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# TRANSMISSION AND DIALOGUE IN THE PROBLEMATIC OF COMMUNICATION

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## ABSTRACT

*The term dialogue is a tantalising synonym for “communication”, and is often considered more “communicative” than transmission. In fact, we have come to refer to transmission and dialogue paradigms at a time when the current popularity of the latter lies partly in its ability to represent all human contact. The theory of dialogue draws extensively on Buber and Bakhtin, from which it is identified with positive terms such as engagement and interaction. Transmission is not only positioned in opposition to dialogue, but in being imagined as “vertical” it is made to represent power, domination and monologue. Hence it is generally treated negatively in communication scholarship. This article reconsiders dialogue and transmission in terms of communication problematics, arguing that each term draws its sense less from essentialist meanings than from the two epistemological fields – rationalism and expressivism – that constitute modernity, and which periodically hold influence over the kinds of questions that may be asked in the discipline. The formation of cultural studies serves to illustrate how communication can be historicised in a manner that rehabilitates transmission by drawing attention to the term as partly constitutive of the field.*

**Keywords:** dialogue, transmission dialogue, cultural studies, rationalism, expressivism, transmission epoch, dialectic-dialogic articulation

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## INTRODUCTION

Few terms have been more successful in colonising the communication field than “dialogue”. The concept has played a significant role in turning organisation studies away from the positivist and behaviourist frameworks which had gained in strength in communication research in and around the 1940s (Tompkins & Wanca-Thibault 2001: xxi; Turner 2006: 413-415), and as good as rejected the now negatively-inflected concept of “transmission” with which mass communication in particular was assumed to be synonymous (Berelson & Janowitz 1953; Hovland, Janis & Kelley 1953; Klapper 1960; Shannon & Weaver 1949). The “turn to culture”, which gained prominence in the human and social sciences in the 1960s, galvanised the movement against what has become known as the “transmission paradigm” in the communication field which was steadily reformed in the methodologies of social semiotics and phenomenological hermeneutics which, in time, “wiped out almost all the old assumptions about mass communication and the validity of ‘old theory’” (Fourie 2011: 2). Concepts such as language, conversation and discourse became the new banners of communication; but *dialogue* has risen as the field’s master imaginary.

Dialogue has emerged as a centrepiece of contemporary communication theory. It reflects most deeply the nature of human interaction and stands in contrast to the overwhelming one-way, monologic character of communication in our technological age. But the concept “dialogue” has become distended and typically invoked without much academic rigour and sophistication (Christians 2005: vii).

“Since the beginning of the phenomenological study of communication, dialogue has been highlighted as a key feature of communication and the ideal of mass communication” (Fourie 2011: 9). That much is no less true than in organisational communication research, where there is a strong impression that *transmission* or *conduit* models of communication have little bearing on day-to-day organising (see Boden 1994; Brown *et al.* 1989; Ford & Ford 1995; Hung 2001; McPhee & Zaig 2009). But there are critics of this over-emphasis who draw attention to tensions between dialogue and transmission (see Stewart & Zediker 2000: 225-229) and index their arguments in core elements of Martin Buber’s (1958) and Mikhail Bakhtin’s (1981) accounts of dialogue. Other critics apply a view of communicative dichotomy to their studies of organisation (Armenakis *et al.* 2011; Barki & Pinsonneault 2005; Elving 2005; Mintzberg & Waters 1982; Robertson *et al.* 1993).

This article draws attention to these fault lines in organisational studies – between advocating dialogue above all, moderating enthusiasm for dialogue, and building transmission into dialogically-relevant models – as an example of the maturation that normally follows the embrace of a new concept, but stands back from the fray in order to consider the underpinning *problematic* that makes contradictions

between transmission and dialogue a defining feature of the communication field in general. That is, the field is a *modern* problematic which, therefore, ought to be defined by a contradiction between the two broad paradigms – expressivism and rationalism (or empiricism) – that have held sway from the Enlightenment to the present.

The article considers the historo-epistemological field by which the “dialogical framework” as a *problematic* – the pre-understanding or “structural unconscious” which “represents the overall framework of a system that puts the basic concepts of a theory in relation to one another” (Chang 1996: 37) – promotes *dialogue* at the expense of *transmission* in communication studies; occluding a fuller-fledged conception of communication.

Certainly, restoring transmission need not be achieved by redeeming positivism, but may be done by properly understanding dialogue. The article begins with a brief description of tensions inherent in the concept of dialogue as represented in communication research using Buber’s and Bakhtin’s theory. The main thrust of the article then follows, beginning with the idea of a problematic by exploring how these tensions are central to the field of communication, seeing how the field is invested in a paradox of divergent epistemological fields that constitute modernity. The article finally explores an articulation of dialogical and transmissive tropes in communication theory. References to organisational communication remain instructively convenient in order to avoid undue abstraction.

## DIALOGUE

Dialogue is mindful, equitable, empathic, and seeks real meeting points between opponents (Eisenberg *et al.* 2010: 40-46). Dialogue is certainly all that, but it is also a power for the emergence of organisation from within the cooperative interactions conducted between individuals who have something to contest. We may consider dialogue as an ideal or “model” condition in organisation, but dialogue is social and the social seldom is orderly.

The idea of dialogue and its supportive framework can be credited for bringing into view dimensions of institutions and practices that are left opaque in the imaginary of sending and receiving information (see Grandori & Kogut 2002; Kellett 1999; Van Every & Taylor 1998). On the other hand, as Gergen *et al.* (2004: 40) point out, the “increasing excitement about the potentials of dialogue for creating and transforming social worlds [has been] accompanied by a certain vagueness as to what is meant by dialogue”. Merely having a conversation does not, as many assume, “constitute true dialogue” (Gergen *et al.* 2004: 41).

It is not the priority given to dialogue in studies of organisational discourse that Gergen *et al.* (2004) object to, but its reification as talk or conversation. Dialogue is coordinated action, embedded in context, situated in history and culture, and may serve negative as well as positive ends (Gergen *et al.* 2004: 43-44). Dialogue is also not a typical or definitive descriptor of engagement, with monologue denoting its paradoxical opposite. Dialogue is a tension, a continuum, between Buber's *I-Thou* and *I-It* relationships (Buber 1958). And while "communication *is* the relationship" between people (Fairhurst 2001: 385), it is in the tensions between Buber's two definitive conditions that we find dialogue to occur.

Dialogue is reified as an ideal type, possibly also because it is imagined to be paradoxically counterpoised to transmission. The either/or dilemma that a paradox poses justifies choosing dialogue at least by virtue of the current interpretive and post-positivist problematic that sustains discourse in and of the communication field. A dialectic or contradiction, however, requires a both/and approach which posits, in this case, a tension between dialogue and transmission; likened to that "between the constructed social world and the ongoing process of social construction" (Fairhurst 2001: 385). "Contradictions and ironies not only reveal the way that power operates in organizational discourse, but also unearth the fault lines in which resistance can emerge" (Putnam & Fairhurst 2001: 113).

Resistance remains a form of dialogue even as it resembles the *I-It* forms of monologue. Hence a dialectical tension may be seen to exist between mutual acceptance of the other-as-person (the *I-Thou* relationship) and the objectification of the person (monologue). The axis of this dichotomy can be laid across a different axis representing a tension between acceptance and resistance (or rejection). Buber "walked the 'narrow ridge' between excessive concern for self and excessive concern for the other" (Heath *et al.* 2006: 345); that is, *between* dialogue and monologue.

Baxter and Montgomery (1996: 15) describe a relational dialectic as a condition where "tensions are played out, relational force against relational force". However, it is not the contradiction in itself that makes for antagonism between parties in dialogue. "[A]n antagonistic contradiction takes place when the parties align with different oppositional poles. In this instance, each party functions as an advocate of a dialogic force that is oppositional to the other's wishes" (Baxter & Montgomery 1996: 67). The notion of dialectics in Baxter and Montgomery's use of Buber and Bakhtin can be confusing. Dialectics is "the *abstract* product of dialogue" (Friedman 2005: 36. *Italics added*). Scholars of dialectic assume that "relationships are organized around the dynamic interplay of opposing tendencies as they are enacted in interaction" (Baxter & Montgomery 1996: 6).

## PROBLEMATICS OF COMMUNICATION

There is a curious line in one of Clifford Christians' numerous defences of his concept of proto-norms in the context of global media ethics:

Philosophy is a discipline; communications is not, in my understanding of it. *Communications is a problematic*, a field of interest. It is an academic area but is interdisciplinary and focused on crucial issues that are not neatly contained within a discipline's boundaries. Therefore, the subject matter of ethics is driven by philosophy and not by the field of communications per se (Christians 2010: 140. Italics added).

It is the phrase in italics that is of interest here. Indeed, communication is a problematic insofar as it is a phenomenon about which its questions derive from the various disciplines that investigate it. But there is another sense in which to research communication entails to engage in a problematic: that is, the pre-theoretical framework in which certain knowledge is produced, but other knowledge remains unavailable. Communication is a field of interest whose questions are constituted against a pre-theoretical background of two competing modern problematics, empiricism and expressivism, which in the discourses of the field may be deemed as a "transmission view" and a "ritual view" respectively (Carey 2009); or as a monological view and a dialogical view (Botan 1997; Massey 2001). Each is not a theory as such, and only in a limited sense can each be considered a paradigm or a perspective. Instead, each operates as a pre-theoretical background against which questions may be posed and paradigms constructed. Each, in a sense of a historical epistemology drawn from Gaston Bachelard, is a problematic brought about historically through an epistemological break (Bachelard 1984; Lecourt 1975: 26-29, 79-86; Maniglier 2012).

Bachelard refined both concepts with reference to the philosophy of science. Foucault (1980) defined problematic as episteme, or discourse. Althusser (1969: 13) used Bachelard's problematic to demonstrate "an 'epistemological break' in the history of Marx's thought, a basic difference between the ideological 'problematic' of the Early Works and the scientific 'problematic' of *Capital*". Chang (1996) applies both Althusser's and Bachelard's uses of problematic and epistemological break to communication. He asks, "If thought cannot proceed without a preunderstanding of the thought object, if scientific thinking is always directed by an implicit question, what is the preconception of communication that prompts inquiry, sustains theoretical reflection, and finally, leads to the construction of theories?" (Chang 1996: 36).

Chang answers his question by way of a tour through modern philosophy in a manner that initially resembles Christians' view of communication as a field of interest, but then in the remainder of his second chapter subscribes to Bachelard's

understanding of the problematic. Chang's argument may be summarised this way: The problematic of communication is the challenge of the solitary subject closing the gap between itself and other subjects to form a community. Communication, thus, becomes a problem of delivery solved through transmission (the 'postal principle', or the sending and receiving of messages). Chang (1996: 56) contends that communication's dialogical nature requires reciprocity; that solitariness is transcended through intersubjectivity, yet remains sympathetic to the "postal principle". He thus articulates two pre-theoretical frameworks: one a transmission view, and the other a ritual or dialogical view.

Communication, Chang contends, is a field constituted in the contradictory epistemologies of scientific rationality and expressive feeling that make up the modern condition. That is, using Carey's (2009) schema, communication is constituted in the two paradigms of transmission and ritual, or two competing views of communication that have been predominant since the field's founding in the late 1930s. The transmission view defines communication as a linear process: of information or signals sent to passive receivers. The ritual view – communication as signification – sees communication as a two-way process whereby senders and receivers are mutually involved in "making meaning". Both paradigms presuppose particular questions about communication. From Ricoeur (1976: 15), communication "appears as a way of transcending or overcoming the *fundamental solitude* of each human being". Solitude, in Ricoeur, refers to the radical non-communicability of lived experience which cannot be passed on, except its meaning. "Communication in this way is the overcoming of the radical non-communicability of lived experience as lived" (Ricoeur 1976: 16).

The delineation of communication theory into transmission and ritual paradigms is often translated into monological and dialogical idioms (Baxter 2004; Craig 1999: 138-140), and is put to good use by scholars in public relations (see Grunig 1992). Johannesen (1996: 377) states that "a person employing monologue seeks to command, coerce, manipulate, conquer, dazzle, deceive, or exploit ... Audience feedback is used only to further the communicator's purpose". Dialogic communication, on the other hand, is "characterised by a relationship in which both parties have genuine concern for each other, rather than merely seeking to fulfil their own needs" (Botan 1997: 192).

The key difference between a monologic/transmission view of communication and a dialogic/ritualistic view of communication is that the former treats receivers as a means to an end, while the latter treats receivers as an end in themselves. The dialogic/ritualistic view of communication emphasises the interdependent relationship between organisations and stakeholders and is a more ethical perspective for communication behaviour (Massey 2001: 156).

There are no prizes for guessing which of the two paradigms receives the “communication award” today. The shift toward dialogue and away from transmission models of (organisational) communication mirrors a paradigmatic swing from a positivist and functionalist problematic that was dominant in communication research until the 1960s, when it came under pressure from emergent interpretive, culturalist and critical perspectives that gained in importance thereafter (Taylor *et al.* 2001: 102-104, 108-109). The dominant view in organisation studies is to see organisations as emerging dialogically in and through discourse rather than (in the transmission view) as “containers” within which members “send information” to each other.

Beyond the linear transmission of messages occurring primarily within the container of the organisation, organisational communication scholars problematise the very notion of organisation and organising by emphasising that communication behaviours serve to establish and affirm organisations continually via participants’ interactions. In this view, organisations are constituted in their enactment and exist as individuals strive to make sense of them (Taylor *et al.* 2001: 114).

The overwhelming popularity the dialogue concept enjoys in organisational communication research leaves a strong impression that these entities consist positively of members engaged in conversation, whereas information transmitted from faceless sources is now seen to be somehow pathological (Banathy & Jenlink 2005; Grandori & Kogut 2002). The conduit metaphor squared easily with classical views of organisations as top-down and managed entities in which communication is an activity that happens within an organisation imagined as a “container” or “machine”, rather than as an “organism”, as in current imaginaries of organisation (Capra 2004: 89-92). Research in the post-1950s period shifted, in line with the turn to culture, to emphasise the importance of participation in organisational settings. It would be untrue, however, to claim that all reference to transmission has been done away with.

Scholars continue to use transmission and tool models of communication, but they function as abstractions in which relational similarities are drawn between communication as transmission and media as channel. Unlike early studies, current research treats senders and receivers as active agents who are engaged in two-way message flows (Putnam & Boys 2006: 545).

## COMMUNICATION IN THE MODERN PARADOX

The broad alliance of interpretism, constructionism and hermeneutics which gained strength in the communication field from the 1960s onward comes across as a correction of an earlier period in the discipline when the field's reigning paradigm was an amalgam of positivism, behaviourism and empiricism, supported by a general belief that natural science was the preferred model for doing social science. In this alliance we may include, at least, humanism, phenomenology, deconstruction and cognitive constructivism; each contributing in its own way to the "realism/constructionism antinomy" (Gergen 1998: 148) that as good as defines the human and social sciences, with communication weighing in on the constructionist side of that antagonistic schism.

The term "correction" may be read here in at least two ways. In one sense, the constructionist turn can be seen as having put right the view typical of 1940s information theory that communication was principally a mechanistic and linear transmission of signals. What was being corrected on a broader epistemological terrain was the value-free knowledge claim of natural science. That this critique from the sociology of knowledge appealed "to many groups whose voices had been marginalized by science, and to all those whose pursuits of social equality and justice were otherwise thwarted by existing authorities" (Gergen 1998: 147) should not necessarily be seen as opportunistic, but as an indication of a second sense of "correction": as an epistemic or paradigmic shift endemic to the modern condition (Foucault 1980). That is, the modern condition is a paradox of rationalist/empiricist and Romantic/expressivist epistemological fields where one historical epoch comes to be defined by "science", and a successive epoch by "culture". This calls into question a tendency to identify modernity with rationalism, empiricism and Enlightenment conceptions of science; or the Enlightenment's epistemic conception of belief and knowledge.

The communication discipline is not immune to this condition, but reflected the rationalist problematic of the pre-1960s period and, in the "turn to culture" thereafter, came to articulate the post-Auschwitz or post-Hiroshima humanistic reaffirmation that was not unlike the Romantic recoil against the Industrial Revolution at the turn of the nineteenth century (see Williams 1958/1983). E.P. Thompson's monumental *Making of the English working class* (1963) traces part of that distant period. The emergence of British Cultural Studies and its diaspora of academic research programmes marked a return or re-awakening of that epoch in the 1960s. Cultural studies was born in and of the new problematic, and was not possible in the long epochal turn to rationalist science that coincided with the modernist age before then.

Two concepts represent the communication discipline across this 1960s epistemic watershed: transmission and dialogue. Nevertheless, for much of the post-1960s

period transmission was represented either as unwanted disciplinary baggage or as a theoretical heritage in need of rehabilitation. Dialogue, by comparison, is almost always treated as a communicative benchmark; a veritable disciplinary “gold standard”. Yet little more than a decade into the twenty-first century there are signs of a “return to science” concomitant with a postmodern fatigue that may well bring communication scholars to rediscover relevance in the “transmission epoch”. This possibility is not too far-fetched.

Think of the growing popularity of cognitive cultural studies (see Zunshine 2010) and science communication. Are these fields not symptomatic of an epistemic shift? This author’s intention is not to warn of these fields or to promote them. Instead, their emergence says something interesting about the epistemic shift (see Bachelard 2012) currently transforming the human and social sciences, which poses a challenge not least to communication scholarship. To illustrate the point, Zunshine (2010: 5-6) reads Raymond Williams’ (1961: 18) reference to “the evolution of the human brain [and] the particular interpretation carried by particular cultures” (and its accompanying text) as alluding to a congruence between cognitive science and cultural studies. “Writing in 1961,” she writes,

Williams expected that attempts to integrate the science of the ‘evolved human brain’ with cultural interpretation would meet with ‘resistance and confusion’. His expectations have been confirmed insofar as ignoring a difficult concept constitutes a form of resistance to it. During the last forty years, cultural studies has thrived and expanded, but its explicit cognitive-evolutionary component, as articulated by Williams, has been ignored (Zunshine 2010: 7).

Zunshine states a page later that “cognitive cultural studies is cultural studies as originally conceptualized by Williams”, which she describes as “an interdisciplinary field that studies the relationship between the ‘evolved human brain’ and ‘the particular interpretations varied by particular cultures’”. However, Zunshine does seem to ignore the anti-behaviourist (and anti-positivist) context of *The long revolution* (Williams 1961), and elsewhere seems to turn Williams on his head (see Williams 1976: 44-45). Williams’ contemporary in the New Left that coalesced at Oxford in the 1950s, Charles Taylor (1989), is well-known for his sustained critique of the paradox of modern identity. But it is in an earlier book, *The explanation of behaviour* (1964), where he most pointedly repudiates behaviourist psychology and much of the cognitive science that Zunshine appears to celebrate. There we find Taylor writing squarely within the epistemology that marked a turn to culture and a rejection of Enlightenment (and Cartesian) scientific rationality in the classical empiricist tradition. But should Zunshine’s (2010: 9) hope come true – to “hasten the day when the qualifier ‘cognitive’ can

be dropped ... [when] the cultural will simply be understood as being in part constituted by the cognitive” – communication scholars may find themselves articulating a new empiricist-Cartesian problematic that makes for repudiating the phenomenological tradition.

Far-fetched? It has happened before. The New Left’s recognition that conditions in 1960s Britain echoed English Romanticism in the late 1700s provided a template not only for how culture was to be theorised in cultural studies (Williams 1977: 13-15), but also inspired the field as a political practice. The motivation for extramural adult education classes, for instance, drew directly on the example of William Morris, among others; and in this way Williams and Thompson sought to reactivate the Romantic tradition for the working class left (Lee 2003: 19). While the New Left engaged specifically with the legacy of Marxism in Britain, its broader canvas was a rejection of rational or classical Enlightenment. But cultural studies did not have the monopoly on the gist of its own movement; nor was its grasp of the modern paradox unique.

The complex debates rejecting an Enlightenment definition of modernity are well-documented. Graham Murdock’s (1993) paper covers some aspects from the interests of communication. Taylor’s (1989) wider-ranging work places particular emphasis on the dual nature of modernity, composed broadly of empiricist and expressivist strands; or, alternatively, of contradictory rationalist-scientific and the Romantic strains that make up the “unbecoming and the rebecoming” between the successive epistemological fields of modernity (Grossberg 2010: 74). For instance, the movement of Anglo-American analytic philosophy was born “in a principled recoil from what the British Idealists made of Hegel” (Brandom 2014: 1). The change seen between the (young) humanist Marx and the (old) scientific Marx illustrates this shift most poignantly (Althusser 1969). The Marx of historical materialism represented an “unbecoming” of Romanticism in the mid-1800s and a “rebecoming” of modernity coincidental with the emergence of analytic philosophy and a “return to science” (see Rockmore 2002). Modernism followed at the turn of the twentieth century, and by the late 1950s the pendulum had swung back from rationalism to expressivism. The rise of cultural studies in the 1960s was an instance of this movement, which

constituted just one condensation funnel in a multi-vortex tornado that transformed the human sciences. Across the disciplines, this period was marked by a resurgence in anti-positivism, in which earlier hermeneutic traditions were rediscovered, reasserted and extended.... In this new *zeitgeist*, positivist epistemology and methodology were not only identified as philosophically untenable but also as politically reactionary, complicit in the legitimisation of capitalist exploitation, racism and sexism (Pickering 2008: 90-91).

The 1950s were the high-water mark of the hegemony of rationality in the twentieth century (Toulmin 1990: 147), and declined as Western democracies came under stress from internal contradictions from the late 1950s onward (Stratton & Ang 1996: 375). The history of the communication discipline straddles this period, with the positivist and transmissive researches attributed typically to Lazarsfeld and his colleagues occurring in the earlier period, and cultural studies in concert with a resurgent anti-positivism emerging thereafter.

While the definite formation of the discipline lies in the early 1940s, the debate between John Dewey and Walter Lippmann in the 1920s may as well represent, respectively, the Romantic and “rational scientific” components of modernity. Here it is worth noting that Lippmann was more plausible in his time – when the transmission view in communication emerged and subsisted easily within the empiricist problematic of modernity – whereas Dewey’s pragmatist and expressivist outlook was only properly read much more recently. Dewey’s (1916: 4) much-quoted line that “society exists not only by transmission, by communication, but it may be fairly said to exist in transmission, in communication” resonates in Carey’s (2009: 12) comparison of the transmission and ritual views as two paradigms of communication that may be seen to correspond more or less to the empiricist and expressivist epistemological fields of modernity. The transmission view (rooted in modern political and scientific discourse) is the idea that “communication is a process whereby messages are transmitted and distributed in space for the control of distance and people” (Carey 2009: 15). The ritual view (rooted in religious discourse), which can be identified with that broad constructionist alliance, sees the highest form of communication “not in the transmission of intelligent information but in the construction and maintenance of an ordered meaningful cultural world that can serve as a control and container for human action” (Carey 2009: 18-19).

Carey (2009: 19) is unambiguous about American communication scholarship having been overly invested in the transmission paradigm at the expense of the ritual view; yet “[n]either of these counterpoised views of communication necessarily denies what the other affirms. A ritual view does not exclude the processes of information transmission or attitude change” (Carey 2009: 21). That is, if a transmission view of communication centres on “the extension of messages across geography for purposes of control”, a ritual view centres on “the sacred ceremony that draws persons together in fellowship and commonality” (Carey 2009: 18). Yet communication scholarship has been remarkably reticent to attempt to articulate these views in studies of actual practices. Certainly, communication is a problematic, as Christians (2010: 140) asserts; and it is possible he has Bachelard’s (2012) definition of problematic in mind insofar as he uses the term in preface to his critique of Enlightenment rationality (2010: 140-143) and the problem of normativity.

Likewise, we can appreciate the transmission view of communication as being for the “control of people” as describing much of organisational research from the 1940s, extending in ameliorated form into the 1970s, as articulating a transmissive episteme. Unlike cultural studies, born partly in reaction to the transmission view, organisational studies in communication were constituted in that view. The conduit (or transmission) metaphor of communication squared easily with classical views of organisations as “top-down” and managed entities in which communication is an activity that happens within an organisation imagined as a container. More recent research that depicts organisations as entities constituted in and of communication (Weick 1995) was simply unavailable within the problematic of that period.

## **DIALOGUE AND TRANSMISSION**

The turn to dialogue in organisational communication research has opened up the field to innovative ways of understanding and explaining how different enterprises are constituted, how they prosper, and why many of these stagnate and go into decline. The turn to dialogue has also revitalised the literature on change management (see Kellett 1999), a genre of organisational analysis (Weick & Quinn 1999), that had become mired in an inadequate information transmission paradigm (Armenakis & Bedeian 1999: 299, 301-302; Redding & Tompkins 1988). Organisational learning and technology transfer are two other themes to have profitably turned to dialogue. Concepts such as situated cognition (Lave & Wenger 1991), legitimate peripheral participation (Lave 1988), and communities of practice (Wenger 1998) each has at its root a rejection of conduit models of communication.

While the concept of dialogue has produced valuable insights into the types of conversation that promote change (Ford & Ford 1995), transmission remains a common communicative phenomenon in almost all aspects of organising. “Persuasive communication”, for instance, “includes the numerous tactics for communication, such as scripted live speeches to groups, informal discussions between the change agents and change recipients, written media like memos/letters, electronic mail, newsletters, etc. Typically, these media inform change recipients about the change and *often include dialogue* about the change” (Russ 2008: 309. Italics added).

Even as dialogue has become metonymic of the communication field “after Kuhn” (see Jensen & Neuman 2013), it is more often than not used as a label for interpersonal communication, and is hence made synonymous with talk, conversation and even “communication” itself. It is understandable, therefore, when Stewart and Zediker (2000: 224) say the dialogue concept “has suffered from the tendency to be defined so generally that it becomes a synonym for almost all human contact”, to suspect the problem lies not only in an inadequate conception of the term itself, but also in

an equally limited appreciation of communication process and practice. Dialogue thus becomes communication “at its best”, and transmission or conduit models are cast as a superfluous hangover from a discredited positivist and instrumentalist paradigm from which communication scholarship has “moved on”.

It takes an act of academic courage to argue in support of linear transmission models of communication, even if their purpose is to offset the singular role afforded to dialogue and other communicative acts that privilege individual agency. But there is one argument that can be made from the earliest influences on the emergence of British Cultural Studies; the idea of modernity being a constitutive contradiction between idealist (or expressivist, culturalist) and reductionist (or empiricist, rationalist) movements. Williams accounts for these contradictory relations in *The long revolution* (1961) and *Culture and society* (1958), and in both books brings to bear the view that modern democratic societies are more than rational political and economic orders, but also systems of generation and nurture.

Both the industrial revolution and the revolution in communication are only fully grasped in terms of the progress of democracy, which cannot be limited to simple political change, but insists, finally, on conceptions of an open society and of freely cooperating individuals which alone are capable of releasing the creative potentiality of the changes in working skills and communication (Williams 1958: 141).

Behind Williams’ work lies a rejection of “the selective way in which particular versions of modernity were foregrounded as if they were the whole of modernity” (Eldridge & Eldridge 1994: 34). Modernity is constituted instead in tensions between elites and subalterns, science and art, and, in Thompson’s (1963: 194) similar view, as in a “working class [that] made itself as much as it was made”. Taylor, and to some extent Weber, identify the contradictory forces of modernity as expressivism and instrumental rationality (see Fareld 2007; Reckling 2001). Against this background we see any model of communication limited either to linear transmission or to dialogue to lack the theoretical capacity to account for (organisational) “contestation – both as a fact of reality ... and as a strategic critical practice – [as] a basic category” (Grossberg 1996: 142).

The pre-eminence the concept of dialogue enjoys in communication studies can be attributed at least to the transmission concept’s tendency to conjure up a host of pejorative terms – positivism, behaviourism, instrumentalism, and more – which occupy the rogues’ gallery of contemporary social science. Popular conceptions of dialogue invariably invoke meanings of “inclusion”, “openness” and “engagement”. Hamelink’s (2006) heading, “From transmission to interaction” expresses this preference. This is underlined two headings later with “The dialogue” (2006: 282). Yet Hamelink’s is no rose-tinted view of

dialogue's appeal in communication scholarship. Conversation is quite impossible in modern (mediated) culture, where no one seems to be listening. "The mass media offer 'talk shows', not 'listen shows'. The dialogue can only take place where silence is respected" (Hamelink 2006: 283). Hamelink may as well have used the term "monologue", with which transmission is often associated, together with pejoratives "exclusion" and "domination".

Transmissive communication is difficult to imagine without the inflection of the negatively-inflected "transmission view" (Carey 2009: 12), or the historical period of communication studies from which conduit models emerged and continue to draw their sense. Among the terms the ritual view connotes are culture, language and dialogue given "not [to] the act of imparting information but the representation of shared beliefs" (Carey 2009: 15). We believe in dialogue not least on the basis of the amalgam of normative, culturalist, critical, interpretative, deconstructionist, and postmodern positions that gained philosophical traction with the disillusionment of Enlightenment that became particularly poignant from the late 1950s onward (see Toulmin 1990: 167ff). But it is by the phenomenological problematic of communication, "[a]s a behind-the-scene decision maker over what can be problematized and what must remain unquestioned" (Chang 1996: 38) that we take dialogue to be true.

Certainly a communicative episode in which conversation between parties prevails can be called dialogical, as much as a condition where one party has all the say can be considered monological. Mere popularity aside, the current prominence of interactive "new media" against the declining transmissive "old media" exerts a formidable pull of the dialogical or interactive paradigm for its explanatory value. Intellectual capital is ready-at-hand from Bakhtin and Buber. Their work refers over two millennia earlier to the dialectic-dialogic articulation found in Socrates, Plato and Aristotle. For all the novelty of "new media", the thinking in communication that attends to it indexes those classical sources. The dialectic-dialogic articulation in the modern period is therefore more a resurgence than a discovery.

## **CONCLUSION**

Most historical reflections about the communication field recognise its bifurcation into antagonistic and dichotomous paradigms that occur more or less on either side of a watershed of the late 1950s. On the earlier side we find the seminal effects research of Lasswell, Lazarsfeld, Berelson and their colleagues. After about 1960 the humanities and social sciences turned to language, culture and questions of the popular; a critical rejection of the behaviourist and administrative research that exemplified naturalist hegemony in the social sciences. The rejection of this paradigmatic bloc coincided with the rise of cultural studies during the 1970s.

While the more recent generation of cultural studies scholars tend to identify the field with postmodern, poststructuralist and critical positions antagonistic to the way of that bloc, the primacy of contradiction which Hall (1980) argued was the new field's defining problematic is curiously limited to contestations in actual sites of struggle (e.g., in factories, gangland ethnographies, and adult education), with little interest in the overriding contradictions that constitute modernity itself.

Certainly cultural interventionist research requires attention to specific contexts. But this has had the effect of reducing some cultural studies to "culturalist" studies, with or without the broader guidance of important attention given to hegemony as a macro-level theory. In what comes close to a founding manifesto of cultural studies, Hall (1980: 72) insists that "neither structuralism or culturalism will do, as self-sufficient paradigms of study" and pointed instead to the contradictions between these paradigms as "the core problem of Cultural Studies". And with his sights both on the problematic base/superstructure metaphor of (scientific) Marxism, and on the empiricist (and naturalist) modern sources of classical Marxism, Hall says of both paradigms:

They are correct in insisting that this question – which resumes all the problems of non-reductive determinacy – is the heart of the matter: and that, on the solution of this problem will turn the capacity of Cultural Studies to supercede the endless oscillations between *idealism* and *reductionism* (1980: 72. Italics added).

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