

from an Griffin's A First  
Look at Communication  
Theory, 4th Ed, 2000, Mc Graw  
 Hill.

## Mapping the Territory

### (Seven Traditions in the Field of Communication Theory)

In their hit single, "The Things We Do For Love," the British rock group 10cc declares, "Communication is the problem to the answer."<sup>1</sup> Since the lyrics that follow don't explain this cryptic statement, listeners are free to interpret *communication* in different ways. *First Look* readers face the same ambiguity. Up to this point I have resisted defining the term *communication*, and I've yet to stake out the boundaries that mark the field of communication theory. That's because scholars hold widely divergent views as to what communication is, and it's hard to map the territory when surveyors don't agree on the size, shape, or exact location of the field. In that sense, there's little discipline in our discipline.

University of Colorado communication professor Robert Craig agrees that the terrain is confusing if we insist on looking for some kind of grand theoretical overview that brings all communication study into focus—a top-down, satellite picture of the communication landscape. Craig suggests, however, that communication theory is a coherent field when we understand communication as a practical discipline.<sup>2</sup> He's convinced we should begin our search for different types of theory on the ground where real people grapple with everyday problems and practices of communication. Craig explains that "all communication theories are relevant to a common practical lifeworld in which *communication* is already a richly meaningful term."<sup>3</sup> From this bottom-up perspective, communication theory is not the language of a land with no inhabitants. Rather it is the systematic and thoughtful response of communication scholars to questions posed as humans interact with each other—the best thinking within a practical discipline.

Craig thinks it's reasonable to talk about a *field of communication theory* if we take a collective look at the actual approaches that researchers have used to study communication problems and practices. He identifies seven established traditions of communication theory that include most, if not all, of what theorists have done. These already established traditions offer "distinct, alternative vocabularies" that describe different "ways of conceptualizing communication problems and practices."<sup>4</sup> This means that scholars within a given tradition talk comfortably with each other, but often take potshots at those who work in other

camps. As Craig suggests, we shouldn't try to smooth over these between-group battles. Theorists argue because they have something important to argue about.

In the rest of the chapter I'll outline the seven traditions that Craig describes. Taken together, they provide a helpful survey of the field of communication theory. The classification will also help you understand why some theories share common ground, while others are effectively fenced off from each other by conflicting goals and assumptions. As I introduce each tradition, I'll highlight how its advocates tend to define communication, suggest a practical communication problem that this kind of theory addresses, and describe an early theorist or school of theorists who helped set the agenda for those who followed.<sup>5</sup>

## THE SOCIO-PSYCHOLOGICAL TRADITION

### Communication as Interpersonal Influence

The socio-psychological tradition epitomizes the scientific or objective perspective described in Chapter 2. Scholars in this tradition believe there are communication truths that can be discovered by careful, systematic observation. They look for cause-and-effect relationships that will predict when a communication behavior will succeed, and when it will fail. When they find such causal links, they are well on the way to answering the ever-present question of persuasion practitioners: "What can I do to get them to change?"

When researchers search for universal laws of communication, they try to focus on what *is* without being biased by their personal view of what *ought to be*. As empiricists, they heed the warning of the skeptical newspaper editor: "You think your mother loves you? Check it out—at least two sources." For communication theorists in the socio-psychological tradition, checking it out usually means designing and running a series of controlled experiments.

Psychologist Carl Hovland was one of the "founding fathers" of experimental research on the effects of communication.<sup>6</sup> Hovland headed up a group of thirty researchers at Yale University who sought to lay a "groundwork of empirical propositions concerning the relationships between communication stimuli, audience predisposition, and opinion change," and to provide "an initial framework for subsequent theory building."<sup>7</sup>

Working within a framework of "*who says what to whom and with what effect*," the Yale Attitude Studies explored three separate causes of persuasive variation:

*Who*—source of the message (expertise, trustworthiness)

*What*—content of the message (fear appeals, order of arguments)

*Whom*—audience characteristics (personality, susceptibility to influence)

The main *effect* they measured was opinion change as revealed by attitude scales given before and after the message. Although the Yale researchers plowed new ground in many areas, their work on source credibility attracted the most interest.

Hovland and his colleagues discovered that a message from a high-credibility source produced large shifts of opinion compared to the same message coming from a low-credibility source. For example, an article on cures for the common cold carried more weight when it was attributed to a doctor writing in *The New England Journal of Medicine* than to a staff reporter from *Life* magazine. Once this overall effect was firmly established, they began to test specific variables one by one.

The Yale researchers found two types of credibility—*expertise* and *character*. Experts were those who seemed to know what they were talking about; audiences judged character on the basis of perceived sincerity. Expertness turned out to be more important than character in boosting opinion change, but the persuasive effects didn't last. Within a few weeks the difference between high and low credible sources disappeared. Hovland and his colleagues called this the " sleeper effect " and ran further experiments to figure out why it happened and ways to overcome it. They discovered that, over time, people forget where they heard or read about an idea, and that by reestablishing a link between the source and the message, credibility would still make a significant difference. Beyond the specific findings, the Yale Attitude Studies are significant to the socio-psychological tradition of communication theory because the researchers didn't accept any claim on faith. They systematically checked it out.

## THE CYBERNETIC TRADITION

### Communication as Information Processing

MIT scientist Norbert Wiener coined the word *cybernetics* to describe the field of artificial intelligence.<sup>3</sup> The term is a transliteration of the Greek word for "steersman" or "governor," and pictures the way feedback makes information processing possible in our heads and on our laptop computers. During World War II, Wiener developed an antiaircraft firing system that adjusted future trajectory by taking into account the results of past performance. His concept of feedback anchored the cybernetic tradition that regards communication as the link connecting the separate parts of any system, such as a computer system, a family system, an organizational system, or a media system.

The idea of communication as information processing was firmly established by Claude Shannon, a Bell Telephone Company research scientist who developed a mathematical theory of signal transmission. His goal was to get maximum line capacity with minimum distortion. Shannon showed little interest in the meaning of a message or its effect on the listener. His theory merely aimed at solving the technical problems of high-fidelity transfer of sound.

Since Bell Laboratories paid the bill for Shannon's research, it seems only fair to use a telephone call you might make to explain his model shown in Figure 3.1. Shannon would see you as the information source. You speak your message into the telephone mouthpiece, which transmits a signal through the telephone-wire channel. The received signal picks up static noise along the way, and this altered signal is reconverted to sound by the receiver in the earpiece

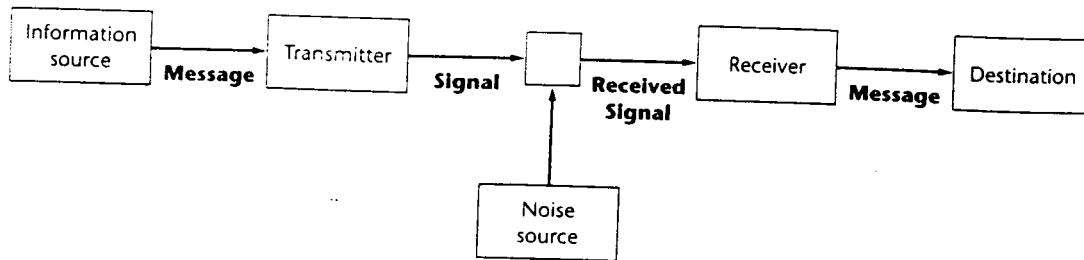


FIGURE 3.1 Shannon and Weaver's Model of Communication

(Adapted from Shannon and Weaver, *The Mathematical Theory of Communication*.)

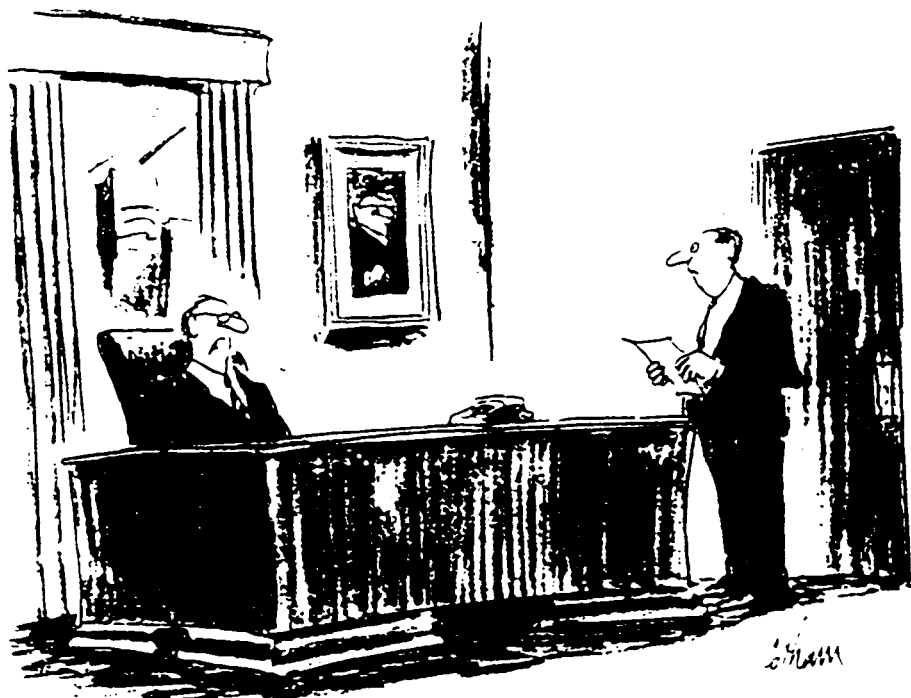
at the destination. Information loss occurs every step of the way so that the message received differs from the one you sent. The ultimate aim of information theory is to maximize the amount of information the system can carry.

Most of us are comfortable with the notion that information is simply "stuff that matters or anything that makes a difference."<sup>9</sup> For Shannon, however, *information* refers to the reduction of uncertainty. The amount of information a message contains is measured by how much it combats chaos. If you phone home and tell your family that you've just accepted a public relations internship in Chicago for the summer, you've conveyed lots of information because your message reduces a great amount of your folks' uncertainty about your immediate future. The less predictable the message, the more information it carries. There are many fine things that can be said over a communication channel that don't qualify as information. Perhaps your phone call is merely an "I just called to say I love you" reminder. If the person on the other end has no doubt of your love, the words are warm ritual rather than information. When the destination party already knows what's coming, information is zero.

Noise is the enemy of information because it cuts into the information-carrying capacity of the channel between the transmitter and receiver. Shannon describes the relationship with a simple equation:<sup>10</sup>

$$\text{Channel Capacity} = \text{Information} + \text{Noise}$$

Every channel has an upper limit on the information it can carry. Even if you resort to a fast-talking monologue, a three-minute telephone call restricts you to using a maximum of 600 words. But noise on the line, surrounding distractions, and static in the mind of your listener all suggest that you should devote a portion of the channel capacity to repeating key ideas that might otherwise be lost. Without a great amount of reiteration, restatement, and redundancy, a noisy channel is quickly overloaded. On the other hand, needless duplication is boring for the listener and wastes channel capacity. Shannon regards communication as the applied science of maintaining an optimal balance between predictability and uncertainty. His theory of signal transmission is an engineer's response to everyday problems of system glitches, overloads, and breakdowns.



*"Our biggest problem around here is lack of information. Of course, I have nothing to base that on."*

Reproduced by permission of Punch.

Shannon's diagram of information flow appears in almost every communication textbook, which is likely due to the fact that it was paired with an interpretive essay by Warren Weaver that applied the concept of information loss to interpersonal communication. Feedback was not an inherent feature of Shannon and Weaver's information model; it took other theorists in the cybernetic tradition to introduce concepts of interactivity, power imbalances, and emotional response into communication systems.

## THE RHETORICAL TRADITION

### Communication as Artful Public Address

Greco-Roman rhetoric was the main source of wisdom about communication well into the twentieth century. In the fourth century B.C., Demosthenes raged against the sea with pebbles in his mouth in order to improve his articulation when he spoke in the Athenian assembly. A few hundred years later, the Roman statesman Cicero refined and applied a system for discovering the key issue in any legal case. In 1963 Martin Luther King, Jr., crafted his moving "I Have A Dream" speech using such stylistic devices as visual depiction, repetition, alliteration, and metaphor. These three men, and thousands like them, perpetuated the Greco-Roman tradition of oratory that began with the Sophists in the an-

THE  
Comr.

cient city-states of the Mediterranean, and still continues today. Whether talking to a crowd, a legislative assembly, a jury, or a single judge, orators seek practical advice on how to best present their case.

There are a half-dozen features that characterize this influential tradition of rhetorical communication:

- A conviction that speech distinguishes humans from other animals. Of oral communication, Cicero asks: "What other power could have been strong enough either to gather scattered humanity into one place, or to lead it out of its brutish existence in the wilderness up to our present condition of citizens, or, after the establishment of social communities, to give shape to laws, tribunals, and civic rights?"<sup>11</sup>
- A confidence that public address delivered in a democratic forum is a more effective way to solve political problems than rule by decree or resorting to force. Within this tradition, the phrase "mere rhetoric" is a contradiction of terms.
- A setting where a single speaker attempts to influence an audience of many listeners through explicitly persuasive discourse. Public speaking is essentially one-way communication.
- Oratorical training as the cornerstone of a leader's education. Speakers learn to develop strong arguments and powerful voices that carry to the edge of a crowd without electronic amplification.
- An emphasis on the power and beauty of language to move people emotionally and stir them to action. Rhetoric is more art than science.
- Oral public persuasion as the province of males. Until the 1800s, women had virtually no opportunity to have their voices heard. So a key feature of the women's movement in America has been the struggle for the right to speak in public.

Within the rhetorical tradition, there has been an ongoing tension between the relative value of study and practice in the development of effective public speakers. Some speech coaches believe there is no substitute for honing skills before an audience. "Practice makes perfect," they say. Other teachers insist that practice merely makes permanent. If speakers don't learn from the systematic advice of Aristotle (see Chapter 20) and others in the Greco-Roman tradition, they are doomed to repeat the same mistakes whenever they speak. The fact that this debate continues suggests that both factors play an important role in artful public address.

## THE SEMIOTIC TRADITION

### Communication as the Process of Sharing Meaning Through Signs

Semiotics is the study of signs. A *sign* is anything that can stand for something else. High body temperature is a sign of infection. Birds flying south signal the coming of winter. An expensive car signifies wealth. An arrow designates which direction to go.

Words are also signs, but of a special kind. They are *symbols*. Unlike the examples cited above, most symbols have no natural connection with the things they describe. There's nothing in the sound of the word *kiss* or anything visual in the letters *h-u-g* that signifies an embrace. One could just as easily coin the term *snarf* or *clag* to symbolize a close encounter of the romantic kind. The same thing is true for nonverbal symbols like winks or waves.

Cambridge University literary critic I. A. Richards was one of the first in the semiotic tradition to systematically describe how words work. According to Richards, words are arbitrary symbols that have no inherent meaning. Like chameleons that take on the coloration of their environment, words take on the meaning of the context in which they are used. He therefore railed against the semantic trap which he labeled "the proper meaning superstition"—the mistaken belief that words have a precise definition. For Richards and other semiologists, meanings don't reside in words or other symbols; meanings reside in people.

Together with his British colleague, C. K. Ogden, Richards created his semantic triangle to show the indirect relationship between symbols and their supposed referents. Figure 3.2 illustrates the iffy link between the word *dog* and the actual hound that may consume the majority of your groceries.

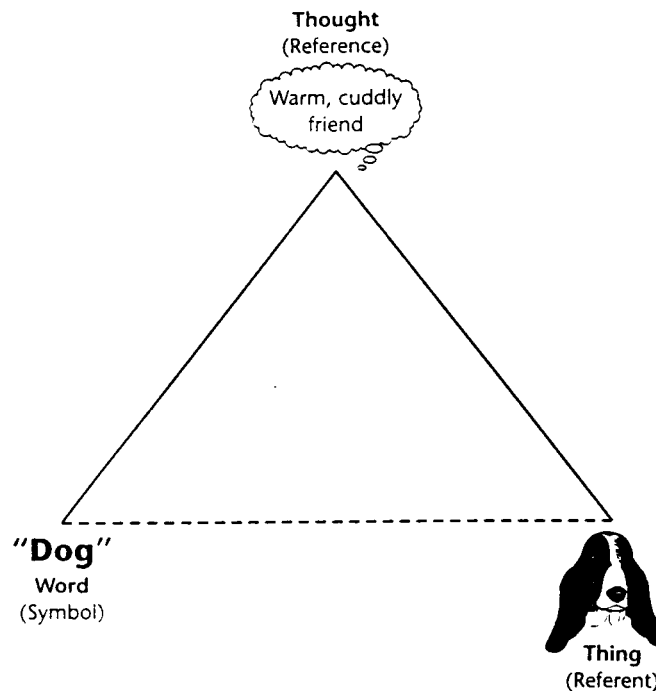


FIGURE 3.2 Richards' Semantic Triangle

Adapted from Ogden and Richards, *The Meaning of Meaning*.<sup>1</sup>

The top of the triangle shows some thoughts that you might have when observing the Hush Puppy pictured at the lower right. Once you perceive the actual animal, thoughts of warmth and faithful friendship fill your mind. Since there is a direct or causal relationship between the referent and the reference, Richards connected the two with a solid line.

Your thoughts are also directly linked with the dog symbol at the lower left of the triangle. Based on childhood language learning, using the word *dog* to symbolize your thoughts is quite natural. Richards diagrammed this causal relationship with a solid line as well.

But the connection between the word *dog* and the actual animal is tenuous at best. Richards represented it with a dotted line. Two people could use that identical word to stand for completely different beasts. When you say *dog*, you might mean a slow-moving, gentle pet who is very fond of children. When I use the word I might mean a carnivorous canine who bites anyone—and is very fond of children. (Note the slippery use of the term *fond* in this example.) Unless we both understand that ambiguity is an inevitable condition of language, you and I are liable to carry on a conversation about dogs without ever realizing we're talking about two very different breeds.

Although Richards and Ferdinand de Saussure (the man who coined the term *semiology*) were fascinated with language, many researchers in the semiotic tradition focus on nonverbal emblems and pictorial images. For example, the French semiotologist Roland Barthes analyzed the emotional and ideological meanings created by print and broadcast media (see Chapter 24). But whether the signs are a few pictures or thousands of words, scholars in this tradition are concerned with the way signs mediate meaning, and how they might be used to avoid misunderstanding rather than create it.

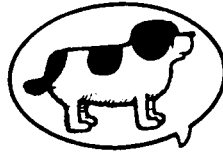
## THE SOCIO-CULTURAL TRADITION

### Communication as the Creation and Enactment of Social Reality

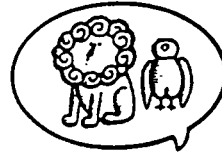
The socio-cultural tradition is based on the premise that, as people talk, they produce and reproduce culture. Most of us assume that words reflect what actually exists. However, theorists in this tradition suggest that the process often works the other way around. Our view of reality is strongly shaped by the language we've used since we were infants.

We've already seen that the semiotic tradition holds that most words have no necessary or logical connection with the ideas they represent. For example, the link between black marks on a page that spell *g-r-e-e-n* and the color of the lawn in front of the library is merely a convention among English-speaking people. Although socio-cultural theorists agree that the term *green* is arbitrary, they also claim that the ability to see green as a distinct color depends on having a specific word to label the 510–560 nanometer band of the electromagnetic wave spectrum.<sup>12</sup> English offers such a word, but many Native American languages don't. Within these cultures, yellow is described as merging directly into blue. We might be tempted to label these speakers "color blind," yet they

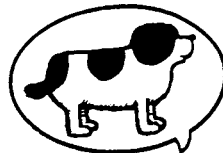




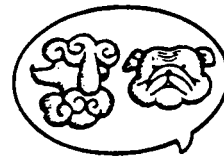
"I have a pet at home."



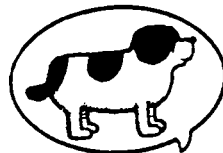
"Oh, what kind of pet?"



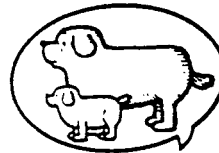
"It is a dog."



"What kind of dog?"



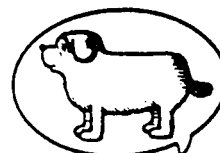
"It is a St. Bernard."



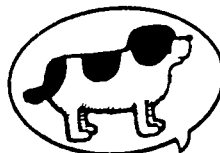
"Grown up or a puppy?"



"It is full grown."



"What color is it?"



"It is brown and white."



"Why didn't you say you had a full-grown, brown and white St. Bernard as a pet in the first place?"



Reprinted with permission of Kaiser Aluminum & Chemical Corporation from COMMUNICATION: THE TRANSFER OF MEANING by Don Fabun. Copyright © 1968, Kaiser Aluminum & Chemical Corporation.

really aren't. Linguists in the socio-cultural tradition would say that these language users inhabit a different world.

University of Chicago linguist Edward Sapir and his student Benjamin Lee Whorf were pioneers in the socio-cultural tradition. The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis of linguistic relativity states that the structure of a culture's language shapes what people think and do.<sup>13</sup> "The 'real world' is to a large extent unconsciously built upon the language habits of the group."<sup>14</sup> Their theory of linguistic relativity counters the assumptions that all languages are similar and that words merely act as neutral vehicles to carry meaning.

Consider the second-person singular pronoun that English speakers use to address another person. No matter what the relationship, Americans use the word *you*. German speakers are forced to label the relationship as either formal (*Sie*) or familiar (*du*). They even have a ceremony (*Bruderschaft*) to celebrate a shift in relationship from *Sie* to *du*. Japanese vocabulary compels a speaker to recognize many more relational distinctions. That language offers ten alternatives—all translated "you" in English—yet only one term is proper in any given relationship, depending on the gender, age, and status of the speaker.

While most observers assume that English, German, and Japanese vocabularies *reflect* cultural differences in relationship patterns, the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis suggests that it works the other way around as well. Language actually structures our perception of reality. As children learn to talk, they also learn what to look for. Most of the world goes unnoticed because it is literally *unremarkable*.

Contemporary socio-cultural theorists claim that it is through the process of communication that "reality is produced, maintained, repaired, and transformed."<sup>15</sup> Or stated in the active voice, *persons-in-conversation co-construct their own social worlds.*<sup>16</sup> When these perceptual worlds collide, the socio-cultural tradition offers help in bridging the culture gap that exists between "us" and "them."

## THE CRITICAL TRADITION

### Communication as a Reflective Challenge of Unjust Discourse

The term *critical theory* comes from the work of a group of German scholars known as the "Frankfurt School" because they were part of the independent Institute for Social Research at Frankfurt University. Originally set up to test the ideas of Karl Marx, the Frankfurt School rejected the economic determinism of orthodox Marxism, yet carried on the Marxist tradition of critiquing society.

The leading figures of the Frankfurt School—Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno, and Herbert Marcuse—were convinced that "all previous history has been characterized by an unjust distribution of suffering."<sup>17</sup> They spotted this same pattern of inequality in modern western democracies where the "haves" continued to exploit the "have nots." Frankfurt School researchers offered thoughtful analyses of discrepancies between the liberal values of freedom and equality that leaders proclaimed, and the unjust concentrations and abuses of

power that made these values a myth. These critiques offered no apology for their negative tone or pessimistic conclusions. As Marcuse noted, "Critical theory preserves obstinacy as a genuine quality of philosophical thought."<sup>18</sup> When Hitler came to power in Germany, that obstinacy forced the Frankfurt School into exile—first to Switzerland, then to the United States.

What types of communication research and practice are critical theorists against? Although there is no single set of abuses that all denounce, critical theorists consistently challenge three features of contemporary society:

1. *The control of language to perpetuate power imbalances.* Critical theorists condemn any use of words that inhibits emancipation. For example, feminist scholars point out that women tend to be a muted group because men are the gatekeepers of language. The resultant public discourse is shot through with metaphors drawn from war and sports—masculine arenas with their own in-group lingo. This concept of muted groups is not new. Marcuse claimed that "the avenues of entrance are closed to the meaning of words and ideas other than the established one—established by the publicity of the powers that be, and verified in their practices."<sup>19</sup>

2. *The role of mass media in dulling sensitivity to repression.* Marx claimed that religion was the opiate of the masses, distracting working-class audiences from their "real" interests. Critical theorists see the "culture industries" of television, film, CDs, and print media as taking over that role. Adorno was hopeful that people might rise in protest once they realized their unjust repression. Yet he noted that "with populations becoming increasingly subject to the power of mass communications, the pre-formation of people's minds has increased to a degree that scarcely allows room for an awareness of it on the part of the people themselves."<sup>20</sup> Marcuse was even more pessimistic about social change coming from the average citizen who is numbed by the mass media. He claimed that hope for change in society comes from "the outcasts and outsiders, the exploited and persecuted of other races and other colors, the unemployed and the unemployable."<sup>21</sup>

3. *Blind reliance on the scientific method and uncritical acceptance of empirical findings.* Horkheimer claimed that "it is naïve and bigoted to think and speak only in the language of science."<sup>22</sup> Naïve because science is not the value-free pursuit of knowledge that it claims to be. Bigoted because survey researchers assume that a sample of public opinion is a true slice of reality. Adorno contends that "the cross-section of attitudes represents, not an approximation to the truth, but a cross-section of social illusion."<sup>23</sup> These theorists are particularly critical of leaders in government, business, and education who use the empirical trappings of social science to validate an unjust status quo—to "bless the mess" which obviously favors them.

Critical theorists are less specific about what they are for. Their essays are filled with calls for liberation, emancipation, transformation, and consciousness raising, but they are often vague on how to achieve these worthy goals. They

do, however, share a common ethical agenda that considers solidarity with suffering human beings as our minimal moral responsibility. That's why Adorno declared, "To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric."<sup>24</sup> Most critical theorists hope to move beyond feelings of sympathy and stimulate a more demanding ethical conduct which Craig calls *praxis*. He defines the word as "theoretically reflective social action,"<sup>25</sup> and many of the thinkers featured in "Ethical Reflections" throughout the book are energized by that same goal.

## THE PHENOMENOLOGICAL TRADITION

### Communication as the Experience of Self and Others Through Dialogue

Although *phenomenology* is an imposing philosophical term, it basically refers to the intentional analysis of everyday life from the standpoint of the person who is living it. Thus the phenomenological tradition places great emphasis on people's interpretation of their own subjective experience. An individual's story becomes more important—and more authoritative—than any research hypothesis or communication axiom. As psychologist Carl Rogers asserts, "Neither the Bible nor the prophets—neither Freud nor research—neither the revelations of God nor man—can take precedence over my own direct experience."<sup>26</sup>

The problem, of course, is that no two people have the same life story. Since we cannot experience another person's experience, we tend to talk past each other and then lament, "Nobody understands what it's like to be me." Can two people get beyond surface impressions and connect at a deeper level? Based on years of nondirective counseling experience, Carl Rogers was confident that personal and relational growth is indeed possible.

Rogers believed that his clients' health improved when his communication created a safe environment for them to talk. He described three necessary and sufficient conditions for personality and relationship change. If clients perceived a counselor's (1) congruence, (2) unconditional positive regard, and (3) empathic understanding, they could and would get better.<sup>27</sup>

*Congruence* is the match or fit between an individual's inner feelings and outer display. The congruent counselor is genuine, real, integrated, whole, transparent. The noncongruent person tries to impress, plays a role, puts up a front, hides behind a facade. "In my relationship with persons," Rogers wrote, "I've found that it does not help, in the long run, to act as though I was something I was not."<sup>28</sup>

*Unconditional positive regard* is an attitude of acceptance that isn't contingent on performance. Rogers asked, "Can I let myself experience positive attitudes toward this other person—attitudes of warmth, caring, liking, interest, and respect?"<sup>29</sup> When the answer was "Yes," both he and his clients matured as human beings. They also liked each other.

*Empathic understanding* is the caring skill of temporarily laying aside our views and values and of entering into another's world without prejudice. It is an active process of seeking to hear the other's thoughts, feelings, tones, and meanings as if they were our own. Rogers thought it was a waste of time to be

suspicious or to wonder, "What does she really mean?" He believed that we help people most when we accept what they say at face value. We should assume that they describe their world as it really appears to them.

Although Rogers' necessary and sufficient conditions emerged in a therapeutic setting, he was certain that they were equally important in all interpersonal relationships. Jewish philosopher and theologian Martin Buber reached a similar conclusion. He held out the possibility of authentic human relationships through dialogue—an intentional process in which the only agenda both parties have is to understand what it's like to be the other. The ideas of Rogers, Buber, and others in the phenomenological tradition have permeated the textbooks and teaching of interpersonal communication.

### FENCING THE FIELD OF COMMUNICATION THEORY

The seven traditions I've described have deep roots in the field of communication theory. Of course, theorists, researchers, and practitioners working within a given tradition often hear criticism that their particular approach has no legitimacy. In addition to whatever arguments they might muster to defend their choice, they can also claim "squatters' rights" because scholars who went before already established the right to occupy that portion of land. Taking the real estate metaphor seriously, in Figure 3.3 I've charted the seven traditions as bounded parcels of land that collectively make up the larger field of study. A few explanations are in order.

First, the seven charted traditions might not cover every approach to communication theory. Craig considers the possibility that a feminist, aesthetic, economic, spiritual, or media tradition should also be included.<sup>30</sup> He ultimately

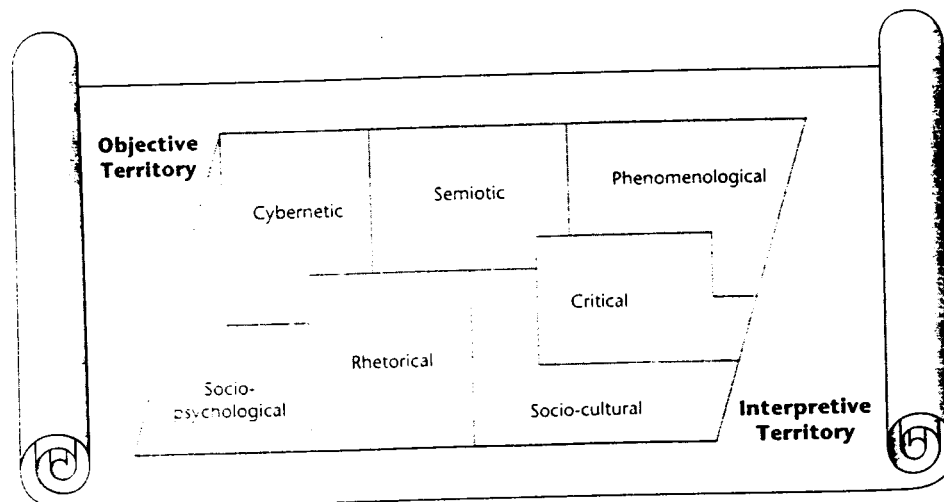


FIGURE 3.3 A Survey Map of Traditions in the Field of Communication Theory

decides that these approaches can best be located among the seven traditions already named, but his openness to new candidates suggests that the map of the field may need to expand.

Second, hybrids are possible across traditions. You've seen throughout the chapter that each tradition has its own way of defining communication and its own distinct vocabulary. So it's fair to think of the lines on the map that divide the individual parcels as fences built to keep out strange ideas. Scholars are an independent bunch, however. They climb fences, read journals, and fly to far-away conferences. This cross-pollination sometimes results in theory grounded in two or three traditions. I make an effort in Appendix C to assign each theory to a single tradition, but a third of them straddle a fence.

Finally, it's important to realize that the location of each tradition on the map is far from random. My rationale for placing them where they are is the distinction between *objective* and *interpretive* theories outlined in the previous chapters. Using criteria presented in Chapters 1 and 2, the socio-psychological tradition is most objective, so it occupies the far left position on the map. Moving from left to right, the traditions become more interpretive and less objective. The phenomenological tradition seems the most interpretive, so it occupies the position farthest to the right. The order of presentation in this chapter followed the same progression—a gradual shift from objective to interpretive concerns. Scholars working in adjacent traditions usually have an easier time appreciating each other's work. On the map they share a common border; professionally they are closer together in their basic assumptions.

This framework of seven traditions can help make sense out of the great diversity in the field of communication theory. As you read about a theory in the media effects section, remember that it may have the same ancestry as a theory you studied earlier in the relationship development section. I'll draw connections along the way and systematically sort the theories by tradition after you've had a chance to understand them. Hopefully by then you'll want to take issue with the 10cc lyric, "Communication is the problem to the answer." In their own way, each of these seven different traditions of communication theory tells us how communication can be the answer to the problem.

### QUESTIONS TO SHARPEN YOUR FOCUS

1. Considering the difference between *objective* and *interpretive* theory, can you make a case that the *rhetorical* tradition is less objective than the *semiotic* one, or the *socio-cultural* tradition more interpretive than the *critical* one?
2. The lyrics of "The Things We Do For Love" describe romance as an emotional roller-coaster. If true, which of the seven highlighted *definitions of communication* offer the most promise of helping you achieve a stable relationship?
3. Craig characterizes communication as a *practical discipline*. What kind of communication problems would the *socio-psychological* tradition help resolve? The *cybernetic* tradition? The *phenomenological* tradition?

4. The map in Figure 3.3 represents seven traditions in the field of communication theory. In which region do you feel most at home? What other areas would you like to explore? Where would you be uncomfortable? Why?

## A SECOND LOOK

*Recommended resource:* Robert T. Craig, "Communication Theory as a Field," *Communication Theory*, Vol. 9, 1999, pp. 119-161.

*Communication as a practical discipline:* Robert T. Craig, "Communication as a Practical Discipline," in *Rethinking Communication*, Vol. 1, Brenda Dervin, Lawrence Grossberg, Barbara O'Keefe, and Ellen Wartella (eds.), Sage, Newbury Park, Calif., 1989, pp. 97-122.

*Socio-psychological tradition:* Carl Hovland, Irving Janis, and Harold Kelley, *Communication and Persuasion*, Yale University, New Haven, Conn., 1953, pp. 1-55.

*Cybernetic tradition:* Norbert Wiener, *The Human Use of Human Beings*, Avon, New York, 1967, pp. 23-100.

*Rhetorical tradition:* Thomas M. Conley, *Rhetoric in the European Tradition*, Longman, New York, 1990, pp. 1-52.

*Semiotic tradition:* C. K. Ogden and I. A. Richards, *The Meaning of Meaning*, Harcourt, Brace & World, New York, 1946, pp. 1-23.

*Phenomenological tradition:* Carl Rogers, "The Characteristics of a Helping Relationship," *On Becoming a Person*, 1961, pp. 39-58.

*Socio-cultural tradition:* Benjamin Lee Whorf, "The Relation of Habitual Thought and Behaviour to Language," in *Language, Culture, and Personality: Essays in Memory of Edward Sapir*, University of Utah, Salt Lake City, 1941, pp. 123-149.

*Critical tradition:* Raymond Morrow with David Brown, *Critical Theory and Methodology*, Sage, Thousand Oaks, Calif., 1994, pp. 3-34, 85-112.