

CHAPTER ONE

Dialogue in Public Space

Dialogic thought in this century is an amorphous phenomenon rather than a shared concern. By and large, the prominent dialogic thinkers did not hold dialogues with each other. . . . You might say that each of them was following his own distinctive line, with his own authorities and his own disciples.

—Robert Grudin, *On Dialogue*

Imagine yourself, for a moment, as a time traveler. It's 1957, and you sit eagerly in a plush auditorium at the University of Michigan, anticipating an unusual event. You've driven to Ann Arbor through difficult weather to attend the spotlight evening program of a conference devoted to the thought of one of the world's most prominent intellectual and cultural figures, Martin Buber of Jerusalem—philosopher, theologian, critic, playwright, educator, advocate for cooperation between Jews and Arabs in Palestine. Buber will be on stage soon, but surprisingly he is not going to lecture this evening.

Buber, on his second lecture tour of the United States, has spoken elsewhere recently on such topics as "Elements of the Interhuman," "Guilt and Guilt Feelings," and "What is Common to All." Instead of a lecture, and consistent with his well known appreciation for dialogue, conference organizers have arranged for the seventy-nine-year-old philosopher to spend an hour or so responding to questions from a noted psychologist about "The Nature of Man as Revealed in Interpersonal Relationship."

You've also heard of Buber's conversation partner, Carl Rogers, although he is not as famous as Buber in the international community of scholars. A University of Chicago psychotherapist, Rogers is one of

those rare college professors who imprint popular culture with a striking and fresh point of view. He has been mentioned recently on national radio and television and was profiled in *Time* magazine for his controversial claim that everyday people possess significant psychological resources they can use to help themselves, rather than having to rely on the answers and techniques of professional psychologists and psychiatrists. Professionals need to listen more and diagnose less, he thought. In his vocabulary, therapy ought to be “client-centered” rather than treatment-centered or therapist-centered, and should help clients discover their own answers. Successful therapy, for Rogers, involves dialogue between person and person. Successful therapy, in fact, is based on dynamics not very different from those of any successful relationship.

A dialogue on dialogue, between prominent dialogic thinkers: a rare and intriguing event. Most people in the audience are unaware that it almost didn’t happen.

Just a month before the conference, Buber, lecturing at the Washington School of Psychiatry (he gave the same lecture at this conference, too), essentially dismissed public dialogue as impossible, arguing that attempts at dialogue before an audience were “separated by a chasm from genuine dialogue” (Buber, 1957b, p. 113). When people are tempted to perform for audiences in addition to speaking with each other, he said, a vital element of dialogue—spontaneity—is sacrificed. An interhuman relation, according to Buber’s thinking at that time, could not rely on performance, and audiences necessitate performances. The spontaneous directness and honesty of dialogic communication is presumably a nonpublic if not private interchange. Buber, however, expressed no reservation about talking with Rogers on stage. Why? According to his friend and translator Maurice Friedman (personal communication, 22 October 1991)—who also moderated the event—he simply didn’t expect anything truly significant to occur, much less a dialogue that scholars in the human sciences would remember and consult for decades.

Earlier, behind the scenes, the man responsible for organizing Buber’s U.S. tour tried to get the conversation with Rogers cancelled. Leslie Farber, chair at the Washington School of Psychiatry, had invited Buber to the United States and arranged for the bulk of the funding. Although he did not object to Buber speaking at various universities, Jewish centers, and other venues across the country, he did object to this one event at the Michigan conference, and asked the conference organizer to drop the dialogue from the program. Farber evidently thought that the Buber–Rogers conversation might concern psychiatry, a sub-

ject he wanted discussed exclusively at Buber's seminars in Washington, D.C. (Baldwin, 1957b). As a result, the event disappeared briefly from the draft program developed for Michigan's conference. Apparently, however, Buber disagreed, and it was reinstated. One important detail, however, remained unresolved, even as people were on their way to Rackham Auditorium for the Buber–Rogers dialogue.

Sitting in the audience, you notice that audiotape equipment has been set up to record the event. The taping almost doesn't happen either.

Buber, you see, didn't want to be recorded. He'd refused to be filmed or even audiotaped at the Washington lectures, even though Farber had arranged for a special grant to support the filming. Buber also believed that technological "contrivances" interfered with dialogue. He explained his refusal to Farber: "My experience is . . . that being filmed slackens the spontaneity of the dialogue, and this is what I need most: full spontaneity. This was my motive when some days ago I refused Dean Pike to have a dialogue with him televised. I am sure you understand that here the negation of certain modern technical means *in this connection* comes from a vital source" (Buber, 1991a, pp. 605–606).

So Buber had personal and conceptual objections not only to attempting dialogue before an audience but also to being taped. Why had he agreed to be taped this evening? Evidently in the hour before the dialogue, during their first introductions to each other, Rogers reassured Buber that he had taped many therapy sessions successfully without the machines or microphones becoming intrusive. Perhaps, too, Buber's low expectations for the interchange with Rogers led him to conclude that the decision to tape wouldn't matter much anyway.

It did matter—very much. Because of the tape, generations of scholars would have a record of an important and revealing event in the history of the human sciences. What Buber and Rogers said that evening would reverberate through the tangle of subsequent decades, addressing concerns and crises that confront world cultures still, as we begin a new millennium. As never before, the challenges of a public sphere are the challenges of integrating or amplifying unfamiliar voices so that they may not only hear and respond to each other across moral and cultural differences, but that these voices may also be heard by relevant new audiences. Democratic dialogue and deliberation depend on a nonacquiescent and informed public forum. That forum is increasingly mediated in ways that would have worried Buber, yet at the gate to the twenty-first century, computerized online culture, to cite only one example, is not only increasingly mediated and technically intricate but more interactive than mediated communication has ever been. But was Buber somehow right? Or is genuine dialogue, after all,

possible in a public setting? What might be its contours? Its effectual space? Its limits? Its invitation for change?

Today, looking back from the experience of contemporary challenges to the public sphere, we realize why the 1957 Buber–Rogers conversation is so intellectually rich and suggestive. Because of it, Buber himself changed his mind about the potential for public dialogue. Because of the success of the dialogue, and despite the large audience and tape equipment, Buber realized that public contexts don't necessarily preclude genuine dialogue. When a 1957 Buber lecture/essay was to be reprinted in his 1965 collection, *The Knowledge of Man*, Buber asked Friedman, his editor and translator, to delete a key passage about how publicity taints dialogue; this request was primarily motivated by the quality of his exchange with Rogers (Buber, 1965b, p. 184). Buber, who could be crusty and blunt, told Friedman afterwards that although he treated Rogers gently ("I was very kind to him. I could have been much sharper" [Friedman, 1983c, p. 227]), he appreciated how the psychologist had truly brought himself to the stage as a person, and he thought that real dialogue had occurred. An example of the personal level Rogers sought for the dialogue can be seen in how he didn't back down about their supposed focus. Not only was their dialogue almost cancelled at Farber's request, but Farber had even asked Buber not to speak with Rogers—the psychotherapist—about psychotherapy. Buber mentioned this when the two first met an hour or so prior to the dialogue. Rogers considered it but concluded that there was no better topic they could explore in front of this audience. A colleague later recounted Rogers's sly decision that although "Buber might not be able to speak to him about psychotherapy, there was nothing to stop him from speaking about psychotherapy to Buber" (Pentony, 1987, p. 420). Conversation, the improvised verbal dance of communication partners, can never be controlled from only one side. Rogers knew that, and Buber did too.

So what Buber once thought couldn't happen—a genuine sense of dialogue in a public setting—turned out to be possible after all; he and Rogers created a conversation that rewards our close attention to its content and process. It provides important clues for how to enable dialogue more readily and with greater impact in contemporary public political and cultural arenas.

We are placing the Buber–Rogers dialogue at the symbolic center of an extended study of the implications of dialogue, a study in which personal and interpersonal decisions must be seen in the context of media decisions. Some things these two men did that evening (their process) and some things they talked about (their content) capsule important insights for sustaining a public democracy in which citizens can speak

with voices that are heard and responded to. This has personal implications for identity and relational satisfaction. It has equally crucial public implications for community development and governmental decision making. The personal inevitably blends with the political where dialogue emerges.

PUBLIC DIALOGUE: ASPIRATION AND SUSPICION

Contemporary public life is characterized by vigorous attempts to elevate dialogue as a goal and equally prominent attempts to denigrate it as an unrealistic ideal. Politicians and other citizens have taken to applying the term "dialogue" whenever they want what they say to have a special sheen. "Talk" isn't good enough, "conversation" sounds pretty folksy, and "communication" is too neutral or stilted for their taste. Calling for "dialogue" makes any venture seem solemn, elevated, even noble. Often, however, use of the term apparently means merely that some group wants more air time for a point of view that it's convinced will defeat competitors if heard by enough listeners. Trading opinions does not show that dialogue is happening any more than extensive class discussion necessarily shows that students are learning something.

This superficial linguistic tactic impoverishes what Buber and others wanted to understand as genuine dialogue, transforming it into a freewheeling form of interpersonal advertising. Nothing could be farther from Buber's vision. As he said in one of the Washington lectures presented just prior to the dialogue with Rogers:

The chief presupposition for the rise of genuine dialogue is that each should regard his partner as the very one he is. I become aware of him, aware that he is different, essentially different from myself, in the definite, unique way which is peculiar to him, and I accept whom I thus see, so that in full earnestness I can direct what I say to him as the person he is. Perhaps from time to time I must offer strict opposition to his view about the subject of our conversation. But I accept this person, the personal bearer of a conviction, in his definite being out of which his conviction has grown—even though I must try to show, bit by bit, the wrongness of this very conviction. I affirm the person I struggle with: I struggle with him as his partner, I confirm him as creature and as creation, I confirm him who is opposed to me as him who is over against me.

It is true that it now depends on the other whether genuine dialogue, mutuality in speech arises between us. But if I thus give to the other who confronts me his legitimate standing as a man with whom I am ready to enter into dialogue, then I may trust him and suppose him to be also ready to deal with me as his partner. (Buber, 1965b, pp. 79–80)

In this brief passage, Buber both defines the central concept of this book and grounds dialogue as radical availability to otherness, an otherness of cultural differences, interpersonal styles, new ideas, and unanticipated horizons. Some readers who have not studied Buber may only recall that his name has been associated with a weak or soft expressivism, a “have a nice day” or a “wouldn’t the world be a better place if we were nicer to each other?” brand of philosophical platitude. Buber was tougher than that; such a curious misreading is undercut by a simple comparison to his published work, and the most cursory survey of his life. We can create dialogue if we are capable of being surprised by what is not-us, and we can recreate it even as we oppose that otherness. In an earlier essay also delivered as a Washington School of Psychiatry lecture, Buber described genuine conversation as involving “acceptance of otherness” (1965b, p. 69) and stipulated an ethic of persuasion that could guide any citizen in the public sphere:

The desire to influence the other then does not mean the effort to change the other, to inject one’s own “rightness” into him; but it means the effort to let that which is recognized as right, as just, as true (and for that very reason must also be established there, in the substance of the other) through one’s influence take seed and grow in the form suited to individuation. Opposed to this effort is the lust to make use of men by which the manipulator of “propaganda” and “suggestion” is possessed, in his relation to men remaining as in a relation to things, to things, moreover, with which he will never enter into relation, which he is indeed eager to rob of their distance and independence. (p. 69)

Dialogue in Buber’s sense, therefore, involves an exceptional openness to otherness, but it is not an unreflective or gullible acceptance or tolerance. Partners in genuine dialogue also say no: they oppose, explore, argue, and willingly influence others. But all this occurs under the responsible condition of remaining open to influence. When he described his own intellectual development to Rogers in Ann Arbor, Buber re-

ported that even as a young man, "I felt I have not the right to want to change another if I am not open to be changed by him as far as it is legitimate" (turn #4).¹ Can there be a task in contemporary culture that is as important, or as risky, as encouraging such engagement in dialogue?

Perhaps it is the risks of such a dialogue that lead some critics to dismiss it, or to diminish its practicality in an age of mass media that is said to atomize listeners, rob them of their vitality, and make their personal access to each other more and more difficult. Buber himself, remember, worried about this. Others have become convinced that the very project of dialogue is doomed. According to sociologist and social critic Jacques Ellul (1985), when language "uses a loudspeaker and crushes others with its powerful equipment, when the television set speaks, the word is no longer involved, since no dialogue is possible" (p. 23). The increasing dominance of media technology in contemporary life led another prominent sociologist, Franco Ferrarotti (1988), to bemoan "the end of conversation," in part because media merely provide a "vocation for narcissism" (p. 13). The fear that genuine dialogue is diminished or eliminated because people have become too individualized, too selfish, and too used to being passive message consumers is also developed in the highly influential work of Bellah and his colleagues (1985), in Postman's (1985) critique of television, and in Berger, Berger, and Kellner's (1974) attribution of much of the same problem to an increasingly technologized, mass-mediated world that has made humans "anonymous" and experientially "homeless."

Our analysis also enters a somewhat different contemporary cultural conversation (in some ways a debate) concerning how much the public sphere should rely on citizen dialogue. It has a long history but at best an uncertain or amorphous resolution. In the early years of the twentieth century, two other famous intellectuals disagreed about the potential, and in some ways the shape, of open communication in the polity. Their interchange sets the table, so to speak, for our book.

Walter Lippmann, author of *Public Opinion* (1922) and other influential works, profoundly mistrusted the ability of common citizens to cope with the ever more complex choices necessary to engage the modern technologized world. He was especially concerned about how the media system complicated the choices of the worldwide audience for news. Effective newspapers should relay correct versions of events to common people; public opinion was the state of readers' and listeners' ability to apprehend events with minimal distortions such as the "stereotypes" he wrote about so persuasively. Lippmann believed that only a select group of technical or political experts—a scientific intelligentsia working largely behind the scenes—would be qualified enough,

or well enough versed in assessing or measuring the truth, to negotiate the maze of new and daunting options. Only experts could be trusted to make the informed choices that could benefit the social order.

In *The Public and Its Problems* John Dewey (1927) argued, to the contrary, that common people can become powerful democratic decision makers to the extent that they have access not just to technical or arcane information, but to *each other*. For Lippmann, the role of the citizen was to be well informed about the experts' opinions and to see things accurately. Dewey thought the citizen's prime role was communication, and he trusted how everyday people understand the importance of mutual participation for shaping democracy. The conclusion of *The Public and Its Problems* makes it clear that interpersonal learning is the essence of public life. "Systematic and continuous inquiry into all the conditions which affect association and their dissemination in print is a precondition of the creation of a true public," Dewey wrote (p. 218). But these means of inquiry are mere tools. "Their final actuality is accomplished in face-to-face relationships by means of direct give and take. Logic in its fulfillment recurs to the primitive sense of the word: dialogue" (p. 218).

In this way, Dewey framed his reply to Lippmann with an impassioned plea for a conversational public life that engages decision makers representing all stations of class, power, citizenship, or cultural identity. James Carey (1989) has characterized the Dewey position particularly well:

Dewey's response takes a number of turns. Public opinion is not formed when individuals possess correct representations of the environment, even if correct representations were possible. It is formed only in discussion, when it is made active in community life. Although news suffers from many of the deficiencies Lippmann cites, its major deficiency is not its failure to represent. The line between an adequate image and a stereotype is impossible to draw anyway. The purpose of news is not to represent and inform but to signal, tell a story, and activate inquiry. Inquiry, in turn, is not something other than conversation and discussion but a more systematic version of it. What we lack is the vital means through which this conversation can be carried on: institutions of public life through which a public can be formed and can form an opinion. The press, by seeing its role as that of informing the public, abandons its role as an agency for carrying on the conversation of our culture. We lack not only an effective press but certain vital habits: the ability

to follow an argument, grasp the point of view of another, expand the boundaries of understanding, debate the alternative purposes that might be pursued. (pp. 81–82)

In other words, the problem of a democracy *is* a problem of public opinion, but not in the sense that Lippmann meant by the term, where public opinion is shaped by effective information flow. Dewey, like Buber, recognized the primacy of human speech. He conceived democracy as the political process by which dialogue can create a public in the first place, and the “habits” of which Dewey and Carey speak are largely the habits of Buber’s dialogue. There is no public until it forms itself, shapes itself, in fact *hears* itself through its own talk. Any politician who proclaims a faith in “the people” is implicitly saying there should be faith in how the people talk with each other about issues of common—that is, community—concern.

CHARACTERISTICS OF DIALOGUE

In a previous analysis (Cissna & Anderson, 1994a), we synthesized eight characteristics of dialogic communication from the literatures of practitioners and philosophers. How do people speak, listen, and respond when their common concerns, and the quality of their relationships, govern communication quality? As we unfold it in this work, the literature is surprisingly extensive and insightful. Dialogue tends to develop in relationships, groups, and communities characterized by:

- *Immediacy of presence.* Presence implies that dialogue partners speak and listen from a common place or space from which they experience access to each other. Communicators sense that, for each other, they are relating *here* (a shared space) and *now* (an immediate moment in time). In many situations, the first task of communicators or planners is to clear such a space, but the clearing doesn’t guarantee dialogue so much as it enables it.
- *Emergent unanticipated consequences.* Dialogue presumes a certain spontaneity and improvisation linking communicators. The reason dialogue often seems to repair manipulation is that, in it, all parties enter without full knowledge of the directions that may be taken within the conversation. They are willing to invite surprise, even at the expense of sacrificing strategy at times.

- *Recognition of strange otherness.* By strange otherness we mean that a dialogue partner assumes not only that the other person is different (that is often obvious, of course), but is different in strange—that is, in essentially and inevitably unfamiliar or unpredicted—ways. Strangeness means the other cannot be reduced to an adjusted version of a “me”; there is always more, and confronting the strange implies imagining an alternate perspective. Such strangeness is not necessarily a threat, but is as often an invitation for learning.
- *Collaborative orientation.* By collaboration, we suggest that dialogue partners stand their own ground while they remain concerned about the current and future ground of others. Dialogic collaboration, however, does not suggest happy two-way backscratching. Indeed, collaboration embraces conflict, because by recognizing accurately the other’s perhaps antithetical position in relation to one’s own, we *confirm* each other.
- *Vulnerability.* Dialogue finds participants open to being changed. We speak from a ground that is important to us, but we do not defend that ground at all costs. Dialogue makes participants willing to be persuaded; dialogue makes us protean creatures. Personalities, understood from a dialogic perspective, are less things that we “have” than they are patterns of changingness.
- *Mutual implication.* A process of dialogue means that speakers anticipate listeners or respondents and incorporate them into messages. In a dialogic process, speaker and listener interdepend, each constructing self, other, and their talk simultaneously. Dewey and Bentley (1949) similarly used the word *trans-action* to suggest a new sense of human causality. Humans aren’t changed by actions traded back and forth from one individual to another, but by the very existence of relationship itself. Communication isn’t primarily “caused” by either party, but develops through the relation of both, in concert. Even when one person might seem to be the sole speaker, the voices of listeners are already present, said Russian language theorist Mikhail Bakhtin (1981, 1984, 1986). For the same reason, Buber referred to the term *I-Thou* as a “primary word” (not words, plural); what he called “the between,” the relation, was a unified phenomenon.

- *Temporal flow.* Understanding dialogue always involves understanding the past out of which it flows and the future that it unfolds so persistently. As we have written elsewhere, it “emerges from a past, fills the immediate present (and thus is experienced as ‘wide,’ ‘deep,’ ‘immersing,’ or ‘enveloping’ by participants), and prefigures an open future” (Cissna & Anderson, 1994a, p. 15).
- *Genuineness and authenticity.* Dialogue partners base their relationship on the presumption of authentic or genuine experience. This means not that people always tell the truth, but that no sense of genuine dialogue can be based on a participant’s self-consciously untruthful, hidden, deceptive, or blatantly strategic set of interpersonal calculations. Rather, in dialogue, communicators are assumed to speak and act in ways that match their worlds of experience. Where such trust breaks down, dialogic potential dissolves.

We suggest in this book that public dialogue exhibiting such characteristics is not only possible but imperative, even considering the extent of contemporary cynicism about the effects of electronic and online media on the quality of personal relations and public discourse. Our position rejects Buber’s early belief that media and publicity intimidate dialogue, but affirms the position he took later, after his illuminating public dialogue with Rogers. Our position rejects the one sketched by Lippmann’s efficient bureaucracy of planners in favor of the messier process by which Dewey trusted communities to talk a future into existence by fits and starts. When a space somehow is cleared for dialogue and when sincere communicators expect and invite it, we glimpse futures that could not have been available or even imagined beforehand. Sometimes that space will be relatively private and interpersonal, such as a family dispute or a therapeutic relationship, sometimes quasi-public, such as classroom interaction, a church committee, or a corporate training session, and sometimes as fully publicized as a school board meeting or a legislative hearing covered by local or national journalists. Using the Buber–Rogers relationship as a springboard, we will consider a variety of such forums.

Our research complements a chorus of voices now invigorating the concept of dialogue.² Most of them do not connect philosophical and pragmatic ideas to touchstone events in intellectual history in quite the way we are attempting, but they make clear and powerful contributions to contemporary life. We will discuss such voices in more

detail later in the book. For now, though, consider a representative spectrum of contemporary activities (of course, these are not mutually exclusive categories):

- *Projects to build nontraditional senses of community.* The so-called new electronic media provide new opportunities for dialogue to flourish, as well as new dangers and challenges. Some have noted how online communities can be formed and sustained in nontraditional “spaces” such as chat rooms (Rheingold, 1993) and listservs (Bird, 1999), giving some participants an experience of dialogue they never would have sought out in face-to-face interaction. Magazines such as the *Utne Reader* and television programs such as “Oprah Winfrey” have tried to establish community salons for conversations probing personal and social concerns, creating opportunities to meld participants within coherent, dialogue-focused small groups.
- *Projects to glimpse new potential for personal and interpersonal growth.* The David Bohm Dialogues group (Bohm, 1996) has sponsored many seminars worldwide on personal creativity based on the work of Bohm, a theoretical physicist who believed that dialogue is an essential and creative process underlying all of nature. One of the pivotal points stressed in the Bohm groups is that people must confront the “blocks” that remove them from dialogue, such as role hierarchy, credit/blame, and partial listening. Another program oriented toward improving interpersonal skills, Shem and Surrey’s (1998) gender dialogue workshops have involved over 20,000 participants since 1986; their “connection model” stresses the tangible effects of a relational “we,” mirroring Buber’s concept of “the between.”
- *Projects to bring disparate groups and cultures together.* The contemporary recognition of the values of cultural pluralism has increased efforts to bring together people who, in earlier times, would have been pleased to avoid each other except in the political arenas of power. A number of sponsoring groups (National Endowment for the Humanities’ National Conversation, National Issues Forums, Public Conversations Project, Public Dialogue Consortium, and others) have developed innovative structures of dialogue that help deeply committed and even ideological

citizens listen beyond their previously developed assumptions to include others with contradictory beliefs.

- *Projects to invigorate complex organizations and corporate life.* A powerful trend in recent organizational theory has been the concept of “the learning organization.” This vigorous approach, based on the work of MIT professors in that university’s Dialogue Project (see Isaacs, 1999; Senge, 1990), stresses systems thinking, cooperative decision making, synergistic knowing, and interpersonal skills.
- *Projects to expand the processes of political participation and choice making.* In one example, James Fishkin (1991) and his colleagues have designed national and international programs involving dialogic “issues forums.” These “deliberative opinion polls,” quite different from traditional public opinion polling, do not simply tap into what people think about an issue, but instead what they think after their own opinions have been tested in a crucible of conversation with other citizens who take different positions. In addition, much research in “deliberative democracy” is currently exploring how citizens can have access to, and contribute to, wider arenas of opinion and action.
- *Projects to make the institutions of journalism more accessible for public dialogue.* Many journalism researchers, theorists, and practitioners in the 1990s reconceptualized the roles and functions of the daily newspaper and other news media to emphasize public listening and deliberation in addition to message transmission (Anderson, Dardenne, & Killenberg, 1994; Charity, 1995; Rosen & Merritt, 1994). A paper can report the news, for example, and also serve as a community forum for dialogue. The labels “public journalism” and “civic journalism” have become contested terms within the profession, but they generally refer to a movement to frame journalism more in terms of a conversational public sphere.
- *Projects to define literary and philosophical insight in new ways.* Developments in many disciplines now stress dialogue far more than they did just a few years ago. For example, a dialogic discourse ethic has had widespread impact on many academic traditions, especially among critical theorists (Habermas, 1992). New theories of narrative knowing in rhetoric and the human sciences privilege dialogue (Clark, 1990; McPhail, 1996; Shotter, 1993a). Contemporary

anthropologists stress dialogue as a key to their discipline (Crapanzano, 1990; Tedlock & Mannheim, 1995). New forms of discursive and hermeneutic psychology are gaining adherents (Cushman, 1995; Shotter, 1995; Smith, Harrè, & Van Langenhove, 1995). Therapy and counseling also now rely on fresh (and some rejuvenated) senses of dialogic knowing (Anderson, 1997). Political philosophers increasingly rely on metaphors of conversation and dialogue in establishing the bases for democratic life (Barber, 1989; Chevigny, 1988; Guttman & Thompson, 1996; Young, 1990). Feminist thinkers, especially black feminist theorists Patricia Hill Collins (1990) and bell hooks (1994), strongly emphasize concepts of dialogue. Much of the most challenging work in recent media theory has had clear dialogic implications (Poster, 1990, 1995; Snyder, 1996; Taylor & Saarinen, 1994). Influential philosophers and cultural critics also have been drawn to dialogic principles; not only is there a resurgent interest in Buber and Bakhtin, but dialogue also can be seen as a core concept in widespread and well publicized contemporary treatments of Taoist philosophy, in the cultural studies of Stuart Hall and James Carey, in the hermeneutics of Hans-Georg Gadamer, in the postmodernism of Michel Foucault, in the Afrocentric approach of Molefi Asante, in the ethical philosophies of Charles Taylor and Emmanuel Levinas, and in the neopragmatism of Cornel West and Richard Rorty.

CONCLUSION

We are hardly the only researchers or critics, then, fashioning an account of dialogue. Dialogue, you might say, is hot. But is it a fad that will dissipate with little lasting effect? Hardly. Instead, we are approaching a critical mass from which global culture will not be able to turn.

With the newfound interest in dialogue, however, must come a responsible attempt to place it in historical context, to describe it carefully, and to sketch its realistic contributions to contemporary public life. That is the direction in which we are pointing. Beginning a journey in that direction means we must think seriously about what approaches or methods support such a project.