CHAPTER 1

Language and Institution
in the Human Sciences

Through the twentieth century, and with increasing urgency in recent years, there has been a persistent influence by an emergent and still controversial perspective which suggests that language use is the most fundamental phenomenon for the philosophy of the human sciences. Consequently, reflection on language has important implications for the method, results, historical location, and meaning for human life of the human sciences. This is the basic position that underlies most of the debates about postmodernism throughout the 1980s. Unlike the predominant modern philosophy of consciousness, which was focused on subject-object relations, critics of modernity turn toward language and culture, which is focused on intersubjective meaning. One way to express this perspective is to notice that recent language theories have been fused with earlier theories of the social construction of reality such that language has ceased to be understood as a distinct phenomenon but is rather taken to be the key to social processes outright. Thus, recently, hermeneutics, deconstruction, and speech act philosophy have converged on the proposal that language is the distinctively human component of social life. This emphasis on language has been overlaid on the previous position that "reality" is socially constructed—a trend in which

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phenomenology, systems theory, and certain brands of Marxism were significant. Many other trends of thought could be mentioned, certainly. Nonetheless, it is possible to discern beyond specific intellectual traditions and innovations an emerging convergence on the notion that social reality is constructed in and through language and that, consequently, the proper activity of philosophy and the human sciences is the investigation of language use in various settings as well as its wider theoretical implications.

While modernity can be characterized through the predominance of a philosophy of consciousness stemming from Descartes, the dualism of this approach always contained the possibility of a degeneration into objectivism. The philosophical expression of modernity should be more accurately defined through the dualism of subjectivism and objectivism, or mentalism and behaviorism, and the continued attempt, but failure, to reconcile these positions. Postmodern philosophical expression thus begins when one ceases to argue from within the subject-object formulation and takes the articulation of this dualism itself as the problem requiring explanation. The Frankfurt School and phenomenology initiated this critique, but it is now pursued more commonly through language-based criticism.

The most distinctive nexus of substantive issues in this convergence is the suggestion that Western societies, and perhaps others also, have entered a new postmodern condition in which the "foundationalist" assumptions of intellectual and social life have been undermined. On the theoretical level, this suggestion pertains primarily to the status of the language of social inquiry: Whereas modern "science" was concerned with the *representation* of social life, and therefore raised questions of accuracy and methodology, postmodern "theory" emphasizes language-in-use as the *construction* of social relationships, which raises issues of institutional legitimacy and the rhetorical power of intellectual discourses. On the level of substantive social analysis, anti-foundationalism suggests that society is, or should be, constituted by a plurality of discourses, none of which can claim overriding legitimacy in the manner that the "grand narratives" (Lyotard) of progress and emancipation did for modernity. There can certainly be more subtle, and more extensive, characterizations of this shift. In particular, the very distinction between theoretical and substantive levels becomes questionable with the shift away from the modern *epistemological* warranting of inquiry toward the postmodern rhetorical emphasis on *what is done by* language rather than what is *said in* it. For this reason, questions concerning the "epistemology of the social sciences" have now largely been overtaken by

contemporary issues of the "rhetoric of the human sciences," which focuses on what they do rather than on the adequacy of their representations. This entire new intellectual perspective, including its substantive claims, can be generally referred to as "discourse theory" due to the key role that language plays in it.

The discursive turn in philosophy and the human sciences thus stems from taking language use as especially significant in illuminating the whole of social praxis. Philosophical and scientific activity itself, after the turn, takes language as the metaphorical basis for understanding its own theoretical formation. Metaphors drawn from social life have allowed a reflexive conception of the formation and role of theory throughout the history of philosophy and the human sciences. Consider the (usually) conservative model of society as an organism, for example, or the liberal theory of society as an aggregate of atoms. Marxism has articulated its conception of theory mainly on the architectural metaphor of base and superstructure, though it has also at times used labor itself as a model in order to clarify the tasks and claims of theory. The basic metaphor in Harold Innis's communication theory of society is transportation, the traversal of space. The concept of metaphor is itself a metaphorical one, based on the Greek for "carrying-over." Metaphor carries over a meaning from one domain to another or, as we often say now, from one "level" to another. Thus, theoretical discourse is necessarily elaborated through metaphorical use of experiential materials. Innis's communication theory rediscovers—in his own sense, through the notion of carrying-over embedded in the concept of transportation as the traversal of space—the root metaphor from which the idea of metaphor began. Nowadays, theory is understood primarily through its expression in language. This reflexive application of the discursive turn to theory itself is one of the main sources of the power of the metaphor of language. It not only provokes interesting new descriptions of social praxis but also re-configures the relationship of theory to social praxis. Or, to state the issue somewhat more generally, when society is understood as a complex of expressive forms, it also encloses the social role of the particular expressive formation that is theory. The metaphor of language gives itself to a concise formulation of the recursive doubling that is always present in the project of self-knowledge in philosophy and the human sciences, since humanity is both known and knower. The project of self-knowledge in the human sciences produces a doubling of the subject which is characteristic of modernity since the anchoring of knowledge in subjectivity by Descartes. It is called by Foucault the empirical-transcendental doublet and by Husserl the transcen-

dental and concrete egos.[1] This book addresses this issue through the notion of a medium of communication as both the transmission of a certain content and, more importantly, as the primal scene instituting social relations. Every communication is thus reflexive. Since humanity appears as both the subject and object of social representations, the reflexive capacity of language demands a theory of social praxis as a complex of expressive forms.

The term "expression" has, of course, a Romantic origin which tends to lead toward the notion of a deep inner experience that is pressed outward into external forms. It seems to imply an inner-outer dualism, similar to and based upon the subject-object dualism, that would be problematic in the context of the discursive turn. The metaphor of language has, perhaps above all, undermined the earlier presupposition that "subjective" human experience is inherently separate from "objective" social forms. By way of contrast, language occupies a middle realm in which human self-conceptions and social activities both emerge from cultural praxis. Language as metaphor has turned philosophy and the human sciences away from this subject-object, or representational, posing toward a conception of culture as its primary realm of investigation. But culture itself must be understood on this basis, not as a merely external or secondary activity, but as the process of formation of individual, group, and inter-group life. This process of formation of identities is expressive, albeit one shorn of inner-outer assumptions, in the sense of a socio-cultural praxis as the shaping of a distinct way of life. Such a self-shaping, or instituting, of a way of life requires a notion of expression, even if we must abandon the notion of an already-existing subjectivity hiding behind the forms of expression.

Expression can thus be understood as a primal scene of self-shaping through culture, indeed as the active component of the instituting of an order that gives rise to the unity of a subsequent history. This use of the term "institution" derives from Edmund Husserl's concept of *Urstiftung*, or sometimes simply *Stiftung*, which is normally translated into English as "instituting," "primal instituting," or "establishment" and which refers to the setting-into-play of a primal scene that founds a scientific or philosophical tradition—that is to say, a distinct formation of temporality.[2] In the context of describing the origin of geometry, Husserl used the term in this way: "Starting from what we know, from our geometry, or rather from the older handed-down forms (such as Euclidean geometry), there is an inquiry back [*Rückgang*] into the submerged original beginnings of geometry as they necessarily must have been in their 'primally establishing' [*urstiftende*] function."[3] An *Urstiftung* is

thus not an event within history but is rather the founding moment of a way of knowing that allows a history to emerge. It can be discovered through an "inquiry back" or "regressive thinking" through the later history to the primal instituting that makes the history possible. Husserl's concept of *Urstiftung* was developed by Maurice Merleau-Ponty to refer to social institutions, who also suggested that it could provide the basis for a theory of culture. Claude Lefort took the concept further to include the notion of "regime" in political philosophy.[4] Martin Heidegger's concept of "the Open," or an "opening," is similar to "institution" and may well have been influenced by Husserl. He describes it this way in the context of the work of art: "The establishing of truth in the work is the bringing forth of a being such as never was before and will never come to be again. The bringing forth places this being in the Open [*Offene*] in such a way that what is to be brought forth first clears the openness of the Open [*die Offenheit des Offenen*] into which it comes forth." Heidegger mentions the act that founds a political state, essential sacrifice, the thinker's questioning, and the work of art as instances of opening.[5] While Husserl's use of the term "institution" refers to the institution of a tradition of science or knowledge, in this case the Galilean mathematical science that became definitive for modernity, Merleau-Ponty, Lefort, and Heidegger expand the use of the term to cover social institutions, political regimes, works of art, works of thought, and historical disclosures of epochs of Being. In other words, it is no longer confined to primal formations of knowledge, but applies also to social institutions and epochs of ontology. I will use this expanded meaning of "institution" in which it refers to the opening of a space from which a new temporal order comes forth and applies both to a formation of knowledge and an epoch of Being.

According to Husserl, every primal establishing also institutes a final establishment which culminates and clarifies the historical process brought into play by the opening. "But to every primal establishment [*Urstiftung*] essentially belongs a final establishment [*Endstiftung*] assigned as a task to the historical process. This final establishment is accomplished when the task is brought to consummate clarity and thus to an apodictic method which, in every step of achievement, is a constant avenue to new steps having the character of absolute success, i.e., the character of apodictic steps."[6] It is the aim of this book to fulfil the teleology of the concept of institution and opening in phenomenological philosophy with a theory of socio-cultural praxis based upon the primal scenes of media of communication. At the current moment of social movements in consumer society, which are primarily phenomena of

communication, the final establishment of the instituting social role of media of communication becomes possible.

The shaping of a way of life in instituting praxis is, among other things, a process of self-convincing into a way of life, a rhetoric which establishes the identifications that constitute a social order. The term "rhetoric" is used in its theoretical sense here, and is to be distinguished from the popular usage in which "mere" rhetoric refers only to the outer presentation, or fashionable packaging, of an argument, rather than to its internal formulation—a formulation which also partakes in the inner-outer presupposition based on the philosophy of consciousness. Rhetoric originally referred to the persuasive component of any discourse, not in the common sense of mere decoration (though it can certainly degenerate into that), and as not necessarily opposed to "truth." Language in its rhetorical use is inherently connected to action because it deals, in Aristotle's words, "with such matters as we deliberate upon without arts or systems to guide us" and "to praise a man is in one respect akin to urging a course of action."[7] This classical formulation involves the notion that the speaker and hearer of a discourse are already formed as subjects prior to, or outside, the rhetorical discourse itself.[8] Once this presupposition of a subject already-there prior to rhetoric is abandoned, the constitutive function of rhetoric in forming subjects and interpellating them into the social formation can be recognized. In this way, the unfortunate Romantic associations of the term "expression" can be avoided.

Such a contemporary reformulation of the concept of rhetoric has been achieved through the concept of "identification" as developed by Kenneth Burke. Through the identificatory aspect of rhetoric, the "consubstantiality" of social actors is established; in short, they are formed into groups with common characteristics.[9] It is of the nature of humans that their social forms are not given directly by nature. Thus, the expressive formation of these social forms is an anthropological characteristic. As Hans Blumenberg has put it, rhetoric corresponds to the "immanent deficiency" of humans that they do not fit into pre-given structures of the world. Thus, "rhetoric means to be conscious both of being compelled to act and of the lack of norms in a finite situation."[10] The discursive turn in philosophy and the human sciences thus brings to the fore both the rhetorical effect of discourses themselves in the social formation as a whole and also the rhetorical formation of social actors. Anthropological incompleteness stirs rhetorical accomplishments.

The contemporary focus on language thus turns away from inner-outer, or consciousness-reality, dichotomies to the process "in-between"

where instituting praxis is understood as the expression of a way of life that forms itself. Its most basic theoretical shift is thus to drop the assumption that the medium of communication could be a neutral channel for the passage between inner and outer, or consciousness and reality. Language, and thus communication more generally, is seen as an active process of the formation of expression.[11] Representation itself becomes questionable when the assumption that a social fact can be represented without being thereby altered is dropped. Terms such as "articulation" or "expression" seem to capture this active process more completely. Indeed, what becomes interesting is precisely the plurality of forms which the active process of expression can take. Philosophy and the human sciences after the discursive turn center precisely on the forming influence of language, and media of communication generally, in giving shape to the form of life that may later be distinguished into the extremes of consciousness and reality (which are constituted by the specific form of modern life). They are concerned with expressive culture, or "language as practical consciousness," as Marx and Engels said in *The German Ideology,* continuing to explain that "consciousness is, therefore, from the beginning a social product." Nietzsche also made this point in *The Gay Science,* where it is argued that "consciousness has developed only under the pressure of the need for communication."[12] The origin of the contemporary discursive turn is thus in the nineteenth century break with the philosophy of consciousness that was achieved by Marx and Nietzsche and confused with the end of philosophy as such.

The discursive turn in philosophy and the human sciences is a turn towards meaning as the central problem that requires understanding, explication and, perhaps, explanation. There were earlier forms of meaning-oriented inquiry, however, notably phenomenology. The current focus adds the notion that the investigation of meaning is best pursued through a focus on language, since language can be taken as the model for meaningful activity in general. Language has become the central phenomenon in both analytic and continental philosophical schools in the twentieth century, but the turn toward language taken by itself often does not arrive at the key phenomenon that can be called "discourse." If language remains understood as primarily representational, as a more or less adequate description of an extra-linguistic activity, and if one still regards language in a common sense way as opposed to other forms of social praxis, then the turn toward discourse has not yet been made. The status of language in discourse requires that language is not understood merely in the sense of speaking activity but rather that such

speaking activity, insofar as it forms and conveys meaning, be taken as *exemplary* for all social action. Once language is regarded as exemplary, it achieves a status as the leading metaphor for all human action and thought. Other types of social action that don't obviously involve speaking, such as wearing clothing or jumping out of airplanes, can also be investigated as meaningful activities in which the characteristics of spoken language can be used to identify analogous characteristics. Moreover, this metaphorical extension of language to social action in general suggests that the primary function of language is not to describe social action scientifically but rather to constitute social action as meaningful. In other words, it should be understood as primarily constitutive rather than representational. If the understanding of language always includes these two co-present functions, then we may say that the *mode of expression* that animates a social action is modeled on discourse in its constitutive function. At this point, it is the constitutive character of expression that has become exemplary, or metaphorical, for philosophy and the human sciences and the main consequence is that the mode of expression, or medium of communication, can no longer be seen as a mere outer clothing of a pre-existing content. Rather, the medium of communication is understood to be a formation of meaning. Interest thus turns toward the particular characteristics of various formations of meaning, which can be called discursive formations. A discursive formation, which Foucault called a "regularity in dispersion,"[13] is concerned, not mainly with the characteristics of language in general, but rather with the constitutive character for social life of a specific form of expression. It consists of an indefinite plurality of related expressions, made from a number of subject-positions, that constitute an arrangement of social life and, thereby, an understanding of "what is," or reality in general.

Discourse as a metaphor for philosophy and the human sciences involves two main aspects. First, an expression is understood, not as a description of an extra-linguistic event, but as an action in its own right. Classic examples of language functioning in this way include, "I now call this meeting to order," and "I now pronounce you husband and wife." These language uses do not describe an event outside of language, but perform the event through an utterance, or expression. This active conception of language has been called text (Ricoeur), speech-act (Austin), and theme (Volosinov). While it may seem at first as if such speech acts refer only to a distinct class of utterances, further reflection suggests that performativity is rather a component of any discursive act.[14] The upshot of this shift has been described as a critique of "foun-

dationalism," which is a critical term referring to the pre-discursive assumption that language acquires its meaning by describing an extra-linguistic reality upon which its truth and significance would be founded.

The second main aspect of the concept of discourse is that every utterance occurs within an organized but not closed system of related terms from which it takes its meaning. This system has been called a structure (Leví-Strauss), a system of differences (Saussure), a language game (Wittgenstein), and so forth. In the present introductory context the specific formulations of this system of meaning are not important. The point is that meaning is not produced by a single term in isolation but by the placing of the utterance within the context of an (at least partially organized) system of meaningful components. The turn to discourse thus replaces the question of the relation between words and things, which has been the main philosophical formulation of the problem of language since Plato and is probably unanswerable as such, with the construction of meaning through given acts within a system of difference-relationships. This shift has been described as a critique of "essentialism." Essentialism is a critical term referring to the pre-discursive notion that an expression has an internal meaning that could be determined without reference to the actual discursive formation in which it occurs. Human "subjects" are thus re-defined as subject-*positions*, as places within the field from which characteristic utterances originate. The field defines possible speakers through these subject-positions, as well as expressions, and the current critique of the "essentialist subject" is a rejection of the notion that the subject exists prior to expression and "enters into" language as a formed unity. Rather, it is suggested, the discursive formation itself encompasses expressions, speakers, and a field of discourse. Clearly, the determination of the limits and, therefore, definition of a given discursive formation is a key question for a specific discourse analysis. Based on these two aspects, discourse may be preliminarily defined as an act within a field of discriminations. Its primary model is an expression in language, but this is generalized into a whole approach to philosophy and the human sciences.

Several consequences of the discursive turn become immediately apparent. First, since discourse is seen as itself constituting the objects to which it refers, it implies abandoning a correspondence between expressions and reality as the criterion of truth, or correctness, of propositions. Second, the constitution of social action through discourse surpasses the fact-value distinction. Performances of social actions involve both fac-

tual and evaluative components, such that one can "derive" an obliga-
tion to perform certain acts in the future from promising to do so in the
present, for example.[15] I propose to call this phenomenon the question
of an "institutional ethic," in the sense that social institutions are con-
stituted by speech acts which require further actions whose performance
is neither a matter of individual proclivity nor universal human ethics
but institutional obligation. If I am a teacher, for example, meeting my
classes and discussing with my students is something required by my
activity within the institution. It is not a matter of my individual char-
acteristics nor of an obligation to which all humans would be subject.
To the contrary, my individual integrity, for example, is given meaning
and measured by my institutional position. Even further, evaluating my
students' work on the basis of their intelligence and ability to express
themselves, based on the evidence of essays or exams, is not a personal
choice but an obligation. If other matters enter into the evaluation
process—such as the race, gender, sexual orientation, disposition, etc. of
the student—this is wrong not only because racism, sexism, etc. are
wrong in general, but because these characteristics are irrelevant to the
discursive formation of education. They are external considerations in
the sense that they are based on extra-educational factors. An institu-
tional ethic is immanent in the discursive practices of an institution.
(This does not imply, however, that institutional ethics are a suffecent
basis for the ethical component of social philosophy.) Third, the turn
toward discourse implies that a social form is constituted by a plurality
of discourses. If there were only one discourse, it would not be visible as
a discourse but would seem to be the one and only reality. Any given dis-
course occurs within a field of discourses. While defining the boundaries
of a given discourse is often quite difficult, and is normally pragmati-
cally constituted by the aim of an inquiry, it is nonetheless clear that a
discursive formation cannot extend to the entirety of a society. Whereas
previous social forms could reconcile the plurality of discourses by
establishing, or assuming, a super-discourse (meta-narrative) that could
reconcile all the others into a hierarchical unity (thus making it appear
as a non-discursive reality), for a discursive conception of society it is the
interaction of discourses that constitutes the social totality. To this
extent, a discursive turn in the human sciences and philosophy presup-
poses a loosening of the "discourse of the whole" that constitutes many
societies and which is the basis for the sociological concept of "tradi-
tion." The fourth consequence of the discursive turn is that the plurality
of discursive forms constitutes a world, or a culture, that is disclosed in
historical epochs. Each epoch is an instituting of a certain relation

between discursive forms. This has been described as a "form of life" (Wittgenstein) "in its characteristic style" (Husserl) such that "as individuals express their life, so they are" (Marx).

These consequences of the discursive turn are addressed in the various chapters of this book. At this point I want to mention certain critiques of the discursive turn in order to prepare the way for a conception of discourse that can avoid certain perceived problems. The critiques all center on the relation of discourse to the materiality of social life, and I address them not by abandoning discourse and retreating behind it to a presupposed and uncritical conception of reality, but by centering analysis on the materiality of discursive forms themselves: on what I call the primal scenes instituted by media of communication.

Criticisms of the discursive turn in philosophy and the human sciences are usually based on two distinct, although often related, concerns. One pertains to the epistemological issue of the relationship between discourse and the extra-discursive or, to put it as a question: Is social action reduced to language? Criticisms of this sort operate with a distinction between discursive and extra- or non-discursive in order to articulate their criticism. But that distinction is precisely what is rejected when language in use is taken as metaphorical. Thus, debates between these critics and their interlocutors give the reader a distinct sense that they are talking completely past each other, and that the real issue of the debate is simply assumed by both sides in a manner that precludes any real confrontation of ideas.

This sense also pervades the second criticism which concerns the political issue of the relations between deconstructive and reconstructive linguistic strategies in new social movements and the re-allocations of power, resources, and social organization which they propose. Again, the presupposition is generally that such resources are conceptually distinct from language, which implies that language is taken in the straightforward sense of spoken (or written) words as opposed to non-linguistic things like punches in the face or social labor. A further issue raised by Marxist critics is whether the plurality of the new social movements is an expression of the more deep-seated social conflict based in social class. Certainly, a discursive approach, insofar as it takes the specific object of a given discursive formation as itself constitutive, tends to set aside such criticisms as "foundationalist," as presupposing a "reality" behind its discursive manifestations.

The interesting thing about these criticisms and the subsequent debates is the extent to which they always seem to be about exactly the same issue—the discursive/extra-discursive problem—and the extent to

which there is really no encounter between the two positions because the basic epistemological and theoretical divide is such as to preclude significant encounter. That the criticisms are theoretically naive from the viewpoint of discourse theory, I take as virtually self-evident. I do not propose to rehearse or enter these debates here, or to defend discourse theory from its critics. My present concern is quite different. Let me just state that the thrust of the criticisms points to a crucial issue, even though it is articulated in a language that does not appreciate what· is has been accomplished by the discursive turn. When language is taken as metaphorical for philosophy and the human sciences outright, it must certainly be legitimate at some point to ask whether there is not something left out in this move. To ask that the something that is left out be formulated in terms accepted within discourse analysis is too much, especially in public debates with those who have not accepted discourse analysis as adequate to the whole of philosophy and the human sciences.

Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe respond to Norman Geras's criticisms of their discourse theory, for example, by restating their use of Wittgenstein's conception of a language game.[16] Wittgenstein considers the case of a builder's assistant who, when asked to, brings materials, brings things called blocks, pillars, slabs, and beams. He comments that the words one uses to provoke these actions can be called "a complete primitive language," thus suggesting that the blocks themselves, however, are not a part of the language even though any actual building will involve language.[17] Laclau and Mouffe suggest, following this line of thought, that putting bricks on the wall is extra-linguistic and bringing bricks at the command of another is linguistic. The totality of both acts, both of which are clearly necessary for the wall to be built, they call "discourse," which they understand to be prior to the linguistic/extra-linguistic distinction.[18] This distinction, then, refers to language in the ordinary sense in which language can be opposed to something other than speech, whereas discourse refers to meaningful activity (based on the metaphor of meaning drawn from language) that is prior to the issue of whether speaking occurs or not. In other words, building the wall, even if new blocks are not brought by an assistant who is commanded by words (but rather performed in silence by a single worker), is still a discursive action. This response clearly deals with the criticism made by Geras through outlining a conception of language as constitutive of social action rather than merely a representation of it. What it does not do, however, is allow a place for questioning the limits of the metaphor of discourse, i.e., the question whether something is lost in characterizing the activity of building a wall as discourse. Is the heaviness of the

blocks, for example, adequately captured by the term discourse, or even the word "heavy"? Should it be? In the formulation of the discursive conception of meaningful activity, the question of whether a reduction of social life is so implied is often occluded. But this is a genuine issue, one which can only be held up to investigation if the metaphorical aspect of the discursive turn is emphasized. This metaphorical dimension occurs in any social theory and pertains to its capacity for universalization. It cannot be avoided (whatever one's model of theory) by a direct appeal to "reality."

These two major sources of criticism of the discursive turn—epistemological and political—can be addressed from within the discursive turn in philosophy and the human sciences if one develops the concept of language further in a direction that centers on the materiality of expressive forms themselves. The standpoint adopted in this book is to accept the discursive turn, at least in its general outline, as a productive root-metaphor for a contemporary philosophy of the human sciences but to look for an expression of the limits of the metaphor from within the formulations available after the discursive turn. I argue that a theory of the materiality of expressive forms can press the discursive turn toward a new philosophy of the human sciences. Its starting point is the primal institution [*Urstiftung*] of social reality and action by media of communication.

In order to emphasize the specificity of this approach through communication media, let me begin by sketching the alternative, and more widespread, content-oriented approach of "discourse theory" and indicating some of its limitations. From this perspective, to investigate a discourse is to focus on the interaction between arguments, the subject-positions from which these arguments can be produced, and the (dis)enablements of the linguistic resources of the discourse, in order to pin down the effects and silences produced by the discourse as a whole. The boundary of a discursive formation can be determined through the *meaning* which the discourse constitutes and the field of objects that it describes. For example, the current discourse of the "free market" consists of arguments pro and con an unregulated market society. From the "free market" position, the con arguments are labeled a priori as in league with some authoritarian (because "unfree") source, the activities of unrestricted buying and selling become emblematic for social practices as a whole, and the meaning of terms like "freedom," "regulation," "government intervention," and so forth, are key in constructing the limits of possible arguments concerning economic relations and social organization. The problem is not that one is automatically constrained

to be in favor of free trade. The problem is, rather, that if one wishes to argue against it the terms in which one must do so are formed by the dominant terms, such as the "freeness" of "free trade." The discourse is such that alternative terms are inflected negatively, and thus have an automatic deficit to overcome. In other words, the *discourse* of free trade is such as to prefer the argumentative *position* in favor of free trade. One can argue in favor of a "certain amount" of government regulation of free trade, but a certain reluctance, a suggestion that this should not go "too far," necessarily accompanies the argument. Moreover, there is a deeper implication in that all other possible forms of economic and social organization are silently subsumed under the notion of "government regulation," resulting in a crippling of the public discourse concerning alternative forms of social organization. Opponents of free trade would thus be advised to shift the *discourse* itself and not remain within the discourse of free trade in arguing for the non–free trade position. If the discourse shifts to one of "responsibility" or "social justice" the non–free trade *position* is re-articulated as a pro-social justice *position* which has a much more positive relation to the *discourse* of social justice.

Such discursive formations are historical, thoroughly grounded in competing interests, and capable of important shifts in relation to strategic interventions. Nevertheless, they have sufficient stability to be studied as an articulation of the prevailing form of social relations. The relevant discourse can be circumscribed in relation to the question posed by the investigator and may be either very widely or quite narrowly conceived. For example, one might study the discourse concerning childcare in a local setting, the discourse concerning drugs in an urban or international setting, or the discourse concerning free market capitalism in either a contemporary setting or across three centuries and the entire globe. I mean to imply by the examples that I have chosen that such studies of discursive formations, whatever their relevant extent, can play an important role in political life, especially insofar as they are oriented toward the expansion of the horizon of political alternatives through the critique of the assumptions of dominant terms and the systemic silences within discourses. Uncovering the enabling possibilities of the discourses of alternative social movements is also a key aspect of this task. Thus, it is certainly not my intention to suggest that such discourse studies are irrelevant to the theoretical and political tasks of critical theory. When it comes to medium-range politics, they are often an important contribution to the widening of political vision. I do, however, want to suggest that such an approach has limitations when it comes to theorizing the

field of discourse itself. While the content-oriented discursive approach is focused on intervention within prevailing common sense assumptions and thus orients itself to meaning, another approach is necessary to orient thought and action toward the horizons of those assumptions, toward the circumscription of the form of life as a whole.

Let me illustrate by returning to the example of the discourse concerning free trade. In studying this discourse, it would be necessary to collect relevant arguments, especially groundbreaking indexical interventions, from whatever domain in which they are articulated and circulated. It would not be particularly relevant for example, whether a key speech by a U. S. president was made on television or in a written document. Such differences would be considered as, at most, secondary variables dependent on the force and effects of the intervention in the discourse as a whole. To formulate the point more generally, the "materiality" of the medium of communication is, from the viewpoint of discourse studies in this sense, secondary to the content, or meaning, constructed in the discourse. The centrality of sense, or meaning-content, is the basis for the choice of object of study by the investigator, the circumscription of the relevant discourse, and the determination of its effects. This focus on meaning-content is precisely what confers the relevance of such studies to immediate or medium-range politics. However, two consequences follow from this focus which indicate the limitations of discourse analysis understood in this way. First, the materiality of the medium of communication is not regarded as important and gives rise to the poorly formulated but relevant issue of the relation of discourse to materiality. Second, there arises an intractable problem of the relation of the discourse to the totality of the social formation in which it occurs. What is the relation between the discourse of free trade and the economic practices of capitalist society, for example? It can hardly be denied that there is such a relation, and that it is an important one, but that relation cannot be formulated within the focus on meaning-content characteristic of discourse theory.

In more general terms we may say that rhetorical criticism comes upon its inherent limitation in its inability to determine the relation of rhetorical interventions either to "material reality" or to the social formation as a whole. I will argue throughout this book that a focus on the "materiality" of media of communication can address these issues without abandoning the advances made by the discursive turn in philosophy and the human sciences. This introduction has been concerned with establishing the linkage between the discursive turn and the concept of a medium of communication as a primal scene that institutes a world.

The basic philosophical formulation is of the role of the body as the root-phenomenon of expressive forms, a particular complex of expressive forms as the construction of a world, and the historical succession of such worlds as manifestations of Being.

A theory of communication must obviously provide analyses of communication processes in various settings, but it also needs to account for the conditions of its own enunciation. Since it is both a theory of enunciation and an enunciation, this self-referential constitution is unavoidable. Such a necessary reflexive self-reference renders a comprehensive theory of communication constitutively paradoxical. The three parts of this book attempt to fulfil this requirement. The first part outlines an approach to communication that I call comparative media theory. The second part establishes the point of origin of this theory in contemporary consumer society and outlines a communication theory of consumer society. The third part examines the social movements that destabilize the attempt at a closed circuit of communication in consumerism and thus outlines the point of emergence of reflexivity. This reflexivity is the condition for the emergence of a contemporary theory of communication and establishes the solidarity of a theory of communication with social criticism.