



Javnost - The Public

Journal of the European Institute for Communication and Culture

ISSN: 1318-3222 (Print) 1854-8377 (Online) Journal homepage: <http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rjav20>

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To cite this article: Kaarle Nordenstreng (2016) Being (Truly) Critical in Media and Communication Studies: Reflections of a Media Scholar Between Science and Politics, Javnost - The Public, 23:1, 89-104

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13183222.2016.1149763>



Published online: 31 Mar 2016.



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BEING (TRULY) CRITICAL IN MEDIA AND COMMUNICATION STUDIES: REFLECTIONS OF A MEDIA SCHOLAR BETWEEN SCIENCE AND POLITICS

Kaarle Nordenstreng

This article is based on the author's contribution to the 2014 EURICOM Colloquium with its call for "reflections about critique and its conditions of possibility in the academic field of media and communication studies". The article intends to review the context and nature of critical media and communication studies, seen through the author's personal experience in national as well as international spheres. While the testimony is autobiographical, an attempt is made to contemplate career development from the outside unlike in conventional memoirs. This article is a prelude to a reflective review of the author's professional and political life story, forthcoming as a book in Finnish. The introduction gives examples of the use of the term "critical" in the field of media and communication studies, followed by a review of different ways in which the critical concept is used in the literature of the field, leading to a reflection on the precarious relationship between the intellectual and the political. A personal testimony by the author then provides a case illustrating how a scholar becomes critical under the influence of philosophical, political and international factors. The discussion at the end offers some concluding reflections.

KEYWORDS history of communication research; critical school; media policies; politicisation; intellectual development

Introduction

Let us first note how the idea of being critical appears as a qualifier in media and communication studies. Good examples are provided by two scholarly associations and two journals. The leading international non-governmental organisation in the field, the International Association for Media and Communication Research (IAMCR), profiles itself as follows:

... is the preeminent worldwide professional organisation in the field of media and communication research. Its members promote global inclusiveness and excellence within the best traditions of critical scholarship in the field.¹

The qualifier "critical" is not included in the IAMCR Statutes² and the reference on the IAMCR welcome webpage seems to mark the tradition prevailing in its ranks in the 1970s: a moderately left-leaning approach personified by its President James Halloran and highlighted by scholars such as Dallas Smythe and Herbert Schiller. However, nowadays the IAMCR's activities, with all their diversity, hardly appear to be more critical than, for example, those of the European Communication Research and Education Association

(ECREA). An exception is the Political Economy Section, which since the mid-1970s has provided support and stimulation for already two generations of critical scholars. Yet in general the IAMCR has always been fairly ecumenical, accommodating different orientations. Even during the heydays of the “critical” period in the 1970s, Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann and other well-known conservative figures of western scholarship were involved in its leading bodies. Given such a historical legacy, the term critical seems to be less than apt here. Today, all western scholarly associations are more or less pluralistic and, at the same time, reluctant to see themselves as uncritical. In fact, critical no longer refers to typically anti-hegemonic tendencies with political overtones, but simply to a scholarly and scientific approach in general.

Another example is provided by the Union of Democratic Communications (UDC), an American-based association of critical media scholars established in the early 1980s to support and promote junior scholars who felt threatened by the predominantly conservative academic establishment. Unlike the IAMCR, the UDC was supposed to be sectarian to a point. The following is how the UDC presents itself:

It is an organization of communication researchers, journalists, media producers, policy analysts, academics and activists dedicated to:

- critical study of the communications establishment;
- production and distribution of democratically controlled and produced media;
- fostering alternative, oppositional, independent and experimental production;
- development of democratic communications systems locally, regionally and internationally.

UDC encourages critical perspectives in communication theory, media production and the study of popular culture.³

Critical is here coupled with the qualifiers democratic, alternative, oppositional and independent. In this context, critical clearly denotes a leftist orientation and serves a specific purpose.

How about a journal which is well established in the field with critical in its very name? *Critical Studies in Media Communication* presents itself as follows:

... provides a home for scholarship in media and mass communication from a cultural studies and critical perspective. It particularly welcomes cross-disciplinary works that enrich debates among various disciplines, critical traditions, methodological and analytical approaches, and theoretical standpoints.⁴

Here critical has a vague meaning associated with cultural studies. It suggests a reading whereby critical is a fairly general quality in media studies, used more or less decoratively to add juicy flavour to spice up an otherwise bland title. The same tone of general innovation is provided by an example of the new journals which keep emerging in the field along with new media forms and genres:

The Journal of Games Criticism (JGC) is a non-profit, peer-reviewed, open-access journal which aims to respond to these cultural artifacts by extending the range of authors to include both traditional academics and popular bloggers. The journal strives to be a producer of feed-forward approaches to video games criticism with a focus on influencing gamer culture, the design and writing of video games, and the social understanding of video games and video games criticism.⁵

In brief, the use of the concept critical seems to have suffered inflation, thereby losing any precise meaning. One might with good reason ask when critical is used as a fashionable label or when the intention is to be truly critical.

Critical Perspectives

However, criticality in a demanding sense is not a simple notion. The concept is quite elusive and used in the literature in a number of ways. What I suggest as its core is the idea of radical: delving down to the roots. The origins of the concept criticality lead to the age of antiquity with Socrates, Plato and Aristotle as shown by Wolfgang Fritz Haug (2012). Yet its current meaning was mainly laid down by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels:

In their conception of critique, that is both in their practice of it and in their reflections on it, Marx and Engels draw on bourgeois Enlightenment. But whereas the latter struggled against the holy feudal rule of absolutism and its religious legitimation by the church, they struggled against the social-economic basis of the bourgeoisie; against the relations of power and exploitation that constitute capitalism and the ideologies that try to justify it. In this way they sublimate the world of Enlightenment both in the conserving and radical critical sense by pulling it from the moral realm and setting it on a new path of the critique of the world that focuses on the material interests and real contradictions in the perspective of changing the world. (Haug 2012, 39; quote translated for this article by Juha Koivisto)

The phrase “ruthless criticism” was aptly raised by William Solomon and Robert McChesney (1993) to the title of their reader on new perspectives in US communication history. The idea was introduced early on by Marx in his letter to Arnold Ruge in September 1843:

We realize all the more clearly what we have to accomplish in the present—I am speaking of *ruthless criticism of everything existing*, ruthless in two senses: The criticism must not be afraid of its own conclusions, nor of conflict with powers that be. (Marx [1843] 1975, 142; original emphasis)

Accordingly, Marxism is obviously the main source of inspiration for the modern concept of criticality.⁶ After all, Marx gave to his *Capital* the subtitle *A Critique of Political Economy*.⁷ It was a critique of both the bourgeois economic system and the contemporary bourgeois science of economics. A fundamentally critical approach—ruthless criticism—can be seen to be a leading methodology of Marxism. It means uncompromising criticism of everything; especially the existing powers in society, but also one’s own thinking—thus encouraging self-criticism. This original idea of ruthless criticism has unfortunately been buried under later Marxist doctrines of Leninism, Maoism and so forth. An important counterforce to these intellectually unproductive tendencies has been Antonio Gramsci, who served as an indispensable source for critical thinking.

Political economy has been a branch of economics since the eighteenth century and continues to be so after the critique by Marx. Combining economics, political science and sociology, it is made up of many schools of thought—including Marxist political economists. In point of fact, many Marxists nowadays present their work in the name of political economy, which has become a soft cover for critical Marxist scholarship. This is particularly true in media and communication research, as demonstrated by the bulky reader *Political*

Economy of the Media (Golding and Murdock 1997) and monographs such as *The Political Economy of Communication* (Mosco 1996) and *The Political Economy of Media* (McChesney 2008). The same strand of political economy is represented by works such as *Capitalism and Communication* (Garnham 1990) and *Communication and Class Struggle* (Mattelart and Siegelau 1979, 1983).

If the Political Economy School in the field has a direct kinship with Marxism, the Frankfurt School differentiates itself as an autonomous branch of philosophy, psychology and sociology not directly related to Marxism. Yet it shares criticality as a basic approach; actually it is known as the Critical Theory School, with scholars such as Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer and Herbert Marcuse, followed by a second generation with first and foremost Jürgen Habermas.⁸ The critical theory tradition has been an important element in the history of communication studies in the United States, as shown by Hanno Hardt (1992)—both as a source of inspiration to emulate and as a warning example to keep a safe distance.

Common to the Critical Theory and the Political Economy Schools is an emphasis on power structures in society as a context of where to look at the media and culture, particularly the mechanisms of maintaining political and cultural hegemony in society. For these schools, critical means essentially delving deep beyond the manifest surface phenomena to the underlying roots determining the power relations. In addition, there are those media and communication scholars who do not belong to either of these two schools but who are equally keen to direct their critical attention to the power structures behind media—notably Stuart Hall's Birmingham School⁹ and individual authors such as James Curran (2002).

While these critical approaches to media and communication are radical in a demanding sense of the term, there are other types of scholarship in the field which also exercise criticism, but in milder ways—not going to the roots of power relations. They offer oppositional and alternative views to the mainstream—from journalism (Atton 2002) to theories of development (Thomas 2015). Actually there are numerous practices and perspectives which can be seen as critical in this or that sense, as shown in George Gerbner's landmark "Ferment in the Field" issue of *Journal of Communication* (Gerbner 1983). However, only few of them meet the standards of truly critical and radical research, as set out in Christian Fuchs's (2011) *Foundations of Critical Media and Information Studies*.

The uptake of the critical within the field has not been stable over time, nor is this a continuous history of unfettered growth or a withering away. On the contrary, there have been quite significant fluctuations. One perspective on how criticality is understood in the field is offered by an historical review of the scholarship over the past six decades as suggested in my *Javnost* article of 2004 (Nordenstren 2004). I distinguished six stages from the angle leftist thinking, one for each decade:

- 1950s—the Left is invisible;
- 1960s—the Left is on the offensive;
- 1970s—the Left is established;
- 1980s—the Left is challenged;
- 1990s—the Left is co-opted; and
- 2000s—the Left is making a comeback?

In this review, Left is understood as an anti-hegemonic critical force making a difference in a predominantly bourgeois-western field. Naturally this is just one angle, which nevertheless serves as a reminder of how the notion of critical becomes absorbed by the

political tendencies of the day. Political is understood here in a general sense, and does not restrict the meaning of political to party politics—it is seen as not merely observing social phenomena, but acting upon them.

The Precarious Relationship between Intellectual and Political

This political nature of the critical raises important strategic issues. As an excursion into the history of ideas in the field, I engaged in some soul-searching around the relationship between the New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO) and critical scholarship in the *Festschrift* for Dallas W. Smythe (Nordenstreng 1993). Because this concerns two tracks of a historical movement—political and intellectual—it serves as a good example of the complex relationship between these components, which have a lot in common. I traced four aspects common to both sides:

- A holistic view of the world with communication as an integral part of it, whereby communication and power are inseparable and media are seen as an omnipotent factor in society—for good and ill.
- Equality as a predominant value both within society and between nations, whereby imbalance and domination should be countered with pluralism and equal opportunity—not only in principle (as libertarians do), but also in practice (as social liberals do).
- Objective truth as the mission of mass communication, based on epistemological realism (common to both bourgeois and Marxist traditions), whereby it is justified to speak about true and false consciousness and about manipulation by the media.
- A normative approach to reality, where at issue are not only supposedly value-free empirical observations but also ethical and ideological positions.

With such components central to both the political and intellectual tracks of the movement, each growing out of its own roots, it was natural that the two at some point met and blended in a hybrid where it was difficult to tell where science ends and politics begins. The testimony of my participation in the political NWICO movement (Nordenstreng 2011), while simultaneously active as a scholar of international communication, demonstrates that such a hybrid may promote both science and politics.

Yet the history of ideas teaches us another lesson, which is more intriguing: the paradox that politicisation beyond a certain level turns from a creative ferment into a repressive paralysing. An instructive case is UNESCO's approach to communication research and policy, examined in my contribution to the *Festschrift* for James D. Halloran (Nordenstreng 1994). First, from the late 1960s onwards, UNESCO approached communication research and policies with a critical paradigm, calling for social relevance rather than methodological sophistication (i.e. politicisation). Then, just when such a policy orientation had gained momentum and the message of critical scholars was taken up by crucial forces in the international community, politics became so pervasive that science was left with no proper breathing space—it fell victim to over-politicisation.

When reflecting upon the precarious relationship between the political and intellectual tracks of international communication, I first need to concede that all social phenomena are political in nature and that it is therefore misguided to suggest that a truly scientific study of social communication could ever be devoid of political implications. Then I also

need to point out that high politics may exert an inhibiting influence upon the intellectual sphere in two respects: the political forces interfere directly in intellectual inquiry by institutional moves such as allocating resources in accordance with the prevailing political balance, typically muzzling anti-hegemonic progressive scholarship; and the political atmosphere indirectly influences scholarship through political conflicts and controversies, dominating the intellectual sphere so that the analytical arsenal may become a mere repetition of political power configurations.

The latter syndrome was commonly associated with the Cold War, whereby the East–West conflict was so all-pervasive that it left hardly any intellectual space for other considerations beyond the perpetuation of controversies such as freedom versus censorship. In both camps the end of the Cold War gave hope for the release of much intellectual potential repressed by political expediency. However, the experience has been otherwise, beginning with main developments in Central and Eastern Europe: the vindictive attitude—even persecution mentality—towards those associated with the old socialist regimes, including the very reformers instrumental to bringing them down, and ending up with the sell-out of mediocre neoliberalism to the new free market. In the West, on the other hand, the end of the Cold War has led to a comeback of the critical Left as suggested in my historical review (Nordenstreng 2004) and in such recent publications as Fuchs and Mosco (2012) and Coban (2015).

My conclusion in the articles of 1993 and 1994 was that over-politicisation may indeed imperil a sound and creative intellectual movement. In another article (Nordenstreng 1995) I went on to warn that the media scholar operating in the contiguous no man’s land between science and politics should keep a safe distance from both. In other words, I saw the ideal media scholar as a dialogical partner in relation to social practice—in a way similar to that in which the anthropologist approaches his/her object. I also elaborated: if we are to follow the good advice of Karl Marx not by merely philosophising about the world but by going out and changing it, the way to do so today is not to get too much involved in murky politics. By this I mean a preoccupation with politics and ideology so overwhelming as to leave no room for rational and analytical consideration of the question at issue.

A Personal Testimony

Against this background we shall now shift to a more personal angle by looking at critical scholarship as I have encountered, adopted and promoted it during the five decades of my excursions in the field. What follows is an individual story intended to illustrate general tendencies—not to celebrate myself as the ultimate personification of criticality, but to demonstrate the context and complexity of critical thinking. The first occasion to do with my case was John Lent’s (1995) collection *A Different Road Taken*, in which he added me to the critical communication profiles of Dallas Smythe, George Gerbner, Herbert Schiller and James Halloran.¹⁰ I felt embarrassed to be ranked alongside these senior scholars but agreed to be displayed as a representative of younger generation with the same orientation. This collection is a valuable resource on the history of critical scholarship in communication, including insightful interviews with the five persons and two evaluative articles on each of them by younger scholars. My own interview there provides already a fairly detailed testimony of my development towards

critical thinking, but here my case is presented in rather more systematic way with relevant references.

It happens that in 2015 it was exactly 50 years since I was employed in 1965 as a junior faculty member in the Department of Journalism and Mass Communication at the University of Tampere (UTA). In 1967 I moved to the Finnish Broadcasting Company, working there as head of research and a member of the long-range planning team until 1971, when I was appointed Professor at the University of Tampere.¹¹ The main lines of my academic life are listed in a short CV¹² accompanied by an interview with Michael Meyen (2013) as well as materials in a *Festschrift* for my 60th birthday (Karvonen and Pietiläinen 2001).

I grew into societal and political consciousness in the intellectual climate of the 1960s—in its “progressive and democratic” stream in western countries known as the New Left. Its core was the belief that everything is political and that the power struggle pervades society—not least media, culture and science. The mainstream tradition of logical positivism was typically seen as a brand of bourgeois (i.e. misguided) scholarship conjuring up an illusion of objective reality around a bastion of class-based forces. Countering this was the critical scholarship based on an anti-hegemonic approach to power structures and insisting that science and politics are interconnected—indeed, part and parcel of a single social process, as claimed by dialectical and historical materialism.

It was in such a climate that this young scholar and his generation entered the field of communication research. American-dominated mass communication research was not merely something to be learned and applied but also to be criticised, as tactfully done in my first international journal contribution (Nordenstreng 1968). My own national environment was particularly conducive to a critical approach as it was exceptionally strongly advocated in Finland from the late 1960s on (see Pietilä, Malmberg, and Nordenstreng 1990).

What led me to become a critical scholar in this atmosphere? In hindsight, the process boils down to three factors: overcoming positivism; being involved in political processes; and getting into international networks. These are interrelated but analytically distinguishable.

The first factor is most fundamental because it deals with a philosophical paradigm, which incorporates a view of the world and of the role of scholarship in it. My initial worldview from home and school was quite a conventional bourgeois approach to society, science and politics without any critical elements based on class background, nor on youthful anarchistic tendencies. I entered university studies in 1960 with a humanistic outlook and an interest in psychoanalysis,¹³ but was soon indoctrinated into a behaviouristic and empiricist approach to human beings and society at large. Reality for me was the observable surface of things which could be analysed by statistical methods¹⁴ rather than unscientific speculation. I had fully internalised the positivist outlook. When I was employed as a junior faculty member in Journalism and Mass Communication at UTA in 1965, my mandate was to teach research methods in this spirit. It was at this stage that I began to systematically read the literature of communication research—of course mainly American, with Wilbur Schramm as the leading light.¹⁵

However, soon after this I was exposed to other streams of thought—not from communication studies (I was totally unaware, for example, of the Critical School), but from the rapidly changing political culture of the time. The initial impulse came from the USA while spending the fall semester 1966 at Southern Illinois University, where I witnessed the mounting unrest among students as well as in the surrounding poor community. The main tide of change overtook me after returning to Finland in spring 1967 in the middle

of an incipient cultural revolution, and moreover working in one of its main facilitators, the Finnish Broadcasting Company (YLE). The political side of it will be covered later, but here the point is that the surrounding political culture began to undermine my positivist view of the world, making me increasingly critical. Crucial contributors in this development were my fellow workers in the research and long-range planning department of YLE—all of them politically more or less leftist. One of them was the philosopher Yrjö Ahmavaara, who not only wrote a groundbreaking book on the theory of information but guided a generation of Finnish scholars to become anti-positivists and critics of the existing power relations.¹⁶

While as head of research at YLE I pursued conventional studies on radio and television audiences, the unusual combination of research and long-range planning brought me to several policy projects which literally broke “Hume’s guillotine”—the cornerstone of positivism, whereby facts about how things are permit no conclusion on how things ought to be. A shift from descriptive to normative was natural for this policy-oriented research—with criticism as an inherent part of it.¹⁷

Although my formal academic work up to the doctoral dissertation in 1969 followed a positivist line, my general orientation had become unequivocally anti-positivist and critical by the time I moved from broadcasting to academia in 1971. My inaugural lecture was an exhortation for a holistic approach in communication research with less attention to media-specific particularities and main focus on the socio-political forces determining the structures and operation of mass communication. The paradigmatic change was strengthened by the academic environment where younger colleagues and students alike were engaged with more or less Marxist study groups. Further stimulation came from a national degree reform in the humanities and social sciences, from a traditional compartmentalised and esoteric system to a more interdisciplinary and pragmatic system. Additional ingredients were supplied by the first signals in the field about a nascent information society.¹⁸

An extended presentation of my scholarly orientation of this stage was a textbook, in Finnish, based on my annual lecture course introducing undergraduates to Journalism and Mass Communication.¹⁹ It portrayed the individual as the material base of human consciousness, society as the operative framework of consciousness and mass communication as the distribution network of social consciousness. Mass communication is positioned as a hybrid between the productive base of society and its superstructure divided into institutions of knowledge and management. The book advocated historical and dialectical materialism and its epistemology was unambiguously realist: an objective reality exists and the ideal role of media is to present that reality.

The shift from an exclusively positivist-descriptive paradigm to a more critical-normative paradigm was fuelled by invitations to join national communication policy projects: first and foremost the Government Committee on Communication Policy dealing with the whole range of media policies from state subsidies to the press to new cable technologies,²⁰ but also a committee for revising the legislation on privacy and pornography as well as a council to monitor Finland’s participation in the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE), leading to the Final Act of Helsinki (see Nordenstreng and Schiller 1976).

A combination of media policy and foreign policy had begun already during my years in YLE when I was invited to join the Finnish National Commission for UNESCO, bringing me to its biannual General Conference and also to events such as the Intergovernmental Conference on Cultural Policies in Europe (Eurocult).²¹ Direct links to UNESCO were established by an invitation in 1969 to a Meeting of Experts on Mass Communication and Society in Montreal²² and later to join a panel of experts preparing the Proposals for an International

Programme of Communication Research.²³ Furthermore, I attended—and was asked to chair—a meeting of experts to deliberate and define the concept of communication policies.²⁴

Moreover, UNESCO commissioned from my department the first overview mapping the import and export of television programmes around the world, leading to a symposium in Tampere to assess the results (Nordenstreng and Varis 1974). Ironically, the mapping part was a purely empirical—positivist—research exercise, but this was balanced by the symposium for assessing the results with scholars including Dallas Smythe, Herbert Schiller and Elihu Katz as well as an address by the President of Finland. Urho Kekkonen did not mind reading sentences such as the following, (ghost)written by me with the support of Herb Schiller: “Just as within Finland there is a situation in the press described as bourgeois hegemony, on the international arena there is a state of affairs called communication imperialism” (1974, 44).

A distinct layer of my policy experience came from direct exposure to the developing countries: first as a UNESCO expert in Malaysia in early 1972 and later through several encounters with colleagues from the developing countries mainly at the IAMCR conferences, followed by the 1976 Symposium on Information of the Non-Aligned Movement in Tunis.²⁵ More experience of the developing world accumulated thereafter during my sojourn to Tanzania in 1981–1982. Yet my main window to the Global South was the International Organization of Journalists (IOJ), of which I was elected President in 1976, serving in this position for 14 years.²⁶ There, however, the main attention was turned to the Soviet Union and the socialist countries of Central and Eastern Europe. Accordingly, I had the privilege of being exposed to an exceptionally wide range of media realities in the developing South and the socialist East—in addition to my home territory in the capitalist West.

All of this policy-related experience, both national and international, imbued my worldview with an anti-positivist and critical orientation. It was not a Marxist position in the demanding sense of the term, although my textbook of 1975 actually made frequent references to the Soviet-authored textbooks of Marxist-Leninist philosophy. The intensive years of the late 1960s and early 1970s left me with no time to really read *The Capital* and other basics of Marxism, nor to participate in study groups on the materialist approach in social sciences. My paradigmatic development remained eclectic, as aptly characterised by colleagues with their critique of the 1975 textbook.²⁷

The second factor explaining why I became a critical scholar was my engagement in political life in Finland and internationally. My experience of domestic politics came through professional activities dealing with politicians and political institutions, first at YLE, which was subject to considerable political pressures in the late 1960s, and then in the 1970s in various committees pursuing media and cultural policies. This exposure taught me to understand the political games, which I found fascinating while preferring to keep them at arm’s length. My personal political position was veering from that of an immature bourgeois youngster towards one that was increasingly to the left—a tendency typical of that generation. However, unlike most of my colleagues and friends, I did not join any political party but just cooperated with some of them—mainly the Communists and also the Social Democrats, as well as parties in the liberal centre. I designated myself in public as an “independent (non-affiliated) left-winger”. This, in essence, meant a dedication to social justice and equality.

International politics became familiar to me first at UNESCO and later especially at the IOJ. Again, I did not enter the first row of political actors in international arena since I

represented myself either as an academic expert or as a representative of a non-governmental organisation (the IOJ), rather than of my government or of a UN organisation.²⁸ Nevertheless, with all of the contacts, including two presidents of the Non-Aligned Movement—Indira Gandhi in 1983 and Robert Mugabe in 1989—my exposure to international politics was rich and stimulating: it strengthened both my critical approach to the existing world order and my idealism about how to change it for better. At the international level, my political designation was “progressive and democratic”.

The third factor—international networking—is obvious already in the preceding two, but it deserves to be separately highlighted. My first international conference in the field was the IAMCR in Herceg Novi (Yugoslavia) in 1966, introducing me to colleagues such as George Gerbner, Herbert Schiller and Yassen Zassoursky. James Halloran followed, at a Council of Europe reception in Salzburg in 1968, and the following year he included me in the Meeting of Experts in Montreal (see note 21). I first met Dallas Smythe at a Yugoslavian UNESCO conference in Bled in 1968, followed by several intensive encounters, as recounted in the interview with Lent (1995) and documented in Nordenstreng (1970) as well as Nordenstreng and Varis (1974).

There were many more contacts, not all of them progressive and sympathetic to leftist orientation, but the most durable relationships developed with like-minded critical scholars. Crucial agents in this networking were Gerbner and Halloran—both inviting me to meetings and publications which snowballed further contacts. The IAMCR was a central agency for a young scholar to reach out to the world: after Herceg Novi in 1966 came Konstanz (1970), Buenos Aires (1972), Leipzig (1974) and Leicester (1976).²⁹ The role of UNESCO was also indispensable, beginning with the 1969 Meeting of Experts in Montreal and the 1971 Panel of Experts in Paris. In addition, contacts and cooperation with colleagues in the neighbouring Scandinavian countries were important, not least for nurturing early critical thinking.³⁰

International networking was absolutely crucial for my intellectual growth as a critical scholar. I was exceptionally fortunate with all of the early contacts made possible through my employers (YLE and UTA), but I have witnessed many others enjoying the same benefits of internationalism in their career development. It was so much more cumbersome in my early years, when telephone and telex were the top technologies and there was no fax, not to mention the Internet, to facilitate international contacts. Today one does not need to pay a price in time and money for networking; it is solely a matter of will. This subjective will is also free to choose not to employ the new technologies for international networking and be content with the old ways of books and libraries. I have some top colleagues of this kind, demonstrating that it is still entirely feasible to be wise and critical without personally reaching out to the global arena. Actually I do not want to mystify personal networking as a guarantee of criticality—in some cases it may be quite the contrary. But in my case it was an indispensable facilitator.

Discussion

After such an excursion into subjective and objective histories, one is left with several “So What” questions. Here I address only the most obvious.

Some conclusions are already built into the foregoing. For example, the precarious relationship between intellectual and political led me to advocate caution regarding over-politicisation. I do not suggest refraining from activism—which typically is firmly

based on rational and analytic reasoning—but I do warn against investing all energies in a direct political struggle, undermining the indirect influence of academic and popular discourse. A conceptual “soft power” may achieve more by exerting long-term influence on the paradigms prevailing in society than by direct intervention in the policy process—especially whenever the balance of power does not favour the critical side. This may appear an unorthodox position for a son of the 1960s, but it is based on historical experience—of the struggles around the NWICO and beyond—that media scholars cannot, after all, make much difference on the barricades of the day, but that their contribution can make a great deal of difference by guiding the intellectual orientation of the real political forces and operations in society.

My personal story suggests that the intellectual and the political can coexist and even be mutually enriching. Moreover, critical thinking is not necessarily extinguished when subjected to political exposure. For example, intensive contacts to the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia during my IOJ Presidency did not make me an uncritical advocate of the “really existing socialism”. Throughout these years I have retained my established “progressive and democratic” position—naturally sympathetic to the socialist countries for their historical role in supporting national liberation and a just world order, but not in avid pursuit of Cold War rhetoric. Admittedly, I have been one of those “useful fools”—as Lenin used to call the western fellow travellers of the young communist state—who emphasised the positive side of the Soviet story instead of capitalising on its problems and atrocities. Obviously this was caused by the Cold War atmosphere pushing people towards political polarisation rather than rational reflection—on both sides, pro-Soviet and anti-Soviet alike.

Another matter, not discussed in this article, is that a critical position in general, and an institutional role such as the IOJ Presidency, makes one a victim of smear campaigns—in my case waged by conservative and “reactionary” forces. This is only obvious and one has to learn to live with it—to take it as proof that one has indeed succeeded in being ruthlessly critical. I also got my share of it, both at home and abroad—but actually less than I expected. Accordingly, my position as professor at UTA was never seriously challenged and I enjoyed remarkable academic solidarity, both nationally and internationally. It is worth recalling that Dallas Smythe was less fortunate than me as he was pursued by the US intelligence (with Wilbur Schramm as its informer) trying to oust him from a position at the University of Illinois, as he recounts in the interview with Lent (1995). George Gerbner, for his part, had a revealing clash with political forces, when, as the editor of *Journal of Communication* he published not only an article on the Helsinki Accords (Nordenstreng and Schiller 1976) but also copy of the Information chapter of the CSCE Final Act. This celebration of détente was too much for Ambassador Walter Annenberg—the then benefactor of Gerbner’s School at the University of Pennsylvania and the journal—who shared the dominant right-wing view of the time, whereby East–West détente was equated with surrender to the Soviet Union. Annenberg threatened to withdraw and Gerbner threatened to step down, but the crisis was soon resolved—and the right wing made a U-turn in their approach to détente, later boasting that the Helsinki process and their participation therein precipitated the collapse of the Soviet Union.

East–West relations also drove a wedge between Herbert Schiller and me while we worked together on the readers on international communication (Nordenstreng and Schiller 1979, 1983). Herb was very suspicious of détente while I was its wholehearted supporter, but this was a productive conflict as can already be seen in our 1976 article. The same controversy continued regarding Gorbachev’s *perestroika* and *glasnost* in the late 1980s—with

myself ardently in favour of it, both as a scholar and as the IOJ President, and Herb being increasingly concerned about weakening of the USSR as a counterforce to US imperialism. At one stage he said: "Thank God there is the GDR." When even the hard-line Germans gave in to the collapse of communism, Herb was naturally dismayed—but at the same time he had the satisfaction of seeing his intuition justified. He was indeed a man with an incredible intuition—always with a critical perspective. However, a strong intuition may undermine the need for theoretical reflection, as shown by our reader of 1983: I wanted to add a chapter on the theory of international communication, but Herb insisted that the timely package had to be published quickly even without further framework building.

Being truly critical is a tricky business and ruthless criticism is a difficult art. To understand and to exercise it in practice, it is useful to learn from personal histories as exemplified in this article. This leads to another perennial question: what is the role of an individual in history? But that is another story.

DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

NOTES

1. <http://iamcr.org/welcome-to-iamcr> [Accessed November 2 2015].
2. <http://iamcr.org/governance/statutes> [Accessed November 2 2015].
3. <https://udc2015.wordpress.com/about-the-udc> [Accessed November 2 2015].
4. <http://www.tandfonline.com/action/journalInformation?show=aimsScope&journalCode=rscsm20> [Accessed November 2 2015].
5. <http://gamescriticism.org/about/> [Accessed November 2 2015].
6. While acknowledging this we have to recall the rich intellectual tradition on which Marxism was based, including such landmarks as Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* from the 1780s. <http://strangebeautiful.com/lmu/readings/kant-first-critique-cambridge.pdf> [Accessed November 2 2015].
7. Its original German edition was published in 1867 and the first English translation in 1887. <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/pdf/Capital-Volume-I.pdf> [Accessed November 2 2015].
8. <http://www.iep.utm.edu/frankfur/> [Accessed November 2 2015].
9. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Centre_for_Contemporary_Cultural_Studies [Accessed November 2 2015].
10. By now there is a second volume of critical scholars—12 colleagues from Noam Chomsky to Yuezhi Zhao (see Lent and Amazeen 2015).
11. It was the first chair in electronic media in the Nordic countries, established parallel to the chair in print media, which was there since the late 1940s—also the first of its kind in Scandinavia. When I started in August 1971, I had just turned 30, being the youngest professor in the country.
12. <http://www.uta.fi/cmt/en/contact/staff/kaarlenordenstreng/cv.html> [Accessed November 2 2015].
13. At this stage I got a unique opportunity to interview Carl Gustav Jung. http://www.uta.fi/cmt/en/contact/staff/kaarlenordenstreng/int_jung.html [Accessed November 2 2015].

14. My personal research for a master's thesis was highly methodological, employing factor analysis, leading to a doctoral dissertation on the Semantic Differential Technique.
15. Actually my first introduction to communication research took place already two years earlier at the Salzburg Seminar in American Studies, as recounted in my interview with Lent (1995, 232). But the real entry was at the University of Tampere in 1965–66. In summer 1966 a special boost was provided by Schramm's visit to Finland as keynote speaker at a television festival: I was asked to be his personal guide during the visit. When I toured through American universities next year, it was natural that Stanford with Schramm was one of my main stops (see Nordenstreng 1968).
16. Ahmavaara's influential books at this time were published only in Finnish. For his key articles in English and for the general policy orientation at YLE in the late 1960s, see Nordenstreng (1970, 1973). For an assessment of this stage, see Hujanen (1995).
17. A product of this work is my summary of a team effort to redefine YLE's news criteria, first presented at a conference on broadcaster/researcher cooperation organised by James Halloran at the University of Leicester in 1970, from which it was picked up by Denis McQuail for his popular reader (see Nordenstreng 1972).
18. They came via Edwin Parker from Stanford in 1975. He was involved in the OECD's project on "Computer/Telecommunications Policies" and in related plans of the International Institute for Applied System Analysis (Vienna-based product of Soviet-American détente). For the evolution of the information society concept, see my presentation in Uppsala in 2012. http://www.uta.fi/cmt/en/contact/staff/kaarlenordenstreng/publications/Uppsala_presentation.pdf [Accessed November 2 2015].
19. *Tiedotusoppi. Johdatus yhteiskunnallisten viestintäprosessien tutkimukseen* [Communication study. Introduction to the research of social communication processes]. Helsinki: Otava, 1975. With a second edition in 1978, it became basic reading for a generation of Finnish students. Swedish, Danish and Hungarian translations were published in the respective countries in 1978/79, but my attempt to prepare an English version never proceeded beyond a first draft made on the basis of a lecture course at Simon Fraser University in Spring 1975 ("Consciousness and Society: Notes Towards an Introduction to the Science of Human Communication").
20. The five reports of the Committee were published in Finnish in 1973–1975, with an abridged versions in English. For an overview, see Nordenstreng and Wiio (1979).
21. <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0000/000014/001486EB.pdf> [Accessed November 2 2015].
22. <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0000/000031/003169eo.pdf> [Accessed November 2 2015].
23. <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0000/000007/000792eb.pdf> [Accessed November 2 2015]. The panel continued to follow-up the programme until 1975 as explained in Nordenstreng (1994).
24. <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0000/000018/001827eb.pdf> [Accessed November 2 2015]. See also Nordenstreng (1978).
25. This was the occasion when the concept of NWICO was first articulated (see Nordenstreng 2011).
26. For an overall history of the IOJ and my role in it, see Nordenstreng (2016 forthcoming).
27. My lack of a consistent theoretical approach was emphasised by Kauko Pietilä, while Tarmo Malmberg accused me of vulgar materialism (after I had accused his semiotic study of idealism). Taisto Hujanen (1995) for his part pointed out the rational bias of

the informational broadcasting policy advocated by me with Ahmavaara's support. None of this criticism was totally dismissive and there prevailed a fairly fraternal atmosphere among the media scholars around me—especially in Tampere but also in Helsinki, where Osmo Wiio became Professor in 1978 with his own school distinct from any Marxist orientation (see Pietilä, Malmberg, and Nordenstreng 1990; Meyen 2013).

28. Sometimes, however, the non-governmental organisation representation can be highly political, as it was in my case when the Director-General of UNESCO invited me to be part of a three-man team of experts for drafting the controversial Mass Media Declaration in 1977: while the other two came from the United Kingdom/West and Peru/South, I was supposed to come from the East—not Finland but the IOJ (see Nordenstreng with Hannikainen 1984, 113–114). I also made contributions on behalf of the IOJ—East and South—to UNESCO's International Commission for the Study of Communication Problems (MacBride Commission) in 1978–1979; for example, background document No. 53. <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0003/000346/034643eb.pdf> [Accessed November 2 2015].
29. For the history of IAMCR, see <http://iamcr.org/in-retrospect> [Accessed November 2 2015].
30. Some young scholars, notably Robin Cheesman in Sweden and Frands Mortensen in Denmark, were particularly active in importing cutting-edge critical scholarship from the Continent to Scandinavia in the early 1970s. Nevertheless, the mainstream of the field in this part of the western world was not particularly critical; it was predominantly Anglo-American and positivist. For an overview, see Nordenstreng (2007).

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