The impossibility of democratic communication: a power analysis*

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RESUMO

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Palavras chaves: poder, linguagem, democracia.

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ABSTRACT

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Key words: power, language, democracy.

INTRODUÇÃO

Achievement of democratic communication is a central objective of critical scholars. In recent years, they have attempted to develop appropriate theoretical formulations and pragmatic strategies for promotion of wider participation in the creation and distribution of information. Simultaneously, outside of the academic world, representatives of Third World countries have continued to call for a multi-directional flow of information and cultural products. These efforts to democratize communication are countered by recent developments in the world economic system that encourage growing centralization of control within communication infrastructures.

In this paper we examine the possibility of achieving democratized communication given the distribution of power in societies. Our discussion reviews the work of various scholars as related to an extension of Lukes' formulation of the "three faces of power." We argue that adherents of the first face of power, the political level, assume that a pluralist power structure exists. Supporters of the second face, the political-economic level, claim that social institutions incorporate a "mobilization of bias" (Schattschneider, 1960) that systematically supports the status quo power structure. Proponents of the third face, the cultural level, contend that power operates through the internalization of cultural assumptions which incorporate the world view of the ruling class. We see these different perspectives as comprising three increasingly-deeper levels of a single power model. We argue that, ultimately, democratic of communication is impossible to achieve because of the ubiquitous and necessary presence of power in society.

We believe that the theory we are developing applies to all societies, capitalist and socialist, north and south (see Lee, 1986, for the application of this theory to an authoritarian press system, South Korea). However, because we are most familiar with the U.S. at this point, many of our examples are taken from that social context. We hope to provide additional evidence for the generalizability of our model in future papers. We are still working on a definition of "power" and would appreciate comments on our conception of it as "any manifestation of the dominance of one set of interests over others".

SECTION I. THE FIRST FACE OF POWER:
THE PLURALIST PERSPECTIVE

The first dimension of power as identified by Lukes (1975) is typically associated with pluralistic theories of society. It focuses on

> behavior in the making of decisions on issues over which there is an observable conflict of (subjective interests), seen as expressed policy preferences, revealed by political participation (p. 14).

At this political (defined in the narrow sense of involving affairs of State) level of analysis, researchers have assumed they can directly observe the relative strengths and strategies of competing interest groups and how their positions and spokespersons are presented by the press.

Positivistic research at this level examines the press as a phenomenon detachable from the surrounding social context. These behavioral studies depend upon what were once thought of as Western press assumptions, assumptions that seemed inappropriate for a socialist or authoritarian context in which the government overtly controls the press.

We believe these assumptions do apply to other than Western, capitalist contexts for two reasons. First, in this age of Deng Xiaoping and Mikhail Gorbachev, at least the Chinese and Soviet presses are growing closer to their Western counterparts. The Chinese press (even the People's Daily, the national voice of the Party) currently is perceived, at least to some extent, as a "check" on the government and, thus, theoretically, separable from that government. The Soviet press has been heroized by recent Western press praise for its presentation of opposing points of view within the government and, consequently, what the Western press lauds as a new-found "impartiality", again as if separable from the government. Indeed, the 1988 Communist Party Congress even considered whether to separate Pravda from the Party. Second, as this movement toward Western journalistic practice points out, even if the press is controlled by the state, this condition does not preclude either belief in separation of state and press or in the possibility of press objectivity. We discuss these convictions below.

1. Journalistic Assumptions

1.1. Journalism as an independent institution

Embedded in the pluralist perspective are several interrelated, largely unexamined assumptions pertaining to the relationship between social power and the press. The first, and perhaps most visible assumption, is that the press is, or could be, independent of other social, economic and political institutions.

In the West the notion of an independent press underpins belief in a pluralistic democracy comprising, competing yet relatively evenly-matched special interest groups that vie for state favors. The press alerts individuals and groups to issues, coordinates various interests and makes those interests known (Sandman, et al., 1982; DeFleur and Ball-Rokeach, 1982; Kraus and Davis, 1976). In addition, an independent press, within liberal pluralistic theory, may play a role as a special interest group itself, protecting its special status with respect to the government and economic system (Robinson and Banks, 1986).

In many socialist and authoritarian Third World countries the press is overtly controlled by the state. The media package and distribute what the state wants the people to know. However, the very existence of this control, the perceived need for control, implies acceptance of the theoretical notion that the press is separable from other social institutions and might oppose the ideas and purposes of those institutions if left to its own devices. Otherwise, overt control would be unnecessary (see Jakubowicz, 1986). The supposed "loosening" of press control by Deng and Gorbachev serves their reform purposes (see Robinson, 1981) and also demonstrates the belief of their societies in the possible separability of press and state.

1.2. Communication as a transmission process

The second assumption built into the dominant view of journalism is a

particular conception of the meaning of communication. Communication is conceived as a transportation system performing the task of getting information from one party to another (Carey, 1974; Gurevitch et al., 1982; Shannon and Weaver, 1960; Westley and Maclean, 1957). Facts, in the vocabulary of journalism, comprise discrete bits of empirically observable reality which can be recontextualized, packaged, shipped and re-experienced with only marginal losses of meaning (the Western belief) or with intended differences in meaning (the socialist, authoritarian belief).

The practice of journalism is, then, the gathering of information and its dissemination, although the criteria by which facts are gathered, packaged and distributed may be criticized. "Bias" is acknowledged as existing but it represents the degree of deviation of reported information from "objective" reality (Hackett, 1984).

1.3. Logical positivism

The third assumption, intimately related to the first two, moves us to the underlying epistemological model upon which all three assumptions are based, the philosophy of logical positivism. Reality exists out there and is perceived, as accurately or inaccurately as our senses allow.

This belief is not obviated by state-run press institutions. The former Chinese practice, for example, of excising undesirable individuals from group photos before they are published, does not deny a belief in objectivity. Rather, it implies that representations of objective reality should be altered in order to promote more socially-beneficial attitudes among the people and, consequently, to alter objective reality itself. These are the functions of the press in a revolutionary society. Third World countries display a belief in the possibility of objectivity when they call for more "accurate" and "unbiased" accounts of their affairs.

In the West objectivity of knowledge is the ideal of human understanding, never achieved, but over time more and more closely approximated in human theory and practice. Within the philosophy of logical positivism, the practice of journalism becomes, therefore, the practical application of the canons of empirical science to everyday understanding (Meyer, 1973). The possibility of objective knowledge remains unquestioned.

1.4. Language as representation

The fourth interrelated assumption provides strong support for logical positivism. Language is assumed to be an instrument of representation (Merrill and Odell, 1983). It may occasionally be cumbersome or inexact, but it is the symbolic system available to humans to re-present reality for human understanding. This philosophy of language rejects the notion that words are like a painter's oils, materials for the expressive statement of some inner reality (Bybee, Robinson, and Banks, 1988). Volosinov (1973) summarizes this theory of language, rooted in the rationalism of the 17th and 18th centuries, as insisting that language be perceived as a "stable immutable system... which the individual finds ready-made," that the laws of language be understood as existing "within a given, closed linguistic system," that linguistic connections remain unconnected to ideological values and that no relationship be perceived between a specific language and its history (p. 57).

2. Assumptions and Symptomatic Causality

Acceptance of the above assumptions leads to acceptance of a mechanistic theory of causality whereby communication technology and practices enter society as fully-developed, initially-autonomous forces that produce certain effects. For example, scarcity of electromagnetic spectrum space dictates that only a few people can use the technologies of radio and television to send messages. A simple mechanistic view of causality would say that any resulting effects of this technological phenomenon were inevitable. Most governments adopt a symptomatic, but still mechanistic, perspective and attempt to manipulate technological consequences through intervention.

Societies with state-owned and operated presses give the communication privilege to the government who, consequently, can use communication resources and technologies in keeping with the government's view of socially-beneficial service. Capitalist societies extend the favor to increasingly fewer private owners. In both the state-owned and capitalist contexts the inequitable distribution of communication resources provides those with control over media an incomparable competitive advantage over dissidents and their views. In the state-owned context the government can choose directly whether to publish dissident views or not. But in the West, if some views are left out the democratic process is perceived as thwarted and further regulation is deemed necessary in order to ameliorate bias.

3. "Bias" and Intervention

3.1. The nature of bias

In countries with government-owned and operated press systems "bias" is an inappropriate word. These governments do not reject the objectivity as a possibility but rather purposefully forego it in favor of restructuring information to meet State goals. Conversely, in the West the observable presence of what is thought of as press "bias" signals an erosion of the desired marketplace of ideas.

Various definitions of bias exist. According to Hackett (1984), Western journalists define bias as the "intrusion of subjective 'opinion' into what is purportedly a 'factual' account" (p. 252). MacLean (1981) claims that bias occurs "when a story does not distinguish clearly between its author's interpretation and the facts being reported" (p. 56). Bias is, therefore, the result of intentional action.

These conceptions of "bias" rely upon the assumptions reviewed above. The concept of bias is appropriate only within the pluralist perspective where news media are considered capable of reflecting reality in accurate and objective reports. This perspective assumes facts can be separated from opinion and journalists can relay these facts to their audience through the careful use of neutral, value-free language. Journalists' accurate re-presentation of reality is impaired only when they allow personal opinions or attitudes to bias a report.

Hackett (1984) identifies two generally accepted criteria for identifying an objective report: "non-distortion" of reality and "balance" between competing viewpoints. According to Hackett, attempts to avoid distortion are premised on a non-relativist, positivist epistemology that assumes journalist-observers can accurately depict reality. The notion of balance is based on a relativist Mannheimian epistemology where each reported viewpoint has its own limited and partial validity.

3.2. Regulation and distortion

The concept of distortion assumes that media are detached, independent observers of a separate reality that can re-present events and issues in this reality in a neutral and objective manner. Distortion occurs when journalists deviate from this accurate representation by advancing their own views in a report. Non-distortion primarily depends upon good-faith efforts of individual journalists, their compliance with established news routines and their adherence to ethical codes.

Governments can encourage ethical practice by demanding formal training and/or licensing of journalists, an unacceptable policy for Western journalists. However, in many Western countries prospective journalists are encouraged to enroll in university journalism schools and departments in order to learn standardized journalistic routines and to acquire a sense of accepted ethical behavior. Journalists who provide recognized, undesirably distorted reports can be fired in either a state-owned or capitalist context and can be further punished legally, for example, as a result of libel suits.

3.3. The regulation of balance

Balance can be required by behavioral regulation of each individual broadcast service's programming or it can be encouraged through structural establishment of multiple media outlets. Governments who favor behavioral deregulation of broadcasting support their positions by arguing that the advent of new communication technologies provides a new plethora of media outlets.

The same argument, that many outlets provide balance, has been applied traditionally to print media. At least the possibility, regardless of the reality, of multiple print outlets is assumed in the West. Supposedly, anyone who really wants to can start a newspaper because no print resource scarcity exists parallel to the spectrum scarcity affecting electronic media. This assumption, of course, ignores capital and newsprint inequities (see Jorg Becker, 1982). Because of this assumption, print media are relatively unregulated in the West (except for minimal restrictions in such areas as obscenity, privacy invasion and libel) in keeping with ideas about press freedom and separability of the press from the government.

All governments, regardless of political-economic philosophy, assume control over use of the electromagnetic spectrum. In the West this authority usually is justified in terms of spectrum scarcity which necessitates assumption by the government of at least traffic cop authority. But spectrum scarcity is to some degree an invalid rationale because governments choose to artificially constrain how much of the spectrum can be used for public service by dedicating a large part of it to government and military communication.

A more basic rationale for spectrum authority is simply that governments do not want to lose control over the electronic communication system. No government has ever turned its traffic cop function over to marketplace forces and permitted private parties to buy spectrum space just as they buy land in the West, although this certainly would be an economically efficient way to allocate spectrum space.

As part of their spectrum control, western societies have implemented various behavioral regulations designed to ameliorate electronic press deviation from the goals of a pluralist democracy. For example, the U.S. historically has required broadcasters to act as public fiduciaries, as people who hold the public airwaves in

trust for their fellow citizens. Accordingly, broadcasters cannot use the spectrum to advance their own narrow self-interest as print publishers can. Rather, broadcasters have been required to represent local interests, to seek out issues of public importance and present them in a fair and balanced manner as well as to afford equal opportunity usage of their facilities to political candidates. The Netherlands goes one step further and arranges for groups with sufficient public support to assume responsibility for limited blocks of programming on the broadcasting system.

3.4. The relative success of government regulation

If we could accept the assumptions outlined above and if behavioral regulation worked ideally, then all ideas and issues would be fairly treated within the Western press system even if not within state-owned systems. However, even though their ideas were represented, most parties still would be denied direct access to the press system. The system described above ideally allows access to ideas but not to people. Whether such a system, even if it could be implemented, would satisfy the definition of democratized communication depends upon what one means by "democratized". We construe it to mean the ability to send one's own messages in addition to being able to receive those of others.

Few critical scholars would be willing to accept the assumptions detailed above or the notion that distortion and imbalance can be eliminated by behavioral regulation. For critics like Hackett (1984), distortion cannot be eliminated by either self or government regulation because the press always structures reports of events in ways that are not intrinsic to those events. The news media do not reflect pre-given reality like a "mirror" but, rather, shape how various aspects of that reality are portrayed.

The assumption that the news media can re-present social reality suggests a clear separation between the media and reality, a belief which Hackett contests. He disputes the existence of a pre-fabricated reality that the media can accurately depict unproblematically. Rather, what is perceived as "reality" is socially constituted, and the news media – rather than comprising a separate and detached institution – actively participate in the construction of the form this reality takes. The line between media and external reality is further blurred by the observation that the press influences and affects the events and institutions it covers.

Further, the news media are unable to relay the supposedly pre-given meaning of events without distortion because of reliance on language to convey information. Language, any kind of symbol system, is inherently ideological and the description of an event using language inevitably carries the evaluative accent of the words used to characterize the event. According to Morley (1976), a language free of ideological values is impossible because "evaluations are already implicit in the concepts, the language in terms of which one observes and records" (pp. 246-247).

Balance regulation is similarly criticized. Hackett (1984) contends that the very objective of balance is flawed because it erroneously assumes presentation of a plurality of views constitutes truth and a sufficient understanding of reality. No mechanism exists for assessing the adequacy of the various views presented. Rather, all are portrayed as equally (albeit partially) valid. When a party advocating institutionalized racism is counterposed against a black rights spokesperson, both are given equal standing even though the latter view may be more widely accepted in society. Further, the structure of news reports privileges the journalist's interpreta-

tion of issues above all others'. According to Epstein (1974), reports on controversial issues adopt a "dialectical model" where

> the correspondent, after reporting the news happening, juxtaposes a contrasting viewpoint and concludes with his synthesis by suggesting that the truth lies somewhere in between (p 67).

The implied claim that the reporter's view is more valid than all other competing ideological positions remains unjustified.

Thus, the fiduciary approach of Western regulation grants journalists control over the production of information on the condition that they provide balanced and undistorted news. But this power given to a few people clearly favors the worldviews of those people and eliminates dissident voices and views as effectively, if not so openly, as a state-owned system. The media system as it exists in either context, cannot represent a pluralistic society (if such a society could exist) but, rather, necessarily represents the perspectives of those who are allowed access to the system.

This does not mean that power cannot be directly observed as working at this level or that no conflict is presented by the press. Quite oppositely, much conflict appears to be presented (Cohen, Adoni, Bantz et al., 1988) but this conflict represents points of view chosen by journalists. Both opposing points of view often serve the interests of the ruling power structure even if one or more perspectives is not in complete agreement with that of the dominant group. Presentation of two or more views that differ in minor ways focuses the debate on small gaps between presented views and masks larger differences represented by more divergent perspectives (Robinson and Banks, 1986). It is these larger differences and the issues that they raise that threaten the status quo power structure.

The U. S. Supreme Court reiterated the underlying journalistic philosophy when it commented that

> In the delicate balancing historically followed in the regulation of broadcasting Congress and the Commission could appropriately conclude that the allocation of journalistic priorities should be concentrated in the licensee rather than diffused among many. This policy gives the public some assurance that the broadcaster will be answerable if he fails to meet its legitimate needs. No such accountability attaches to the private individual, whose only qualifications for using the broadcast facility may be abundant funds and a point of view (CBS v. DNC, 1973, reprinted in Kahn, pp. 307-308).

No discernible difference exists between the structure described by the Supreme Court and a state-owned system in regard to presentation of a marketplace of ideas. With either the capitalist or state-owned and operated system, the general public has no way of discovering points of view not presented by journalists except through direct contact. That contact depends upon how close a conflict is to particular individuals (Adoni, Cohen and Mane, 1984). Conflicts that occur far away remain unknown unless aired in the press. Also, as we shall discuss below, some conflicts never emerge into open discussion at all but, rather, remain latent beneath the surface of daily life.

Thus, the public most often cannot complain that journalists (or the government in the case of state-owned and operated systems) are failing to fulfill their

public service obligation. The Supreme Court's position depends upon the belief that in a pluralist society all voices and issues are raised and that government regulation can ensure that at least most views and issues are given their due by the press. This belief obscures the absence of dissident voices and the issues they raise from the media forum.

SECTION II. THE SECOND FACE OF POWER: THE STRUCTURALIST PERSPECTIVE

The second face of power, associated with the work of Bachrach and Baratz (1962), Schattschneider (1960) and here extended to Althusser (1971) directs our attention to a more hidden dimension of support for the status quo. Bachrach and Baratz attribute the two-dimensional functioning of power to what they call the "non-decisionmaking process." Non-decisions are conflicts excluded from the public agenda, issues that do not surface in the press or other public forums even though they voiced within society and, therefore, are still observable if within personal contact range of individuals or covered by non-mainstream publications. Non-decisions result from "suppression or thwarting of a latent or manifest challenge to the values or interests of the decision-maker" (Lukes, 1974, p. 44). They provide

a means by which demands for change in the existing allocation of benefits and privileges in the community can be suffocated before they are even voiced; or kept covert; or killed before they gain access to the relevant decision-making arena; or, failing all these things, maimed or destroyed in the decision-implementing stage of the policy process" (Lukes, 1974, pp. 18-19).

Bachrach and Baratz' notion of the non-decision making process or mobilization of bias applies not just to the press but to generalized public-forum support for the dominant power structure. The press, however, is probably the most important public forum for people who are no longer part of the educational system. Bachrach and Baratz also infer that press favoritism at this level is intentional. While admitting that possibility, we believe that structural forces provide more subtle support for the status quo by making unconscious suppression of dissident voices, ideas and conflicts possible. Consequently, political-economic studies are more fruitful than purely political power research for examination of this second manifestation of power.

1. Intentionality and Structure

1.1. Motivated manipulation

Lukes (1974) criticized Bachrach and Baratz (1962) for assuming that "decisions are choices made consciously and intentionally" between alternatives and failing to see that "the bias of the system can be mobilized, recreated and reinforced in ways that are neither consciously chosen nor the intended result of particular individuals' choices" (p. 21).

Certainly specific parties, especially the government, can intentionally use structural characteristics of the press and its surrounding context to manipulate information production (Schiller, 1971; Paletz and Entman, 1981). Parenti points out that "along with owners and advertisers, political rulers exercise a substantial

influence over what becomes news" (1986, p. 228). For example, "news" leaks exploit the journalistic definition of news as "breaking" and "aberrant" and the eagerness of the Western press to outscoop the competition. The government also can stage events that focus journalistic attention on a specific facet of an issue. For example, the U.S. General Accounting Office launched an investigation of UNESCO during the year between the U.S.' announcement of intention to withdraw from that organization and the country's actual withdrawal. This investigation drew press attention from the larger issue of a fairer distribution of world wealth and resources to a sub-issue, largely invented by the U.S. government, of possible UNESCO fiscal corruption (Robinson and Banks, 1986). Event staging takes advantage of the press' "event" rather than "issue" orientation. Governments can legitimate their constructed messages on state-owned systems by using the same tactics.

But this kind of manipulation would not be possible if it were not for specific structural characteristics of extant social institutions, one of which is the press, and the way they operate within their specific social context. At this level, then, political economic and news routine studies are more appropriate than conspiratorial and other intentional manipulation research. ·

1.2. News routine and other structural studies

Standardized practices in the news media, for example, news routines that favor official government sources or practices inherent in notions of "objectivity" (Tuchman, 1978; Schudson, 1978; Gans, 1979) result in patterns of news presentation that favor certain parties and points of view. Political economic forces, for example, advertising support and increasing concentration of ownership in the West or state-ownership in some socialist and Third World countries, obviously interact with news content.

The relationship between political economic forces and news production is not always so easily perceived. For example, journalistic attempts at balance and objectivity appear to work in support of dominant political parties (Hackett, 1984). Major party representatives receive more attention and access without any conscious manipulation on the part of journalists. According to a study of British television news programs by Hall, Connell and Curti (1976), journalistic adherence to balance principles regularly reinforces how establishment political parties define issues. The news media give generous opportunities to spokesperson from the major contending parties and largely exclude representatives of more minor parties.

The same is true in the United States where "great debates" between Presidential and Vice Presidential candidates are now confined to the Republican and Democratic candidates despite the equal opportunity section of the 1934 Communication Act which demands equal access to broadcasting facilities for minor candidates. A series of Federal Communication Commission and Court decisions simply eroded away the original intention of Congress in formulating the equal opportunity rule. And, because Congress exclusively comprises Democratics and Republicans, it is not interested in challenging this erosion.

The reinterpretation of the equal opportunity section of the U.S. Communication Act, therefore, is not the result of conscious manipulation, although certainly specific parties did work to change interpretation of the section in their favor. Rather, this outcome results from the interplay of a complex set of political

economic forces within the specific American context. Similary, the heralded Soviet "new press freedom" is not the result of a conscious decision to alter how the press functions as it is the consequence of large scale political and economic structural changes proposed within the country.

In the U.S. the erosion of the Equal Opportunity section and the demise of the Fairness Doctrine (which required broadcasters to seek out controversial issues of public importance and present them in a fair and balanced manner) are part of a larger movement away from behavioral regulation to almost laissez faire economie determination of media structure. This movement depends upon the assumption that a marketplace of ideas is best achieved through a plurality of media outlets.

Public rhetoric used to defend communication deregulation is the same as that used for deregulation of other kinds of industries, for example, the airline industry. Governments argue that deregulation will promote competition, lower prices, make the market more efficient, provide incentive for industry innovation and, therefore, increase customer satisfaction. But critics argue that deregulation has totally different results. Eventually, it promotes concentration, increases unemployment, deteriorates service, and decreases customer satisfaction (Robinson, 1983a; Rentoul, 1987). Additionally, these critics object to treating communication enterprises the same way as toaster manufacturers. They argue that deregulation of consumer product industries does not have such direct effects on the functioning of democractic institutions.

The government, in defending what are really attempts to make corporations more competitive in the international marketplace, brings into question the presumed "naturalness" of the historic industry structures (see Habermas, 1973, for a theoretical discussion of delegitimation). For example, now that major telephone companies have been broken up and/or privatized, the general public has begun to question why communication technologies and services have been divided as they now exist. Citizen commission studies now perceive that many different kinds of communication services can be provided by a single transmission system (Pacific Bell, 1988).

Western privatization of formerly public communication institutions and the opening of former monopolies to competition signify greater dependency on structural forces and much less on behavioral regulation to achieve social goals in information production and dissemination. On the other hand, recent developments in press "freedom" in China and the U.S.S.R. are behavioral changes only, as of yet. Structural change, for example, separating Pravda from the Communist Party, is down another road which may never be taken. However, these behavioral changes accompany deep structural changes within the general political-economic contexts of those countries. These structural changes, in all countries, are necessitated by changes in the world economic system.

13. International considerations

At this point we wish to broaden our discussion from a narrower consideration of the press and power to exploration of all types of information and power. We do this because all information infrastructures and services are now inextricably interwined and because the significance of news problems at this structural level becomes a more generalized cultural and economic issue, especially in an international context, as exemplified by the close ties between the New World Economic Order and the New World Information Order (see Pavlic and Hamelink, 1985).

The dominant world economic system is capitalistic. Three trends are most evident in the development of advanced monopoly capitalism: increasing diversification, increasing decentralization and growing concentration. Deregulation temporarily permits more companies to enter into a specific market but the exigencies of competition eventually reduce the number of companies in that market to a few large corporations. This trend happens on national and, eventually, as the market expands, international levels. At the same time large corporations continue to decentralize and diversify their activities.

Multinational corporations (MNCs) now operate in many countries and, frequently, in several economic sectors. We define MNCs as corporations that operate in several countries. This definition differs from our definition of transnational corporations (TNCs). TNCs represent a new level of concentration because they are internationally-owned corporations. In other words, they are owned by parties in many different countries and, consequently, TNCs owe allegiance to no single nation. Proponents of the New International Economic and New World Information Orders want curbs placed on the activities of MNCs and TNCs in order to lessen exploitation of the south by the north. Third World countries want a fairer share of the world economic pie.

At the same time, more developed countries (MDCs) are engaged in a ferocious competition for larger shares of that international pie, especially, in this information age, within communication industries and services (Robinson, 1983b). In addition newly industrializing countries (NICs) are giving MDCs a new run for world profits (Robinson, 1983b). MDCs have adopted two strategies for promoting their international competitiveness. One is to enable their largest communication corporations to enter the international marketplace. Deregulation and/or privatization permit huge, but formerly national, communication corporations to compete within the international marketplace, for example, British Telecomm, American Telephone and Telegraph, Nippon Telephone and Telegraph. Another MDC tactic is to encourage both old and new communication corporations to strengthen their competitive positions in world markets. So far, these strategies have supported American world information hegemony, the direct opposite to what supporters of the NWIO want to happen.

Two examples of television privatization illustrate our point. A film programmer for the Italian public RAI-2 service commented that "in the battle with private tv for audience leadership, the feature film has become the principle cannon fodder" (Fava, quoted in Los Angeles Daily Variety, 1988, p. 36). Public-private competition quickly exhausted RAI-2's available supply of domestic films and so now around ninety percent of films shown on this public channel are American. The other public channel, RAI-1 has moved similarly to a more commercial, more American programs format. France recently privatized its public TF-1. Ensuing competition among TF-1 and its five competitors resulted in more American-type programming patterns as well as more American programs. The American contest program "Wheel of Fortune" is now one of France's most popular television shows.

European television competition is now complicated and extended by satellite and cable technologies, an example of the new inseparability of communication systems and services. Two English language satellite channels, Rupert Murdoch's Sky Channel and the London-based Super Channel offer programming for European cable services. Because of the fierce competition for advertising dollars, they are thinking of merging in order to strengthen their competitive

positions. A number of European television programmers now think that European broadcasters are beginning to function as U.S. local television stations do – producing a little local programming but primarily acting as transmission belts for centrally-produced (which in Europe will mean American) programming.

Private-public competition and new forms of transmission affect the structure of news institutions as well as their output. BBC is thinking of producing world television news programming similar to its radio BBC World Service. British publisher Robert Maxwell plans to begin an European television news service. But Ted Turner's Cable News Network is already popular in Europe. It reaches 500,000 homes in Sweden, Finland, France and the U.K. and will soon reach an additional 22,000 in the Netherlands and major hotels and newspapers in Spain. All of these structural developments depend upon relatively new combinations of media transmission technologies.

The internationalization of programming production and distribution goes well beyond European-American competition. Some companies are trying to play the American world programming game by producing programming primarily for Third World countries. The British ITV company Granada is striving to gain a world market for its productions. Maxwell's MCC International Communications Group is trying to acquire a Macao broadcast license in order to broadcast programming into the People's Republic of China. American companies are not being left behind in this competition as U.S. film companies are making deals with countries such as South Korea and Brazil for movie and video distribution.

These movements in turn are setting other forces in motion and entwining not only previously different communication structures but also what were previously thought of as completely different political-economic sectors. A case-in-point is the new "debt-for-equity" production of films that puts together foreign governments, world banking institutions and other kinds of TNCs which are not necessarily communication corporations.

TNCs make films less expensively in Third World countries by getting international banks to arrange debt-for-equity swaps. The TNCs form partnerships with local companies, use discounted local currency to pay for production and then distribute the finished product in hard-currency countries to generate profits. All kinds of companies are involved in such deals, for example,

> A classic example of a film produced with blocked funds was New World Pictures' "Transylvania 6-5000," shot in Yugoslavia and released in 1985. Sources familiar with the film's financing say that Dow Chemical invested $1,000,000 in the picture from a pool of blocked funds that Dow was unable to get out of Yugoslavia. That investment, which represented about 25% of the production budget, entitled Dow to 25% of the film's profits, to be paid in dollars outside of Yugoslavia (Jay Shapiro, quoted in Robb, 1988, p. 15 ff.).

Thus, Third World capital is used for financing production of First World culture so that First World corporations can extract capital from the Third World and profits from everywhere.

2. Structural Intervention

2.1. White's recommendations

White (1982) advocates structural regulation of communication institutions in order to democratize communication. He identifies five policy objectives that must be adopted if broader communication participation is to be achieved. First, policy-makers must confront the growing inequity of access to information in societies. White contends that this inequitable access creates a two-tier class structure of "information rich" and "information poor" through uneven distribution of the benefits and advantages of an increasingly information-oriented society.

Given the general trends of deregulation and privatization and the whole-scale abandonment of behavioral regulation, we doubt that many Western nations will make strong efforts to ameliorate this situation nationally. Given the present intensity of inter nation competition in sales of communication software, hardware and services along with increasing attempts to exploit Third World markets, we doubt that world cooperation in eliminating inequities can be achieved. The recent withdrawal of the U.S. from UNESCO is a case in point. The U.S. will rejoin this organization only when it becomes more "cooperative", in other words, soft-peddles its former emphasis on achievement of an NIEO and NWIO.

Second, White notes that the production of information in most societies is controlled by a small professional elite, a topic discussed in Section I of this paper. According to White, this disproportionate control results in a one-way flow of information from this elite to all others in society who remain passive receivers. He contends that this structure must be changed to encourage broader participation in the creation of information.

Some restructuring is already happening in this direction as the general public becomes more able to self-produce its own cultural products through development of small-scale video, audio and desktop publishing facilities. Broad distribution of these products, however, remains dependent upon large corporation-controlled facilities such as electronic mail networks and record distributors. Self-producers are disadvantaged also by competition with highly advertised products and by insufficient means for wide-scale cooperation among producers. For example, we have difficulty imagining how a grass-roots international news gathering and distribution network could be put together at this time.

Third, White argues that the policy-making bodies charged with regulating communication infrastructures are controlled by this same professional elite. The policy formation process must be modified to decentralize the decisionmaking process and solicit the views of all groups in society. The structure of media institutions is a crucial issue to be decided by society as a whole, not just a privileged elite class.

History shows that governments and industries have never permitted true public participation in communication policy formulation. We have no reason to believe this situation will change.

Fourth, White says there should be some mechanism to allow the public to hold the government accountable for the regulatory policy it implements for communication institutions. And, finally, White calls for policy to be guided by a new philosophy of communication that conceives of information as a necessary and basic human right, rather than an unessential luxury or private commodity. Accountability mechanisms do exist, for example, the electoral process, court appellate procedures, citizen advocacy groups etc. However, they have never worked in favor of the general public welfare for the same reasons that a new philosophy of communication is largely unattainable, reasons we discuss in Section III.

3. Assumptions and Structural Causality

3.1. Separability of social forces

White's recommendations for structural change are premised on separability of social forces. He implies that new communication policy can be formulated by people with sufficient power and high conviction. Althusser, perhaps the best known structural theorist, did posit three social sectors: the economic, the political which contained Repressive State Apparatuses (RSA's) and the ideological which comprised Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs). On first glance these categories seem to allow for autonomous change in a single sector. However, Althusser believed that RSAs and ISAs support the economic sector, a theoretical arrangement that harks back to the classical base-superstructure dichotomy. Each ISA has its own ideological structure which is unique to that ISA (educational and religious institutions, the media, etc.) but in the final analysis all ISAs support the economic sphere. Althusser's theory does not permit unilateral changes in ISA's that then produce change in the economic sector.

Bachrach and Baratz, ten years earlier, saw no need for sectors at all when they paraphrased the work of Schattschneider. They argued that it is the "set of dominant values, beliefs, rituals and institutional procedures ... that operates systematically and consistently to the benefit of certain persons and groups at the expense of others" (1962, p. 43). This statement implies that social forces are not separable into categories but that they all work together as a "set" and, thus, their interactions constitute the dynamic social context.

Our own position on this issue of separability is that we can speak about institutions as separate organizations and as separate forces. We cannot regard them as separate forces working apart from other forces and producing separate effects. All forces necessarily interact all of the time and it is the sum total of these interactions that produces social conditions and social change. The dominant ideology, because of its pervasiveness, exerts greater force than subordinate ideologies but it is their interactions with each other and other social forces that produce hegemony.

Structural changes, then, do not happen because a few good men with the "right" ideology rush in like the U.S. Marines to correct what they perceive as social ills. The "Marines-to-the-rescue" view assumes that social forces operate independently of each other, that, for example, Gorbachev and Deng are responsible for structural changes in their countries just as 1960s American dissidents believed Johnson was responsible for the Vietnamese War. Individuals such as Gorbachev, Deng and Johnson do, by virtue of their offices, constitute social forces but they do not change social situations single-handedly like political versions of John Wayne characters. They acquire power and assert that power only in concert with other interacting forces and thus are simultaneously instigators and products of structural changes already occurring within the surrounding social context.

3.2. Intentionality

White also calls for intentional change, including ideological change. Yet there is no reason to suppose that the international or national power hierarchies will change their ideology in the direction posed by him. Structural intervention

leaves open the question of where the idea for intervention comes from and how support for change is generated. Our explanation of structural change above lies in how forces interact to produce a certain ideology and how that ideology then feeds back into systems as a force of its own. The questions of how, given existing conditions, an alternative ideology can arise and acquire support suggests a criticism Lukes (1974) applied to the work of Bachrach and Baratz (1962).

3.3. Latent conflicts and ideology as a social force

Lukes, noting that certain conflicts never were voiced in society, criticized Bachrach and Baratz for confining themselves to an explanation of the ways "in which decisions are prevented from being taken on potential issues over which there is observable conflict" (1974), p. 20). Lukes saw the need to examine how latent conflicts were kept from surfacing:

A may exercise power over B by getting him to do what he does not want to do, but he also exercises power over him by influencing, shaping or determining his very wants. Indeed, is it not the supreme exercise of power to get another or others to have the desires you want them to have – that is, to secure their compliance by controlling their thoughts and desires? (1974, p. 23)

Lukes here agrees with Althusser in giving a place to ideology in the working of power within society. But his conception of how this takes place implies intentional action by those in power. Our own view of the role of ideology does not necessitate intentionality, although it may be present as one force, but, rather, understands power to be working through the sum total of the interactions among forces within a social field. Gorbachev and Deng probably would never have arrived at their present ideas if the interplay of social forces had not generated fertile conditions for the germination of such thoughts. Many of the most serious issues of class society lie beneath the surface of daily existence and fail to emerge as observable conflicts because people generally remain unconscious of them. A brief summary of how we see the rise of women's "liberation" as an issue illustrates our point of view.

Most MDC women in the 1950s did not object to their designated roles as wives and mothers because they assumed the naturalness of their condition; alternatives remained unrecognized by them. But the conditions and attitudes that kept most women at home in the 1930s had received a challenge during World War II when many women assumed men's jobs. Memories of those experiences lived on in the minds of women who had returned home. Furthermore, a shortage of labor in war-devastated countries and intensifying international competition after the industrial restoration of those countries led employers to see women as both a plentiful and cheap supply of labor. As the industrial age gave way to the information age, physical strength became less important and the skills traditionally associated with women more so. Alternative views of women's roles, at first held by only a few women whose cultural assumptions had been challenged by these changing conditions, became more widespread and gained strength as an ideological force in society. The interaction of all these forces continued to change both the ideology and conditions affecting women. Once a sufficient number of women perceived that role alternatives existed, they began to question the conditions of their own home-bound life and women's "liberation" became an issue. Before

widespread consciousness of alternatives, this issue remained latent for most people, men and women, in society.

Hall attempted to explain how such changes occur in paraphrasing Gramsci's concept of ideological hegemony as the result of the dominant classes' effort, and to a degree success, in "framing all competing definitions of reality within their range, bringing all alternatives within their horizon of thought. The dominant classes "set the limits – mental and structural – within which subordinate classes 'live' and make sense of their subordination in such a way as to sustain the dominance of those ruling over them" (1979, p. 333). In the case of the women above as in Foucault's (1980) example of French workers earlier in the century, these subordinated groups "moralized" themselves into new working forces. No one in power told the French workers they had to become an industrial labor force and no one demanded that women become an information age labor pool.

3.4. Structural causality

In this section we have examined how power works through social structures. At the second level of analysis, political economic studies describe how the constantly changing interaction of social forces serves the interests of the status quo power hierarchy. Because of the increasing internationalization of political economic structures, second level studies now consider the global rather than just national contexts. Recognition of the consequences of social force interactions for information production and dissemination is premised on the theoretical model of structural causality.

Slack (1983) contends that structural causality is not a mechanistic model because it rejects the characterization of cause and effect as autonomous and separate forces. Social forces cannot be depicted solely as "cause" or "effect". Rather, the structural model assumes an interactive, reciprocal form of causality where constellations of social forces exercise limited effectivity while simultaneously being influenced by other forces. According to Slack, this model conceives of society as a social whole composed of three semi-autonomous dimensions – the ideological, political and economic – each of which has reciprocal relationships with the others, a model based upon that of Althusser (1971). We believe this is a limited model because this categorization of forces into separate sectors still implies a degree of separability as well as intentionality and is an inadequate explanation of the process of social change.

SECTION III: THE THIRD FACE OF POWER:
OUR CULTURALIST PERSPECTIVE

We call this level of analysis "our" cultural perspective because it differs from what some other critical scholars regard as culturalism in that it does not dispute the workings of power described in the two previous sections but, rather, becomes another part of the single model we are presenting. We regard this third face of power as a deeper manifestation of power's presence and operation within society. We do not believe it obviates power working through observable conflicts among political interest groups nor power working through social structures. The third face is simply that–another, deeper manifestation of power within society.

We also disagree with Luke's conception of this third face because of his implication of intentionality, a subject we address further below.

1. Foundations of the Cultural Dimension

1.1. The hegemonic process

In 1980 Gitlin summarized the differences between Gramsci's and Williams' definitions of hegemony as follows:

> In the version of Marxist theory inaugurated by Antonio Gramsci (1971), hegemony is the name given to a ruling class' domination through ideology, through the shaping of popular consent. More recently, Raymond Williams (1973, 1977) has transcended the classical Marxist base superstructure dichotomy (in which the "material base" of "forces" and relations of production" "gives rise" to the ideological "superstructure"). Williams has proposed a notion of hegemony as "not only the articulate upper level of 'ideology,' but "a whole body of practices and expectations" which "constitutes a sense of reality for most people in the society" (pp. 9-10).

Gramsci (1971) developed his concept of hegemony in order to explain why the ruling class in advanced capitalist countries is able to gain the active consent of subordinate groups to participate in a system that clearly does not function in their best interests. According to Gramsci, hegemony exists when dominated groups accept the ideological worldview articulated by dominant groups and, thus, collude in their own domination. Williams reinterpreted Gramsci's notion of hegemony as

> an order in which a certain way of life and thought is dominant, in which one concept of reality is diffused throughout society in all of its institutional and private manifestations, informing with its spirit all taste, morality, customs, religious and political principles, and all social relations, particularly in their intellectual and moral connotations (quoted in Miliband, 1973, p. 162).

Gramsci argued that capitalist societies generally have maintained order and preserved the status quo power structure by successfully colonizing working class consciousness with a "conception of the world" premised on capitalist ideology. For Gramsci, the capitalist state's domination of subordinate classes generally is not accomplished through the use of force (military or police action) or the operation of productive forces (creation of alienated labor), but instead through its successful ability to convey a hegemonic worldview widely accepted throughout society. Dominated classes actively consent to capitalism because the ruling class' conception of reality that they have internalized leads them to perceive their subordinate position and the system as a whole as just and natural. (We have not addressed how Gramsci's theory might apply to a socialist context as of yet.)

1.2. Capillary and sovereign power

We have put together the ideas of Gramsci and Williams with those of

Foucault in order to argue that the daily existence of people within a certain social structure produces "a system of shared meanings and assumptions" (Robinson and Banks, 1988). This common sense in turn supports continuance of the status quo way of life by coloring perception of how it is to live in that social context and the meaning of social interactions (Robinson, 1986).

All daily interactions of people with each other and with social phenomena are power interactions in the sense that they support or do not support the status quo ideology by the interpretation given them by participants. These daily interactions constitute "capillary power" in Foucault's terminology. "Capillary power" aggregates to support "sovereign power" through the shared meanings people derive for their own existence and various social phenomena within society. This shared meaning, in other words, common sense, acts as the social glue that holds society together. This manifestation of power, thus, is both positive and negative. People must share meanings in order to live within a specific society. If they do not, if their ideas of how things work and who they are too divergent, then the society will be destabilized. On the other hand if no one in society ever questions the cultural assumptions that lie behind their common sense, then the society will stagnate. The ruling power structure and inevitably inequitable social structures will remain unchallenged.

The press and other cultural institutions are central forces in the reinforcement of hegemonic ideology. We have not thought out the relevance of our ideas to socialist contexts but we expect that the process is the same despite differences in observable structures. We do have some evidence for saying that the process is the same between highly disparate social contexts. Lee's 1987 study of the South Korean press indicates that the process is the same in that capitalistic, but more politically oriented context as it is in the U.S. more economically oriented context. Observable differences seem to lie more in degree of intentionality than in degree of support the two press systems offer to the dominant power structure within each country.

1.3. Intentionality

Communicators may convey ideologically premised messages without consciously trying to manipulate receivers. As we have seen in Section II, journalists do not even need to be aware of the ideological nature of their reports. For example, they may provide privileged status to views expressed by the dominant power structure simply by conforming to the structures of news routines and without consciously manipulating coverage of an event of issues. But this unconscious hegemonic support goes further. Morley (1976) asserts that news media primarily reinforce elements of the dominant ideology through the presentation of

the basic conceptual and ideological framework through which events are presented and as a result of which they come to be given one dominant/primary meaning rather than another (p. 246).

Hackett (1984) argues that this framing of events

may well be the result of the unconscious absorption of assumptions about the social world in which the news must be embedded to be intelligible to its inended audience (p. 263).

Journalists live within the same social context and are subject to the same cultural assumptions, the same common sense as their audiences.

Habermas (1971) allows for conscious manipulation of subordinates through their cultural assumptions by those in power who somehow have escaped those cultural restraints, who have become aware of alternatives. We certainly do not rule out the possibility that journalists sometimes attempt to or collaborate in attempts to manipulate public opinion. Certainly, high government officials have greater access to information than is permitted to other members of society and, thus, frequently may be able to manipulate the thoughts and actions of those they govern. However, we believe that most often journalists and members of the government, because they live within the same social context, make many of the same cultural assumptions as do the less privileged members of that society.

Hall (1982) supports our conviction by noting that communicators must rely on the dominant linguistic and semantic structures of a culture to convey any kinds of messages. The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis contends that cultures organize their understanding of reality in quite different ways and these disparate worldviews are incorporated within the linguistic structures of those cultures. Reviewing a structuralist (in the sense of a closed language system where the speaker only uses various permutations of that system; the speaker has no creative power) conception of language and ideology, Hall comments that within this framework "particular discursive formulations" such as a television news report or newspaper article would

> be ideological, not because of the manifest bias or distortions of their surface contents, but because they were generated out of, or were transformations based on, a limited ideological matrix or set (p. 72).

Shared meaning, common sense, then, depends to a great extent on the use of language. We turn now to further consideration of how power works through language.

2. Language and Power

The traditional view of the practice of journalism is underpinned by an objectivist philosophy of language. Reality exists out there and can be re-presented through careful choice of words. Consequently, this language philosophy obscures the role of journalistic practice in the systematic, structural exercise of power as explicated in Section II. It permits no consideration of the cultural dimension of power because it fails to acknowledge language as a vehicle through which cultural assumptions are reinforced. A review of Volosinov's critique of the objectivist philosophy of language clarifies our point. We note, at this point, that by "language" we mean any symbol system (audio, visual, linguistic, etc.) in the following discussion. Some of the theorists reviewed below use "language" in a more narrow sense to mean linguistic systems only. However, we believe their thoughts can be extended to our broader definition without harming their basic concepts.

2.1. Volosinov's theory of language

Volosinov's (1973) theory of language criticized the objectivist position for viewing "language as a stable system of normatively identical forms". For

Volosinov this notion "is merely a scientific abstraction" and "not adequate to the concrete reality of language" (1973, p. 98). He argues that conception of language as a stable system applies "scientific" ideology to language by insisting that immutable symbols represent a mutually agreed upon reality. The assumption of immutability does not allow for language change.

For Volosinov "language is a continous generative process implemented in the social-interaction of speakers" (1973, p. 98). He acknowledges that individuals contribute both to the creation and maintenance of the always social meaning of language. Language is dialogic, a necessarily social activity. No matter what symbol system is being used, film, music, words, the communication process is social in nature. As Vgotsky argued (1986), even thinking is a social activity because it involves social meaning creation. Adding our notions derived from Foucault to this proposition, we arrive at the position where every social interaction is a power interaction depending upon whether it is interpreted through dominant modes of conceptualization or dissident ones. Modes of conceptualization depend upon language. The ubiquitous use of language to interpret reality inevitably influences perception of that reality.

In two senses, then, the act of language becomes a site for power struggle. First, deviance from expected symbolic conventions provides alternative patterns of conceptualization (Robinson, 1986). Second, to the extent that social forces produce differing opportunities for dialogue, some groups of communicators are more privileged than others and more able, through individual and social language activities, to define reality than less privileged groups.

The social nature of language is evident in another Volosinov proposition:

> The laws of the generative process of language are not at all the laws of individual psychology, but neither can they be divorced from the activity of speakers. The laws of language are sociological laws.

Individuals can creatively use language but must do so always within the social boundaries that give language its interactive meaning. In this sense "free speech" is literally an impossibility as it would demand that language not be inherently dialogic. Symbol systems cannot be other than socially and historically constituted despite opportunity for individual language creativity. Dominant groups, who are given greater dialogue opportunities, contribute more heavily to the historical evolution of language than subordinate groups. Subordinate groups have less opportunity, and less power, both to construct and reconstruct symbol systems. Language is as much an expression of social power as individual essence. Indeed, the individual essence is itself largely a product of society.

3. Intervention

3.1. Volosinov's strategy

Volosinov not only provides a theory of language, but also seems to suggest a strategy to achieve more democratic communication. Speakers engaged in social dialogue can attempt to deconstruct the cultural assumptions embedded within certain formulations of language and create new meanings that better serve their interests. In fact, this is a task embraced by critical theorists who realize that it is

unquestioned and uncriticized cultural assumptions that preempt possibilities for more equitable resource allocation, including communication opportunities.

Democratized speech is different from free speech, which is precluded by Volosinov's theory. Democratized speech is theoretically possible through equal extension of dialogic opportunities to everyone. At first glance Volosinov's solution seems not far from that proposed by Gramsci.

3.2. Gramsci's strategy

According to Gramsci, dominated groups within advanced capitalist societies have been unable to articulate their own views and ideas because they have internalized the ideological worldview of the ruling class. Their interpretation of reality is premised on cultural assumptions that serve to preserve the extant power structure. However, Gramsci outlines a strategy for subordinate classes to overcome the hegemony. Construction of a counter-hegemony can challenge the cultural assumptions of the ruling class. Gramsci contends that disenfranchised groups must establish their own organizations and institutions where they can articulate an alternative vision of reality.

Once these dominated groups have created the counter-hegemony, they must engage the ruling class in a "war of position" where the cultural assumptions of the dominant hegemony are directly challenged and problematized. Gramsci's proposal thus seems to resemble that of Volosinov because it emphasizes the overcoming of cultural assumptions through voicing of alternative concepts. But Volosinov advocates an open system where alternative concepts continue to be voiced whereas Gramsci appears to support substituting one set of cultural assumptions for another. Even if involves adopting cultural assumptions premised on an ideology that better suits the interests of a disenfranchised class, this cannot be considered democratized communication because it promotes uncritical acceptance of a certain, if different, interpretation of reality. Habermas' offers a third strategy for democratizing communication.

3.3. Habermas' solution

Habermas (1973, 1979) seeks to provide people with the means to free themselves from unnecessary forms of domination. He argues that oppressed groups can achieve such emancipation by discarding distorted forms of communication which legitimize structures of domination. His theory of communicative competence examines how distorted communication can be undermined through analysis of the speech act. The ideal speech situation demands that communication takes place according to canons of rational thought and critical reasoning, untainted by systems of distorted communication based upon tradition or dogma.

Habermas contends that in modem societies, structures of domination are maintained primarily through dissemination of distorted communication by major institutions, a process which legitimizes an inequitable social order. The content and expressive structure of distorted communication are internalized by oppressed groups who accept their inferior status within society as just and natural. Habermas' concept of distorted communication, thus, seems parallel to what we have called ideology and the process by which it infiltrates society appears akin to hegemony.

Critical theorists disagree over the concept of distorted communication. Classical Marxists consider the media as constantly guilty of distorting material reality and cultivating "false consciousness", publishing lies about reality. These theorists argue that emancipation comes when institutions such as the media are prevented from presenting distorted, false views of reality. Others argue that only distorted views of reality are possible. No true view of reality exists, only different views (see Sholle, 1988).

Habermas implies that undistorted communication is possible. We have posited that all communication, all social interactions must manifest the workings of power through support or non-support for the status quo. The work of Volosinov also is inconsistent with this notion of Habermas. For Volosinov, there can be no value-free communication and thus, it is, by definition, distorted.

Habermas escapes this logical trap by defining "undistorted" communication, "truth" in a relativist manner. "Truth" is synonymous with the consensus adopted by a group of many observers within discourse. For the consensus to be genuine, the discourse must be totally unconstrained, limited by nothing other than provisions for orderly procedure and rational argumentation. In this sense, then, Habermas' strategy resembles that of Volosinov.

Habermas concedes that his is an idealized conception of interaction rarely achieved in society. He posits it only as a standard against which all inadequacies of distorted communication can be measured, evaluated and hopefully minimized in future discourses. He then progresses to a detailed description of how such discourses should be conducted, a topic which we, in the interests of space, will not raise here.

The freedom for speakers to enter discourse and move through the various levels of reflection is a major prerequisite for Habermas' conception of the ideal speech situation to be in effect. The other primary condition is the "general symmetry requirement" (1973, 1979). There are three components to this requirement which must be satisfied if true discourse is to take place: all participants must have the same opportunities to speak, express their attitudes, feelings or intentions and the same ability to utter commands. What Habermas has ended up doing then is to provide a detailed description of how to produce the democratic speech suggested by Volosinov's theory of language.

Habermas also has undertaken a historical analysis of instances where relatively unconstrained discourse could take place. These instances, or areas, are defined by Habermas as "public spheres", realms where people can gather freely to discuss issues of community importance. Within early capitalist society newspapers, journals and clubs grew into central forums for the public sphere and became primary sites for the reflection and formation of public opinion.

However, Habermas believes the democratic nature of the public sphere has always been overemphasized. Even at the height of its development during liberal capitalism, participation was limited to a very narrow segment of the population (white male property owners, for example). Habermas argues that as capitalism has matured, the public sphere has been greatly diminished. No longer does a prominent forum exist for a substantial proportion of the citizenry to engage in rational discussion of public affairs.

Habermas attributes the demise of the public sphere to a number of related developments within advanced capitalism, including: increasing state intervention into civil society which compromises the ability of the latter to critique the former;

commercialization of the media which shifts the objective of media producers from political discourse to profits; and the saturation of technocratic consciousness throughout society which encourages people to defer to the policy of the state as administered by technocratic experts.

Habermas argues that for people to achieve emancipation from unnecessary domination, a society must have a revitalized, enlarged public sphere. With such a realm for unconstrained discourse, political decisions can be made with the participation and consent of the citizenry. But, as we have seen in Section I, contemporary pluralist notions of communication endorse top to bottom communication by a cadre of professional journalists who are fettered by their own social assumptions. Further, as we have seen in Section II, journalists work in increasingly concentrated institutions that are extending their spheres of activity all over the world and into all kinds of enterprise. National public policies are encouraging these trends because of the intensifying international competitive situation and the resultant fear that national economies will be adversely affected. The only public sphere that seems to be increasing opportunities for horizontal (people to people, rather than the elite to people) communication is that of self-production via small-scale audio, video and desktop publishing technologies.

4. Expressive Causality

Volosinov, Gramsci and Habermas each provide their own unique analysis of obstacles preventing the emergence of democratic communication and prescribe different strategies for removing those barriers, an inconsistent approach under Slack's conception of expressive causality. Slack (1983) criticizes this perspective as holding no opportunity for social change. Slack insists that the expressive philosophy depends upon the belief that all phenomena are simply expressions of an underlying essence. Thus, everyone within the society is nothing but a manifestation of this essence and cannot acknowledge alternative conceptions of their existence, a position with which expressive theorists disagree.

We agree that societies depend upon some organizing principle that manifests itself in all social realms. Social forces, such as communication structures, have no autonomy or effectivity apart from this essence. Thus, behavioral regulation or structural modification of existing communication infrastructures are ineffective strategies for social change because they do nothing to modify the underlying essence. However, this does not mean that the society is stagnant or that individuals are not part of the social forces interacting to produce that essence.

Slack (1983) notes that expressive theorists have identified different "essences" of society. Mumford argued that the underlying social principle was a mechanistic conception of life, while Lukacs contended it was the commodity structure of capitalism. Most critical theorists reviewed in this paper appear to associate the essence with cultural assumptions that support the worldview of the ruling class. The internalization of these assumptions by dominant and subordinate classes undermines the possibility for democratic communication.

For us and, we think, Foucault, the essence is more abstract and is the same for any society, anywhere and at any time. It is power. Cultural assumptions, common sense are only one more manifestation of this essence which operates in the most minute details and largest social structures of life. In fact, the ubiquitous presence of power is the ultimate destroyer of both the ideal of the Marxist state-

less, classless society and the dream of democratized communication. As long as two people exist in proximity anywhere on earth, a social structure also will exist that necessitates social interactions, interactions that always will either support or not support the prevailing power structure. In terms of power possession, equality, at any moment in time, is impossible, although power may shift from one party to another at a later point in time.

5. The Role of the Critical Scholar

We come then to the role of the critical scholar in respect to our power model. We see this role as the continual unearthing of the way power works in specific social contexts on all three levels. A complete analysis of, for example, the operation of a press system in respect to public service, would include examination of parties represented and provided access, identification of structural forces that supported the dominant power structure, and most importantly, exposure of the cultural assumptions that reinforced the inevitably inequitable system (see Robinson and Banks, 1988).

Power is always present everywhere in any social context. It cannot be eliminated because of its ubiquity and its essentialness for social organization. Without power, we face anarchy. Manifestations of power will always produce inequitable social conditions. The task of the critical scholar is to expose the workings of power in a constant effort to alleviate as much inequity as possible, a sort of intellectual terrorism, a constant undermining of the status quo power structure.

Given the internationalization of not only the world economy but the world society at this point in time, analyses need to consider the international context in addition to local, regional and national circumstances. A crucial question now presented to us is whether internationalization is producing a homogeneous culture or providing greater opportunities for contact with alternative perspectives and, thus, exposure of our diverse cultural assumptions (Robinson, 1986). Another current challenge for critical scholars is to investigate the possibilities alternative communication systems promise for greater democratization of communication even in the face of in-folding communication infrastructures. Critical scholars can offer suggestions for how self production systems can be strengthened and opportunities for horizontal communication widened.

We think such efforts are eminently worthwhile even though they are limited in what they can achieve. In our view intellectuals can continually trod the path to democratized communication but can never enter the heaven of democratic discourse.

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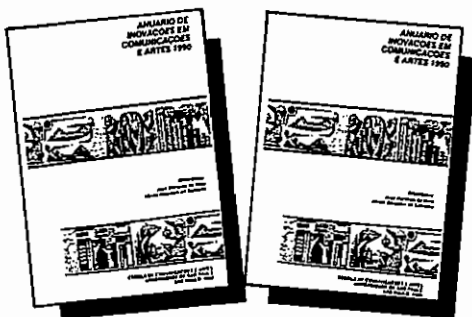
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