



## THE 1988 SOUTHAM LECTURE: THE TEXTS OF WAR AND THE DISCOURSE OF PEACE

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A l'instar des généraux, les journalistes sont toujours les combattants de la dernière guerre. Les mouvements pour la paix sont représentés comme étant déviants. La responsabilité incombe aux chercheurs de formuler un discours alternatif sur la paix. Leur méthodologie doit devenir plus communicative tout en enjoignant une plus grande participation.

Credibility, the central concept of communication theory and implicit in all its paradigms, is best understood by examining its limits; that is, the denial of reality. Two cases are studied here: the European holocaust and Vietnam revisionism. The former is framed by two documentary films, Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will* and Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah*; the latter by the CBS TV special "The Uncounted Enemy." A "worst case scenario" suggests that Vietnam revisionism is part of a larger strategy to persuade a public that a nuclear war is winnable. Current coverage of the Middle East is seen as an example of World War III being seen through the eyes of World War II as journalists and other interpreters are unable to transcend their own occupational subculture and experience in covering foreign policy leadership (The Diplomatic Correspondent syndrome) and military engagements (The Foreign Correspondent syndrome). Like Generals, journalists are always fighting the last war. Peace movements are represented as deviant and serve to enhance the credibility of war movements. They are like the images of women in the androcentric discourse of our dominant culture. Responsibility for an alternative peace discourse, then, rests with researchers whose methodology must become more communicative and participatory.

### **The Problem of "Credibility"**

Canadian communications studies have come a long way in a very short time. I gave my first paper on communications at the Learned's in a session of Political Science, and when I set up a course at York on Social Theory and the Mass Media of Communication in 1964—prehistory—it was the only course in the country and regarded as typically American. I hastily renamed it the Sociology of Knowledge which gave it a certain European panache and legitimacy.

Although we have grown and flourished as an academic community, we have not had much impact on public policy. There are some distinguished exceptions, among them John Meisel, Liora Salter, Fred Fletcher, "GiGi" Robinson and Tom McPhail.

But all of them have come out of other disciplines. We still have to earn our status as a distinctive discipline.

Even within academe the perception of us is confused. The people in Humanities think we're "number crunchers", and the "number crunchers" think we're qualitative; the phenomenologists think we're positivists, and the positivists think we're phenomenologists. The administration thinks we're Marxists, and the Marxists think we are a branch of "Admin" studies. We seem to float without a fixed place or a body of knowledge.

But 1988 may be our historic moment. The new Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and particularly Section 2(b) of the Constitution, is part of Canada's Quiet Revolution which began in Quebec but has spread across the country in both directions. Canadian political culture of 1988 is post-Lassagne, post-Lévesque, post-*Péquiste*, a strange mix of elements—Francophone and Anglophone, East and West, male and female, working-class and middle-class, farmer and factory worker— but it is different. In 1988, we are also part of the Soviet Union's *Glasnost* and *Perestroika* which people are beginning to call the Second Russian Revolution.

There is a connection between these two revolutions, for when the Charter and *Glasnost*, are juxtaposed, when they are placed side-by-side, they are complementary, two sides of the same coin. The Charter deals with rights; *Glasnost*, with process; the first with the state, the second with society; the first with dissent, the second with tolerance. The first with *langue*, the second with *parole*. And it is in that space between *langue* and *parole*, state and society, rights and process that we can situate communication and our agenda.

Compared to many of the Western democracies, Canada appreciates freedom more than tolerance. Bill C-54 which deals with the censorship of pornography is a case in point. Closer to Stalinism than Voltaire-ism, the legislation would make Canada the most culturally repressive country of the Western democracies. Yet not many Canadians have protested C-54, and I think it is indicative of a more general distrust of culture. I have been more puzzled, however, by the silence of our university-based experts on culture and communication who as a collectivity have said nothing about the Bill, nothing about the behaviorist research on which it is based, and the political pressures that have led to it. Do we have nothing to say on these issues? If our knowledge and expertise do not give us any special authority in this area, how can we expect to be taken seriously? Our credibility as a professional community of scholars is also, then, located between rights and process, between the Constitution and *Glasnost*.

I am going to talk about communication and credibility: the credibility of the media and of our research. I am particularly interested in the limits of credibility, at what point it disintegrates or fails and we respond to reality by denying it. Denial has become the distinguishing characteristic of our modern psychohistory, and the

holocaust is a prime example. I am going to frame my comments on this phenomenon by comparing two documentary films: Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will* and Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah*.

I am also going to talk about the current emphasis in our media on war texts. Vietnam revisionism is one of these texts, and in my opinion, a very crucial one. For it is my belief that the strategic theorists are moving toward the idea of a nuclear war as winnable, and to make that case Vietnam must be seen in a different light. For purposes of that discussion I am going to look at a CBS documentary called "The Un-counted Enemy" which is an example of Vietnam revisionism. The program was also, you may recall, the subject of a big libel suit filed by General Westmoreland. And I'll have a few things to say about libel suits and the media's near hysteria about them.

The alternative to war texts is peace discourse. The problem with media coverage of the peace movement is not neglect but patronizing attitudes. The movement is seen through the eyes of macho reporters and editors whose careers have been spent covering the military.

Finally, I want to talk about us and the way we do our research. Most of us are not practicing journalists, broadcasters or film makers. We are observers of them, spectators who study what others say and do. Media people like to think they set the political agenda; they don't; they only think they do which is their peculiar occupational *hubris*. At best, they are parties in what I have called agenda-negotiating (McCormack, 1983).

The problem is that too often they set *our* agenda. Indirectly, they determine what we study, the texts we deconstruct. And although we may bring a critical perspective to this, we are not, as I think we must become, the conscience of the media. The nature of criticism itself cannot be assumed. The critical act itself needs to be understood. As Michael Walzer says, "critical distance is measured in inches" (Walzer, 1987).

### **The Meaning of "Communication"**

"What do we mean by "communication?" At the present time we tend to borrow our understanding of communication from other sources, from Marxist theories of ideology, literary criticism, linguistics, psychoanalytic psychology, symbolic interaction, semiotics, structuralism and post-structuralism, and Radical Feminism, from German phenomenology, Frankfurt critical theory, French existentialism, and British analytic theory. We are either the most powerful scholars in the twentieth century or the most dilettante depending on how you look at it. But either way it is an impressive intellectual background, long on theorizing and weak on empirical verification, rich in speculation but poor on methodological rigour.

None of these various schools of thought really address the meaning of communication. We are still just stalking the prey. Communication theory is its own domain with its own conceptual systems and frameworks, its own competing interpretations of its shared observations, and its own methods. It is not a child conceived through in-vitro fertilization, not a subset of one of our established disciplines or philosophical orientations although it helps to be knowledgeable about several of them and expert in, at least, one.

Communication is an *interactive* process through which we achieve a consensual validation. The cornerstone of any communication theory is the concept of credibility, and until we can elaborate and specify what we mean by credibility, we have no theory of communication.

To understand credibility, however, we must look beyond its psychological meaning to its societal contexts. What image do we have of society? Our current paradigms are based on three quite different models. They are, very briefly, a cybernetic or systems model with an emphasis on cognitive processes, on information and problem-solving; a cultural model with an emphasis on motivation, on the production of meaning and the achievement of collective identity; and a conflict model in which communication is ideological expression, an instrument of a class in the process of social change. (McCormack, 1986) Each of these paradigms has its own heuristic strength, but the issue of credibility is central to all of them.

Credibility also depends critically on a political-historical environment. We may look at texts, *l'écrits* as if they were self-contained, as if they were closed and complete systems within themselves, and we can examine their dramaturgical strategies and make inferences about them. But we do so at our own risk for texts come to life, they breathe and acquire credibility, as Habermas understood, through social action. One example of a truly great, superb act of communication in our time was Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I have a Dream" speech. (McCormack, 1982) It is still in 1988 a very moving speech, and if you are Black it is the equivalent of Lincoln's Gettysburg address. But King's speech was willed into being by a civil rights movement. The Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C. July of 1968 happened to be the moment. We can, I think, extrapolate from that to say that when we look at communication we are looking at social movements.

### Communication and the Nazi Movement

National Socialism in Germany was the social movement that led to World War II. In 1934 Leni Riefenstahl was commissioned by Hitler to make a film which has become one of the great classics of modern art propaganda (Furhammar, Isaksson, 1971). The title *Triumph of the Will* was, Riefenstahl tells us Hitler's own suggestion. It was about a Party rally of the National Socialist Party Congress held in Nuremberg; (Nuremberg because Hitler's strength was greater there than in Berlin.) Thus the audiences

wherever it was shown believed it was seeing a real event, not a staged dramatization. The film, carefully scripted, was intended to capture the true spirit of the new Nazi Germany and the *echt Deutsch* soul of the German people. Its imagery is brilliant from the opening shots when we see Hitler's plane descending through the skies, arriving, as Taylor said, like Lenin at the Finland station (Taylor, 1979). The film emphasizes the masses and their discipline, their devotion to Der Fuhrer, and their unity (labour, youth, the army and SS.) There is one extraordinary scene where Hitler is consecrating the battle flags. He touches each as if he had a mystical power to raise the dead. No matter how often I've seen this film I am always caught up in that moment and for a fraction of a second become a "true believer." It is easy to slide sequentially from the flag scene to the final climactic speech by Hess, "The Party is Hitler; But Hitler is Germany, just as Germany is Hitler. Sieg Heil." Thus there is a synchronic logic.

Throughout the film there is only one passing reference to race: "A people that does not preserve its racial purity must perish". Otherwise there is no mention of anti-Semitism. Nor is there any reference to a Left—Communist and Socialist—opposition. A weak powerless Germany, a humiliated people who saw *Triumph of the Will* was transformed in their own imaginations to a proud nation with an historic destiny. Riefenstahl did far more for the Third Reich than Nietzsche, but neither the film nor the government could have been as effective without the intellectual underpinning of Nietzsche. Nietzsche, however, is not banned in Germany today; *Triumph of the Will* is.

The other Germany was either lost or subordinated into some kind of anti-Communist and Aryan mystique, so that when the first German refugees came over in the 1930s they said, "You don't know what is happening". What they meant, in part, was that they did not understand, for the parameters of it were beyond their comprehension as well as ours. They read into our eyes their own disbelief. And, indeed, it remained a phenomenon that eluded our imaginations and our capacity to make sense of it. So, too, the judges at Nuremberg were just as incredulous. "There is less of a mental barrier in accepting the weirdest stories of supernatural phenomena as, for example, water running uphill and trees with roots reaching to the sky. than in taking at face value these narratives which go beyond the frontiers of human cruelty and savagery" (Masruss, 1987: 159).

But those early refugees believed naively that we were a tough-minded pragmatic people who wanted information and would act on it. Later, and with infinitely greater bitterness and truth, they said, "You don't know and you don't *want* to know." It was this accusation of denial and indifference which engendered a guilt which has haunted modern intellectuals who had explored their own unconscious enough to know or suspect it was true. The liberal mind shaped by the 18th century and barely able to balance John Stuart Mill with Freud and Marx was overwhelmed by this introspective nightmare. Even persons who had fled the pogroms of Eastern Europe and carried in

their memories Czarist atrocities did not comprehend it, for the *stetl* cruelty of Eastern Europe was feudal, pre-modern Europe, not Germany, not Weimar.

*Triumph of the Will*—its message, its style, its aesthetics—can be contrasted with Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah* where the denial of genocide is painfully forced out into the open and confronted. The difference between the two documentaries constitutes a chapter in our modern political cultural history. But between the beginning and the end was nearly half a century of believing and disbelieving.

In her remarkable study of how the media covered the holocaust, Deborah Lipstadt documents the inability of media to confront what they saw and knew was happening (Lipstadt, 1986). The American press was not on the side of Hitler, but they were not on the side of the Jews either, and many of their publishers might have thought the Nazis preferable to the Communists. But they could not comprehend the gas chambers, the death camps, the forced evacuation of millions of people who had done nothing. Auschwitz was, she said, *Beyond Belief*.

Yet, from time to time the correspondents in Germany and Eastern Europe did grasp the politics of the Nazi movement; that is, the leadership of Hitler and the National Socialist Movement. And they created another myth. The Final Solution wasn't the German people; it was their leaders. Once the party was defeated, Germany would be forgiven and return to us, to the fold of Enlightenment democracies, to the civilization of Goethe not Wagner.

One consequence of this myth that Nazi Germany was an aberration was another form of denial by Canadian officials who could have opened the doors of Canada to refugees. Failure to do so made us complicit, a party of the holocaust. (Imagine Canada if we had gotten Einstein!) (Abella and Troper, 1982). Had the press, Lipstadt writes, "been willing to build on the information which had been steadily emerging over the past twelve years, there would have been little reason for 'surprise'. But the press was never able to see the full picture, even when it had many, if not all, of the details in hand."

It could not admit to itself or to its readers that these stories were the truth. Often, instead of explicitly rejecting the news as exaggerated, it simply put a critically important story on the comic page or next to the weather report. It put blinders on and erected all sorts of barriers which *made it more rational for readers to disbelieve than believe*. (Lipstadt, 1986, p. 271-272. Italics mine.)

The British press, she tells us, was better. Was this because they were closer to Europe and understood it better? Or was it because their readers were more political? Or that Europeans, in general, were less naive about the nature of good and evil? George Orwell who spoke disparagingly of the "imbecile optimism of the Tory press" probably thought there was no difference. The Soviet press also carried reports of the

deportations of Jews, but American journalists were too shrewd to trust anything datelined Moscow, and they were equally skeptical of information from Jewish sources.

But the horror goes further. Some years ago I was involved in a study at the Allen Memorial hospital in Montreal on stress: the senile psychoses and stress. This was one of those ambitious multi-disciplinary studies—a psychiatrist, a neurologist, and others. I was the sociologist who had the responsibility of drawing up a life history questionnaire. The head of the project was a Czech refugee: brilliant, wise, literate, a scientist with a humanist's understanding of the human condition. Nevertheless, we had a great deal of trouble defining "stress". So after weeks of frustrating discussion we decided that we would take home a group of case histories and rate them using whatever definition of stress we wanted. On Monday morning the director picked up one of mine to which I had given a plus four, maximum stress.

"Why", he said, "did you do that?"

"Well," I replied, "this man was in a concentration camp; he didn't know from day to day whether he would live or die; he was separated from his family. He had no idea of where his wife and children were and whether they were alive or dead. I think that is maximum stress."

"Don't be ridiculous," he said. "That man was in an Italian concentration camp. They had wine; they had haircuts. I was in Dachau."

I was stunned; first, by the personal revelation and then, gradually, by the realization of the mental state we were in if we are sitting there like characters out of Kafka comparing the relative merits of concentration camps. The holocaust had now, like disease, destroyed the tissue of our values. Nothing in my family experience, nothing in my education, nothing in my life had prepared me for the morality of ranking concentration camps, of making fine distinctions between Dachau and an Italian concentration camp. It was "beyond belief."

The success of the neo Nazi movement lies in our innocence, our self-deception about their claim that the holocaust did not exist. You and I are not likely to believe it; we are too close to it, but we should not have any illusions about future generations. Jim Keegstra and Ernst Zundel may well succeed not because they are clever propagandists or super manipulators—they are both inept and appeal to the semi-literate—but because of our failure of nerve, our *trahison des clerics*; we want to forget the holocaust.

The media in Toronto took pride in the fact that they gave almost no attention to the recent Zundel trial, depriving Zundel of a forum and martyrdom. But if you look closely at the coverage of Israel in our own media (our own media is somewhat of a fiction since the major coverage of the Middle East is by the U.S. wire services) there

is a much more subtle denial of any connection between the holocaust and the State of Israel. Leaving aside the possibility of contrived footage of children throwing stones, what are we to make of a headline in the *Washington Post* which reads, "Israelis Jubilant at Killing." (*Manchester Guardian*, 1988, p. 17) Whoever wrote that headline is what Leslie Fiedler would call one of the "new mutants". I am under no illusions about the state of Israel and its relationship to its Arab population. Occupation corrupts, and absolute occupation corrupts absolutely, but occupation does not turn a people into sadists.

I don't want to stop here and discuss the media coverage of the Middle-East, whether there is too much or too little, whether it is pro-Arab or pro-Israel. Or why. I accept the view of several observers that (1) there is too much of it and that it receives disproportionately more coverage than other more newsworthy stories; and (2) there has been a shift from pro-Israel to pro-Arab sympathy. I suspect both trends have more to do with a world-wide oil crisis than a resurgence of anti-Semitism or the propaganda efforts of the P.L.O. (Emerson, 1986/7). Like Neil Kressel, I question the usefulness of that kind of content analysis. (Kressel, 1987) And I share Robert Hackett's critique of objectivity as a journalistic norm (Hackett, 1984). The point I want to make is that the media have taken the old template of Nazi Germany and reversed the cast: the children of survivors are the storm troopers; the victims of racism become the racists. By this strange inversion the holocaust and the concept of "survivors" cease to exist and no longer have any claim on our historical conscience. Thus, that long legacy of Judeo-Christian guilt is suspended temporarily. It is a strange and bitter fruit.

What we see on television every night in Lebanon or Gaza or the West Bank is World War III through the eyes of World War II. There is the same Foreign Correspondent syndrome which emphasizes the military action; and there is the familiar Diplomatic Correspondent syndrome which focuses on officials and government policies. But there is a contradiction, for within these conventions which were created and honed in World War II the issues have been de-Europeanized and emotionally distanced as if the Middle East was disconnected from us, from our knowledge, our experience, from our past; as if it was a regional, not a global, dispute between two strange parties each of whom can elicit our xenophobic responses. They are "other", *L'étranger*. Middle East media coverage is, as military history, one war behind; as political history, it is bereft, ahistorical. It is concrete where it should be metaphorical and metaphorical where it should be explicit. No wonder we become desensitized to it since it lacks the matrix of values and history that would give it a meaning.

In her study of the media and the holocaust, Deborah Lipstadt (1986) does not mention the people who were doing research on the media in this period, many of whom were themselves refugees. They were, in fact, analyzing Nazi propaganda for it was the war and its outcome that preoccupied them. Many, of course, hoped to return to their homes, and winning the war was more important to them than understanding Fascism or persuading apolitical North Americans to think politically. Then, as now,



we turn less believable political states of mind into more believable forms of action, and political events into military ones since they are easier to circumscribe and understand. In addition, as several scholars have noted, the television camera is inevitably drawn to hard action, to do-ers rather than thinkers. Todd Gitlin, you may recall, described how the media turned the New Left from a political movement into an anti-war movement (Gitlin, 1980). Alice Cook and Gwyn Kirk describe media coverage of the Women's Encampment in Britain (Greenham Common) as similarly biased. The media were not, they say, interested in the cause but in the physical appearances and lifestyles of the women, not interested in the nonviolence but in arrests (Cook, Kirk, 1983). These distortions are not inherent in the medium, but the television medium exaggerates further the stylistics of the existing discourse.

There is a parallel today with Chile where our media and our media researchers have distanced themselves from the Pinochet government and the social groups who support it, where it is, as Lipstadt says, more rational to disbelieve than believe. There are a handful of people in Santiago who are studying the media. But apart from Claudio Duran, who else studies the Chilean press and the strategies it uses to normalize the unthinkable?

If the Nazi era began, as Kracauer suggests, with *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* and reached its symbolic apotheosis in *Triumph of the Will*, it ends with *Shoah* and the morbid cabinets of the sealed trains in which people were transported to the death camps (Kracauer, 1947). The contrast between *Triumph of the Will* and *Shoah* could not be more compelling. There are no staged spectacles in *Shoah*, no Wagnerian music, no uniforms and massed rituals. The settings are a quiet landscape, an empty park, a river in the background. We are told it is the route which the trains took, but it looks to the viewer like the *tabula rasa*; it is in this setting where people are asked relive their trauma. Only at the end of the nine hours does the film become more dramatic as we hear of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising and its defeat. Otherwise, the film makes no concessions to our need for narrative, suspense or climax. It is the anti-aesthetic that breaks with the conventional documentary form to achieve an authenticity about the unthinkable. From that perspective *Shoah* is to the modern documentary film what Picasso was to art; its aesthetics are those of *Guernica*. And just as *Guernica* illuminated the violence of the Spanish Civil War, *Shoah* confronts us with the cognitive dimensions of the holocaust that were so dissonant in the past. Claude Lanzmann, the producer and interviewer of *Shoah*, was not a therapist skillfull in peeling back the layers of self-deception; he was an intellectual, a friend of Sartre's. The concreteness of *Shoah*, the exhaustiveness of it give the film an existentialist voice beneath the voices of the speakers, and that, I suggest, is why it is credible to a generation that lived in an existentialist frame-of-reference. It was the perfect match between genre and audience.

*Shoah* has no formal script. On the surface it consists of nothing more than a series of interviews with survivors, former camp functionaries, members of the Polish

underground, people who lived in the villages where the camps were located. The interviews are very slow as the questions and answers are translated laboriously from one language to another: French, Polish, Hebrew, English. And Lanzmann is a very direct and inquisitorial type of interviewer. The pace of the film is also very slow, almost slow-motion with long stretches when nothing is said and nothing happens so as to suggest the nonlinearity of the structure. We and the camera keep returning to the scenes of the camps with a numbing redundancy. Thus *Shoah* has a credibility that our tighter, more overproduced *Fifth Estate* or NFB documentaries lack. *Shoah*, like history itself, has no closure. *Shoah* also provides the evidence of denial. To take just one example:

A prisoner on the 'special detail' saw a woman in the 'undressing room' who was the wife of a friend of his. He came right out and told her: 'You are going to be exterminated. In three hours you'll be ashes.' The woman believed him because she knew him. She ran all over and warned the other women., 'We're going to be killed. We're going to be gassed.' Mothers carrying their children on their shoulders didn't want to hear that. They decided the woman was crazy. They chased her away. So she went to the men. To no avail. Not that they didn't believe her; they'd hear rumors in the Bialystok ghetto or in Grodno and elsewhere. But who wanted to hear that! When she saw that no one would listen, she scratched her whole face. Out of despair. In shock. And she started to scream (Lanzmann, 1985, p. 126)

Victims of the holocaust said they couldn't remember, and Polish bystanders said they didn't know what was going on a few kilometers outside of their village. Lanzmann, at times, pushing his interviewees forced some of them to remember.

I watched *Shoah* several times each time becoming more fascinated by it. Grotesque and tragic as the stories were, I didn't shed a tear. I still don't understand why it affected me so powerfully intellectually and so weakly at the level of sentiment. Others I have talked to have had similar reactions; they expected the pathos of *The Diary of Anne Frank*, not the making of an historical record. But although the film failed to reach me on an emotional level, it touched all of the sensitive nerves of an intellectual biography so that when not long ago Kurt Waldheim's memory failed him about his Nazi past, I was prepared; I felt I had already met Kurt Waldheim in Lanzmann's film. Future generations whose life experiences may be less characterized by the equations of the existential mood of our era may find in *Shoah* something very different just as they will in *La Nausea* and the myth of Sisyphus, but I do not think the holocaust will disappear from living history as long as *Shoah* is available, for *Shoah* is the death, not of Fascism, but of the credibility of *Triumph of the Will*.

### The Rhetoric of War and Peace

*Shoah* belongs to World War II; Vietnam is World War III and, it too, was covered by correspondents who had learned their trade either in World War II or by others who had been there. *My Lai* which Seymour Hersh made into the war crime of the Vietnam war was a reminder of the dehumanization of the death camps. And *My Lai*, together with the revelations of the *Pentagon Papers* was important in the eventual withdrawal of U.S. "advisers".

Neither of these, however, is an image of the version of Vietnam we are getting today. Popular films like *Platoon* and *Rambo* are war films, action films with *macho* values. Their message is that Vietnam was a noble and unnecessary defeat. *The Green Berets*, *The Deer Hunter* (which ends in a bathetic scene of everyone singing "God Bless America"), *Taxi Driver*, *Platoon*, *Full Metal Jacket*, *Rambo*, *Good Morning, Vietnam* are just a few of the Hollywood films which celebrate the American way of life and the American soldier over the South East Asians, that is, an enemy Communist force. Most of these films are racist, jingoistic, and "macho"; they are not about the Vietnam of anti-war demonstrations, of draft evaders coming to Canada, of young people burning their draft registration cards. Vietnam is the excuse for films whose appeal to a teenage audience is danger, excitement, growing-up, death and inter-personal loyalty. The formulae are well-researched and the films differ only in their thematic emphasis. But the Vietnam of a divided America is not there.

Among strategic theorists, however, the issue is not to convert the generation that opposed Vietnam, but to deny the reality of defeat in Vietnam. They do not speak to a generation that opposed the presence of American advisers in Vietnam, but to those who are disillusioned by the experience, who went expecting to triumph over an evil empire of Asian communists, and returned with those forces in firm control. Vietnam *revisionism* legitimates the war but questions its leadership.

It defines Vietnam as a military engagement not a political war and argues that it could have and should have been won. It was lost, according to the military, because Congress failed to provide the personnel and material. But according to the CIA, it was lost because of the ineptitude of the military who failed to understand the ideological aspects of the war. Congress blames the media which manipulated public opinion. Each locates culpability somewhere else, but they are agreed that the defeat was a disgrace that could have been avoided.

It was the CIA's interpretation, the second view which held the military responsible for the defeat that CBS made into a 90 minute documentary called "The Uncounted Enemy: A Vietnam Deception." The program, drawing on same format as *60 Minutes* and narrated by Mike Wallace, was a joint product of Sam Adams, a former CIA analyst and George Crile a CBS television producer. It was Adams's story based on his own analysis of statistics that both the CIA and the military were engaged in a cover-up, an attempt to underestimate the number of civilian Vietnamese who were

helping the Vietcong. According to Adams and the program, the motive behind the deception was political expedience, a desire to please President Johnson who, in an election year, kept assuring the American people that there was a "light at the end of the tunnel." Adams insisted that Presidential advisers were keeping the President himself in the dark; it was a cruel conspiracy. And General Westmoreland, more than anyone else was responsible for this tragedy. As Adams testified later in a libel trial:

We lost a war in Vietnam. There's never been an adequate investigation of how we managed to do it. We're a great big country and Vietnam is a little bitty country.

"Vietnam was," according to Mike Wallace "Lyndon Johnson's war, but from the beginning of the American buildup the President placed his faith in victory on one man—General Westmoreland." Opposing Westmoreland's "good news" was, according to Wallace, only one man, "a lone analyst of the CIA [who] found reason to question the very basis of General Westmoreland's asserting that we could defeat the enemy. His name was Sam Adams."

During the program the officials who supported Adams's thesis were primarily CIA officials. Immediately after the program was aired, two letters appeared in the *New York Times*, one by Walt W. Rostow, the other by Roger Hillsman each refuting Adams's thesis. CBS, however, was not alarmed until an article appeared in *TV Guide* by Don Kowet and Sally Bedell describing in detail how Westmoreland had been tricked by Wallace and CBS, and how questionable techniques had been used by Crile to achieve the effect he and Adams wanted (Kowet, 1984). As a result CBS undertook its own investigation.

The CBS in-house inquiry demonstrated how far the program had strayed from the glory days of Edward R. Murrow. Hardly a rule was left unbroken. However, no disciplinary action was taken. Congress also looked at the program. Most elected officials are not very fond of the media and we might have expected them to use this opportunity to say a few things about fairness and objectivity. The Members of Congress agreed that the program was editorializing, but, it turns out, they too felt the military was withholding information or getting false information.

The libel trial which began in New York City in October of 1984 took the public behind the scenes of CBS to see and hear at first-hand how the network creates a documentary. It was hardly an edifying spectacle. But the trial was important for another reason; it brought out the insuperable problems of trying to estimate the strength of a civilian guerrilla force. It is an almost impossible task which depends on what measures are used and on what day of the week the report was made. There was no more reason to believe Adams's calculations than Westmoreland's. The crisis of credibility was that there was no truth to be found.

The trial ended inconclusively when General Westmoreland withdrew his suit and claimed a victory, while CBS hailed the outcome as a great victory for them and for the First Amendment. But the public who had no reason to believe either side was left with the problem unresolved. Whom do you believe when you can't believe either side? At no point during the trial or later was any reference made to the original documentary and it is doubtful if reporters who covered the story had seen it. They could argue that they were covering a libel trial not a television program. Thus people in the media many of whom were critical of the Vietnam War and who may have been part of the anti-war demonstrations became part of a process in which Vietnam revisionism has become our accepted view.

Why were the reporters, editors and others so uncritical?

The explanation for that is to be found in the culture of the media. First, there is a conflict of interest when journalists report on journalists. Second, journalists are obsessed with the idea that libel trials are detrimental to freedom of the press. Historians may conclude that libel trials do serve a useful purpose by putting people under oath and being able to subpoena evidence that might otherwise be erased from the tapes. Investigative journalism did not suffer in this instance. But media people on the subject of libel are as unbiased as the Pope on abortion.

In addition the journalists who covered the trial were socialized and educated by a generation of journalists who covered the Vietnam war and were convinced that despite the absence of censorship, they were nevertheless not given the truth (Hallin, 1986). Thus, it was plausible and credible to them that the military had deceived the President. It did not occur to them at that time, as it did to me or anyone who had an elementary knowledge of statistics, that no one knew the truth. Nor did it occur to them, as it did to me when I went back and looked at the newspaper coverage of the Tet offensive that the media people were caught off guard by their own misjudgment of what was happening. As I have suggested many times elsewhere, the most serious bias of the media lies in themselves, their own subculture, their own discourse and own folklore. The more closely I followed the trial, the more I became convinced that libel cases may have a "chilling effect" on the media, but historians may look upon these trials as a gift.

Hallin (1986) describes the themes of pre Tet reporting. "War is a national endeavour", "War is an American tradition—invocation of memory of World War II," "War is manly" "War is rational", "Winning is what counts." After Tet, he says, these changed (Hallin, 1986, p. 175-178). But Vietnam revisionism is a war text and a return to that pre-Tet set: "winning is what counts".

The urgency with which it is being foisted on us is not merely to assuage the embittered Vietnam veterans, although it is that, too. It is intended to keep alive the paranoia, the image of an enemy. And it is a logical step in the preparation of a much more terrifying war text, namely that a nuclear war is winnable. Vietnam revisionism

is not just a pro-war text; it is also a theory of history which edits the past by writing out of the record widespread public disillusionment, student protest, and anti-war sentiment; that is, it takes history out of our hands and sees it as the prerogative of small elites. In this scenario we have become the refugees whose experience is being denied, and whose credibility is being undermined.

### The Social Responsibility of Researchers

The problem for us who do media research is whether we are going to document this or resist it?

The latter means not just exposing Vietnam revisionism and other New Right war texts, nor in describing how the media present the various peace movements, for peace movements are also seen through a military discourse. Like women who are depicted in androcentric scripts as being there to enhance the egos and credibility of men, the peace movement is presented in the language of the military and strategic theorists. It adds the necessary tension in a dialectical process. But it is not a form of peace discourse in which militarism is the deviance. One of my fantasies is to recall all foreign correspondents and diplomatic correspondents and assign them to cover City Hall, while only pacifists, peaceniks and disarmament advocates would cover foreign policy, the Ottawa-Washington defense establishment and those fetal forms of World War III.

Is that really so unrealistic? Some social psychologist ought to be able to construct a scale measuring "doveism" and "hawkism", and only those who score high on the former could cover the international scene. Assuming that is possible—and I believe we could simulate this set of conditions—our research would be different as well.

As I watched *Shoah* I asked myself how one would go about doing research on it. If we wanted to do a study of its impact on an audience and why it had credibility, how would we go about it? Eventually, I realized that we could not. *Shoah* was the research. It is as much about how we investigate the truth as the truth itself. And it is from that I deduced that those of us interested in peace discourse as an alternative to the texts of war must deconstruct our own studies as texts and find new, more creative ways of doing research, some point between the documentary and survey research, between art and content analysis, between analytic categories and communication. This enterprise begins when we stop defining our research as monitoring, as reports about or studies of what is or has been. We need to simulate a future and base our research on becoming. Credibility involves making choices so that if our research remains on a purely descriptive level, quantitative or qualitative, it may be respectable, publishable but not credible.

To summarize I have suggested here that at the present time our activities and research have proliferated yet we seem to have lost sight of the meaning of

communication. We acquire a certain degree of academic status but not credibility. And credibility, I suggested, is the key to understanding communication. One way of approaching this is to examine the massive denials of reality that have occurred on both the macro and micro scale. The holocaust is the limiting case. Recovering this history through the repressed memories of individuals suggests a different format through which it is possible to hold on to the past we denied. Just as we did not believe the holocaust until it was too late to save six million people, so we do not today believe the evidence of nuclear war. The failure of the media to speak out against the CBS program and its assumptions, the reflex of the media to favour the media in a libel trial, the habits of the media to distrust the military contributed to a statement of Vietnam revisionism going unchallenged. Vietnam revisionism is not just a different interpretation of the Vietnam war. It is itself a form of denial, a repudiation of that great wave of revulsion in world opinion that led to the withdrawal of American "advisers." Media researchers have enough distance from the media culture to recognize the bias, but we do not offer an alternative; under the circumstances our research must become a form of peace discourse. This will involve new modes of research which will automatically be communicative.

I recently saw a wonderful one-woman performance by Lily Tomlin called, "The Search For Signs of Intelligent Life in the Universe" written by Jane Wagner. In it Lily Tomlin plays a bag lady named Trudy who is trying to explain to a couple of aliens from outer space about Andy Warhol's painting of Campbell's soup can. She holds up a can of soup, and says, "Now this is soup". Then she points to the picture and says, "This is art." She repeats this many times but the two aliens are still baffled. Later and apropos something else they question her about "goose bumps" What are they? And she has a hard time explaining that, but she takes them to see a play, and while they are there the two aliens experience goose bumps.

"Did you like the play that much?" she asked.

The play? They had been watching the audiences. And they explained to her in language she would understand. "Trudy," they said, "The play is the soup. . . the audience is the art." It sums up some of my views about communication and certainly about our meeting this morning: I'm the soup; you are the art.

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