

# Seminar: Contemporary Rhetorical Theory

## Communication 652

Fall Semester 2014

Class Website:

<http://terpconnect.umd.edu/~jklumpp/comm652/home.html>

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I first taught Contemporary Rhetorical Theory 40 years ago this fall. Our reading material was quite different then. We had earlier editions of Kenneth Burke, Richard Weaver's *Ethics of Rhetoric*, Stephen Toulmin, and the just published Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca. Michele Foucault was writing in French and Jürgen Habermas in German, but neither were woven into the fabric of Contemporary Rhetorical Theory. We read a lot of secondary literature that was of the "Let me introduce you to . . ." variety.

Nevertheless, the problem that was compelling the study of CRT was vital. It was the era known typically as the '60s. Traditional understandings of rhetoric, rather narrowly based in simple theories of persuasion, were under siege. Systematic study of the voluminous discourse that formed the atmosphere of that time required innovative strategies. We were in search of theories that allowed us to go meaningfully to our world. We were seekers trying to organize a new terrain. And we were trying to do so not by "turning a different way" but by widening our gaze, by seeing additional ways to understand rhetoric.

Here we are 40 years later. We can look back now and see the revolution in rhetorical study that was just underway then. But the danger is that we will see this course as a "History of Rhetorical Theory," recounting a past as archaic as the Sophists. That would be a mistake. There is a trajectory that has brought us to today, but the path ahead is still one in which we need to work to provide theoretical perspective for innovative approaches. I just returned from the Kenneth Burke Conference. The innovative power of Burke remains stimulative to very smart people. Kenneth Burke was not a moment in the history of rhetorical theory; he was the opening of an innovative way of seeing the world that we are still applying to problems of today that are very different than in 1974. Our problems have changed and our vistas have opened wider. So, our task this semester is to broaden the way you think about rhetoric. We want to be in 2014, standing on the shoulders of those who have widened our gaze, and seeing where their ideas lead us in our time. This task is what makes our reading list so much richer today.

What is the alternative to history? It is trajectory. Your task is to understand the innovative moves that opened new vistas and to project them into the problems of our time. On each, ask: Where is this move going today? What questions compel us to follow its potential?

Having widened your gaze, let me then suggest how to focus it a bit. In the last half of the twentieth century, because of the activity I have just explained, rhetorical study attained an importance it had not enjoyed since classical Greece and Rome. The discovery of that half century was the importance of human symbolic activity in making human action. Often called "the linguistic turn," the interest in rhetoric was startlingly clear throughout the intellectual estate. Contemporary rhetorical theory became an interdisciplinary activity with people contributing from a dozen academic disciplines. There were a number of problems on which these various scholars were working: the shape of human sociality, the strength of human culture, and the intricate role of the power of human speech in the complex societies of our time.

In the twenty-first century, does that ecumenical interest in rhetorical theory continue? Most assuredly. We live in a time of transition from the mass to dispersed patterns of communication, and a time when the orientation of our problems and opportunities transcends national boundaries all the way to the local. At such a time, the role of symbolic forms in motivating and directing human lives permeates the texture of the world within which we live. Understanding and negotiating this transformation in the modes of communication requires that criticism and invention are working out the possibilities of our underlying theories.

And perhaps that is the key: the work we do – with artifacts, with construal of rhetorical action, with ways of understanding socio-cultural reality, with action to change or defend our world – is framed by the theory with which we encounter it. So, this is why the thrust of contemporary rhetorical theory has been to multiply the ways we understand rhetorical activity. We want to understand those ways more thoroughly to equip you for a more fertile trip through rhetoric. This desire ties contemporary rhetorical theory directly to your specific research interest.

So, our task this semester is to understand the linguistic turn and its influence on how we think about the power of symbolic action. We will read a considerable distance beyond the communication discipline into literature, linguistics, sociology, anthropology, philosophy, and history. But the focus of this course is still on the contributions that communication scholars have made to the dialogue.

The tendency has been to organize the study of rhetorical theory around people, to study one theorist and then the next. (You will notice the Foss, Foss, and Trapp review of contemporary theory still does.) Some time ago, I decided that there were three weaknesses with that approach: (1) it left students unengaged in a disciplinary literature in rhetorical theory; (2) it left students either incapable or unwilling to offer their own contribution to the literature of those disciplines; and (3) it failed to fully communicate the increasingly exciting and radical changes occurring in contemporary rhetorical theory. I sought to remedy this problem by reorganizing the course around problems that motivate contemporary theorists. Such a focus should inject you into developments in the field in such a way that you can identify the leading edge of work.

Hopefully your semester will help you engage the liveliness of the contemporary study of rhetoric.

### **Who is the course for?**

About anyone with some basic knowledge of the sorts of things rhetorical theory attempts to do will be able to handle the course. In fact, this is not a bad course for people with little knowledge of rhetorical theory who want to learn more about it. Because of the newness of contemporary theories, those without previous biases are almost in a better position than those with trained incapacities. Perhaps a more important determinant of your affinity for this class than previous training is your comfort with abstraction. The course will be easier for those who are comfortable with theory, with thinking at abstract levels.

### **What should you know and/or be able to do after completing the course?**

In terms of your knowledge, I expect both breadth and some depth. The breadth comes from knowing the overall landscape of contemporary theory. You should have a knowledge of who the important theorists are and how they relate to the primary projects that structure contemporary theory. I do not expect you will have the opportunity to have depth in the full breadth of the study, but there will be at least one particular theoretical project that you have mastered to the extent necessary to participate in the debate. That includes the ability to read the work, isolate the problems yet to be solved in the theory, the strengths and weaknesses of past efforts to solve these problems, and the ability to propose and work through

potential solutions on your own. At the heart of this is the skill of thinking in terms of theoretical *problems* and their *solutions*.

Finally, I want to emphasize the importance of flexibility of mind. When the linguistic turn happened, it destroyed a hegemony. And, at its best, it did not replace that hegemony. Rather it did what the hermeneutic folks call “bracketing”; that is, it taught us to set assumptions aside to look at things in different ways. I will try to provide you some ways early to bracket things. It will be your responsibility to make the moves with me to see more and more things as alterable in how we look at rhetorical action.

### **What will the course be like?**

This is a seminar. I expect lots of discussion. That being said there are three forms that discussion will take:

- Inquiry. Sometimes you will have questions. This reading can get pretty thick sometimes. If you are reading innovative moves seriously, you will inevitably need help answering questions because your questions will often come from an old framework rather the revised one. It is different questions, not different answers that mark differences of theory and only by sorting questions will you advance. So, we *should* work with your questions. Bring them to class.
- Report/discussion. Then it will be time for you to lead the seminar discussion. You will have reporting responsibilities that will grow your inquiry into the responsibility to structure the seminar’s understanding.
- Argument. I hope that there will be a lot of times when you are seeing weaknesses and strengths in theoretical positions. Or maybe applying the theoretical insights to new developments. I expect your work to blossom to engaging the literature with significant contributions. The task of the seminar is to help you do that.

Above all, participate. I want you to master some fairly sophisticated skills of analysis and argument, and you need to have the experience of articulating the problem-solution and question-answer structure of contemporary theory if you are going to master that. So I hope we will have a lively discussion of the issues framed by each of the theoretical projects.

We will organize our study around eight problems that occupy contemporary rhetorical theory. Somewhat arbitrarily these are divided into two groups:

- Group A: rhetorical argument, rhetoric as epistemic, morality and history in rhetoric, and identity/subjectivity.
- Group B: symbolic motivation, the public sphere, freedom/domination, and cultural studies.

You will become an expert on one move from each group. The groupings are arbitrary in that all eight of these moves have had active research over the last few years. All are currently active and being pursued in research programs and appearing in either journals or university press publishing venues. Any could be moved to the other group. We needed, however, to figure out how to attain some depth of understanding in some of these within the semester. So I divided them into groups.

There will probably be times I talk more than you. After we get going, I will restrict these to explaining systems or concepts that it is more efficient to convey via power point than reading. Do you understand the difference between Hegelian and categorical logic? Maybe not. If so, you won’t hear from me. But knowing that difference will help understand some things going on in CRT. So, if I need to, I will explain precursor concepts or systems.

## Texts

Sonja Foss, Karen Foss, and Robert Trapp, *Contemporary Perspectives on Rhetoric*, 30th anniversary ed. (Prospect Heights IL: Waveland, 2014). ISBN: 9781478615248

Kenneth Burke, *Permanence and Change*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1985). ISBN: 9780520041462

Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger (Cambridge MA: MIT, 1989). ISBN: 0262581086

Meenakshi Gigi Durham and Douglas M. Kellner, eds. *Media and Cultural Studies: Keywords* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012). ISBN: 978047065808.

In addition, there will be many shorter readings. We will talk the first seminar about how you would like for me to make these available.

## Communicating with Klumpp

Above all you should look on me as a resource for your learning. I do know a bit about these topics, you know. So, you should mine my knowledge, turning it to your learning. And you should do that beyond the three hours a week in the seminar room. Let me list my preferences for communicating:

1. By far the best is to drop by my office and talk about it. My door is open a whole lot, and not just to let fresh air into my office (or hot air out). Face to face communication is the most efficient way to answer your questions and to develop your understanding of contemporary rhetorical theory. My designated office hours for this semester are W 10-11 and Th 2-3. Please check my website for weekly schedules. But remember I am in a lot more than that.
2. If you have a single question or are sitting at home reading and need help, call me. Really! Telephone. Alexander Graham Bell. Great invention. It isn't as good as sitting in the office, but is the next best thing.
3. Email has become my least favorite method. It is great for short messages such as setting up a meeting, but otherwise is dreadfully inefficient. For example, you don't understand something. You send me an email. But chances are if you don't understand it, I may not understand the question. Then there has to be another exchange. Compare that with the other two methods. In fact, as some of you may have discovered, my priority to email has sunk to the level that I am now scheduling some time each week to respond to email. That will make it even more inefficient. Nonetheless, email has its advantages. No telephone tag. So, if other methods fail, email me.
4. I do not text, tweet, or do facebook. Sorry.

## How should you prepare for sessions of the seminar?

In general, I recommend that you divide your 8-9 hours each week in three: one part in which you work on reading and organizing the material for the seminars you will lead, one part in which you work on preparing for the current class, and one part in which you work on some theoretical writing. The relative share of your time devoted to each will vary from week to week, but every week some time should be devoted to each. Do *not* "cruise and cram" the seminar you will lead.

More detailed suggestions for preparation is on the course website.

## Assignments

*Bibliographic Essays.* You will prepare a full bibliographic essay on each of the units (one Group A and one Group B) for which you present the seminar. This project should simply be a written report on your literature search that is part of your seminar presentation. No longer than 1000 words (four pages, 12 point, word processed), excluding source list. These are best completed as a group project. All working on the project are assigned the grade for the project. Due date, further definition, and additional advice on the project will be found on the website.

*The Major Essay.* Write an essay which contributes to one of the projects current in contemporary rhetorical theory. Your paper should: (1) isolate a problem/question within the project; (2) establish the significance of the problem/question; (3) propose your solution to this problem/question *or* identify the solution of someone else you want to evaluate; and (4) defend the significance of the contribution of your proposal *or* if you are evaluating the solution of another, defend your evaluation. In other words, you have the option of either (1) proposing your own addition to the project, (2) finding some new theorist or some already developed idea that can contribute to the project but has not been related to it, or (3) evaluating the proposal of someone else you have read who contributes to the project. This assignment should reveal your ability to work with a theoretical project with some depth. It might be the project that your group has examined, but it need not be. Your reading, and our journals, are filled with papers that can serve as examples (good and bad) of essays that would meet this requirement. Note this is an essay addressing a problem in theory. It is *not* a criticism *using* a theory, although certainly some criticism might illustrate or illuminate your theoretical thesis.

This paper should be about 3000-5000 words (check the total on your word processor, but on average this is 12-20 pages of 12 point non-proportional text). Be certain you narrow your focus sufficiently to make your project possible in an essay of this length. *The paper should contain an extended author's note* containing: (1) the word count for the essay including notes and references as derived from your word processor; (2) notes on the provenance of your essay, (3) a short paragraph indicating your vision of the place of this paper in your scholarly program. (See explanation below for items 2 and 3. If you are using APA these items should be added to the title page.) Due date November 25 (yes, I am going to ruin your Thanksgiving).

*The State of Contemporary Theory.* This assignment is designed to allow you to demonstrate the breadth of your understanding of contemporary theory. A number of years ago Michael Leff wrote an essay in which he attempted to characterize contemporary rhetorical theory. He reduced the complexity to only the epistemic move, so he failed, but I want you to try a version of this. Address the essay this way: Is there a coherence to contemporary rhetorical theory? If so, what is that coherence? In addition to the framework specified below, your essay will be evaluated on the breadth of knowledge of contemporary rhetorical theory you display. This paper should be 1500-2500 words (check the total on your word processor, but on average this is 6-10 pages of 12 point non-proportional text). Due December 16.

## Grading and Assignment Instructions

**Weight for assignments:** Major essay, 40%; State of contemporary theory, 25%; Each bibliographic essay, 10%; Seminar Presentations and class participation, 15%.

**Papers will be graded on:** (1) insight or significance of claim; (2) cogency and clarity in explanation and argument; (3) quality of writing; and (4) following of proper form. An "A" paper will be superior in all ways. I recommend Chicago form, although APA is acceptable.

**Honor Code:** Please attach to the paper a page containing the UM honor code signed by the author. (APA users may place this at the bottom of the title page.)

**Provenance of your work and vision of the project.** Scholars working on projects – your paper for this course being an example – always see their work within a broader frame of reference than a single iteration. Projects inevitably balance novelty with long periods of development. I expect that your work in this seminar will be both original and a part of your ongoing program of research. To facilitate your thinking on this relationship I offer the following observations:

- Rewriting is a part of any quality project. I expect that the final product you hand in to me will be the culmination of a process of research that includes multiple rewritings of the document I receive.
- I expect that most of you will frame your project beyond the end of this course. After receiving my comments, you will revise for presentation at a convention, conference, or symposium, and eventually you will be rewrite again for submission to publication. There is an ethical dimension to this process that you should become familiar with. In later iterations, you should credit this course as an important moment in the work. Similarly, if you present the material orally at a scholarly venue you should credit that in a journal submission. This is called the “provenance” or “acknowledgment” note for an essay.
- You may well want to work in this course with an idea or even an essay that you have written in the past. If you choose to do this, ethics (and academic integrity) dictate that you discuss the plan with me, identifying the advances that you plan for the project. In addition, your provenance for the paper should identify its earlier iterations. The key to such a process is to use the scholarship of this course to *advance* the project. In this course I expect the project to have original content added that makes the paper you hand to me substantively advanced from its earlier iteration.
- Having said this, I understand that some papers ought to die in the seminar for which they were originally prepared. Let them die. They may do so because they are not directly relevant to where you wish to devote your energies in your research program (you have taken the seminar to expand the breadth of your understanding), or they did not result in a vision of further work on your part. Developing the judgement to place particular projects into the overall plan for one's research involves making this judgment. Such a judgment does not necessarily say that a paper lacks quality (it better not lack quality!), but that it serves its purposes best standing alone without further pursuit.

The results from the process of reflection occasioned by these observations should be included in the author's note described above. I intend no grading advantage to those with great plans, I merely wish to stimulate your thinking about the relationship of the paper to your other work

**Submitting papers:** Please send me your paper in a word processing file (rtf format if sending me from a MAC) and place a hard copy in my mailbox.

**Late papers?** This course will stack up on you very rapidly if you get behind. The guidelines of "The Great Klumpp Incomplete Memo" will be followed.

### **Attendance**

The benefit of a seminar is marginal without your attendance. If your schedule will require frequent absences, take some course besides a seminar.

## **Study Syllabus**

**COMM 652: Contemporary Rhetorical Theory**

**Fall 2014**

*A Note on the Units:* Below I have provided only the weekly schedule and a brief introduction on each unit. Each unit will have a website that will contain the list of readings, questions to ask during your reading, and other pertinent information. You can get to all those websites now, but they will not become official until the week before we move to the unit. That way those who are working on the various units can work with me on updating the reading lists. Also note that the calendar of the various topics is tentative. We may get behind.

**Weeks 1-2: Introduction to Theory, and Contemporary Rhetorical Theory**

- Theory: An activity of life and an activity of the scholar
- Achieving flexibility in theoretical thinking about rhetoric
- Contextualism and the Linguistic Turn
- Major Moves in Contemporary Rhetoric

**Readings:**

Condit, Celeste. “Kenneth Burke and Linguistic Reflexivity: Reflections on the Scene of the Philosophy of Communication in the Twentieth Century.” In Bernard Brock, ed. *Kenneth Burke and Contemporary European Thought* (University Park: University of Alabama Press, 1995). 207-62.

**Optional Reading:**

Pepper, Stephen C. *World Hypotheses*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1942.

Ford, James E., and James F. Klumpp. “Systematic Pluralism: An Inquiry Into the Bases of Communication Research.” *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 2.4 (December 1985): 408-30. Read particularly the sections on mechanism and contextualism on pp. 416-21. To get full treatment of the shift in our studies may wish to read the entire article.

**Weeks 2-4: Symbolic Motivation**

An important influence on CRT is the 20<sup>th</sup> century intellectual movement called “contextualism.” Contextualists emphasize how human interpretation of the world around them is performed with language. Thus, human action itself is framed – or motivated – by ways of talking about experience. Burke is a central theorist in this cluster, but others have developed aspects of the perspective. Several moves that these theories have in common define the cluster:

- 1) *Rhetorical form.* They punctuate accounts of rhetorical transactions with the help of rhetorical form. This constructs coherence in rhetoric around patterns in discourse rather than around the rhetor. Thus, they study the clustering of language forms in a culture.
- 2) *Symbolic action.* These theories primarily locate rhetoric in directing the flow of social action rather than the initiation of action or theories of knowledge. Consequently motivation is a central concern. In the heyday of behaviorism, motivation had been understood as located in biological drives and had been punctuated as an account of the initiation of behavior. A sociological school – the symbolic interactionists – offered an alternative. They began by rejecting the completeness of the biologically based theory, arguing that humans share essentially identical biology yet in any given situation humans react many different ways. Then, they asserted a methodological point: the most interesting questions of human motivation are to be answered not with an account of the initiation of action but with an explanation of the variety of human action.

- 3) *Culture-creating power of language.* In these theories, motivational patterns are tied to cultures rather than to biological individuals or the species in general.

On these three linchpins developed a theory of human motivation as symbolic. Because symbols were given a central place in motivation, the methodological moves of the symbolic interactionists had opened the opportunity to study the clustering of rhetoric in forms, and the practical accomplishment of rhetoric as an invoking of these forms to influence human action.

Although Kenneth Burke is not the font of all contemporary rhetoric, no other thinker lies at the intersection of so many of the rhetorical problems we will address. Consequently, I have decided to begin our examination through contemporary theory by reading Burke's work. Burke is easy to read only for Burkeans. But do not despair. Remember that you are reading not for theory but for his project. The concepts that he raises in laying out that project become an argument for how to understand the use of language in life. "Every living thing is a critic," he famously said. Mark passages you do not understand and we will work through them after answering the question of what his project is.

### **Week 5: Group A Moves**

#### **The Rhetorical Argument Move**

One of the earliest problems addressed by contemporary theorizers was the exclusion of argument from rhetoric. This exclusion dates from the Ramist and Port Royalist's division of invention (assigned to dialectic) from rhetoric. In the twentieth century this influence remained in the teaching of formal logic as practical logic. The theorists working on this problem worked to attack this interpretation of practical reasoning. Their problem was to construct an alternative model for practical reasoning based in rhetoric.

#### **The Epistemic Move**

Once argument was torn loose from its position as an inferior derivative of formal logic, the implications of that change began to be traced. Robert L. Scott posited that if rhetorical and scientific logic were different then there must be a rhetorical way of knowing. The epistemic work sought to track down the implication of practical reasoning on human knowledge.

#### **Weeks 6-8: The Public Sphere Problem**

If rhetoric is central to community, morality, and practical reason, then the next question is: How healthy is this dimension of human life? Not healthy, famously answers Jürgen Habermas. The diagnosis and the cure of this diseased body politic occupies an important trajectory in CRT.

The heart of Habermas' critique lies in his concept of legitimacy – patterns of discourse must underlie a public identity which guides relationships of public life. In doing so, his work contrasts with those who see themselves as political *scientists*, and most sociologists of our century who view public life in terms of structures and institutions. At the same time there is a second reorientation involved here which connects "public" more broadly than to government. Government is merely a particular solution to the public problem. Typically today politics is viewed as a subject of study in social contexts from the family to the office to the nation-state. Viewed this way, problems of social identity are fundamentally problems in our rhetoric. This opens up so many new ways of thinking about social relationships and political communication that the studies are practically reinvented. The diagnosis has now crossed from the academic to the public media. Laments for the low state of public discourse are a part of editorial pages and talk shows. It is a part of the same movement.

Given the locating of the problem in the quality of discourse, the theoretical issues which follow have to do with the preconditions and praxis of a satisfactory public discourse. Habermas' approach to addressing

this problem has been markedly different from American approaches. You will read both. The European reading will be difficult because of the vocabulary and theoretical differences. Work through it carefully.

### **Week 9-11: Domination and Freedom: Feminism and Critical Rhetoric**

Classical rhetorical theory featured the liberating power of rhetoric. Men (they were in those days, right?) achieved power over others through their voice. Of course, such liberation for speakers implicates the question of when the exercise of liberating power becomes the domination of others. Contemporary rhetorical theory has substantially explored this problem. And it has complicated it. It has bracketed the assumption of a human controlling other humans by drawing the locus of rhetorical power broader than the individual. Having moved the locus of rhetoric from the individual speaker making the rhetorical decisions to address an audience to communities of discourse within which socio-political life proceeds, theorists began to understand powers of power and domination along dimensions other than volition. But what if this greater circumference is itself too narrow? What if the power of language to guide human action gives language sufficient power to constrain that action?

These questions run through contemporary rhetoric. Is rhetoric a means of domination? Much of this work answers "Yes" but adds that rhetoric also contains the power of freedom from that domination. So freedom and domination become central dimensions of theorizing about rhetoric.

Once this framework is established then questions about the conditions of domination and rhetoric's work in them come forward. In 1969, Robert Scott and Donald K. Smith charged rhetorical critics and theorists to consider that traditional rhetoric entailed assumptions of oppression. Foucault has been a major figure in this move. Another central critique comes from feminism. Of course, the intellectual movement we call "feminism" is as multifaceted as any other movement. There are political feminists, cultural feminists, radical feminists, marxist feminists, and so on. Not all are amenable to a role for rhetoric. The ones we will read take the feminist critique as a rhetorical problem. A final and fecund manifestation of the move is Raymie McKerrow's notion of Critical Rhetoric. McKerrow attempts to domesticate Foucault's critique to guide rhetorical study.

### **Week 12: Group A Units**

#### **Implicating Morality and History in Rhetoric**

By now you have a sense for the active creative force of text in creating the socio-cultural world in which humans live. Discourse serves a practical role in the knitting of our day-to-day activities. Once rhetoric is seen as a force for textual merger, then a number of questions open seeking to understand traditional concepts and their relationship to this process. Two of those that have been a focus of rhetorical theorists are morality and history.

In addressing the practical reasoning problem, theorists had discovered that one of the most important advantages of rhetorical logic was its more powerful account of morality in human action. The initial development here was the concept of an advisory rhetoric: as individuals we use rhetoric to provide moral advice to others. But then, with the growth of the constitutive rhetoric, attention turned to rhetorically constituting morality. The rhetorical construction of morality became a central problem just as the rhetorical construction of reality was a problem for the social epistemics.

Similarly, history could be seen not as a study of material events told in language, but as a construction brought textually into rhetorically constituting the moment. But on what terms?

#### **Subjectivity and Identity**

Three stages have conceptualized this problem in contemporary rhetoric. It began with the problem of identity formation in the individual, tied to communication by George Herbert Mead's ideas that identity

was formed in communication with others. Because communication was an inherent part of identity-formation, so was a notion of the social. Thus, it was a small extension to begin to question how social identities were formed. This notion that social identity was constructed in rhetoric then became a focus of theory. Finally, the problem of power began to mix into identity with the notion of rhetorical subjectivity. Identity, individual and social, creates the power of voice and audience in symbolic action. Thus, this move ponders ways in which people can have access to the power of discourse and take that power into social, political, and economic relationships.

### **Weeks 13-15: Critical Theory and Cultural Studies**

This move is fundamentally contextualist. Americans embraced this study through the dramatist's principles of symbolic motivation reinscribed in culture. But as it has developed in European thought, this move's roots philosophically reached back into orthodox Marxism's historical materialism with its philosophical mechanism and suspicion of rhetoric, refined through the neo-Marxist contextualist tradition called critical theory. Habermas writes in this tradition. So did Foucault. Its heroes include Gramsci, Althusser, Benjamin, Horkheimer, and Adorno. Its main elaborators are Edward Hall in Britain and Larry Grossberg in this country. Critical theory attacks concepts of "theory" that are abstract rather than concrete (the critique it gets from Marxism). It is, therefore, a theory which forces praxis. But Marxism is a modern theory. Does postmodernism call for something more? That has given rise to concepts of critical rhetoric where theory is set aside. There is perhaps another question today even more vital: Critical theory and cultural studies were products of the 20<sup>th</sup> century with its emphasis on mass communication. Today as we enter a period when mass communication is in descendancy and public communication ascendant – the so-called “new media” – how does this theory adapt?