unfinished. For all the difficulties of application, or perhaps because of them, the work of Gadamer remains a distinctive "counter-

statement" to the intrapersonal and public domains of communication.

Schutz (1964) brings a more practical marriage of interpretative hermeneutics and phenomenology to the world of communication practice. In a wide-ranging series of studies using classic literature, pragmatic philosophy, and social research, Schutz helped make a critical transition from the interpretive domain of the individual to the interpersonal and social aspects of knowledge. While many of Schutz's studies seem to be framed according to "social types" (the "stranger," the "well-informed citizen," the "homecomer"), these types really coalesce as recurring problems of communication. Moreover, Schutz brings to his subjects a wealth of insight that may be applicable to the current interest in patterns of relational development, friendship networks, and even political communication.

A host of contemporary scholars have reasserted the importance of hermeneutics and phenomenology to the understanding of communication practice: Apel's "The A Priori of Communication" (1972), Edie's *Speaking and Meaning* (1976), Ricoeur's studies of interpretation, textuality, time, and action (1974, 1976, 1977, 1984, 1985), and Schrag's *Communicative Praxis and the Space of Subjectivity* (1985). These works raise fascinating questions about the meaning and comprehension of communication practice. There is, of course, an understandable bias throughout much of this literature toward the subjective intrapersonal domain of communication. But since a great many constructs and variables in the scientific study of communication are derived from this same intrapersonal realm, this bias should not reduce the literature's value to communication research.

Much of the best scholarship employs its own heuristic test of phenomenological and hermeneutic sources. Hyde and Smith's "Hermeneutics and Rhetoric: A Seen But Unobserved Relationship" (1979) documents the influence of Heideggerian phenomenology upon the whole problem of creating and discovering "meaning" in communication texts. Hyde's work with the study of anxiety (1980) and recent problems in communication technology (Hyde, 1982) offer powerful heuristic examples of how philosophical method may enrich construct definition in communication science. Stewart's (1981) work in the study of dialogic communication owes much to a variety of phenomenological influences, and yet manages to be compatible with a range of practicing social sciences. The extensive research programs in constructivism have been much influenced by the various generations of Schutzian phenomenology. This research relies on a basic phenomenological shift to studying discursive constructs through empirical measurement of a presentational field. Since there is not much evidence that the field of discursive constructs is likely to exhaust itself, the longevity of constructivism research seems assured. Finally, as this chapter was being

completed, an entire issue of the *Western Journal of Speech Communication* was devoted to the topic "Communication and Consciousness" ("Communication," 1986).

This attenuated overview of hermeneutics and phenomenology points to the value of this research in setting an actor-centered agenda for substantive focus in communication, as well as offering a rich method for construct definition and refinement. As the hermeneutician would undoubtedly notice, the communication researcher, no less than the actual communicant, is constantly engaged by a multitextual phenomenon. We are immersed in intrapersonal, interpersonal, organizational, and systemic communication during much of our public and private lives. Fortunately, neither the researcher nor the practitioner is able to attend to all levels of interpretive "density" at the same time. From what my colleagues in the sciences tell me, however, we are only beginning to raise the questions of level and priority of influence. It may be among these prior issues that hermeneutics and phenomenology offer their greatest value.

SEMIOTICS AND STRUCTURALISM

Semiotics and structuralism are close enough together conceptually that they dwell constantly upon their own differences. Nonetheless, I will stress certain commonalities of theme and emphasize works that offer an introduction to this nomenclature. Semiotics presents us with one further difficulty in that some of its more sophisticated forms claim to be a sort of science. I will not evaluate this claim but merely bring the matter to the attention of those better able to consider it.

The various strands of semiotics may be traced to two very different conceptual sources. First, there is the very important work of American pragmatic philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce. Peirce's theory of signs was part of a phenomenology of perception and meaning that bears little in common with a second source of contemporary understanding, the linear information-transmission model of communication filtered through ear information-transmission model of communication filtered through the somewhat unlikely cultural lens of French linguistics. This may be why the study of semiotics ranges from the highly impressionistic critiques of Barthes (1968) to elaborate mathematical models of codes and transformations. Given such extravagant diversity, we are fortunate in having available several useful introductory works.

The philosophical origins of semiotics are overviewed by Lyne (1980). Specifically centered on the seminal influence of Peirce, Lyne's essay introduces the contemporary reader to the first systematic interpretation of signs and their attendant functions, explaining how Peirce's pragmatic philosophical assumptions inform a developing logic of signs.

Among the most accessible overviews of contemporary semiotics is Leach's *Culture and Communication* (1976). Although purportedly written for an advanced undergraduate reader, this work is neither simplistic nor removed from scholarly concerns. What is most applicable to its aim is a careful didacticism of treatment. Basic terms are defined. We are told how sign and symbol relationships are created and discovered in a rich diversity of contexts. Most important, we are instructed as to how semiotics might actually be employed as a methodology in communication research. Communication is conceptualized as a kind of meaning-event constituted by signs and their interpretations. The perspective will frustrate some mainstream research assumptions, but Leach is careful to offer a detailed list of his classic sources (e.g., Malinowski, Levi-Strauss, Jakobson).

The French tradition in semiotics requires a range of introduction entirely its own. I recommend Guiraud's *Semiology* (1975) and Barthes's *Elements of Semiology* (1968). Guiraud and Barthes examine virtually identical conceptual territory: signs, signifiers and systems, codes and their variations, denotation and connotation, and programs for related research. Both presume that semiology is a science of communication carefully delimited from outside frames of reference.

The study of semiotics takes on a more interesting range of implications when viewed alongside some recent developments in social anthropology. Chief among these is the work of Geertz and Douglas, who share with the semioticians the belief that communication is dependent upon an internally consistent framework of connectives within a common culture. Unlike the semioticians, these scholars are concerned with connections among symbols rather than signs. They believe that the commonality of a logic of connections must stop once we come to the limits of the cultural community. Because of these beliefs, they admit the possibility of time, change, and even transformation in symbol systems. Geertz (1983) presents a provocative attempt to get at the limits of discourse in systems of understanding that are, like much of our own discipline, undergoing "revision." Douglas comes closer to the semiology mold, largely because of her implicit denial of an actional dimension in the various "logics" she continues to uncover (Douglas, 1954, 1960, 1982). Put another way, she sometimes has a tendency to treat symbols as if they were signs.

The literature on semiotics and social anthropology is much larger than what is described here. But a few interim conclusions may still be appropriate. At first glance, this appears to be an area with important but untapped implications for social science research. Although the assumptions that guide semiotics seem diametrically opposed to those of, say, social cognition, there are still exciting prospective developments in relational network research and message variables generally, to

say nothing of that rapidly expanding gray area in media studies where content analysis meets "critical research." Having said this much, however, I suspect there are reasons why more has not been done. The vocabularies of semiotics and anthropology are imposing, and there is a tendency of both schools of thought to treat their research object as a matrix of relationships whose rigor is completely internalized. Although there is no semiotic "law" against experimental research, the univocal lawlike quality of its logic seems outside the probabilistic presumptions of social science experimentation.

Social anthropology is in a somewhat different situation, and could offer a powerful corrective to the tendency toward psychological reductionism in interpersonal communication. Yet, the cultural variable is a rare commodity in communication research (Katriel & Philipson, 1981, is a refreshing counterexample). To the semiotic and anthropological traditions, the *message* is a loose linguistic metaphor for the larger system of sociocultural relationships. For many social scientists of communication, however, the larger system of relationships is a loose relational metaphor for whatever the *message* is. This conceptual inversion is not to deny that some intersystemic discussion might one day prove useful.

MARXISM AND SOCIAL THEORY

A great deal of contemporary ferment and friction between "humanists" and "scientists" can be found within Marxism and social theory. We have noted the tendency of social science to bracket or suspend "outside" conditions and circumstances in both the definition and the model explanations of its object, presumably, *communication*. One reason for the confounding ambiguity of social theory to social science (in addition to its taxing Germanic jargon) is its tendency to remove the brackets from social science research—to let all "outside" factors in—at the same time as it purports to be a science. The source of this ambiguity may be traced back to the seminal text for much of social theory: the work of Marx himself.

In a difficult but powerful analysis of Marxism, Gouldner (1980) suggests that there is a fundamental ambivalence in Marxism between necessity as determinism (i.e., the material conditions that are purportedly causal for all "meaning" and action) and necessity as imperative (i.e., the climactic rhetorical sense that we *must* act). This ambivalence informs everything from the role of consciousness formation in revolutionary action to the status of cultural products in the social order. Moreover, the ambivalence is covered over by compelling but slippery concepts such as, "the totality," the "superstructure," even *ideology*. As a result of this initial problem, there is what may be called a scientific Marxism

as well as a romantic revolutionary Marxism. The scientific Marxism is preoccupied with the formation of those conditions that might bring about a "revolutionary situation." The romantic revolutionary Marxism, believing that thought, desire, and will are all formative ingredients in the transformation of society, is considerably less stable. It is uncomfortable with science generally, given to utopian exhortations ("revolution for the hell of it") and, predictably, prolonged pessimism and melancholia. Each style of thought has some basis in the original texts of Marx, and each has its contemporary adherents.

The most conspicuous example of utopian, romantic Marxism and social theory is the core scholarship behind the Frankfurt school. This is where the most trenchant and consuming criticism of "positivistic" social science may be found. Horkheimer, Adorno, Bloch, Benjamin, and Marcuse were primarily social critics, with a strikingly similar religious heritage. As I argued elsewhere (Farrell & Aune, 1979), the critical posture of the Frankfurt school was so sweeping in its compass as virtually to preclude any practical discourse. In a work that pursues a similar theme, *The Tragedy of the Enlightenment*, Connerton (1980) argues that the Frankfurt school drove its own critical reason into a double bind, rendering itself politically impotent in the process. I would stop short of the self-destructive motive Connerton appears to discover within the intellectual legacy of Frankfurt, but his is a challenging interpretation.

There are, in the midst of the critical negation of romantic Marxism, some intriguing contributions to the study of communication. The unlikely blend of Freud, Marx, and a primitive language pragmatics led to fascinating and pioneering work on communication in the family (which Frankfurt could be said to have founded as an area of research), the distortions of propaganda and "administrative" communication generally, and perhaps most pivotal, the classic *The Authoritarian Personality* (Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswick, Levinson, & Sanford, 1950). The models of communication generated by Frankfurt theory are simplistic, and even such contemporary theorists as Schiller (1969) employ a mimetic view of media domination that reduces all communication to the status of a dependent variable "product." For all these difficulties, there is a sense in which the very development of a communication science owes something to this odd assortment of alienated intellectuals. The analogy that comes to mind is the paradoxical origins of contemporary sociology in Spencer and Comte.

There is also a scientific Marxism and social theory. Here it is difficult *not* to think of Habermas, whose seminal contributions to philosophy, ethics, criticism, history, art, linguistics, and communication defy conventional disciplinary boundaries. Since the 1950s, when he was Adorno's research assistant, Habermas has been at work on a vast philosophical project designed to reinvigorate the criticism of society while maintaining a defensible foundation for the social and natural sci-

ences. Not all of Habermas's work, of course, is of equal relevance to the social science of communication. The early studies, *Knowledge and Human Interests* (1971) and *Theory and Practice* (1974), are absorbed with conventional philosophical questions of epistemology and meaning that are rooted in the touchstones of German thought. The works are nonetheless important because of their implications for social science research methods and programs, as well as for the much-discussed "linguistic turn" in critical theory. In revitalizing the most "modernist" heritage of the Frankfurt school, Habermas sought to reinterpret Marxism from a communicative perspective. By reintroducing certain Kantian postulates presupposed by the very practice of dialogic reflection (an optimal communication practice) Habermas was able to allow for an aspect of "reason" and critique that is not historically determined and that, therefore, cannot be cancelled out by the cumulative weight of events alone. For Habermas, then, the project of Modernity is not over, and the prospect for reason is always available. There is, in other words, no contradiction between the interests we have in our inquiry and the validation of what inquiry reveals through the mediation of others. The validation is fundamentally communicative.

Habermas's theory of communication incorporates insights from analytic philosophy, argumentation, speech act theory, and systems analysis, together with a healthy dose of Western pragmatism. What results is a vision of ordinary discourse that is language-centered, audience dependent, grounded in reflective reason, and admitting to a developmental logic of communicative and (later) moral competence. Each of these aspects of the theory has received considerable scholarly attention. Beyond the challenging content of the Habermas conceptualizations, there have already been important implications in the collaborative aims, methods, and topical agenda of social science research. But understandably, there has been no systematic empirical research program to incorporate all relevant aspects of the theory itself. Since a full bibliography on Habermas would exhaust these pages, I can best recommend McCarty's *The Critical Theory of Jurgen Habermas* (1978) as a systematic introduction. Habermas poses almost an inventional agenda for social scientists interested in the construct-formation phase of theory development in communication. We may sense some range of variation by mentioning two other social theory writers who take demonstrably different paths.

Wilden's *System and Structure: Essays in Communication and Exchange* (1977) defies any category system I could imagine. Best to consider this difficult work a kind of amalgam of repressed connections among social-psychological philosophies and research paradigms. Communication is modeled upon the idea of exchange, and an information-based concept of exchange at that. But Wilden (one of the founders of the

British Marxist tradition) is well aware of the political ramifications of terminologies, so each is a kind of experiment in the politics of social science as well. A Lacanian analysis yields (if that is the proper term) the phallogocentrism in most post-Freudian therapeutic literature, structuralism gives us an analogue to law in late Capitalism, and so forth. Wilden's work provides a virtual inventory of fascinating reflections on the consequences of social science models as communication behavior.

An indication of how far the British Marxist tradition has come from its eclectic beginnings can be found in Giddens, *A Contemporary Critique of Historical Materialism* (1981). This important work is less interested in the tour de force variations of radical social theory than in the implications of communication media for Marx's original formulations. The result is something unique: a theory of structuration that is *not* tied to a deterministic developmental process. Acquisition and concentration of power are not, in Giddens's view, entirely the consequence of controlled *means of production*. In late capitalism, power has come to equal the long-distance control of information, and its capacities for surveillance and discipline of those who might deviate from norms of conduct. Giddens thus can argue that both the stakes and the rules of intersystemic conflict have changed, even as entirely different developmental types of systems coexist within a parallel span of time. It is, as he puts it, a nonevolutionary view of history. One does not have to endorse the same critical theory agenda as Giddens to appreciate the implications for both social analysis and empirical research that follow from his perspective. The program of Giddens, and social theory generally, presents the kind of challenge that is implicit in the best contributions from the philosophy of communication. Social science research in communication, as our editors (Chapter 3 in this volume) note, is no more about language or words alone than it is about numbers. Rather words and numbers are only tools for capturing invariant features of a much more elusive phenomenon: relationships of meaning among persons.

NONRATIONAL PHILOSOPHY, OR DECONSTRUCTION

The very presumption that we can make true and reliable statements about such features of social life has been called into question by a fourth general category of speculative thought, nonrational philosophy, or deconstruction. Since I make no attempt to capture all the nuances of this amorphous area of research, I will discuss it cautiously and generally, using its lessons as a basis for some tentative conclusions about our overall task.

When we speak of the movement away from rationalism in the theory and criticism of texts, we are reflecting the influence of Foucault and

Derrida. Several useful interpretive works help introduce the lay reader to these imposing French philosophers, including Megill's *Prophets of Extremity* (1985) and Said's *The World, the Text, and the Critic* (1983); for an exposition and critique of Derrida alone, see also Rorty (1982). All these works concede the radical-challenge deconstruction poses to conventional, speaker-centered approaches to meaning and communication.

Although there are major and controversial differences between the two writers, what binds Derrida and Foucault together is their rejection of what might be called the "logocentric" preoccupation of Western thought generally, encapsulated by the primacy of a singular, knowing subject in the classic philosophic texts (e.g., Plato, Aristotle, Descartes, Kant, Hegel). If philosophy is "dead," if it has not satisfied its all-consuming quest for a truth-in-itself that may be known to the unified self, one possible reason is that the quest was terribly wrongheaded from the beginning. The very idea of a stable subject-object relationship to truth is without foundation. For Derrida particularly, this stable logocentrism is typified in the primacy he believes to have been accorded speech throughout the history of ideas. With speech, we assume a speaker who means what he says, a listener to whom the meaning is apparent, and so forth. Note that these very conditions of communicative truth resemble the program of Habermas. But, the net cast by nonrational philosophy catches a much larger range of nemeses than social theory and analytic philosophy. The point is to remove the subject from discourse, to replace the primacy of speech with the phenomenon of writing or the "text," and to replace the quest for truth with the interpretation (or "misreading") of meaning. When Rorty (1982) observes that literary criticism is the new philosophy, this is what he means (or at least it is one of the things his text means, to borrow a locution). Overall, the process of systematic misreading is designed to place what the author intends the text to do in opposition to what the text itself tends to assert in a kind of defiance of the author's purported ownership of meaning. This is what its practitioners refer to as deconstruction.

At this point, the agendas of Derrida and Foucault take off in sharply different directions. Foucault, being the more overtly political of the two, is interested in the way rules of discourse formation define and exclude membership in various forms of affiliation. Definitions of reason and sanity, guilt and responsibility, discipline and authority, gender and autonomy all offer unexamined margins of power and domination. Again, it is not that the language is controlled by some sinister subject so much as the language itself controls its use. For Foucault, then, deconstruction is a concerted attempt to see what has been left out of the picture. For Derrida, despite his protestations, the practice is more traditionally academic. By reinventing the meanings of our classic texts, he

would hope to restore something of the fluidity and richness in the prospects for meaning in language.

To theorists in communication, I suspect that the work of deconstruction is more interesting to read about than to actually read. Foucault (1972, 1973, 1977) and Derrida (1972, 1974, 1981) have had something of the same influence upon the humanities that Kuhn and Popper had on the progressive vision of science. These are the sort of contentious thinkers who distrust orderly formations of any kind, who enjoy watching the pieces tumble and the people scatter. Why, then, should the serious student of communication science care about their cognitive vandalism? Primarily because they have exploited a core myth about the way communication occurs and have taken their exploits to a disturbingly extreme implication.

CONCLUSION

Communication among persons seems to have much more to do with the invention of meaning than with the discovery of truth. Add to this the truism that, as communicating agents, we are never able to exert total control over what our symbols, signals, utterances, message units, and information *mean*. Nonetheless, as theorists, we claim to be able to make not only meaningful, but also *true* statements about the phenomenon of communication generally, as well as the principles best able to explain its character. Viewed from the perspective of Foucault and Derrida, then, the whole process of scientific experimentation has a great deal more in common with deconstruction than might be supposed. I say this not so much to debunk either enterprise as to place them both in perspective.

Communication science progresses to the extent that it can generate hypotheses that might be invalidated. Whether we are dealing in the realms of decision theory, mass communication, deception, interpersonal cognition, network analysis, or their numerous specialized offshoots, we search for a kind of coherence that is not insulated from the world of choice and chance, but rather can be overturned—at any moment—by their insinuation. This is a fragile truth at best. It is both enriched and challenged by the equally different approaches to communicative meaning offered by contemporary schools of thought in the humanities. Each perspective I have examined has its own category system for the overall practice of communication. Drawing upon such category systems, the studies of argument, rules approaches, myth, ritual, text, and metaphor each offer an opportunity for conceptual invention, as well as a potential angle of vision on what we ourselves *do* in communication. There would be no contradiction in thinking as a hermeneu-

tician, a semiotician, a social theorist, or even a deconstructionist, and thinking as a communication scientist. There would, of course, be extraordinary tension. But only through such extraordinary tension do the extraordinary possibilities for communication science persist.

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