

# Politics within Parentheses



# Politics within Parentheses:

*Qualitative Research Methods  
in Communication Studies*

By

Georgina Gabor

Cambridge  
Scholars  
Publishing



Politics within Parentheses:  
Qualitative Research Methods in Communication Studies

By Georgina Gabor

This book first published 2017

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data  
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Copyright © 2017 by Georgina Gabor

All rights for this book reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the copyright owner.

ISBN (10): 1-4438-9253-X  
ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-9253-7

# CONTENTS

Introduction .....	vii
Chapter One.....	1
Rhetorical Criticism	
Chapter Two .....	9
Rhetorical Criticism in Intercultural Communication	
2.1. “Whiteness,” a Discursive Construct: Raka Shome’s Analysis of <i>City of Joy</i> .....	17
2.2. Black tropes in African-American Rhetoric: Patricia Sullivan’s Analysis of Jesse Jackson’s “Common ground and common sense” Speech .....	27
2.3. Mexican “otherness” in the Poetry of Mexican-Americans from Ohio: Al González’s view on Mexican-American Rhetoric ..	35
2.4. John J. Makay and Al González’s view on Bob Dylan’s Biographical Rhetoric .....	44
Chapter Three .....	59
The Ethnographic Undertaking: Dwight Conquergood’s Analysis of Communication Practices in Chicago Gangs	
Chapter Four.....	79
The Auto-ethnographic Undertaking: A Day in Ron Pelias’ Life	
Chapter Five .....	93
Ethnotextuality	
Conclusions .....	103
Bibliography .....	105
Abstract .....	109
Resume .....	111



# INTRODUCTION

It is the 4th of July, 2013. Ten years ago, I celebrated the United States' National Day by returning to my home country, Romania, for good. Between 1999 and 2003, I completed programs and was awarded Master of Arts and Doctor of Philosophy degrees in Communication Studies at Bowling Green State University, Ohio. Drs. Alberto González and Joe Austin coordinated my doctoral dissertation, called "Play(ing) with(in) parentheses: A meta-critical analysis of communication and culture(s)." Since I came back to my home town, I have been teaching at West University of Timișoara, the school where I finished my undergraduate studies in 1999 before leaving the country. I am an assistant professor in the Faculty of Political Science, Philosophy, and Communication Studies. Throughout the past decade, I have taught courses such as: Intercultural Communication, Organizational Communication, Political Communication, Communication Theories, Communication and Culture, Rhetoric and Negotiation, Negotiation in Political Conflicts, Argumentation and Communication, Non-verbal Behavior in Communication, etc. The American experience conferred on me a special status both as a doctoral student in a foreign country and as a professor in my own country. I do not intend to speak here about the (difficult!) years I spent abroad or about the obstacles I encountered in articulating my inevitably different "voice" within a foreign cultural context. Despite the difficulties or, perhaps, because of them, and certainly with the help of God, I successfully completed my studies and immediately left the U. S. Once I returned to my country, I encountered other obstacles in getting the teaching position in Communication Studies at West University of Timișoara. Eventually, I started the new job and a new life. From the very beginning, I confronted the question: How was I to teach my classes? How was I going to bring my students "onto the same page" as me, so that the didactic experience gave us all an occasion to self-develop and construct new things together?

My students know me very well. After the first introductory discussion session in class, I have the impression we have always known each other. That what is left for us to do is take up, together, the fascinating journey of the relationship I propose. From the very beginning, I tell them I do not intend to, and really could not possibly, perpetuate the so-called "banking concept of education," in the terms of the Brazilian sociologist Paulo

Freire. I assure them we will not abide by those outdated prescriptions, according to which knowledge constitutes some kind of monolithic “block” or a banking “deposit” which, through a linear process, “moves,” in the duration of a specific interval (a semester, a year), from the enlightened mind of the professor, to an empty recipient, a sort of *tabula rasa* – the mind of the student. According to such a model, the student has a perfectly passive position. Their role is limited to receiving and assimilating the already processed and construed information. Apparently, such a model leaves no room for an articulation of any “personal voice,” leaves aside a “different” kind of voice. That would represent a real danger to the immovability of “Knowledge” with a capital *k*, which only needs efficient (meaning: precise) transmission from one generation to the next. The voice of the student is important at one point only: during the exam, and then only to the extent it manages to reproduce, with high fidelity, the knowledge the student has received. Other than that, the students do not matter. They do not exist.

During the 1970s, Paulo Freire called the banking concept of education an “anachronism.” He suggested a participatory model, according to which knowledge constitutes a process rather than a product. Knowledge results from the active participation and unique contribution of each of those engaged in its production. At the beginning of each semester, I tell my students we all should take responsibility for the concept of knowledge of the specific area of communication we study. I prompt them to come to class prepared. I urge them to get rid of the consolidated habit, the effect of years of “bank-like” education, whereby they expect to receive information and knowledge. Instead, they should come to class prepared to offer their colleagues and me the gift of their otherness and their uniqueness. Through explicit messages and actions, I assure my students that, in the process of discursive production of knowledge, everyone’s voice is essential, rather than “expletive.” Each of us directly and responsibly contributes to the configuring of the profile of communication studies, as the discipline exists to us here and now. It seems my proposal, my work plan, resonates with my students’ expectation that something must change. I immediately win them over to my side with such suggestions. Most of them are overfed with “silence,” that state of muteness which the traditional Romanian educational system has blocked them into. They wish to test their own limits and “consistency” in articulating their unique and irreplaceable perspectives within and through discourse. They are eager to “verify their reality.” Some of them convey rightful suspicion in varied ways, from passive forms of stubborn silence



to verbal forms of rare aggressiveness. At least once a year, with vexation and resignation, someone explicitly tells me: “There is no point in talking, because nothing will change as a consequence of that.” I venture to say I convince them – or rather, they convince each other – of the opposite. At the end of each academic year, my emotions overwhelm me. My students’ successes in their Senior or Master’s theses defenses fill me with joy. Most of all, I am touched that these extraordinary young people choose to continue the venture we began together by exploring its feasibility beyond the limited space – the playground, so to speak – of our classroom. Their messages are my precious stones, my treasure. And where your treasure is, there your heart will be also ...

I dedicate these pages to my students. It has been a long while since I set out to write about the things I discuss with my students in the classroom. My wish for this modest book is that it represents a helping hand: a text to which they may turn every time we do not manage to meet in class; a means they may use in approaching intercultural communication responsibly. Many of my students work full-time or part-time jobs. That limits their access to the privileged space of our encounters. I hope this book will create an alternative space of interaction, a space into which I invite you, dear students, to step with confidence. You will find me here, in my lines – assuring you that theories which do not help us in our everyday lives are futile. Dead. Like books which lie on shelves, instead of finding their place in the hands of a reader.



## CHAPTER ONE

### RHETORICAL CRITICISM

Rhetorical criticism appeared in qualitative research in communication studies at the beginning of the previous century. In 1925, Herbert Wichelns<sup>1</sup> published his famous study, “The literary criticism of oratory.” In essence, the study delineated between rhetorical and literary criticism. Wichelns’ article revolutionized scientific inquiry. The terms Wichelns used acquired adherence from the scholarly community. It became a reference in qualitative research methodology in communication studies. In other words, rhetorical criticism, always (re)defined according to purposes scholars believed it might serve, became an unmatched qualitative research instrument in the discipline. It created and, later, enlarged discursive spaces which practitioners of quantitative (statistical) research methods had previously ignored. Herbert Wichelns acknowledged literary criticism’s focus on the study of permanent values such as beauty or truth. Rhetorical criticism, on the other hand, set out to estimate the efficacy of a certain, particular, and contextualized act of oratory upon a given audience. In Wichelns’ opinion, rhetorical criticism was, necessarily, analytical. It was an end in itself, although it could also be a means to accomplish, at least partially, the more comprehensive purpose of literary criticism. In our hasty incursion through the texts that legitimized rhetorical criticism as a qualitative research method in communication studies, I will make a brief map of the route the term itself took, as scholars tried to define it and specify its purpose and limits. In my sketch, I use the book *Readings in rhetorical criticism*, edited by Carl R. Burghardt, a professor at Colorado State University, which was originally published in 1995 and reached its fourth edition in 2010. The book constitutes a reference for any scholar who engages in qualitative and critical inquiry. Among its highlights:

In 1941, Kenneth Burke<sup>2</sup> renewed rhetorical criticism. His concept of “drama” or “complete action” helped to interpret the ways in which people structured their experiences. To Burke, a drama was a recurrent situation. People’s descriptions of their dramas offered access to their worldviews.

According to Burke, rhetoric helps us to understand humans' motivation and conduct, as it focuses on examining symbolic interactions between humans and/or discourses. Burke's "dramatic pentad," comprised of *act*, *agent*, *agency*, *scene*, and *purpose*, constitutes the "lenses" the rhetorical critic uses to appraise a drama's impact on people's worldviews. It reveals how people create, maintain, and modify reality through symbolic action.

In a 1947 study, Ernest Wraga<sup>3</sup> prompted his fellow scholars to focus on a perspective on rhetoric centered on ideas, rather than the traditional perspective centered on orators. According to Wraga, ideas supply the most profound representations of people's purposes and values. The product of social milieus, ideas (in)form them, in their turn. Consequently, rhetorical critics decisively influenced intellectuals' lives, as they perceived discourses' impact on particular types of audience. In 1954, Wayland Parrish<sup>4</sup> claimed the study of discourse should focus less on its effects on a certain audience. Instead, it should focus on the efficiency of discourse. According to Parrish, the rhetorical critic must question the intrinsic, inherent quality of discourse itself, instead of measuring a public's reactions to it. In 1958, Leland Griffin<sup>5</sup> gave rhetorical criticism a more general character. He expanded it at the level of "rhetorical movements." A rhetorical movement is the rhetorical model or paradigm which emerges from within a historical movement. In this sense, historical events become as many macro-texts. As such, they become the object of critical rhetorical analysis. A rhetorical critic's task consists of deciphering the supposed "models" or "paradigms" revealed by historical movements.

Edwin Black<sup>6</sup> challenged neo-Aristotelianism through his firm opposition. Neo-Aristotelianism dominated rhetorical criticism in the United States between 1925 (the Wichelns moment) and 1965. In 1965, Black claimed that those rhetorical undertakings which cannot give an account of an exemplary work do not qualify as research methods; they are simply compromised. Black's trenchant intervention totally obliterated any neo-Aristotelian critical attempts. But a resuscitation of neo-Aristotelianism as a traditional research method took place during the 1970s and the 1980s. In a subsequent 1970 study, Black<sup>7</sup> emphasized, once again, his position against the neo-Aristotelian method. He claimed that the audience the orator "intends" to persuade comes prior to the orator's immediate audience. The public an orator has in mind when they conceive their discourse in a specific way (the "second persona") is labeled an ideal audience. The study of discourse supplies information on the public an orator intends to persuade and offers a significant critical perspective. The same Edwin Black introduced ethical criteria in rhetorical

criticism. He argued that throughout the inherently decisive process in which they engage, orators must guide themselves according to certain ethical criteria. Ethical criticism became an important direction in rhetorical criticism.

In stark opposition to Black, Forbes Hill<sup>8</sup> proclaimed himself, in 1972, the last neo-Aristotelian critic. According to Hill, the rhetorical critic should not be preoccupied with the effects of a discourse upon a given audience. On the contrary, they must inquire whether or not an orator has taken the “right” decisions; if they have made the best choices, given the available resources. Obviously, such a *telos* of rhetorical criticism reminds us of Aristotle’s famous definition of rhetoric (a faculty of discovering, for each situation, the available means of persuasion). Whether or not orators obtain the desired decision from their public should not interest the critic. Chance factors often prevent an orator from achieving their purposes. If Aristotle were able to return two millennia after he exposed his conceptual apparatus in *Rhetoric*, he might agree that the critic Hill described demonstrates how this apparatus may equally function as a critical instrument.

In 1968, Lloyd Bitzer<sup>9</sup> introduced the notion of “rhetorical situation” in rhetorical criticism. Three factors determine a rhetorical situation: An exigency, an imperfection marked by urgency; the audience, comprised solely of those people capable of “perceiving” the exigency, noticing its importance, and responding to it; and the constraints (convictions, beliefs, attitudes, and values). The rhetorical situation confers on an event its rhetorical character; it constitutes the adequate response to the event. A situation is rhetorical if it is capable of being positively modified through the mediation of discourse. Bitzer believed rhetoric helped to alter reality, not by direct application of energy to objects, but by the creation of discourse, which changes reality through the mediation of thought and action. Bitzer’s view on rhetoric had significant echoes. In a 1973 study, Richard Vatz<sup>10</sup> investigated the concept of rhetorical situation. He called it a “myth” of the type that only a Platonic *Weltanschauung* supplies. Such myths prescribe that meanings *reside in* events. Instead, Vatz argued that an orator *creates* rhetorical situations. Therefore, they can be judged according to the extant ethical and moral criteria of the time. Later, in 1993, Mary Garret and Xiaosui Xiao<sup>11</sup> interrogated Bitzer’s rhetorical situation in their turn. They claimed both the public and the “discursive tradition” hold a decisive role in the configuration of a rhetorical situation.

In 1968, Lawrence Rosenfield<sup>12</sup> defined rhetorical criticism as an exercise in forensic argument. By looking at key elements any discursive undertaking employs – source, message, context, and critic – quality rhetorical criticism confesses its credo in the pluralism of interpretations. Other subsequent critical rhetorical approaches built on Rosenthal's view. In 1972, Karlyn Kohrs Campbell<sup>13</sup> argued in favor of keeping a careful eye on moral and ethical values when evaluating discourses. At the same time, the critic should not overlook certain standards of objectivity. In the same year, Ernest Bormann<sup>14</sup> attempted an expansion of Burkean dramatism. He proposed the concept of “fantasy theme” in rhetorical criticism. The concept gave an account of the varied ways in which human beings interactively and spontaneously “dramatize.” As fantasy themes “chain out” they become “rhetorical visions”: “realities” certain communities share. Rhetorical visions help the critic to understand the significance of discourse in people's lives. In 1981, Stephen Lucas<sup>15</sup> argued for the historically determined character of any discursive critical endeavor. In 1983, Phillip Wander<sup>16</sup> claimed rhetorical criticism should necessarily undertake an “ideological turn,” which may ease access and engage rhetorical critics more decisively in political life. According to Wander, ideologies ground any discursive critical undertaking.

In 1984, Walter Fisher<sup>17</sup> initiated the narrative perspective in rhetorical criticism, a perspective affiliated with Kenneth Burke's dramaturgical approach. Fisher extended the concept of “narrative” beyond its Aristotelian meaning of traditional persuasive technique. He argued that “stories” ground human communication, as they give structure to human experience and determine the formation of communities in which people share the same values and meanings. People share a common “impulse” towards storytelling, as stories comprise real “moral constructs” with their own alternative “rationality.”

In 1989, Raymie McKerrow<sup>18</sup> came up with a postmodern approach to rhetorical criticism. He claimed “rehabilitating” rhetoric from its marginalized position, given the perennial privileging of “reason” or of “universalist” perspectives, was a dead end. Instead, he proposed it in terms of a critical practice. Theoretically, critical rhetoric purports to demystify the conditions of social domination. Its *telos* resonates with Foucault's permanent criticism. Critical rhetoric became the main instrument in unveiling power relations and surveying their integration in a relativized world. McKerrow claimed the new status of critical rhetoric stated that rhetoric is contingent, knowledge is *doxastic* (grounded in opinion), and criticism is a performance. Rhetoric conceals as much as it

revealed. The fragmentary character of discourses, the body of current intellectual life, make pluralistic interpretations legitimate. McKerrow's principles of critical rhetoric put a postmodern imprint upon the study of rhetorical criticism. They directly supported what Rosenfield implicitly argued for: a pluralistic approach to rhetorical criticism in general.

More recently, in 1994, Sonja Foss and Karen Foss<sup>19</sup> contributed to the development of rhetorical criticism through their feminist approach. According to the two authors, feminist criticism set out to understand and appreciate the modes in which discourse creates and maintains particular definitions of the concepts of "woman" and "man." A long time before Foss, Karlyn Khors Campbell<sup>20</sup> also offered a sample of feminist criticism by illustrating its "humanist" foundations in her study of one of Elisabeth Stanton's speeches. The lyrical mode, the tragic perspective, and the existentialist orientation comprised the clearest proof that any critic could successfully depart from the traditional criteria of oratory. Feminism as a social movement could not change the human condition any more than patriarchal societies could.

All perspectives on rhetorical criticism point out meta-theoretically – practically, using rhetorical criticism as a research method means a totally different thing – rhetorical criticism's essential role as an instrument of inquiry in communication studies. From inception, the discipline has been divided. The first "speech schools" appeared in the United States in the 1920s, when several professors, such as Wichelns, decided to separate from literature departments. As they felt professionally dissatisfied with the kind of scientific research they could perform, they laid the foundations of a new discipline. According to Jesse Delia, during the 1940s, the speech schools acquired their current denomination: as schools of communication or departments of communication.<sup>21</sup> Other scholars, with social sciences backgrounds (psychologists, sociologists, anthropologists, etc.) joined the professors of oratory in their effort to build a new discipline. They wished to study new issues related to communication practices by use of standard social scientific methods. Paradoxically, the discipline was under the hegemony of social sciences.<sup>22</sup> Quantitative research methods dominated all areas of research, while the professionals within the discipline were trained to use them exclusively. Any attempt to approach communication historically or culturally was marginalized.

The story of the intricate path which qualitative research methods (rhetorical criticism, particularly) took to offer a viable alternative to

quantitative research practices is very long. It is not my purpose to tell that story. Instead, I want to emphasize the constitutive dichotomy of the discipline. On this fragmented territory and with the history of the methods' struggle for supremacy that any professional in the field carries on their shoulders, it is – *for political, rather than (epistemo)logical reasons* – difficult to practice both types of research method at the same time. We define and identify ourselves and each other as professionals in the communication studies discipline based on the type of methods we practice in our research. We are either qualitative or quantitative. Our orientations become our credo, our personal engagement, and our act of identification.

*I confess to my being a practitioner of qualitative research methods. In my work, I use rhetorical criticism and auto-ethnography. While searching for the possibility of articulating my identity, as a researcher personally and responsibly engaged in understanding cultural phenomena of interest, I proposed, in my doctoral dissertation, an innovative method. My direct collaborator, Dr. Alberto González, called it “ethnotextuality.” We cannot dismiss the necessity of choosing. We cannot avoid choice. Through its inherent logic, an initial choice may lead us to unimaginable places.*

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Herbert Wichelns, “The literary criticism of oratory,” in Carl R. Burgchardt (ed.), *Readings in rhetorical criticism*, Strata Publishing Company, State College, PA, 1995, pp. 3–28.

<sup>2</sup> Kenneth Burke, “The rhetoric of Hitler’s ‘battle’,” in Burgchardt, *Readings*, pp. 208–223.

<sup>3</sup> Ernest Wrage, “Public address: A study in social and intellectual history,” in Burgchardt, *Readings*, pp. 29–35.

<sup>4</sup> Wayland Parish, “The study of speeches,” in Burgchardt, *Readings*, pp. 35–47.

<sup>5</sup> Leland Griffin, “The rhetorical structure of the antimasonic movement,” in Burgchardt, *Readings*, pp. 369–378.

<sup>6</sup> Edwin Black, “Excerpts from *Rhetorical criticism: A study in method*,” in Burgchardt, *Readings*, pp. 47–59.

<sup>7</sup> Edwin Black, “The second persona,” in Burgchardt, *Readings*, pp. 190–200.

<sup>8</sup> Forbes Hill, “Conventional wisdom – traditional form – the president’s message of November 3, 1969,” in Burgchardt, *Readings*, pp. 164–176.

<sup>9</sup> Lloyd Bitzer, “The rhetorical situation,” in Burgchardt, *Readings*, pp. 60–68.

<sup>10</sup> Richard Vatz, “The myth of the rhetorical situation,” *Philosophy and Rhetoric*, Vol. 6, No. 3, 1973, pp. 154–161.

<sup>11</sup> Mary Garret and Xiaosui Xiao, “The rhetorical situation. Revisited,” *Rhetoric Society Quarterly*, Vol. 23, No. 2, 1993, pp. 30–40.



- <sup>12</sup> Lawrence Rosenfield, "The anatomy of critical discourse," in Burgchardt, *Readings*, pp. 69–88.
- <sup>13</sup> Karlyn Kohrs Campbell, "An exercise in the rhetoric of mythical America," in Burgchardt, *Readings*, pp. 200–205.
- <sup>14</sup> Ernest Bormann, "Fantasy and rhetorical vision: The rhetorical criticism of social reality," in Burgchardt, *Readings*, pp. 248–259.
- <sup>15</sup> Stephen Lucas, "The schism in. Rhetorical scholarship," in Burgchardt, *Readings*, pp. 88–107.
- <sup>16</sup> Phillip Wander, "The third persona: An ideological turn in rhetorical theory," in Burgchardt, *Readings*, pp. 107–125.
- <sup>17</sup> Walter Fisher, "Narration as a human communication paradigm: The case of public moral argument," in Burgchardt, *Readings*, pp. 290–312.
- <sup>18</sup> Raymie McKerrow, "Critical rhetoric: Theory and praxis," in Burgchardt, *Readings*, pp. 126–147.
- <sup>19</sup> Sonja Foss and Karen Foss, "The construction of feminine spectatorship in Garrison Keillor's radio monologues," in Burgchardt, *Readings*, pp. 526–543.
- <sup>20</sup> Karlyn Kohrs Campbell, "The rhetoric of women's liberation: An oxymoron," in Burgchardt, *Readings*, pp. 494–507.
- <sup>21</sup> Jesse Delia, "Communication research: A history," in Charles R. Neger and Stephen H. Chaffee (eds.), *Handbook of communication science*, Sage, Newbury Park, CA, 1987, pp. 20–98.
- <sup>22</sup> *Ibidem*.



## CHAPTER TWO

# RHETORICAL CRITICISM IN INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

The previous chapter presented an extremely concise review of the varied perspectives on rhetorical criticism, from its inception as a critical method of interrogation of public discourse in general to the most recent feminist or postmodern critical approaches. The task of the rhetorical critic resides in decrypting (the mode of construction of) the meaning of a discourse. Oftentimes, their purpose consists of placing discourse within a larger historical-cultural context. In performing rhetorical criticism, critics must acknowledge their ongoing meta-discursive position. To the extent they credit the Ricoeurian<sup>1</sup> assumption that any cultural artifact (discourse, film, photography, ritual, human activity, the human body, etc.) may be thought of as a “text,” the critical undertaking translates into understanding the mechanisms of production of the meaning of such a “text,” and the interests such “production” serves. Therefore, the critical undertaking employs several levels. First, we may talk about the relation between an orator/producer of a text and the discourse/text itself. Rhetorical critics interrogate that relation. Second, we must acknowledge the relationship that rhetorical critics themselves sustain with the texts whose meanings they endeavor to decipher. In that relationship, scholars in communication studies, practitioners of qualitative research methods, position themselves meta-critically. Thus, they become critics of rhetorical critics.

In this chapter, we do not approach texts which aim at familiarizing the academic public with the concept of rhetorical criticism and its various theoretical and practical approaches. Instead, we focus on texts whereby critics actually perform (high-quality) critical inquiry. In each instance, our purpose resides in illustrating the efficiency and the real potential of the different approaches to rhetorical criticism. Metaphorically speaking, rhetorical criticism resembles a diamond with countless sides. Each side reflects the “object” of inquiry in a different manner, according to its own possibilities. Throughout this chapter, we interpret texts whereby critics

practice specific approaches to rhetorical criticism. Thus, they privilege certain aspects of the “object” of their inquiry. By the same gesture, they leave aside/exclude/marginalize/silence/mute other aspects. Both actions convey a critic’s own subjective position in relation to the object: their own “politics” of inquiry.

With these words, we have just stepped on “mined” territory: *the political character of (scientific) inquiry*. In a different context,<sup>2</sup> I approached this issue extensively. For my purposes in this work, I am coming back to the topic in the manner in which my students and I approach it in the context of our Intercultural Communication class. I base my course on what, initially, constituted a simple exchange of messages, via e-mail, among five communication studies scholars<sup>3</sup> in the United States of America: Wenshu Lee, Gust Yep, Tom Nakayama, Radha Hedge, and Mary Jane Collier.

*Wenshu Lee was my professor of international communication during my second year in the doctoral program in the U. S. (2000–2001). She came from San Jose State university as a visiting professor. Wenshu was a small, smiley person, full of charm and mystery. Beyond the newness of her approach to pedagogical practices, which amazed me and filled me with enthusiasm, Wenshu interpellated me both professionally, as a researcher fully engaged in her areas of interest, and personally, as she became, despite the huge “political” difference between us at that time, my friend.*

*Wenshu taught her classes in the basement of the School of Communication Studies building, in a room equipped, as all others that were destined for “graduate” courses, with a “round” table. The ten to fifteen students and Wenshu, who was seemingly indistinct from us, gathered around it. A whiteboard and all of the state-of-the-art technological equipment one expects to find in such a seminar room completed the picture. Out of all the above, Wenshu only used the “roundness” of the table. Each person in the class accessed a portion of space absolutely equivalent with that of each other person, including that of the teacher. Wenshu’s approach to space – which, by the way, I copied without hesitation when I became, in my turn, a teacher – was not an unusual academic practice in the United States. All other classes I took throughout my doctoral years took place in similar conditions. The space which hosted the pedagogical act was designed in such manner so as to support, rather than obstruct, the “participatory” pedagogical model of Paulo Freire. But Wenshu brought her own difference to the theory to which the space attested. She proposed, through her own practices – as she talked sparingly and was quiet just as often as she spoke – that we all support the participatory model with our entire (discursive) bodies. More, she used certain “tricks” to give us all a voice. In my prolonged academic*

*experience, I have never encountered such ideas anywhere else. For instance, once she came to class with little perfumed candles. She turned off the artificial lights and we discussed Jun 'ichirō Tanizaki's In Praise of Shadows. She used everything around to facilitate our access to the texts which constituted the pre-text readings for our encounters. And, as a friend, she was faultlessly responsible.*

*I could write forever about Wenshu, the person. But we should turn our focus to that "draft" of her dialogue with the other four colleagues which, a year later, became a scientific article.<sup>4</sup> The piece got my attention right away, because I had rarely read a text which articulated the voices of certain researchers radically engaged in inquiry in such an authentic manner. Within a virtual medium of exchange, they created an alternative space of freedom which celebrated difference. The "norm" and the "normal" acquired new definitions, which acknowledged the interests of those engaged in dialogue, rather than ignore them.*

*At the beginning of each Intercultural Communication class, I invite my students into Wenshu's alternative "space." Convinced that I do not fail to represent anyone via my invitation, I prompt my students to take part in the dialogue of the five. If we manage to perceive the urgency of addressing a series of intercultural communication issues, we assume a "local" project of the discipline. Many students ask me why our discussion sessions exclusively employ texts written in the United States. My response is part of my identity. I tell my students I deem those texts essential to our common pedagogical project. As Ronald Pelias<sup>5</sup> wrote in an article we will discuss towards the end of this book, "with the entire academic authority" acquired through so many years of specialization, I reckon those texts – and not others – can help the students to understand the intercultural project. Once out of the "lobby" of education – and the exits, contrary to common opinion, do not await them at the end of the educational cycle; instead, they are spread all along their routes – students may use the experience of our thematic discussions in their everyday social life. If that explanation does not satisfy them (and sometimes it does not), I bring to my students' awareness the fact that the entire communication studies discipline and, particularly, intercultural communication, are "as American as apple pie." By studying the history of the discipline and its areas of research, we become aware of their specificity to the American academic context. Solely based on such a "work premise," we may succeed in finding the breaches where we may articulate our own differences, our own perspectives on communication and interculturality.*

Thus, Collier et al.<sup>6</sup> represent the pre-text for meta-theoretical talk. My students and I accompany Wenshu and her colleagues through their authentic project of rethinking intercultural communication. In our attempt to conceive an intercultural project of our own, we join their efforts. Lee's

idea that scholars should distinguish between two meanings of the “political” leads our way. Lee writes that, on the one hand, “political” opposes “scientific”: “political” means “unscientific, unscholarly work done by partisans, politicians, and people ‘on the street’”<sup>7</sup> and opposes “real scholarship – rigorous, scientific, generalizable, and done by people in the ‘academy’.”<sup>8</sup> On the other hand, “political” opposes “acontextualized”: “political” means “engaged, contextualized scholarship acknowledging the interests served and the limits/exclusions practiced”<sup>9</sup> and opposes “acontextualized scholarship that does not or refuses to acknowledge interests served/promoted and interests left out/excluded.”<sup>10</sup> Lee argues in favor of privileging the latter definition of the “political,” to the detriment of the former. The dominant, hegemonic research in the discipline (quantitative research) fosters the proliferation of the former meaning of the political. In the face of quantitative rigors of “scientificity” – reduced to such attributes/values as universality, generalizability, objectivity, and predictability – the definition of the political forces practitioners of qualitative methods into defensive positions. They have to argue, “But we are doing scientific work, as well!” Instead, Lee suggests, all (qualitative or quantitative) scholars should change their perspectives and acknowledge that *all scientific inquiry is political*.

The nature of intercultural communication, a necessary “project of intercultural communication” which lacks the shortcomings of previous scientific inquiry, premised on the urgency of intellectuals’ engagement in the social life, requires a “postcolonialist turn.” Tom Nakayama states that intercultural inquiry needs to dismiss the U. S. scholars’ custom of serving exclusively the invisible interests of “white” communities. Access to higher education has significantly differentiated the “work field” by reserving privileged spaces to the so-called “white collars” and excluding the “blue collars” from social life. The U. S. scholars who taught in the American universities after World War II were predominantly white American men. The phenomenal world and communication practices in particular were “seen,” in a unique and exhaustive manner, the way white American men “saw” them. Regardless of its being so constructed within and through discourse, this particular historical “reality” may constitute our point of departure in understanding interculturality, as the phenomenon appeared on the United States territory as *part of academic inquiry*. The cultural encounter has existed ever since people have populated the earth. Yet, *as an object of scientific inquiry*, intercultural communication appeared in the 20th century, more precisely in 1946, when the American government put forward its famous Foreign Affairs Act, a response to the crises which emerged as an outcome of the lack of

preparation of American diplomats to efficiently deal with foreign partners. According to the Act, American diplomats had to complete so-called “pre-departure courses” designed to teach them complex issues relating to communication with foreigners. E. T. Hall offered such preparation courses, designed to help Americans to approach their “cultural other.” Hence, intercultural communication as a separate area of research within the discipline was born in a classroom.

Tom Nakayama claims that scholars’ pursuit of social justice in the new project of intercultural communication helps them to stop serving the interests of the “white” community. Research methodologies themselves often fall prey to colonialist/imperialist interests. Thus, scholars should consciously reflect on the *interests that determine intercultural communication inquiry*. If they do not, they merely “assist,” once again, the white American man to “better” communicate with “the other”; in other words, they contribute to traditional imperialist/colonialist domination. Gust Yep agrees that the project of intercultural communication is profoundly political and, at the same time, extremely practical. Issues of power, representation, (in)visibility, celebration and marginalization, interests, purposes, ideology, voice, identity, and (self-)representation map the “political vocabulary” of intercultural research and solicit scholars to use them cautiously and responsibly. Their work directly affects the implementation of concrete and highly practical decisions that influence individuals and social communities. In fact, all five agree on the political character of intercultural inquiry. Given that four of them belong to a “racial minority,” but also to “genre and sexual minorities,” Lee’s proposal that *the act of conceptualization itself is political* becomes acceptable. Lee adds that such a statement does not mean blaming language(s) for human beings’ failure to think and express themselves other than through dichotomies, “binaries,” or differences. When people conceptualize or define concepts, the nature of language compels them to choose a definition to the detriment of all others. Lee argues that when dealing with “umbrella terms” which may subsume countless meanings, scholars should ask themselves questions such as: What interests does this definition articulate? What definitions have been left out, excluded, or not even imagined? If no one can avoid choosing, the thoughtful scholar may avoid using power to silence or delegitimize alternative possibilities of conceptualization. The “core” of the issue becomes defining the term “culture” itself so that intercultural communication legitimizes and includes alternative possibilities.

Lee lists no less than six definitions of the term “culture.” All definitions (in)form inquiry in intercultural communication. First, the famous opposition between culture and nature restricts the meaning of “culture” to people’s unique creative efforts. In this sense, culture means everything that has nothing to do with nature. The two concepts mutually exclude each other. Despite the prolonged history of the dichotomy, especially in anthropology, such delineation is difficult to sustain. Let us only remember Maitreyi, Mircea Eliade’s heroine, who fell in love with a tree. To the Native American population of the Apache reservation, the observatory on Mount Graham in South Arizona represents a sacred place, a space for prayer and divine veneration comparable to Christian churches.<sup>11</sup> In a second sense, culture means “refinement” or “mannerism.” It excludes everything “vulgar” or “unchiseled” which lacks refinement. This second definition privileges so-called high culture (“elite” culture) and leaves aside popular/pop culture, a vital part of American culture. American pop culture brings together cultural objects and practices destined for the “ordinary man,” the “common man,” or the “man on the street.” American popular culture scholars appropriated the term, as well as its theoretical foundations, from the Frankfurt School scholars (Adorno, Horkheimer etc.). Thus, the concept became fundamental in American culture. Americans placed the concept of the “ordinary man” on a pedestal. They made it central to the theoretical and practical act of celebration – post-industrialization and post-urbanization of the American society – of “mass culture.” Within and throughout such a celebratory act, the “ordinary man” became the “consumer.” The entire mass production served consumers to address (and invent) their needs. Hence, American pop culture constructed itself around the central concept of consumerism, human identity brutally reduced solely to that single attribute. Obviously, the second definition of culture directly insults American identity. It says that most constitutive data of Americans’ cultural identity simply does not count.

In a third sense, culture equals civilization. By virtue of their condition, “barbaric” or “backward” people fail to convey a culture or express themselves from a cultural perspective. The third definition privileges imperialist nations (Spain in the 16th–19th centuries, Great Britain and France in the 19th century, Germany and Japan during World War II, the United States of America and the Soviet Union during the Cold War, and the United States nowadays). It prevails within the “centers of empires” inasmuch as the second definition resonates with “domestic” (American) discourse. In a fourth sense, “culture” means those convictions, beliefs, values, language, etc. which certain communities share, and excludes any



unshared elements, the “dissident” voices, the “other” voices, or the voices of “the others.” The fourth definition privileges a “universalist and representative” perspective upon society. Yet, such a vision “often represents only a specific powerful group and silences other groups that do not readily share this view,”<sup>12</sup> such as disenfranchised groups. It dominates intercultural inquiry that is “liberal, open-minded, descriptive, and scientific but uncritical and limited to the geography of single nations (e. g., within the United States, within Japan, within Mexico).”<sup>13</sup>

According to the fifth definition, culture means dominant culture. The definition excludes so-called marginal cultures. It represents a more “charged” form of definitions 2, 3, and 4, because it acknowledges the fundamental element of power. It privileges those interrogations of culture which dominant communities/nations authorize. From a political standpoint, the fifth definition is more explicit than the previous ones. It dominates critical intercultural research (postcolonial, cultural, transnational, feminist, and Marxist studies). As it focuses on intervention and social change, it aims for an emancipative *telos*. The sixth definition Lee points out sounds “complex and ineffable”: “the shifting tension between what is shared and what is not shared by certain communities.”<sup>14</sup> Albeit that it assumes their existence, the definition excludes both the commonalities and the differences which communities display. Lee appreciates the sixth definition, a sort of processual, unstable, ever-changing, concurrential, dynamic, “meta-perspective” upon cultures, sensitive as regards issues such as power, equity, and ideology, which constitutes “the direction in which politicized intercultural communication is shifting.”<sup>15</sup> Lee wonders: Will scholars ever use such a complex definition?

Gust Yep warns that any project in intercultural inquiry compels scholars, before they engage with the research process *per se*, to consider certain questions which refer to the presuppositions of their particular undertaking: fundamental, (meta-)theoretical, and methodological. Scholars must take responsibility for their – always particular! – views on culture and its centrality in the process of inquiry; on the role of communication, power, ideology, and history; on the nature of knowledge; on the values their research sustains and how it does so; on the role of “voice” and the purpose of scientific inquiry in general. Ultimately, when engaged in intercultural research, scholars should have already responded to the question: What qualitative criteria guide me in my research? In one’s scientific inquiry, one cannot appreciate both qualitative criteria such as validity, generalizability, or objectivity – specific to social-

scientific, quantitative research – and historical situatedness and potential for social change – specific to humanist, qualitative inquiry – at the same time. In responding to all the questions above, scholars must take responsibility for the political dimension of their inquiries. At this crossroads, choice means answering such questions as: Who or what could I legitimately write about? What individuals and/or communities am I entitled to represent? What interests converge with mine so thoroughly that my academic authority entitles me to articulate them on behalf of or as a member of a certain community? Would such a community feel well represented or not by my scientific work? Would it affect their concrete, everyday lives? If so, is it a positive influence? If not, then the question stands: What for, scientific inquiry and scholarly work?

“Conventional” intercultural research suffers from all the symptoms of what, far from constituting “normal science,” became a pathological “anachronism”: the “i-reality” conferred upon concrete persons or communities who fail to identify with the descriptions or interpretations such studies propose. For instance, Tom Nakayama confesses he once failed to identify himself within his own alienated research. Conventional research centers on “white” individuals and communities. It does not acknowledge its inherently political dimension. It does not take the differences between individuals/communities into account and it does not interrogate the constructed and presumptuous character of “knowledge.” In opposition to conventional research, “fringe scholars” – which includes, but is not limited to, women and men of color – take responsibility for maintaining their fringe view, to “see and hear more clearly from ‘meta’ perspectives and think and talk impurely to push issues unaddressed and unnamed.”<sup>16</sup> “Conventional” scholars, just like the imperialist subject, “cannot and will not see the subtleties and power of the fringe. *What they do see and create in their representation of the fringe* must conform to the logic of the empire – domination, control, erasure, and profit taking.”<sup>17</sup> By turning self-reflectively upon its own premises and being self-aware of its particular ways of “constructing” representations, “anti-hegemonic” knowledge places itself in the service of the entire society. In that, it takes social equity as a reference point. Social equity becomes an ethical imperative for communication studies scholars, for those involved in intercultural inquiry, and for professors.

Far from aiming to replace one dominant discourse with another, the new project of intercultural communication is based on a wish, on the contrary, “to create new spaces for multiple voices and knowledges of individuals and groups yet named, recognized, and honored.”<sup>18</sup> The

necessary “political turn” in intercultural research reflects “the commitment to democratic goals in the production of knowledge.”<sup>19</sup> In sustaining, theoretically and practically, “progressive social change,”<sup>20</sup> the new *telos* of intercultural inquiry should progressively dismiss the stigma which imprints the entire academic inquiry: the ordinary man’s suspicion that scientific inquiry has nothing to do with authentic life and real interests. Communication scholars should fill the gap between the “ivory tower” of the academy and social life in general. Mary Jane Collier puts a precise diagnosis on “conventional” scholarly research: academic life trains scholars to incorporate a “model” of the “successful intellectual.” We all chose an area of “expertise” which becomes part of our identity. Then, to get promotion, we see ourselves compelled to plead for the centrality of our views, theories, or approaches. We publish as many articles, book chapters, and, sometimes, books in precisely those “weighing” publications in our professional areas of interest. We reach the peak of our success when our theory becomes a commodity we may sell to our doctoral students, who reproduce it in their studies. In short, we train ourselves in promoting our intellectual identities to climb the academic hierarchy as fast as we can. Instead, we should look for alliances with our fellow colleagues through the process of knowledge and research. We should “unlearn” the canons of scientific inquiry and engage in an “interrhetorical relearning process with co-equals across cultural boundaries.”<sup>21</sup> We must always ask ourselves who benefits from our research. And, as *simply registering* different voices does not make our work political, *responsible intercultural inquiry means expanding our representational possibilities*, so that they theoretically legitimize the most secluded and obscure corners of culture. That way, we have a chance of staying contemporary with the complex world around us, and with each other.

### **2.1. “Whiteness,” a Discursive Construct: Raka Shome’s Analysis of *City of Joy***

My interpretation of Raka Shome<sup>22</sup> confesses my political identity and my “readiness” to articulate a new project of intercultural communication in Timișoara, Romania. We must stay optimistic: my students and I commenced that journey almost a decade ago.

*Raka Shome’s text got my attention many years ago, in the fall of 2000, when I studied intercultural communication with Dr. Alberto González, whom I intellectually “allied” with to the end of my doctoral years. In his classes, Dr. González had us read texts he liked himself in the first place.*

*As an expert in intercultural communication and practitioner of qualitative research methods – rhetorical criticism, particularly – Dr. González was part of the “resistance”: first, because he practiced qualitative research methods; second, as his name reveals, because of his Mexican ancestry; third, because he put his entire “intellectual credo” within the texts he brought to our meetings. Those texts carried his political engagement: they had Dr. González’s “approval”; always subtly, always discreetly, they helped to articulate his identity.*

*As he recently confessed, Al González has struggled his entire life for the expansion of the possibilities for representation. For intercultural communication in the United States, he accomplished what perhaps only Carl R. Burghardt did for rhetorical criticism. Our Voices: Essays in culture, ethnicity, and communication, the book he edited,<sup>23</sup> which has reached its fifth edition, represents the materialization of the new project of intercultural communication, as our old(er) partners in dialogue, Lee and the others, conceived it. Like Dr. González, I thought an interrogation of “whiteness” through Shome’s article could help us to get a sense of the difficulties inherent to pursuing the new project of intercultural communication. Expanding the possibilities of representation employed true heroism on the part of many scholars.*

In 1996, *Communication Quarterly*, one of the most prestigious academic publications in communication studies in the United States, published Shome’s article, which initially constituted a conference presentation at the convention the International Communication Association hosts annually. Shome’s study instantly gets our attention through a challenging motto. The motto belongs to Claire Pajaczkowska and Lola Young: “Within European history descriptions of Whiteness are absent due to denial of imperialism and that leaves a blank in the place of knowledge of the destructive effects of wielding power. An identity based on power never has to develop consciousness of itself as responsible, it has no sense of its limits.”<sup>24</sup> The statement is provocative. Let us note a few phrases and come back to it later: “descriptions of Whiteness are absent”; “denial of imperialism”; “a blank in the place of knowledge of the destructive effects”; “identity based on power ... has no sense of its limits.” A description of the “European” already interpellates us from above the text and our European culture. We should manage a response, but perhaps not just yet.

Raka Shome clearly points out critical studies in the United States particularly focused on “representations of non-white racial groups in hegemonic cultural discourses.”<sup>25</sup> Despite certain benefits, such as the introduction of classes on “race” or “minorities” in the American academic

curricula, the limit of such criticism resides in brief attention delivered to the white “center.” The effects entail “continuous legitimation of ‘white’ as a hegemonic racial group.”<sup>26</sup> Research on “whiteness” became a topic of interest to scholars in the departments of history, cultural studies, sociology, critical media studies, education, and even rhetorical inquiry.<sup>27</sup>

*We can take her word for it. In order to get published in Communication Quarterly, obviously she has “done her homework”: she covered that mandatory part of any (conventional) academic undertaking called “review of the pertinent literature,” which involves a dialogue with (only) those scholars preoccupied, with “acceptable” approximation, with the same object of interest. We should remember the year though: 1995. In 1995, there was one critical rhetorical study on “whiteness.” In 2000–2001, when Lee’s dialogue with the others took place, Shome’s study articulated “common knowledge” among those preoccupied with a change in intercultural inquiry.*

Shome defines “whiteness”: “By whiteness I mean the everyday, invisible, subtle, cultural, and social practices, ideas, and codes that discursively secure the power and privilege of white people, but that strategically remains unmarked, unnamed, and unmapped in contemporary society.”<sup>28</sup> So, “whiteness” is *a concept*. As such, it belongs to discourse. Previous research studied the space of daily manifestations of “whiteness” to perceive and expose the rhetorical strategies through which “whites are positioned and produced as ‘whites’.”<sup>29</sup> If the discursively legitimated power of white people is to come to an end, “it is important to uncover the various self-representational strategies through which whiteness establishes its social, cultural, and political hegemony.”<sup>30</sup> Such revelation becomes the (very difficult!) task of the rhetorical critic. In Raymie McKerrow’s sense of the term, the rhetorical critic practices critical rhetoric. In examining the discourse on “whiteness,” critical rhetoric, aimed at unmasking the discourse of power and at examining the dimensions of domination, allows the critic to understand some of the “silent and often non-deliberate ways in which rhetoric conceals as much as it reveals.”<sup>31</sup> Performing rhetorical criticism on “whiteness” in its postmodern version allows the critic to “extend the frontiers of rhetorical criticism to a deconstruction of power and ideology.”<sup>32</sup> Despite certain feminist, ideological, or postmodern contributions, rhetorical criticism had not previously accomplished such efforts adequately.

Shome evaluates the task as extremely difficult. “Whiteness” characterizes Anglo/European cultures through what Ruth Frankenberg<sup>33</sup> calls a certain “dailiness,” which masks it and conceals its identity as a

racial category (among others). This dailiness refers to a “set of cultural rules, procedures, tacit assumptions about the way things should be that have acquired a social normalcy as a result of white people controlling dominant cultural, social, and political institutions for generations.”<sup>34</sup> The ubiquity of whites’ dailiness makes it invisible to the eyes of the dominant community and, in any case, less visible than other racial categories, such as “blackness, asianness, ‘hispanic’-ness,”<sup>35</sup> etc. The authority of the dominant discourse stems from *an absence*. It relies on its ability to avoid *self-nomination* and its capacity to elude its *particular* character.<sup>36</sup> To transgress the phase whereby the ubiquity of “whiteness” helps it to escape definition, we must ask ourselves: How could we begin to critically de-center “whiteness” in contemporary society, as long as it remains so unnamed and so unmarked? Shome’s proposal for a solution comes right away: “One way in which to examine ‘whiteness’ and expose its constructed-ness, as opposed to its seeming natural-ness, is to focus on the institutions that discursively produce and secure the power of whites.”<sup>37</sup> Media count among such institutions. In Stuart Hall’s footsteps, Shome appreciates that the media, far from comprising simple (regardless of how influential) suppliers of ideas as regards race, are the places *per excellence* “where these ideas are articulated, worked on, transformed and elaborated.”<sup>38</sup>

In her attempt to take a critical position towards “whiteness,” the “object” of her inquiry, Shome tests her theory as regards the mode in which “whiteness” can be deconstructed on a concrete case: a media product, Roland Joffe’s 1992 film *City of Joy*. In positioning meta-critically towards a text, it is important for critics to respond to a few questions. First, what is the object of inquiry in the study under scrutiny? Second, what is the subjective position of the researcher in relation to the object of their inquiry? Third, what is the research method they use? And fourth, how does the study contribute to the development of intercultural communication and communication studies? In the “equation” of the cognitive process, critics cut the task into pieces easier to approach the questions: *Who* knows *what* or *whom*? What *instruments* do they use, and with what *relevance*? Because of Shome’s effort to explicitly define “whiteness,” we get *direct access to the political dimension of her inquiry*. We can ask: Whose interests does this definition serve? What definitions are left out/silenced? Such questions will help us to understand Shome’s critical position in relation to the object of her inquiry and her choice to move the project of intercultural communication forward on certain paths instead of others.