

# AT THE SANDBANKS OF CRITICAL COMMUNICATION STUDIES

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MEANDERING MAINSTREAMS ED MCLUSKIE

## Abstract

The mainstream is winning – again, now as “mainstream version 2.0.” Like word processors and spreadsheets that engineer more than revise, versions and varieties in communication studies extend but rarely revolutionise. Whether 1.x or 2.x, the differences are quibbles on substance and orientation. Communication studies as a field keeps its attentions to shifting technologies, reifies messages and audiences, and melts distinctions between communication and control on altars of effects studies and pedagogies. Once defined as a binary battleground – between administrative and critical research, quantitative and qualitative research, etc. – version 2.x takes a lesson from the other side to declare the mainstream an urban legend: multiplicities of coexistence have melted the old binaries if ever there were a basis for the mythology. This dismissal of the critique of the mainstream is remarkable both for its prematurity and its approach to the history of the field’s concepts and approaches to them.

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## Introduction

*... the illusion that communication studies is well remains the leading thought [against critical] remarks. ... and so it goes ...*

Hanno Hardt (2011)

*... what presents itself as progress can soon show itself to be the perpetuation of what was presumably overcome.*

Jürgen Habermas (1979, 57)

It was a heady three decades since Gitlin's critique of "the dominant paradigm" for communication and media studies (1981). Mainstream research even appeared to give way somewhat thereafter. Instead of drawing from the periphery alone, the mainstream appeared to celebrate, for example, Frankfurt Critical Theory in frequent deployments of Anglicised terminologies – "public sphere" and "communicative action" – as though they had always been in the mainstream's lexicon. They hadn't, of course, and were on substance quite disengaged (McLuskie 2001; Hardt 2007; Splichal 2010). Hardt (Hardt 1989) saw a "return of the critical" toward the 1990s, an intellectual migration morphed to suit U.S. individualist themes at the heart of reformist movements. An earlier moment at the edge of the critical – a more indigenous American effort at pre-WWII intersections of philosophical pragmatism and symbolic interaction – attempted to socialise the very concept of the individual (Dewey 1999) as a corrective against power and control in the socio-cultural system (Duncan 1962). Symbolic interactionism, though, had been lost to history in such themes (Duncan 1967). An effort to show the field that power fell to abstracted, idealistic analyses of symbols and their movements, Duncan supports Hardt's assertions that U.S. versions of criticality failed to take power seriously. Few read that tendency in alternative intellectual constellations.

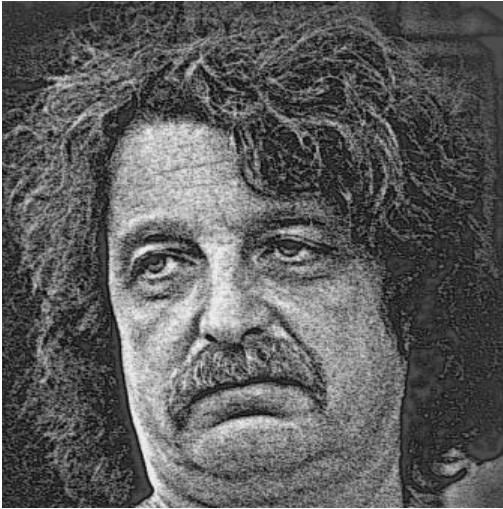
Hopes of more philosophical and "connected" approaches to the study of human communication emerged in the midst of preoccupations with media-tied professions. Part of a larger trend in the social sciences, qualitative inquiry in communication studies joined alternatives stressing the human condition, just short of ideology critique, far short of political-economic analysis. The field imported phenomenology, ethnomethodology, hermeneutics, and diffuse groupings of Canadian political economy, Chicago sociology, literary criticism, British cultural Marxism, and Frankfurt Critical Theory. Even when these movements became better known, as Giddens remarked, they were "not known well" (Giddens 1977). In any event, some considered that a fluid mixture of these potentially oppositional movements would not only produce more richly "textured" narratives about human communicative experience, but also would work toward restructuring society or, failing that, enliven cultural practices in moves from the margins to the mainstream. The mainstream worked in the opposite direction instead.

Against the background of such noble aspirations, familiar, mainstream trajectories for inquiry and action developed. The scope of research was limited largely to the here and now and the localised or, worse yet, to the isolated event *as* an event. Addressees once ambitiously envisioned for theories, analyses, or other interpretative "readings" of human experience remained audiences invested with imaginations making little difference except as texts to be reinterpreted. Meta-

scientific positions increasingly became strategies of intellectual identity for the researcher and her epistemic communities. "Alternative approaches" declared their intentions "humanistic" by taking concepts like "experience" more seriously than positivism, but the alternatives began to look rather familiar. Narratives produced by qualitative researchers failed to connect as had mountains of quantitative data, and researchers on either side of the quantitative-qualitative divide seemed only to have themselves as their addressees.

International and national learned societies were creating niches that 21st-century scholars built upon to claim perspectives of resistance, deconstruction, and cultural studies across continents. Criticality seemed on the move, treated as an enduring if not growing presence in communication studies. After a decade and more of heated opposition against mainstream social science, hopes either of detente (Gerbner 1983b) or dialogue (Dervin 1985) mutated into paradigms cast into the levelling playing fields of grids that tried to bring order out of an alleged 200+ communication theories. The founder of the journal, *Communication Theory*, supplied such a framework while complaining that theories in the field never really engaged one another (Craig 1999). Research foci continued to narrow and proliferate, reflecting in any event the mainstream's habit of settling in. Few seemed to notice that the mainstream was winning – again.

Perhaps it should be labelled "mainstream version 2.0." Like word processors and spreadsheets that engineer more than revise, versions and varieties of communication studies extend but rarely revolutionise. Whether 1.x or 2.x, the differences are quibbles on substance and orientation. Communication studies as a field keeps its attentions to shifting technologies, reifies messages and audiences, and melts distinctions between communication and control on altars of effects studies and pedagogies. Once defined as a binary battleground – between administrative and critical research, quantitative and qualitative research, etc. – version 2.x takes a lesson from the other side to declare the mainstream an urban legend: histories and multiplicities of coexistence have melted the old binaries if ever there were a basis for that "mythology." This dismissal is remarkable both for its prematurity and its acceptance. The criticism against binary oppositions was also, some warned, an attack on dialectical theory. Referring to the heyday of the "Columbia School," Hardt highlighted the persistence of "mainstream communication and media research" as a persistent failure "to address critical developments from within and without its boundaries" (Hardt 1992, 122). The situation was not helped by the "arrival of cultural studies" in the U.S., whose "reception, or rather co-optation, by communication studies" compromised efforts to pursue communication theory and research "as political" amidst "ideology and power" (Hardt 2008, xviii). The field still remains, in spite of "rare" instances, "by and large" the "ideologically homogeneous environment" moving through succeeding generations (Hardt 2008, xv). Location in the persistence of ideological power co-opts the social with chimeric staying power. Hardt made these remarks in a two-decade span from a multidisciplinary wake-up call in his *Critical Communication Studies* (1992) to a forward in a collection subtitled "contested memories" (Park and Pooley 2008). Hardt warned new generation of new historians that attempts to reposition, reorient and supply the field with identity require "reminders" (Hardt 2008, xiii) along the way from beyond emerging enclaves of study.



Hanno Hardt during a University of Vienna conference on Paul Lazarsfeld, May, 1988 (photo by E. M.)

the field filtered it (Lanigan 1985), and critique of the societal system through the power of the (sometimes social) psychological effects tradition (Jansen 2002). 2.x claims otherwise. *Communication Yearbook 35*, the annual review published by the International Communication Association (ICA), reads in its first section as though it were “Canonic Texts II,” with the plot-twisting claim that there never was a mainstream to rail against. From Robinson (2011) to Katz (2011) to the CY35 editor, the history of communication research emerges as if it had been fully engaged with criticality. The impression is buttressed by implication. Hardt (1986, 153) saw this coming, and concluded, in the midst of the field’s streaming lore, that Critical Theory had been and would likely continue to be a “footnote” with ambitions only to “cruise” on the Left (Hardt 2007). 2.x was hiding behind what Craig Calhoun (2011) called “theory light,” a judgment rendered much earlier when a Finnish scholar characterised, in veiled frustration, “communication research” as meaning little more than “research on communication” (Pietilä 1978, 1). Hardt signalled as much by showing that “the vocabulary” of criticality had settled into the field’s terminologies, but that “clear distinctions, however, have faded” (Hardt 2007).

The way had been prepared during the 1980s, when mainstream journals relativised criticality through its “ferments.” Communication researchers of all orientations could each claim to be “critical,” as George Gerbner wrote, “in one’s own fashion” (Gerbner 1983a). A decade later, the “paradigm dialogues,” according to two “Ferment II” collections (*Journal of Communication*, volume 43) led Nordenstreng (2004) to suggest caution when assessing the growth of communication research alongside such ferments when assessing the field’s disciplinary status.

In addition, the field’s new historians are rehabilitating the usual suspects associated with the mainstream, revisiting and reframing intellectual history. On the heels of post-modern postmortems, Fukuyama’s “end of history” thesis (1992) expanded into a rationale for declaring the mainstream, too, at an end. The end

Mainstreaming 2.x practices vindicate Hardt’s point in “Beyond Cultural Studies” (Hardt 1997) that critical perspectives had joined the mainstream. Both did not “even attempt” redefinitions “of communication, participation, or public interests and democracy” as even “Cultural Studies” in its “U.S. American reproduction” of British Cultural Studies adhered to or let pass “bankrupt utopian constructions of communication and media environments in contemporary society” (pp. 70-71). Receptions of criticality in general rinsed much of political economy from the American scene (Garnham 1995; Murdock 1995), theory from European philosophy once

of media as we knew it and know it no doubt is a continuing story (Hardt 1996), but the presumed loss of continuity in historical frameworks has opened doors in other fields in ways that give pause. For example, Jürgen Habermas wrote simultaneously to scholars and the public about the dangers that “new historians” were presenting as a “new conservatism” that justified oppressive practices in Germany’s history, and that such forms of revisionism had implications for other societies as well (Habermas 1989). The stakes in communication and media studies may not be as high, though the historian Christopher Simpson was able to show that the field had its own “spiral of silence” legacy applying to the effects traditions that grew from psychological warfare into the marketing arenas of postwar society (Simpson 1996). Curran saw the new revisionism as the illusion of criticality “in media and cultural studies.” It was not about “throwing off the shackles of tradition,” but was, instead, a “revivalist” mask of “liberal pluralism” fraught with accommodation and compromise with the mainstream (Curran 1990, 135, 142). Such traditions and movements are not lost on the European experience. That “new historians” and “new conservatives” are interchangeable designations is worth keeping in mind, especially when considering intellectual migration loaded with themes of psychological warfare growing out of the WWII era. When “ambivalence” is a characterisation (Lazarsfeld’s) of the tensions between the mainstream and criticality, the characterisation applies to Lazarsfeld himself as one who at least tried to engage critics of administrative research, at least until he and Adorno broke it off (Adorno 1969; Lazarsfeld 1969). Lazarsfeld’s student did take courses with Löwenthal, another critical theorist, a point recent revisionists like to mention. But the record has nothing of dialogues or conversation because, thus far, no such records apparently exist. This is a problem for historians hoping that archives settle matters regarding the field’s history of ideas. When such records exist, as in the case of the Lazarsfeld-Adorno episodes, the administrative-critical divide retains its plausibility for a critique of the mainstream. One must go inside the metascientific and theoretical sources of the divide to assess the distinction’s appropriateness. Indeed, when historians point out that a defender of the mainstream (Katz 1987a, 1987b) had “heard enough and came to his teacher Lazarsfeld’s defence” (Simonson and Weimann 2003, 15), it is time to engage the theoretical issues at hand rather than leave the matter there. Less is on the record regarding from the Columbia side of things, precisely because Lazarsfeld himself denied that his idea of methodology had anything to do with the epistemological and metascientific issues that enliven the critique of the mainstream (Boudon 1972). That was typical of research connected with Vienna Circle logical empiricism (McLuskie 1993). The discussion opened up by Park and Pooley’s compilation (2008) contributes to these issues, including critics of the mainstream critique, and deserves further discussion of what Hardt considered to be “utopian” moments in the field’s re-readings alongside epistemological and political subtexts explicitly addressing approaches to inquiry. The critique of the mainstream is not exhausted in its claims that the field follows longstanding trends that adapt critical perspectives to the history of the victors in communication studies. Before yet another history is written by the victors – in this case, by a mainstream that denies its very existence – Hardt’s distinction between *Gemeinschaftskommunikation* and *Gesellschaftskommunikation* (Hardt 1977a) urges recovery of the more buried traditions that shape the critique of the mainstream,

traditions that go beyond the fact of associations in social groups to interrogate the difference between a world in which people connect, empathise, and recognise one another in spite of dividing factors, including divisions created through aggregating and abstracting beings. The critique of the mainstream was and remains an effort to uncover “the human bottom of non-human things” (Adorno and Horkheimer 1997, xiii) for communicative ways of life.

## Defining “The Mainstream” Today

Thus far in this essay, a definition of the “mainstream” appears only to mean either “that which is normal” or “that which contains criticality by declaring ‘the mainstream’ dead.” Even these definitions are important. The list of normality includes the audience concept as an unquestioned research focus, a focus that, regardless of the usual arguments (active vs. passive, for example), retains a certain naturalism. The field seems to have forgotten that Dallas Smythe called that naturalism into question when he introduced the concept of “the audience commodity” (Smythe 1981). Whenever communication and media theory support the concept of an “audience,” Smythe argued, the field supports some version of capitalism by serving up insights into reaching, marketing and using this commodity. Audiences are forms of unpaid labour, according to Smythe, which mainstream communication research exploits, too. Smythe’s analysis may be even more important today, as populations exercise “free time” without pay on Internet activities, which Smythe did not live to write about. Mainstream 2.x treats audiences as though they are publics or potential publics (McLuskie 2010).

It also matters that the mainstream be defined for its exclusionary practices, including the exclusion of considerations about mainstream scholarship and research. If the field is as “theory light” as Calhoun claimed, such exclusions easily become systematic ways of not viewing or understanding the world and communication, particularly as the demands of society define research pursuits. The category “administrative research” is not a category now defunct. If anything, it applies more than ever, as universities become the next generation’s training ground for industry/knowledge-worker jobs while the most well off attend elite universities and watch Ted Lectures on the side rather than as their mainstreamed diet. If it is too abstract to tie professions to theories in communication and media studies, and then to tie both to crisis-ridden capitalism, then the field already has made its strategic decision to render “communication” strategically and instrumentally in line with such demands. Crisis-ridden though capitalism may be (Habermas 1975), universities and businesses alike accelerate the training and hiring of the field’s knowledge workers without entering into the efficiency-challenging discussions criticality brings. Indeed, universities and business are as alike as ever. In the day-to-day infrastructures of society, the seemingly benign traditions of description and prediction sit silent as communication from theory to practice becomes a zone of competition and surreptition. This leads to a more substantive definition of “the mainstream” today.

“Strategy” and “communication” are the bedfellows of today’s mainstream lexicon. As this manuscript is written, the oldest school of journalism in the United States shows the future of the young scholar in a now-familiar job description: “a colleague who will teach at the graduate and undergraduate levels” the specialty

of “strategic communication,” so that “marketing research, data analysis, and consumer insights” call upon “principles of strategic communication and interactive advertising” in a blend of “quantitative and qualitative methods.” Only those with a background in “interactive advertising” and “marketing research” need apply. Touted as “the largest emphasis area in the School,” this specialty dominates as part of the mainstream’s transformation of communication education into business education. Theory in these contexts is a tooth-pulling operation unless strategies and tactics connect to the instrumentalist data serving strategic interests. The list of synonyms – here “strategies,” “public relations,” “advertising,” and “marketing” are not new in many respects – they are rooted in mainstream 1.x. Habermas described these as relations of technology to ideology (Habermas 1970; Habermas and Luhmann 1971). Hardt described them as blows to the idea of communication in general, and to the practice of journalism in particular (Hardt 1980; 1996; 2002). This is a mainstream where scale is proof of concept, an exclusionary practice against theory and critical communication studies, even against older versions of the mainstream.

Mainstreams, then, create debris to be discarded. But not all is discarded. “I have a tendency towards cannibalism,” the author (Lazarsfeld 1975) wrote of his oft-celebrated “Remarks on Administrative and Critical Communications Research” (Lazarsfeld 1941). “In order to understand another system of thought I have to translate it into my own terms. It never occurred to me that I might thereby try to exercise dominance over the other fellow. But [such] interpretations cannot easily be disputed.” Buried in a mainstream archive (Paul F. Lazarsfeld Archiv, Institut für Soziologie, Wien), the remark on conceptual cannibalism is a rare glimpse into the relation of the mainstream to criticality in the social sciences. As today’s mainstream is defined by transformations of communication into strategic-instrumental notions and practices, the remark takes on renewed, even heightened, significance.

The mainstream sticks to a “course that supports routinised research activities” oriented to the targeted, “anonymous audience.” It threads proliferating varieties of “empiricism, behaviourism, and psychologism” still obsessed with “causes and effects” (Hardt 2001, 14, 18). The mainstream mirrors the social sciences in general, largely through “specialist” journals that appear to give the lie to the idea of a mainstream through the sheer varieties of foci. Nevertheless, according to Habermas (2009, vii), this enduring, American-style social and political science continues to aggregate populations in ways creating barriers to their political and epistemic potential. Splichal’s accounts of *Öffentlichkeit* and the shifting state of the public (Splichal 2010; 2012) extend Habermas’s critique of mainstream social science into the field’s now-salient concept, “public sphere,” whose use devalues and displaces both the public and the politics of inquiry.

A lack of engagement encourages the status quo, to encourage treating biographical associations from the past as real theoretical collaboration. Thus the Frankfurt School becomes part of the flow of the Columbia School in CY35 (Salmon 2011), hinting at crossed paths suggesting mentorships or other mutualities of theories. Synergy by mere association opens CY35 to in an understated neutralising of the critique of the mainstream, a point that surfaces in passing when Robinson (2011, 33) declares Hardt mistaken in his criticisms of the mainstream. “Hanno Hardt,” she writes, had “well-rehearsed” the “‘critical-administrative’ debate” but viewed “the historical context in which it was played out too narrowly,” missing the “dete-

riorating personal relationships between Lazarsfeld and Adorno.” But Hardt had made the point (Hardt 1990) in the same volume (Langenbucher 1990) in which Robinson had appeared (Robinson 1990), but did not cite; and if the personal matters for the history of ideas, Hardt directed the doctoral dissertation (McLuskie 1975) that included descriptions of the Adorno-Lazarsfeld relation. But it is not the personal relationships or associations that define “mainstream” research.

Surveying the history of debates with the mainstream, Hermes (2013, 85) notes that “a mainstream research tradition” today means “doing audience research” expanded into the more “multidisciplinary ... ‘cultural studies’.” While he once argued the potential for productive convergence between the mainstream and the critical, the “tumultuous debate in the 1980s and 1990s” produced conditions to “now wonder whether that is really the case.” Buxton (2007, 133) notes that the field has a long history of “revisionist readings,” “revisionist” in the sense that “traditional communication research” denies any “systematic acknowledgement of Marxist scholarship,” especially “in the United States.” It may well require a stake in alternatives based on experience.

### The Importance of a Stake in Criticality

In front of a packed audience of communication researchers at the (then West) Berlin Congress Hall, Hardt (1977b) addressed an ICA plenary session to share what would become part of his first book, *Social Theories of the Press* (Hardt 1979). The presentation called for a refocusing of the field’s intellectual sources, sources that by their orientations and analyses invite more explicitly critical debate about how to understand society and communication in relation to democratic potential. Not all figures known and less-known in the history of ideas present communication in a democratic light, Hardt argued, but some, at least, put more of their assumptions on the table than did the behaviourists and positivists representing the 1970s mainstream. Hardt’s exposition of a history of ideas, rarely used by the field then and now, was unmistakable for its support of an idea of communication marked by authenticity and aimed at material conditions for a democratic society. “Reform,” even “revolution,” should be part of the communication scholar’s vocabulary in a world struggling toward freedom. As his title suggested, lesser-known figures were “reformers of society” who require critical appropriation, and who provided the terms by which to do so. Hardt warned that less could be expected of the mainstream then.

The critique of the mainstream Hardt mentioned then was indulged because, in 1977 at a conference dominated by Americans, it was novel to hear from a European about American and European perspectives, especially when that European was carrying a “green card,” which permitted Hardt to work at the University of Iowa. The audience trained in effects and audience research traditions did not simply represent half of the binary opposition of concepts; it was a palpable opposition, political as well as methodological and epistemological. It was the year the Philosophy of Communication division was born in ICA, to help bring European theory into largely behavioural learned societies, a potential challenge to the mainstream. Hardt would assess for the same learned society in their yearbook of research (Hardt 1989). “The return of the ‘critical’ and challenge of radical dissent” described the long road travelled by critical theory and cultural studies. The idea of “the public”



had been a German subject matter unknown to most of the audience, but also an American subject influenced by the German discourse but lost to the field. Thus Hardt delivered a version of his critique of the mainstream, a broad-based critique aimed at uncovering alternative positions in German and American thought. In the context of the “West Berlin Island” during the age of the Cold War, Hardt was mindful that the gate to the East was unwise to cross, because an expat whose family left the Soviet orb could be arrested.

Earlier, the working visa allowing Hardt to teach as a “resident alien” professor became entangled with his course syllabi. The concrete, political dimensions of his critique of the mainstream included the critique of capitalism and a wide range of critical thought as texts. Hardt had been assigning leftist scholars in his courses at a time when the Nixon administration cultivated intelligence for its now-famous “enemies list.” Journalism and journalism education entered that fray with a handshake, when a stranger introduced himself during an evening lecture across the street from Hardt’s university office. The stranger said that he had looked for Hardt at the office, to “talk with you about my son” entering the Iowa Ph.D. program. The son, said to be a Des Moines Register employee looking to advance in that newspaper’s hierarchy, could use some advice, which the father was investigating on his behalf. He was, instead, investigating Hardt. Hardt invited the father to join him and accompanying students for the usual, informal post-event analysis of a lecture. Drinks soon flowed at George’s Bar, the usual venue. Unusual were the rounds of hard liquor instead of cheap pitchers of beer, glasses of hard liquor lined up in front of everyone except the stranger and Hardt. The interrogating father’s abundant cash-stash was over-fuelling the table. Hardt pointed out that advancement in journalistic careers did not require Ph.D.’s, excepting, perhaps, specialist journalists. “Is your son an economist? A medical doctor? Or someone really interested in an MBA?” The father instead wanted to know the nature of Hardt’s approach to the field he was teaching. The table sobered to a focus when the stranger answered the question, “What do you do?”: “foreign service,” he said. The next day, the story moved through a group of students and colleagues, one of them a former Des Moines Register reporter. There was no such son at the newspaper. Nothing dramatic happened, but a notice of sorts had been delivered. Hardt was not deported. Nixon resigned. The Reagan era took hold, and globalisation changed the media and professional landscape well before the Internet became central to journalism education. Left-oriented communication and media inquiry and education stayed at the margins of the field. For Hardt, hegemony was as much an experience as it was a concept. Mainstreams thus flow into life, and across generations.

## Conclusion

Hardt positioned his critical communication research against “mainstream communication research” for the latter’s ties to advanced capitalism and their consequences for authentic communication. He invoked Tönnies when coining the distinction, *Gemeinschaftskommunikation* vs. *Gesellschaftskommunikation* (1972), which became the basis of a recurring theme, “authentic communication.” His collaboration with Splichal (2000) aimed to connect the idea of authenticity to the idea of the public, an alternative to the mainstream.

Criticality is always expressed through a series of critiques of other thinkers of other and current times. It requires the development of a dialogue with past and current thought in a way that permits critical appropriation out of theoretical and empirical discourse. Its “method” must at least be dialectical in a sense that includes the movement of ideas in history, so that criticality can still refuse to celebrate only the present or the historical period. The worst situation is to delude ourselves about the past, especially about those mainstreams that spill into the present in new forms of unawareness that go by names like “focus” and “practicality” in a strategic-instrumental world. The assault of strategies on the idea and experience of communication is a problem for which Hardt reserved the idea, “authentic communication.” Today’s binary opposition may no longer be called “administrative” versus “critical” research. “Authentic” versus “strategic” conceptions of “communication,” however, appears to be the struggle that fits the century.

The marginalisation of “any radical challenge” to “traditional social theories” (Hardt 1989, 579) was evident since the 1950s, and continued through the end of the twentieth century. Warnings about the containment of criticality span two centuries in communication and media research. Early analyses described containment as the mainstream’s persistent disinterest through exclusively methodological and behavioural orientations. By the mid-1970s, Schiller pegged the field to be “waiting for orders” (Schiller 1974) from the dominant ideology. Hardt added that the warning had a future, that the mainstream would use the language of critical-theoretical work to contain criticality. The field responded to critical impulses by relativising them. While “the language of orthodox Marxism, Critical Theory, or Cultural Studies,” Hardt wrote, “is reflected throughout the discussion of the ‘ferment in the field,’” its “vocabulary ... was reproduced by many authors without further discussion” of “the ideological perspective of mainstream American mass communication research” (1989, 581). Any effort to claim the irrelevance or demise of the mainstream mistakes vocabulary for engagement. Thus recent variations of the mainstream suggest a field that forgets as much as it struggles to remember. The more problematic instances are those claiming nothing to remember when it comes to “mainstreams,” underscoring that more needs to be done along the lines of, for example, a special issue of *Javnost* on forgotten communication scholars (“*Forgotten communication scholars*,” 2006). In the age of mainstreaming 2.x, “neither cultural studies nor communication studies constitute effective arenas for the pursuit of ideological issues” (1997, 70). Indeed, ideology is less the topic of discussion when interpreting the field’s history of ideas, a characteristic embedded in the history of the field’s ideas, and which encourages the tamest possible versions of criticality.

Finally, it is in the nature of a mainstream, after all, that it keeps flowing. What is remarkable is that, by 2012, an academic legitimation practice chose in various ways to declare the idea of the mainstream over, or to have been an illusion. CY35 is but the more recent part of a longer move since Lazarsfeld, at least three decades in the making, aimed at generating a “new history” of the field that dilutes criticality through associations left to mere time-place locations. Efforts to end critique of the mainstream require, then, the field’s more textured attention.

Until then, the field works the mainstream like a 1960s pop song with lyrics that span decades in an unbroken though morphing orientation, an orientation that presses an unintended contradiction: “The beat goes on” but “History has turned

the page" (Sonny Bono 1967). History's turned page could be explained as memory loss behind changed terminologies, a resolution of the contradiction expressed in another lyric that, too, has become a cliché: "No need to remember when / 'Cause ev'ry thing old is new again" (Hugh Jackman 2003). The continuous beat under the surface lyrics describes a field engaged in a kind of ritual, which Carey (2009) once described for media audiences, but which applies to communication and media studies as well. That ritual is the rolling mainstream of familiar academic orientations and approaches, occasionally marked by ambivalent relations to traditions of research. Even challenges to research practices are constrained, whatever their moments of emergence in the field's history of ideas. The ritual replay of "the beat going on" mutes criticality. The muting of criticality was one of Hardt's consistent messages to the field – a lesson subject now to the field's mainstreaming 2.x message. Left behind, however, is a history of successful attempts to neutralise criticality, a history required now, while the latest generations go into the field's archives to determine whether, indeed, communication and media studies were, after all, "critical in their own fashions." As Hardt wrote in 2011, "And so it goes."

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