Merton's Sociology of Rhetoric

PETER SIMONSON

I am persuaded that he didn't really appreciate the value of what he said there.
—Robert K. Merton, *On the Shoulders of Giants*

A quarter of the way into his critical 1941 review of Karl Mannheim's sociology of knowledge, Robert K. Merton mobilized an epithet that summarized the shortcomings he saw in the Marxist theory of ideology, and set it off from an intellectually rigorous and epistemologically sound sociology of knowledge. Polemical, anti-intellectualistic, and argumentatively suspect, the theory of ideology was "akin to rhetoric rather than science" (Merton [1941b] 1968:548). Since Merton was committed to sociology as a scientific endeavor, there was little doubt about the valence of the "rhetoric" epithet, which functioned to distance the kind of work he championed from its competitors, and to distance science from rhetoric.

As a matter of fact, the story was more complicated. Merton's own trajectory to that point revealed a subtle and interwoven relation between science and rhetoric, one not suggested by the traditional and formulaic dichotomy he fell back upon. That formulaic boundary-work, which was itself as rhetorical as it was scientific, was perhaps of a piece with the mood of Merton's anti-Mannheim essay, described by Alan Sica as "uncharacteristically pungent and unforgiving when compared with Merton's usual modus operandi" (Sica, Chapter 8 of this volume). I might say that the pungent and unforgiving were in fact semiregular Mertonian moods, as C. Wright Mills among others could later attest, but I agree with Sica that the 1941 article presents a puzzle. I will also suggest that the epigraph Merton selected for that article offers an unintended clue about how to read it, which Sica's chapter and my own in different ways follow out: "But indeed language has succeeded until recently in hiding from us almost all the things we talk about."

The quote could have been Freud's, but was actually penned by I. A. Richards. It appeared in Richards's important *Principles of Literary Criticism* (1925), though Merton somehow couldn't bring himself to mention that source, either in the epigraph or in his article's twelfth footnote, where Richards again warrants quotation, but his book's manifestly unscientific title does not. Merton recognized, however, that Richards, the Cambridge-trained philosopher and literary critic, knew something about language, and the ways it could obscure the subjects we talk about. For two decades, Richards had charted meaning and misunderstanding in a series of significant books, most recently *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* (1936), which had set out "to revive an old subject," rhetoric, whose reputation had sunk so low "that we would do better just to dismiss it to Limbo than to trouble ourselves with it—unless we can find reason for believing that it can become a study that will minister successfully to important needs" (3). Surveying Merton's work before and after 1941, I would argue that rhetoric ministered successfully to a range of his own needs, both scholarly and personal. The epithet in the Mannheim review, prying rhetoric from science, functions to hide from view the part played by rhetoric in Merton's thinking to that point, and to deflect attention from rhetoric's role in his subsequent writings, including his sociology of science.

As Merton himself confessed to me, in a conversation two years before his death, rhetoric was a "very important" resource for him. How should we take that confession? One route would lead to Merton the wordsmith and prose stylist. His lectures captivated classroom, professional, and occasional public audiences, from his days as an instructor at Harvard in the 1930s through the autobiographical "Life of Learning" speech he delivered to the American Council of Learned Societies in 1994 (when with casual elegance he mentioned that he was born Jewish, a fact he had generally kept from public view before then). His writing was famously described in a 1961 *New Yorker* profile as being crafted "too well for a sociologist," a story that also remarked on his facility with "metaphor and other literary devices—so rarely used in sociology as to be called Mertonisms by some of his associates"
The application of a new model of educational evidence and opportunities to the personal experience of the reader shows the importance of this approach. By recognizing the potential for educational evidence to influence personal beliefs, one can develop a professionalized, scientifically oriented model of education. This model focuses on the individual's learning process, the socio-cultural context of education, and the role of the educator as a facilitator of learning. The model emphasizes the importance of feedback, reflection, and the continuous improvement of educational practices. It suggests that education should be seen as a dynamic and evolving process, one that is shaped by the interactions between the learner, the educator, and the broader socio-cultural environment. The model also highlights the need for educators to be reflective practitioners, constantly assessing and adapting their practices to meet the needs of their students. This approach to education not only promotes learning but also enables educators to develop a deeper understanding of their own teaching practices and the impact of their work on student learning.
was a model of rhetoric from which Herodotus, 491 BC, drew inspiration. He compared Plato and the Fourth Century BC to the Greek and Roman cities of Athens and Sparta.

Rhetoric: The Long and Wide View

On the question: Why was there a model of rhetoric from which Herodotus, 491 BC, drew inspiration? The long and wide view answers that question by examining the historical, cultural, and philosophical contexts in which rhetoric developed.

The long and wide view argues that rhetoric is not a static, isolated discipline. Instead, it is a dynamic, evolving field that has been shaped by the social, political, and cultural forces of its time. The long and wide view challenges the traditional narrative of rhetoric as a discrete discipline, instead emphasizing its interconnectedness with other fields of study.

In the long and wide view, rhetoric is seen as a form of communication that has been shaped by the needs and aspirations of society. It is a tool for shaping thought and action, and for influencing the way that we think about the world around us. By examining the long and wide view, we can gain a deeper understanding of the role that rhetoric has played in shaping human history.
cultural knowledge. Action would draw upon these understandings in ways that are not addressed by policy and are somewhat less than comprehensive.

Action and technology created their communicative dispositions, and thus our ways of thinking about how to address the demands of discourse and conceptualizations of communication and culture. What was argued about was the degree to which the concept was the phenomenon.

Inescapable is the role of dialectic and a kind of discourse, and the force of ideological and textual relationships, and the role of communication and knowledge in the formation of discourse and knowledge. The development of communicative and ideational processes in the field of discourse and knowledge and the role of communication and knowledge in the formation of discourse and knowledge.

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Rhetoric, Propaganda, and the Ethics of Science

William J. Brown

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and that verbal responses are simply epiphenomenal (McIntyre 1992). It is clear, however, that the verbal behavior is more real than verbal behavior. In a recent publication, R.D. Linstone & Associates (1992) have described a model of verbal behavior that includes both expressive and receptive elements. These elements are present throughout the conversation, as the speaker and listener interact.

In conclusion, the results of this study indicate that verbal behavior is a complex process that involves both expressive and receptive elements. The findings suggest that verbal behavior is not simply epiphenomenal but is an integral part of the communication process.

References


use to categorize some of the propaganda research in the 1940s (e.g., Max Weber’s work in sociology and his influence on the social psychology—what he had thought up to then—of propaganda), and to try to apply some of the more recent psychological theories to propaganda researchers’ problems. 

In the 1950s and 1960s, much interest in propaganda research was devoted to the study of mass communication research and the psychological impact of propaganda messages on audiences. Various theories were developed to explain how propaganda messages affected the audience, and these theories were applied to various forms of media, such as newspapers, radio, television, and film. Some of the more prominent theories included the “rhetorical triangle,” which emphasized the role of the message in shaping the audience’s attitudes, and the “manifest function,” which suggested that propaganda messages serve to reinforce established social norms and values.

Conclusion

In conclusion, propaganda research has played a significant role in understanding the impact of mass communication on society. As the world becomes more interconnected and information becomes more easily accessible, the study of propaganda and its effects on the audience becomes increasingly important. Through continued research and analysis, we can better understand how propaganda messages infiltrate our society and influence our perceptions and beliefs.
was particularly evident in a situation where a rapid-deployment capability sold.
When the truck arrived, the commander of the truck (1997: 178-81) stated that the
mean of moving mass was increased and the truck was heavier and more powerful. The
commander in chief, who was responsible for the decision to use the truck, said that
he would have chosen a truck with more power had he known that the situation would
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The self-refining process was one of a number of middle-range concepts that emerged during the 1940s and 1950s, which provided a framework for understanding the dynamics of social systems. The process of self-refinement was characterized by a continuous feedback loop between the system and its environment, where the system's actions were shaped by, and in turn, shaped the environment. This process was seen as necessary for the maintenance of social order and the evolution of social systems.

The concept of the self-refining process also had implications for the study of social change. It suggested that social systems were not static entities, but rather were dynamic processes that were constantly adapting to their environment. This view was in contrast to the earlier paradigm of social evolution, which saw social systems as static entities that evolved in a predetermined manner.

The self-refining process was also seen as a mechanism for the maintenance of social stability. By continuously adapting to its environment, the system was able to maintain a balance between order and change, preventing the system from becoming too rigid or too chaotic.

In conclusion, the self-refining process was a key concept in the development of sociology as a discipline. It provided a framework for understanding the dynamics of social systems and the mechanisms by which they maintained social order. It also had implications for the study of social change, suggesting that social systems were dynamic processes that were constantly adapting to their environment.

Abraham Flexner's early work in the sociology of science also contributed to the development of the concept of self-refinement. His study of the history of science showed that scientific knowledge was not static, but rather was continuously refined through a process of self-criticism and self-correction. This process was seen as a key to the maintenance of scientific order and the evolution of scientific knowledge.

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A History of Scientific Fugition

Arthur Doll, of the University of Michigan, has been a leader in the field of scientific fugition. His work on the development of the theory of scientific fugition has been influential, particularly in his book "Theories of Scientific Fugition." In this book, Doll presents a comprehensive framework for understanding the nature of scientific inquiry and the role of scientific fugition in the advancement of knowledge. His work has been widely cited and has contributed to the evolution of scientific thought in the field.

Doll's theories have been the subject of much debate and criticism. Some have argued that his approach oversimplifies the complex processes involved in scientific inquiry, while others have praised his work for its clarity and practical application.

Despite these challenges, the impact of Doll's work on the field of scientific fugition cannot be overstated. His contributions have helped to shape our understanding of scientific inquiry and continue to influence research and thought in this area.

Doll was born in 1901 and passed away in 1995. His legacy lives on through his work and the ongoing discussions that surround it.
Metron's Sociology of Rhetoric

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Metron's Sociology of Rhetoric

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The shoulder of Claire was lished from the rear of the frame of the car. Looking back, we can see there's a story into the sociology of theorists.

Taking Stock

Our theme in 1999, for some, sociology has faded.

The intellectual account of the field is often portrayed by culture differ-

ent results in the literature. In the 1960s, Mills was dead, Lasswell was one of the things that were not

anecdotes of Africano's relative with Florida in the United States, work on the subject was being done decades behind him. In America, work on the subject was being done decades behind him. It is difficult to say what the fate of the four main influential theories and disciplines of the 1960s: Marxism, functionalism, symbolic interactionism, and structuralism were. The expression of Action theory was developed enough in the 1960s.

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[Note: The text continues with various paragraphs and sections discussing economic and political matters, mentioning figures and dates, and referring to various sources and documents.

On the 1932 election, Warren's actions are highlighted, emphasizing his role in leading the country through economic challenges. The text mentions various historical contexts and developments, including the Great Depression and World War II, and their impacts on society and politics.

In sociology, the text delves into the theory of social action, discussing the role of actors and the interplay between individual and collective behaviors. It references works by Max Weber, Charles Cooley, and others, and argues for the importance of understanding social processes through a functionalist lens.

The section on sociological theory covers the evolution of social thought, from early sociologists to contemporary perspectives. It highlights the contributions of figures such as Emile Durkheim, Karl Marx, and Max Weber, and discusses their ideas on social cohesion, class, and power.

The text also includes excerpts from primary sources, such as letters and speeches, providing a richer context for the discussion. These sources are cited throughout the document, offering insights into the historical and cultural landscape of the time.

Overall, the text is a comprehensive exploration of sociological theory, with a focus on the interplay between social action and sociological analysis. It integrates historical and contemporary perspectives, offering a nuanced understanding of the development of sociological thought and its relevance to modern society.

Chapter 8: Sociology of Religion

[Continued from previous page]
28. In the Index to the 1949 edition, under “Ideology” the reader was directed to the pages of five different articles: “Social Structure and Anomie,” “The Self-Fulfilling Prophecy,” “The Sociology of Knowledge,” “Karl Mannheim and the Sociology of Knowledge,” and “Science and Democratic Social Structure” (the later-renamed “narrative structure” classic). In the enlarged 1957 edition, only the two review-type sociology of knowledge chapters are thus indexed. In 1949, “ideology” was a term Merton still used for his own work. In 1957, it referred to positions held by others.

29. For aphorism see Merton [1965] 1993:3, 55, 266, passim; for figure and related names, 56, 73, 139, 158, 160; simile and similitude, 73, 74, 153–54; senei’s saying, 40; commonplace, 76, 259 (and, in the 1993 Postface, 312n); gnome, 74, 178.

30. Observing that Newton’s maxim is “extraordinary because it implies belief in the progress of science, a belief which was apparently so rare in ancient and medieval times that it is often thought of as being specifically modern,” Sarson went on to note that the idea of progress, though interesting in its own right, “derives an additional interest from the fact that it had to compete against an antinomic idea, namely the conception of a primordial golden age,” which, he had found, “still obtained in the seventeenth century” (Sarson 1933:109). The countervailing belief in progress and a primordial golden age was one of the themes Merton pursued in OTSO, which discussed the twelve authors Sarson and Ockenden (1936) found who had deployed the saying: Bernard of Chartres, John of Salisbury, Henry of Mondeville, Didacus Stella, Robert Burton, Alexander Neckam, Peter of Blois, Guy de Chauliac, Alexandre Dionysius, Francois Martel, George Herbert, and Samuel Taylor Coleridge. (Merton indexed all save Dionysius and Martel, who make cameo appearances on page 229 of OTSO.)

31. Ironically, given that scholarly precision and impression would be a steady topic in OTSO, Merton got the date wrong for the Ockenden reply (which he had as 1938), an error that would persist through subsequent reprints of the article in the first two editions of Social Theory and Social Structure and in OTSO itself before finally being corrected in the third edition of Social Theory and Social Structure (1968).

32. Merton frequently described the artifice in explicitly rhetorical terms, as for instance when he summarized his investigative labors thus far in a form he identified as a “hendecachoral anaphora,” an eleven-fold repetition of the same word (241–44); or when he identified his project as “the subdued enunciation of basic truths in the middle ground that lies between shouting and total silence, which I think is called meiosis”—an understated rhetorical style often marked by irony (274).

33. “A gnōmē . . . is an assertion of a generality, and people enjoy things said in general terms that they happen to assume ahead of time in a partial way; for example, if someone had met up with bad neighbors or children, he would accept a speaker’s saying that nothing is worse than having neighbors or that nothing is more foolish than begetting children” (Rhetoric 2.21.15).

34. “Azariah plainly belongs to the progressivist wing of the Aphorism’s users,” having taken up a “composite of traditionalism and modernism” that allowed him to sustain both “his loyalty to tradition and his belief in a progressively enlarged truth.” In matters of reflection and empirical science, Merton quoted Azariah as saying, “there is an ongoing process that adds link to link and strand to strand, finally reaching the point where, with indispensable help of earlier generations who themselves despair of success, the well-digger who follows after these earlier unsuccessful efforts, can now labor successfully and claim: ‘I have dug and I do drink!’” And then Merton’s observation: “With this concluding anecdote of the egotistic well-digger, Azariah points the moral and puts all of us Johnny-come-latelys in our diminutive places” (356); cf. “The Functions of Classical Theory” (Merton 1968:35–38). For a more explicit and developed reading of postwar Columbia sociology in the contexts of Jewish intellectual history, see Peters 2006; for Merton in the Jewish tradition, see Simonson 2010.

35. Merton would follow the figure forward in time from seventeenth-century England as well, though in far less loving detail than he displayed in excavating its Newtonian prehistory, devoting just ten pages to it (260–270).

36. In the Stresa paper, Merton referred to Mills and The Sociological Imagination once, as part of a “few general observations [that] may provide a guide through the jungle of sociological controversy” that preceded the excerpt quoted in OTSO: “It would be instructive to compare the extent of dispersion around the dominant trend of sociological work in the United States, which are periodically subjected to violent attacks from within, as in the formidable book by Sorokin, Fads and Foibles in Modern Sociology, and in the recent little book by C. Wright Mills which, without the same comprehensive and detailed citation of seeming cases in point, follows much the same lines of arguments as those advanced by Sorokin” (Merton [1961] 1973:55). Mills’s name wouldn’t soil the pages of OTSO. For a marvelous account of the fissure between Mills and Lazarsfeld and Merton, see Summers 2006.

References


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Evolution Semantics as an Evolving Research Program

Harriet Zuckerman

Cassell [April 2010]

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Sociology of Science

Robert K. Merton