Public Relations and Contemporary Theory

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Swinburne University, Australia
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This work – PhD Thesis: Public Relations and Contemporary Theory – has not been previously submitted for another award

……………………… (Steve Mackey) 29/3/01
# CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter One</th>
<th>Rationale For The Thesis:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>page 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>page 9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter Two</th>
<th>Epistemological Introduction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>page 13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>page 28</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter Three</th>
<th>Public Relations Defined As: “Privatised Rhetoric For Privatised Governance”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>page 30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public relations and the rhetorical turn</td>
<td>page 31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contemporary definitions and critiques</td>
<td>page 39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concepts of persuasion and propaganda</td>
<td>page 51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Privatised rhetoric for privatised governance</td>
<td>page 66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>page 72</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter Four</th>
<th>Public Relations and US Political-Cultural History</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>page 74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural Crisis and the Progressives</td>
<td>page 76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public relations flourishes, individualism dies</td>
<td>page 83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In the old world and its colonies</td>
<td>page 86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>page 88</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter Five</th>
<th>Early Theory in Public Relations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>page 89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gustave Le Bon</td>
<td>page 96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walter Lippmann</td>
<td>page 99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ivy Lee</td>
<td>page 101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edward Bernays</td>
<td>page 104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>page 105</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter Six</th>
<th>Ken Livingstone's London – Case Study One</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>An application of theory to this case study</td>
<td>page 108</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter Seven</th>
<th>Attitudes Towards “Biosolids” – Case Study Two</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The public relations theoretical context</td>
<td>page 129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>page 155</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter Eight</th>
<th>Association For The Public University – Case Study Three</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>page 157</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Strategy pre-requisites  
The campaign in a nutshell  
Business studies of all sorts  
Education studies  
Other fields of study  
APU strategy as public relations plan  
Applying cultural and critical theory  
Conclusion  
Supplementary conclusion  

Chapter Nine  
Contemporary Use Of Theory in Textbooks  
Introduction  
Persuasion, motivation, behaviour  
Theories of communication  
Organisations and organisational communication  
Specialist theories of public relations  
Theories which are not taken up in textbooks  
Conclusion  

Chapter Ten  
New Suggestions For Theory – More Habermas  
Introduction  
Fragmentation and social structure  
Conclusion  

Chapter Eleven  
Critique of Current University Teaching And Research  
Introduction  
(1) Education  
(2) Research (Writings on public relations theory)  
Increasing criticism of Public Relations  
Conclusion  

Bibliography  

[...] = my clarifying comments inserted in quoted text
ABSTRACT

In the postmodern era, as authoritative discourses are being undermined, there is an increased vulnerability of thoughts to the influence of the deliberate promotion of viewpoints. In this environment, public relations is becoming increasingly important. In this thesis I use the term ‘public relations’ both in the sense of an extensive, specific industry, as well as in the sense of the general processes increasingly being used by all sorts of groups and organisations to get their voices heard, their effects felt, their interests defended and their aims achieved. Concomitant with this growth in public relations activity, public relations has emerged as a rapidly growing field of study within universities. This thesis critically assesses the state of this emerging university ‘discipline’.

A claim of this thesis is that the mainstream public relations industry is dominated by a corporatist ideology stemming from a particular US business tradition. This ideology produces a problem for university teachers, researchers and ethicists of public relations because it pervades and dominates the textbooks, teaching, research and academic-industry liaison committees. I suggest that this permeation has helped to shape the conceptual tools which public relations people use to examine their own activities. The thesis warns that this interference in academic freedom results in a situation where a genuine ‘professional’ status for graduates with degrees in public relations is rarely achieved. I suggest than many of these graduates may not have the intellectual equipage necessary for the level of detached understanding of their field which would be necessary for them to be true ‘professionals’.

This thesis attempts to explain these inadequacies. It points to the presumption of political pluralism and an unproblematic consensual society which is implicit in the approaches of the orthodox exponents of public relations since the second world war. A contrast with the candidness of public relations theory in the more elitist and authoritarian period of the 1920s and 30s helps to make this point. In order to improve public relations theory, the more recent work of “New Rhetoric” theorists is employed. These theorists point to the inevitability and in fact the necessity of the persuasive activities which construct reality in all human cultural spheres. I opposed the negative critiques of some critical theorists for whom public relations is an abomination. Instead I argue that everyone now needs to be provided with an understanding of, and access to, their own means of
generating public relations-like activity. I suggest that we all need to have some sort of control over the public relations which affects us because this activity is becoming the currency used in the maintenance of all of our postmodern identities. But in grasping the nettle of participating in public relations activity, I suggest that it is also necessary to foreground the oppositional aspects of society and draw on neo-Marxist critical and cultural theories. I employ Habermas and Beck in particular in order to expose the mainstream public relations industry’s historically rooted cultural mission to maintain the pretense that we live in a consensual capitalist culture based on conservatism and corporate American values. A reformulation of public relation theory along critical theory lines is necessary in order to provide the reflexive knowledge required by teachers and students of public relations if public relations is to justify itself as a university discipline.
Chapter One

Rationale For The Thesis

Introduction
This thesis reviews the present intellectual basis of the university subject of public relations and finds it wanting. It sides with critics who say that at present this is NOT a bona fide area of university study. However the thesis argues that public relations SHOULD be a recognised university discipline and shows how this can be achieved. In arguing for this recognition, the thesis reviews and critiques present intellectual efforts which are working towards this end and makes its own theoretical contributions.

The subject of public relations has been taught in universities for more than 70 years (IPRA. 1990. p2). In Public Relations, originally copyrighted in 1952 a “founding father” of public relations - Edward Bernays wrote:

In 1937, we surveyed public relations training in American colleges and universities and…found that institutions of higher learning now offered a wide variety of courses on public relations and allied subjects (Bernays. 1970. p108).

The first university degree in the world in public relations - a Master of Science - is claimed by Boston University where the first cohort of students graduated in 1949\(^1\). By 1952 there were “a number” of such degrees in the United States (Bernays. 1970. p135). There are now more than 200 university courses in public relations in the US\(^2\). The subject

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\(^1\) E.mail from former departmental head at Boston University: Dr. John J. Schulz, 21/12/00.
\(^2\) Donald. K Wright. (1991). Institute for Public Relations (Conference paper to IPRA World Congress, Toronto). Also: “The Public Relations Student Society of America (PRSSA), the college-student arm of PRSA [Public Relations Society of America], is active on over 200 college and university campuses in the USA, and has some 6,000 student members.” (e.mail, 2/2/01, from Michael McDermott, APR, Fellow PRSA. Also the 1999 report of the US non-profit publication: Where shall I go to study advertising and public
is more recent to UK and Australian universities. The first public relations degrees in the UK started in 1988 at Stirling University and 1989 at what is now Bournemouth University. (I was tangentially involved with both of these UK start-ups). By 2000 there were still less than a dozen public relations degrees in the UK. The first degrees in public relations in Australia started in 1969 at what is now Charles Sturt University (Zawawi. 2000. p19) and at what is now Queensland University of Technology in 1977 (QUT departmental e.mail).

There are currently 20 degree courses approved by the Public Relations Institute of Australia. Despite this very recent history, and the general view that public relations is a “vocational subject”, one of the implications of the argument of this thesis is that public relations has the potential to become far more important to academia than is presently the case. The argument is as follows: Postmodernism has problematised objectivism and positivism. This intellectual changing of the guard can be said to involve all arts subjects, as well as other subjects, with the “rhetorical turn”. The “rhetorical turn” is the admission that our understanding of reality is inevitably mediated by the codes of language used in a human setting (Vickers. 1988; Burke. 1963, 1979, 1974, 1961; Perelman 1968, 1971; Brown. 1992; Simons. 1990; Fisher. 1987; Farrell. 1993; Toulmin. 1990; Mayhew. 1997). The difference between the “linguistic turn” and the “rhetorical turn” is that, in the “linguistic turn” there were still attempts to embed the construction of reality in a scientific, purely dialectical or objectivist manner which eschewed rhetoric. For instance Habermas and McIntyre who were heavily involved with the “linguistic turn” in the main have been opposed to rhetoric. As McIntyre wrote:

...one of the more obscurantist features of a sophist like Gorgias - and indeed of his later successors among the electioneering politicians of liberal democracy, the advertising executives, and other open and hidden persuaders - is the willingness to assume a whole philosophical psychology. It is this which leads Socrates to develop an argument to show that rhetoric is not a genuine art at all but a mere spurious imitation of an art (MacIntyre. 1993. p27-28).

relations said 145 public relations degree programs had notified them as well as a further 53 combined advertising-public relations programs. In the stand-alone public relations programs there were 15,964 undergraduate students and there had been 4,513 conferred bachelor degrees that year. The same figures for 2000 were 16,679 and 5,004. (http://www.mcom.ttu.edu/wsig/ (24/1/2001).
Habermas argued:

Whoever transposes the radical critique of reason into the domain of rhetoric in order to blunt the paradox of self-referentiality, also dulls the sword of the critique of reason itself (Habermas. 1994. p210).

With the “rhetorical turn” we realise that every time we communicate or think, we can only do this with the use of linguistic “tokens” (Mayhew. 1997). These “tokens” are reference point words and reference point expressions which align with chains of other words and other expressions leading us into certain ways of understanding. We understand in line with the ways of grasping reality that are open to us. These are the ways that reality has been persuasively and linguistically “constructed” by the institutions and life situations which we live among. As Berger and Luckmann put it:

Man is biologically predestined to construct and to inhabit a world with others. This world becomes for him the dominant and definite reality. Its limits are set by nature, but once constructed, this world acts back upon nature. In the dialectic between nature and the socially constructed world the human organism is itself transformed. In this same dialectic man produces reality and thereby produces himself (Berger & Luckmann. 1984. p204)...We not only live in the same world, we participate in each other’s being. Only when he has achieved this degree of internalization is an individual a member of society (Ibid. p150).

Holzner (1972) writes on a similar theme. He suggests how reality is constructed within society by symbolic and communication processes and discusses the way people’s fates are influenced by their understandings which are a result of their location within these reality generating processes. Advocates of new rhetoric suggest that these internalised mind constructions of the world we live in cannot be pinned down by purely dialectical arguments or by scientific rationalism alone (Mayhew. 1997). Drawing on Burke’s notion

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3 But see my discussion of Habermas’s more complex attitude towards rhetoric in Chapter Ten
Mayhew discusses “logological tokens” as the linguistic reference points that all of us have to accept. Ultimately we have to accept the various “logologies” which are on offer to construct our realities because we cannot possibly go on arguing dialectically indefinitely as Habermas implies we must. We cannot forever put off the acceptance of the social realities which are constantly being persuasively offered to us on the basis that we cannot prove their validity in a logical or scientific fashion. We cannot hold out indefinitely against rhetoric and persuasion because we have finite lives and because these finite lives are extremely busy. Even in the reflective academic situation, we have to constantly choose between, take on faith and ultimately accept as valid, various “tokens” or messages which refer to disparate chains of understandings. These are the schools of thought or theories which ‘persuade’ us of their validity. Of course we are very selective about committing ourselves to the acceptance of particular chains. These are chains which are manifest in the schools of thought or paradigms which we base our ideas on. Despite this careful selection, the suggestion is that every day many of our ideas are based on the trust and acceptance of certain tokens, a trust and an acceptance which would be hard to fully substantiate as totally sound. This difficulty to substantiate chains of thought as ‘valid’ stems from what we might call the ‘economics’ of reaching understandings. There is no alternative but to invest, on a day-to-day basis, in a high level of trust in certain concepts which are said or written by other people. We simply have to accept the validity of other sources of understanding which are not our own and we have to accept the consequences of this day-to-day intellectual allegiance. The implication of the notion of “logology” is that if we do not participate in this “economy of logology”, which becomes an economy of our understanding, society would break down into a non-communicative anarchy. There would be a situation rather like the Monty Python sketch Is This The Right Room For An Argument? with everybody attempting to argue dialectically over everything to the nth degree. The recognition that there is an ‘economy of understanding’, in other words that there are finite boundaries to our ability to understand things through logical deduction and dialectical argument, leads to a reconsideration of the discursive and the persuasive elements in the reaching of understanding.

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4 I offer a reconstruction of Habermassian approaches in Chapter Ten in an attempt to reconcile a Habermassian approach with a rhetorical one.
This recognition of the limits to logic and dialectical reasoning spurred the mid 20th century work which became known as “New Rhetoric” and which has led to what some term the present day “Rhetorical Turn”. The rhetorical turn developed largely from work carried out 40 to 50 years ago by Kenneth Burke, Chaim Pereleman and others who started to re-examine aspects of rhetoric from the classical era. They undertook this project at a time when faith in modernity and its scientific objectivism was on the wane. Their project anticipated the French structuralists and the later postmodernists (Mayhew. 1997. p32). In the notion of “logology” we might see parallels to notions such as the syntagmatic chains of Saussure’s structuralist theory (Saussure. 1966. p49-64). However a social/political dimension of the context in which people choose particular concepts or, as it were, go down particular “chains” of meaning, is inserted by the elements of trust, persuasion and what we might call the ‘economy of understanding’ or the ‘conceptual economy’.

The realisations which emerge from the rhetorical turn help us to conceptually locate public relations, with all its paraphernalia of ‘spin doctoring’, ‘sound bites’, lobbying, opinion monitoring and so on, more centrally in academia. This is because the rhetorical turn, as expressed by the authors listed above, helps us to make more social-contextual sense of the notions involved in postmodern theory as they may be applied to public relations. The rhetorical turn goes further than the structuralists and the post-structuralists in attempting to explain how we are dependent on a certain economy of linguistic social cooperation for the achievement of meanings. The rhetorical turn, like the linguistic turn, supplies us with concepts which imply that we cannot just grasp things, objectively in a positive-scientific, non-social manner. But unlike the linguistic turn, the rhetorical turn foregrounds the social-political element of this problematisation of objectivity. Of course authors who build on the linguistic turn involve the social context of language. But unlike people such as Foucault, MacIntyre, Habermas and so on, the exponents of the rhetorical turn work from the basis that language is already inherently persuasive as it is uttered. In other words language is already socially and politically loaded before it is used. Utterances are always already organised to persuade the reader or listener, irrespective of the logical or dialectical material which they contain. I suggest that this is contra Foucault, MacIntyre, Habermas etc who seem to imply that it is how language is used which colours it politically, rather than how it originally “is”.

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I will discuss this point more fully in the next two chapters where the rhetorical turn will be presented as a theoretical movement which draws attention back to the ever present strand of rhetoric which exists in all discourse. By this I mean that there is always an element of persuasion, there is always an element of presentation, there is always an element of trying to elicit agreement or compliance which can be theoretically separated out from the logical and dialectical elements of discourse. I say attention is drawn “back” because this notion of rhetoric is nothing new. As we will see, rhetorical practices have been understood and legitimatised since classical times. Rhetoric only lost prestige and became a problematic term with the Enlightenment and the rise of scientifically oriented modernity. The significance of this ‘rediscovery of rhetoric’ for public relations is that, as will be argued in chapter three, the most direct descendent of the classical practice of rhetoric is public relations. Rhetoric started out in ancient Greek times as the practice and study of the oral procedures used for advocacy and the attempted shaping of, inter alia, social, legal and, political understandings in democratic culture. These were democratic cultures which endorsed slavery, but democratic cultures none-the-less. Public relations, is also to do with the study of and the practice of the shaping of people’s understandings in modern, democratic culture, again, admittedly imperfect democratic culture. Surely, if nothing else, the bad name which these terms have attracted is uncannily parallel and indicative of this succession? But if an argument can be mounted that rhetoric has been important in projecting and deciphering truths and understandings through discourse for most of the history of western civilisation (Vickers. 1988; Toulmin. 1990), how then should we regard public relations today? This thesis takes the view that public relations, in its dominant application, is a commercialisation of aspects of just this same activity of rhetoric which has been known down the ages. That is, I will claim that both rhetoric and public relations are identical in their function as integral aspects of the construction of reality, or their function as helping to shape the understandings of reality – which I suggest amounts to the same thing. Of course present day commercialised rhetorical practices (public relations practices) involve the projection of partial truths and partial understandings commissioned by specific interests. For this reason it is not immediately apparent how public relations can come to hold the same sort of central place in culture that rhetoric held in the past. During much of antiquity rhetoric became a school or university subject in its
own right and the name persisted as the title of some studies of literature and linguistic practice into the 20th century. Because of this difficulty I will have to explain how the present manifestation of rhetoric as public relations differs from former manifestations and why the connection which I have drawn between rhetoric and public relations is not normally made. I believe the explanation can be grasped from an understanding of how public relations has been incorporated as predominantly the rhetorical procedures of the dominant in society rather than the facility of the many. Chapter three will explain the previous placement of the facilities of rhetorical expression and influence vis-à-vis a wider demographic in classical society. The thesis will go on to argue that in present day society ideological processes have been deployed which tend to concentrate the rhetorical power of public relations (contemporary rhetorical practice) in the hands of a far more restricted demographic. This is the demographic in control of the big institutions of capitalism rather than the demographic of the wider citizenry. I build an argument that this grip on the reigns of much of present day systematic rhetorical processes can and should be broken. I draw attention to how this domination of public relations processes is in fact already under attack both by political activist and by some academics.

The importance of understanding this whole area of discussion is underlined if we look at the current expansion of the profession of ‘rhetoric workers’ (public relations professionals) and if we see this expansion as a manifestation of the increasing postmodernisation – that is the reliance on diverse discourses – of present day society. If we accept the argument that there is always an “economy of understanding” – a view which I suggest is backed by a discussion of Hilary Putnam’s work in chapter two – then it would appear that a very large industry is growing up to gain control of that economy, i.e. to gain control of our thoughts. Figures supplied by the Public Relations Society of America5 show they had 9,217 members in 1980; 14,983 in 1990; and 20,100 in 2000. The same figures for the (UK) Institute of Public Relations6 were 2,500 members in 1980; 3,000 members in 1990; and 6,500 members in 2000. Michie (1998. p12-13) put the number of all sorts of public relations people in the UK at 25,000. He says this is about half the number of journalists in the UK. Michie puts US numbers at 150,000 public relations practitioners

5 By e.mail 11/2/01.
6 By e.mail 11/12/00.
versus only 130,000 US journalists. (These figures are not contradictory as there is no requirement for public relations people to join professional associations). A late 2000 round-robin e.mail to the Australian journalism and public relations educators e.mail networks, which took account of Public Relations Institute of Australia figures, indicated that there were about equal numbers of public relations practitioners and journalists in Australia - about 5,000. This increasing number of public relations practitioners (rhetoric workers) is surely what one might expect in a culture where there is increasing reliance on more and more discourse, and more potentially contested discourse, as the sureties of the positivist and objectivist notions in the grand narratives of modernity dissolve in the era of postmodernism.

The more advanced academic writings on public relations reflect a growing realisation of this situation, although current textbooks and the modes of teaching and practicing public relations do not. Also the way the subject is regarded by other arts faculty members does not yet encompass the above understandings. Public relations is of course taught at other locations in universities – including sometimes in business faculties. Although current understandings of rhetoric penetrate those faculties (eg. Alvesson & Deetz. 1999; Dobson. 1999), a subsidiary implication of this thesis will be that, because public relations is to do with the philosophy of social understanding, although public relations is related to business measures, the subject is more properly located in arts faculties. The implications for the arts faculty of the above described conjuncture include the following:

1) A public relations course for the 21st century needs to appreciate these principles and to intelligently integrate other areas such as politics, literature, religion and philosophy with a better understanding of public relations. The integration needs to proceed from the perspective of discourse. At the moment public relations in Australia and in America is usually taught adjacent to social science and liberal arts courses. But I do not believe the deep connection between these courses at the level of rhetoric is fully appreciated.

2) An academic unit which engages with such developments would prove extremely valuable both in the teaching of students and in consulting. The value would be in
providing a sound understanding of what organisations should say, and what it is legitimate to say, in an increasingly unsure and increasingly discursive world.

3) The fundamental integration of public relations with the critical and deconstructive approaches of the arts faculty would expose the ethical, political and cultural implications of public relations to the most rigorous intellectual scrutiny. There would be a proper, academic investigation of the activity of public relations – an activity which has so many significant implications for contemporary culture. Scrutiny within academia would be more valuable than the currently simplistic demonising and rejection of public relations by many academics.

Conclusion

The rationale for this thesis is the need which I suggest exists for an explanation of the close connections and affinities between public relations, the classical notion of rhetoric and the intellectual work of the rhetorical turn. The rationale also includes a need to comment on what I claim is the current poverty of theory which obscures this connection. Understanding of these connections and their obscuring is necessary at a time when there is a rush to manage, or at least to influence society through the processes of discourse. This is a rush which is indicated by the huge increase in public relations employees, or as I alternatively call them 'rhetoric workers'. I argue that before modernity, deliberate and less constrained rhetorical practices were more significant for society. Thought was not organised so much via the efficient systems which organise and direct it presently – the educations systems, political systems, employment systems, news and entertainment media, various modes of consumption and so on. It may be correct to claim that some unconstrained rhetorical activities of the 'postmodern period' are now challenging these systems. However, I suggest that this ‘anti-system’ diversity of thought is less significant than the popular ballyhoo surrounding postmodernism would have us believe. I suggest the basic economic system still significantly dominates the way lives are led and consequently the possibilities for ways of understanding the world. My contention will be that some classical periods saw the occasional supreme manifestation of a society run by the use of democratically organised argument and persuasion. These were what we might call periods of ‘democratically healthy’, or ‘free’ rhetoric. These were periods when society, for those
who qualified as citizens, was open to direction by open argument and discussion. This is in contrast to periods when direction has been more by what we might call “pre-systematised thought”. By pre-systematised thought I mean thought which is only exercised after it has been preconditioned by religion, scientific principles, the production of people ideologically as producers and consumers and so on. I suggest that the current period is one where thought is predominantly pre-systemised by ‘unfree’ deliberate and organised rhetorical processes. I suggest that an examination of the freedom or lack of freedom with which we are able to exercise rhetoric, i.e. the facility for, or limits on, our activities to persuade people to hold different views and to form alternative communities of understanding, is the key to understanding the ways in which we are able to conceptualise the world. The counterpart to our individual or immediate communal rhetorical freedom is the rhetorical freedom, rhetorical ability and rhetorical power of the dominant organisations in society which are the perpetrators of usually one-way directed or “unfree” rhetoric. These dominant organisations’ rhetorical processes are commonly called public relations. I suggest that we should however guard against attributing ownership of and ability in such influential and organised rhetoric to only the richest and most powerful parts of society.

Chapter two of this thesis aims to puts this project on a sound epistemological basis by using the work of philosopher Hilary Putnam to try to explain the vulnerability of our grasp on reality. This is a vulnerability which implies the inevitability of our dependence on those who manage what I have called the ‘economy of understanding’ – a term which signals our susceptibility to having our realities constructed for us. The implication of chapter two and the conclusion to the wider thesis will be that it is essential that this vulnerability is widely understood and always managed fairly. Chapter three starts by discussing the history and current notions of rhetoric and the ways in which the current rhetorical turn has been cautiously taken up by theorists of public relations. The middle part of chapter three criticises public relations associations and others who tend to obscure the clearly persuasive and thus clearly rhetorical nature of public relations. This obscuring is carried out by defining public relations as bereft of persuasion and by falsely distancing public relations from the notion of propaganda. The last part of chapter three summarises the chapter’s arguments in order to define public relations as a clear example of rhetorical practice. Chapter four suggests the historical and cultural reasons for the harnessing and
development of rhetorical practices into the dominant forms of present day public relations activity. The chapter explains why current, prevalent practices of public relations are predominantly conservative in character. Chapter five draws attention to how public relations was theorised by its early exponents and commentators. These early exponents drew upon theories and discussions which candidly presented this activity as to do with selecting the perceptions which should be transmitted to mass audiences (Lee) and to do with manipulating mass public understandings (Bernays). Chapters six, seven and eight are case studies which are included in the centre of the thesis in order to focus attention on just what it is that we mean when we talk about public relations. Their topics are chosen to make the additional point that public relations activities are not only the province of the dominant groups in society. Chapter nine contrasts the proto-type theoretical approaches of the early advocates of public relations which are described in chapter five, and the examples of how contemporary theory could be applied, which is illustrated by the case studies, with how theory is currently treated in orthodox public relations textbooks. I suggest it is regrettable that the good theoretical work to do with public relations which started before the second world war did not continue after it. In the post-war period critical strands of theory, or theories which would encourage public relations practitioners to reflect on the wider implications of their work, tended to be avoided for the reasons suggested in chapters three, four and five about the conservative origins and purposes of public relations. Chapter ten picks up from the theoretical comments at the ends of the case studies and further develops what I claim to be better ways of theorising public relations. Drawing on Habermas I argue that public relations should be seen as the directed use of rhetoric in an oppositional society rather than the directed use of rhetoric in a consensual, pluralist society. I take the use of the term ‘pluralist’ by some orthodox authorities on public relations to mean a society where there are different views but no fundamental, potentially destructive oppositions. While society may indeed be ‘pluralist’ I suggest that we should avoid adopting this term as a euphemism which results in us overlooking deeper, fundamental disputes and oppositions which make cooperation very problematic or impossible among some opposed factions of society. See for example the 1982 Public Relations Society of America definition of public relations quoted in chapter three, a section of which reads in part:
Public relations helps our complex, pluralistic society to reach decisions and function more effectively by contributing to mutual understanding among groups and institutions.

The final chapter 11 reviews what I claim to be the unsatisfactory state of current public relations university education. I particularly criticise the report and associated journal articles to do with the 1999 Commission on Public Relations: *Public Relations for the 21st century: A Port of Entry*. This major, US centred review of public relations education appears to me to lack the political and theoretical insights into public relations activity, and its status as a valid university subject, which my thesis is intended to supply. My contention is that the results of the 1999 commission confirm much of my thesis by omission. What I mean is, if my thesis is convincing up to the end of chapter ten, then the contrast with how the ‘commissioners’ see public relations is of concern. Two matters of particular concern are the sanguinity with which the commission report treats the present state of the universities which teach public relations and the low key manner in which the commission treats critical theory. I suggest these omissions amount to a lack of concern about, and a lack of insight into, the intellectual attacks on the purported genuinely scholarly nature of public relations study. This failure to deal with valid and widespread scholarly criticism underlines the on-going question about the professional standing of university graduates of public relations degrees.
Chapter Two

Epistemological Introduction

Introduction
This chapter discusses the works of public relations rhetorical theorist Robert Heath; a founder of the new rhetoric movement Chaim Perelman; and philosopher Hilary Putnam. I use Putnam to try to explain the vulnerability of our grasp on reality and the ease with which people can oscillate between significantly different views which can all appear valid. I suggest the implication of Putnam is that reality can never be determined simply by logical and dialectical processes. There will always be an alternative view which can be presented in a manner which makes it appear valid. When we realise that truth can be so plastic this must surely ring the alarm bells about how we allow our views to be influenced. If this vulnerability is not clearly recognised it will be impossible to lay down legal, ethical or political regulations to guard against bodies of opinion which could have ultimately destructive consequences. In my view what I have earlier called the ‘economy of understanding’ – the wrestle for the control of this vulnerability – has always taken the form of rhetorical activity. In the current era this rhetorical power-play has been institutionalised and is dominated by organisations which employ large scale, orthodox and conservative public relations processes. I suggest it is important however to realise that orthodox public relations is only one possible form of those rhetorical processes which orient our vulnerable understandings. What we might call petit public relations – the organised modern rhetoric of the little people – is still available to us as the later case studies will show. In the below chapter I suggest Heath sides with orthodox public relations rather than petit public relations. I suggest he does this because of a failure to conceive of public relations in a broader context – as the modern manifestation of rhetoric. I suggest that this failure stems from a more general failure by current public relations theorists, in fact a failure of many social theorists, to come to terms with the balance between dialectical and rhetorical processes in the formation of understandings, a balance which is being revived by the rhetorical turn, but which is not quite here yet. I suggest that this failure to
quite come to grips with the rhetorical turn puts Heath in the ambiguous position of still thinking in an objectivist social science paradigm which eschews the ultimate implications of the relationship of understandings to rhetoric. Heath’s position is ambiguous, if not ironic, because he is using a less developed conceptualisation of rhetoric – the notion of rhetoric as a ‘fair voice for all’ in order to produce a politically acceptable notion of public relations. I try to demonstrate below that Heath overlooks the deeper social and political significance of the effects of public relations which are the ultimate implications of his applying rhetorical theory to this activity. I suggest that the below discussion can explain why orthodox public relations is becoming such a large industry in the postmodern era. It is becoming the industry which maintains thinking in line with the wishes of the dominant economic systems at a time when other mind influences such as religion, monarchy, belief in science, progress and the bureaucratic administrative system are on the wane. A more subtle, all embracing network of mind influencing mechanisms – public relations programs – is needed instead.

The objective of this thesis is to attempt to convince its readers that public relations is an activity which is more important than is usually recognised. By “important” I do not mean that public relations is more benign or creditable than some people suppose it is. Nor do I mean that public relations is necessarily more dangerous to democratic or community standards than it is usually taken to be. Rather what I mean is that the objective is to try to show that public relations is more important in the sense of being more “significant”, more involved in the workings of contemporary society than is normally taken to be the case. Of course if this heightened significance is the case, public relations may as a consequence sometimes be more constructive or sometimes more destructive than is generally thought. However the argument will be rather different from this. The argument will be that public relations per se is perhaps most important in neither of those extreme aspects. Instead it will be claimed that overt public relations and less recognised “public relations-like” activities are more crucial to the unremarkable, every-day functioning of society than is generally thought. The argument will be that public relations and public relations-like activities “set the agenda of thinking” far more extensively than is generally recognised. Understood in this way this project suggests that there should be more comprehensive research and
theorising about public relations’ role and about who predominately controls that role, in order to understand its involvement with the shape and direction of society. The method used in this thesis in attempting to reveal this deeper and broader significance is the method of using contemporary theory in an effort to better reveal the workings of public relations vis-à-vis society. In tackling this theoretical analysis this thesis tries to locate the activity of public relations within the current debates of modernism versus postmodernism and within discussions about rhetoric and what is referred to as “new rhetoric” and the “rhetorical turn” (Perelman. 1968; Brown. 1992; Simmons. 1990; Fisher. 1987. p44; Farrell. 1993).

The thesis tries to draw analogies between some of the notions discussed in these theoretical realms and some of the activities in the practical realm of public relations. I will offer an epistemological basis – an approach to understanding – for this project in a moment. What I hope that explanation will justify is this: Many of the activities which come under the heading of “public relations” are closely aligned with, if not identical to, activities which can be described as involving the application of “rhetoric”. By “rhetoric” we are referring to the political, legal and policy making or influencing activities of persuasive oratory and other linguistic and narrative processes which are described by Aristotle in his *The Art of Rhetoric*. These activities were well understood and written about from the classical period onwards... “Isocrates and others had established rhetoric as a legitimate basis of further education and in so doing they were establishing a trend that was to last for a millennium” (Lawson-Tancred. 1991. p15). Lawson-Tancred is here discussing rhetoric as an important aspect of government, judicial proceedings, education, communication and reasoning which was prominent in various forms until modern times and modern approaches to philosophy. Toulmin (1993) and Perelman (1968) suggest that that “modern” philosophy, certainly from Descartes onward, decried rhetorical practices. Instead of accrediting world views which emerged out of interpersonal discussion in the specific times, from the specific opinions and with reference to the specific culture of the specific era, “rationalism” strove for universal, timeless certainties. These were certainties derived from logical prognostications of truths which derived from the superior reasoning of the few, rather than from rhetorical discussion and contention among the many.

According to both Toulmin and Perelman this rational philosophy of the “Modern Period” – from the late 17th to the mid 20th century – had the political and cultural effect of reducing
the possibility of a multiplicity of independent, heterogeneous perspectives on the world. This new tradition of rationalism bound people to presuming and being influenced by certain received truths. This restriction had similarities to the limitation of ‘religion-bound’ thinking which had been exercised by the Western theocracies and monarchies. Despite some reference to a muted and truncated rhetorical tradition, religion-bound thinking was predominant in the many centuries between the advent of “modern” rationalism and the democratic and by implication heterogeneous thinking periods of some parts of the classical era when democratic, discursive exchange was far more extensive. The argument of this thesis will be that after two millennia of religious or traditional rationality controlled thinking, we have now almost returned to a heterogeneous thinking period, similar to that predominant in some periods of the ancient Greeks. We are back to a period when, in the question of deciding world views on matters, there is a potential for discussion and contention among the many to challenge the received wisdom of the few. The importance of public relations and public relations-type activities in such an era and the parallel between current public relations and classical rhetorical practices in the democratic periods of classical civilisation thus present themselves as relevant for study. By “public relations” we mean activities which are overtly declared as “Public Relations” with a large P.R. But we also mean activities whose nature as public relations activities has to be deduced from comparing them to how the relevant textbooks describe public relations activity. Definitions of public relations are set out and critiqued in a subsequent section of this thesis.

Academic work connecting public relations to the theoretical notions involving the “rhetorical turn” and “new rhetoric” is just starting to emerge after a decade when public relations was compared to rhetoric in some theoretical circles, but not at a deep analytical level. The recognition of the coincidence between public relations and rhetoric is seen in Elwood (1995); Toth & Heath (1992); and some articles in Botan & Hazleton (1989). These are all major edited volumes of public relations theory which have some articles linking public relations and rhetoric in the sense of persuasive communication. These books are quoted in this respect later in this thesis. Heath, the editor of the most advanced and influential current public relations book touches on the “rhetorical turn”. In one of his sections of the 2001 book he says: “It [rhetoric] offers a theoretical, practical and critical
rationale for the study, teaching and practice of public relations” (p50). In this chapter Heath is careful not to directly call the modern practice and study of public relations the same as the ancient practice and study of rhetoric. Heath does however argue a strong case for using developments of the analysis of rhetorical practice, i.e. rhetorical theory, as the best way of analysing and understanding the contemporary practice of public relations. His chapter is titled “Rhetorical Enactment Rationale” and purports to be a rationale for understanding public relations in some sort of relationship to rhetoric. Exactly what this relationship is, is not clear:

This chapter reasons that rhetorical enactment theory can meet epistemological, axiological and ontological requirements needed to demonstrate how public relations should operate to add value to clients as well as to society (Ibid. p31).

While one might see a case for keeping the ancient and modern practices of rhetoric and public relations distinct, one might perhaps also be excused for questioning whether there is anything but an historical distinction between the two. If it looks like a duck, if it waddles like a duck and if it quacks like a duck, i.e. if public relations can be analysed by the same schema as rhetoric can be – by rhetorical theory – then surely there is a good argument to be made that public relations and rhetoric, in the sense that Heath uses the term rhetoric, are the same activity. In his justification for the adoption of rhetorical theory to the analysis of public relations Heath touches on the arguments of the postmodern “rhetorical turn” and the “new rhetoric”. Essentially the argument is that:

Does public relations – or any discipline have means for knowing absolute truth? The answer to this epistemic question probably is no…Even scientific studies advance knowledge rhetorically by examining premises supported by evidence, evaluative opinions and degrees of certainty calculated as probabilities. Are we stuck with an expedient relativism?…[in answer to this question]…rhetoricians take the position that ‘unacknowledged and unaccepted truths are of no use at all’ [Heath quotes Campbell here] (Heath. 2001. p43).
I will come back to the epistemological question which Heath raises via Putnam’s conceptual relativism which is involved with Putnam’s theory of Internal Realism. But first it is important to point out the divergences between Heath’s article and this present thesis. Heath devotes much of his article to the apparent need to rehabilitate rhetoric and rhetorical analysis for serious contemporary consideration. He seems very sensitive about the negative connotations of the word “rhetoric”. He is also concerned about how the negative notion of “rhetoric” might be reinforced particularly if organisations with “deep pockets” take unfair advantage of their “rhetorical” power. Heath is anxious to direct attention to the free flow and exchange of ideas offered in a fair and reciprocal manner which he argues underpins the basis of correctly performed rhetoric. This is the free flowing, discursive exchanges which are the lingua franca of (some parts of) the classical and the modern democratic eras. He is anxious to perform this ‘good reputation mission’ on behalf of public relations because, unlike this present thesis, Heath is anxious to persuade us that:

A rhetorical approach to the discipline gives insights into the social importance of the meaning that public relations practitioners help to shape in their efforts to assist the building of society - of community (Heath. 2001. p31).

Heath’s partisan attitude on behalf the public relations industry and his unproblematic acceptance, backed up in the next chapter by Stark & Kruckeberg, that commercial representatives act well when they help to build a sense of some vaguely defined “community”, differentiates Heath’s project from the present one. In following sections I shall add my own radical definition to the many attempts at defining the orthodox practice of public relations, which I will be criticising throughout this thesis, by calling it “Privatised Rhetoric for Privatised Governance”. I write chapter three as a justification of this new, four word definition. This title for my definition makes the point of both my agreement with and my argument against Heath. I am agreeing that public relations can and should be analysed through the methods of rhetorical theory. However my disagreements include the suggestions that: (1) Heath does not justify his distinguishing of public relations practice from rhetorical practice. (2) He does not signal the wider significance for the
functioning of society which is implied in the epistemological conclusions he arrives at.
Heath is pleased to conclude that the rhetorical practices in public relations are identical
with practices which underpin understanding in all spheres. But his refusal to identify
public relations with rhetorical practice per se allows him to sidestep the wider social and
political implications of this fact – that public relations is far too important to be left to the
public relations people. (3) Instead Heath immediately applies his discovery (of the efficacy
of rhetorical theory to public relations) in an instrumental manner - as a way of enhancing
the reputation of public relations people by giving them an additional tool to build up some
undefined sense of “community”. (4) The notion of community which Heath is presumably
referring to is that discussed by Stark and Kruckeberg (1988 and 2001):

In this spirit, and in a reaffirmation…of what has become known as the
Kruckeberg and Stark “community-building theory” of public relations, we make
these recommendations to corporations – particularly transnational corporations –
that we believe should form a basic public relations philosophy and set of operating
principles of all organisations. We ask these organisations to ponder their
organisational missions and goals and to consider larger questions that deal with
society, and ultimately with life itself and the values that give life meaning for each
of us (Stark & Kruckeberg. 2001. p54).

This apparent supplication at the altar of big corporations is another aspect of my
differentiation from Heath. Heath would seem to be writing from a perspective that the
commercialisation of the management of discourse (public relations in his terms) is a fait
accompli. The present project is written from the perspective that it is not a fait accompli
although one can understand why, particularly the American public relations cognoscenti,
should think this way. My explanation of why the American public relations cognoscenti
should think this way is set out in the following sections and in my “Public Relations and
US Political-Cultural History” section. One implication of my analysis will be that unlike
the apparent attitudes of the contemporary public relations industry and related academic
cognoscenti, we should not be sanguine at having PRIVATE corporations fulfill the
heterogeneous rhetorical production opportunities presented by the decline of homogeneous
religious and the decline of modernist philosophical world views. I will suggest that rather, contemporary society as a whole should look to the opportunities for the PUBLIC production and engagement of public relations / rhetorical discourse à la the ancients, in order to take advantage of the postmodern free thinking spree.

Because of the above intention this thesis is written from the perspective of the need to differentiate democracy from commercial interests and the need to protect democracy from commercial interests. My suggestion is that understanding of rhetorical/public relations processes is necessary for this differentiation and protection to take place. I suggest that Heath and many of his colleagues, like Stark & Kruckeberg, seem to accept that democracy and even “community” has been captured by commercial interests and it is just a matter of seeing how much democracy or community “they” will allow us. This I submit is the basic reason why Health has to keep the notion of public relations separate from the notion of rhetoric. The reason is that ancient rhetorical practices when at their apogee, for all the failings of the sorts of societies they emerged from, were a manifestation of a truly civil society. Contemporary public relations on the other hand is a manifestation of a corporatised society. I will explain more what I mean later, but first to return to epistemology.

One way to justify the use of the rhetorical perspective for arriving at philosophically acceptable or “correct” views is to argue from empiricism via internal or pragmatic realism to conceptual relativism. There are considerable difficulties with the empirical approach - the proposition that we can simply “see” or otherwise directly sensually experience reality. For instance there are considerable difficulties with the notion that by simply questioning a group of employees, or shareholders, or customers we can directly “hear” what they think of their corporation or supplier. Doubts about empiricism were expressed virtually as soon as the empirical method of elucidating facts was set out by modern philosophy:

...concepts of objects in general must lie as a priori conditions at the foundation of all empirical knowledge; and consequently the objective validity of the categories, as a priori concepts, will rest upon this, that experience (as far as regards the form of thought) is possible only by their means. For in that case they
apply necessarily and \textit{a priori} to objects of experience, because only through them can an object of experience be thought (Kant. 1996. p96).

Kant is here making the point that people’s perceiving mechanisms always intervene between our understanding and what it is we want to understand. For instance we have pre-given senses of time and of space which enable us to think in terms of sequence and location. These senses then pre-order the ways in which we must observe. Kant also talks about our pre-given sense of causality. Natural scientists who try to use and justify the empirical method are always anxious to strain out effects of the observer during the observation of the object. But this is generally held to be impossible. The possibility of direct empirical knowledge always faces such problems as: the possible ways the object can be described given the available language; the scientific or common sense theories which exist at the time which are arguably always bound to control their particular perspectives on what is being seen; the nature of the observing equipment; the disposition and abilities of the human observer or operator of the equipment. Difficulties such as this arise even before Kant’s suggestion that, in any case, there are these transcendental, \textit{a priori} conditions, or “categories” of human existence which always condition experience. All these factors conspire to confound suggestions that we can know reality simply by sensually experiencing it. In the case of the reputation of the corporation or supplier posited above, a myriad of observational difficulties stand between the public relations consultant who, at the start of her public relations task, tries to get a picture of how employees, shareholders and customers are thinking. Even the most rigorous survey of views which elicits the most comprehensive and the most honest opinions is subject to massive contextual difficulties such as: The possible ways of describing opinion in the language available; what is understood to be opinion (as opposed to outright opposition, attempts at ingratiation or apparently irrelevant comments which do not seem to involve opinion- eg “the corporation is run by a woman”, “I’m leaving in a month’s time”); the difficulty of knowing what is in the minds of both the interviewer and the interviewee when they talk about ostensibly the same concepts – such as “the corporation”.

Such difficulties of ever knowing reality from what is directly experienced – in this case from what is experienced of the views of the interviewees – inclines some theorists to
go down the various branches of the Realist tradition of epistemology. The realist acknowledges the various perceptual and conceptual barriers which stand between the observer and what is being observed but insists that there are real things out there which can be understood in an adequate manner. For instance the realist says there are real opinions which these publics hold about the corporation. What is needed in order to grasp this reality is a coherent way of dealing with the difficulties of observation. So for instance in this case the realist would need to research and discuss all the concerns raised at the end of the empiricists paragraph above and then use judgments formed on the basis of what we might call this conceptual research as well as realist philosophical perspectives, such as those we are about to discuss, in order to feel qualified to understand the results of the actual research on views about the corporation. In practical terms of course, under the realist method, the research instrument would originally have been designed under a realist critique before it was used. Questionnaires and other aspects of the approach to employees, shareholders and customers would have been designed within criteria laid down by the earlier conceptual research, conceptual discussion and relevant realist philosophising. To briefly explore “realist philosophising” we might discuss Putnam who defends his approach to Realism – an approach which he calls “Internal Realism” or “Pragmatic Realism” – in contrast to what he implies are the more problematic approaches of “Metaphysical Realism”. Putnam says that according to Hartry Field “Metaphysical Realism” can mean that: “The world consists of a fixed totality of mind-independent objects.” Or it can mean that: “There is exactly one true and complete description of the way the world is.” Or it can mean that: “Truth involves some sort of correspondence.” (Putnam. 1994. p429). In this criticism of Hartry’s purported notion of realism, Putnam is illustrating some of the basic principles of some realist approaches. These are: that there is a real world with real things in it irrespective of how we might think about this world and its things; that it may be possible through the careful refinement of the language with which we describe the world, to eventually be able to describe this world adequately; and that it is possible to have some adequate relationship between things and how they are described such that reality can be correctly apprehended. In his own version of realism Putnam eschews some of the difficulties of the above approaches saying at one point:
The key to working out the program of preserving commonsense realism while avoiding the absurdities and antinomies [conceptual muddles] of metaphysical realism in all its familiar varieties…is something I have called internal realism. (I should have called it pragmatic realism!) (Putnam. 1991. p17).

Putnam’s “Internal Realism” involves the concept of “conceptual relativity”:

Internal realism is, at bottom, just the insistence that realism is not incompatible with conceptual relativity. One can be both a realist and a conceptual relativist (Ibid. p17).

Putnam then goes on to say that the mind can see the same thing in different ways. For instance, if you are given three objects and asked how many objects you have you might respond “three” or say different numbers depending on if you combine some of the objects into other objects. The implication is that provided you have grounds for arguing, you can view things differently. In the end Putnam reverts to a humanist, common sense about how far it is possible to pursue foundational or absolute facts and about how one should judge between concepts in a relativist manner:

Recognizing with Wittgenstein, that there are places where our explanations run out, isn’t saying that any particular place is fated to be bedrock, or that any particular belief is forever immune from criticism. This is where my spade is turned now. This is where my justification and explanation stop now. To recognise that a loyal human being is better than a disloyal human being, that a person capable of philia [love] is better than a person incapable of philia, that a person capable of a sense of community, of citizenship in a polis is better than a person who is incapable of community of citizenship in a polis and so forth is not to say that any one of these values or any one of the moral pictures which may lie behind and organise these values is final. Our moral images are in a process of development and reform (Ibid. p85).
Putnam’s internal or pragmatic realism and conceptual relativism seem to be compatible with what we might call the humanism and “constrained relativism” of accredited rhetorical discursive practice. Some arguments of an important founder of “new rhetoric”: Chaim Perelman illustrate this point:

Only the discussion of opposed theses, in a spirit of mutual understanding, will make it possible to locate the elements of the discourse in which an agreement can eventually be reached, provisional though it may be. Such discussion will also turn up theses which, pending new developments, seem the basis of irreducible opposition. According to this rhetorical conception, the existence of a unique truth in all domains can no longer constitute an initial certitude guaranteeing that in the end all minds endowed with reason will agree on all the problems that men can sensibly raise. Hence it would be possible to understand and justify the existence of a plurality of philosophies, each claiming to furnish a true vision of reality, yet none capable of compelling acquiescence. To the idea of the uniqueness of truth, which does not explain disagreement among philosophers, our conception opposes the pluralism of values and the multiplicity of ways of being reasonable (Perelman. 1968. p21).

Perelman suggests that in the rhetorical mode a philosophical claim to “truth” need only be able to: “claim universal recognition” (Ibid. p22). “Universal recognition” involves that the matter which is being claimed as “true” is available as reasoning which can be used practically. Perelman suggests that this formula overcomes the problem which Putnam seems to be concerned with in his dispute with Hartry Field: that a philosopher can only dispute her claims if others agree that there are universally perceived principles involved with her dispute. If others do not recognise the problems which she perceives, then the whole subject she is disputing is deemed not valid. If on the other hand the concepts which she is discussing can be shown to have practical application there is a rhetorical validity in her point of view. This point of view will be considered in a context where:
To recognise the possibility of discussion that is not a dialogue of deaf people is to admit the existence of commonplaces such as have been defined by classical rhetoric; there will be the common values, common notions and common rules of conduct, borrowed from common language…divergences will come to light [but there will be]…notions like truth, reason, personal freedom, persuading and convincing [albeit these notions will be treated differently in different philosophies] (Ibid. p23).

Putnam’s suggestions, Perelman’s suggestions and Heath’s suggestions, (Heath’s suggestions drawn from Campbell and quoted above… “rhetoricians take the position that unacknowledged and unaccepted truths are of no use at all”) enable the following position to be taken about the epistemological credentials of rhetoric. (In my schema – these same epistemological credentials apply to public relations when public relations conforms to the strictures of rhetorical practice which both Heath and Perelman would endorse): When subjects are discussed under certain agreed rules of rhetoric the various and differing views which are expressed on topics, as long as they are in some way held to have practical application, can be said to conform to the conceptual relativity alternatives of Putnam’s internal or pragmatic realism. One is reminded of both Aristotle’s notion of: “Rhetoric is the counterpart of dialectic” (Aristotle. 1991. p66) and Karl-Otto Apel and Habermas’s concept of Universal Pragmatics. Habermas’s validity claims or conditions for universal pragmatics are:

(1) uttering something understandably; (2) giving the hearer something to understand; (3) making him/[her]self thereby understandable; (4) coming to an understanding with another person (Habermas. 1979. p2).

This would seem to have some correspondence to Perelman’s conditions of valid rhetorical discourse:

…the existence of commonplaces such as have been defined by classical rhetoric; there will be the common values, common notions and common rules of
conduct, borrowed from common language…divergences will come to light [but there will be]…notions like truth, reason, personal freedom, persuading and convincing (Perelman. 1968. p23).

In terms of the concrete public relations situation suggested above, bearing in mind that I say public relations is the contemporary rhetoric and Heath says public relations can be analysed with the current theories of rhetoric, acceptance of this epistemological argument would have the following consequences: The opinions of the employee, shareholder and customer publics would be considered in terms of the possible practical application of a number of different ways in which those opinions could be interpreted. In other words, the questionnaire returns and other survey instruments may be regarded as capable of eliciting “real” opinions about the reputation of the company. However there are two tests which the procedure has to follow in order for reality to be elicited. One is the stature of the whole exercise in terms of “practical application”. In other words… is this a genuine attempt at putting people into a situation of confidence, ease and privacy where they are inclined to express their opinions without fear or favour, where they are motivated to make a useful, thoughtful and diligent response to the questionnaire by a belief that they will not be ignored or punished for their views and that what they say will really matter because it will be taken notice of? Or is this a window dressing exercise designed to massage the ego of the corporation executives with no genuine practical application? The other dimension relates to the possibility of interpreting what is said in different ways all of which may have practical application. For instance “the corporation is run by a woman” or “I’m leaving in a month’s time”, if judged to be valid and meaningful responses in terms of the first dimension of the survey, are open to varied interpretations as to their meaning in the second dimension. These responses may be interpreted in multiple ways under the rules of conceptual relativism, but these variations are limited to interpretations which have possible practical application as far as being useful for showing the different ways in which the employee, shareholder, or customer respondent may feel about the corporation. So for the purposes of the early stages of mounting a public relations campaign – the research stage – this epistemological basis would seem to have the following main implications. Firstly analysis of the epistemology underscores the need for careful and genuine
preparation of survey instruments. Secondly appreciation of the epistemology warns that there may be different but valid interpretations of the eventual data. These are interpretations which may perhaps have to be tested later by more research instruments, or which may have to be decided between on the basis of common sense or other humanist principles.

However if we go a few stages further in the public relations campaign the application of this epistemological basis for analysing the processes of public relations becomes more problematic as far as corporate or commercial public relations is concerned. Remember our epistemology is built on the basis of an Internal or Pragmatic realism which involves conceptual relativity. Conceptual relativity implies the allowance of different interpretations – a number of which may be valid explanations of the world situation. This possibility for a constrained choice of alternative interpretations – constrained by their necessity to be defensible interpretations – coincides with the notion in rhetorical theory of the heterogeneous exchange of different points of view which none the less are constrained by or must conform to: “common values, common notions and common rules of conduct, borrowed from common language” (see above). Heath dwells on the need for common values, reciprocity and the free and fair exchange of discourse in order to accredit public relations as a symmetrical and ethical mutual exercise between the corporation and the public. But, from the point of view of the corporation, in the delivery stage of the public relations project – the stage where the corporation wants the public to view the corporation in such and such a light – there is clearly a temptation for the company to advance just those particular rhetorical perspectives or those particular concepts of the conceptual relativist domain which will benefit it. Now it is true of course that Heath’s whole point of adopting the rhetorical rationale is so as to clearly illustrate this potential faux pas and to agree with the similar moral strictures of Grunig’s established symmetrical public relations model. Progressive as this stance may seem, however, it begs the deeper implications of the epistemology just described. This epistemology, if it is a sound basis for understanding what takes place in the public relations process, has implications much wider than any local interests to do with how employees, shareholders, customers, or in fact any other publics see and relate to a corporation, and how the corporation sees and relates to them. And it is not enough to say, as Heath does, that symmetrical communication - or the heterogeneous
voices on all sides of a rhetorical exchange between a corporation and its publics make that exchange fair and healthy for society.

The problem is this… If the above epistemological model is right the public relations process builds reality, or at least it offers the relative conceptual alternatives from which the building of reality is possible. This is of course my thesis because I am identifying public relations directly with rhetorical practice. Heath of course, as discussed above, does not do this. He keeps rhetoric and public relations separate. My response to this separation as indicated above is – if it looks like a duck, if it waddles like a duck if it quacks like a duck etc. In other words I do not think Heath can have it both ways. In my view he cannot say that public relations is totally analysable through rhetorical theory, but it is not rhetorical discourse. Now if we hold that public relations is rhetorical discourse and if we hold that it does help build reality – that it is the counterpart to dialectic – then, as I imply above and reinforce here, it is extremely worrying to realise that the most powerful motors of reality building in the contemporary world – the public relations departments of the corporations and their agents – are in private commercial and not public hands. A major theme of the rest of this thesis is the attempt to ring the alarm bells about this “privatised rhetoric for privatised governance”. I am trying to draw attention to the massive industry which is currently entrusted with a very large proportion of the creation of contemporary, postmodern or late modern world views primarily for the benefit of commercial organisations. As the dam wall of modernist philosophy and other traditional beliefs – of universal truths – continues to crumble and megalitres of certainty – western identity stored up over the millennia – cascade out, who is working in the alchemical factories of postmodern thought? Who is shaping understandings for the possible futures to come? I fear that it is those who can make the most money out of how we think.

**Conclusion**

The argument is this chapter is intended to raise the stakes in the debate in which this thesis is seeking to participate. Essentially I am claiming that it is possible to show through epistemological argument that the public relations process is far more significant than it is commonly given credit for. It is significant because public relations - orthodox and *petit* - is the dominant modern manifestation of rhetoric as rhetoric is applied to many
of our significant economic, social and political life processes. But rhetoric – whether it goes under the guise of persuasion, presentation, preconceived orientations in symbolic expression or motivating language has been known since antiquity, and is being shown again by the rhetorical turn, to be highly influential in fixing our truths – our perceptions of reality. The next chapter will further argue for this coincidence between public relations and rhetoric and will strongly condemn forces within the public relations industry and public relations academia which try to obscure this coincidence. This obscuring takes on a number of guises one of which is the way that public relation is defined. I suggest that often public relations is defined in a way calculated to disguise what it is, rather than to show what it is. This leads me to draft my own definition of public relations in its orthodox guise. I reserve a description of the petit mode of public relations to practical examples in the case studies chapters.
Chapter Three

Public Relations Defined As: “Privatised Rhetoric For Privatised Governance”

Introduction
This chapter builds on the notion of conceptual relativism and the consequent implications for the vulnerability of understanding. It draws attention to widespread thinking which is in line with that of Putnam, which argues that philosophy is now post-objectivist in nature. Post-objectivism is another way of expressing the notion that there is no simple, empirical world which stands apart from our thinking and which is immune from the ways we perceive it. Previous religious or positivist-scientific thinking may have implied there was a simple immutable world which we could unproblematically know. Mainstream thinking of our era rejects this notion. Putnam deals with this mutability through the notion of conceptual relativism. By conceptual relativism, as we have seen, Putnam means that “facts”, that is logically argued or empirically apparent matters, can none the less still be validly conceptually viewed in different ways. For instance the facts surrounding abortion can be seen in different ways as can the facts surrounding how the environment should be handled or facts to do with all sorts of economic or social issues. This chapter suggests that dominant rhetorical forces – that is orthodox public relations – has its raison d’etre in mediating the ways we think in a world which rejects objectivism. This is the same as saying public relations attempts to manage conceptual relativism. I start chapter three by reviewing public relations academics’ present appropriation of rhetorical theory. I discuss the ways that some advanced theorists of public relations have drawn from some aspects of the notion of rhetoric over the last decade. I suggest Heath’s 2001 writings are the latest stage of this appropriation and that there is a difficulty with this appropriation because Heath does not apply rhetoric in the context of post-objectivism or conceptual relativism. Such a contextualisation is warranted in view of Aristotle’s realisation that rhetoric is the counterpart to dialectic. That is, persuasion and presentation strongly influences the ways we see the facts. Later in this chapter I go on to suggest a main reason why writers on public relations do not contextualise rhetoric in this way. This is because orthodox public relations denies its rhetorical nature for ideological reasons. These are reasons to do with its
purpose and history. (I review public relations’ history in chapter four.) After a discussion of rhetoric and objectivity I offer a review of the official definitions of public relations and of the attempts to distance public relations from the notions of persuasion and propaganda, as an illustration of this ideologically motivated denial of public relations as rhetoric. The implication is, if public relations denies it is rhetoric, or even if it is coy about this possibility, its academics may not see the relevance of public relations to conceptual relativism and post-objectivism. The results of this ideological denial, and thus the obstruction to fully applying the rhetorical turn to public relations is, I suggest, alluded to by one of the 1990s pioneers of the rhetorical study of public relations when Toth says:

However, rhetorical studies of public relations may have reached their greatest concentration in the 1990s. Little followed the book of articles by Toth and Heath [Elizabeth Toth and Robert Heath] published in 1992. It may be that the rhetorical perspective has been too critical of public relations without the directions provided in these studies to further rhetoric’s critical aims (Toth. 2000. p141).

This downplaying of rhetoric motivates me into titling orthodox public relations: “privatised rhetoric for privatised governance” as an accurate and revealing description of orthodox public relations. However I reserve the notion of petit public relations, that is organised rhetoric expressed by non-dominant forces, for a different critique and a different definition which will arise from my case studies.

Public relations and the rhetorical turn

Two important components of what I mean by the phrase “privatised rhetoric for privatised governance”, involve the argument that: (1) The planning and implementation of public relations processes generally operate in the private sphere. The presence of public relations activity is often not publicly declared or noticed (Stauber & Rampton. 1995. p16; Bernays. 1928. p9; Cutlip. 1994; Minchie. 1998). The title of Cutlip’s 1994 unsurpassed, 800 page, 20th century history of American public relations is: The Unseen Power: Public Relations A History. Cutlip is a major, mainstream, public relations textbook author. (2) But while its operations are often unseen, public relations activities sometimes have
powerful effects. They shape many fundamental aspects of the ways we are governed and managed (Beder. 1997; Carey. 1995; Trento. 1992; Cutlip. 1994 & 1995; Ewen. 1996; Jones. 1999; Bernays. 1961, 1969 & 1970; Pimlott. 1951; Marchand. 1998). A major component of my argument for my new definition has been argued in chapter two where public relations both “orthodox” and “petit” was identified with rhetoric. Two principle notions of “rhetoric” were intended there. One was the classical sense of the term in which rhetoric was an important aspect of ancient Greek civilization. It was the art of persuasive oratory, the medium of the skillful exchange of important thoughts and ways of understanding. In this sense rhetoric was the process of mostly verbal activity and was particularly significant in the putative democratic political and legal processes of ancient Greek society (Brown. 1992; Vickers. 1988; Cockcroft & Cockcroft. 1992. p5; Ong. p109; Lawson-Tancred. 1991; Kennedy. 1974). Rhetoric in the above sense is recognised in many advanced studies of public relations as akin to, or the antecedent of, contemporary public relations. Perhaps more directly than Heath, Cheney & Dionisopoulos; Cheney; and Elwood have identified public relations or corporate communication as “rhetoric” in the above sense, that is as the product of the “corporate rhetor”:

Mediating structures [internal and external lobbying and pressure group activity of various kinds] also offer people possibilities for addressing the rhetorical challenge which we pose as “How to converse with a corporate Rhetor” (Cheney & Dionisopoulos. 1989. p150).

However rhetorical scholars have not yet come to terms with the nature of corporate rhetoric. A model that features the individual rhetor must be complimented with one that accounts for the corporate, collective nature of much of contemporary rhetoric (Cheney. 1992. p178).

In fact, Aristotle’s (1991) most recent translation includes “a theory of civic discourse” as a subtitle to Rhetoric. Bernays views Aristotle as a public relations forbear who synthesizes rhetoric, public relations and politics…Aristotle defines rhetoric as; “an ability in each particular case, to see the available means of
persuasion” and accordingly devotes one of his three rhetorical forms to deliberative discourse, the rhetorical instances that address public and private policy resolutions (Elwood. 1995. p5).

The other sense of rhetoric which will be explored in this chapter is the theoretical notion of rhetoric involved in the rhetorical turn. The rhetorical turn, as we have seen, involves a revision and a deepening of our understanding of the processes of rhetoric along the lines founded by Kenneth Burke and Chaim Perelman among others. Burke describes “man” (sic) as: “the symbol-using-animal” (Burke. 1973. p3)7. Writing about “new rhetoric” Burke argues:

For rhetoric as such is not rooted in any past condition of human society. It is rooted in an essential function of language itself, a function that is wholly realistic and is continually born anew; the use of language as a symbolic means of inducing cooperation in beings that by nature respond to symbols (Burke.1969. p43).

Burke is arguing that every utterance involves rhetoric. There is no neutrality in language in the sense required by those who presume we can have “pure” dialectic. For example if I just say: “G’day” I am simultaneously trying to persuade you – whether I’m conscious of it or not – that ‘I’m a friendly person’; and/or that I am a person worthy of being befriended; and/or that I am someone who uses the Australian larrikin mode of speech; and/or I am someone with an affected way of speaking; and so on. But the argument of the previous chapter was that in many respects and in many instances rhetoric is the same as public relations. Following this argument it is interesting to read Burke further substituting the concept “public relations” for the concept “rhetoric”:

…rhetoric [public relations] is properly said to be grounded in opinion. But we think that the relation between “truth” and the kind of opinion with which rhetoric [public relations] operates is often misunderstood. And the classical texts

7 Presumably in Burke’s day his “logological” anti-feminist use of the word “man” would not induce the lack of cooperation which its “logology” might today.
do not seem to bring out the point we have in mind, namely: The kind of opinion with which rhetoric [public relations] deals, in its role of inducement to action, is not opinion as contrasted to truth. There is the invitation to look at the matter…[from the perspective suggested by the public relations work] (Burke. 1969. p54). [my additions in square brackets]

So by equating public relations with rhetoric we might suggest that public relations is grounded in opinion – the opinion shown in the opinion polls8 which the practitioner has commissioned – and that it is about orienting people to think in certain ways with the potential for certain actions on their part. It (rhetoric and/or public relations) is not about telling untruths or substitute truths. It is about putting a particular inflection on knowledge, (the term “spin” seems relevant here)… “yes the president did such and such reprehensible thing.” Or “OK our factories admit to emitting greenhouse gases.” “but look at it this way”… “the president was reprehensible but the US economy is booming.” or “We produce emission but we keep a lot of people in work and we are trying to maintain this employment benefit while reducing the emissions over a long period.” In other words the task of rhetoric or public relations is not to countermand knowledge. Its effect is to give a certain direction to how knowledge is thought. This is perhaps a rather exaggerated and crass interpretation of what Burke really meant, but it perhaps gets across the point that there is an inevitably persuasive effect, an inevitable attempt to influence thought in possible directions in every utterance. One does not say G’day in isolation of the social influences which using that expression is bound to invoke.

This is not to overlook McCarthy’s and similar attacks on “rhetoric” as allegedly deployed by Derrida in the sense of a preposterous, purely idealistic invention of reason – words free floating and cut off from any referent and thus any sense which we can ever make of those words or what they depict. McCarthy contrasts that sort of allegedly nihilistic “rhetoric” to Habermas’s supposedly more grounded theories for the acquisition of reason. These are theories which, in contrast to Derrida’s, allegedly “maintain language’s capacity to solve problems” (McCarthy. 1994. pxiii). Burke construes rhetoric as the inevitable opinion directing effect innate to all interpersonal discourse. It is not the

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8 But see Habermas on “public opinion” in chapter ten.
opposite of logic or dialectic. It is the “counterpart of dialectic” (logical argument) (Burke 1969. p54; Aristotle. 1991. p66). That is, the already persuasive inflection (spin) is the condition in which argued ‘facts’ must be served up in order for them to have any acceptance – to be accepted as facts. Truths are not taken notice of unless they are packaged within certain rules of language which facilitate their acceptance in an unavoidably persuasive process. The studious academic is no more immune from this inherent factor of language than the most crass advertising person. The only way the academic can communicate in an effective and successful professional manner with her peers is through a process which “persuades” others that what she says is worth listening to. This is a process which might appear more low key than that employed by the advertising executive, but the process of convincing other academics of the value of the academic effort involves many similarities if perhaps in a more subtle style. For instance for her “truth” to be accepted there may need to be publication in a prestigious journal; good written and oral expression – in those journals and at conferences; the expositions need topicality; it may help if the academic has a fine reputation for good work, for a particular policy position, or for a particular political position. It might also help if the work promised solutions to intellectual, practical or humanitarian problems. All these and others are factors which are the counterpart to the actual dialectic of the academic’s work. For the work to “mean” anything the work inevitably will involve some of these rhetorical factors. They are not optional. While these factors have always been necessary, Wernick (1991) suggests how these rhetorical aspects have now been taken to dizzying heights in his chapter ‘The Promotional University’ in his book Promotional Culture.

If this view is allowed and if notions of rhetoric practical and theoretical, ancient and modern, are as closely associated with contemporary public relations as many public relations scholars admit, then ipso facto public relations as an aspect of contemporary social, political, commercial etc. discourses – can be argued to be important in the construction of many aspects of contemporary ways of understanding in society. Just as rhetoric is the aspect which frames or orients discursive “truths” as such, so public relations is the aspect which frames or orients many contemporary social, commercial, political and cultural truths. Public relations is to notions in complex contemporary society as rhetoric was to notions in simpler classical society. Rhetoric played a significant role in the
institutions and directions of ancient Greek society, including in the creation and maintenance of government, the courts and so on - through public, oral debate. Public relations plays a similar, but largely unseen role today through its organisation of mass persuasion drafted on computer screens in the back offices of consultancies and in-house public relations departments. In those back offices the particular rhetorical or public relations inflection (spin) to the particular matter of fact is worked upon just as happened in the ancient law courts and debating chambers of classical civilisation. In other words both rhetoricians and public relations people realise at some level what Burke states explicitly, that every fact will be uttered in a way which can motivate us to think of the issue it represents in such and such a way. If Burke can be thought of as dealing with the “science of rhetoric” public relations people and classical rhetoricians can be thought of as applying the “technology of rhetoric”.

But if the above arguments hold, current dominant ways of theorising public relations practice are thrown somewhat into question. This is because, as will be explored in chapter nine, contemporary textbooks of public relations tend to borrow their approaches to the theories of how public relations works from the positivist and empiricist branches of science. These textbook approaches are based on modernist, objectivist attitudes towards ontology despite the argument that public relations is an activity that, if it is carefully examined as above, can be seen as ‘rhetoric writ large’. But the contemporary theories of rhetoric, as explained in previous sections of this thesis, undermine the very epistemology of objectivism. The approach of new rhetoric posits reality as not empirically apprehendable. The approach of rhetoric or new rhetoric and by implication ‘advanced’ public relations theory is therefore ‘post’ or anti-objectivist. This situation, including relevance to McCarthy’s point (above), is summarised by Maneli. (1994):

The New Rhetoric rejects all absolutist and dogmatic ideas, but does not support absolute relativism either. While rejecting the existence of absolute truth it constitutes a method for endless search for truthful explanations and for enlightened practical activity… The New Rhetoric represents a consistent rationalism but rejects the excessive demands of Cartesian thinking and of formal logic…[it] asserts that there is not only one way to truth but many (Maneli. 1994. back cover).
That is, the rhetorical notion that we must always have to apprehend the world and ourselves via discourse and discourse which involves some sort of persuasion, challenges, or at least makes it difficult for us to see the possibility of a ready made existing objective reality, or at least an actually existing objective reality which is entirely separate from how the mind thinks about the world and describes the world via the use of language. This issue is illustrated in the chapter two account of Putnam’s schema of “internal” or “pragmatic” realism. In that schema Putnam’s notion of conceptual relativism suggests how different inflections can be put on the same “facts”. This approach avoids the need for there to be either the ready-made world of the objectivist or the total relativism which is attacked by McCarthy. In public relations texts this issue was touched on in Pearson (1989. p113). Pearson refers to Bernstein (1983). Bernstein describes the late 20th century philosophical disenchantment with scientific positivism. Scientific positivism involves the acceptance of proven “facts”. It implies that these “facts” exist with no bearing on how we think of and describe those “facts”. Pearson however does not pursue this philosophical discussion. This is a discussion which is argued in this thesis to have the potential to put public relations at the center of knowledge formation in contemporary society. Instead he uses the discussion of the trinity of “objectivism”, “relativism” and “inter-subjectivism” as an “analogue” – an analogy – for three phases of US, post-war public relations practice. In phase one (the 1950s) US corporations acted as if there was a real objective world which existed irrespective of how people thought or spoke about the world (objectivism). Public relations work was geared to assessing and responding to the timeless certainties of the way the world was and always would be. In phase two in the 1960s and 1970s the social climate became radicalised by Vietnam war protests, feminism, environmental concerns and so on. The presumed “objective” world had rudely changed. Corporations now thought the sort of world they were in moved fluidly with the contemporary discourse. This prompted them to unconditionally join the discourse, to envisage public relations as trying to understand and enable the organisation to fit in with an infinitely shifting set of ways of construing reality (relativism). In phase three, from the 80’s onward, corporations decided not to go along with all the cultural trends but to stand outside and use public relations techniques for planned interventions into social discourse in order to attempt to direct discourse and deliberately influence the direction of thought (inter-subjectivism). The latter approach –
inter-subjectivism – sounds nearest to a conceptual relativist approach to understanding the activity of public relations although this is not made explicit and it may be feared that inter-subjectivist approaches may still look very much like relativist approaches. What is at stake here is the effort to put public relations on a sound theoretical basis in the era of the rhetorical turn. This theoretical basis would be one which rejects objectivism – the ontological basis of much current orthodox public relations theory – as intellectually unsound. It would reject relativism as similarly intellectually unsound. These epistemologies have the danger of (1) presuming a world with a particular fixed set of pre-existing public interests (objectivism) or (2) presuming that the world is a tabula rasa in which any orientation of public interests can be created (relativism). Both of these approaches avail public relations for instrumental or patronising usage. In other words the powerful organisation either presumes the world works in a certain way and then creates its program to confirm that paradigm (objectivism), or the organisation presumes its program can create a world which works in any way it wants (relativism). Conceptual realism by contrast, which coincides with the notion of conceptual inflection on facts, and fits in with the idea of the rhetorical counterpart to dialectic, avoids either of these temptations for public relations to be used in either an instrumental or a patronising manner. It avoids a manner which presumes the emitters of the program know how the world works (objectivism) or how the world should work (relativism). Instead conceptual relativism – that is a proper application of rhetorical theory – acknowledges that there can be many different interpretations of the same facts. This acknowledgement signals the humble position which any rhetorician or public relations person must take towards mounting a campaign or an argument. It makes explicit that the public relations practitioner is specifically arguing for one particular notion of reality to be upheld in contradistinction from a number of others. As such public relations is seen transparently to be a persuasive process mounted by specific interests towards specific aims. Public relations thus emerges into the light of day as part of the democratic process and ceases to remain the “unseen power” of Cutlip’s phrase. This is the way public relations must be theorised if it is to be recognised as fulfilling an ethical role in society and if it is to be a respected university subject.

In the rest of this section we will:
(1) Review conventional definitions of public relations and critiques of these definitions.

(2) Consider the concepts of persuasion and propaganda in respect of public relations.

(3) Return to an argument to justify “privatised rhetoric for privatised governance” as an appropriate definition of public relations in view of the preceding discussion.

Conventional definitions of public relations and contemporary critiques

Public relations scholar James Hutton (1999) criticises public relations practitioners and academics for perpetuating an identity crisis for this activity by failing to: “consolidate and develop its basic tenets” (Hutton. 1999. p199). Hutton says the “void” has been filled by critics’ “monikers as spin, or spin control, or spin doctoring” (Ibid. p200). Hutton’s main criticism of standard contemporary definitions of public relations is that they fail to admit “public relations’ true [rhetorical] function in contemporary commerce and politics” (Ibid. p201). I have inserted the term “rhetorical” in the above quote. However I suggest that this insertion legitimately conveys Hutton’s stance in view of his significant concern with “persuasion”:

For example, the concept of persuasion is very much a part of everyday practice, yet few academic definitions include persuasion as a basic tenet. Similarly few academic or even practitioner organisations’ definitions of public relations address the issue of manipulating public opinion…(Ibid. p201).

Hutton also remarks on the tendency of standard definitions to: “ignore the practice of public relations for individuals or groups of people who are not formally organised.” and he decries a: “lack of the richness of thought and the eloquence of simplicity that characterised many of the historical definitions of the field” (Ibid. p202). Presumably Hutton is in favour of the definitional approach of one of the acknowledged “fathers” of public relations - Edward Bernays - who he quotes as saying: “Public relations is the

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9 Parents?
attempt, by information, persuasion and adjustment, to engineer public support for an activity, cause, movement or institution” (Ibid. p200). This quote is taken from Bernay’s 1955 book *The Engineering of Consent* which was reprinted up until at least 1969.

Bernay’s candidness, which is so unlike contemporary industry and academic definitions, is not far way from the opening section in Bernay’s 1928 book *Propaganda* which would have orthodox public relations academics and industry representatives even more aghast:

> The conscious and intelligent manipulation of the organised habits and opinions of the masses is an important element in democratic society. Those who manipulate this unseen mechanism of society constitute an invisible government which is the true ruling power of our country. We are governed, our ideas are moulded, our tastes formed, our ideas suggested, largely by men we have never heard of. This is a logical result of the way in which our democratic society is organised. Vast numbers of human beings must cooperate in this manner if they are to live together in a smoothly functioning society (Bernays. 1928. p9).

Such definitional “heresy” is of course welcomed by critics of public relations such as John Stauber – a joint author of *Toxic Sludge Is Good For You: Lies, Damn Lies and the Public Relations Industry* (1995). Discussing public relations on an Australian Broadcasting Corporation radio program Stauber said:

> Edward Bernays in particular was a really fascinating man, and he did not mess around; he was interviewed a few years ago…he said: ‘Yes I’m into propaganda and I just hope it’s propaganda and not impropaganda’…I love honest public relations (Stauber. 1999).

Hutton reviews definitions such as those of: mid to late mid 20th century American public relations authority Rex Harlow; that of the forty years editor of *Public Relations News*: Denny Griswold; and a definition emerging from a public relations firm. These will be listed below with contemporary definitions from public relations associations before
continuing discussion of some of Hutton’s criticism of them. I will also discuss the criticisms of public relations’ definitions mounted by Gordon (1997).

(A) Rex Harlow

Public Relations is the distinctive management function which helps establish and maintain mutual lines of communication, understanding, acceptance and cooperation between an organisation and its publics; involves the management of problems or issues; helps management to keep informed on and responsive to public opinion; defines and emphasizes the responsibility of management to serve the public interest; helps management keep abreast of and effectively utilize change, serving as an early warning system to anticipate trends; and uses research and sound and ethical communication as its principal tools (Harlow. 1976).

(B) Public Relations News (Denny Griswold)

Public Relations is the management function which evaluates public relations attitudes, identifies the policies and procedures of an individual or an organisation with the public interest, and plans and executes a program of action to earn public understanding and acceptance (quoted in Cutlip et. al. 1994. p3).

(C) Practitioners Sauerhaft & Atkins

Public relations is the art and science of creating, altering, strengthening or overcoming public opinion (Sauerhaft & Atkins of Burson Marsteller quoted in Hutton. 1999. p201).

(D) Public Relations Society of America (1)

Public relations helps an organization and its publics adapt mutually to each other. Often, it is a term used to describe both, a way of looking at an organization's performance and a program of activities.

The public relations function takes many forms in different organizations, including public information, investor relations, public affairs, corporate
communications, employee relations, marketing or product publicity, and consumer service or customer relations (http://www.prsa.org/careers.html 12/9/00).

(E) Public Relations Society of America (2)

A more comprehensive official statement on public relations adopted by the Public Relations Society of America Assembly in 1982 running to over 500 words says in parts:

Public relations helps our complex, pluralistic society to reach decisions and function more effectively by contributing to mutual understanding among groups and institutions. It serves to bring private and public policies into harmony. Public relations serves a wide variety of institutions in society such as business, trade unions, government agencies, voluntary associations...To achieve their goals, these institutions must develop effective relationships with many different audiences or publics...As a management function public relations encompasses the following...[variety of aspects including]...Anticipating, analysing and interpreting public opinion, attitudes, and issues that might impact for good or ill, the operations and plans of the organisation; Counseling management; Researching public opinion; Influencing public policy (quoted in Wilcox et. al. 1998. p7).

(F) Institute of Public Relations (UK)

Public relations is the discipline which looks after reputation, with the aim of earning understanding and support and influencing opinion and behaviour. It is the planned and sustained effort to establish and maintain goodwill and mutual understanding between an organisation and its publics (http://www.ipr.org.uk/Careers/careersframeset.htm 12/9/00).

(G) Public Relations Institute of Australia

Public relations is the management function concerned with effective communication. It includes research to understand issues and public attitudes which have an impact on an organisation; planning and implementing communication
activities to effect change; and evaluating the outcomes

(H) Public Relations Institute of New Zealand

Public relations practice shall be defined as the deliberate, planned and
sustained effort to establish and maintain mutual understanding and excellent
communications between an organisation and its publics
12/9/00).

Hutton suggests that in general, conventional definitions:

…tend to be focused more on the effects of public relations and/or the
specific tasks that practitioners engage in, rather than on its fundamental
purpose…they are normative or prescriptive rather than descriptive (Hutton. 1999.
p201).

We might carry out a brief analysis here using the definitions above to try to
confirm Hutton’s critique and to confirm the inclusion or exclusion of the concept
“persuasion”. The definitions are represented (A) to (H) by the letters attached to them.

**Effects – normative/prescriptive**

(A) Everything after “helps”- A mix of descriptive and normative/prescriptive.
(B) Everything after “which”- Mostly normative/prescriptive.
(C) Everything after “of”- Descriptive.
(D) “Helps to mutually adapt”- Normative/prescriptive.
(E) Everything from “helps” to “harmony”- Heavily normative/prescriptive.
(F) Everything from “which” to “behaviour”- A mix of descriptive and
normative/prescriptive.
(G) No such effects.
(H) No such effects.
Tasks

(A) Tasks implied in effects summarily.
(B) Tasks implied in effects very summarily.
(C) No tasks.
(D) Weak implication of tasks in second sentence.
(E) Strong description of tasks after “these institutions must develop”.
(F) Tasks implied in second sentence.
(G) Tasks implied in second sentence.
(H) –

Persuasion

(A) No “persuasion”.
(B) No “persuasion”.
(C) “Overcoming” – implied persuasion or propaganda.
(D) No “persuasion”.
(E) “Influence or change public policy” implies persuasion or propaganda.
(F) “Influencing opinion and behaviour” implies persuasion or propaganda.
(G) “Activities to effect change” weakly implies persuasion or propaganda.
(H) No “persuasion”.

The above brief analysis would appear to confirm most of Hutton’s criticisms. The reader is invited to review the above claims. If they are found to hold it confirms Hutton’s worrying point that many definitions of public relations obscure, rather than reveal, or at the very least – do not make plain – what this activity is all about. They concentrate on suggesting what the ethically normative effects of public relations should be and make general allusions to how these effects should be brought about. But, in general they do not deal with the deep-seated motivation behind these allusions. Some do not even deal with the practical activities involved, thus they do not reveal activity descriptions which would imply persuasion. For instance the definitions do not speak about “lobbying”, “motivating”, or “criticising”. These are activities involved in some public relations campaigns which would make it clear that public relations is a process of deliberate persuasion. Surely it is self evident that, to take a phrase from the definition which I imply is the “weakest” in the
above list – the New Zealand one – if an organisation is “establishing and maintaining mutual understanding” with its publics, it is doing that so that the management of the organisation will be persuaded of how to treat the public correctly. Also, as an ultimate consequence, the intention is that the public will ultimately be persuaded of the acceptableness and good intentions of the organisation. Except in the case of the industry definition, for whatever reason, it appears that there is a reluctance to make it clear why public relations is thought of, devised, implemented, and paid for, paid for sometimes to the tune of considerable sums of money. An organisation or an individual only enlists deliberate public relations techniques to their *modus operandi* in order to influence the thinking, attitudes and hopefully, ultimately the behavior of targeted publics towards that individual, organisation or some third party or client. But this conclusion puts public relations squarely into the realm which is also claimed by propaganda studies, be it “black” or “white” (evil or laudable) propaganda Jowett & O’Donnell (1986)\(^\text{10}\). We will be discussing public relations’ conceptual meeting with propaganda further below.

Gordon (1997) makes a very relevant and post-objectivist point when she begins her criticism of public relations definitions by drawing attention to the two-way effect of definitions. She points out that a definition of something is not always necessarily aimed at helping the reader to understand what the subject being defined “is”. It may be more about positioning the reader’s understanding. That is, a definition maybe more about prescribing how the reader should understand the subject according to the defining authority than about candidly enlightening the reader. Grunig (1989. p17-41 & 1992. p31-64) touches on a related point when he refers to “worldview” or “presuppositions” in public relations theory and models. Both Grunig and Gordon are of course drawing attention to a rhetorical matter in the sense discussed earlier and they ultimately open up the objectivist versus post-objectivist debate although we will not go into this for the moment. Gordon’s view on the issue is:

> Many communication scholars agree that definitions are inherently rhetorical and that the formation of definitions are social processes that shape reality…A successful new definition changes not only recognisable patterns of

\(^{10}\) Surely the terms “black” and “white” in this context are rather insensitive politically to contemporary ears?
behaviour but also our understanding of the world. Therefore definition is crucial to
the process that society employs to understand the world (Gordon. 1997. p58).

Gordon critiques a number of textbook definitions of public relations from the
perspective of the effects of the alleged, particular premises on which they are based. She
suggests that the inclusion of “management function” in definitions is intended to
rhetorically cast this activity as a management function, though in reality public relations
officers may not be among the top managers of an organisation. Gordon shares Hutton’s
criticism that definitions usually cast public relations as an activity performed by
“organisations” rather than by “individuals”, or towards an individual. This is because
definitions usually include the former term – “organisation” but usually exclude the latter
term – “individual”. But Gordon’s strongest criticism is that most definitions of public
relations maintain a myth that public relations is a “mutual”, or a “symmetrical two-way”
process. A symmetrical two-way process – the model strongly advocated by Grunig and
his colleagues – implies that everyone has an equal say and is equally listened to and has
their wishes equally respected in public relations activity. Both Gordon and Hutton claim
this is not the case and public relations is normally an asymmetric or unbalanced activity
where communication flow and the purported effects are mostly one way. Grunig et. al
(1992) wrote their 660 page research project *Excellence in Public Relations and
Communication Management* in an attempt to refute the notion that asymmetrical public
relations is effective. Their project is an attack on the asymmetric mode which they confirm
as the dominant mode of public relations work:

Each of these three quotes comes from a practitioner who works or has
worked in major public relations firms or for major corporations. Each quote
describes what we consider to be the dominant worldview in public relations – the

Despite this authoritative view the rhetoric of symmetry or “mutuality” can be seen
mythically conjuring up reality in some of the above definitions:

(A) “mutual lines of communication, understanding, acceptance”.

46
(B) “identifies the policies and procedures of an individual or an organisation with the public interest”.

(C) (this definition is clearly asymmetrical).

(D) “helps an organisation and its public adapt mutually”.

(E) (The usual use of the term “pluralistic society” in the political context implies non-elite. This definition has therefore already rhetorically cast the nature of society before it defines a concept of public relations which is appropriate to that society. It then goes on to use the terms:) “contributing to mutual understanding” and “it serves to bring private and public policies into harmony”.

(F) “establish and maintain goodwill and mutual understanding”.

(G) The Australian definition avoids casting public relations as necessarily symmetrical.

(H) “establish and maintain mutual understanding”

Like Hutton, Gordon condemns the absence of the term “persuasion” in public relations definitions (Ibid. p61). In an e.mail to me Gordon said:

That article [Gordon. 1997] argues that perceptions of "persuasion" (Note that many people out there would say that public relations activities constitute persuasion) as inherently unethical are tied to the perceptions that less dominant actors have meaning dictated to them by more dominant actors (a Marxist world view assumption) (Gordon. 2000).

Gordon can be said to resort to the rhetorical tradition of Burke and Pereleman combined with symbolic interactionism in the tradition of Mead and Blumer (Gordon. 1997. p63) in her project to clarify our understanding of public relations. The rhetorical and “new rhetoric” tradition, as argued earlier, casts persuasion as an inevitable aspect of language and by implication an inevitable aspect of symbolic communication. Gordon sees

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11 Bracketed text written by Gordon.
12 Bracketed text written by Gordon.
symbolic interactionism as: “...the construction of meaning and social reality through symbols and social interaction” (Gordon. 1997. p63). She says:

By utilizing Blumer’s advancements concerning symbolic interaction, I advance that public relations is the active participation in social construction of meaning. Such a definition is admittedly broad and throws us into a paradox long addressed by students of rhetoric: either public relations is everything or nothing...The organisation rather than being a dominant player capable of assigning meaning for others, is more realistically cast as one player among many in a larger social dynamic that continually forms meanings (Ibid. p64).

Gordon sees her approach as a way out of the Marxist paradigm which, according to her, has shaped much thought about public relations:

Most notably, symbolic interactionism offers an alternative to the Marxist ideology that has guided so much of our thought (Ibid. p64).

Hutton opposes Gordon’s approach:

...Gordon’s proposal that “public relations is the active participation in social construction of meaning” in keeping with Blumer’s symbolic interactionism, lacks discriminant validity. Such definitions which fail to distinguish public relations, not just from other communication fields, but also from large areas of sociology, psychology and cultural studies, simply muddy the waters (Hutton. 1999. p202).

Hutton goes on to offer his casting of public relations as: “managing strategic relationships”. In coming to his choice of words for this definition Hutton rejects the inclusion of the word “persuasion” which he says is too closely thought of as the activity of the advertiser or the sales person. This is surprising in view of Hutton’s above discussed acknowledgement that public relations very much involves persuasion. In Gordon’s terms
Hutton is embarking on a definition project somewhat in the tradition of the rhetorical casting of prescriptive ideals rather than descriptive pragmatics. This can be argued to be so in terms of the use of the word “management” – a term problematised by Gordon – and more especially in the normative demand for “symmetry” à la the Grunig tradition. Hutton’s overtly rhetorical intention is apparent in his section:

“Managing” implies planning, control, feedback and performance measurement. “Strategic” implies planning, prioritization, action orientation and a focus on relationships most relevant to client organizational goals. Finally “relationships” implies effective communication, mutual adaptation, mutual dependency, shared values, trust and commitment (Ibid. p209).

An obvious criticism of this schema is that the implications under “strategic” and “relationships” would appear to be contradictory. How can public relations: “focus on relationships most relevant to client goals” while at the same time it involves: “shared values, trust and commitment”? However a wider criticism would be that Hutton fails to sufficiently deal with the rhetorical questions posed earlier in this paper and touched on by Gordon. Hutton is quite willing to use the rhetorical process in his schema – the casting of meaning via the connotations of the words he picks. But he does not deal with the ways his audience will be, he hopes, persuaded to think in certain ways as a result of his choice of words, his academic arguments and the fact that these words and arguments are published in a particular academic text. By the same token Hutton seems unwilling to enter into the mechanics of the way the activities of public relations continually attempt to define the social world in the ways which the public relations practitioner and her client want it defined. Hutton criticises approaches like Gordon’s which he sees as too wide in defining public relations. I would like to support Gordon in this argument even thought I am not quite sure what Gordon means by “Marxist ideology guiding so much of our thought”. In my opinion the legacy of the neo-Marxist Frankfurt School, which is important to understanding contemporary public relations, is worryingly absent in most writings on this topic. However I agree with Gordon to the extent that, in particular, the first section and the concluding arguments in this chapter support the notion that public relations programs and
campaigns embark on a rhetorical process to construct social reality through the uses of words and symbols and that that activity, in common with all communication activity, à la Burke, inevitably involves elements of persuasion. I will be arguing that the sort of social reality which people perceive, governs their thoughts, attitudes and ultimately influences their behaviour. A study of public relations is therefore not unlike a study of culture, placing it at the centre of the academy – a possibility which Hutton seems to want to specifically rule out. I will further be arguing a point which Hutton and Gordon and other definers tend to leave out – that this rhetorical process is generally constructed in private. This view aligns with that of right wing critic of public relations Marvin Olasky. Olasky (1987) petitions for a more laissez-faire model of corporatism and decries the way corporations and government sometimes cooperate to regulate prices, business practices and other matters in a way which he views as anti-competitive (Olasky. 1987. p1-6). Olasky suggests corporations have to pander to public opinion to win and maintain support for these governmental processes. As a consequence, because of the confidential nature of many corporate matters, corporations’ public relations people often face an ethical crisis when they have to appear to be open with the public. If they are not open they risk alienating public opinion and thus losing government support. He suggests:

Public relations practitioners who have proclaimed the importance of answering reporters’ questions cannot give a direct “no comment” because they have agreed that those words are illegitimate. Therefore manipulation of reporters to avoid straightforward refusals has become standard procedure (Olasky. 1987. p6).

Also:

With courtesy but firmness public relations managers should learn to tell overly-demanding fundraisers, reporters or politicians, “None of your business” (Ibid. p151).

Olasky’s view reinforces the point that although public relations may be manifested in public, it is devised and operated within and from the private realms of
organisations. This point about the underlying “private” nature of “public” relations will be expanded in the conclusion to this part of the thesis. Combining these arguments I will argue that public relations should be defined as “privatised rhetoric for privatised governance”.

**Concepts of persuasion and propaganda in respect of public relations.**

In this section I will be arguing that most public relations textbook writers make an artificial distinction between public relations and propaganda or that they fail to include the term where it is appropriate. I will be suggesting that the flimsy distinction between the two terms rests largely on the definitional obscurantism which is suggested above. This is the obscurantism that “proper” public relations is symmetrical and mutual and that it consequently does not involve persuasion or that the level of persuasion is so minimal as not to require serious attention. Following from this, the argument will be that what is usually called “public relations”, but could equally be called “propaganda”, does often involve significant levels of persuasion and that public relations is rarely purely “mutual”. The argument will be that even where symmetry can be argued to exist in terms of mutual respect, equal access to information and the rare instances where people have equal power and resources, persuasion and rhetoric are always present. Persuasion and rhetoric are always present because the *a priori* characteristics of communication mean that, *à la* Burke, people who communicate are always engaged in persuasive acts. That is, as previously argued, there can never be a “purely”, or “un-touched”, or un-mediated” extra-discursively pure objective world which the communication is about. “The world” or “reality” always has to be apprehended through language or symbols which are innately persuasive or rhetorical because they, and the form of the discourse they are set into, always has a purpose to incline us to see things in a certain way. As a consequence the communication is always orienting (attempting to persuade) the receiver to “think about” the posited object in a certain manner. In this way the origin of “propaganda” from the notion “propagate” – to grow or form something – in this case opinions – can be seen as indistinguishable from the overwhelming instances of public relations usage. The only real distinction between public relations and propaganda is that public relations is an aspect which is claimed by its proponents, by definition, to be more socially responsible and legitimate than these
proponents’ definition of propaganda. This claim of distinction and legitimacy for public relations, of course, is not always accepted by those outside the public relations fraternity and sorority.

Another complication arises that writers on propaganda often discuss the legitimate use of propaganda for laudable ends framing it as no worse, and indeed perhaps even more open, honest and ethical than some questionable public relations initiatives. Perhaps a more clear distinction between public relations and propaganda is that propaganda is clearly associated with persuasion and usually accepted by its proponents to be associated with persuasion. Public relations on the other hand is not usually openly associated with persuasion by its proponents.

This latter distinction, when further argued will allow me to attempt to distinguish between what I will call “propaganda” and what I will call “mere public relations”. The former involves activities which are clearly programs aimed at getting people to think in different ways – to persuade them to see the world differently. These are programs of propaganda. For instance the current program in Australia to convince opponents that smoking in restaurants and pubs is a bad thing and should be banned by my definition is a program of propaganda. It involves the attempt to change the thinking and attitudes of people. On the other hand a program which merely sets out to remind people that smoking is bad for them, a program which agrees with the mind set people already hold is “mere public relations”. Both activities are persuasive, but one is persuasive in a stronger sense. The propaganda approach demanding a change in the law is clearly persuasive. The public relations approach reminding people of health matters does not demand any particular action or any particular change of behaviour or thinking. It merely tries to remind people of what they may be already thinking. The mere public relations approach tries to look for common ground in terms of mutual understandings that smoking is bad. Mutual ground in agreeing that one should stop smoking gels with definitions of public relations which see it as a mutual activity. It is none the less a persuasive activity if a more subtle one than propaganda and it is asynchronous in the sense that communication is largely one way. To give another example: an environmental campaign which tries to encourage people to reduce energy consumption in the home by the conventional means of better insulation, buying more efficient machinery, hanging clothes out rather than using an electric dryer.
would be “mere public relations”. This is because many people, however slightly, already hold a worldview that these measures are appropriate, sometimes simply for reasons of economy. There is a bid for mutual understanding – a tapping into this pre-existing attitude. The subtlety involved in massaging existing ideas in this way might incline practitioners to claim that they are trying to reach mutual understandings… “why…you thought of it yourself?” they might say – in order to enhance the possibility of the target audience acting on its own behalf without suspecting manipulation. None the less, however benign and however beneficial the objective of such a “mutual” campaign the campaign is designed to manipulate and to persuade. It is asynchronous, not synchronous. So despite the special use of the term “mutuality” in such a campaign the campaign is still asynchronous persuasion and any perpetuation of the mythology that it is not is more fuel to cynicism about public relations. A campaign on behalf of more radical environmental critics which tries to seriously get families to consider buying smaller homes with less rooms next time they move, in order to save energy, would step out of line with usual worldviews – well beyond the ordinary bounds of “mutual” thoughts and outlooks. This campaign would have to propagate quite new ideas about appropriate modes of modern life rather than just massage existing ideas.

The latter would not be a mutual exercise as it would require a campaign of overt persuasion which could be called propaganda. A program to maintain good relations between a factory and local residents whom the factory did not inconvenience much and to whom it supplied jobs and other economic advantages would be “mere public relations”. If however the factory decided to double its capacity involving temporary building work and other longer term problems of noise, visual and other forms of pollution, including a significant increase in truck movements in the neighborhood, then a campaign of “propaganda” would be required. That is there would be a need for a clearly persuasive initiative to get people to accept what may otherwise very likely be unacceptable to them. The same division can be argued for the three case studies in this thesis. They are about struggles over public opinion in respect of: (1) the attempted implementation of biosolids schemes (the use of sewage sludge as farm fertilizer) in the face of local community opposition; (2) whether universities should be governed using commercial or collegiate culture; (3) inter alia, central government road building and privatised transport systems
versus the public transport and anti-road building desires of local communities and their regional governments. Although these case studies are presented as examples of activities involving public relations contests, in the light of the above discussion they could be assigned to that type of public relations more properly described as propaganda.

Support for this differentiation between propaganda and ‘mere public relations’ can be claimed from the discussion of a parallel argument in *The New Rhetoric* – the Perelman & Olbrechts-Tytecs book, (1969 – originally 1958), which is frequently cited in the literature of the movement of that name. The parallel arises in Perelman & Olbrechts-Tytecs’ discussion of the contrast between propaganda and education. They suggest:

> Whereas the propagandist must, as a preliminary, gain the goodwill of his audience, the educator has been commissioned by a community to be the spokesman for the values it recognises…(Ibid. p52).

In this section Perelman & Olbrechts-Tytec are suggesting that education, in a certain sense, involves the epidictic form of discourse. Epidictic means that aspect of speech which is elaborative rather than argumentative. They give the example of a funeral oration. It is seldom appropriate to say anything controversial or argumentative in a funeral oration. Such an oration would nearly always review the known, favourable facts about the deceased and sums up the congregation’s agreed, positive feelings about him or her. This is the speech form at most, non-contentious formal occasions. Perelman & Olbrechts-Tytec suggest that the epidictic form parallels education in that a community generally approves what is going to be taught to its children before it is taught. Teaching is therefore uncontroversial. It only gets called propaganda if teachers start saying things which the community has not previously approved as the view of the world which should be conveyed:

> Epidictic discourse, as well as education, is less directed towards changing beliefs than to strengthening adherence to what is already accepted. Propaganda, on the other hand, profits from the spectacular aspect of the visible changes it seeks to, and sometimes does bring about (Ibid. p54).
Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca’s distinction between education and propaganda would seem to be in sympathy with the argument expressed above in respect of public relations and propaganda. The adjective “educative” or the noun “education” is sometimes applied to the work of public relations. Public relations people would certainly see education as within their purview. For example in their chapter ‘Corporate Public Relations’ Baskin & Aronoff (1992) suggest:

Economic understanding programs for employees should be built on the specifics of corporate finances, activities and economics as they affect the individual…To be effective for any audience, economic education must be communicated objectively, letting the facts speak for themselves (Ibid. p432).

Also:

In most educational relations programs, public relations practitioners develop materials related to the work of their organisation to supplement existing curricular materials (Grunig & Hunt. 1984).

Other writers when defining public relations attribute a significant role to public relations people as: “interpreters” of philosophies, policies and opinions between publics and managers (Seitel. 1998. p8); and “sensitive communicators who explain the goals and methods of individuals, organisations and government” (Wilcox. et. al. 1998). These are clearly activities close to education. Put together with the notion of the “mutual” and the “symmetrical” it might even be argued that public relations itself is presented as if it were largely to do with the epidictic function. This perhaps it too strong a claim as probably few people would accept that public relations was not to do with influencing opinion in a stronger manner than that implied by the epidictic. However based on the criticisms above about the public relations industry’s reluctance to advertise its persuasive role and its inclination to emphasise the non-controversial - the “goodwill” and “mutual” aspect of its operations - it is perhaps valid to compare Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca’s distinction
between education and propaganda with the suggested distinction between “mere public relations” and propaganda. We will now go on to look at the historical association between the terms “public relations” and “propaganda” and to emphasise the point that originally these terms were closely associated. The association lasted until propaganda gained serious negative connotations through its appropriation by extreme and sometimes abhorrent political forces in the second quarter of the 20th century. The argument will be that it is justified for us to go back to an earlier, weaker sense of the word “propaganda” in order to make plain the submergence or obscuring of the propaganda aspect of public relations. The *Oxford Concise Dictionary of Politics*, Ed Iain McLean (1996) says the word Propaganda entered common usage as:

…attempts by totalitarian regimes to achieve comprehensive subordination of knowledge to state policy. Based on the desire of fascists, Nazis and Bolsheviks to develop legitimacy and social control overcoming the broadly based cultural hegemony of antecedent regimes… (Ibid. 1996).

Other authors however point to additional reasons for the stigmatising of the term. These include: (1) excessive and exaggerated use of partisan publicity on the allied side in the First World War (Grunig. 1993; Cutlip. 1994. p106); (2), “propaganda” carried out between the wars on behalf of monopoly industrialists to gain unfair commercial advantage, such as by the electrical utilities in the US (Cutlip. 1994. p183); (3) contests between political ideologies, particularly to do with opposition to “Marxism” (O’Sullivan et. al.. 1989. p186); (4) a general feeling of the loss of political power and individual identity in US mass society dominated by corporations and their publicity machines (Ewen. 1996. p174; Dewey. 1931. p42-43); (5) the later use of the “propaganda model” as a means of theorising the maintenance of inequities in society by effects of the mass media (Herman & Chomsky. 1988. p1-2; McQuail. 1994. p367). Writers both on public relations and on propaganda point to a common origin before the bifurcation. We can see this commonality if we compare these representative extracts from authors on the different concepts:
Propaganda, in the most neural sense, means to disseminate or promote particular ideas. It is from the Latin – “congregation de propaganda fide” – meaning congregation for propagating the faith of the Roman Catholic Church (Jowett & O’Donnell. 1986. p15).

The word propaganda was born in the 17th century when the Catholic Church set up its Congregatio de Propaganda, “congregation for the propagation of the faith.” Although propaganda became a pejorative term in the wake of World War 1, it continues to be a part of today’s public relations in a very real sense. The two terms are still synonymous in many citizens’ minds (Cutlip. 1994. pxiv).

Like Cutlip, most textbook writers on public relations introduce the subject with an observance of the Congregatio de Propaganda antecedents. However they then usually ignore this relationship or attempt to differentiate public relations from propaganda which often seems hard to do. For instance the adjacency of the two activities is touched on in Baskin & Aronoff (1992). They claim that undue attention should not be attached to the notion of “propaganda” in the sense of Congregatio de Propaganda because spreading the word was in fact the purpose of the church. In other words this was not a specially contrived activity. Instead they draw attention to modern public relations as: “a product of the recognition of the power of public opinion and competition among institutions for public support” (Baskin & Aronoff. 1992. p25). They avoid directly dealing with the concept of propaganda in its modern sense. Jefkins (1984) by contrast in one of his earlier public relations textbooks tackles the problem head on:

This [propaganda] is yet another form of communication which is often quite wrongly regarded as PR. The two could not be more different, if only because to be successful PR must be credible, whereas propaganda is liable to invite suspicion, or at least disagreement. The problem is sometimes to distinguish between the propaganda and the PR elements in information issued by, for instance government departments. Propaganda would be aimed at keeping the government in
power but PR would be aimed at getting its services understood and used properly. (Jefkins 1984. p6).

This rather simplistic attempt at a distinction has obvious flaws. The distinction is not repeated in Jefkins’s later textbooks. Instead he simply refers to the practice of propaganda in a derogatory manner. A brief but perhaps a more thoughtful consideration of the adjacency is described in the textbook by Wilcox et. al. (1998):

Advertising and public relations messages for commercial purposes, however, do use several techniques associated with propaganda. The most common are the following: [politicians are ordinary folk like you; testimonial from a celebrity; come join our bandwagon; over-representing the facts on one side of the argument; associating the argument with a concept or person the public are already sympathetic to; associating the argument with attractive generalities such as “freedom”, “democracy”, “justice”] \(^{13}\). A student of public relations should be aware of these techniques if only to make certain that he or she doesn’t intentionally use them to deceive and mislead the public (Wilcox et. al. p228-229).

The artificial distinction between the notion of public relations and propaganda has arisen essentially because of the social role of public relations as explained in my thesis section entitled Public Relations and US Political-Cultural History. In a nutshell that section argues that public relations was in fact an invention of the ‘Progressive Era’, a rhetorical project to reshape the American psyche in a way which preserved and advanced the interests of the US corporations and the form of capitalist culture which they represented. It is my contention that the process of this construction of subjectivity has now gone so far that it has become naturalised for all but the most strident critics such as Chomsky and Ewen. Public relations writers now largely fail to acknowledge that the activity they are writing about is to do with persuasion, rhetoric and propaganda. I suggest the differentiation between public relations and propaganda justified by arguments to do with extreme politics such as Nazism is a simplification if not obscurantism. Some of the

\(^{13}\) Actual words, but contraction of what Wilcox wrote.
common dictionary definition of propaganda fit well with a description of what happens in the public relations process. I am not arguing that all aspects of the following dictionary definition of propaganda apply to an industry which at least attempts to maintain ethical respectability. I am, however, arguing that many of the characteristics do apply to public relations as well as to propaganda:

1. the systematic propagation of a given doctrine. 2. the particular doctrines or principles propagated by an organisation or movement. 3. dissemination of ideas, information or rumour for the purpose of injuring or helping an institution, a cause or a person. 4. doctrines, arguments, facts spread by deliberate effort through any medium in order to further one’s cause or to damage an opposing cause. 5. a public action or display aimed at furthering or hindering a cause. (The Macquarie Concise Dictionary. 2nd edition. eds. Delbridge & Bernard).

It is interesting to see how public relations and propaganda were closely associated in the early days of modern public relations. Certainly these were the days before the concerns of propaganda use by the US government, totalitarian regimes and before the height of concerns about the effects of the domestic mass media. However I suggest these were also the days before the “Americanisation” – of the US psyche. These were the days before Dewey’s lament that individuals had surrendered a large part of their personality to the utilitarian aims of the corporation – the days before the corporatisation of people – that is the internalisation of the values of the corporation through a process borne by the effects of public relations, propaganda, advertising, the mass media and consumerism (Dewey. 1931. p42-43) (see my history chapter). They were the days when the individuality and consequently the polity of the US had not attained its current uniformity, the days when the Socialist Party still commanded 6% of the vote in presidential elections. By contrast to that era, the current era of political uniformity in the US is one where the association of public relations with propaganda and thus the overtones of “ideology” or radical politics would provoke considerable cognitive dissonance among the average American. As a consequence, public relations’ synonymy with propaganda becomes literally “un-thinkable”
especially within the particular cognoscenti which is charged with continually justifying a political-cultural system distinguished by the dominance of the large, now global corporations. An excellent example of this tendency is the criticism by the present day public relations cognoscenti as represented by the highly regarded Scott Cutlip of some of Bernays’ early writing:

In 1928, Liveright published Bernays’ second major book, *Propaganda*, which set back his efforts to clarify the function of public relations and to boot, handed the infant field’s critics a club with which to bludgeon it. In this book, Bernays called public relations the new propaganda and expanded the thesis of *Crystallizing Public Opinion*. His was an inept public relations decision – to put it mildly. Surely by this time, Bernays knew what every seasoned practitioner knows today: The manner in which a disseminated message is interpreted by the receiver is largely determined by the context in which the message is delivered – the prevailing climate of opinion (Cutlip. 1994.182 –183).

What I find interesting here is that Cutlip does not take issue with the suggestion that propaganda can in fact be public relations or vice versa. Rather Cutlip takes an outraged instrumentalist position and reverts to the language of scientism: “receiver”. He shies away from more human phraseology which might acknowledging the ability of people to be able to judge for themselves what is true. To me this is a clear indication of the cognitive dissonance suggested above. Cutlip is not attempting to take part in rational debate. He is immured within the ideology that says it is unthinkable to equate public relations with propaganda. He is in fact engaged in a propaganda campaign, but he is so far inside that campaign that he is either unaware of it or he is loathe to admit it. Below are sections from the writings of Edward Bernays and the other acknowledge founding father of public relations, Ivy Lee, which show how the inter-relationship between public relations and propaganda was totally unremarkable in the first quarter of the twentieth century. (These founding fathers are discussed in my history section.) Their extracts are followed by passages from Jowett and O’Donnell (1986); McDavid and Harari (1968); and Lasswell (1941) who all provide ammunition for the thesis that the distinction between public
relations and propaganda is in important respects a false one. Writing before the term “public relations” had gained common currency, and thus without the benefit of the term, the elder of the two acknowledged “fathers” of public relations, Ivy Lee, relied heavily on the term “propaganda” to describe his trade. Bernays writes that “public relations” was a term which had been used in public utilities and railways by the time of the extract from Lee below was written, however Bernays claims to have used it first in the sense of “counsel on public relations” in the period 1919 to 1923 (Bernays. 1970. p79).

A great many people object to what they call propaganda. For instance, last Sunday I read in the papers a speech by the President of the United States, delivered to the Association of Newspaper Editors, in Washington, last Saturday. In the course of his speech Mr Coolidge said: “Propaganda seeks to present a part of the facts, to distort their relations, and to force conclusions which could not be drawn from a complete and candid survey of all the facts.” Then he says later on: “Of real education and of real information we cannot get too much; but of propaganda…we cannot get too little.” Will you kindly tell me of any situation in human history which has ever been presented to the people in the form of a candid survey of all the facts? (Lee. 1925. p17-18).

Lee expands on his point that it is legitimate to give a [propaganda] view of the facts because, in the words of Walter Lippman, there are hundreds of thousands of government employees occupying more departments, bureaus and commissions “than you can shake a stick at”. Nobody would be able to read all the detail of all the output of these departments. As a consequence: “somebody has to pick out an act here and there for the citizen to notice” (Lippman in Lee. 1925. p19-20).

That is the whole process with reference to propaganda. It is a bad word; I wish I had some substitute for it, but after all it means the effort to propagate ideas, and I do not know any real derivative to substitute for the word: all that can be involved in propaganda is a demand which the public is entitled to make, that when
it is given information upon which it is expected to form conclusions, it shall know
who is doing the telling, who is responsible for the information (Ibid. p22-23).

In his 1923 book *Crystallizing Public Opinion* Bernays gives his views on the
interchangeability of the terms public relations and propaganda which so outraged Cutlip:

Observe how sincerely each side of [a manufacturers-government dispute on
tariff protection] call even the verifiable facts and figures of the other by the dread
name “propaganda”. Should the importers submit figures showing that wages could
be raised and the prices to the consumers reduced, their adherents would be gratified
that such educational work should be done among the public and that the
newspapers should be so fair minded as to publish it. The manufacturers on the
other hand will call such material “propaganda” and blame either the newspaper
which publishes those figures or the economist who compiled them, or the public
relations counsel who advised collating the material. The only difference between
“propaganda” and “education” really is in the point of view. The advocacy of what
we believe in is education. The advocacy of what we don’t believe in is propaganda

Bernays here seems to coincide with my and the Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca
views, expressed above that the attempt to foster views which are not immediately accepted
can be termed “propaganda”. Ipso facto if present day public relations insists that it is a
“mutual” process uninvolved in contention or “persuasion”, then it is no wonder that
Bernays’ views are criticised by Cutlip and other proponents of “orthodox” public relations.
I of course take the view that Bernays is right and is a much clearer definer of the practice
of public relations. Similarly Bernays’ “inept” *Propaganda* (see above quote from Cutlip.
1994. p183) hardly seems to state anything but the actual process of what goes on outside
the description of the public relations cognoscenti. There are also overtones of Mayhew and
Burke’s “logology”, (discussed in chapter one) which imply chains of understanding terms
and my previous suggested notion of an “economy of discourse”:
In theory, every citizen makes up his mind on public questions and matters of private conduct. In practice, if all men had to study for themselves the abstruse economic, political and ethical data involved in every question, they would find it impossible to come to a conclusion about anything. We have voluntarily agreed to let an invisible government sift the data and high spot the outstanding issues so that our field of choice shall be narrowed to practical proportions. From our leaders and the media they use to reach the public we accept the evidence and the demarcation of issues bearing upon public questions...In theory everybody buys the best and cheapest commodities offered him on the market. In practice, if everyone went around pricing, and chemically testing before purchase, the dozens of soaps or fabrics or brands of bread that are for sale, economic life would become hopelessly jammed. To avoid such confusion society consents to have its choice narrowed. Its ideas and objects are brought to its attention through propaganda of all kinds. There is consequently a vast and continuous effort going on to capture our minds in the interests of some policy or commodity or idea (Bernays. 1928. p10-11).

These views of Bernays’ of course look very worrying *vis-à-vis* democracy. However, is he not describing how we ultimately form our political and personal opinions and our consumer choices? Some of our preferred “invisible governments” are not necessarily the governments which are in power, but it is hard to see how, as language using individuals, we can be anything but directed by the prevailing economy of discourse – with its rationing of the concepts made available to us whether for political reasoning or our behaviour as consumers. Surely this is the message of both Foucault and of Habermas? Other treatments of the concept “propaganda” are included below to bolster the argument that the term “propaganda” substantially covers the same ground as the term “public relations”.

Can the citizen of democracy remain true to the standards of democratic society and engage in the practice of public relations which includes the various branches of propaganda, publicity, advertising and information?...No doubt the most comforting thought to the expert on public relations and his employer is that
the propagandist is a species of advocate, and that there are many well established ways of justifying the function of advocacy. As an advocate the propagandist can think of himself as having much in common with the lawyer. The propagandist operates upon the public as a whole while the lawyer is more commonly restricted to the judge and jury (Lasswell. 1941. p74-76).

Lasswell’s passage above bolsters the argument previously made that propaganda is an aspect of public relations. McDavid & Harari below counter the suggestion sometimes made that propaganda is always to do with false information.

Although the term, [propaganda] in common usage comes to imply conniving falsehoods or half-truths, this connotation is not literally accurate. Any attempt to influence the development or change of attitudes may be properly called propaganda, as are commercial advertising and political campaigning…Even when propaganda is planned on an honest, factual basis, the manner of presentation of factual arguments may influence the persuasive impact on the audience’s attitudes (McDavid & Harari. 1968. p371).

Propaganda is the deliberate and systematic attempt to shape perception, manipulate cognitions, and direct labor to achieve a response that furthers the desired intent of the propagandist... One person’s propaganda may be another person’s education. The elements of deliberateness and manipulation along with a systematic plan to achieve a purpose that is advantageous to the propagandist, however, distinguishes propaganda from a free and open exchange of ideas (Jowett & O’Donnell. 1986. p16).

The above passage from Jowett & O’Donnell reinforces the education versus propaganda discussion. Its use of “deliberate and systematic attempt to shape perception” closely shadows the public relations industry’s description of public relations planning. Jowett & O’Donnell’s use of the phrases “manipulate cognitions” and “distinguishes propaganda from a free and open exchange of ideas” appears to side them with the critics of
the public relations process. I feel that the above discussion should be sufficient to made the point that the reality of public relations is that in the end its objective is to get people to think in certain ways and those ways may well be considerable different from the ways they now think. If this can be termed the “manipulation of cognitions” then so be it. Similarly, clearly for public relations to remain ethical, practitioners should not hide any facts. The reality is however that often, certainly from the perspective of oppositional community groups, it is the other group which has better command of the facts, figures and communication and lobbying resources to put those facts and figures across. Please see the three case studies in this thesis for illustrations of this suggestion. In other words it is often not a concern of a party to a public relations exercise to make all the facts known. Certainly it would be wrong and counter productive for a party to hide relevant facts. The party which hid any facts would only bring eventual discredit upon itself. But the point is that public relations is largely concerned with the practitioner projecting the facts about the organisation which it wants to project. This surely, when the facts are selective, as Lee argues they must be, cannot be far away from propaganda especially when the facts which are being projected are not those which the recipient of the information wants to hear. The conclusions to this section then are that:

1. Public relations and propaganda are closely related to the extent that propaganda can be said to be a constantly practiced aspect of public relations. Public relations might even be broken down into the components of “propaganda” on the one hand and “mere public relations” on the other.

2. The absence of the term “propaganda” in modern discussions of public relations is related to the absence of the term “persuasion” in modern definitions of public relations. The absence of the term “propaganda” also seems to be related to a perverse and wrong insistence that public relations is not asymmetrical. This perversion can be traced to the culture and ideology of the current capitalist form and the role of the public relation cognoscenti in this form.

3. Taken together these factors would tend to indicate that there is a worrying lacuna or pathology in present day public relations studies. It is a lacuna which invites pointed criticism from other more traditional and critical disciplines in neighbouring
It is the contention here that these matters are very serious indeed for the acceptance of public relations either as a proper academic subject or as a profession. I follow the suggestions of Bernays, Chomsky, the Frankfurt School and others that public relations and propaganda-like practices are far more pervasive and significant in regulating the sort of understandings of our world that we have than is commonly taken for granted or is admitted by the public relations cognoscenti. One reason for the pervasion and significance which I claim is the non-objectivist manner in which reason is, in fact arrived at. Social symbolic processes such as public relations and propaganda are in fact motors of the production of knowledge rather than the conduit which objectivists would claim. Another part of this thesis will argue that the public relations cognoscenti maintain a blind spot to this significance by insisting on an objectivist ontology and by embracing the theoretical outlook which goes with objectivism by preferring objectivist theory. This will be followed by a part which examines post-objectivist, late modern and post-modern theories for ways out of the objectivist paradigm – other ways of theorising public relations which illustrate how it is really shaping our realities. The final part of this present section of the thesis however develops the argument for the redefinition of public relations as “privatised rhetoric for privatised governance” – a title which is intended to summarise the points made thus far and to point the way ahead.

“Privatised rhetoric for privatised governance” - an appropriate definition?

The development of rhetoric in ancient Greek and Roman times was essentially the systematising of oral public discourse. This systemising had implications for expanding democracy. Kennedy (1974, p26-31) and Vickers (1988) explain that although both the ancient Greeks and the Romans had writing, their cultures were predominantly oral where a considerable amount of power could be wielded by the use of rhetoric in the putatively democratic forums of government and the courts:

It is a historical fact, more familiar in this century than any other, that tyrants and totalitarian states destroy freedom of speech. Under the Thirty Tyrants in
Athens at one point the teachers of rhetoric were forbidden to work (Vickers. 1988. p7)

The relationship between rhetoric and democracy can also perhaps be seen in Rome. Oratory had flourished for a century when teachers of rhetoric appeared at the beginning of the first century BC. The senatorial party regarding them as a sign of democratic progress, tried to silence them. (Kennedy. 1974. p29).

It is of course to risk using an oxymoron to talk about “Greek democracy” as the situations of women and slaves and the aristocracies of the relevant era, the fourth and fifth centuries BC, problematise this concept. None the less large numbers of suitably qualified men, theoretically about 20 to 25 per cent of the population, although in practical terms a far lower proportion, had the franchise to speak and vote in the major governmental forum the Ecclesia (Assembly) (Lawson-Tancred. 1991. p9). The court – the Heliaea with its open jury membership of often hundreds and the executive sub-committee of the Assembly – the 500 member council or Boule, were open to the power of oratory (Ibid. p9-10). Representatives of the accusers and the accused, anyone else who wanted to speak and sometimes “free-lance” orators hired for the event, turned these hearings into theatrical and sometimes politically vindictive occasion (Ibid. p11). Aristotle’s Art of Rhetoric was only the greatest of a succession of publications produced to aid citizens for this purpose (Kennedy. 1974. p28). It was in reaction to the “sophists” the experts of rhetoric that Plato attacked the notion of rhetoric as opposed to dialectic. Vickers, Kennedy and Lawson-Tancred draw attention to the implications for democracy of this attack. Aristotle created what can be called a university course on rhetoric which united rhetoric with philosophy and made the study of rhetoric: “an important component in the general study of man” (Lawson-Tancred. 1991. p8). Full bloodied rhetorical practices declined as European society became less democratic from the later Roman period onward. There was a revival of both democracy and rhetoric during the Renaissance with the rediscovery of the ancient texts. But in the medieval period rhetoric became formal speech performance and, as we have seen, was largely intellectually outlawed with the introduction of the modern period
The end of free rhetoric and “democracy” - democracy for the enfranchised citizens of Greece and Rome - can be argued to be the end of the chance for those enfranchised people to contribute to defining their world. The world came to be defined by monarchies and churches. Later as modernity dawned the world became defined in scientific/philosophical, rather than either rhetorical/democratic, kingly or religious ways. Plato’s wish that the sophists be silenced thus continued into the scientific era. The modern period of the 19th and early 20th centuries was the period of “progress” and science. Enthusiasm for science and technology-driven progress however came into question later in the 20th century marked by books such as Marcuse’s *One Dimensional Man*. Books of this nature accompanied the introduction of the postmodern era which rejected the standard scientific and formerly respected philosophical authorities. We now live in an era when there is potentially a return to a “rhetorically free” society. That is, we live at a time where for some, probably about the same 20 to 25 per cent as in ancient Greece, there is a chance to experience a fine quality of democracy. This 20 or 25 per cent, probably less, are not under kingly, theocratic or other totalitarian rule. They are the mostly western, or the international, middle classes. They are not the wage slaves of the west or the virtual slaves or subsistence workers of the developing world. These educated middle class world citizens tend to reject the kind of technological mystification produced by science. This will be illustrated by my discussion of Ulrich Beck and ‘Risk Society’ in the Biosolids case study in this thesis. This stratum are the people who potentially have a chance to set the agendas including the expectation for what kinds of representations are seen on television and in other media. They have the potential to define what sort of society we have. Now from the above discussion on the origins of rhetoric in ancient civilisation we might advance the following argument: Democracy in ancient Greece - that is democracy for 20 to 25 per cent - was largely consensual in periods which did not suffer from the repressions brought about by war or tyranny. In the democratic periods government and the general regulation of society was like it is now, largely consensual - at least consensual for this 20 to 25 per cent. As a consequence power had then and has now, to be claimed by persuasion. Just as in classical Greek society, contemporary society (that is the more wealthy and powerful elements of the educated middle class of contemporary society) potentially have the power to contribute direct expressions of how society should think of itself. These elements have
Nietzsche’s permission to persuade others to follow these various thoughts however fragmented this makes our world views. This reminds us that it was the ability to indulge in free expression and persuasion, in the style of even anarchic arguments by some of the sophists, which so annoyed Plato: “Unfortunately our tradition of information about the sophists was poisoned almost at source by Plato and the Academy” (Lawson-Tancred. 1991. p11). Not only is God now dead (Nietzsche), in the ‘Risk Society’ not even worship to the god of technological progress can cower the mind-spirit of the contemporary elite.

If the above suggestions are accepted the following arguments may be added. It is argued above that in view of the need for consensus, persuasion was particularly important in some classical eras. The refinement of persuasion led to the art and practice of rhetoric. Rhetoric became a fundamental aspect of governance. Now in ancient Greece, in contrast to present times, governance was a relatively straightforward process. The enfranchised section of the population – 20 to 25 per cent of it – could (in theory) all turn up in one place and directly influence politics and the laws. The present world is much more complex. Its institutions of governance – that is its governments and the multitude of other public and private facets of the management of society – are quite Byzantine. However the principle of consensus, the need for persuasion and the honing of persuasion which we might call rhetoric remains essentially the same as in the fifth century BC. As a consequence these principles – consensus, persuasion and the honing of persuasion run through, or at least heavily influence, most of the institutions which are under the putative control of the 20 to 25 per cent. This is why all sorts of government bodies, corporations and non-government organisations (NGOs), as well as the interest, pressure, or other representative groups which lobby them, all practice something akin to public relations. This “ideas management” is necessary because there is a loss of ideological reference points such as those involved in the religious or scientistic bricolage14 – the grand narratives of the pre-modern or the modern eras. Respect for or belief in authoritarian structures and institutions dissolve before our eyes – for instance marriage, political parties, the standing of the university (see the case study on universities in this thesis). Public relations is growing in volume and importance at an accelerating rate in order to fill this vacuum of definition of how the world

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14 Bricolage is meant here in Levi-Strauss’s terms as the available materials or thought images which are to hand for crafting a picture of reality (Levi-Strauss. 1976. p16-36).
is and ought to be. We are in a time when realities and identities are becoming almost
nihilistically democratic\(^\text{15}\). This is the reason why public relations is already very powerful
and will become increasingly so in all sorts of political and commercial matters.

But unlike the rhetorical process in the ancient Greek city-state, contemporary
rhetorical projects and processes (the processes which many public relations scholars
identify with public relations - see above and in the previous chapter) are much further
away from public view than they were in the Heliaeus and the Boule. The fabrication of
public relations/rhetoric is not performed visibly by the orator in front of thousands of her
peers. Instead contemporary rhetoric, the public relations programs which carry reality
forming persuasive messages, are constructed in the detached and hidden realms of the
public relations consultancy, the corporation office, the party political headquarters and the
refuge of the pressure group. Important rhetoric is no longer hatched spontaneously in the
oral hurly burly of the election platform, the floors of parliament, congress or the house of
representatives. Instead the careful formulation of rhetoric, and thus, potentially the
construction of reality for the purposes of organising how democracy will be governed and
managed, takes place to an important extent on the computer screens in the back rooms of
public relations offices. This is the privatisation of governance.

The private construction of rhetoric for privatised governance is for instance
illustrated by my biosolids case study in this thesis. There the “facts” given out by the water
“authority” were overturned in a rhetorical process – the privately organised public
relations campaign of residents. These were residents who were intent on deciding for
themselves the way they would be governed in this respect. This small public revolt can be
argued to be a microcosmic example of the whole notion of the postmodern, rhetorical turn,
the jaundiced view of, and impatience with, grand narratives – the narratives of unified
authority. There was a rejection of a central, controlling public utility authority along with
the rejection of their ideologies just as there is a rejection of authority at the philosophical
level. Postmodernists say we can no longer have faith in unified notions of how the world
works. The residents involved feel the same way about presentations on how their sewage
system should work. The water authority has now gone back to the rhetorical drawing
board to try to find other ways of presenting reality. In such ways one can make out an

\(^{15}\) For the 20 to 25 per cent or less…i.e. not the third world or the poor strata in Western society.
argument that public relations is the supreme postmodern activity. It is the rhetorical function which has poured in to replace the orientation of thinking vacated by the decline of the rule of kings, the decline of faith in religion, the decline of adherence to philosophy, science or progress.

A word of caution should be struck here in that the expression “public relations practices” should perhaps be used rather than “public relations” as such. This is because the phrase “public relations” itself has become a word conveying authority. As such it has becomes too much an authority and frequently has to hide behind rhetorical practices by using other names such as reputation management, public affairs, communication management and so on.

The omnibus title of this thesis “Public Relations and Contemporary Theory” is meant to give me room to explain how the approaches of late modern or postmodern theorists can be used to explain the absence of consistent contemporary narrative and its replacement by diverse rhetorical initiatives. The continuing expansion of public relations activity and this thesis are both essentially to do with the fragmentation of organised, authoritative and authoritarian ideologies. Public relations is the massive industrial effort to devise pragmatic new ideas, or to collate and modifies old ones to rhetorically cast the world anew usually in favour of the relevant paymasters. This is not to say that fragmentation of ideas always works in favour of elites. For instance if Habermas does not succeed in unifying sociological thought under his particular rhetoric – the more scope there is for the “play” of individual rhetorics and thus potentially of escape from morality or equitable democracy. Those elites who feel they benefit from boundless democracy may want to revel in the fragmentation of no restrictions, no ethics. In this sense public relations which Olasky criticises as anti-laissez-faire can been seen to be a potential bastion of the center or even of the left of politics. The case studies in this thesis suggest examples of these reality building processes in action. They are to do with attempts at rhetorically manufacturing new, authoritative ideas and narratives, new sub-plots to reality. They are also about attempts to advise people to reject new narratives and old narratives of reality. These attempts are both by the elites and the sub-elites – that is those who do and those who do not benefit so much from dissolution into a value-free or value shifting world. These are the processes that are happening on all sides of the Australian Association for the
Public University struggle. They are also happening on all sides of the struggle for London’s governance and London’s transport systems. This is what is happening in respect of all sorts of technological initiatives, such as the biosolids initiative, which in the contemporary era requires informed community consent and not merely “privatised rhetoric for privatised governance”.

Conclusion
This chapter reviewed the notion of rhetoric which has come to us from the art of oratory of the classical period. Aristotle studied that activity and has given us a deep insight into what classical rhetoric involved. The chapter then looked at some of the work of the new rhetoricians which has developed from the 1950s to the present day. While I acknowledge that some current theorists of public relations refer to the older notion of rhetoric, I suggested that the current rhetorical turn has not been substantially applied to studies of public relations. The claim was made that if the rhetorical turn were properly applied to public relations it would involve the field with notions of objectivism and relativism. The resulting rejection of these modes would point the way to the parallel between Putnam’s notion of conceptual relativism and the “spin” or inflection which, according to the new rhetoricians, all ‘facts’ are delivered with. The next section of the chapter criticised the public relations industry, its associations and its academics for creating definitions of public relations which seem deliberately designed to hide the persuasive and thus the rhetorical nature of this activity. This was followed by a further section which maintained the same argument - this time by pointing out how an artificial distinction between public relations and propaganda has been erected. I argue that this barrier can be seen to have been erected in order to obscure the rhetorical nature of public relations. The last section of the chapter called for a realisation of the matters I raise. I suggest a logical outcome of that realisation would be a more explicit definition of what public relations is. A somewhat provocative, but none the less descriptive summary of such an explicit definition could I think be “privatised rhetoric for privatised governance.” Apart from making the connection to rhetoric this phrase gets across the notion that orthodox public relation is not under the control of the democratic system. It is a powerful tool for shaping our consciousness which is overwhelmingly under the control of private
corporations whose main motivation is profit rather than adherence to the strictures of the voters or any publicly controlled authority.
Chapter Four

Public Relations and US Political-Cultural History

Introduction
This chapter challenges the orthodox textbook account of the origins of public relations. It argues that those accounts de-politicise both the reasons for, and the effects of, early public relations. It suggests that this de-politicisation takes place because of the conservative political orientation of the whole public relations industry, an orientation which is explained in chapter three. I suggest that de-politicisation of the history of public relations parallels the de-politicisation and emasculation of public relations theory – an issue highlighted in chapters five, nine and eleven. De-politicisation of public relations’ history along with de-politicisation of public relations’ theory combines to restrict proper intellectual and academic appreciation of the subject. This denial of critical insights means the bona fides of public relations as a university subject, will continue to be challenged.

Textbooks tend to naturalise the emergence of public relations as a logical development to do with efficiency and democracy. The emergence was a common sense progression which no reasonable person would think of questioning or opposing. Textbooks explain the emergence of the practice like this: Although it was expanding, big business was not as efficient as it could be because it was not taking account of the views of the wider sweep of the American public. Some of the effects of brash big business operations were antagonising people and causing a political, labour and commercial backlash. Public relations poured balm on this inflammation to the benefit of everyone. The protesting publics and politicians were given a better insight into the difficulties and the value of the corporations. At the same time the corporations were made more aware of what it was they were doing which was unnecessarily antagonising people. Corporations were counseled about how to reduce or remove this rift in ways which enabled their businesses to flourish. The outcome was mutual benefit all round with the economic consequence that a large public relations industry could be sustained. This is essentially the notion of
orthodox public relations which has persisted into the 21st century. However if one views public relations at the turn of the 19th century in a wider political and cultural perspective, a more complex picture emerges which has direct relevance for how orthodox public relations should be viewed today.

An alternative reading of the birth and growth of public relations is that it was essentially an arm of a political movement which was trying to assist the burgeoning big corporations in a new capitalist era which required a new ethic, a new attitude to be ingrained in its employees, its customers, its suppliers and so forth. Public relations arose in a society which had good means of communication and reasonable levels of education and wealth, but which was wrought by political change and uncertainties both to do with individuals’ economic circumstances and with people’s core identities as Americans. In this time of shifting attitudes and understandings public relations came into being closely aligned to the aspirations and ideas of the “Progressive” movement. The Progressive movement was a social and political tendency which was trying to navigate a middle road between the right and the left critics of the growing, powerful corporations. The Progressives wanted the corporations to prosper and become the foundation and driving force of American culture. But they realised that in order to qualify for this hugely important role the corporations had to be acceptable to all strata of American society and to the politicians. European and European colonial nations were largely monarchies with established and stable cultural formations. Corporations were not needed there to play a prominent cultural and political role. Consequently there was much less requirement for a huge effort to “sell the corporations to the citizens” outside of America. The result was that public relations developed dramatically in America but not elsewhere until, from the last quarter of the 20th century onward, public relations was called in to sell corporations to the rest of the world. It is now the world, as opposed to turn of the 19th century America, which is the well informed and communicative mass society wrought by political change and uncertainties. These are uncertainties to do with both individuals’ economic circumstances and their core identities as national and economic and cultural citizens of their own country vis-à-vis their apparent, recently developed global “citizenship” which is to do with global cultural and economic influences and expectations. This chapter will
suggest why modern public relations really came into existence and what it was doing at the start of the 20th century. The commentary will imply a considerable critique on the way public relations is “officially” conceived to have developed and to be operating in the 21st century.

**Cultural Crisis and the Progressives**

The history of modern public relations can be seen to be very closely entwined with the history and development of United States 20th century commercial and political culture. In fact an historical examination of public relations can throw into relief the history of thinking of turn of the 19th century America and can perhaps give clues to the relationship between thinking and the operations of public relations today. The close relationship between US history and the sentiments and attitudes of Americans, as monitored or influenced by public relations, is remarked on by Cutlip when he comments on his 40 years work on the production of his 800 page comprehensive history of this activity: “A historian friend suggested that I was trying to write a history of the United States” (Cutlip. 1994. px). Some authorities on public relations see public relations as principally a process of reacting to or attempting to influence public opinion. (Bernays. 1970; Cutlip. 1994, 1995; Olasky. 1987). Cutlip’s supplementary 1995 book is largely about public opinion in terms of the promotion of the settlement of the British American colonies, anti-British propaganda leading up to the American revolution, and the symbolic and communication processes which formed the public opinion which helped create the United States. Cutlips’s main 1994 book is a comprehensive history of the activity of public relations where the influencing of public opinion is often referred to. Bernays (1970) is keen to put public relations into every stage of civilization as the counterpoint to public opinion. Olasky, (1987) discusses the “manipulation,” “molding” and “manufacture” of public opinion by public relations processes in the USA from the 19th century onwards starting with the drive to get public acceptance of the introduction of railways. In all of these views public relations is any activity which attempts to influence widespread opinion or the opinion of those whose views are most important for the direction of society. Understood in this way public relations or propaganda can be said to exist in every period where there was a
semblance of civilised society and some level of democratic governance and debate, that is from ancient times onward.

We have already seen glimpses of the history of public relations in previous chapters. These glimpses include the previously interchangeable use of the terms “public relations” and “propaganda”. We have discussed the cessation of “propaganda” as a polite term only in the second quarter of the 20th century. We have referred to the fact that history chapters in the major public relations textbooks used in universities from the 1980s onwards usually acknowledge antecedents of public relations in the Congregatio de Propaganda Fide (Congregation for Propagation of the Faith), an organization of Roman Catholic cardinals founded in 1622 to carry out missionary work. We have discussed the parallel between public relations and the activities of classical orators who were involved with the development and expert use of rhetoric in some ancient Greek and Roman periods. Other references to public relations like activity cited in public relations textbooks include discussion of farming advice found on ancient Middle Eastern tablets. Ogilvy-Webb (1965) even cites the ballads of Viking minstrels and bards as public relations practices which boosted support for militarism. However these textbooks refer to public dissatisfaction with late 19th and early 20th century US big business as the reason for the rise of the modern public relations industry. The textbooks say this new industry came into being to advise corporations how to deal with an upwelling of protests in the specifically United States democratic context where the right to free speech both for accusation and for rebuttal is significantly guaranteed by the constitution (Newson et. al. 1993; Grunig & Hunt. 1984; Wilcox et. al. 1992; Cutlip et. al. 1994). At the turn of the century in the US there were widespread, very justified, public protests to do with atrocious employment practices, monopoly control of suppliers’ prices, shoddy goods and general arrogance by big business which was forming into “trusts” or conglomerates – single organisations which controlled whole industries. Unfair dealing and an antagonistic stance was leading to outrage among church, trade union, small farmers and small business groups. The protests led to exposé or ‘muckraking’ journalism. There was dramatically negative journalistic coverage on subjects as diverse as monopoly control of industries; unhygienic meat packing; unfair employment practices - particularly towards immigrants; and dangerous railroad and mine operation. One notorious case was the “Ludlow Massacre” of 1914 when strikers and some of their
wives and children were killed by armed anti-strike militia at the Colorado Fuel and Iron Company which was part owned by the Rockefellers. These incidents and exposés in turn attracted attention from politicians and were leading to legislation or the threat of legislation to break up and/or control the trusts. A closer reading of the history of the era confirms this general theme. However it shows a more particular strand in the development of US public opinion at the turn of the century.

Although the first decade of the 20th Century was relatively affluent, it followed on the heels of two decades of social and economic dislocation. This was the period when the original “Captains of Industry”, the original “Millionaires”, made their fortunes by creating the big industrial trusts or conglomerates. The conglomerates accelerated America’s development but made many small business people, artisans and small farmers into ordinary employees, factory workers and farm labourers. Modern technology and the concentration of power and wealth into the hands of a relatively small number of large corporations was taking power away from individuals of all classes who had a tradition of fierce independence within a cherished democratic culture. This was a culture which had been founded on rebellion against the British and which still emphasises the political iconography of freedom, independence, individualism and the right to bear arms to protect these virtues. As a consequence the turn of the century saw a wide variety of radical political organisations:

...this social ferment included, among others, the Grange, the Greenbackers, the Knights of Labour, the Populist Party, militant craft and industrial unions, utopian societies, and socialist parties and organisations (Bowman. 1996. p77).

Some of these organisations were trade union or other left wing inspired organisations. The Knights of Labour were notable for including radical small businessmen and lawyers (Egbert & Persons. 1952. p236). The socialists experienced a “golden age” between 1902 and 1912 with 125,826 American members in the Socialist Party in 1912. That year there were said to be 56 Socialist Party mayors in local authorities and a Socialist Party congressman in New York State (Egbert & Persons. 1952. p283). The Socialist Party candidate for President in that year, Eugene Debs won 897,011 votes or about 6 per cent
Debs was imprisoned in 1919 for making an alleged seditious speech in 1918 but still attracted 915,000 votes when he fought the 1920 election from his prison cell (Britannica). The mood of the time is explained by Goldman (1972) in *Rendezvous with Destiny*:

> By 1900 more than one third of American farmers did not work their own acres. The big factory dominated the industrial scene to such an extent that only the most optimistic employee still dreamed of owning his own plant...one per cent of the population owned more than the remaining ninety-nine per cent put together. [This was] especially menacing to the small entrepreneur (Goldman. 1972. p72).

Even conservative newspapers were railing against a seemingly inevitable Government control or take-over of these super-concentrated, monopoly owned industries. They saw such a take-over as threatening the end of free enterprise, replacing it with a de facto “state socialism” (Ibid. p73). The resulting political compromise was the creation of “Progressivism”. This was a liberal movement aimed at a middle road between the radical leftists while not compromising a more workable form of capitalism. Walter Lippmann who wrote *Public Opinion* and who was to be one of the early theorists of public relations and a senior member of the United States’ World War One government propaganda agency - the Committee On Public Information - was a leading member of this movement. Lippmann had joined the Socialist Party in 1910 (Ewen. 1996. p61) but left to become a progressive and to become a critic of socialism in his books of 1922 and 1927 (copyrighted 1925):

> ...Croly and Weyl...together with Walter Lippmann founded the progressive journal *The New Republic*...and along with Lippmann assumed the role of intellectual leaders of liberal reform, believing that reformist measures offered the only solution (Bowman. 1996. p79).

Bowman goes on to argue that the revision of American liberalism by figures including Lippmann:
...constituted both a criticism of, and an accommodation to, the new corporate order. Sweeping proposals for institutional reform were sustained by the belief that corporate power could be regulated in the interests of all social classes (Ibid. p79-80).

This new liberal political thinking in the “Progressive Era” offered a way of taming laissez-faire capitalism to an extent that the dangers of the government having to institute state socialism were reduced and radical politics could be cooled down. But a great deal of explaining and ideological work would be needed for this project to succeed:

In synthesising beliefs which were both critical of and accommodating to corporate power, corporate liberals sought to overcome the conflict within liberalism between liberty and equality in order to justify comprehensive reform. With the large corporation ascendant, no less of an ideological revision would suffice (Ibid. p80).

The above analysis of the need to “accommodate” corporate power fits closely with Olasky’s highly critical thesis of what public relations was to become. Olasky criticises the first major figure of public relations - Ivy Lee - as a “collaborationist”, that is as one of the progressives who was for cooperation between government and the corporations over matters such as price fixing. Olasky argues from a pro-laissez fair position which constantly criticises “collaboration”. He quotes Lee as saying: “…restrictions must be placed on the use of capital so as to obtain, at the same time, the utmost good for the community as a whole” (Olasky. 1987. p47). After working as a political press secretary Lee started an agency with a partner in 1904 (Hibbert. 1966. p45). Olasky goes on:

Crucially Lee understood not only the new political economy but the practical political and psychological steps that would have to be taken along the way. He knew that the new collaborationism could be put into place only if businessmen were fully united behind it…A public relations counselor (sic) would
also have to convince businessmen that it was improper simply to think of companies responding to customer desires as expressed in the marketplace (Olasky. 1987. p47-48).

Olasky critically examines Lee’s “social gospel ideas” obtained growing up as the son of a “liberalised” Protestant minister (Ibid. p48). Olasky also attacks Lee – the acknowledged earliest founder of public relations – by summarising the contemporary accusations that Lee later had sympathies with the Soviet Union and quotes negatively from Lee’s book *Present Day Russia*. Olasky does not however include quotes in that book such as:

> The Russians as a people are all right. The great enemy of mankind is the Communist International. The supreme problem is how to drive a wedge between the Communist International and the Russian people so that the people themselves will come to feel that they want none of the International or its works (Lee. 1928. p200).

Olasky concludes his discussion of Lee with comments which continue to illustrate the cultural role change of the big corporation, through public relations practices in this era:

> He succeeded in making the concept of collaboration welcome in many corporations. He seeded some of the largest with public relations counselors (sic) (op. cit. p53).

Olasky attributes to Lee quotes to the effect that the United States and the Soviet Union were at the opposite ends of the pole when it comes to individualism although individualism in the United States was now being restricted (op. cit. p52). The passages Olasky cites in this respect are not in the Macmillan edition of Lee 1928. However Lee does say:
“The great mass of people – and Russia should be thought of more as a collection of individuals – is slowly awakening from the long sleep impose upon it by a thousand years of repression” (Lee. 1928. p197).

Also, contra Olasky’s attack, Lee uncritically quotes Lloyd George from 1920: “‘The fact is that the majority of the Russian people are more individualist than the people of this country [UK]’” (Lee. 1928. p184). It is interesting that Olasky criticises the workings of public relations from a right wing perspective while most critics of public relations take a perspective from a left or environmentalist perspective (see Stauber & Rampton. 1995; Carey. 1995; Ewen. 1996). Olasky is concerned that public relations from its inception was used to subvert political culture in a manner, in line with the aims of the Progressives, to tame the power of laissez fair capitalism. Lippmann is singled out for criticism in this context (Olasky. 1987. pp 83, 84, 113). Just in case there is any misunderstanding of his politics Olasky ends his book:

Business has democratic legitimacy only when it is controlled by the market and does what the market wants to do…With courtesy but firmness, public relations managers should learn to tell overly-demanding fund raisers, reporters, or politicians, “None of your business.” (Olasky. 1987. p151).

Olasky is clearly still fighting against Lippmann’s progressive middle way without referring to the anti-corporativist forces which would attack public relations from the left because of public relations’ support of capitalism. What Olasky and the left may well share however, and this is in opposition to Lippmann as will be discussed in the next chapter, is support for democratic individualism, particularly in the historical American context. Hartz, (1955) provides a nice irony to Olasky’s 1987 position:

The effect of the red scare technique as used against Progressivism flowers slowly…The impact on progressivism itself comes most vividly later and especially of course after the Russian revolution (Hartz. 1955. p218).
Public Relations Flourishes, Individualism Dies

Hartz suggests that America had lost its “American Revolution / Thomas Paine / Lafayette” brand of revolutionary individualism by the time of the Paris Commune… the insurrection of Paris against the French government in 1871. The Paris Commune was not supported in contemporary American newspaper editorials. This conservatism is in contrast to the earlier 19th century findings of De Tocqueville who chronicled what he saw as a local based, genuine democracy both in the political and economic sense in his 1835 book *Democracy in America* (Bottomore. 1969. p20). Americans continued with a romantic notion of the frontiersman and the “land of the free”, but as discussed above, technology and “trust style capitalism” (the big corporations) overcame the simple localised modes of employment and styles of living well before the end of the 19th century. Thus the turn of the century saw not only political protests against the new economic life. It also saw protest against the ideological attacks on American individualism, which as previously discussed is contrasted by Olasky to Soviet individualism. Dewey writing in 1931 attributes American individuality not to revolutionary history but to the US heritage of religious notions of an individual soul, although the church link ceased to be conscious by the 20th century (Dewey. 1931. p71). By 1931 this individualism has been devastated by the new way of living in a society dominated by corporations which now have the backing of public opinion:

We live exposed to the greatest flood of mass suggestion that any people has ever experienced. The need for united action and the supposed need of integrated opinion and sentiment are met by organised propaganda and advertising. The publicity agent is perhaps the most significant symbol of our present social life. There are individuals who resist; but, for a time at least, sentiment can be manufactured by mass methods for almost any person or cause (Dewey. 1931. p42-43).

In relation to all the above, it can be argued that the public relations industry boomed early in the US because it was used to help build public opinion which resulted in a sort of “Americanised” business democracy-culture. It is necessary to quote Dewey at
Dewey agrees with this lamentable analysis. He says “Americanisation” – this change of the soul in a way which facilitates the instrumentalism of the big corporation – is spreading out from America to other parts of the world. However Dewey claims Freienfels agrees this is a transitional phase caused by the “quantification, mechanisation and standardisation” of the new American way of life (Ibid. p29). This new way of regulated life is modeled on the success of the big corporations which have by the 1930s won the affections of the public at large. Although this affection was starting to be shaken by the Depression. After two decades of public relations and the ideological effects of the war, corporations are no longer the target of the pre-war muckrakers and trust busters:

There are no words which adequately express what is taking place…Perhaps the constantly increasing role of corporations in our economic life gives a clue to a fitting name…We may then say that the United States has steadily moved from an early pioneer individualism to a condition of dominant corporateness. The influence business corporations exercise in determining present industrial and economic
activities is both a cause and a symbol of the tendency to combination in all phases of life (Dewey. 1931. p36-37).

Public relations boomed under the sponsorship of business organisations which, rather than the public sector, were particularly well placed to benefit from the acceptance of an “Americanised” and “corporatised” cultural milieu. Although there were early press bureaux in government, notably the US Forest Service in 1905 (Ponder. 1990), the overwhelming impetus came from private industry. There were said to be 1,200 press or publicity agents – the original names for many of those who later called themselves public relations counsel – in New York City by the First World War:

A great increase in the amount of publicity and propaganda material furnished to newspapers marked the period beginning about 1890…When, during the nineties and early nineteen-hundreds attacks were being made upon the so called trusts, these and other big business enterprises discovered that it was to their advantage to employ press agents to present their side of the controversies…a census of the regular accredited press agents taken by the New York newspapers shortly before the outbreak of the [First] World War showed that they numbered about 1,200 (Bleyer. 1973. p.420-421, originally published 1927).

Publicists organised events which captured the imagination of the public and tried to get free editorial coverage for their clients. The approaches of public relations pioneers Ivy Lee and Edward Bernays taught some of these 1,200 to take a more rounded view of the way the public perceived organisations. Public relations counsel differed from publicists in that, besides handling publicity, if necessary, they gave strategic advice to organisations on how to change their ways of operating, including their ways of treating their customers, employees, shareholders and so on, in order to achieve the best public profile and acceptance by public opinion.
Less Public Relations in the Old World and its Colonies

While this boom in public relations activity was taking place in the US, in the UK, Australia and related cultures there was much less of this activity. Where such ideological or cultural production existed it could usually be categorised as statist, monarchical, or as an adjunct to empire. A more traditional milieu with a comparatively staid business culture where corporations were more peripheral to social and national identity did not require a commercial public relations industry like that needed in the ‘ballyhoo’ of US commercial, public and political life. Both the US and the UK had considerable information and propaganda machines in their central governments in both world wars. However little became of the acceleration of propaganda/public relations activity in the UK after WW1 compared to the steady increase in public relations in the US. There are references to publicity by the UK Post Office in the 19th century (Ogilvy-Webb. 1965). But modern public relations in the UK seems to have grown sedately out of the between wars activities of central and local government, the Empire Marketing Board in the 1920s and then the Post Office. (L’Etang. 1999, 1998; Clark. 1970; Ogilvy-Webb. 1965). This was mainly in-house activity. Sir Stephen Tallents who introduced public relations activity to the Empire Marketing Board and then the Post Office was informed by US methods rather than a UK public relations industry. Tallents refers to Ivy Lee who preceded Edward Bernays as the founder and leader of US public relations techniques. Tallents is quoted referring to Lee in Lloyd, (1980. p5). L’Etang lists a few UK private sector organisations which had public relations before the second world war. She suggests: “There was relatively little public relations in the private sector prior to the Second World War…Those in the private sector…often worked alone…they seem to have been a rather fragmentary group during this period.” (L’Etang. 1998). In Australia there was some publicist activity between the wars particularly for the American dominated movie industry. Public relations people proper first seem to have arrived with General MacArthur in the Second World War. The first listing of public relations practitioners in the Sydney phone books did not come until the 1950s (Zawawi. 2000). Comparing the UK sphere and the US it can be claimed that ideological activities such as public relations or propaganda in the British world was more incorporated into state and establishment image making and symbolism instead of being
"contracted out" to private consultants as it was by US big business. In the *Invention of Tradition* Hobsbawm and Ranger suggest that:

Almost certainly Queen Victoria’s jubilee of 1887, repeated ten years later in view of its notable success, inspired subsequent royal or imperial occasions…revival of royal ritualism was seen as a necessary counterweight to the dangers of popular democracy. (Hobsbawm & Ranger. 1983. p279-284).

We can thus argue that popular democracy was met in the UK by a government approach to marketing people as part of an empire and as loyal subjects of the Crown. Popular democracy in the US was met by the selling of notions of America and Americanism largely as a consequence of the promotion of the corporations. Bernays lists some of the ‘American’ symbols which he used during his employment which included for government agencies but which was mostly for corporations. The symbols included the colours: red white and blue; Uncle Sam; the American flag – (Old Glory); the Statue of Liberty; the Liberty Bell; the Lincoln Memorial; the Washington Monument; the American Eagle; the Seal of the United States; the Goddess of Liberty; the White House; the map of the nation; the covered wagon (Bernays. 1969. p154-155 first published 1955). This “selling” of patriotism both in the US and UK was particularly accelerated during the First World War when it was fuelled by large budgets and masses of information workers, both paid and volunteer.

Viewing ideology from the 21st century it is clearly US commercial political culture which has won out globally in preference to statist and monarchial ways of thinking. The consequence is that the highly developed, US dominated public relations industry with its global public relations consulting firms is booming everywhere. Non-US, statist institutions such as the UK monarchy and the UK government are having to adopt essentially US methods of identity production to ward off decline or dismissal in the public imagination. The UK Royal Family yearly develops its television image and books are being written about the increasing adoption of sometimes ham-fisted public relations practices by the UK government and allied institutions (Jones. 1999; Michie. 1998). One result of the early start and continued domination of US public relations, as opposed to public relations elsewhere,
is that virtually all the substantial public relations textbooks used to educated practitioners around the world are American. This in itself is an interesting aspect for any study of the history and the present of the effects of the advent of public relations on US and global culture.

Conclusion

With the above perspective on the history of public relations it is possible to argue that the origin of modern, orthodox public relations was to do with a phenomena which was far more complex and important than merely winning support for turn-of-the-century, large American corporations. Public relations and its antecedent publicity or press agentry mushroomed in turn of the century America at a time of specific economic, social and political-cultural change. This widespread change in public attitudes, in the public’s identification about who they were, was either very closely associated with public relations work or perhaps to some extent actually driven by public relations work. One implication of this finding – the finding of public relations being deliberately deeply implicated in significant cultural change – is that contemporary theorists or practitioners of public relations must have known this. They must have been able to theoretically conceptualise how they were affecting society. It follows that is must be possible to find significant, serious theoretical work to do with the inauguration of public relations activity. This is theorising which has disappeared. It has disappeared because of the nature of orthodox public relations. Orthodox public relations routinely hides or disguises what it is. This was discussed in chapter three in terms of official definitions of the activity and the notion of propaganda. The next chapter goes back into the history of theory of public relations to make this rediscovery in order to expose the current de-politicisation of public relations history and theory which jeopardises its status as a university subject.
Chapter Five

Early Theory In Public Relations

Introduction
As we have seen, at the same time as public relations became established, the US saw a period of rapid expansion and intensification in the development of capitalism and the rapid developments of capitalism’s most potent vehicle – the corporation. In this chapter I argue that the elitist and explicitly anti-communist politics of a corporate-capitalism dominated America, enabled early exponents of public relations, Lee and Bernays, to overtly associated public relations with an expanding capitalism and a right wing, authoritarian political ethos. I suggest that by contrast, the complex social compacts and welfare state compromises of our present era, inclines the current public relations establishment to draw a veil over the operation of public relations vis-à-vis politics and the capitalist mode. But I will explain that, despite its appropriation by extremist political tendencies, some strands of early social, psychological and political theory applied to public relations, are none the less still very interesting to today’s public relations theorist. This interest links the early and the current periods of public relations theory across an historical chasm. This is a chasm of more than half a century during which there has been a disappearance of serious public relations theorisation. This chapter foreshadows the discussion in chapters nine and eleven which attempt to explain this disappearance and the reasons for today’s usual partial and instrumental appropriation and application of theory to public relations. It adds an historical dimension to the criticism that, in order for public relations to become a truly professional activity, and for public relations studies to become academically legitimate in the university, there needs to be a more rounded, genuine academic approach to theorising this field.

Acute observer of the early 20th Century, John Dewey (1859 – 1952) wrote: “There are no words which adequately express what is taking place…” (Dewey. 1931. p36). In fact it could be proposed that there are words to adequately express what was taking place. What was taking place was the expansion of the purposive rationalism associated with
Fordism and Taylorism. Taylorism is the label applied to the scientific management of society and many of its processes which were developed and instituted in the early years of the 20th century. Fordism is the application of scientific management and other efficiency methods to industrial production. Purposive rationalism, a term particularly used by Weber, Parsons and Habermas is discussed at length in chapter ten. As used by Habermas, purposive rationalism involves the organisation of people’s thinking habits in ways which *inter alia* achieve Fordist and Taylorist goals. For Habermas purposive rational and instrumental thinking contrasts with communicative rationality with its validity claims aimed at forming an agreed consensus on reality (see discussion of Habermas’s Theory of Communicative Action in chapters nine and ten). Communicative rationalism involves an awareness consequent of an ability of people to draw on the cultural understandings of their own communities. This is as opposed to an awareness confined and directed by the deliberate, strategic communicative influences of interests and parties who want to harness the ways particular communities think. Taylorism and Fordism are manifestations of the instrumental and purposive rationalism analysed by Weber, Parsons and Habermas. Habermas has analysed and contrasted purposive rationalism and communicative rationalism in the following way:

The model of purposive rational action takes as its point of departure the view that the actor is primarily oriented to attaining an end …and that he calculates other foreseeable consequences of action as secondary conditions of success. Success is defined as the appearance in the world of a defined state, which can, in a given situation, be causally produced through goal-oriented action or omission…We call an action oriented to success instrumental…By contrast I shall speak of communicative action whenever the actions of the agents involved are coordinated not through egocentric calculation of success but through acts of reaching understanding. In communicative action participants are not primarily oriented to their own individual success; they pursue their own individual goals under the condition that they can harmonise their plans of action on the basis of common situation definitions (Habermas. 1991. p285-286).
Habermas’s analysis of how such purposive rationalism is colonising the “lifeworld” (the everyday thoughts of people) and consequently corrupting communicative action, and the relevance of this to understanding public relations, will be examined further in chapter ten. For now it is sufficient to say that, especially in the early 20th century, the strategic communicative influences of corporate capitalism, with its Fordism and Taylorism, undermined how classes of the American population presented their own identity to themselves. This restructuring of the US psyche, partly through the activities of public relations, is depicted by Dewey. In the year following the third printing of Bernays’ Propaganda (1930), Dewey conceded that an Americanisation” of US culture had taken place. “Americanisation” meant that Americans had lost their depth of character in the change from a culture of rugged individualism to a culture of superficiality where efficiency, mechanisation and the pursuit of money were the prime values for society. Dewey acknowledged charges that this specifically American type of culture was now spreading around the world. Dewey used the term “hegemony” in relation to the economic and financial aspects of this spreading. However he can also be seen to have been discussing American cultural hegemony and the Europeans’ attempts at countering cultural hegemony:

We have heard a great deal in late years of class-consciousness…a still more recent manifestation might be called “culture-consciousness” or “civilisation-consciousness”…Americanism as a form of culture did not exist, before the war, for Europeans. Now it does exist and is a menace. In reaction and as a protest there is developing, at least among literary folk, the consciousness of a culture which is distinctively European, something which is precious and whose very existence is threatened by an invasion of a new form of barbarism issuing from the United States…If the ideal is approximated in reality, it will probably be a protective reaction to the economic and financial hegemony of the United States of America…it is in the end no great consolation to know that in losing our own soul we have been a means of helping to save the soul of someone else (Dewey. 1931. p22-23).

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16 Propaganda is quoted in chapter three.
Dewey’s pessimistic analysis of what was happening to the “soul” of Americans came at the same time as Bernays was vigorously advocating views on how society should be managed and showing how “minds are moulded, our tastes formed, our ideas suggested” (see Bernays quoted below). Dewey cited the work of “publicity agents” in this process (Ibid. p43, 82) and used the concept of “culture” in a way anticipating the use of this term by the cultural studies movement in Britain from the 1970s. The above quote shows that he also introduced the term “hegemony” in a way which indicates his belief in how the material-economic activities of American capitalism is linked to its ideology – “the production of souls”. This was a process of concern to Gramsci whose *Prison Notebooks* foreground the notion of cultural hegemony and provides the basis for other strands of late 20th century and 21st century social theory. But a further and very significant resonance to other strands of late modern theory is also tangible. Looking back at Dewey’s concerns from a Habermassian perspective, one cannot but notice a parallel between what Dewey is describing and Habermas’s notion of the colonisation of the “lifeworld”. The “lifeworld” is the concept which in Habermas’s schema stands for the world of everyday life within which people are free to hold and express thoughts which spring from their human, cultural mentality before it is altered by instrumental action designed to have people think along purposive rational lines. It is too early in the thesis to go into these Habermassian concepts in any depth. They are discussed later, in chapters eight, nine and especially in chapter ten. In the meantime, however, I would like to draw attention to Dewey’s picture of early 20th century United States culture deliberately constructed to engineer citizens to think along restricted lines to make them instruments of big corporations. There was a deliberate project to develop a mass mentality which accepted and supported capitalism; and “publicity agents” are cited by Dewey as deeply involved in this project. Further Dewey agrees that this project to produce capitalist oriented, instrumental thinking flowed across borders to the extent that European cultures reacted against it. Dewey remarks on the way the Europeans tried to protect their culture from US hegemony by promoting their own literary and other forms of cultural expression. In Habermassian terms this might be likened to a defence of the “lifeworlds” of European citizens from attempts at “colonisation” by purposive rational concepts.
But to go back across the Atlantic to events in the United States. In the United States public relations was born and grew up in this purposive rational climate of fiercely utilitarian, Fordist, Taylorist, and instrumental thinking. This climate impregnates every syllable of Bernays’ more famous passages, conjuring up the image of a mass, mechanistic society which is, or should be, rationally and scientifically managed. It is an impregnation which appears deeply patronising to those who defend the right and the ability of people to think and reason for themselves:

The conscious and intelligent manipulation of the organised habits and opinions of the masses is an important element in democratic society. Those who manipulate this unseen mechanism of society constitute an invisible government which is the true ruling power of our country.

We are governed, our minds are moulded, our tastes formed, our ideas suggested, largely by men we have never heard of. This is a logical result of the way in which our democratic society is organised. Vast numbers of human beings must cooperate in this manner if they are to live together in a smoothly functioning society (Bernays. 1930. p9. first published 1928).

In hunting for the early 20th century antecedents of present public relations theory therefore, we should not be surprised if we encounter theoretical approaches with a distinctly instrumental bent. These would be theories which bear the hallmarks of purposive rationalism in an unselfconscious, and in fact in a celebratory manner. They celebrate the contemporary fashionable theme of the scientific management of society. These are theories that describe how to make people and society work like efficient mass produced machines. It is just this sort of theorising which one can discover when looking for the early antecedents of public relations theory. But this early embracing of the scientific, capitalist approach places the cognoscenti of late 20th century and early 21st century orthodox public relations is a dilemma when they come to try to identify public relations with “the public interest” in general. In chapter three we saw this uneasiness displayed in terms of Scott Cutlip’s criticism of Bernays. A recent textbook author and historian of public relations, Cutlip calls the founder of the field, Bernays, “inept”. I suggest this accusation is made
because of Bernay’s candidness about the complicity of public relations with the capitalist project, a complicity which was overt at the start of the 20th century:

Bernays called public relations the new propaganda and expanded the thesis of *Crystallizing Public Opinion*. His was an inept public relations decision – to put it mildly. Surely by this time, Bernays knew what every seasoned practitioner knows today: The manner in which a disseminated message is interpreted by the receiver is largely determined by the context in which the message is delivered – the prevailing climate of opinion (Cutlip. 1994.182 –183).\(^\text{17}\)

This disparity in candidness between public relations experts at different ends of the 20th century finds a parallel in the metre of the respective theoretical approaches which they draw upon. As will be explained in chapter nine, current orthodox public relations authorities draw upon theories which obscure or play down this instrumentalism, this Fordism, this Taylorism. Current authorities now do not find it ‘sound’ to use theories which make it plain that they are in the “mind moulding” business. At the start of the century however, when Taylorist, Fordist, instrumental approaches were embraced and when the belief in ‘progress’ and ‘scientific advance’ was unproblematic, there was far less of a problem identifying capitalist-complicit public relations with the public interest. Belief in ‘progress’ had not yet been palled by the awful disenchantments of the Second World War, the mid century wider political demands for economic and social equality, and the late-modern pro-environmental, anti-scientific anxieties.

I suggest that it is this waxing and waning, this original admission of what public relations is, followed by a later 20th century political coyness, which explains the difference between the explicitness and the non-explicitness of approaches to theorising public relations theory over the century. An unusual effect is brought about by the coincidence between the explicitness of the early orthodox public relations theorists and the explicitness of late 20th century and 21st century critics and critical theorists of public relations. It is as if these two groupings of approaches have more in common than either have with the theoretical approach of the late 20th century orthodox theorists of public relations. In

\(^{17}\) Previously quoted in chapter three.
chapters nine and eleven I question the intellectual legitimacy of current orthodox public relations theory which I suggest has estranged itself from early 20th century candidness and which does not welcome the searchlight of critical theory into its ultimate implications. In those chapters I argue that public relations will not earn genuine academic credibility until this problem is addressed.

A search for early theorists of public relations is hampered by the fact that the term “public relations counsel” did not come into general currency until 1923 with the publication of Bernay’s *Crystallizing Public Opinion* (Cutlip 1994. p176). In the early days it was far more usual to use the terms “publicity” and “public opinion” in discussions about activities which today would be called public relations. As a consequence one of the acknowledged founders of public relations, Ivy Lee, titles one of his influential books about this activity: *Publicity: Some of the Things It Is and Is Not*. Another consequence is that Walter Lippmann’s important 1922 book *Public Opinion* does not refer to public relations, although it is very relevant to this activity. So it is hard to find social theorists writing about “public relations” in the 1920s. What we can see however, is that the ideas of Gustave Le Bon and associated social theorists such as Tarde and Trotter were prominent among those involved with the emerging fields of study and practice of both public relations and public opinion. One can also arguably detect a resonance with Nietzsche’s ideas in the ways these fields were originally conceptualised.

Bernays and Lippmann both quote La Bon and Trotter. Lippman who is clearly the more intellectually informed also refers to Marx and Hegel and turn-of-the-century sociologist Tarde. Lee’s writings are more practical than theoretical, but he wrote a politically explicit analysis entitled *Present-Day Russia* after a trip to the Soviet Union in 1927. In the following I trace how psychological theories, particularly those of Gustave Le Bon, are taken up by Lippmann, Lee and Bernays and then used in a manner which fitted in with the pro-corporate capitalist extremism of the day. It is striking how this capitalist oriented instrumentalist use of theory is accompanied by a strong anti-communist rhetoric in the writings of Lee. What I want to demonstrate below is that in the early days of public relations there were theoretical concepts available which provided a good basis for theorising what happens public relations processes. Some of these are concepts which can be said to be reminiscent of, or to resonate or correspond with, current critical and cultural
studies approaches to theorising public relations activity. I suggest that the existence of these concepts and the early recognition of their relevance, might have enabled public relations to have established itself as a sound, academic discipline in universities many decades ago. However, what I also intend to demonstrate is that the purposive rational imperatives of the orthodox public relations industry distorted the manner in which social theory was in fact taken up. The consequence today, as will be further explained in chapters nine and eleven, is that public relations is poorly theorized in terms of practitioners and academics reflecting on their own activity. Instead the term “public relations theory” in textbooks and classes tends to mean the appropriation of various strands of social science theory in ways that makes the purposive rational, instrumental practices of orthodox public relations more efficient. It is as if there has been a self-censorship of public relations theory. But this is a censorship which currently faces a contradiction. The contradiction is the current clamour for public relations to be recognised as a proper profession, and consequently for public relations studies to be recognised as a proper academic discipline in the university. (The problems of this recognition are discussed in chapter eleven). It is this contradiction which gives rise to the current, growing prominence of critical studies of public relations. It is this contradiction and ambiguity which this thesis explores. The present chapter draws attention to the ambiguity of the selective way in which theory was applied to public relations in its early days. My implication is that this early theory has many similarities to that being applied in a critical manner by theorists today. This current critical application is the application which has the best chance of establishing public relations as an authentic university subject. If public relations is established in this way that achievement will come despite decades in which the critical potential of early theorizing of the field has been seemingly deliberately “lost” by the orthodox practitioners and teachers of this subject.

A discussion of Gustave Le Bon (1841-1931) and Trotter (1872-1939) provides a useful starting point for an analysis of this appropriation. Trotter, cited by Bernays (see below) was the author of the mid First World War Instincts of the Herd in Peace and War. This is a social psychological commentary on group behaviour, particularly the supposed behaviour of the Germans and the English in peace and war. It discusses Freudian ideas but is most striking for its sweeping and stereotypical comparisons between certain nations and
the behaviour of certain species of animals. Trotter who would appear to be propagandising is on the side of the British who naturally come off best from these comparisons. The book would probably be seen as racist by most people today. However the concept of “the herd” which he uses in his title had become very important in Nietzsche’s work. In this way we can see a resonance with the elitism of Nietzsche’s (1844 – 1900) and Bernay’s 1928 theorising of public relations. Trotter suggests how people meekly follow the leaders of the ‘herd’. His ideas are clearly elitist and would have assisted those opposed to democratic political structures.

Le Bon was a French social psychologist whose writings anticipate recent theoretical approaches, including Burke’s “logology” of rhetorical ‘thought connections’ discussed in chapter one. The quote below from *The Crowd: a Study of the Popular Mind* illustrates his basic orientation:

> A crowd thinks in images, and the image itself immediately calls up a series of other images, having no logical connection with the first. We can easily conceive this state by thinking of the fantastic succession of ideas to which we are sometimes led by calling up in our minds any facts (Le Bon. *The Crowd: a Study of the Popular Mind* 1921. p45. first published 1896).

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18 See also Nietzsche (1974 [1887] sections 354 & 116) for references to “the herd”. Nietzsche’s analogy of the human “herd” seems to be rather more sophisticated than Trotter’s. Nietzsche uses the analogy to express his view that human thinking, however creative or individual, can only be expressed via the mores, the particular cultural milieu, in which it takes place and is thus confined within the herd-like constraints of how society in general thinks: “…consequently each of us, even with the best will to understand himself in as individual a way as possible, ‘to know himself’, will none the less bring into his consciousness only what is not individual in him, his ‘average’ – that our thought itself is continually, as it were outvoted, by the character of consciousness – by the ‘genius of the species’ which rules in it – and translated back into the perspective of the herd” (Ibid. section 354). It is not clear if there is a direct link between Nietzsche and early public relations theorists. However the adoption certainly of Trotter, and perhaps Le Bon by these early theorists indicates that Nietzsche and these theorists certainly shared the “herd” concept to some extent.
Le Bon also echoes Nietzsche on the notion of elitism and in his dismissal of the common person’s ability to reason while holding that some few ‘men’ (sic) ARE capable of independent reason:

An orator in intimate communication with the crowd can evoke images by which it will be seduced…the powerlessness of crowds to reason prevents them displaying any trace of the critical spirit of discerning truth from error…the ease with which certain opinions obtain general acceptance results more especially from the impossibility experienced by the majority of men in forming an opinion peculiar to themselves and based on reasoning of their own (Le Bon. 1921. p74-75. first published 1896).

Le Bon’s notion of the “crowd” corresponds to Nietzsche’s notion of the “herd”:

The ideas of the herd should rule in the herd but not reach out beyond it: the leaders of the herd require a fundamentally different valuation for their own action (Nietzsche. 1967). (See also footnote in this chapter.)

Le Bon anticipates ‘reception theory’ as used by some modern social and communication theorists. Both Le Bon and these later theorists are concerned with the way the messages is ‘read’ by the receiver in contrast to how it was intended by the sender (McQuail. 1994. p53; Holub. 1984; Jauss. 1982). The passage below also resonates with Aristotle’s concern with the emotions in his The Art of Rhetoric:

…crowds are not to be influenced by reasoning and can only comprehend rough and ready associations of ideas. The orators who know how to make an impression on them always appeal in consequence to their sentiments and never to their reason…To bring home conviction to crowds it is necessary first of all to thoroughly comprehend the sentiments by which they are animated (Le Bon. 1921. p129 first published 1896).
There are also overtones of an Hegelian ‘Geist’ or ‘Spirit’ developing through history towards ‘Absolute Knowledge’ in:

It is by the acquisition of a solidly constituted collective spirit that the race frees itself to a greater and greater extent from the unreflecting power of crowds, and emerges from the barbarian state (Le Bon. 1921. p181. first published 1896).

**Walter Lippmann (1889-1974)** drew in part on Le Bon but also incorporated other contemporary theoretical approaches into his analysis. His theories and commentary helped to found the field of public opinion studies. There is criticism of Hegel, overtones of Rousseau and what we might see as harbingers of structuralism, post-structuralism and the later 20th century interest in Nietzsche in Lippmann’s analysis. Like other contemporary observers of the political and cultural climate, including Lee, Lippmann was particularly interested in analysing and critiquing Marxist ideas. He concluded that Marxism was wrong in predicting that people’s class loyalties and political affiliations would be determined by their economic circumstances:

They [Marxians] thought that they themselves possessed that clear conception, and that what they knew the rest of mankind would learn. The event has shown, not only that a clear conception of interest does not arise automatically in everyone, but that it did not even arise in Marx and Lenin themselves. After all that Marx and Lenin have written, the social behaviour of mankind is still obscure. It ought not to be if economic position alone determined public opinion. Position ought, if their theory were correct, not only to divide mankind into classes, but to supply each class with a view of its interest and a coherent policy for obtaining it. Yet nothing is more certain than that all classes of men are in constant perplexity as to what their interests are. (Footnote: …when it came to the test Lenin completely abandoned the materialist interpretation of politics)…

In respect to the existing social order, Marxian socialism emphasises property conflict as the maker of opinion, in respect to the loosely defined working class it ignores property conflict as the basis of agitation, in respect of the future it
imagines a society without property conflict and therefore without conflict of opinion…though you remove every instance of absolute conflict, the partial access of everyman to the whole range of facts would never the less create conflict…The communists in Russia would not propagate their faith with such unflagging zeal if economic determinism were alone determining the opinion of the Russian people (Lippmann. 1949. p118-119-120. first published 1922).

Lippmann’s rejection of crude, economistic Marxist ideas means he had to develop other approaches to predict the ‘mentality of the masses’ – the ways large numbers of people were induced to think in such and such a manner. Parties of the left were still attempting to augment ‘orthodox-Marxist’ thinking long after Lippmann had dismissed it as simply wrong. This augmentation is reflected in the writings of Lukacs and the early Frankfurt School. Lippmann’s writings reveal that the political right in fact had a head start in this reformation. In Lippmann’s 1922 writing we see this debate being played out in a manner which is taken up early by the US capitalist establishment. It is taken up by this establishment by virtue of the fact that many of Lippmann’s ideas were adopted by the developing public relations industry of his day. This adoption is reflected in Bernays’ reference to Lippmann, an instance of which is quoted lower down in this chapter. In place of crude Marxism, Lippmann offers a raft of theoretical approaches for understanding how mass thought may be steered. Some of these approaches resonate with the structuralist, post-structuralist, Rousseauian and Hegelian notions incorporated into many strands of our current social and cultural analyses. For example:

The making of one general will out of a multitude of general wishes is not an Hegelian mystery, as so many social philosophers have imagined, but an art well known to leaders, politicians and steering committees. It consists essentially of the use of symbols which assemble emotions after they have been detached from their ideas (Lippmann. 1927. p47).

Overtones of Durkheim (in *Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*) and more recent studies of semiotics, might be seen in:
What privileges do within the hierarchy, symbols do for the rank and file. They conserve unity. From the totem pole to the national flag, from the wooden idol to God the Invisible King, from the magic word to some diluted version of Adam Smith or Bentham, symbols have been cherished by leaders, many of whom were themselves unbelievers…the leader knows by experience that only when symbols have done their work is there a handle he can use to move a crowd (Lippmann. 1949. p150. first published 1922).

Lippmann also refers to Le Bon:

Those who have been most impressed by [the popular will’s] erratic workings have found a prophet in M. LeBon and have welcomed generalisations about what Sir Robert Peel called “that great compound of folly weakness, prejudice, wrong feeling, right feeling, obstinacy and newspaper paragraphs which is called public opinion (Lippmann. 1949. p127. first published 1922).

Ivy Lee (1877-1934) shared Lippmann’s rejection of Marxism. However, unlike the more neutral, academic terminology which Lipmann uses to reject Marxism, Lee uses rhetorical, emotion invoking language, including the metaphor of ‘disease’ which shows his utter distaste for Marxism and communism. This is the sort of partisan political attitude which stridently capitalist, contemporary big business expected when they sought the services of public relations advisers for work to orient public opinion in their favour. Lee’s anti-communism can in this way be argued to be in line with the instrumental and purposive rational, radical re-shaping - the ‘moulding’, as Bernays called it, of individual American mentalities in the early part of the 20th century. But first a bit of personal history about Lee. Lee is often put forward as the real father of public relations rather than Edward Bernays. This epithet is despite the fact that Lee died in disgrace in 1934 after being condemned for dealing with the Nazis. He had a cerebral hemorrhage at age 57. Since 1929 he had worked for the US arm of the politically well connected major German chemicals firm I. G. Farben. In the early 1930s Lee toured Germany in connection with this work. On
one of these trips he met Goebbels and Hitler (Heibert. 1966. p287). Lee’s sympathetic biographer Hiebert says:

The company officials wanted, as Lee said later, to have him ‘size up’ Hitler. He talked with the dictator for half an hour…Lee told the Germans that complete frankness and openness was the only sound basis for public relations. If their policies were unacceptable to the people after their policies had been frankly and openly explained, then the Germans had better change their policies (Hiebert. 1966. p288).

In *Present Day Russia* Lee includes chapters on *inter alia* “Soviet Propaganda”, “Lenin and Leninism”, “Stalin and the Communist Party”, “Boukharin and the International”, “Trotsky and the Opposition”, “Radek and Bolshevik Propaganda”. Lee’s analysis is sympathetic to the Russian people but its reception gives an insight into the total opposition of the business class in the United States to communism. Lee states his anti-Communist view very clearly:

Such is the dilemma which now faces civilisation. The problem is: how to draw Russia towards the West, cure the disease of Bolshevism, avert the menace of a revolutionary Asia (Lee. 1928. p204).

Lee advances politically conservative theories of human nature and of the relationship between human nature and economics:

Russian human nature is exactly like all other human nature, and economic law, which is a mere expression of human nature, is as resistless as the tides. The Russian people as a whole are slowly adjusting themselves to the same conditions which prevail in the rest of the world. Those conditions, in so far as they are successful anywhere, are based upon the recognition of the rights of private property and the necessity of giving the largest amount of personal freedom to the individual human being (Ibid. p198).
Lee’s suggestions that US–Soviet trade should perhaps be resumed to raise the standard of living of Russians, in order to topple the communist regime politically, resulted in unsubstantiated allegations that he was in the pay of the Russians. Lee was opposed to continued economic isolation of Russia because isolation and military action had not succeeded in stopping Communism:

Isolation has been tried, armed intervention by other nations has been tried. These have not cured the Bolshevik disease…the question is: can trade with Russia on sound business principles save her? (Ibid. p203).

Lee employs his concept of human nature to suggest that helping the Russian economy would be the best way of destabilising the contemporary Soviet regime. He ranks his theory of society, which he calls “law”, above that of Marxist theory by claiming that his is the “natural” approach:

That new “affection” for the people as a whole can be found in the opportunity to own and enjoy the results of their toil, to taste the joys of high wages, comfortable incomes and the possibilities of possessing property. Once the Russian people – and particularly the Russian peasants – have tasted these delights, all the Bolshevik theories in the world will, through the sheer action of innate human nature, perish from the face of the landscape. The law of nature is stronger than any social theory (Ibid. p202).

Lee highlights the anti-communist, political potential of the kulaks – the *petit* landowning class which resisted agricultural collectivisation. In a passage which highlights the ‘biologist’ metaphors of his theory and attitude towards society, he points out that there is a particular class which is most resistant to communism. This is the class which a few years later was to be dispossessed and massacred by Stalin:
Russia is afflicted with a serious disease, one which has permeated malignantly that portion of the Russian population which is included within the Communist Party. But that fragment of the population is small in numbers. The disease has not yet permeated the great body of peasants who till the land and in whom rests the future of Russia (Ibid. p201).

Despite the fact that he characterised communism as a disease and championed corporate capitalism, some Americans accused Lee of having pro-Soviet sympathies. This contradiction highlights the anti-communist paranoia of the era when even intelligent engagement with the phenomenon of communism was seen to be disloyal to capitalism.

**Edward Bernays (1891-1995)** was primarily a public relations practitioner rather than a theorist. However his observation of turn of the century theorists and his longevity, including his professional longevity and his writings brought considerable influence from these early theorists to bear on public relations practice. In his 1923 book *Crystallizing Public Opinion*, Bernays quotes Lippmann uncritically:

> Water Lippmann…declares that: “…the significant revolution of modern times is not industrial or economic or political, but the revolution which is taking place in the art of creating consent among the governed.” [Bernays himself continues]: In domestic affairs the importance of public opinion, not only in political decisions, but in the daily industrial life of the nation, may be seen from numerous incidents (Bernays. 1961. p38-39 first published 1923).

Edward Bernays was seen as the grand old man of public relations – he died in 1995 at the age of 103. He is celebrated for his contribution to public relations, however the titles of two of his books are a gift to critics of public relations and a considerable embarrassment for orthodox public relations practitioners. The titles are: *Propaganda* (1928) and perhaps more damaging because of its more recent date: *The Engineering of Consent* first published in 1955. The opening of the first chapter in *Propaganda* quoted above in this thesis chapter, states Bernays’ instrumentalist conceptualisation of public relations clearly. Later in
Bernays confirms his adoption of theoretical approaches which are arguably comparable to those of structuralism and post-structuralism and which have some resonance with Nietzsche’s ideas:

Trotter and Le Bon concluded that the group mind does not *think* in the strict sense of the word. In place of thoughts it has impulses, habits and emotions. In making up its mind its first impulse is to follow the example of a trusted leader. This is one of the most firmly established principles of mass psychology…But when the example of the leader is not at hand and the herd must think for itself, it does so by means of clichés, pat words or images which stand for a whole group of ideas or experiences. Not many years ago it was only necessary to tag a political candidate with the word interests to stampede millions of people into voting against him, because anything associated with “the interests” seemed necessarily corrupt. Recently the word Bolshevik has performed a similar service for persons who wished to frighten the public away from a line of action. By playing upon an old cliché or manipulating a new one, the propagandist can sometimes swing a whole mass of group emotions…Men are rarely aware of the real reasons which motivate their actions (Bernays. 1930. p50-51 first published 1928).

As previously discussed, in *The Engineering of Consent* Bernays lists some of the symbols which he has found effective in applying the above theories. The symbols included the colours: red white and blue; Uncle Sam; the American flag – (Old Glory); the Statue of Liberty; the Liberty Bell; the Lincoln Memorial; the Washington Monument; the American Eagle; the Seal of the United States; the Goddess of Liberty; the White House; the map of the nation; the covered wagon (Bernays 1969. p154-155 first published 1955). Surely this reveals Bernays’ practical application of Saussure and Pierce’s notions of semiotics or semiology long before this subject became popular and elaborated in cultural studies?

**Conclusion**

In this chapter I have argued that the extremist, pro corporate-capitalist climate of the early 20th century, the period when the identity of US citizens as rugged individualists was
pulverised, required an explicitly right-wing style of public relations. Lee, who is still revered as the founder of public relations, despite the fact that he advised Hitler and Goebbels face to face! displays the paradigm example of this extremism. He is both the founder of public relations and the author of one of the first books that thoughtfully surveyed Soviet communism and condemned it as a “malignant disease”. This juxtaposition would appear to make it hard for proponents of the orthodox public relations industry to deny my claim, made throughout this thesis, that in its orthodox form, public relations is, at the very least, a politically conservative practice. I further suggest that the manner of Bernay’s appropriation of Lippmann’s approach, and both Lippmann and Bernays’ use of Le Bon, points towards the construction of an instrumental and purposive rational imperative where it comes to the use of theoretical concepts in public relations practice. This imperative is encapsulated in Bernays’ celebration of the “moulding” of people’s minds by public relations practice. This was the era which Dewey describes as the time when the culture and the “soul” of Americans was shaped in a radically different way for the purposes of advancing the interests of corporate capitalism. The developing public relations industry played a major part in the “moulding” or shaping of the soul. I suggest the above discussion shows that early attempts at theorising public relations, though based on Le Bon’s and Lippmann’s quite legitimate intellectual approaches, approaches which still have resonance with 21st century thought in cultural studies, can be seen to have been appropriated in a manner involving extreme politics. The politics of early public relations is now seen to be extreme because of the current sensitivities of an industry which bills public relations practice as “in the public interest”. In late capitalism, with its many social compacts and welfare state compromises, “the public interest” is realised to be a far more complex and sensitive matter than it was in the rather more straightforward, ‘red-hating’ political climate of the early 20th century United States. However, just because current corporate use of public relations is more sensitive, this does not mean to say that public relations, in its dominant orthodox mode, is not still a continuation of the efforts to maintain the domination of corporations and consequently of the capitalist political system which nurtures them. Current critical theorists of public relations therefore face an interesting project in investigating early theory for current usage. They have to distinguish the instrumental and political appropriation of early theory from early theory per se. In
making this distinction, as I have tried to show above, we can find many resonances between the theories which influence early public relations and the more intelligent approaches which are currently brought to bear in analysing public relations, such as those described in chapter eleven of this thesis. The implication of that chapter, and of chapter nine, is that current orthodox textbooks on public relations, by their omission, prefer to draw a veil over the stark political implications of the early period of public relations theory. I suggest that they draw this veil for reasons of the difficult political sensitivities – the fact that public relations still is predominately a powerful, partisan, right wing political influence on society. Orthodox exponents of the industry, the public relations cognoscenti, cannot afford to disclose this political affiliation which would emerge if they made themselves fully open and academically honest in the face of critical theory. They fear that making this fact transparent will diminish some of their effectiveness as a conservative political influence. In the next three chapters I will present case studies of public relations and suggest how current critical theory approaches could be used to understand the wider implications of public relations practice, including its embedded political implications. However, unlike the early exponents of public relations, I will avoid using theory for instrumental proposes. Instead I will demonstrate how critical theory can be used in conjunction with petit public relations – that is the public relations of the ordinary person - to enhance what Habermas would term communicative action, as opposed to strategic action. In other words I will try to demonstrate how current critical theory can NOW be, and by implication how some strands of early 20th century theory could THEN have been, used by public relations people to enhance democracy, rather than to restrict it.
Chapter Six

Ken Livingstone’s London – Case Study One

This case study uses theory and an actual account of public relations activity to challenge some common assumptions. These are the assumptions that public relations is always performed by a detached exponent in a commercial relationship to their employer or client with the aim of creating a putative, unsubstantial identity for the benefit of the client. It challenges assumptions that the “discourse” produced in the public relations process cannot help to develop a more authentic understanding of the world in the minds of the targeted public. In arguing the above this chapter will draw on the writer’s experiences as a press officer in the Ken Livingstone led Greater London Council (GLC) which was abolished by the Thatcher led UK government in 1986. It also draws from my activities as an anti-road building environmental activist preceding that employment. At the time of writing there was a fine irony to what took place. In early 2000 Ken Livingstone MP was a half forgotten, faintly reported, left wing, dissident, voice very much on the backbench of Tony Blair’s “Third Way” government. In May however Livingstone was elected as the independent Mayor of London in the teeth of unprecedented opposition from Blair and the Labour Party – a party which Livingstone had to resign from in order to stand. The terror which Livingstone struck into the hearts of both Thatcher and Blair was to do with the huge public platform which left-leaning Livingstone recaptured for the second time as the spokesperson for London. Clearly publicity in all its manifestations, including public relations, is an issue here. However the party political aspects of these wrangles are a side issue to the case study, which as I say, is about challenging some common assumptions about public relations. In making this challenge, the chapter will acknowledge some of the ways in which cultural theories can be employed to get a better grasp on what goes on in the public relations process. The implication will be that it may be possible to employ cultural and critical theory in a way which justifies legitimate use of public relations and allied processes and which at the same time exposes illegitimate usage.
As discussed in chapter four of this thesis, modern public relations came into existence at the start of the 20th century in the United States at a time when the “Progressives” were seeking a middle path between laissez faire, monopoly capitalism and a seemingly inevitable state control of corruptly run industries. Resort to state control was seen by the political right as tantamount to state socialism (Goldman. 1972; Bowman. 1996; Hartz. 1955). The immediate aim of early public relations counsel was to improve public acceptance of their clients – mostly large corporations – even if this meant advising their clients to change their ways (Lee. 1925; Hiebert. 1966; Bernays. 1970,). But the general political effect of these initiatives, in line with the aims of the Progressives, was to help in the reduction of support for pre-First World War American left wing radicalism and to ease the path for the acceptance of a regulated and politically responsive capitalism which removed the need for the feared government take-over. This process was part of a political-cultural change in the US which involved a reduction of individualism and the creation of an “Americanised” “Corporateness” – an acceptance of the domination of corporations and corporations’ commercial-personal values by the United States political milieu (Dewey. 1931). The public relations industry has always been US centred. Nearly all the major public relations firms and textbooks originate in the US. This industry could be said to now be ‘selling’ American style corporatisation and related conformity globally in the face of residual objections from national cultural and political interests and traditions. In particular US inspired public relations intervenes in debates on attitudes to the environmental effects of global industries (Beder. 1997). This corporatisation is occasionally thrown into relief by trade union stands against privatisation as in Britain and Australia in the 1980s and 1990s; by street protests against global capitalism as in Seattle, Davos, and London in 1999 and 2000; and the odd national government refusal to fully cooperate as in Malaysia in 1999. As a consequence of its founding raison d’etre, public relations practice has always been attacked from the left (Carey. 1995; Stauber. 1995; Ewen. 1996). But it has also been attacked from the right for its allegiance with those who seek to limit or regulate laissez faire capitalism (Olasky. 1987). Public relations also has a very bad press which is not helped by the opening two chapters from the late doyen of public relations, Edward Bernays in his honestly, but blatantly entitled Propaganda:
The conscious and intelligent manipulation of the organised habits and opinions of the masses is an important element in democratic society. Those who manipulate this unseen mechanism of society constitute an invisible government which is the true ruling power of our country.

We are governed, our minds are moulded, our tastes formed, our ideas suggested, largely by men we have never heard of. This is a logical result of the way in which our democratic society is organised. Vast numbers of human beings must cooperate in this manner if they are to live together in a smoothly functioning society (Bernays. 1930. p9 - first published 1928).

The ensuing is an account of some of this alleged “mind moulding” in the 1980s which Londoners were ‘rescued’ from by Mrs Thatcher and her government. The implication of the below account is that public relations practices can perfectly well be harnessed for sensible and wholesome purposes. Public relations’ name is only mired because of its questionable uses by those who are usually in power politically or financially and determined to hold on to their power at the expense of wider interests. This account ends with an appeal for a sensible appreciation of the uses and abuses of public relations. In making this appeal this account utilises Habermas’s concepts. In particular it advocates Habermas’s imperative for the protection and examination of ‘lifeworlds’ as a way of trying to judge how we might distinguish well conducted public relations from unacceptable public relations activities.

Shortly after he arrived in power in 1981 left wing Labour leader of the Greater London Council Ken Livingstone summed up the change of thinking in some Labour controlled local authorities at that time and the challenge which they faced from a right wing dominated media:

The influx of people who have given the GLC this great reputation in the gutter press for being the end of civilisation as we know it...is the post-1968 generation in politics (in Gyford. 1985. p21).
The Conservatives who were in ascendancy nationally with Margaret Thatchers as their Prime Minister did not welcome these left wing radical ideas. Before this turn to town hall socialism, previous GLC administrations were already involving local communities in development planning processes. However under socialist control this involvement was modified with GLC funds going directly to pressure groups and forums to better enable policy influence by sections of the community across a whole range of issues. There was unprecedented political and funding support for a range of interests such as gay constituents, for black people, for women's causes, for improved public transport and so on. Groups to benefit from this support included the Docklands Forum which acted as a watchdog to the Government's Docklands Development Corporation; Capital Transport Campaign which promoted better, cheaper public transport; The Gay and Lesbian Centre in Smithfield, East London; various anti-motorway building groups and so on. The socialists’ decision to financially enable pressure or lobby groups came after experience and studies found that the public participation mechanisms of the 1960 and 1970s were of dubious efficacy for marginalised groups (Boaden et. al. 1982; Hain. 1980; Gyford. 1985): "That the middle class participate more frequently in the issues involved in local service provision has been repeatedly demonstrated throughout this book" (Boaden. et. al. 1982). The socialists hoped that funding would help marginalised and less articulate constituencies. Hopefully ad hoc groups would form and become effective representatives across a range of issues which had previously been neglected to the disadvantage of the most beleaguered and worst off Londoners. These louder, organised voices were needed to engage with central government, other authorities and with the County Hall bureaucracy itself which Labour GLC politicians sometimes found hard to shift to their ideas even though they formally controlled these officers. This fundamental challenge to conventional political power blocks ignited tempers on the right of politics and in right leaning newspapers. Councils were branded in the tabloid press in headline after headline as 'loony' above stories which tried to incite loathing at the thought of people's rates money going to support unconventional ends such as black and gay campaigning groups (Gyford. 1982. pix). Gyford gives Islington as a borough council which was particularly strong on these principles in that period. Henney (1984) adds that the IRA, bisexuality, anti-imperialism and foreign policy in relation to the promotion of peace were also concerns of the new
political leaders at County Hall. This radicalism came at a time when central government was particularly keen to promote a competitive, individualist market culture to suit its vision of global economics. Trade unions were being assaulted by legislation, public housing was being sold off to promote self reliance and all sorts of public services were being privatised. At the same time there were attempts to reign in public spending generally and to cap the amount of money which councils could raise autonomously from rates. One consequence of this collision of political intentions was the October 1983 white paper to abolish the Greater London Council.

It was in this explosive political and intellectual environment that the GLC and some other local authorities started to fully explore the publicity powers given to them in the 1972 Local Government Act. Those powers had been drafted when local-central government relations were far more consensual. Local government generated publicity was at that time envisaged more as a means to make people aware of their local councils in order to push up council voting participation and to encourage people to stand for election for local government. There seemed to be little anticipation of the political climate in which these powers would now be used. The present writer was involved with some of the groups which received money under the 1972 Act to produce some of the alternative voices in this controversial era for London. I was the chair of an anti-urban motorway local residents group: New Archway Road Residents Association (NARRA) in 1982 and 1983 which was funded by both left wing controlled Haringey Council and the GLC to a total of about £3,000. In 1983 I was a member of an anti-road building film group: The Archway Road Movie Group, which obtained a loan of £83,000 from the GLC. For a short period I was treasurer of a London-wide anti-urban motorway campaign coordination group: Transport for an Improved City (TRAFIC), which obtained approximately £110,000 in grant from the GLC. In November 1983 I relinquished those positions to become a full time press officer with the Greater London Council until its abolition in March 1986. Most of the rest of this chapter will involve a first hand recollection of examples of the public relations activities in County Hall and of some related ad hoc group campaigning during this period.

The New Archway Road Residents Association (NARRA) is an example of a small neighbourhood group which was strongly backed by the GLC and which helped pass on parts of the GLC's message. In the 1970s the Greater London Council had reversed its
urban motorway building policy after widespread public outcry. The 1981 administration was strongly anti-motorway and committed to expanding public transport and resisting central government plans to widen the main roads which the government controlled in the outer London boroughs. In the early 1980s residents in Highgate, North London were fighting plans to widen the government controlled two thirds of the mile-and-a-quarter long Archway Road. Archway Road is part of the main A1 route from the English Channel ports through London and on to Edinburgh. The GLC third at the south end of the road had been widened to near motorway standards before GLC policy changed. The newly enlightened GLC paid for its own legal and planning experts to oppose the government case for widening the rest of the road at a new public inquiry into the plan. GLC funds were made available to NARRA and other neighbourhood protest groups to help them project their views against widening. There was some degree of divergence in views between the resident protesters and the County Hall hired experts even though the experts were working to a political brief which was largely in line with the protesters. The protesters attempted to get their own experts and some protesting individuals themselves developed formidable understanding and expertise in the public inquiry process. However to a large extent they were reliant on using publicity to focus and broadcast the extensive local public opinion against the plans. A large part of the strategy was to make the scheme politically unacceptable or at least to create a political atmosphere in which protesters could capitalise on any technical slip ups or difficulties of the inquiry process. This kind of public inquiry inevitably finds for government departments and against protesters. Even if the inspector finds for the protesters, the inspector’s recommendations can be over-ruled by government ministers. New Archway Road Residents Association was just one of many groups involved in the protest. It was however central in that it purported to represent those who lived and worked on the road, many of whom would be displaced by the scheme. NARRA organised many activities which will only be sampled below. One was a march up Archway Road.

The public relations activities surrounding the march involved liaising with police who escorted us on this very busy road. A building supplies firm on the road supplied a lorry for a float depicting faceless, suited, bowler hatted, ministry bureaucrats sledge hammering down a house with a woman inside. Another lorry from a garden supplies firm
carried a jazz band. Children and those who did not want to walk could ride on a vintage London Transport open top-deck bus provided by the GLC. Scores of the 300 marchers carried placards with A3 sized posters on them. The posters were of the campaign's "Archway Motorway: No Way" slogan and the campaign symbol - like the End of Motorway sign - a motorway symbol receding into the distance with a motorway bridge and a red slash across to indicate the end or in this case "no". There were 1.5-inch badges with the same motif, balloons with the same motif and GLC banners draped from the bus. A related group made a large banner which was draped from the 19th century Archway Bridge road viaduct after which the road is named and which the procession passed under. The march went the length of the road and then returned to Jackson's Lane Community Centre half way along the road. The centre was part funded by the GLC and its management combined a building completion event with the end of the march. Leader of the GLC Ken Livingstone and Transport Chair and Deputy Chair Dave Wetzel and Paul Moore attended the reception. The march was covered in the local newspapers and in "Archway" - an A4, eight page, professional looking illustrated newsletter produced occasionally by NARRA members who had journalistic backgrounds. It was printed with GLC money. The offset litho print run was about 3,000 copies. It was delivered door to door. All work except the printing was voluntary. Although media coverage of the Sunday march was not huge, reference to the event would be used for months afterwards to illustrate the strength of local feeling. This illustration could be used by local campaigners or politicians when putting their case in many different forums. The march was also a unifying event which showed the GLC and local people working well together over policy issues. It produced a great deal of esprit de corps and high morale among all those involved in the anti-road building campaign. Such morale raising was especially useful among the bulk of the public inquiry’s 5,000 officially registered protesters who saw themselves as impotent in the face of the legalistic and bureaucratic inquiry and planning processes.

I suggest that this small sample of activities conforms closely to the concepts in the various orthodox definitions and descriptions of organised public relations activity. These definitions are discussed in chapter three. These are such orthodox definitions as those which are cited in public relations textbooks, for example: (Newson et. al. 1993; Grunig & Hunt. 1984; Wilcox et. al. 1992; Cutlip et. al. 1994). The march demonstrated and
cemented mutual understanding between various sections involved in the anti-urban motorway movement including councils, protesters and even those who wanted the motorway-style road built. The latter group were provided with a clearer picture of the strength of local feeling. The march also involved the generation of goodwill, particularly between the GLC and protesters and among protesters from different sub-neighbourhoods, from amenity and environmental groups, people with differing political opinions and so on. This goodwill was particularly enhanced by the festive feeling among those who took part and those who watched. There was also a feeling of catharsis: For many, marching was the only way they could demonstrate deep seated feelings felt for years which could hardly be expressed by letter. In line with other definitions of public relations the march involved the earning of respect in different directions, for instance respect for the creatively and responsibly expressed views of the protesters and their representatives and respect for the organising ability of the protest organisations. It made the campaign concrete and visible by bringing people together for purposeful expression of their feelings. Some of these more nebulous, morale related effects of public relations activity are notoriously difficult to measure. The anti widening campaign was eventually won and the plans scrapped. Safeguarded houses on the route were sold back to their occupants by the Department of Transport in 1994.

Transport For An Improved City (TRAFIC) was an organisation which arose out of occasional pan London meetings of small groups like NARRA in an attempt to coordinate protest against government road transport policy for the capital. In 1984 with Government moves to abolish the GLC in train, there was concern about what central government would do once it gained control over main roads in inner London. Hitherto London boroughs controlled minor roads and the government controlled main roads, sometimes known as 'trunk routes' in outer London and the rest of the country. However in the inner boroughs the Greater London Council controlled main roads even where they were extensions of government controlled roads radiating in from the suburbs. Archway Road was an example where a government trunk route became a GLC main road at the inner London boundary. As has been said above, in the early 1970s the GLC was keen to expand its main roads and build urban motorways, but by the early 1980s the council was strongly opposed to demolishing homes to increase traffic capacity in the traffic jammed and air polluted heart
of London. TRAFIC was formed and managed by a committee of neighbourhood groups and sympathetic environmental and amenity associations which were concerned about these issues. It was awarded more than £110,000 by the GLC in two tranches to carry out publicity work to make Londoners aware of the issues. Two employees were appointed and installed in rented space at the Friends of the Earth national headquarters at City Road, Islington. Friends of the Earth is an environment campaigning group similar to Greenpeace. FoE were also contracted to provide additional services such as payroll, office services and accounting. TRAFIC targeted south and particularly south west London as an area which could be severely affected by government roads policy post GLC. It was also thought to be an area where understanding of, and organisation against road widening could fruitfully be enhanced. In liaison with local groups TRAFIC organised a series of heavily publicised public meetings. Direct mail was employed to alert residents to the meetings. At the meetings local politicians, including MPs, GLC members and local councillors shared platforms with knowledgeable spokespeople for the anti-roads campaign. These often packed meetings were remarked upon as particularly useful for impressing on Conservative MPs the anti road widening sentiments of large numbers of their constituents. The meetings were widely reported in local newspapers. Other TRAFIC public relations activities included the issuing of news releases, Parliamentary lobbies and stunts. An example of a pan London publicity event was the launching, almost literally, of the TRAFIC elephant. An elephant theme ran through publicity material including stickers, posters, news releases, and tee shirts to make the point that elephants needed trunks (trunk roads), but London did not. The larger than life-sized elephant was commissioned from an artist who built it out of light grey, paper-like, plastic sheeting. Protesters and the deflated elephant were then assembled on an appropriate day at a suitable news-deadline time, with permission, on the green outside Euston Station- one of the London main line rail terminals. With the invited journalists and local television crews present, the elephant envelope was inflated by an industrial, electric, airblower via a tube into one leg. Due to the squally and rainy weather it took most of the two dozen or so campaigners to keep the elephant in position. Some took the opportunity to shelter from the rain underneath it. The resulting media coverage was perhaps a bit more humorous than intended and abounded with puns about white elephants. However the stunt was generally assessed as a success. Spokespeople were interviewed at
the event and this resulted in newspaper, local radio and local television coverage of some of the points TRAFIC was trying to make.

The nature and effects of the year or so campaign by TRAFIC could be compared to those of the NARRA campaign. However the differences were the pan-London nature, its higher cost and its aim and apparent success in reaching people and politicians with hitherto low understanding of roads policy matters. It was noticeable that during and after the campaign the government's Department of Transport dropped references to 'trunk' roads or 'trunk' routes – the normal terminology – in their discussion of the main roads to be taken over from the GLC. This care with terminology was judged as an indicator of success. Campaigners felt it important that post GLC, the Inner London main roads should not become regarded as integrated extensions of the national trunk route network. The argument was that when national trunk routes penetrated deep inside the capital, still using the same, often ancient route lines, they should not be regarded primarily as routes for the movement of heavy lorries and other traffic. Rather they should be regarded as part of the infrastructure of densely packed communities of local people. They should be regarded as particularly troublesome, dangerous and polluting parts of that local infrastructure. For these reasons they should be controlled in a way which enhanced public transport facilities and amenity for those communities through which they passed, rather than as arteries for transient, often pan European transport operations. No concerted programme of major works on the roads in question has been announced since 1986, although the Department of Transport has pressed ahead with schemes previously in train in their own pre-1986 outer London roads domain, notably widening of the North Circular Road which arcs through the North London suburbs. On some of the inner London -would be trunk routes- the government has instead instigated a new road regulation. This is called Red Routes and involves much more stringent parking bans and heavy policing by traffic wardens. An exception is the building of the M11 link in East London, an area which has a lesser population of better off socio-economic groups than the north and south west of London and consequently less resources for campaigning.

GLC money for NARRA, TRAFIC and scores of other controversial groups to do with all sorts of issues in London was granted under publicity related sections of the 1972 Local Government Act: particularly Sections 111, 142 and 137. By 1984 these sections
were also being used to empower a fierce campaign of direct expenditure by the GLC against its abolition. Former GLC Committee Chair Tony Banks, by 1984 an MP, said in a House of Commons Debate:

It has been necessary for bodies like the GLC and the metropolitan county councils to explain the case [against abolition] to their electorate...Much of that opposition [to abolition] has come about because of the GLC's campaign...All that expenditure has been cleared through the GLC's legal department and I dare any Conservative member to say that any of it has been illegal, because it has not been illegal, as I suspect they know (Hansard. 9/5/84).

All pressure groups’ publicity and campaigning was also similarly legally cleared with groups having to carefully explain their intentions before grants were made. By late 1984 and into 1985 however the granting processes were being hampered by legal challenges. In 1985 the government rushed through an interim report from a government committee of inquiry chaired by David Widdicombe QC, into a range of local authority business. The committee was requested to bring its consideration of publicity matters forward. The legal challenges as well as the 1985 publication of the inquiry's interim report had the effect of making council lawyers more cautious in approving pressure groups’ funding for publicity purposes as outlined above. This kind of funding was virtually outlawed in the Local Government Act of 1986.

The official Livingstone GLC publicity and public relations effort (as opposed to publicity generated by outside groups) was led by Tony Wilson, formerly head of public relations at the left wing borough of Lambeth. Wilson paid less attention to the County Hall press office which mostly organised news conferences and responded to journalists’ questions. Instead he focused most of his attention on the publicity side of the operation and was principally responsible for a provocatively graphic, Londonwide road side hoarding and newspaper advertising campaign which won publicity industry accolades. This campaign also attracted Conservative political outrage, close official scrutiny and eventually immortality as pictures in a number of books which mention the GLC anti-abolition campaign (Myers. 1986; Wheen. 1985; Forrester et. al. 1985). The posters,
sometimes repeated in the newspaper ads, showed images such as Mrs Thatcher turning her back on Londoners; a funeral wreath around the London Transport symbol when the capital's public transport system was taken away from GLC control; government red tape entangling symbols of London; multiple pictures of the Environment Secretary who would allegedly act as dictator of London in the absence of a multitude of councillors; and so on. Wilson and his associate Dr Harry Barlow were also responsible for a number of innovations including the regular posting of updated London unemployment totals on giant changeable number boards. These were positioned on the roof of County Hall so that they could be read from the Palace of Westminster across the Thames. The idea was adapted so that other salient campaign messages could be substituted for the figures on occasion. The story goes that Barlow proposed this unemployed numbers idea and Wilson approved it as long as Barlow was prepared to risk his own neck by crawling out along the top floor parapet himself each time the numbers had to be changed. Stringent standard political broadcasting restrictions barred the campaign from television and radio. These media were used however for less contentious advertising campaigns such as one to discourage parking on pavements and another to get motorcyclists to use headlights during the day.

Other innovative activities in the campaign included massive, free open air concerts in the very large County Hall car park and adjoining Jubilee Gardens riverside area. Among the more esoteric and rejected ideas was one to project a hologram of the GLC protest into the sky above the Palace of Westminster and another to make Livingstone appear to walk on water across the Thames towards Parliament. This latter idea was based on the fact that although many right wing politicians and right wing media were intent on creating a folk devil image for County Hall, opinion research showed that Livingstone came across very positively as a likeable and affable ordinary Londoner particularly in television interviews. Livingstone's TV image alone is credited with playing a large part in winning support for the GLC (Carvel. 1984; Forrester et. al. 1985). The water walk idea involved a semi submersible pontoon. GLC Press and Public Relations Branch also paid a lot of attention to publication work, to signage, political lobbying, discussion among trade unions and other potential allies and so on. Wilson commissioned repeated opinion polling which showed the progress of the campaign in close detail. Because of this careful polling, in summer 1984 the GLC was able to boast on billboards and the County Hall parapet that 74% of
Londoners were against abolition. But further than this the polling enabled a senior official to say with assurance that support for this outcome could be measured as increasing by 2% for every £100,000 of advertising campaign spend.

The present writer arrived to work in the GLC Press Office in November 1983 when there was a staff of eight press officers in that office. In addition there was a chief press officer in an inner office in the press office. A press secretary to the majority group was based near the council leader's office on another floor. The eight GLC press officers had separate function areas of the authority to look after and worked closely with senior officers and members, particularly the committee chairs and deputy chairs, who were responsible for those areas.

With the publication of the Streamlining the Cities (abolition) white paper in October 1983, the early 1984 introduction of the Local Government (Interim Provisions) - (also known as the Abolition Paving Bill) and the Local Government Bill which was the abolition bill proper by the end of 1984 - press work increased manyfold from Christmas 1983 onward. The majority group was in a mood to facilitate the voice of County Hall as far as possible so there were no budget restrictions to appointing press office staff. The consequence was that temporary press officers were constantly drafted in from 1984 in what became known as a rubber walls policy. Additional desks were seemingly being added constantly with chairs having to be pushed further back against the wall and more phone lines put on. The office setting was probably about 10 years behind comparable commercial office organisation. The elderly office decor and furniture would have been reasonably comfortable with the original space allocation. The windows afforded a fine view over the Thames to Westminster. However the typewriters were manual. There were no word processors with news releases having to be typed again by typists allocated to each desk. The phone system was basic. An administrative service desk near the door accommodated another small crowded team which organised the envelope stuffing, filing and posting of releases. A small adjoining office was commandeered for the expanding industry and employment and housing team. Later, when a new press team to specifically service local newspapers was set up, an additional room was commandeered along the corridor. In the main press office functions proliferated with the requirement for instance for an exclusively women's committee press officer and an ethnic minorities press officer.
There was a constant demand by members for news releases to be issued on many aspects of policy to an extent that practitioners were aware that few of the releases would be used by mainstream media. Local newspapers however have a voracious appetite for even mundane stories with a local angle. They were also the media specifically taken by the London electorate - a significant target audience in the campaign, hence the formation of the local press team.

Press officers were most in demand in this period to deal with journalists from the national, regional and local media who were constantly ringing and visiting County Hall and attending the many news conferences, as well as seeking individual interviews with various members. Two experienced staff left their jobs for promotion to other organisations at this time. Another retired. The influx of newcomers were mostly young and mostly sympathetic to the left, although this was not always the case. There were probably in excess of thirty press officer appointments between Christmas 1983 and close of play at the end of March 1986 with around 25 press officers in post at the same time at the height of recruitment. One appointee for a few months was Diane Abbott who later became MP for Hackney. There were others who went on to work in national newspapers, for television and to head or take senior jobs in other local authority public relations offices. Some GLC public relations and publicity workers ended up with public relations related posts in the Blair government.

A few examples from the current writer's log of activities during this period might include preparing the press work for the opening of a substantially GLC funded Lesbian and Gay community centre in East London. At about the same time another task had been to deal with homophobic queries from right wing newspapers. For instance take the following summary of a phone call to the press office:

Daily Express reporter: "Following the spread of AIDS is the GLC going to arrange for separate toilets for gays at County Hall?"
Press Officer: "Sorry?"
Daily Express reporter: "Following the spread of AIDS is the GLC going to arrange for separate toilets for gays at County Hall?"
Press Officer: "Is the Express?"
Daily Express reporter: "Sorry!"
Press Officer: "Is the Daily Express going to arrange for separate toilets?"
Reporter: "But there are lots of gays at County Hall."
Press Officer: "How do you know there aren't more at the Daily Express?"
and so on....Nothing appeared.

A recurring job for the present writer when promoted to the Transport and Planning Desk was to try to gather media attention for the opening of new bus lanes and other public transport initiatives. Often the local newspapers were the only media interested except when the GLC opened one outside the Palace of Westminster to the protest of some of the incumbents. An unusual media stunt during this period was the hiring of a very elderly looking large bi-plane which flew a few sorties from Biggin Hill over the site of the proposed East London River Crossing. The GLC and allied local authorities were opposing this government sponsored, motorway-style road bridge across the Thames in line with much local feeling. The plane took parties of journalists, elected members and some officers six at a time to get an overview of the proposal. The main purpose of the event was to attract publicity to the issue and the stance of the objecting councils. In 1994 the government announced that the scheme would not be built. More run of the mill stunts were the use of giant tickets and giant scissors, both about six foot long, for ceremonial openings of GLC schemes or buildings or to signify the cheap public transport fares scheme being launched at the time. Another variation was the mock presentation to Mrs Thatcher of a giant pensioners' travel pass on her 60th birthday. This ceremony was conducted in her absence by leader of the council Ken Livingstone in front of a bank of photographers at Euston Railway Station. The point of the giant items was to help photographers create an off-beat picture which might be selected for use and thus induce editors to run a mention of GLC policy and views. In the latter case the objective was to publicise County Hall concerns for the future of the GLC's free public transport travel passes for old age pensioners- women over 60, men over 65.

In opposition to the County Hall campaign some right wing newspapers and journalists were strongly critical. The following example represents hundreds of a similar type which appeared during the Livingstone regime. This example is from a tabloid: The
Sun, on February, 23, 1984. The story has a by-line of Trevor Kavenagh, a picture of Ken Livingstone and a headline: "Loony Lefties in £31 million Handout"...

Loony lefties and fringe groups are grabbing millions of pounds a year from Labour controlled council coffers. The rush to give away council cash is led by 'Red' Ken Livingstone's Greater London Council which forked out £31 million in 1983 to bizarre organisations. They included the Brent Black Music Coop which got £205,000 and the Gay London Police Monitoring Group, £17,616. Now disgusted right wingers have hit back with a jokey scroungers guide - explaining how to get money out of easy touch authorities. The guide produced by Aims of Industry suggests that anti-government campaigns and sex protest groups are quids in. Groups like the London Lesbian and Gay Centre and the Gay Bereavement Project, the West Indians Under Five Action Group and the Rastafarian Advisory Committee also get hand outs of as much as £78,000 (Kavenagh. 23/2/84).

In fact the bulk of GLC grant money went to traditional and uncontroversial groups. However the Sun story neatly illustrates the point that business interests were attempting to discredit the GLC. Aims of Industry was a right wing pressure group funded by commercial organisations. Further the article displays that these principally economically motivated forces were attempting to capitalise on the 'challenge to traditional values' nature of the GLC in making this attack. That is, these right wing forces could be argued to be only posturing as moralists because they could see the potential for damaging headlines in the populist media. In other words an intelligent war of mediation was in progress where the political right were taking advantage of allies and allied ideologies held by the press. The example is also useful to illustrate the casting of minority and powerless groups as unworthy of funding by media sympathetic to the political right. The very attempt by gay or racial minority groups to come together for mutual support or to organise to get their concerns heard in a political environment which was hostile towards them was labelled as bizarre. These bizarre left wing or radical pressure groups were thus clearly associated with elected representatives who were by definition “loonies.”
One of the best examples of then contemporary Government attitudes both towards radical GLC policy and towards the GLC's method of promoting and defending this policy, and the interests of GLC allied interest groups, comes in a Commons speech by then Transport Secretary Nicholas Ridley. Ridley was at the time a close Cabinet ally of Mrs Thatcher. The length of the following House of Commons exchange is allowed because of the relevance to the discussion of aspects of GLC transport policy promotion discussed above:

The GLC has in recent years seen its strategic responsibilities in terms of spending money on political campaigns suggesting that the Government intends to carpet London with motorways. The GLC is giving £122,000 to TRAFIC, an organisation purportedly seeking improved transport but actually paid to frighten people into believing that the government are about to embark on a huge motorway programme. It is of course another silly myth and complete and dangerous rubbish. The GLC has also seen its strategic responsibilities in terms of giving money to ratepayer's organisations like the New Archway Road Residents association and the North Circular Road Ealing action group to fund their campaigns against the government's proposals to improve certain roads in London. Never mind whether the roads are needed or not - if the government proposes the GLC will oppose (Hansard. 4/12/84).

There was a response from Jeremy Corbyn MP (Labour, Islington North- a close ally of the Archway Road campaigners):

If the Department proposes motorways throughout London and through parts of my constituency, surely it is only fair that those who object to the Government's plans but have not the Government's resources, have some funding so that they can argue the case on an equal footing with the Government at a public inquiry (Hansard. 4/12/84).
Ridley: In that case, people who wish to circulate along London's roads to carry out their business also deserve a grant from the GLC. It might be better to call it a day and give neither side any money. The GLC has failed to recognise the need to tackle the appalling conditions for travellers and residents around London's major roads. In its ideological refusal to come to terms with the existence and the dependence of London's economy on the lorry and the motor car, it has done nothing, presumably seeing congestion as a way of tackling London's traffic problems (Hansard. 4/12/84).

As Jeremy Corbyn indicated there was indeed a great deal of pressure to build large roads in the London area for instance at Archway and at Ealing- part of the North Circular route. However more interesting to this thesis are a particular acknowledgment and a particular lacuna in Ridley's speech. The acknowledgment is to the effectiveness of GLC and allied publicity campaigning. The lacuna is the assumption that there was no countervailing campaign in favour of government roads policy.

Taking the latter point first, there clearly was a well resourced and well financed pro-road building campaign in London. It was common knowledge that the British Road Federation - a lobbying organisation for various road construction interests, for road hauliers and motoring associations - met regularly with government politicians and civil servants to promote road building. In his guise as an interviewer for the Archway Road Movie the present writer interviewed senior officials of the Road Hauliers Association (RHA) an industry association which is a member of the British Road Federation. RHA officials freely admitted on camera that lobbying to improve road facilities on their terms for their members was a central part of their full time paid jobs. Also, in the 1985 Archway Road Movie Den Dover MP was interviewed in his Parliamentary office. He freely admitted that, like other MPs, in addition to his Parliamentary salary, he was also paid as a political adviser and lobbyist by a construction industry firm. This firm was Wimpy- the major construction firm which earned a large proportion of its profits from road construction schemes. He said other MPs were paid by other construction firms. In London pro-road interests- construction firms, transport industry associations, motorists associations and others were also represented by a nominal organisation called Movement
For London. This 'organisation' in fact consisted of one spokesperson based in the British Road Federation office. For a long time Movement for London's spokesperson was Jeremy Hawksley. Hawksley was constantly on local radio programmes discussing London road issues. Radio is of course a favourite medium of drivers and thus a very effective way of reaching a section of the electorate which, especially if stuck in a traffic jam at the time, might well be available to populist road building public opinion forming.

**An application of theory to the above case study:**

Both German (1995) and Leeper (1996) advocate the application of Habermas’s critical theory – the theory of communicative action – to public relations practice. Unlike some post-modernists and post-structuralists, Habermas holds that understandings of the world are not always hopelessly obscured or coded among shifting matrices of texts and symbols. Habermas agrees that understandings are created through discourses. But he suggests that cultures which are able to function and sustain themselves observe rules regulating how people use discourse when they communicate with each other…the rules of “universal pragmatics”. Habermas’s theory holds that people achieve useful, or valid, or correct understandings, that is understandings consistent with decisions on how to organise democratic societies in humane and successful ways, if the discussants engage in “communicative action” in their discursive exchanges rather than “strategic action”. Strategic action is action driven by “purposive rationality” or “instrumental reason”, that is by a mode of thinking, by common senses, norms and assumption created in society by virtue of the political and economic formation:

To the degree that the economic system subjects the life-forms of private households and the life conduct of consumers and employees to its imperatives, consumerism and possessive individualism, motives of personal performance and competition gain the force to shape behaviour. The communicative practice of everyday life is one sidedly rationalised into a utilitarian life-style; this media induced shift to purposive rational action orientations calls forth the reaction of a hedonism freed from the pressures of rationality. As the private sphere is
undermined and eroded by the economic system so too is the public sphere by the

One can apply this theory to the pro-GLC and anti-road widening campaigns by
pointing to the Sun article and the Parliamentary exchange involving Nicholas Ridley as
reflections of a pervasive instrumental thinking which sought to limit debate on possible
ways of living. This thinking included the assumptions that funding disenfranchised groups
to give them a chance to oppose establishment ideologies in respect of issues such as
transport policy and sexuality was… in the words of the Sun article… “loony”. Habermas’s
notion of ‘communicative action’, that is the application of universal pragmatics in a non-
instrumental, non-repressive manner, involves the defence of the private and public
spheres. That is ‘communicative action’ involves a defence of non-commercialised family
and community life from the common sense of a capitalist inspired “utilitarian life-style”
(see above quote). For Habermas universal pragmatics operate in the style of
communicative action when individuals and communities have available to them other
ways of discussing and thinking about the world which are relevant to their own real needs,
rather than needs which have been foisted on them by dominant interested parties.
Habermas borrows the concept of “lifeworld” from phenomenology to suggest the
theoretical coming together of minds where ordinary individuals and communities can
create, store and draw their own understandings and concepts. The term is used in
phenomenology to mean ‘everyday reality’ or ‘natural attitude’. For Habermas it is
important to keep the lifeworld vibrant, relevant and to resist its “colonisation” by activity
and thinking inspired by the producers of instrumental reason, ie thinking designed to make
the capitalist system work rather than thinking which serves people’s real needs. The
danger is that a colonised, instrumentally rationalised lifeworld would deprive people of the
possibility for a range of beneficial ideology formation. Control of, or dominance over the
norms of thinking by repressive political and bureaucratic forces could decrease the ability
to imagine a “human” society. We would find it harder and harder to ‘think outside the
square’ when it came to deciding what sort of politics, culture and economy we would
prefer to live within. Society would degenerate into a “bureaucratised” state, an
“administered world” with “Orwellian” characteristics (Ibid. p312).
The theories of Habermas are useful as a way of charting how public relations can be used in the strategic sense by organisations like the British Road Federation and Aims of Industry to maintain establishment mores as well as to show how its use can be justified to defend or construct within their lifeworld an alternative possible reality for people to consider. The public relations work of the Livingstone led Greater London Council and its associated ad hoc groups can in fact be assessed as helping to provide a fleeting opportunity for people to think about the possibilities of life in London in a somewhat different way. A reading of Bernays may characterise this initiative as attempting to break the “mould” generated by “men we have never heard of”. For a while public relations helped to depict a different reality for Livingstone’s London.
Chapter Seven

Attitudes Towards “Biosolids” (Sewage Sludge) - Case Study Two

(One of the main participants in this study sent me an e-mail briefly criticising the way the participant had been quoted in the study. The quotes were an accurate transcription of notes taken during my interview with the participant. Subsequent letters, e-mail and telephone calls to the participant and the participant’s secretary were not returned. The full Swinburne Ethics Committee clearance was undertaken ahead of the interview and the participant received a full explanation of the reason for the interview and the way the interview would be used. The explanation – as instructed by the Swinburne Ethics Committee – included the information that the participant could withdraw their contribution at any time and not have their organisation named. Although the participant has not directly asked for this withdrawal and anonymity, in view of the participant’s criticism and obvious discomfort with the project the below has been modified to withdraw the interview given by this particular participant and to make the organisation anonymous. This has necessitated making all the participants and all the locations anonymous. Where the participant has made public statements at public meetings or in newspapers these are clearly public statements not covered by the ethics procedure. Where I have referred below to the activities of the organisation involved, the information I have used is well known public information which has been reported in local newspapers and at public meetings and is not drawn from the interview. The names of the local newspapers have however also had to be kept confidential for reasons of geographic identification. As this case study is principally a discussion of theory in relation to public relations I suggest that the below still provides enough concrete material on which the primarily theoretical project can still be based.)

This case study involves something with which we all have an intimate, life-long familiarity, but which many communities find difficult to deal with both in a public engineering sense and seemingly in an emotional / psychological sense. The vast majority of us think no more about the disposal of human and other wastes as soon as the substances enter the sewerage system. However what happens then is becoming increasingly prominent in discussions about disposal, public health and environmental sustainability. The water industry globally has devised the term “biosolids” as arguably a more accurate, some would say a more publicly acceptable term to stand in for what is also described as processed, treated or stabilised sewage sludge. This is solid residue which may be stored for years or disposed of as landfill or burned, but which some authorities allow to be used for agricultural purposes provided harmful organisms, elements and chemicals are removed, neutralised, or reduced to the levels they specify. This case study starts by discussing the general issue of biosolids. It then goes on to described the public opinion and public relations activities and implications of an Australian water authority's attempts to introduce projects involving biosolids. The third section of the chapter discusses the efficacy of
conventional public relations textbook theories in comparison to contemporary cultural and
critical theories which may be used to analyse some of the public relations and public
opinion aspects of the water authority’s biosolids initiatives. It also looks at the reaction to
those initiatives by local communities. This case study should be read particularly bearing
in mind “rhetoric” and the “rhetorical turn” as these concepts were discussed earlier in this
thesis. In line with that discussion this case study revolves centrally around the struggle
over the invention and use of the word “biosolids” and the “logology” – the chains of
understandings – which may, or may not flow from that word.

It would be fair to say that the subject of “biosolids” is tinged with controversy.
The name “biosolids” was coined in 1991 after a competition among members of the Water
Pollution Control Federation which was later renamed the Water Environment Federation
(WEF) (Stauber and Rampton. 1995; Blatt. 2000). The web site of the WEF proclaims it to be:

An international not-for-profit educational and technical organization of
more than 40,000 water quality experts. Members include environmental, civil, and
chemical engineers, biologists, chemists, government officials, students, treatment
plant managers and operators, laboratory analysts, and equipment manufacturers
and distributors. WEF’s mission is to preserve and enhance the global water
environment. (http://www.wef.org/PublicInfo/FactSheets/wqexperts.htm 11/8/00).

WEF is based in the United States but has affiliate organisations from many
countries including the Australian Water Association (AWA). According to Stauber and
Rampton (1995) the word “biosolids” was coined in order to break some of the
connotations (or rhetorical logology) of the expression “sewage sludge”. The competition
was organised by a Federation member Peter Machno who wanted a name which would
make it easier to convince the public at large that sludge could be made safe for spreading
on tree farms near Seattle. Other names entered in the competition included: “all growth”,
“purenutri”, “biolife”, “bioslurp”, “black gold”, “geoslime”, “sca-doo”, “the end product”,
“humanure”, “hu-doo”, “organic residuals”, “bioresidue”, “urban biomass”, “powergro”,
“organite”, “recyclite”, “nuti-cake”, and “ROSE” – short for recycling of organics
environmentally (Stauber and Rampton. 1995. p106). Peter Machno is currently (August, 2000) listed on the web site of the National Biosolids Partnership (NBP) as Environmental Systems Management Manager for NBP. Mr Machno did not respond to e.mail questions on this subject in August 2000. NBP describes itself in the following way:

The goal of the National Biosolids Partnership (NBP), a not-for-profit alliance formed in 1997 with the Association of Metropolitan Sewerage Agencies (AMSA), Water Environment Federation (WEF), and US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), is to advance environmentally sound and accepted biosolids management practices. Biosolids producers, service contractors, and users - together with stakeholders from regulatory agencies, universities, the farming community, and environmental organizations - will have input into shaping NBP priorities through scientific and technical support and communications linkages relating to biosolids issues (http://biosolids.policy.net/about/ 11/8/00).

The National Biosolids Partnership and the Water Environment Federation lobby policy makers and deal with news media and other groups to defend and advocate biosolids use. The WEF issues an electronic newsletter which weekly discusses good biosolids practice and responds to criticism from other agencies and groups which have concerns or campaign against biosolids - often via the medium of other web sites. The comments on biosolids from the United States Environmental Protection Agency and the United States Centre for Disease Control and Prevention discussed below were made available on their respective web sites.

In Australia where this thesis is being written the term biosolids seems to have won general acceptance and support among water authorities, water engineers, academics and scientists as an appropriate term. For instance Dr Geoffrey J. Syme, a CSIRO scientist and researcher who with Katrina D. Williams and Mark A. Lee made an important study of public attitudes to sludge in Australia in 1990 says he supports the term “biosolids” (Syme. by e.mail. 2000). The Syme, Williams, Lee paper does not use the term “biosolids”. It was published before the coining. Instead they use the term “domestic sludge”. Their paper is concerned with:

The paper does not suggest trying to change the semantics of this area, but it is clear that Syme et. al. are concerned with how the topic is perceived and interpreted in the minds of publics. One of the three “issues” which the paper bills itself as addressing is public perception:

…in areas of risk or uncertainty in sludge management, subjective perceptions of risk need to be incorporated in the design of the public involvement program (Ibid. p2).

Elsewhere the paper suggests (rather contradictorily) that:

…there is no need for the public to fully understand all technical issues. Public involvement should be about input into the criteria for planning (e.g. a health preserving sludge policy or one which involves the maximum recycling) rather than the technicalities of the solution. People need either to know enough about the technicalities to understand what is impossible or to trust the relevant authorities sufficiently to believe that there is an honest attempt to incorporate their views. Technical information flow should be designed with this point in mind (Ibid. p4).

In the same August 2000 e.mail Syme said he thought public attitudes towards the issue of domestic sludge were “very similar” to those at the time the 1990 paper was written. In the August 2000 e.mail Syme continued the 1990 paper’s criticism of the professionals in the field who had: “...a reluctant to actively pursue reforms”. These were reforms aimed at involving the public in planning domestic sludge or “biosolids” projects,
albeit on the basis of limited public understanding of the technological issues involved. The 1990 paper justifies limitation of understanding because:

…it is evident that too much, or the wrong kind of information can result in risk (or uncertainty) amplification in the community, which may lead to over concern about issues (Ibid. p4).

From this view the term “biosolids” would seem to be a useful “know enough” term which stands in for the details and thus reduces the associated “risk amplification” which may be involved in the use of terms such as “sewage” or “sludge”. The Syme, Williams, Lee paper concurs with literature suggesting it is self-defeating to engage totally with every informational aspect of a project, including every scientific informational aspect. They call for more general, wider public acceptance measures. These measures involve a reliance on public opinion in general to get a scheme accepted, rather than engagement with a policy of exhaustive scientific argument over every detail of the scheme. There is a reluctance to engage with specific individuals or groups seeking micro-explanation of contestable matters:

All parties should understand that public involvement programs do not require technical expertise from ‘amateurs’ but a contribution to setting planning criteria (Ibid. conclusions. p18).

Arguably because of the above sorts of considerations, by the 21st century the term "biosolids" had been routinely adopted in Australia. For instance see the map of operations on the Sydney Water Authority web site: http://www.sydneywater.com.au/environment/cycle_frameset.html 10/8/00 and the Melbourne Water Authority's news releases: http://www.melbwater.com.au/navsearch.asp 10/8/00. Both of these major authorities have carried out public consultation on this subject using the term "biosolids". There is however still some uncertainty about the term within the industry as revealed in the industry’s important publication A Global Atlas of Wastewater Sludge and Biosolids Use and Disposal (1997):
The language used for discussion is in itself critical. So ‘sludge dumped on land’ sends out a different message to ‘biosolids used in agriculture’! In deference to this issue of language, from now on reference will be made to wastewater solids. There is still no agreement on how far the word ‘biosolids’ should be extended but for the time being there is agreement that when waste water solids are used, particularly in agriculture, the word is highly suitable (Matthews. 1997. p1).

Whatever the terminology, the continuing topicality of contention over this matter was highlighted in 2000 as this thesis was being written. On August 3, 2000 the US Environmental Protection Agency issued a news release saying:

NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES TO STUDY SLUDGE

To ensure that government standards for land applications of sewage sludge are fully protective of human health and the environment, EPA has asked the National Academy of Sciences to review the science and methodology behind the standards and to provide the agency with recommendations that will strengthen the sludge program. The Academy's definitive review and its recommendations will strengthen existing programs for protecting public health and the environment. The US Center for Disease Control - National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health has agreed to work with EPA and NAS on this review. EPA looks forward to the Academy's recommendations. Sludge is the residual product produced by sewage treatment plants after wastewater has been cleansed by the plant. In some cases, sludge can be disposed of through applications on land, including use as a fertiliser. Less than one percent of the nation's agricultural land is fertilized with sludge. However, EPA requires that both the water leaving the plant, as well as the sludge wastes, meet health and environmental standards. The review by the NAS is designed to ensure that such standards are based on the best and most current science possible, and that sludge management policies are responsive to that science (US EPA news release 3/8/00).
This release followed one on July 27, 2000 from the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health which published a message on its web site saying:

**Workers Exposed to Class B Biosolids During and After Field Application**

Workers may be exposed to disease-causing organisms while handling, applying or disturbing Class B biosolids on agricultural lands or mine reclamation sites.

Class B biosolids are sewage sludge that has undergone treatment by processes that significantly reduce pathogen concentrations. These processes include aerobic and anaerobic digestion, air drying, composting, and lime stabilization. According to the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Class B biosolids may contain pathogens in sufficient quantity to warrant restricted public access and special precautions for exposed workers.

Class A biosolids are sewage sludge that has undergone treatment by processes that further reduce pathogen concentrations resulting in an end product that is virtually pathogen-free. These processes include irradiation, composting, heat drying, heat treatment, pasteurization, thermophilic aerobic digestion, and alkaline stabilization. Class A biosolids do not contain pathogens in sufficient quantity to warrant restricted access or special precautions and may be applied the same way as commercial fertiliser (news release of the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health 27/8/00).

The Water Environment Federation reacted to these statements and associated news stories by e-mailing information to members in an attempt to minimise the controversy:

As you know, recommendations for worker protection were released by the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) shortly after the July 13 USA Today article. Although immediate public reaction to the USA Today piece was minimal, this article with all its gross misrepresentation of the NIOSH recommendations, etc., will continue to surface in public hearings, as will the NIOSH report. Moreover, coverage of the NIOSH report is appearing in trade press.
You can address these issues by providing the facts missing in the USA Today article and the perspective needed for the NIOSH report. (The NIOSH report is available online at http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/hid10.html and the USA Today article is available at http://www.usatoday.com/life/health/general/lhgen056.htm.) In terms of the USA Today story, you can provide the following factual information:

The article contains no reference to the vast majority of scientific opinion and research affirming the safety and value of properly managed biosolids.

Two unfortunate deaths which have been investigated by responsible health agencies and found to have absolutely no relationship to biosolids...(Water Environment Federation Public Information Office. 9/8/00).

The memorandum, also called a "press advisory", goes on to give WEF members other suggestions for what they can say to any journalists who phone them up in their professional capacities to put the record straight on biosolids. The contrasting statements from the different United States agencies highlights that US governmental agencies have different terms for this waste. The EPA message refers throughout to sewage sludge while the NIOSH refers to biosolids but makes it plain that the different classes of biosolids are sewage sludge which has undergone different processes. A communications plan commissioned by the Water Environment Federation makes the point that this policy decision by the EPA not to use the term "biosolids" "...may neutralise...efforts to gain widespread acceptance for the term biosolids" (Tate. 1993. p7). The WEF press advisory is of course aimed at the "biosolids stakeholder" cognoscenti rather than the general public. It refers to biosolids all the way through. The WEF memo, and much other information on the WEF and NBP web sites illustrate the considerable investment which the water industry in the United States has put into producing and maintaining a reputable image for the concept "biosolids". In Australia however at the present time (southern winter 2000), it is not so easy for authorities to speak categorically on the standards of safety of biosolids. Although New South Wales publishes its own standards (Matthews. 1997), there are no agreed national regulations on what constitutes the different classes of biosolids. This lack of national guidelines has a bearing to the situation described below where in 1998 an Australian local community became aware of a biosolids project, rose up and stopped it.
Despite this protesters' victory the same water authority is currently consulting on another biosolids project at a location a few kilometres from the location of the project which was stopped.

It was intended to explain the Australian example in summaries of interviews with four individuals. The object of the interviews was to attempt to gauge attitudes and opinions on this issue from various perspectives. The interviews took place in August 2000. Due to the discomfort of the water authority spokesperson with the quotes produced from their interview (explained above) the identities of the four people interviewed will be referred to circumspectly:

1. Interviewee A is a government environmental protection officer.
2. Interviewee B is the spokesperson for the water authority involved in the situation described below. For a number of years the water authority and its predecessor municipal organisation has been considering new ways of disposing of sewage sludge following the cessation of sea dumping. Currently (2000) sludge is stored and trucked to longer term storage at another water authority’s facility. The water authority involved in the below situation proposed setting up a storage and sludge treatment plant in cooperation with a contractor to produce biosolids fertiliser at a location 5 kilometres from a small town. This authority later abandoned this proposal after objections and campaigning by the town’s residents. The campaign involved stormy public meetings and fierce debate in the local media. A later authority plan for a sludge storage facility near another township was abandoned after protesters from the first town assisted residents of the second town to object. Early in 2000 however the authority began public consultation aimed at getting acceptance for an experimental biosolids project on a farm property which the authority has purchased. This farm is near a township with a population of less than 200. The biosolids for the farm experiment are due to be produced from sludge at the authority’s current sewage works. The authority spokesperson spoke about the project at a well attended public meeting organised by the authority in February 2000. The authority has set up a committee to seek the advice and views of neighbours to the experimental farm site. The spokesperson said application of biosolids was then two years away and would only take place if the site proved to be suitable and safe. He said production of the biosolids would take place elsewhere.
3. Interviewee C, a resident of the first town referred to above, was one of the leading protesters to the proposal for storage and processing of sludge into biosolids outside her town. Interviewee C assisted the protesters at the second town to get storage facility proposals rejected there. She has subsequently become the councillor for her town on the local shire council. Interviewee C attended the February 2000 public meeting where she asked some pointed questions about the process the water authority proposed to use in their production of biosolids. Interviewee C says she is not against biosolids use in principle but has strong reservations about the type of processing and the end product which the water authority is proposing.

4. Interviewee D is a resident near the proposed experimental farm where he lives with his young family. He has been to most of the on-going consultation meetings and continues to monitor developments.

Interview with Interviewee D:

The resident said that following the announcement of the farm experiment project in early 2000, by August 2000 the “heat had gone out of the debate”. He said that among the neighbouring landowners group, which was formed to discuss the issue, there was a general acceptance of the water authority’s sustainability argument in the use of biosolids, although some local “old timers” did not accept this argument. The local resident said his observation of meetings and discussions led him to believe that the water authority “would do the right thing” in terms of the investigation of all safety aspects. He believed the authority would carefully examine the hydrology of the farm. Hydrology involves investigating the quality of water and the characteristics of water movement above and below the ground's surface. People are concerned with hydrology in relation to biosolids in case there is a risk of undesirable material or organisms originating in the biosolids being concentrated or moved to locations where they would be a hazard. He believed that the authority would ensure that no harm would come from anything in the biosolids either via crops or livestock or via creeks near the property. He said that in terms of soil type and topography he was “…not sure of the suitability of the site for what is proposed.” - but he was confident that the “research findings will be abided by”. These research findings about the suitability of the farm for the application of biosolids were to be produced by
consultants employed by the water authority on advice from a sub-committee. The sub committee was composed of three water authority representatives, three land owner representatives and a local shire councillor – not Interviewee C. He said two of the main concerns which residents had at the moment were the effect on property prices and the social stigma which might attach to the township and its inhabitants if it became known as “Poo-town”. The township resident suggested that this reputation issue has probably already caused a drop in property prices and he quoted local gossip which said a local farm owner had to drop her selling price when the buyer heard about the proposed biosolids project. Whether this is true or not is not important to establish as far as public relations considerations go. This perception was in the local community true or false. When talking about these negative reputation aspects the local resident then veered his conversation towards other negative perceptions. He said that despite some acceptance of the water authority’s intentions there was also a feeling that they: “...could have done what commercial fertiliser firms do and get farmers to try the product on small strips of land first.” He said this would have caused less alarm and would have helped confidence building for the project. He said there was speculation in the community on why the water authority had bought the substantial farm before they were clear on how they would carry out the experimental application of biosolids. Local gossip speculated that the substantial purchase might have been in order to commit the water authority to going ahead with the project despite the debacles at the previous two towns. He said at this stage he was not sure what composting process the water authority would use to manufacture its biosolids from raw sewage sludge or how the final product would turn out. He referred to warnings sometimes seen on fertiliser bags supplied by commercial firms which warn that over-use would cause metals to build up in the soil. These are metals like cadmium and copper which are listed in biosolids regulations as potentially harmful and only acceptable in biosolids up to levels which may differ for the grade of biosolids and its use. For instance biosolids used to fertilise forestry might not need the same regulation as biosolids for crop or grazing land as no eventual human ingestion would be involved. Handling by farmers and workers, including truck drivers and sewage workers and potential water or wind transmission of contaminants off the farm area are other considerations of the potential risks. Referring back to the warnings on commercial fertiliser bags the local resident said:
"It makes you wonder where they get it from. Perhaps it is sewage from the third world?"
The overall impression which this local resident gave was that he and the local community were open to points of view expressed by the water authority about the project. He was however also very aware of the difficulties which the water authority might face in delivering their safety guarantees.

Interview with Interviewee B (omitted)

Interview with Interviewee A:

The environmental protection officer provided a section of the still unratified draft "Environmental Guidelines for Biosolids Management" These guidelines demonstrate the EPA's strong acceptance of the term biosolids:

The overall objective of the Guidelines is to encourage the sustainable and beneficial use of biosolids, thereby minimising any risk associated with the use of biosolids. The inappropriate use and management of this material can pose a risk to the environment, human health and agricultural health (p8).

Elsewhere the draft says:

"Incentives to beneficially use biosolids include...potential savings by turning a waste that attracts treatment and disposal costs, to a resource which may provide an economic or environmental value."

Interviewee B said the guideline delay was to do with getting national agreement. The state guidelines which the above is quoted from had previously been agreed. The object of the eventual guideline document is to specify the permitted levels of the components of biosolids as well as to make clear what different grades of biosolids can be used for. The grades of biosolids are determined by their components which may be changed or made safer by processing. Interviewee B said final agreement on the guidelines appeared to be some months or possibly years away. He said that although agreement on
the standards and use of biosolids had been agreed in his state some of the participants to the agreement were now changing their position in the light of debates in other states which had not come to agreement. Interviewee B said these changes of position were in both directions by food industries. Some food industries saw Australia as claiming the mantle of "clean, green sustainable" agriculture through the use of biosolids. Other food industries thought Australian food products could acquire the opposite reputation through the widespread use of biosolids. Like the local resident quoted above Interviewee B also indicated that the controversy over the experimental farm had declined. He said he was not getting complaints or letters about this proposed scheme. It might be noted that this Australian state environmental protection authority, unlike the US Environmental Protection Agency, freely used the term “biosolids” in its literature.

Interview with Interviewee C:

Interviewee C maintains a vivid and passionate memory of the successful campaign to stop the water authority from constructing a biosolids production and storage facility near her home town. Interviewee C played a central part in the campaign and chaired some of the protesters' meetings. She said:

When the leaflets on the proposal were put in [the local] post office there was no mention of the word "sewage" in the information. The information referred to "biosolids". People were not aware of what that was. I was the person who turned around and asked what it was. When they knew, people went ballistic. They felt that things were done deliberately to mislead. From the moment people found they were not being given the whole story, or that the truth was being manipulated, they became suspicious and determined to have the project fully investigated. We were also concerned about the lack of support from the local council for the community's investigation of just what this project was about. This was also people's feeling when they rang [the water authority] and the EPA to find out what was going on. [the water authority] failed miserably to be open about what they were doing. It provoked a reaction to the extent that 350 people attended a meeting at [X] [April,
1998] which was on the local television news. It is the only meeting in [Y] Shire
which I've been to which has been on television news.

The April 1998 meeting was chaired by a [Y] Shire councillor. Interviewee C
decisively beat this councillor taking his seat in council elections in the following year.
Water authority representatives were on the platform of the April 1998 meeting.
Interviewee C had helped organise preparatory meetings of protesters in the days before the
meeting and she was an active participant from the floor. She said that she found the water
authority’s control of the meeting "intimidating":

  Straight answers may have addressed the problem but they were incredible.
  They wanted to write down our questions and come back to us. Even the television
  report remarked on their manner.

Interviewee C said the protesters' working group had carried out a great deal of
research and preparation before the April 1998 meeting and felt indignant when they did
not get clear answers to their detailed questions about the biosolids process and the
suitability of the site. She said:

  They should be answerable if they levy rates and charges, especially when
  there are concerns about what they are doing. It took four people from our group
  working full time for two weeks to get the information which we based our
  questions on.

Part of the working group’s case was that the site had water courses running through
it, was subject to inundation and was therefore unsuitable for storage and composting.
Interviewee C and her colleagues looked at the water table information in a site report
commissioned by the water authority and found the hydrology was inappropriate. She said
one consultant within the report had made a mistake about classifying a bore. The
classification of the bore was wrong in terms of the interpretation of the water quality data.
This particular bore was of a quality that gave it protection under state environment laws.
However the report identified all the bores as low quality water and had therefore downgraded this bore. This mistake had not been picked up in other parts of the report which were written by other consultants. Interviewee C said the protesters had no technical training in hydrology. She said:

But I don't think you need to go to school for three years to read a consultant's report and an EPA report on surface water and catchments. We read these reports from cover to cover. When we found that the bore classification was wrong this called into question a lot of other information. If this was wrong what else were they not correct about?

...We were a small group but so motivated. We were able to understand the information and quote it back at them. I think that the public are underestimated. They [the water authority] seemed to take an ignorance is bliss approach - a paternalistic view of how information should be shared with the community. I think this has had its day....We used the Internet a bit to get evidence of disasters to do with chemicals and sludge in the United States.

In June, 1998 at a meeting chaired by Interviewee C, protesters unanimously passed this motion:

This meeting declares that we are offended by the over simplistic presentation and lack of supporting evidence to date in the response given by [the water authority] to the questions raised [at the April meeting] and request that an open public meeting be convened by an independent body to discuss the proposals (local newspaper report).

Water authority members attended the June meeting. Later that June the water authority scrapped the proposal. Another local newspaper reported that:

...The plan was abandoned after the authority failed to take up an option on the land which would have housed the facility.
The authority's [spokesperson] said the decision to abandon the plan came after his authority failed to acquire the proposed site … five kilometres north of [the town] before the … deadline. "With the option expiring [the water authority] had no choice but to withdraw its…applications for biosolids storage approvals which are currently before the … Shire Council and the EPA." [the spokesman] said.

The planning application was to have been decided upon by the … Shire Council at a special meeting to be held at … tomorrow. … chief executive officer …said the council had agreed at a meeting earlier this week to recommend refusing the biosolids application based on insufficient information (local newspaper report).

Another local newspaper reported:

[The decision] was greeted with enthusiasm by residents and active members of the [town working group] who had spent much time in researching the outcomes of the proposal.

[Interviewee C]...spear-headed the campaign.

Interviewed in August 2000 Interviewee C said:

They [the water authority] are much more slick now. I think if they had used the approach they have at [the 200 person township] they would have beaten us at [Interviewee C’s town]. At [the township] meetings are more closed, secretive, slicker - they are trying to do the PR thing...[the water authority] always wants to hold small meetings. At [Interviewee C’s town] we would not go along with that. We wanted everyone to come. We wanted an independent chair not a small panel including three [water authority] representatives with a councillor as the chair [This is the current - August 2000 - township sub-committee composition]...This is what they are doing at [the township] with small meetings. [At Interviewee C’s town] we rejected their idea of forums in favour of meetings. In meetings people are on a more equal basis. It is their [the people's] meeting while forums are something more
controlled or educational. A properly run meeting means everyone has a right to have a say. Forums are not seen that way.

Forums are all more part of the PR stuff.

Shortly before the biosolids plan was dropped a local newspaper reported:

Protesters will boycott a series of forums later this month for objectors to discuss the biosolids storage and composting proposal north of [X].

The forums, called by the [water authority] and starting on June …, will discuss a sustainable format for a public meeting on the proposal.

But spokeswoman for the working party opposing the project, [Interviewee C] said yesterday the forums would be blackbanned by the group…

"They are avoiding meeting the whole community and being accountable. These forums are just an attempt to brainwash people and divide and conquer the opponents”

As has been said above, the water authority abandoned their town X plan at the end of the same month as the above article - June 1998. In general discussion about the biosolids episode Interviewee C said: "I don't have a problem with reuse and doing something useful with it (sewage sludge).” However the frantic campaigning period which involved a desperate search for facts over a few week period has given Interviewee C a working knowledge of the subject. Drawing from her now understanding of biosolids she said:

I don't believe we'd have problems if they [the water authority] didn't try for the cheap simple solutions. There are cost effective methods [of composting sludge] in the US and Europe. [The authority] need to make clear that "stabilised" does not equal "pasteurised” and [people need to be informed that] their terms "Grade A" for killing germs and “ratings 1 and 2” are different.
These last remarks refer to the levels of the remaining organisms and other pollutants in the processed sludge. Interviewee C agreed that: "a little information is a dangerous thing." However she said that the campaign had relied on protesters getting all the available technical facts and educating themselves sufficiently so that they could make a rational challenge to oppose sludge sites at both the towns which repulsed the authority’s plans. This challenge has to be on scientific grounds so that Environmental Protection Authority and council approvals could not be given for the sites. She said:

We pointed out that EPA rules were breached. We were trying to win on a scientific basis. Though we weren't scientists our conclusions were ratified by an Australian Conservation Foundation scientist.

Interviewee C said that the campaign did not aim at using political pressure. There was no letter writing campaign although they did use media releases effectively:

It was very much a grass roots groundswell. We were opposed to [town X] being used as [a bigger town’s rubbish dump]. We had far fewer resources [than the authority]. I bought a mobile phone and a fax machine. We had to use their material and data. We had to win on a rational basis to defeat the works application. We were raising awareness. We had no state or [shire] political support. What we found most effective was asking questions nicely in an effective way. We were demonised especially being women. [A local columnists] wrote about us as a group of housewives, sending up the people who had expressed the view that we should stay at home and look after our families. We were painted as "ratbags" but this worked to our advantage because they [proponents of the project] did not take the community action process seriously. They gave up. If they had carried on they might have defeated us. If we had known at the beginning what was involved we might not have done it. We were castigated in the press and our families were put under pressure. Partners were saying "When is this going to end?" There was division in the community. Some people were prepared to blindly accept [the biosolids project] was not harmful and that there would be jobs, though it is fair to
say these ['agree-ers'] numbered less than half a dozen. But there would not be jobs. Most people were at least concerned about the odour from the lagoons, and the potential for accidental contamination. There would be huge trucks full of sewage going through the town and dumping their load in lagoons which could leak...Their attitude was "We are doing this and you can all go to hell." Or at least that was how the community perceived their manner. They would not get away with this now and they obviously understand this.

The public relations theoretical context

The above case study can be related to the formal practice of public relations in a number of ways but principally via the subsections of public relations activity: "issues management" and "crisis management." Crisis management also involves identifying and communicating about risk. Issues management is defined by Heath as:

...a foresighted discipline that can serve the needs of nonprofits, advocacy groups, and governmental agencies, all groups of people who assert their interests through public policy formation, mitigation and adaptation...Issues management is a means of linking the public relations function and the management function of the organisation in ways that foster the organisation's efforts to be outer directed and to have a participative organisational culture (Heath. 1997. p6).

Organisations which carry out issues management scan the future for social, cultural economic and technological changes which the organisation has to understand and adapt to, or perhaps influence, in order to maintain its reputation and the sympathetic understanding of the groups of people who are important to it. The organisation has to maintain this high esteem with important sections of its audience or risk clashing with public opinion with the risk of negative political effects and possible eventual policy difficulties. The case of this water authority presents a classic study of a failure to see ahead to the controversies and consequent policy difficulties surrounding the advent of biosolids. In this respect the above can be seen as an analysis of the consequences of an issue - the introduction of biosolids - which was initially not handled appropriately in public relations terms. The case study
could also be presented as fertile ground for a study of the necessity of crisis management. There was a crisis of public confidence in both the water authority and the technology associated with biosolids. Defining "crisis" in public relations terms Lerbinger (1997) writes:

"[a crisis is]...an event which brings or has the potential for bringing an organisation into disrepute and imperils its future profitability, growth, and possibly its very survival...A crisis delves into the soul of an organisation and dissects its core identity (Lerbinger. 1997. p4).

It could be argued that the water authority has certainly had to re-examine some of its values and its public perception in the face of a public opinion crisis. However a similar argument could be made for the community of town X. Although the town’s citizens cannot be viewed as a cohesive corporation in the manner which most public relations textbooks view the subject (as opposed to object) of public relations activity, they can never-the-less be argued to have undergone soul searching processes in which crises of confidence in their governance brought about endings and changes. For instance we can point to the taking of the existing councillor’s seat by Interviewee C at the subsequent election. We have also hinted at a split in the community with a formerly established association initially backing the biosolids project believing it would bring economic and employment benefits. There was certainly some soul searching among members of the community as a new realisation of what biosolids might involve dawned. This new realisation welded many township members into a cohesive campaigning group and overwhelmed the thinking of the pro-biosolids group. But perhaps a third important link between the practice of public relations and the above biosolids example is that to do with risk management. In discussing risk management Lerbinger says: "Being aware of the existence of risk in transactions with nature, technology, people and organised groups is a fundamental necessity of being a manager" (Ibid. p267). And:

Organisations should provide sufficient information and background knowledge to members of the public affected by a risk situation to enable them to
engage in dialogue and directly to share risk decision making with them. Interested parties must exchange information and views about risks so that everyone feels adequately informed about the limits of available knowledge (Ibid. p282).

Lerbinger is an expert writer on public relations. His 1997 text specialises in crisis and risk communication in the context of maintaining good public relations between organisations and their publics.

Having argued that the above biosolids example flags up matters of interest for public relations, we will now go on to briefly suggest how some contemporary theories, particularly Beck's notion of "The Risk Society" might be used to further understand the above biosolids issues in public relations terms. In chapters nine and ten of this thesis I contrast the present orthodox positivist science theoretical approaches to public relations to cultural and critical theory. I make the point that cultural and critical theory approaches are normally overlooked in favour of psychological and process communication based theories. Psychological and process communication based theories assume a given, unchanging "human nature". The assumption is that people and their groupings can be related with in a mechanical or a simple, systematic way because of people's and groups' innate characteristics. Cultural and critical theories by contrast see people's and communities' thinking and perspectives as more flexible. Styles of thinking are to a large extent produced and maintained outcomes of the particular culture and language, the rhetorical processes which are employed to make sense of the world. We will first test two of the orthodox approaches which eschew the rhetorical or language based approach.

Using examples of first a psychological and then a process communication theoretical approach we might say that Maslow's hierarchy of needs and Lasswell's sender/receiver theory, which are discussed in chapter nine, can help us see how public relations should have been carried out in the above example. Maslow's hierarchy would suggest that the local community first had to be 100 per cent assured of their health safety before they would have entered into discussions on other aspects of the project. If they were assured they would then want to settle matters to do with truck movements and smell before they would entertain discussion on the even "higher" level issues of how new jobs might be produced and allocated. Even "finer" topics of, for example esteem for the district
- how this project might bring a clean green sustainable reputation to their neighbourhood -
would only be entered into after these penultimate features of the public relations campaign
had been concluded satisfactorily. Maslow's hierarchy presumes we react and think in this
systematic and sequential way. We care for our basic physiological needs first before other
practical needs, then our social needs are considered before our higher esteem and
enjoyment of life needs. This theory thus implies a staggered approach for the public
relations practitioner.

sender/receiver models analyse communication into components including the
source, the message, transmission, noise and receiver. This model might remind public
relations practitioners to reflect on just what messages are the most important in a public
relations campaign? The water authority's or what the community are saying? Also what
credibility did the source of the authority's message have? A defensive response from the
platform at the April, 1998 meeting, a platform which did not have agreed Environmental
Protection Authority guidelines for biosolids to draw on, might have made the source of
positive messages for the project look rather lacking. What noise in the sense of inaccurate
information was there in the system interfering with correct statements? What should have
been done about this? Had the authority correctly identified its target receivers of its
messages? Did it have a good understanding of who it was talking to and what they needed
to hear?

A problem with the above positivistic science approaches is that they seem to slip
nicely into the pattern of "getting on with the job" They are to do with the PROCESS of
getting the message across. They tend to take for granted the ways and the sequences with
which people will read the messages, and hopefully be influence by them. Cultural and
critical theories on the other hand start by critiquing the very nub of the meaning of the
message in the context of the type of thinking within which it resides. As mentioned above
we will examine this proposition with reference to Ulrich Beck's notion of "the risk society"
and with some reference to concepts stemming from Foucault and Bourdieu.

Beck's central thesis is that for a lot of the developed world the politics of the poor
versus the rich is becoming less important than the politics of the whole lot of us surviving
or being destroyed by the dangers which relative affluence has brought. Do you regard it as
more important to on strike to get more pay from your factory owners and managers than
lobbying the authorities to stop the factory's smoke killing your children? If you go for the latter, traditional left wing/right wing politics dissolves. In its place is an amalgam of the formerly separated social classes which are now intertwined in an interest group opposing the financial, technological or managerial interest groups who are causing the "risk" problems. In the more affluent parts of the world we are all in the same boat or class where it comes to risks from, for example car crashes, pollution, cancer causing diets, global warming and so on. For Beck in his "risk society" class politics has not disappeared but it has this added dimension:

Risk societies are not class societies. ...They contain within themselves a grass roots developmental dynamics that destroys boundaries, through which the people are forced together in the uniform position of civilisation's self-endangering...The place of eliminating scarcity is taken by eliminating risk. Even if the consciousness and the forms of political organisation for this are still lacking, one can say that risk society, through the dynamic of endangerment it sets in motion, undermines the borders of nation states as much as those of military alliances and economic blocs (Beck. 1996. p47).

For Beck the age in which we live is entering a stage of "reflexive modernity" where people are now becoming far more conscious of the way their world works and as a consequence the pathologies of the way their world works. These pathologies include the administrative pathologies. In other words people are now reasonably well informed about how they might be lied to by organisations about the dangers the organisations might be causing:

[One] concept combines the reflex of modernisation threatening itself with reflection on this self-threat, whereby new conflicts and tensions run through the spilt society (Beck. 1996. p41).

These "splits", have echoes of Lerbinger's characterisation of "crisis" as quoted above: "A crisis delves into the soul of an organisation and dissects its core identity"
Translated to the town X situation one can see Beck's reflexive modernity and risk society manifesting itself in the conflicts and tensions of the biosolids dispute. The old "modernity" which involved belief and trust in a science led "progress" has now dissolved into a society of rational suspicion where there are disparate, resource sapping battles between people who think they are doing the best for everyone's environmental well being.

It is interesting to further examine this reflexivity - this self examination by society of the risks it is creating for itself with reference to the above example. We will conduct this examination and the consequent "splits" - in terms of the water authority’s approach, the advice of Syme et. al. about what to tell protesters and what not to tell them and in terms of the responses of the Water Environment Federation and the National Biosolids Partnership. Foucault's notion of "discursive formations" and Bourdieu's notion of "field" will be touched on here. In the first instance, in the light of their change of tactics in relation to the present township project, the water authority would probably agree that they did not sufficiently consult members of the community at X over matters which involved a degree of risk. But the question might be posed: Is the level of consultation proposed by Syme et. al. - in their paper which is specifically about public consultation on biosolids matters - adequate? It should be recalled that the paper criticises water authorities for not involving communities in biosolids project planning, but it says it is not necessary to educate the public in the full technical details of such schemes. Syme is also in favour of the use of the term "biosolids" (see above). From the perspective of Beck an answer to this question might be that: in public relations terms, in the "risk society" it is dangerous for any originator of risk to set any parameter whereby understanding of risk is limited. Parameters might be set by policies on what details of a project are released to the public or not and also by the terminology used. It is dangerous to impose any restriction because society is now "self reflexive"... It no longer goes along with a straightforward trust in modernity. It no longer goes along with pronouncements when the authorities (in this case a water "authority") tell it what is good for it in a scientific manner. It should be recalled that what spurred protesters into action most was the feeling that they had only been given half the picture. Interviewee C in her interview agreed that "a little knowledge is a bad thing", but she meant this in a different way from the water authority and Syme et. al. who thought that...
giving some technical knowledge to unschooled members of the public might increase hostility unnecessarily because people might become unnecessarily fixated on inconsequential scientific matters. For Interviewee C giving a little knowledge was a dangerous thing because without all the facts being available the authority was made to look dishonest. This would only stoke the flames of protest. Interviewee C also made the point that unschooled protesters are none the less quite capable of reading a thick consultant's report from cover to cover and that if they were not sure of the scientific implications they could soon find scientifically competent allies who would back them up. This arguably is the nature of the risk society. It is a society which has gone further than the need for authorities to provide polite consultation on their plans. The very notion of "authority" in the risk society is in fact under attack. "Authority" is now a political concept which is fair game to be put under political opposition from other parts of civil society. It is a concept created at the time of the other politics - economic class based politics - not risk society based politics. There is no longer any traditional society general consensus "authorisation" for the notion of "authority". This argument is in line with suggestions in chapter three that certain affluent societies have now reached a point in democratic development where they invoke a need for constant rhetorical process in order to make governance possible. Governance is needed more in the almost anarchic seeming style of multitudinous rhetoric like that during the full bloom of the Greek demos rather than the more limited discussions of the times of the tyrants.

Within this "Beckian" society-scape we might pose what it is that Syme, the Water Environment Federation and the National Biosolid's Partnership are trying to achieve in the following way... Using Bourdieu's notion of "field" we might suggest that these professional groups are trying to maintain claims to their own "authority" within the thinking of that former politics where authority was more respected and rhetoric less needed. Using another term from Bourdieu which is based in the former economy and class based politics, they are trying to maintain their own "cultural capital" by pegging out their own professional field of understanding as "discrete" and to some extent exclusive to those professionals:
According to Bourdieu's theoretical model, any social formation is structured by way of a hierarchically organised series of fields (the economic field, the educational field the political field, the cultural field etc.), each defined as a structural space with its own laws of functioning and its own relations of force independent of those of politics and the economy (Johnson & Bourdieu. 1993. p6).

Symbolic capital refers to degree of accumulated prestige, celebrity, consecration or honour and is founded on a dialectic of knowledge and recognition (Ibid. p7).

In other words the "field" of academia, or the field of water engineering or the field of local government all have their own qualifications for entry and status of membership and range of status and qualification for people within these fields. Status and qualification equals the concept capital. What seems to happen within the risk society, in contradiction to Bourdieu, is that these statuses, or levels of symbolic capital lose their political value. There is a declining recognition of the status of the scientists and engineers who are less and less trusted as we become more and more worried about the safety and sustainability of our planet.

A sub-section of this discussion could be had around the birth and promotion of the term "biosolids". This birth and promotion could be argued to be a classic example of what Foucault terms the "discursive formation":

It is possible to describe several distinct emergences of a discursive formation. The moment at which a discursive practice achieves individuality and autonomy, the moment therefore at which a single system for the formation of statements is put into operation, or the moment at which this system is transformed, might be called the threshold of positivity. When in the operation of a discursive formation, a group of statements is articulated, claims to validate (even unsuccessfully) norms of verification and coherence, and when it exercises a dominant function (as a model, a critique, or a verification) over knowledge, we will
say that the discursive formation crosses a threshold of epistemologisation
(Foucault. 1982, p186-187).

In his work Foucault is concerned with the way our understanding of the world, our
perception of the world is framed by the way we can express the world through language.
The coining of the term "biosolids" and its strong promotion can be seen as a means of
capturing reality in a certain shape. This is the shape in which the water industry and allied
"authorities" would like to see it captured. However the US Environmental Protection
Agency’s reluctance to adopt this term (see above) would seem to leave "biosolids" just
short of being an "epistemologising" term - a term through which other aspects of reality to
do with the world of sewage sludge are defined. (Please also read this discussion in terms
of “logology” and the “rhetorical turn” discussed in the first three chapters. As the Water
Environment Federation public relations document puts it seemingly somewhat
disconsolately in its first sentence:

After twenty years of stirring and percolating, America's environmental
consciousness is here to stay -- and the impact this awareness is having on the way
we live is immeasurable (Tate. 1993, p1)

Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to illustrate the controversy surrounding biosolids; set
this controversy within the context of debates in a particular community; explain the
relevance of this discussion for the practice of public relations; and then briefly introduce
some usual and some less usual theoretical notions for analysing the whole discussion. This
case study is part of the wider thesis which is to do with suggesting how strands of cultural
and critical theory could be better taken up in public relations studies. As such the full
details and ramifications of alternative theory application are not pursued here. These
matters and the whole setting of public relations within the context of modern and
postmodern theory will be the subject of chapter ten. However some initial conclusions to
do with the application of unusual theory can be suggested from this thesis. Firstly the
application of Beck, Bourdieu and Foucault is not something for the process stage of the
public relations campaign. They do not provide immediate guidelines to how the campaign should be carried out. Rather they can be seen as modes of thinking about the "situation" - the first part of any public relations campaign. It is the "situation" which the public relations practitioner has to understand properly and get correct at the beginning before potentially wasteful spending decisions are made about what to do. Also it is the situation which the client depends on the practitioner to define whether she knows it or not. It may well be that what the client thinks is the situation may be the problem itself. – That is the client's thinking is wrong. As standard textbooks say, the client is often too involved with the situation professionally, financially and on a day-to-day work habit basis, to allow them to view this situation in a detached manner. For this reason cultural and critical theory approaches are investigated in the present project as the way forward for public relations theory.

An analysis from Beck's perspective warns us that the old status barriers around authority, or in this case the "authority", are wearing thin as people become politicised in a new way about all sorts of previously not thought about or taken for granted risks. The authorities seem to be trying to rebuild their "fields" - their status defences, altering people's world views of them, by such methods as re-creating the language, for example with the word "biosolids" and re-creating the imagery which people might have of them - glossy web sites and the water authority’s corporate advertising in the local press. However, in the risk society, in fact seemingly in postmodernity or late modernity generally, there is no autonomous field or authority which escapes the new political reorganisation - the prioritisation of general well being over crude economic "scarcity" politics. This is a lesson which this water authority seems to have learned the hard way. Their considerable involvement with landowners in the present experimental farm project would seem to go some of the way towards taking on board the politics of the risk society. Interviewee C acknowledges that the authority’s present "PR" style is likely to win the day at that farm.
Chapter Eight

Australian Association For The Public University - Case Study Three

Introduction

This chapter involves the theorising of a proposed public relations campaign for the Australian Association for the Public University. The Australian Association for the Public University, henceforward to be called the APU, is a lobby group of university academics who are opposed to the way Australian universities are adopting a "managerial" style. At this time (southern winter 2000-2001) the group is mostly Melbourne based.

Managerialism, also referred to by this group as corporatisation, in the university context is meant to convey the notion of a mostly top down command structure for university operation, including the regulation and direction of the activities of academics. Academics are having to operate more in line with detailed financial criteria, business plans and mission statements set by university executives. Academics' hours and workloads are increasing and what they should do in those hours and work is becoming more tightly prescribed and checked in a "quality control" manner. APU academics feel that previously they were more in control of their own modes of work and intellectual pursuits. The APU purports to express the feelings of a considerable number of academics and others in saying that academics as individuals, committees and professional associations should have more of a say in setting the parameters of their own work as well as the priorities of universities and how universities should be run. The below suggested campaign strategy was written by myself. It is offered as an example of a professional public relations plan to be critiqued in theoretical terms lower down. The plan has been offered for action to the APU. The justification for the claim of professional quality for this plan is: my ten years as a full time journalist; my seven years as a full time regional authority press officer; on-going public relations-style activity - principally as part of trade union activities; my (UK) industry qualifications in public relations; and my status as a member of the Public Relations Institute of Australia. In addition, the suggested campaign strategy has been read and endorsed by Noel Turnbull a Fellow of the Public Relations Institute of Australia and the Melbourne based principal of Turnbull Porter Novelli. Turnbull Porter Novelli is a major
Australian public relations firm and part of the global Porter Novelli public relations group. Mr Turnbull approved the document after making a few suggestions for minor changes which have been incorporated.

**Strategy prerequisites**

This strategy is being written after attendance at the July 29-30, 2000 APU conference and after meetings and discussions with some APU committee members. During those sessions an impression has been conveyed that some members of APU do not see this organisation or movement as a campaigning one. These people do not seem to think that the APU should play the same "managerial-style" game as the universities and that instead academics should use APU only as a rallying point from which they can make individual public comments in the traditional way that academic opinions are sometimes made known in the academic, professional and mass media. The suggested strategy in this document differs from that approach. This document take the view that current attitudes and policies which shape the contemporary style of higher education in Australia are the outcome of massive, coordinated and sustained managerial and political processes. These processes have ingrained certain managerialist and corporatist ideologies and cultures into many aspects of the ways universities operate. These are ideologies and cultures affecting the opinions, attitudes and beliefs of many people both inside and outside the university system. These opinions, attitudes and beliefs are constantly supported across the university and education ministry structure and in the popular media by extensive and routinised processes of communication, administration and decision making. It is for this reason that this strategy is premised on the need for a large, coordinated and sustained program of research, public education and lobbying, initially among groups who may be more easily persuaded to accept, pass on and champion APU ideals. These are groups and organisations including those from the realms of business, the professions, other educational organisations and some political groups. Uncoordinated, individualistic and untargeted responses from people loosely associated with APU cannot hope to have an impact on a problem of this scale. In fact initial discussions and observations have revealed that such well meaning but misguided solo contributions may be counter-productive. For instance some uncoordinated segments of information supposedly emanating from the APU have
already, unnecessarily alienated a section of the National Tertiary Education Union - a union which might be seen as an important ally of the APU and certainly a good channel for conveying APU information. For the above reasons this campaign strategy suggestion is written on the premise that it should be implemented in a cohesive, coherent and planned manner. It is strongly recommended that before implementation the APU looks carefully to its constitution and executive structure. It is important that any disharmony and factionalism is reduced to a minimum, that the campaign committee has a cohesive and agreed approach and that only those approved by the campaign committee are authorised to speak on behalf of the APU. Although this tightly controlled approach may at first appear anathema to the aims and ideals of many in the wider APU "movement" it is argued here that ill-disciplined statements and remarks by people claiming APU status could be very harmful. The nature of the corporation is that it is disciplined, controlled, speaks with one voice and appears to be cohesive and organised. The APU cannot afford to appear any less organised, less cohesive or less disciplined than those which it is out to critique. A failure to understand this point would invalidate much of what is suggested below.

The campaign in a nutshell

Broadly speaking the design of the campaign is to mimic many of the communication, public educational and lobbying processes which have resulted in university managements and others thinking of universities as quasi-corporations. However this time, in these ideological processes, cooperative academic imperatives will be substituted for top down "command-management" ones. A wider understanding of the nature and importance of higher education will be conveyed in opposition to the current more narrowly focused conception. This narrow conception sees higher education as primarily an instrument which can be fragmented or moulded into any shape which appears to satisfy the immediate consumer-style demands of students and employers. Such instrumentalism limits the bigger picture understanding of the importance of higher education in general social, economic and cultural outcomes. Stage One of the campaign involves marshalling this argument. Just as think-tanks have in the past marshalled arguments for privatisation, deregulation, outsourcing and so on before feeding various agendas, APU needs to draw on its potentially vast intellectual base to marshal the
arguments against university managerialism and in favour of the voices of empowered academics. The APU needs to unify around a philosophical approach which constructively critiques the managerial model. The APU starts this campaign with a considerable advantage as an intelligent group within the industry of intellectual debate and production. In the initial stages the APU should therefore merely need to discover and collate existing information in this arena. APU should not have to produce new research. A reporting structure should be set up to “mine” all academic disciplines for useful research and journal articles. The following areas might prove particularly useful...

**Business studies of all sorts**

It is not unusual to find reviews of the qualities of graduates entrants, or the preferred qualities of these entrants in many areas of business and the professions.Quite often in these reviews qualities such as "critical thinking" "independent thought" "adaptability" and so on are mentioned. Some professions may mention "liberal education" or a wide "general education" as a preferred characteristic in graduate employees who take up many different types of occupations. It is not uncommon for employers to tell universities that they - the employers - will teach the graduate exactly how they want the job done in their particular house. What they want the university to supply is people who are skilled in the necessary areas of expertise, but also people who can think for themselves, people who have a wider understanding than purely the technical or mechanical procedures of the occupation. Technical, procedural and cultural developments are moving too fast for organisations to accept people who are narrowly "trained". They need people who have a more rounded education including the ability to understand how an organisation or a process relates to the world as a whole. Surely it would be the APU's view that this requirement for broad understanding is constrained by top down "command structure" prescription of how various business and professional courses should be taught. Over-reliance on less informed student "consumerist" subject choice and student critique about courses would both have a similar effect. This take over of control would mean less informed student/clients steering curricular previously set by those who actually know the subjects involved and who collectively have many years of experience of higher education and its outcomes. Surely APU's view would be that authority over curricular matters,
teaching styles and standards should be retained by academics working in appropriate liaison with industry representatives and others concerned with higher education matters. Allies can surely be found in the various business or similar faculties who are already, or who would be only too willing to research the above effects and arguments? These would be academics who are at suitable vantage points where they can search for research and journal articles which make these and related points. Any material in existing business or business/academic publications which imply support for APU arguments from the business or professional community for a greater empowerment of academics would be of particular political use. The campaign committee and its allies should search for research which supports the need for truly "vocational" or truly "professional" studies at universities. “Vocation” here is meant in the original sense of the word which is now usually only associated with the caring or educational professions. “Professional” is meant in the sense of qualified practitioners who are respected as having a certain independent status in civil society by virtue of their high qualifications, code of ethics and importance to the functioning of society. That is we need to make clear the need for courses which produce the technically able, but also independently thinking, roundly informed and independently ethically responsible individual. We need research which enables us to critique courses which are merely narrowly, technically and skills focused and which do not contain these wider imperatives, or where these wider imperatives are being eroded. There might also be existing studies of how contemporary university management systems compare to best management practice in the corporate world proper. Some have suggested that although universities are attempting to ape corporation management processes they are doing this badly with out of date approaches and inexperienced managers. Many organisations, particularly those with the "knowledge base" as their main resource - like computer software firms – are said to be devolving decision making down to their front line knowledgeable people just at the time when universities are centralising this power.

**Education studies**

The changed relationship which exists between academics and students - some might even say "lecture theatre workers" and their "clients" - has surely become an interesting field of study for researchers in education faculties? Many universities enforce
detailed assessment of the performance of academics by inviting students to criticise lecturers and tutors in a number of respects through twice yearly questionnaires. Good academics have always used student feedback as a way of developing their pedagogic performance, however now this procedure has been made official with some universities intercepting the results before the academic gets them. Some universities use these results to criticise how the academic job is being done. This places some academics in the quandary of needing to balance how well they please their students vis-a-vis how much they should challenge them in the way which the academic feels is most appropriate educationally. There are also questions about how this potential student criticism diverts effort which might otherwise have gone into research. Also the general "client centred" nature of university course provision in the corporate university has meant that courses and units which appeal to students tend to be prioritised, resourced and offered over or in place of courses which for whatever reason do not hold the same cachet in the mind of the student. This is another example of the less informed student influencing aspects of education which should more properly be under the influence of knowledgeable academic bodies and committees. Again this is having considerable effects on the profile of university offerings, as well as effects on the morale of staff within universities. Surely there must be studies in this area which can be collated and enlisted to the APU campaign? It would be interesting to hear research conclusions on the quality of a university education system where individual students, as opposed to representative student bodies - bodies which can be resourced and informed about educational matters - dictate what and how students are to be taught in an uniformed, popularist, individualist and consumerist fashion.

Other fields of study

The above areas of research on the effects of the swing to managerialism in universities might provide the most immediately telling and politically useful information. However there may be very useful information to be found across many other fields of academic research including history, sociology, political science and so on. When mining these areas for relevant knowledge it is important that people remain focused on exactly what it is the APU objects to in the present university system. For instance it would be counter-productive to get side tracked into a debate on the development of mass higher
education. Presumably most people agree that widespread higher education is desirable. What we need to remain focused on is the broader nature of higher education and the effects of the current managerialist/corporate style of governance. With this focus in mind historical research into the styles of university management down the ages and the posited outcomes of different styles of management might prove useful. For instance a discussion of Prussian Education Minister Wilhelm von Humboldt's early 19th century initiatives and the subsequent effects of those initiatives in Germany and other countries might prove interesting when contrasted to what is currently happening in Australian universities. A study of Scottish universities in the Enlightenment might also be useful. Political science might be the region for examining, among other things, notions of the globalisation of the higher education industry and the managerialist approach to this. Political science might also be the region of research which could explain the political influences which have brought universities to their present condition. Political studies might also explain the political and social implications of the production of a technologised workforce, a skilled workforce which yet has limited understandings because its universities are directed not by academics, but by the imperatives of corporate culture. Communication studies departments, as well as education faculties are likely to be the realms in which the incorporation of information technology into higher education processes is being studied. Many university staff feel that this incorporation is being handled badly by a management structure where the few people who are least likely to use computer systems for teaching and research never-the-less make the big ticket policy and purchase decisions on behalf of the thousands of students and staff who constantly use and rely on the equipment.

In gathering research from the above and other academic areas the campaign committee would be researching the nature and the extent of corporatisation or managerialism in universities (the two terms are used interchangeably here). Articles in newspapers and other media should also be systematically gathered, analysed and filed in order to gain a coherent picture of: the suggested origins of the corporate impulse; an understanding of who is maintaining this impulse and how; a panorama of the arguments for and against this style of university governance; and a log of the effects of this approach. The effects would include the decline of the humanities as a university subject and pressure on mathematics and pure sciences. Such an approach would help to separate the causes
from the symptoms focusing the campaign on opposing the causes of corporatisation rather than wasting resources in fruitless lamentation about the consequences. The committee needs to brainstorm to fill in the questions in a schema such as the below:

1) What are the top twenty characteristics of the "corporate university"?

2) What are the negative and positive consequences of these characteristics?

3) Are your answers to "2)" backed up by the research suggested above? If not why not and where is more research "mining" needed?

4) How would each of these top twenty regrettable characteristics be dealt with in the sort of university the APU envisages?

5) Which organisations and individuals have proposed and maintain support for the mechanisms or measures which lead to the top twenty regrettable characteristics? (Please name at least forty of these people and organisations.)

6) Analyse the power base and the motivations of the top twenty of these opposition individuals and organisations. Do a S.W.O.T. analysis on each of these twenty.

7) Decide on five legitimate ways to discredit the views of each of these top twenty. In carrying out this task think in particular about how our above research might help. In legitimately discrediting corporatist views think about:
   a. The academic authority of the opposition individual or organisation and the vulnerability of that academic position.
   b. The political party support which that individual has including the factions in those parties. In whose party political interest is it to oppose those views?
c. What institutional support does this person or organisation have? What organisations or factions of organisations - particularly mainstream, respected organisations - harbour or may latently harbour opposed views?

d. What is the popular basis of the support of that individual or organisation? Do they maintain a popular reputation with the public at large or with particular sections of the public? How can the public in general or particular publics be given evidence which might lead them to legitimately question the competence or authority of each of these twenty individuals or organisations?

8) Which influential organisations and individuals outside of the APU have definitely expressed opposition to the mechanisms or measures which lead to the top twenty regrettable characteristics? Try to name at least twenty. Only count people or organisations who have gone into print on this. Do not count people or organisations who you think would be sympathetic or who have verbally expressed their support because they might change their mind.

9) Divide the above potential allies politically into "mainstream" organisations and “radical” or clearly self-interested organisations. For instance support from major students associations or professional associations will be seen as much more valuable in political campaigning terms than totally legitimate, but obviously self-interested support from the National Tertiary Education Union.

10) Pick ten influential individuals and ten influential organisations which you think might latently harbour sympathies to the APU position. But be very cautious here. It could be damaging to the campaign if potentially influential opinion leaders were embarrassed by APU’s presumption of their position. Enquiries to explore the potentiality of their supporting the APU position should be very discreet.

   Considerable thought and effort should be put into carrying out the above exercise suggestions 1 to 10. The exercise should help the APU to write a substantial policy
document. It should not simply lead to a list of names and short comments. Instead it
should be used to stimulate a more clear idea of what the APU is opposed to and what it
stands for. It needs to have a clear statement of the eventual situation it would like to see in
order for it to feel that the APU’s work has been done and it can disband. In particular the
above exercise might help to sort out the symptom versus cause confusion evident at the
July 29-30 conference. Some people seemed to think that bringing back humanities and
pure science would solve the problem. These people did not appear to grasp the notion that
discrimination against these subjects is a symptom of the current malaise, it is not the cause
of the malaise. As a consequence of this confusion the conference seemed to be arguing for
a fossilised, throwback university curriculum instead of for a renewed academic freedom
which would lead to a different contemporary university in touch with the present higher
educational needs of society. This "bring back the old" tendency of speakers led to a dead
end when it came to envisaging the identity which contemporary academics might take up
in a "freed" academic system. A freed academic system would clearly take the best from
the traditions and work of the university up until now, but it would also require a
positioning of the identity of contemporary academics and students who are now working
in a globally networked information environment and a global economy. This is an
economy which has many global cultural influences not the least of which is the
corporatisation of universities!

After setting the goals of the APU on the basis of the above analysis the ten point
analysis exercise should lead logically to contemplation of the practical steps which have to
be taken to reach the goals, or to subsidiary goals if ideal and "acceptable" goals are
differentiated:

- First the timescale has to be contemplated. Clearly this campaign is going to
  have to run for a number of years. How many? What is reasonable? What sub-
  goal can be set for the first year? Or the first six months? What “measurements”
  should we make now in order to decide after that year, or six months, if a sub
  goal has been achieved?...For instance what do we understand about our
  opponents now? What would we expect to know about our opponents after six
  months of research? What amount of supporting research literature do we have
  now? What quality and volume of supporting literature can we expect to have in

166
six months time? Undertaking the 10 point exercise now and then re-doing it in six months time and comparing the outcomes might be a good way of assessing the progress of the campaign.

- Secondly what resources are needed? The initial resources in the above campaign suggestion would be like minded academics who are placed in good positions to spot, collate and summarise to an agreed format the needed research basis for the later more public stages of the campaign. Also later on an important resource will be people with expert knowledge of, or contacts with, the people and organisations which have shown up in researching to answer questions 1 to 10. We need people with knowledge of the opponents, people with contacts to the allies and people with a sensitive and accurate understanding of the possible allies. The need for other resources will become apparent as the campaign plan develops. The principle in thinking about resources should be to realise the advantage which APU has over many other major campaigning organisations in terms of sympathetic and potentially sympathetic personnel and the expertise and location of these personnel in the system which it is targeting. The importance of not unnecessarily annoying potentially sympathetic personnel should be clear.

- Setting achievable and measurable objectives for the first year or six months...

Two objectives have already been suggested under “timescale” above. It should be up to the campaign committee to fix other genuinely achievable objectives. Do not set unachievable objectives which may result in poor morale if they are not reached. But get a good understanding of your available resources so that you do not unnecessarily limit your progress through the plan. The later objectives (by objectives we mean discrete, actual activities which are components of the overall plan) might include:

- getting six other professional groups to speak out on your side this year.
- exposing this year’s top ten bad decisions by universities.
- having your spokesperson (one personable and fluent spokesperson) appear on TV and radio at least three times per month each.
-getting at least ten allied groups to write and give evidence to any appropriate governmental committees, inquiries, political parties and factions of parties.

-look out for five campaigns which yours might ally itself to - but avoid allying to campaigns which might cause you trouble.

-issue interesting and relevant information to Australian academics as a whole quarterly and ask them to contribute - perhaps via a web site magazine. Keep careful control of this magazine and do not allow opponents or difficult people to use it as a vehicle.

-devise an identity and a role for the contemporary academic which they can identify with which is superior to that produced by current academic employment practices...Ie. define what an academic should do, how they should be assessed, what their aims should be...and promote this vision at every opportunity. Test this vision in six focus groups of academics and adjust the vision aiming at an eighty percent approval rating for your vision by the sixth focus group. Test this percentage in a further three focus groups by making no further adjustments.

(End of campaign strategy 1/9/00)

.................................

**The APU campaign strategy as a public relations plan**

In the chapter in this thesis on public relations history I suggest early 20th century motivations for the emergence and development of public relations. The general conclusion of the section on definitions is that public relations involves persuading people to take up a particular perspective when thinking about an organisation, a person, an activity or a concept. The history chapter suggests this activity was mainly required and funded by large corporations which were concerned about their social and political profile. There was a concern in the late 19th to early 20th century that corporations had become too powerful in society. Public relations was needed to better align corporate image and activities with
public expectation. Defining public relations tends to be a popular activity engaged in by many different associations of public relations practitioners who often come out with differing descriptions, although some of the key elements are similar or the same. For the purposes of justifying the APU strategy as a public relations plan we will revisit the examples of the definitions used by the Public Relations Society of America; The Institute of Public Relations (UK); the Public Relations Institute of Australia; and the Public Relations Institute of New Zealand. These definitions will be introduced in the context of the way they have previously been discussed in this thesis. These current (September, 2000) definitions are taken from the central web sites of the above named organisations with the addition of the also previously discussed 1982 American definition which is taken from textbooks.

**Public Relations Society of America (1)**

Public relations helps an organization and its publics adapt mutually to each other. Often, it is a term used to describe both, a way of looking at an organization's performance and a program of activities.

The public relations function takes many forms in different organizations, including public information, investor relations, public affairs, corporate communications, employee relations, marketing or product publicity, and consumer service or customer relations (http://www.prsa.org/careers.html 12/9/00).

**Public Relations Society of America (2)**

A more comprehensive definition adopted by the Public Relations Society of America Assembly in 1982 running to over 500 words says in parts:

Public relations serves a wide variety of institutions in society such as business, trade unions, government agencies, voluntary associations...To achieve their goals, these institutions must develop effective relationships with many different audiences or publics...As a management function public relations encompasses the following...[variety of aspects including]...Anticipating, analysing
and interpreting public opinion, attitudes, and issues that might impact for good or ill, the operations and plans of the organisation (quoted in Cutlip et. al. 1994 p4).

(UK) Institute of Public Relations

Public relations is the discipline which looks after reputation, with the aim of earning understanding and support and influencing opinion and behaviour. It is the planned and sustained effort to establish and maintain goodwill and mutual understanding between an organisation and its publics (http://www.ipr.org.uk/Careers/careersframeset.htm 12/9/00).

Public Relations Institute of Australia

Public relations is the management function concerned with effective communication. It includes research to understand issues and public attitudes which have an impact on an organisation; planning and implementing communication activities to effect change; and evaluating the outcomes (http://www.pria.com.au/index.htm 12/9/00).

Public Relations Institute of New Zealand

Public relations practice shall be defined as the deliberate, planned and sustained effort to establish and maintain mutual understanding and excellent communications between an organisation and its publics (http://www.prinz.org.nz/PRINZ/prinzopen.nsf/htmlmedia/constitution.html 12/9/00).

It might be said that the shorter definitions above orientate our understanding of what public relations is more towards something that an organisation does. In this way we might be led to think that public relations is more an aspect of an established and large organisation such as a commercial corporation or a government or government agency, rather than an activity easily associated with an ad hoc or loose grouping of individuals. The longer, 1982 American example however specifies "a wide variety of institutions" and offers as examples among others: "trade unions" and "voluntary associations". As voluntary
organisations come in many shapes, sizes and intentions it is perhaps legitimate to admit the APU to this classification. Other aspects of the definitions would seem to correspond well with what is being proposed above. We could list phrases from the definitions which correspond with what is being proposed in the APU strategy documents such as: "deliberate, planned and sustained effort"; "excellent communications"; "effective communication"; "research to understand issues and public attitudes which have an impact"; "planning and implementing communication activities to effect change"; "earning understanding and support and influencing opinion and behaviour". However when it comes to some notions involved in the above definitions there is perhaps need for further discussion. These are notions represented by such phrases as "mutual understanding"; "goodwill"; "reputation"; "an organisation and its publics"; "the operations and plans of the organisation"; "public relations helps an organization and its publics adapt mutually to each other". These latter notions reinforced the notion of public relations as an "establishment" activity. They imply a pre-given reputation for a substantive organisation which already has an audience or a public with which the organisation is already engaged in mutual discourse. The purpose of public relations activity is to have the organisation and its publics mutually adapt to each other so that goodwill continues to flow to the organisation...the audience finds the organisation agreeable and thus the organisation gets the cooperation of its publics. This is not quite what is intended by the APU campaign and the contrast illustrates the points made in the public relations definitions and history section of this thesis. These are the suggestions that public relations at base is rhetorical activity to persuade targeted people to think in ways which benefit of those commissioning public relations activity.

Another way of conceptualising the APU campaign in conventional public relations terms is to see it as a counter-campaign which has as its aim the overturning of reputations, goodwill and mutual understandings which have previously been established. In this way the universities and their associated government agencies can be seen as the organisations who need to maintain goodwill with, and adapt to, the expectations of the various publics who they serve. The APU can be seen as an oppositional group which is determined to inform these various publics and persuade them to particular points of view in such a way that the organisations will have to re-adapt to take the APU view into account. The alternative approach is to reject the "establishment" overtones of the above definitions and
to suggest that the APU can develop a presence, a standing, a reputation of its own. From this position it will speak to its own audiences to create mutual understanding and goodwill. This latter approach however sits uneasily with the orthodox definitions (before they are critiqued as earlier in this thesis). It is obvious that the APU is not engaging in public relations-like activities with the purpose of adapting itself to public expectations. Nor is the APU likely to want or be able to create goodwill with all sections of its audience. As a campaigning organisation it is clearly dedicated to a certain line in terms of how it wishes to see issues resolved. Two points need to be drawn from this contrast between campaigning organisations such as the APU and the "establishment" organisations which “orthodox” public relations is purported to serve on a “mutual” basis with those establishment organisations’ publics. The first, as is often seen reflected in the case study work of undergraduate public relations students, is that campaigning organisations do not always make good examples when one is trying to illustrate the carrying out of a public relations campaign in the conventional sense. The other point, rather counter to this first one is that: established organisations are campaigning organisations as well! This is particularly clear when established organisations indulge in that aspect of public relations called issues management. As we have seen, issues management is defined by authority on issues management Heath (1997) as:

The management of organisational and community resources through the public policy process to advance organisational interests and rights by striking a mutual balance with those of stakeholders...It [issues management] is expected to keep the firm ethically attuned to its community and positioned to exploit, mitigate and foster public policy changes as they relate to the corporate mission (Heath. 1997. p9).

Earlier in his introductory chapter Heath writes:

What is issues management? Some people believe the answer to that question is the manipulation of issues to the advantage of large private sector
organisations. A contrasting view recognises that companies cannot manipulate issues to their interests for long (Ibid. p4).

Heath goes on from the above to acknowledge the Grunig and Hunt two way symmetrical public relations model which is discussed in chapter nine. In his discussion Heath implies that manipulative or crass promotional attempts at influencing opinion do not work and should not be tried. He depicts issues management, an aspect of public relations, as a sort of "fair trading" in public discussion. It is legitimate for large organisations to research opinion, predict future trends in opinion and then either organise themselves to take advantage of these trends, or advertise, lobby and run media relations to try to ameliorate the effects of public opinion trends which may be adverse to them. A long running issues management campaign in the United State has been that led by the National Rifle Association against gun control (Wilcox. 1992. p459). An important Australian example in recent years has been the mining industry's involvement with legislation over native title rights to land, particularly at the time of the "Wik" legislation in 1997 (The Age advertisement 1997). In both the American and the Australian examples, alliances of large and powerful organisations used internal and external communication and organisation, advertising, media spokespersons contacts with government officials and politicians and other public relations techniques in a concerted way to get their opinion felt in the policy making process. The American example was and still is aimed at getting or keeping advantage for an alliance of gun industry and shooting club interests. In the Australian example major mining interests came together to bring their influence to bear in an attempt to speed the passing of legislation. In referring to ethics Heath implies that it is both wrong and counter-productive for organisations to act in a way which is out of tune with community expectations (Ibid p9). It is clear however that issues management is involved with suggesting what is in tune with a community's expectations - if only they knew it! That is, issues management is a process of dialogue initiated by the organisation which wants to keep or produce advantage in terms of public perceptions. As such it might be argued that issues management must usually take a relativistic approach to truth... That is issues managers attempt to find and foster the truths which both parties agree on which are to the advantage of the organisation. The manager seeks agreement on particular truths
rather than deferral to some absolute values. Overtones of Putnam’s conceptual relativity and the inevitability of partiality in Burke’s analysis of communication, as discussed in chapter two are invoked in theoretically analysing this process. As such issues management confronts a difficult line between, on the one hand giving simple information and on the other hand attempting to persuade people to a particular point of view. Burke would say this line does not exist. It is only where the norms of issues management dialogue exceed more substantial political and policy guidelines that boundaries have to be set outside of the dialogue and the process becomes open to accusations of propaganda – as discussed in chapter three. For instance in the Australian context, boundaries of what can and cannot be agreed in discussion with "issues management publics" might be set by a state environmental protection authority or by the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission. Heath gives the examples of the United States’ Environmental Protection Agency, Occupational Safety and Health Administration and Food and Drug Administration (Ibid. p42). There is little discussion in Heath and indeed in the Grunig and Hunt two way symmetrical public relations tradition about whether disparate individuals or putative "communities" are resourced or informed enough to be able to carry on genuine "dialogue" with major organisations. The need for normative confines for truths – supplied by such organisations as consumer commissions or health and safety bodies – can be seen to be essential for keeping issues management discussions within the bounds of some sort of societal agreement acceptable to unresourced groups. Keeping discussion within the understanding and possible voluntary acquiescence of unresourced groups keeps discussion within the bounds of public relations practice, as opposed to outside those bounds and into the realms of propaganda. Please see how the difference between public relations and propaganda is defined in this thesis in chapter three. By unresourced groups I mean ad hoc organisations which, unlike the usual originators of issues management plans, do not have full access to a range of public opinion monitoring and opinion issuing apparatuses.

Following the above discussion of public relations definitions and issues management, it might be suggested that although the APU campaign sits slightly uneasily with standard notions of public relations campaigns, it none the less does involve many characteristics of public relations and the related field of issues management activity. In particular, even within the realm of “orthodox” definitions, there is a declaration that public
relations is meant to be an activity which is used by all sorts of organisations. It is further noted that public relations, in its issues management aspect, is overtly aimed at influencing public opinion on a wide scale. In consequence, although the APU is clearly not an established organisation and would instead be described by Heath as an "advocacy group" (Ibid. p2) or "activists" (Ibid. p6), the campaign outlined above can be treated as a public relations campaign with an issues management aspect. The rest of this chapter goes on to review the plan of the suggested campaign in a conventional public relations practice sense and then to apply cultural and critical theory to the project.

Most textbooks on public relations are predominantly practical in their purpose. They are usually books about the process of public relations. They tell the reader how to ‘do’ public relations, usually in an elaborate way and with illustrations from case studies to show how it was done before. Only a few books critique public relations or discuss wider issues to do with this activity. Orthodox and critical writings on public relations are discussed in chapters nine and eleven. If we look through a selection of practical public relations textbooks we can briefly characterise the methods for carrying out the public relations processes which they advocate. We can then compare this method to the suggested APU campaign strategy and discuss similarities and differences.

Jefkins (1986), one of the few UK texts in this US dominated field, advocates a six point planning model for public relations. His points are either a very close précis of, or the basis of six more elaborated points listed as the management by objectives approach to doing public relations in Baskin & Aronoff (1992). The pair cite Jefkins earlier (Ibid. p9). Jefkins’s six points are:

(1) Appreciation of the situation or the communication audit; (2) Definition of objectives; (3) Definition of publics; (4) Choice of media and techniques; (5) Budget, including work hours; (6) Evaluation of results (Jefkins. 1986. p16; Baskin & Aronoff. 1992. p139).

stands for research, objectives, programming, evaluation (Singh. 2000. p95; Hendrix. 1992. p40-41). The issues management formula is generally given following Chase (1984) as: (1) issues identification; (2) analysis; (3) strategy options; (4) program; (5) evaluation (Heath. 1997. p8; Mackey, 2000 p324). The basic intentions behind all these public relations process schemata is to help people systemise public relations work. Public relations planners are invited to recognise that there are separate elements to organised public relations activity. All three public relations schemata (Jefkins/ Baskin & Aronoff; R.A.C.E.; and R.O.P.E.) start with either research or the appreciation of the situation which amounts to the same thing. The above APU suggested campaign strategy is weighted towards this researching of the situation. Besides recommending research it also makes its own suggestions about what the situation is in terms of the cultural/business milieu in which universities and their staff currently find themselves. These observations are based on the writer’s involvement in the industry and its main trade union, his long-term observation of the issues under discussion and conversations with leading APU members.

The next stage in the public relations process is to decide on actions. It is about setting long-term goals and specific short-term, manageable objectives which are intended to be stepping stones to those ultimate goals. The primary goal – more influence for academics – is implied throughout the document. It would be good public relations practice, as the plan is developed, to specify more clearly what degree and what sort of influence is needed. We would also need to ascertain methods for checking when this level and quality of influence had been achieved. Some intermediate objectives are suggested in the document as an indication of the sorts of objectives the group might set. A timescale and a “budget” are implied in remarks about what might happen in the first year and the resources that are available – primarily good access to academic researchers. This area of timescale and resources is deliberately vague because this small and ad hoc organisation needs to seriously consider what resources and time it can in fact expect activists to devote in the face of a mammoth task. Some broad suggestions for communication and the public who need to be communicated with are suggested. Methods of evaluation are also suggested.

In terms of issues management… prudent, pre-existing, substantial organisations should constantly have some form of issues identification in place simply to enable them to go about their day-to-day policy and planning work sensibly. One would expect that for
instance the (Australian) National Tertiary Education Union would have been alive to the developments of university managerialism for some years before this milieu was felt to be a crisis by many university staff. University managements and their associations should similarly have been monitoring these trends as they emerged and developed. Considering the next stage of the issues management process: the analysis of the implications of these public issues, i.e. how these issues concretely affect academics and universities, receives considerable attention in this written strategy as it does verbally among the APU membership and among many others associated with universities. This is for example often a component of most coffee time work conversations! What is needed is some method of formalising this analysis which is constantly in train. Again the APU needs to call on the expertise of good academics who would be more than capable of systematising this existing analysis process. At the strategy options stage: if this matter were treated as an issues management project, strategy options might range from writing quiet academic protests, as a few have chosen to do, through to noisy campaigning and lobbying. The strategy options suggested in this chapter involve a multi-pronged attack aimed at exposing the downside of managerialism as well as enlisting the assistance of potential allies. The campaign strategy is in essence an entire public relations program to carry out this particular strategy option. Following the program stage, evaluation of the program’s effects on public opinion could be gleaned by monitoring media, analyzing any shift in the rhetoric of politicians, surveying the stakeholders of universities and so on. Having claimed the pedigree of the suggested campaign strategy as a proper public relation campaign plan, we will now turn to examining aspects of this plan in terms of contemporary cultural and critical theories.

Applying cultural and critical theory to the campaign strategy

The theoretical discussion below is aimed at justifying the suggested campaign’s recommendations to work largely within the discourse of managerialism but substituting a “better managerialism” – one that is based on academic power – for the present one which is largely based on executive diktat. The primary theoretical notions which will be employed are those of “lifeworld”, “purposive rational action” “communicative action” and “mediatisation”.
Mediatisation (Habermas. 1991. p342; 1989. p305, p325) stands for the virtual control of people’s reasoning environment – their thinking points of reference when they come to decide what is possible or what is best for them – by economic or legal factors. These economic or legal factors pass on or “mediate” what it is apparently possible to do, and thus what it is possible to think within the politics of a certain socio-economic structure. For instance it would apparently be impossible for the APU to hire a top public relations firm for a year to run their campaign. Such a move would be “unthinkable” because of the financial position of the APU and legal restrictions on their pretending to have the money.

Life-world is used by Husserl 1859-1938 to mean the concrete, everyday world which is experienced by people and from which they draw their immediate understandings. These experiences and understandings are inescapably bound to the sense organs and the particular community of the individual. Objective, scientific understandings are possible, but this transcendent reasoning can only be achieved on the basis of these initial life-world produced reasoning building blocks (Nenon. 1996. p305). Lifeworld is given in Schutz’s (1970) glossary as:

The total sphere of experiences of an individual which is circumscribed by the objects, persons, and events encountered in the pursuit of the pragmatic objectives of living. It is a “world” in which a person is “wide-awake” and which asserts itself as the “paramount reality” of [their] life (Schutz. 1970. p320).

Habermas uses his interpretation of the concept of lifeworld as a basic building block of his theory of communicative action. The theory of communicative action holds that people reach their understandings of the world and thus their basis for thinking and acting, in a linguistic process which depends on communication exchanges. These exchanges have to be governed by certain pragmatic rules of agreed discourse processes in order for the exchanges to be intelligible in human terms. The exchanges create the lifeworlds – the complexes of commonsense understandings of who we are and what the world around us is. But these preformed lifeworlds are also the bases of the individual’s
immediate suppositions from which they enter into the conversations with others that build their knowledge:

Subjects acting communicatively always come to an understanding in the horizon of a lifeworld. Their lifeworld is formed from more or less diffuse, always unproblematic, background convictions. This lifeworld background serves as a source of situation definitions that are presupposed by participants as unproblematic. In their interpretive accomplishments the members of a communicative community demarcate the one objective world and their inter-subjectively shared social world from the subjective worlds of individuals and other collectives. The world concepts and the corresponding validity claims provide the formal scaffolding with which those acting communicatively order problematic contexts of situations, that is, those requiring agreement…(Habermas. 1991. p70)

Habermas develops the concept of purposive rational action from Weber (Habermas. 1989. p303) and Parson (Ibid. p209). By purposive rationalism and its consequent actions Habermas means the ability of people to think and act in a post-enlightenment, scientifically reasoning manner as opposed to a manner dependent on constant reference to a mythological cosmology. Weber was concerned with the changed understandings of the world people had as they dropped or modified their previous understanding of the world and their place in it in religious terms. Society is reorganized along rational bureaucratic lines instead of in relation to beliefs and mythology. Parsons develops this theme to suggest how the different parts of the consequent rationally produced bureaucracies and institutions might be understood to function within themselves and in relation to each other, to create the sort of society we have. Habermas is concerned with the quality of the purposive rationalisations which are possible. He concludes that purposive rationalism is in danger of being over-determined by economic and social systems factors which overwhelm more human ways of understanding life (see chapter ten). For Habermas more human reasoning is shaped by the qualities of the “lifeworlds” seen as the primary local cultures and communities which people would live and think in relation to if their thinking was not degraded by more instrumental influences. There is
particular concern if the moralities which were a fundamental part of pre-enlightenment, religious thinking are not carried through in some form in the lifeworlds of the post-enlightenment (Ibid. p174).

Having discussed some of the terms Habermas uses we will now use them to theorise the situation described in the suggested campaign strategy. Later, as a consequence of this theorisation, we will make some further suggestions for the campaign strategy. Habermas suggests that in late modernity, i.e. the present time, the traditions, institutions and commonsense of a more human society, are being overwhelmed by the dry instrumental reasoning of a society which prioritises economic success above other virtues:

But only if we differentiate Gesellschaftshandeln (social action) into action oriented to reaching understanding and action oriented to success can we conceive the communicative rationalisation of everyday action and the formation of sub systems of purposive-rational economic and administrative action as complementary developments. Both reflect, it is true, the institutional embodiment of rationality complexes; but in other respects they are counteracting tendencies (Habermas. 1991. p341).

In the universities example, instead of an holistic dialogue taking place, purposive-rational economic and administrative action have been privileged over communicative action, that is over action oriented to reaching understanding. The aporias in the thought orienting spaces of the lifeworld have been “colonized” by the thought “steering media” of the economy…

…[institutions] are formed on the basis of media that uncouple action from processes of reaching understanding and coordinate it via generalized, instrumental values such as money and power. These steering media replace language as the mechanism for coordinating action. They set social action loose from integration through value consensus and switch it over to purposive rationality steered by media (Ibid. p342).
This accelerating, market driven purposive rationality of the university system is discussed in the Australian context in Cunningham (1992) and in the UK context in Wernick (1991):

The fundamental aim of the reforms, as presented in the White Paper, *Higher Education: A Policy Statement* (Dawkins. 1988), was to facilitate the role of higher education in serving social and economic goals, or ‘national priorities’. These included the sector’s contribution to re-skilling the workforce; identifying those areas of industry, services and manufacturing in which Australia might enjoy a comparative advantage and redeploying resources towards them; the need to integrate Australia more dynamically towards the Pacific rim and East Asian economies; and the need to develop Australia’s communications and information technology sectors (Cunningham. 1992. p15).

In a similar vein Wernick writes:

… the conversion of the now idealised elite bourgeois university into a market oriented agency for the delivery of educational and research services (a long term conversion which the Reagan-Thatcher reforms have, in any case only accelerated) is only part of the picture. For universities, as for late capitalist society as a whole, penetration by the price system has been accompanied (and anticipated) by the extension of competitive exchange in general (Wernick. 1991. p158).

Cunningham and Wernick would seem to be characterising those rational purposive influences which crept into UK and Australian universities during the 1990s and which now, in the 21st century seem to dominate their lifeworlds shaping the very possibility of the ways we can think about universities. Cunningham incidentally appears to speak within the discourse of purposive rationalism and to advise accommodation to those influences:

If the humanities are to respond positively to the challenge of higher education reform and grasp the opportunities that it presents, they need to review
their curriculum priorities in order to build, rather than merely assert, the relationship between citizenship formation, critical thought and vocational education (Ibid. p18).

Wernick takes a more rebellious line giving the example of his own piece as counter to, as we might say, the uncoupled purposive rational impulse. He refers to Habermas’s concern on this very subject: the spectacle of late modernity, as it were, eating itself by the process of instrumental rationalism growing ahead of and out of balance with communicative action:

In calling for a completion of the modern project, even the relatively optimistic Habermas was moved (in 1980) to doubt the emancipatory prospects (Ibid. p177).

This Habermassian analysis would appear to imply that the purposive rationality of late modernity has, in the university, as probably in most other institutions, defeated the more human processes of communicative action. As a consequence universities are more concerned about instrumental matters to do with economy than with reflective matters to do with building human understandings from which virtues, values and the quality of life can be more roundly appreciated. Habermas’s term for how this has happened is colonisation by steering media, namely money, administrative systems and laws. This is perhaps a coy way of making the Marxist point that the economic form has dominated over ideological production, but we will not go down that theoretical track for the present. The task at hand is to suggest what this analysis implies for the proposed APU public relations campaign. The first point to make is that if this analysis is right there are considerable barriers to persuading people in general to the point of view of the APU. The analysis implies that for many people their “lifeworld”… that is the basis on which they could understand straightforward APU arguments, will not support the sort of understanding which the APU intends. A pre-campaign test of this theoretical warning would be completely in line with public relations practice. The test would involve “market testing” people who the campaign was aimed at, by focus group, survey or interview, to find out just exactly what they
understood by draft campaign messages. That is, before campaigning takes place the campaign should attempt to map the lifeworlds – the systems for understanding of the particular groups of people – the publics – which the campaign seeks to reach and influence. Under the above hypothesis about the penetration of purposive rationalism into the contemporary lifeworld, this initial scouting is likely to find: “the cultural impoverishment and fragmentation of everyday consciousness” (Habermas. 1989. p355) In other words targets of the campaign may be found to not have the sort of world views and potential reasoning about the value of universities which campaigners might imagine and hope they have. This may come as a shock to the committed academics of the APU whose highly, in fact professionally developed lifeworlds and persona will be the complete opposite of this “cultural impoverishment and fragmentation” situation.

A few possibilities present themselves here some of which have correspondences to the concrete suggestions in the suggested campaign strategy. Firstly it might be possible to map and identify other professional institutions facing similar “lifeworld” disruption – other groups of professionals in relatively prestigious positions who may have some common cause with academics as purposive rational action disrupts their operations as well. With publics who are not in institutions – such as non student association students and potential students for instance – it may be necessary to learn how to phrase campaign messages predominantly in the language of purposive rationalisation. That is for instance…instead of saying “the life of the mind is vital” or “the quality of Australia’s culture needs to be safeguarded” …one says “superior understanding will help you get and keep your job” or “Australia will go out of business if it does not educate its minds to the same quality as the minds in competitor countries”.

But perhaps the strongest implication of the above hypothesis is that the APU needs to figure out how to deal with what Habermas would call the mediatisation of the lifeworld though the steering mechanism of money, but which we will call here the economic form which tends to control ideology. This chapter only has the space and the scope to merely outline the proposed task. Firstly there is an apparent need to try to capture some material means of power in the university field. Perhaps the National Tertiary Education Union should be lobbied in an attempt to get specific powers for academics written into the next round of enterprise bargaining. Institutional and political allies should be found to try to get
powers for academics included in any coming revisions of legislation to do with university operation or legislation in which university operations could be included. In terms of legislation the APU should lobby for practical powers which have some real effect but which do not seem to transgress the sensibilities of purposive rationalism, that is they do not cost money. They need to be measures which might slip through as seemingly non-economic, tidying up issues to do with the communication aspects of governance, but measures which none the less may give academics as a whole some return to a constitutional grip on the curriculum. The suggested campaign strategy already urges that the campaign speaks wherever possible in terms of the economic benefits of liberal studies and pure science education. This is of course advocating a mode of speaking which makes sense within the purposive rational colonised lifeworld. The reverse side of this approach might be to identify just those areas where allies could be had and clear understandings could be met outside of the purposive rational paradigm. For instance perhaps leading artists or scientists in various fields might want to publicly advocate what it was about their university experience which helped them to be national or international figures. What are their fears for a generation coming out of universities which have lost their way? This sort of speech should correspond with vestiges of lifeworlds to do with nationhood, the greater good, anti-philistinism and so on which hopefully still do remain in general consciousness.

**Conclusion**

This case study, like the two other case studies in this thesis puts most theoretical attention on the situation aspect of the public relations problem at hand. However perhaps more than those other case studies the Habermassian theory deployed could be said to have reasonably clear implications for other aspects of the campaigning process. Included among the aims of this thesis is the attempt to critique the usefulness or otherwise of contemporary theory per se. That is, this project is not just about uniting seemingly relevant theories to public relations practice with the intention of improving and critiquing public relations practice. Rather the suggestion is, as is argued in earlier sections in relation to “new rhetoric”, that public relations practice, whether people like it or not… is a substantial and significant social activity. It is a social activity to do with the cultural formation, the behaviour and the very thinking of people. Considerable resources are devoted to this
activity and it is surely unlikely that it does not have some sorts of tangible effects, whether they are recognised or not. Following this argument the proposition is that perhaps the efficacy of some contemporary theories which purport to explain and predict phenomena in the area of human communication could be tested against concrete public relations examples. It must be admitted that the APU example is merely a plan. However it has also been argued that this is an example of a valid public relations plan which would survive professional scrutiny from within the public relations industry. If this argument is allowed, one general conclusion from this case study might be that Habermassian analysis has much to offer this sort of politically based, issues management involved, public relations project. Habermas is centrally concerned with the ways communities of people think and this is precisely the concern of the public relations industry. The only criticism touched upon in the above discussion was the way that Habermas fails to characterise the origins of the purposive rational forces. They apparently just appear as an inevitable outcome of the sort of thinking which has developed with the Enlightenment and modernity. A Marxist analysis would presumably have much more to say about the forms of economic production and the kinds of messages which are generated to maintain those economic forms.

This case study has steered away from Bourdieu and Foucault who are discussed in chapter seven. One feeling is that, despite the criticism just made, Habermas would appear to offer a more substantive critique of current society and certainly a critique which is very central to the communication and thinking concerns of public relations. Another project would be needed to do this proposition justice, but perhaps the sentiment could be advanced that Bourdieu’s notions of the field and the habitus and of the academic’s cultural and symbolic capital is rather overwhelmed by the present circumstances. These are circumstances where fields and habitus among all sorts of professionals would appear to be being swept aside and disregarded as global capital and world trade agreements trample over the hitherto practices of institutions and professional associations. The notion of purposive rationalism used by Weber, Parsons and Habermas would seem very apt to help describe the thinking processes behind outsourcing of professionals, the introduction of performance indicators for professionals and the radical insecurity of professionals in their employment which is illustrated in its paradigm example by the end of tenure for academics. In a similar vein Foucaltian approaches might be argued to seem like
epiphenomena. Clearly there are notions of power involved in the terminology of the above discussion as well as the redefining of practices through language: students becoming “clients”; universities having “mission statements”; the notion of “entrepreneurialism” and so on. But again this must wait for another discussion. For the present is might be said that the notion of the lifeworld and the battle for its occupation perhaps offers at least some model for understanding and some possible hope for fighting back against regressive influences.

**Supplementary conclusion**

It has been pointed out that the left-pessimism and cultural determinism of the above chapter as well as its conclusion, is more to do with the difficult situation academics find themselves in, than with using Habermassian perspectives to analyse public relations. Though this may be true, the material here is also a basis of more public relations centred analysis in the final three chapters of this thesis. One of the other intentions of this present chapter is to start the critique of Habermassian approaches for understanding public relations. This critique is continued at the end of chapter nine and developed fully in chapter ten. In starting this critique I have perhaps been too mysterious in some of my remarks above. When I refer to Habermas being “coy”: “This is perhaps a coy way of making the Marxist point that the economic form has dominated over ideological production.” What I mean is this. In *The German Ideology* Marx and Engels wrote:

> The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas; i.e. the class, which is the ruling material force of society, is at the same time its ruling intellectual force. The class which has the means of material production at its disposal, has control at the same time over the means of mental production, so that thereby, generally speaking, the ideas of those that lack the means of mental production are subject to it (Marx and Engels. 1942. p39).

I suggest there is an argument that, in some respects, Habermas’s notion of “mediatisation” is merely a fleshing out of this original, Marxist notion of economically initiated ideological determination. Habermas talks about mediatisation as involving
money, administration systems and the law. These factors orient purposive rationalism. Purposive rationalism – the style of reasoning which economic systems bestow on people – involves a focus of individual success. This is a self-centred calculating focus to thinking which invades the “lifeworlds” of people thought – the former more human and community orientations of thought. This “colonisation of the lifeworld”, as Habermas calls it, is more fully explained in chapter ten.

The point of raising this pessimism in this case study is to make the point about the power of ideological processes and their embeddedness in the type of social, economic and political formation in which we live and in which the university exists. What I do here, I suggest, is realistically pose the challenge that petit public relations – the public relations of the class which does not control “the means of mental production” – is presented with. In this case we are talking about a disenfranchised academic class. In order to counter the pessimism of this analysis three things have to be born in mind. First Marx and Engels say: “generally speaking, the ideas of those that lack the means of mental production are subject to it”. “Generally speaking” I take to mean ‘it is not always the case’ and ‘there are ambiguities to this rule’. Secondly Habermas in his The Theory of Communicative Action does not sufficiently contemplate the notion of the use of rhetoric by oppositional forces, i.e. petit public relations. This effective use of rhetoric as petit public relations is what I have outlined in the other two other case studies in chapters six and seven. In those chapters the whole petit public relations scenario has been played out. In the APU case study we are merely dealing with the initial planning stages of the campaign and in fact dwelling heavily on the ‘situation analysis’ stage. You will see that I recommend further initial research such as focus groups, in order to see if the attitudes predicted by this theoretical analysis are correct before possibly misdirected ideological work gets under way. The third thing to bear in mind is the very ambiguity which my contrasting concepts of ‘orthodox’ and ‘petit’ public relations spotlights. This is the contradiction that, despite the general ownership of the means of mental production and despite generally directive mediatisation processes, there is still a sufficient plurality of views in society such that public relations firms and their associations are still very careful about notions of ethics and very careful about what political orientation their clients should admit to. Every significant public relations
association has a code of ethics and speaking diplomatically is the meat and drink of much public relations or public affairs.

In summary what I am saying in this supplementary conclusion is that, in this chapter Habermassian thought is being used to analyse the existing ideological situation which the APU faces. In the process of this ideological analysis there is a reverse effect in that a critique of Habermas’s ideas in also produced. This application of theory should perhaps be suspended for now and considered later in the context of chapters nine, ten and eleven where I argue that, despite its need for modification, Habermassian theory is indispensable if public relations theory is to achieve sound intellectual status. One theme of those chapters is that the instrumental theories reviewed in chapter nine would not be able to do the job of situation analysis which I claim for Habermassian theory and use in this present chapter. Another argument is that the status of the contemporary university which I review in chapter eleven, demands that informed public relations academics take advantage of the ambiguity of the orthodox public relations industry’s repeatedly declared need for ethics and academic status to make use of critical theory to the depth it has been used in this chapter.
Chapter Nine

Contemporary Use Of “Theory” in Public Relations Textbooks

Introduction

This chapter looks at the notion of “theory” as such and then sets out from the basis of that discussion to examine what is referred to as “theory” in some of the commonly used public relations textbooks. What is found is that public relations, as conventionally taught, draws from a wide range of psychological, communication and sociological theories and approaches which have developed since the second world war. However what this examination also suggests is that textbooks do not include the substantial critique which has been made of these strands of theory in the last two decades by the approaches of critical theory and cultural theory. One of the main issues of the current thesis is that this neglect must surely be significant in view of the fact that critical and cultural theory is predominantly to do with how the social environment, its symbols, its languages and the control of these matters can be said to influence thinking. Public relations is surely about just this: the social environment, its symbols, its languages and the control of these matters in ways which might be thought to influence thinking? What follows below does not aim to be anything like an exhaustive review of all the theories which are used in public relations. Instead it will be an arguably, reasonably representative overview of the sorts of theories which are to be found in textbooks and an exposition of the ways these theories are used. At the end of the chapter I add a section on apposite theories which are not used. I argue that these approaches are barred because of their powerful potential for exposing the conservatism which is a significant factor in the politics and academic aspects of public relations.

My hypothesis implicit in the depiction of the orthodox usage of theory in public relations below is that there is something fundamentally conservative in the practice of public relations. There is a quality of political conservatism, cultural conservatism, sociological conservatism and consequently intellectual conservatism which runs throughout the public relations industry and mainstream public relations academia. My
thesis is that this is a predictable conservatism stemming from the origin and purpose of public relations as described in chapters four and five. It is a conservatism to do with what we might term the rhetorical construction of the putatively possible - the orientation of people’s understandings of their world stemming from the massive effort to make corporations acceptable and to turn the “American Way” into a virtual religion during the early part of the 20th century, especially during the First World War years. By extension, in the 21st century this has now become an effort to make corporations acceptable, as well as to turn the “Global Way” into a pseudo religion. My thesis holds that conventional public relations education, that is the bulk of public relations education, has and will only adopt theories which can be used in ways which perpetuate the construction of an outlook which assists in the normalisation of corporate capitalism and the political structures which are allied to that particular normalisation motive.

Now this is not to embark on a massive conspiracy thesis. It seems quite plausible to me that in some allied parts of global society there may be fiercely conservative property owning and property controlling interests which may be lobbying strongly to maintain their position and to generate the ideology which assists them in this process. At the same time elsewhere in society there may be all sorts of other people with different, sometimes capitalist aligned, but sometimes opposing interests. Society is obviously an amalgam of all sorts of interests. I pursue this argument in the following way: In the absence of “‘public’, public relations” along the lines of “‘public’ broadcasting” there is nothing to stop the operational resources of orthodox public relations being mainly funded and therefore mainly reserved and designed for the use of private, commercial, corporate interests. I include “private” here to mean “privatised” shareholder interests on the basis that it is only the major holding interests among shareholders in so called “public” companies who have real power in and who take maximum benefit from those companies. Again, there is, in theory, nothing to stop non-corporate interests, even radical or revolutionary interests, from attempting to imitate, adopt or even where possible, to infiltrate and usurp public relations as practiced by dominant players. I have separated these activities as “orthodox” and “petit” public relations earlier. Of course all sorts of non-dominant players from trade unions to local community groups or organised left wing groups do indeed make use of their own petit public relations activities. As we have seen in the case studies, they also participate in
or respond to public relations activity organised by dominant groups. Furthermore, because of the spectrum of the different political, cultural and social approaches and outlooks of different governments, commercial organisations, non government agencies and so on, at the ideological level there are a range of different ways in which public relations can be envisaged and employed. Despite this level of plurality in contemporary global culture, however, I suggest that the peculiar origin of the public relations industry – its core perception of itself and the current thinking of its “cognoscenti” (as discussed earlier) orients this industry towards conservatism and the political right. This analysis can, I suggest, be upheld by the examination below which, as introduced above, is about the difficulties which can be found with the intellectual quality and questionable contemporaneousness – the lack of topicality – which currently resides in public relations textbook theory. The argument will be that the theories discussed below, which are the normal offerings in these textbooks, are in two ways restrictive of the sorts of thinking which next generation public relations employees are going to bring to their workplaces. The first way is because of the almost universal assumption in public relations textbooks that theory is only of application to public relations if it can be put to instrumental use. In other words theory is not something which is to be used to challenge the perceptions, the conceptions, the thinking of the student or employee in order to give them a wider vision of the role of public relations in society. Rather, I suggest, these books imply that theory should be envisaged as a tool which can be used to more efficiently manage the thinking of the target public for the advantage of the client. Secondly the choice of theory itself underlines this first point by restricting students to peruse only, what we might call “safe”, though in reality rather outmoded theories of psychological, communication and organisational process. Theories which are by definition a challenge to instrumentalism – those from the critical and cultural studies realm, such as those used in the case studies of chapters six, seven and eight– are eschewed. One of the consequences of this eschewing is the simplistic, one might even say muddle-headed adoption of theoretical approaches which have been heavily criticised, even substantially discredited in the eyes of many in mainstream academia. Systems theory is one such heavily criticised theory. This chapter describes this instrumental use of theory and points to theory which is specifically excluded. It is followed by chapter ten in which I draw from more recent strands of critical
and cultural theory, particularly Habermassian theory, to expand the suggestions for theory use which I made in the case studies. Chapter ten also describes some other recent applications of critical and cultural theories to public relations practice which have yet to be taken up by textbooks. The overall aim is to suggest a way forward for putting public relations on a more sound academic footing.

Williams (1981) traces the development of the term “theory” and its antecedents from the 14th century. In giving one contemporary definition as “a scheme of ideas which explains practice” Williams remarks on the contrast which the term “theory” has in modern understanding both with the terms “practice” and with the term “speculation”. He also discusses the relationship which both “theory” and “practice” have with the term “praxis”. Theory differs from speculation in the sense that theory is a considered, putative rational explanation of some practical matter. Theory involves explanation which has a basis in some methodological observation or intellectually tested and therefore legitimate argument. Speculation is not so grounded. Praxis is a term which is particularly associated with Hegelian and Marxist approaches but essentially means practice guided by theory. One might suggest, on the basis of this present thesis, that public relations is an area ripe for a revision of praxis, or perhaps for an introduction of praxis where little exists at present.

I contrast the notion “theories” to the notion “methods”. Public relations textbooks nearly always contain an obligatory section on the suggested sequential steps and practical details involved in each step when carrying out public relations programs. This I suggest is to do with the “methods” of carrying out public relations. These sections sometimes introduce abstract concepts to do with the ways different tasks are defined and allocated in the conception, planning and execution of a public relations activity. But these are methods for carrying out public relations work. They are not public relations theories although they may use some concepts or presumptions which are derived from theories. For instance under the R-O-P-E model of public relations programming people carry out Research before setting public relations Objectives which are then Programmed into activities before an eventual Evaluation. Methods are models for how people might do things. Theories are models for how people might think about things before they do things. My distinction here is contrary to how large numbers of undergraduates are sometimes taught to understand “method” as “theory”. I add this observation to my overall thesis about the paucity of
theorising in mainstream public relations education. Littlejohn (1989, p16) gives a good overview of the contemporary concept of “theory”:

The first and most basic aspect of a theory is it is a set of concepts. We as persons are by nature concept-processing beings. Our entire symbolic world – everything known – stems from concept formation…Although the process of conceptualising is complex, basically it consists of grouping things and event into categories according to observed commonalities (Ibid. p16).

Littlejohn is here clearly writing in the post-objectivist paradigm discussed in this thesis. The above passage can be argued to imply a realist epistemology with the implications of conceptual relativism. In summarising his chapter Littlejohn suggests:

A theory is always abstract and always leaves something out of its observations. Theories function to organise and summarise knowledge, to focus observation, to clarify what is seen and to provide methods for observation. They also help to predict, to generate research, to communicate ideas and to control. Theories are not immutable: Because of research theories grow by intention, extension and revolution (Ibid. p30).

The complexity of the conceptual nature of “theory” *per se*, added to its mutability, multiplied by the various potential disciplinary sources of public relations theory, clearly makes a definitive mapping of public relations theory a very large project indeed. Public relations sometimes calls itself a social science19. Public relations is clearly to do with communication, organisational matters and as the advocates of rhetorical theory can hardly deny – persuasion. All these factors put public relations theory into the realms of psychological theories as well as sociological, communication and organisational ones with all the lacunae, abstractions and competing notions of human nature and capabilities which

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19 “Public relations practice is the art and social science of analysing trends, predicting their consequences, counselling organisation leaders, and implementing planned programmes of action which serve both the organisation and the public interest.” – Statement by the World Assembly of Public Relations Associations in Mexico City in 1978.
reside in the theoretical debates in those regions of academia. If we simply glance at the divergence among sociological theories alone we can see how large a comprehensive mapping task would be: Jary and Jary (1991) list the major branches of theory in sociology as:

1. “Functionalism” – relating social actions to the function which those activities have in a social “system”.
2. “Symbolic Interactionism and Interpretive Sociology” – Symbolic Interactionism has already been touched on in the section on definitions of public relations.
3. “Marxist Sociology and Conflict Theory” – this could be taken to include Frankfurt School and critical theory.
4. “Formal Sociology” – to do with the underlying, recurring macro and micro “forms” of social life – deriving from Simmel.
5. “Social Phenomenology and Ethnomethodology” – to do with carefully refining empirical observations of social life.
6. “Structuralism and Post-Structuralism” – the linguistic paradigm associated with cultural studies which leads into postmodern approaches.

One could list many different theoretical approaches to social psychology taken for instance from McDavid & Harari (1968): Predispositional theories; psychoanalytic theory; cognitive theories; behaviorist theories; and so on. From Robbins (1986) – a book on organisational behaviour – one could list various theories of motivation including: Hierarchy of needs theory; motivation-hygiene theory; cognitive evaluation theory; goal-setting theory; and so on. One could list communication theories from McQuail (1983), or Littlejohn (1989): Agenda setting; cultivation theory; the sender receiver model; cybernetics; and so on. It has to be said that many of the issues raised by the communication theory writers overlap concepts raised in sociological theory. By the same token organisational theory writers draw on social science approaches. Organisational theory authority Silverman (1974) for example has sections on systems theory, structural-functionalism and the action frame of reference (Ibid. pvii). Also organisational theories
contain many psychological theories relevant to organisations. The reason for social science theories’ considerable overlap with communication theories is that communication theorists view themselves as dealing very much with the codes and processes by which understandings, and thus unavoidably, “social reality” is conveyed. For this reason contemporary theories of communication tend to deal in the same realms as the discussions about how social reality is outlined in linguistic and symbolic form - the realm of the social and cultural theorists. The link between organisational theory and communication is made via the adoption of social science theories by organisational theorists such as Silverman, but more currently by postmodern theorists of organisations such as Avesson & Deetz (1999).

The more mundane processes of the transmission of messages – communication process theories – tend not to always be foregrounded in communication texts. Contemporary social psychology also, particularly in discussions on cognition, sometimes comes into the realms of the linguistic and symbolic. The theories of psychologist Lacan for example have underpinned much writing on structuralist approaches to the self and consequently much thought on gender studies (Jary & Jary, p344).

The ensuing sections are organised into four main groups of theories found in public relations textbooks: (a) theories of persuasion, motivation and behaviour; (b) theories of communication; (c) theories of organisation structure; (d) specialist theories of public relations. The last two categories do not contain much material. This is because public relations textbooks do not dwell much on organisational theory, although some do depict organisations using a simplified approach to systems theory. Group (d) is similarly very limited as most “public relations theory” is in fact theory borrowed from other areas. This is why specialist theories of public relations are left until last in this chapter. This placing enables us to see specialist theory in contrast to “borrowed theory”. The sequence ends with examples of theory which should be used but is not. In addition I include an illustration of public relations and feminist theory for reasons which I will explain below. As implied above in the discussion of instrumental versus critical theory, one reason why debates about theory in the human sciences can be so hotly contested is that once a certain strand of theory or its premises are established or accepted this enables people to think about the human condition in a certain way. Giving credence to certain theories can permit or make fashionable or respectable certain approaches to considering who we are. The following use
of theory is presented in the way it is used in the textbooks cited. The impression that comes across, that is, in terms of the above - the “premises which are established” - are that whatever the various stands of theory, they are overwhelmingly available for instrumental, as opposed to critical purposes. There is little reference back to the origins of those theories to put them in their social science or communication theory context. This lack of contextualisation or critique tends to make the theories look like expedient and sure short cuts to knowledge about the public relations process. We start off however with what might be counted as one exception to this lack of political problematisation - feminist theory of public relations. A number of writers have recently been theorising the achievements and difficulties of women in public relations employment: McElreath (1993. p419); Hon, Grunig, Dozier (1992. p419); Hon (1995. p27); Serini, Toth, Wright, Emig (1998); Aldoory. (1998. p73). These scholars’ theories include such suggestions as:

…gender research and discussion in public relations too often have failed to recognise that if feminisation [employing women] brings deflating salaries and status, the real problem lies in societal devaluation of women and the feminine – not in women themselves. Thus suggestions for retaining or salvaging public relations’ stature merely by training women to more effectively ascend to a male defined management structure miss the point. And, worse, these recommendations further exacerbate the underlying problem [of] gender based evaluations that privilege men and penalise women (Hon, Grunig, Dozier. 1992. p419).

This strand of theory suggests that there are feminine and masculine aspects and traits to how business life is organised and acted out. Organisational communication theorists debate this issue in the broader context of human communication and the way that this relates to men and women in the workplace. On the one hand there are the more considerate and communicative traits labeled ‘feminine’. On the other hand there are the competitive ‘male’ dominated approaches which allegedly have the upper hand in the boardrooms and at the higher levels of the public relations profession. In the absence of such academic theorising, discussion or grievances about women’s career prospects would be confined to private and anecdotal conversations. Such informal conversations have less
chance of influencing the profession and its managers. Informal discussions do not get into the learned journals. They are not passed on and discussed in a systematic manner among the people who are society’s commentators and policy advisers.

This short section on feminist theory in public relations is inserted simply to make the point about the importance and the potential impact of theorising in this academic and industrial area. It has to be admitted that only the McElreath text cited above is a true textbook. The other writings come from journals. However, as perhaps the favourite area of the introduction of new theory to public relations, it is perhaps to be hoped that feminist theory will be the first area to make a decisive break through into mainstream public relations theorising. If this strand of theory is taken up obviously issues to do with women would then become more central to the teaching and practice of public relations. Similarly if strands of theory to do with the contentious political impacts of public relations on society, impacts such as those outlined in the case studies, are taken up generally in textbooks, then this area of discussion would come more into focus. Instead currently textbooks take up theories in a manner stripped of public relation’s social or political context. It is not specifically stated, but people are implicitly regarded in the approaches discussed below as unproblematic, apolitical, machines or organisms who respond, or can be viewed in a simplistic manner for the purposes of the relevant theory.

**Theories of persuasion, motivation and behaviour**

Theories about public relations involving how people are motivated or how they can be persuaded are predominately borrowed from the domain of the psychologist or social psychologist as opposed to the rhetorician. These theories are of particular interest to the professions of marketing and advertising. Some of these theories suggest the stages of how people become aware of matters and how they reach their decisions for action. Textbooks suggest that if these theories are effectively employed this might enable practitioners to better design and time the different parts of public relations programs in step with the mental and behavioural processes of target publics.
Social Learning Theory as used in mainstream textbooks, eg: Baskin et. al. (1997. p61); Newsom. et. al. (2000. p210).

Social learning theory, as used in public relations textbooks, suggests people modify their attitudes and behaviour to emulate or fit in with the attitudes and actions exhibited by others if there are psychological rewards for doing this. For instance an employer may wish to smarten the dress and politeness of their employees. Social learning theory would indicate that the first thing to do is to ensure the leaders of the organisation conform to these standards as people are presumed to adapt their behaviour to their role models. If people are seen to get on in an organisation by behaving in certain ways, others are likely to learn to emulate the same outlooks and behaviour. In the reverse situation you might come across another organisation where people habitually cover up mistakes and avoid being creative or speaking out because their social experience in the organisation has taught them they risk censure or humiliation of some sort for taking initiatives. Social learning theory is offered as a way of understanding how people can be encouraged to relate well to an organisation and a way of analysing what may be wrong with an organisation where relations are not very good. Students may for example be invited to try imagining social learning situations for publics external to an organisation. For instance have individuals learned to grumble rather than get involved with the big organisations which affects their life? What if their workplace, local government, school or university invited those individuals to talk to decision making staff and kept them abreast of the organisation’s current views? Could this induce the individuals to learn to take a different attitude towards these organisations because of the then more welcoming and participant climate which they might now be experiencing?


Exchange theory holds that social life is a series of exchanges. We give and receive affection; respect; labour, goods and services for reward; our hard earned money for goods and services and so on. Designing a public relations campaign along these lines we might theorise the predisposition of, for example, protesters to listen to our views in exchange for being fully briefed on the project we are proposing. Employees might respect bosses in
return for their attention and genuine interest. Support for arts or community projects may bring government policy support or customer loyalty to the donor. Critics of exchange theory suggest there are some social phenomena that cannot be explained by exchange such as tradition, political dominance, gender discrimination and so on. However, public relations users of exchange theory suggest it would seem to be useful for public relations purposes. They suggest it rings true that the average person feels obliged to act reciprocally in all sorts of relationship situations. We would feel and appear to others to be very grumpy if we did not go some way towards reciprocating polite offers that were made in a civilised manner.

*Hierarchy of Effects as used in mainstream textbooks, eg: McElreath (1997. p159); Burnett & Moriarty (1998).*

The hierarchy of effects theory is presented as a simple statement of the sequence of steps believed to be involved in any public relations or similar persuasive process. McElreath (1997) gives these steps as: (a) The message, campaign or program are formulated; (b) These are sent or put into effect; (c) the message or messages are received; (d) understandings are taken from them; (e) the effects of these understandings on thought and attitudes develop in the targeted audience (if the program was successful); (f) a change in behaviour follows. This is clearly a rather simple theory by which to plan the stages of public relations activity. It presumes a predictable progression of events with none of the complications discussed in this chapter in relation to semiotics, situational theory, cognitive theory and critical theory.

*Diffusion Theory as used in mainstream textbooks, eg: Baskin (1997. p60); Wilcox & Nolte (1996. p64).*

This theory is also about the stages people go through before they make decisions. Diffusion theory interpreted by public relations texts stresses that the media are often involved at the awareness and interest phases of public decisions. Personal contacts are more important for the later, more consequential evaluation and action taking stages of the decision process. In other words this use of theory suggests people may get ideas from public relations campaigns. But it maintains they are likely to discuss these ideas with their
own friends, families and communities before deciding whether to adopt these ideas or not and whether to do anything as a result of adopting or agreeing to those ideas. The implication for public relations is that a message in itself is not enough to change behaviour. Some involvement in the community or personal life of the target public would seem to be required for effective results. This involvement may come under the heading of community affairs, reaching opinion formers, good employee relations and so on.

*Hierarchy of Needs as used in mainstream textbooks, eg: Wilcox et. al.(2000. p220); Newsom et. al. (2000. p203).*

The often quoted Maslow’s hierarchy of needs says people only live life at the most rational and pleasant levels after they first feel respected, secure socially, secure psychologically and secure physically – in that order. For this reason public relations people will probably not find shareholders keen to hear about the technological wonders of a new manufacturing development if their share price is currently under threat. Similarly residents near a chemical plant are unlikely to pay much attention to information about the great contribution which the company makes towards the infrastructure of the nation if there is some hint that their homes may be facing a danger hazard. The public relations person has to realise and counsel their management that people must be satisfied about their physical and psychological welfare and must feel respected as human beings before they are likely to discuss the finer points about an organisation in a civilised and rational way.

*Opinion, Attitude, Belief as used in mainstream textbooks, eg: Newsom et. al. (1998. p44); Seitel (2001. p53).*

These are concepts to do with persuasion which are used for categorising and thus putatively for clarifying how firmly people hold particular views towards issues or items related to clients or campaigns. It would be inaccurate to talk of Opinion, Attitude, Belief as a theory. However a discussion of these concepts is used as an introduction to theories of persuasion in Newsom (1998). In a careful survey practitioners might try to ascertain whether the views they are receiving are merely the audience’s quite fleeting and changeable opinion of the day. This approach to theory holds that opinions are probably based on superficial knowledge and might be reversed quickly by one dose of the other
point of view. This may be handy if the practitioner wants to change that opinion, but on the other hand the practitioner may be caught out if she were counting on that view to continue in their or the client’s favour, because of its malleability. By contrast, does the audience have a more substantial attitude built up by information and experience over a longer period? This would take more convincing to change. Or perhaps the practitioner’s objective is to reinforce and build on this view, or to convey it to others as support for the objective? Hardest of all to change is an unshakeable belief in a certain brand, political party, aesthetic principle, style of living and so on. The implication of this approach is that some people hold their beliefs so dearly that they would feel shattered if those beliefs were exposed as false in some way. People even go to war quoting the right to defend the holding of certain beliefs. This strand of theory suggests that if one can distinguish and categorise the different strengths of people’s views, characterising them as either opinion, attitude or belief, this would help to determine how much effort will be need to be directed at those particular people. Such categorisation would also help to assess the solidity or weakness of the client’s views which they hold in pursuit of their objectives. At the belief end of the spectrum a question arises about whether it is practicable to try to influence the views of some people at all on some matters.

*Stimulus-Response, as used in mainstream textbooks, e.g.: Tucker et. al. (1997. p41); Newsom. et. al.(1996. p202); Newsom & Carrell (1998. p46).*

This is perhaps the most clearly instrumental of any of the theories associated with public relations. It implies that people are simple mechanisms or organisms with little independent thought. Stimulus-response theory supposes that people can be conditioned into thinking in certain ways by simple association. But if a mining company spends enough to make its corporate image associated with reliability, efficiency, generosity and so on… when it digs an open cast pit next to your house will you still think the company is great? Perhaps it might be hard to associate the company with unpleasant effects if the pit was somewhere else and you were not immediately affected? This theory clearly plays down our ability for rational, independent thought. It is clearly different from a theory based on cognition.

Cognition is presented as simply meaning rational understanding. Campaigns conducted along the lines of cognition would be those where the organisation or practitioner was being clear and candid about everything with its target publics. Because of this attempt at achieving clear understanding, everything rests on the target audience agreeing. This is because when the practitioner explains matters associated with the campaign or the relevant organisation, they are in effect gambling on the public not objecting to what they now understand is supposed to happen. At least this route appears to be ethical and above board, a tactic which may count in favour of the practitioner if there is only minor disagreement. However, as argued in the early chapters of this thesis, the overall social contexts of public relations activity may not be immediately apparent for cognition.


Motivational persuasion is presented as implying the cognitive approach with the addition of one or two very good reasons why what is being proposed is in the interests of the target public…it will bring such and such benefits.

Social, Personality as used in mainstream textbooks, eg: Newsom & Carrell (1998. p47);

The social and personality elements of persuasion imply that the practitioner has to understand the culture or the character of the group or the individual being targeted and design their approach accordingly. For instance what are the history, education, social standing, expectation, cohesiveness or otherwise of the group? What are the social status, emotional disposition, intellectual acumen, personal interests and so on of the individual?

Theories of communication

As noted above, communication is claimed as a field of study by many scholars in arts, business and social science areas. Current communication theories borrow from linguistics and postmodernist philosophy. Contemporary theories of communication
involve how society and its individuals picture themselves and their world through their shared messages. Views of the social world are of course wrapped up in all sorts of political and philosophical arguments about what sort of world we live in and what sort of society is possible. An understanding of these theories should be able to guide the student or practitioner on how meaning is best transferred between people and on how the general activities of our culture have us thinking in certain ways at different times. It is for these reasons that the absence in public relations texts of certain approaches to theorising communication is quite striking. Below I discuss some of the strands of communication theory which are included. Some strands which are not included are discussed at the end of the chapter. The brief discussions of the strands which are not included are about how they might be utilised in both a critical and an instrumental manner. The brief discussions regarding the strands which are currently included are about how these strands of theory are depicted and how they are at present utilised by standard public relations texts. The implication of the contrast between the communication theories which are taken up versus those which are not taken up is that the non-critical, non self-reflexive theories are preferred by standard public relations textbook compilers. For instance the Habermassian theory of communication with its aspect of validity – the prerequisites, or what he calls the “universal pragmatics” which are necessary for genuine human communication to take place in a civilized society are not taken up. Sender receiver models of communication which deal with human understandings in an instrumental, very simple way are taken up.

*Sender/Receiver Theories as used in mainstream textbooks, eg: Newsom (1998. p54); Kendall (1996. p344).*

Many people are familiar with the Source, Message, Medium, Audience Effects model of mass communication associated with Lasswell. Lassell’s theory is in turn associated with Shannon and Weaver’s more mechanical theories of telephone transmission. Many scholars have been suspicious of what they see as the simplistic assumptions that messages can be shifted from one mind to another irrespective of the thinking of both people, the intervening use of language, the type of communication channel and the social context. None the less this instrumental style of theory can be adapted for thinking about public relations processes in the following way:
a) People are not going to be influenced by the message unless the right source is chosen as the writer, broadcaster or speaker. This might be an individual or an organisation who/which is a respected authority on the matter.

b) The message has to be couched in a way which takes into account the cultural, social, personal and other dispositions of the audiences – in line with discussions of theories above.

c) Also the correct media need to be selected. In fact many different types of media might need to be selected. The type of media may also influence the style of the message – for instance the placement of a company’s good financial results in the *Australian Financial Review* implies “considered, important financial information”. A simplification of the main bottom line financial results of the report on a tee-shirt implies: “hey man, big bucks!” and is clearly aimed at a different audience, or perhaps the same audience in a different mood.

d) There can be little doubt that the public relations practitioner needs to have a good understanding of the audience at which the message is aimed. She/he needs to understand audience priorities, pre-dispositions, culture and politics. Some of this understanding can be built up through research - opinion surveys, focus groups and so on. The public relations person will also apply their intuitive abilities to empathise as far as possible, building from their own experience and professional and social education.

e) The importance of research to find out what effects messages have had is becoming increasingly recognised in the public relations industry. This development is aimed at understanding of what goes on in the process of sending a message in a particular culture and context.

Sender/receiver theories can be depicted as having a predominately instrumental implication – how to get your message across so that people clearly understand and respect what you are trying to say.

This theory involves pointing out that not everyone gets their information through the same route or in the same way. Some people might read about a company’s good financial results in the financial press. But perhaps another important target of the same message could be better reached if a simplification of the company’s bottom line result was printed on tee-shirts. The theory draws attention to the probable need to use a whole range of different communication techniques and styles to make sure that the message gets across. Even confirmed Australian Financial Review readers may be hard pressed to read all the pages everyday. Or they may be on holiday.

Uses and Gratification Theory as used in mainstream textbooks, eg: Baskin (1997. p62); Newsom et. al. (2000. p189).

Besides getting communication through different routes, uses and gratification theory points out that people may use media for different purposes than might initially be presumed. They may read, listen to, or watch new media for entertainment, diversion or just to fill up the silence rather than in order to deliberately take in news. Some may only take notice of entertainment or sports sections or programs. This means practitioners need to understand their target audience well, figure out what sorts of use they make of which media and then adapt the message production to this usage. For instance a TV star interviewed about why she is a member of the union movement; or a feature on a footballer who works with blind people; or a story about a rock singer’s business initiative may be ways of meeting people’s actual use of the media by delivering a union message wrapped up in celebrity; a charity message presented with a sports flavour; or business information under the guise of rock music related chit chat. This theoretical approach would encourage the public relations practitioner to consider how they can package the message they are trying to get across in a manner in which it will actually be noticed by the generation or particular lifestyle group who they are aiming at.
Agenda Setting as used in mainstream textbooks, eg: Cutlip et. al. (2000. p260); Newsom et. al. (2000. p202).

Agenda setting theory is mostly concerned with the mass media. It is about the difference in the effects on the reader of some news items being selected for prominent newspaper publication while other items are either not published or given less important treatment either “downpage” or on less read inside pages. In radio or TV terms this is the same as the item being aired frequently, earlier and for more seconds in news bulletins, or the opposite of these, or not being aired at all. In line with other theories in this chapter, agenda setting theory holds that what is written in the news media, or what is projected through communication campaigns, does not necessarily determine the ways that people think on public issues. However it does claim that the mass media and by implication some aspects of public relations campaigns, do have the effect of making the public feel that they need to have some sorts of opinions on the matters raised in these communications. The theory suggests that effective audience evaluation of the issues covered in these stories that might lead to changes of mind and the resulting adoption or rejection of attitudes and proposals, is more likely to happen in face to face discussion later. The news stories, if they are used and prominent enough, merely put the matters ‘on the agenda’ for public discussion, although the way the media indicate the importance of the matters can prioritise this discussion. In this way agenda setting theory is in line with the hierarchy of effects and diffusion theories discussed above. Like those theories it implies that a public relations campaign needs to work at many other levels than media relations alone. Littlejohn (1989. p271) says that in news media terms, public issues agendas are set by the selection and editing of news by editors. In public relations terms we might see this as the resourcing of particular campaigns and programs as opposed to a lesser resourcing or absence of campaigns with other intentions and points of view. Public relations textbooks do not draw this parallel. Littlejohn veers more towards diffusion theory and criticises agenda setting theory when he says that although news media can put certain issues on everyone’s lips, (increase their salience) this is not the same as saying the news media make people feel that these matters are the most important. (Ibid. p272). The lesson for public relations would seem to be that a campaign, no matter how vociferous and extensive, will not convince the
target public that its contents are important for them unless the public itself hold that belief because of discussion from other sources.

*Hot and Cool Media as used in mainstream textbooks, eg: Cutlip (2000. p256); Seitel (2001. p160).*

Marshal McLuhan suggests that simply the selection of the form of the media sends a message in itself. In McLuhan’s terms hot media are those which require quite a bit of creative work and imagination on the part of the audience. For instance a book, or to some extent a radio play, which needs quite a lot of ‘mind work’ by the audience, is a hot medium. A television show put across clearly visually, in short sound bites, with pre-digested simple points in simple language, or perhaps with humour, can be seen as a cool medium which does not require so much work from the audience. We might try to think whether hot or cool media are relevant to the tee-shirt/Financial Review message about the company’s good financial results. The *Australian Financial Review* report which would probably require some knowledge of financial matters and company reporting would be the hot medium, while the tee-shirt would be, appropriately enough, ‘cool’. What temperature is the right one for a particular audience in a particular campaign? Is the campaign trying to provoke people to think for themselves about something and to come up with their own ideas? Or does the practitioner simply want the targeted audience to understand a message with the least possible effort? Does the campaign need a combination of these temperatures at different stages?

*Coorientation Model as used in mainstream textbooks, eg: McElreath (1997. p173); Cutlip et. al. (2000. p271).*

The coorientational model of public relations makes the point that people must have some mental and cultural reference points in common to begin to understand each other – even if they disagree. For instance the practitioner must start out with a rough understanding of what her target public will think or already thinks about her program or organisation. There may be a need to map the understanding of the target public on a coorientation basis to find out what thinking does or does not correspond between the target audience and the campaigners. Also do the groups which are presumed to be discrete
publics actually coorientate their thoughts among themselves or are their reference points disparate? In other words are they able to think about the same things or do they live in different mental worlds? If individuals do not think together in cohesive ways it may be harder for them to come together or to identify themselves as the same group. This means the practitioner may need many different styles of media and messages. If she wants the various groups to act together, a lack of this co-understanding of each other’s thinking makes it harder for her to work with them. If the groups are opposing the campaign however, this lack of cohesion may be to the campaigner’s advantage. Coorientation covers overlapping ground to that of the cultural and critical theorist who we will discuss later.

**Theories of organisations and organisational communication.**

The concerns of public relations specialists overlap to a considerable extent with those of people who study and manage organisations. Most of the above listed textbooks overtly reference “organisations” in their indexes and devote considerable space to subjects such as organisational publications; organisation counselling; the organisation’s conscience; organisational culture; organisational mission; organisational change; organisation type. Wilcox and Seitel do not overtly index “organisation”. The word however appears throughout their texts and is implicit in concepts such as “corporation”, “non-profit organisation” and so on. Orthodox public relations theory tends to dwell in the realms of functional social and psychological theory as well as in the realms of process communication theory. In these theory types political difficulties, power relations, dissention and so on are less of a consideration than in the realms of conflict or critical theory. Often theories which can be applied to organisation are introduced piecemeal. For example is Newsom (2000) p200 where social conflict theory, structural functionalism, social Darwinism and symbolic interactionism are all described in about 30 words each and then the reader is advised to construct a cohesive approach to theorising public relations on the basis of these miniscule and unproblematised introductions. Systems theory is introduced in some textbooks as a route to conceptualising organisations: McElreath (1997. p13 onward) and Cutlip et. al. (2000. p228 onward). There is also a mention in Baskin (1997. p54). However systems theory is absent in the other textbooks quoted above. A reading of these books does not make it clear whether this absence is to do with the
contemporary problematisation of functionalist theory or whether there is a failing to come to terms with organisational studies at the theoretical level. Organisational studies has progressed much further down the path of critical and reflective theory than has public relations (see Clegg & Hardy 1999; Alvesson & Deetz. 1999).


Risk management and conflict management are other areas of organisational concepts relevant to public relations. Theories of risk management presume that a wide spread of managers and employees of an organisation are best able to point to potential disasters or crises. The first stage of risk management therefore often involves group brainstorming as part of an audit of potential risks. Brainstorms are useful for involving people and getting the best ideas in a number of aspects of public relations. Conflict management is relevant to psychology and the behavioural matters touched on in the first category of theories above. These matters include the opinions and attitudes people hold; social and personal factors; the cognition (understanding) of the situation by the different parties; the needs (as in Maslow’s hierarchy) which people feel they have and so on. Conflict management involves analysis of some of these factors in the situation in which the conflict arose and considerable psychological, historical and intuitive theorising of the cause. This analysis is followed by decisions on whether collaboration, mediation or arbitration is the method needed for resolution. Public relations people would usually recommend negotiation and settlement at the collaboration level before disputes entered the more public domain of mediation or more formal arbitration.

Specialist theories of public relations

It is difficult to separate out theory which is strictly public relations theory as such and which does not involve elements of the theory discussed above which is largely borrowed from cognate disciplines. One strand of theory which we could claim as exclusively about public relations is of course rhetorical theory which is extensively discussed in chapter three. Perhaps the only other is the theoretical approach associated with James Grunig. There is a caveat to place on this “exclusively public relations theory”
claim for Grunig however. The caveat is that Grunig wrote in *Public Relations Theory* (eds. Botan and Hazleton 1989. p37):

> These symmetrical theories of communication [interpersonal communication] were popular when I was a doctoral student…As a result their presuppositions have been a part of my worldview ever since. In addition, I studied and accepted most of the presuppositions of the systems approach to organisations and communication at that time. Finally, I have incorporated presuppositions from a theory of politics called interest group liberalism into the conceptual framework of the two way-symmetrical model of public relations (Ibid. p37).

So it seems that small group communication theory, systems theory and political theory, theories from cognate disciplines, all have a part to play in the creation of Grunig’s two-way symmetrical model of public relations. This theory has been very significant for perhaps a decade and a half and is still prominent in textbooks. The theory advocates “symmetrical public relations” and purports to explain the difference between the a) “press agentry/publicity”; b) the “public information”, c) the “two-way asymmetric” and d) the “two-way symmetrical” models for practicing public relations.

a) The press agentry/publicity model depicts a process primarily designed to drum up attention – for instance getting individuals’, such as film stars, but also products and organisations, favourable mentions in the media;

b) The public information model involves the one way distribution of the organisation’s message via media relations, company newsletters, speeches and so on with no attention to feedback from the audience

c) The two-way asymmetric model is a development of the public information model. The organisation puts out its information and its views and listens to what its publics are saying. But the organisation does not necessarily act on the feedback from its publics in the ways they request. It may for instance use the feedback to re-design and intensify its campaign to make the same point more strongly, rather than to concede and adapt the organisation to the external views which are being expressed.
d) The two-way symmetrical model is a model for organising public relations around principles which attach equal importance to the views of both the organisation and its publics. Under this model the organisation does not simply advance its views and campaign for its policies to be adopted. It also commits itself to seriously canvas and take the views of its publics into account and to give these views high status when making policy decisions (Grunig & Hunt. 1989).

Another theory proposed by Grunig is the ‘situational theory’ of public relations. This theory emphasises the practitioner’s need to look closely at the way people make up their minds about a matter affecting, or potentially affecting them. The theory suggests people only reflect on a situation if they realise that it affects them. They then start on a sequence of activity which is similar to that discussed above under hierarchy of effects and diffusion theories. Grunig elaborates this process, predicting that some people will seek further information, some will take an active role in opposing, supporting or participating in certain activities and others will ignore or go along with the situation or proposal, whether it is to their advantage or not. The type of response will depend on the nature and the degree to which the people are affected by the situation and their particular circumstances. Some may feel empowered to act because they are educated, including in the broadest sense of ‘understanding the workings of the world’. Some may feel it is their responsibility to respond to the situation. Others may not feel empowered if they question their own, or their community’s ability to have an effect in the particular situation. The understanding that people have of their powers, status and resources will influence the sort of response they make. For instance well resourced people or groups who feel they have influence in society may make a polite ‘through official channels’ response. Others who feel disenfranchised may take a more radical approach, perhaps involving pickets, protest marches and media stunts. Grunig is particularly concerned with the degree to which the publics recognise the situation as one that requires their activity and the extent to which they feel able to do anything about it (Ibid).
Theories which are not taken up in public relations text books

*Semiotics.*

No usage of semiotic theory is to be found in the above mentioned mainstream public relations textbooks. It may perhaps be used thus:

Semiotics or semiology is the basis of many theories of how images and words convey meanings. de Saussure’s rendition of this process in his *Course in General Linguistics* puts it like this:

I propose to retain the word sign to designate the whole [the thing meant or concept as well as the word or sound image] and to replace concept and sound-image respectively by signified and signifier (Saussure. 1966. p67).

The other founder of the semiotic tradition Peirce is quoted by Fiske:

A sign is something which stands to somebody for something in some respect or capacity. It addresses somebody, that is, it creates in the mind of that person an equivalent sign, or perhaps a more developed sign. The sign which it creates I call the interpretant of the first sign. The sign stands for something, its object (In Fiske. 1991. p42).

In both approaches the way we eventually think about something is mediated through a signification process. For Saussure our thinking minds attach a certain concept of an item to the word or symbol which represents it. For Pierce our minds create their own inner, mental signs in response to the physical spoken or written words or other kinds of symbols which represent something in the world. Semiotics stresses the importance of what goes on in the readers’ minds. It can be utilised in realist epistemology to suggest we experience everything as a combination of: (a) what is really going on in the real world; (b) how our minds tell us what is going on and; (c) the symbolic systems, including language and the ways language is used to convey our thoughts and expressions about that reality of things going on. This relationship is sometimes expressed in textbooks by a triangular diagram. Semiotics tries to explain why it is possible for the mind to attach many different
interpretations to spoken and written words and to symbols and pictures. Advertisers have been known to use this theory in an attempt to subvert, or play with audiences’ ideas, by triggering off certain thoughts about the world through the use of particular cultural symbols. For instance if they dress their product up in a gold coloured packet, or use the world “gold” when naming or describing it, in most cultures this conveys the notion that it is luxurious, top of the range, highest quality and so on. In this respect we might consider the semiotics of the Public Relations Institute of Australia Golden Target Awards or the use of gold coloured cigarette packets. The semiotic approach reminds public relations people and designers to be aware of the negative as well as the useful constructions people can put on messages depending on how the message is written or symbolised in relation to thinking processes and the reality intended to be conveyed. A salutary example concerns a well known Australian university. For a new logo the university adopted a large triangular symbol which incorporated the university’s name. In the designer’s mind the triangular logo stood for the university pointing the way ahead in a metaphorical sense. When the logo first appeared on signage outside the university some people took the triangle to be part of an arrow pointing the way ahead literally. They thought it meant the university was further down the road so they drove past it! Corporate designers usually consider many complex and subtle meanings in their designs, but perhaps it is important to get the more obvious aspects of semiology right first. Another illustration of the need to be sure of the semiotics of a communication is the fact that in some Asian cultures white is the colour of mourning. In most European ones it is black. In some cultures head shaking and nodding has different meanings. There are many other such examples.

Rhetoric,

There is very limited usage of rhetorical theory in mainstream textbooks but it does appear marginally in some more recent books: Wilcox (2000. p214); Newsom (2000. p34). I have written extensively in chapter three of this thesis about how rhetorical theory could be central to understandings of public relations. Newsom. et. al. disposes of the subject in part of one sentence:

Of course not all tactics of modern PR are of recent origin. PR still uses rhetoric, which is as old as human speech; symbols which have been around as long
as the human imagination; and slogans which date back to people’s first consciousness of themselves as groups (Newsom. et. al. 2000. p34).

Wilcox. et. al. (2000) would seem to indicate a small move towards the use of the concept of rhetoric in a mainstream public relations textbook. Under the subheading “Persuasion: pervasive in our lives” this book contains a section beginning:

Persuasion has been around since the dawn of human history. It was formalized as a concept more than 2000 years ago by the Greeks, who made rhetoric, the art of using language effectively and persuasively, part of their educational system. Aristotle was the first to set down the ideas of ethos, logos and pathos, which roughly translates as “source credibility”, “logical argument” and “emotional appeal” (Wilcox. et. al. 2000. p214).

This three page section in a 570 page book refers to Bernays’ *Engineering of Consent* and to Elizabeth Toth and Robert Heath who edited *Rhetorical and Critical Approaches to Public Relations*. The section also says:

Everyone, as Walter Lippmann has described, has pictures in his or her head based on an individual perception of reality (Ibid. p216).

I suggest this rare inclusion of rhetorical notions and early theory in a mainstream textbook makes the point about their relevance to public relations. However the textbook is clearly an instrumental one which instructs people how to carry out public relations procedures. These glimpses of the affinity between public relations and rhetoric and greater significance of public relations for creating consciousness, are not developed to show the significance of understanding public relations in the way this thesis attempts to do. It is promising however to see that the anomalous position of public relations vis-à-vis contemporary theory is now beginning to crop up in mainstream education.
Narrative

Some theorists suggest that we form our understanding of what happens to us and our world as a narrative – a story. Our lives can be seen as stories of what happens to us from birth to death. We sometimes get home in the evening and tell the ‘stories’ of what happened at work or study that day. News items are referred to as ‘stories’. Similarly a public relations program or campaign, or the situation a public relations client is in or what they hope to achieve can be seen as a story – a progression of events with landmark occurrences which usually have a beginning, a middle and an end. A practitioner aware of narrative theory would figure out how to convey public relations messages and plans in a narrative form which coincided with the way people expect to “read” the stories of their lives or particular days or sections of their lives, perhaps with alternate endings, adventures, interesting events and so on. A suggestion of why narrative theory is not used in public relations might be abstracted from Hayden White. The implication is that narrative theory would bring so powerful an analysis to bear that it would provoke self reflection about the fundamental power public relations exerts on society. Thus narrative theory comes up against and is opposed by the conservative imperatives of orthodox public relations:

To raise the question of the nature of narrative is to invite reflection on the very nature of culture and, possibly, even on the nature of humanity itself (White. 1987. p1).
Ideology

The notion of Ideology is a contested one. The term is used in different ways and like rhetoric, and for that matter public relations, the term ideology sometimes has a negative connotation. Just a look at its origins is enough to see why the term may suggest analytical procedures which may be too powerful and self reflective for exponents of the orthodox notion of public relations. At the start of this chapter I have already likened the early 20th century invocation of the American Way and now the Global Way – to proselytising a religion.

Authority on Ideology Larraine writes:

The concept of ideology was born in the context of the early bourgeois struggles against feudalism and the traditional aristocratic society…the concept of ideology emerged first as a science of ideas which entailed a deep trust in reason and…as a critical weapon to be used in the struggle against the old regime…It was precisely the belief that truth could be rationally and scientifically achieved, and that armed with it society could be rationally reconstructed, that provided the Enlightenment with the confidence to criticise irrational, metaphysical and religious ideas (Larraine. 1994. p9).

One simple interpretation of the term “ideology” could be: “the organisation of thought”. For example, people in favour of capitalism can refer to capitalism as an ideology. In this example the term ideology means a certain organisation of thinking with important implications for the organisation of society. Ideology can be thought of as another consequence of the particular marshalling of ideas and impressions through the use of rhetoric. The discrimination against the term ideology in mainstream public relations thought is unfortunate. Semiotic analysis of certain rhetorical products (particular communications or information campaigns) could lead the public relations practitioner to decide the ideological position of their own campaign or program. For instance: Is the promotion of a new way of working in a company up against an old ideology? This old ideology might be in the form of a former system of thinking which holds people into certain attitudes and beliefs by the use of certain rhetorical constructions. There may be over-use or unfortunate semi or unconscious acceptance of particular problem causing
metaphors. There may be a domination of visual and verbal images and mannerism of speech which all militate towards constructing a particularly unfortunate perspective on reality. The importance of combating inappropriate verbal and visual imagery and their capacity for affecting the way we think is illustrated by the ban on sexist and racist pictures and writing and the rules against objectionable advertising. Try imagining a television advertisement for cigarettes complete with images and script which would be in line with an ideology which encouraged children to smoke. If our rhetorical environment does not affect people’s thinking then there would be no need for such bans. At least one study of public relations talks about the profession exhibiting both ideologies of masculinity and ideologies of femininity (Toth. 1992. p8).

**Critical Theory:**

No usage of critical theory is to be found in the above mentioned mainstream public relations textbooks in the sense of critical theory described by scholars of and contributors to textbooks in the adjacent field of organisational studies Avesson & Deetz:

Sometimes critical theory is given a broad meaning and includes all works taking a basically critical or radical stance on contemporary society with an orientation towards investigating exploitation, repression, unfairness, asymmetrical power relations (generated from class, gender or position), distorted communication and false consciousness. We however, use the term…referring to organisational studies drawing primarily…from the Frankfurt School (Adorno, Horkheimer, Marcuse and Habermas) (Alvesson & Deetz. 1999. p186).

Jary and Jary (1991) take critical theory to be very much the specific intellectual tradition of the Frankfurt School:

The distinctive approach of the Frankfurt School of critical theory was a branch of Neo-Marxist and New Left thinking which took issue with both western positivism and Marxist scientism (Jary & Jary. 1991. p237).
The early Frankfurt School which emerged between the wars, largely in opposition
to Nazism, refined and critiqued earlier Marxist and Freudian theories in an attempt to
better explain the failure of left wing movements and the success of capitalism. Some of
this school’s argument seems to abut those of Dewey as discussed in chapter five. Dewey is
concerned about the loss of individuality in the American character in the early 20th century
– a loss which is somehow associated with the rise of the corporation and the corporation’s
publicist. Horkeimer and Adorno were particularly concerned to argue how the mass media
and the rest of the “culture industry” shaped mass understanding in the 1930s, overriding
individuality:

In the culture industry the individual is an illusion not merely because of the
standardisation of the means of production. He is tolerated only so long as his
complete identification with the generality is unquestioned (Adorno & Horkheimer.

Jurgen Habermas is the contemporary successor to the Frankfurt School tradition.
Many current theorists of public relations refer to Habermas although his theories have not
moved overtly into the textbooks. An important aspect of Habermas’s approach is that the
best qualities of civilised society, particularly genuine understanding between people, are
maintained if people are truly intellectually and politically free and fully informed when
they make up their minds about matters in a rational way. Such a putative “ideal speech
situation” (Habermas. 1991. p25-26) presupposes a certain etiquette for how communication
is exchanged. This etiquette which Habermas calls “universal pragmatics” has obvious deep
implications for how communication is exchanged in the public relations situation. For
Habermas: “The task of universal pragmatics is to identify and reconstruct universal
conditions of possible understanding” (Habermas. 1979. p1). In devising these universal
conditions Habermas: “…single[s] out explicit speech actions from other forms of
communicative action” (Ibid. p1). He ignores nonverbal actions and bodily expressions
(Ibid. p1).

Habermas writes:
I shall develop the thesis that anyone acting communicatively must, in performing any speech action, raise universal validity claims and suppose that they can be vindicated (or redeemed). Insofar as he wants to participate in a process of reaching understanding, he cannot avoid raising the following - and indeed precisely the following - validity claims. He claims to be:

a. Uttering something understandably;
b. Giving the hearer something to understand;
c. Making himself thereby understandable; and
d. Coming to an understanding with another person.

The speaker must choose a comprehensible expression so that the speaker and hearer can understand one another. The speaker must have the intention of communicating a true proposition so that the hearer can share the knowledge of the speaker. The speaker must want to express his intentions truthfully so that the hearer can believe the utterance of the speaker…Finally the speaker must chose an utterance that is right so that the hearer can accept the utterance and speaker and hearer can agree with one another in the utterance with respect to a recognised normative background (Ibid. p2).

Habermas’s universal pragmatics and its derivative validity claims a. b. c. and d. imply that if genuine understanding is to take place in the public relations situation: participants have to be sincere; and they have to use understandable terms in an understandable way designed to reach genuine understanding. Also the target public has to be engaged, that is we have to know the target public is engaged with us in this genuine communication, messages cannot just be broadcast without a connection first being established. Universal pragmatics are involved in the ideal speech situation, which Habermas concedes is hard to achieve (Ibid. p25). The ideal speech situation requires that people are not in unequal positions of power to unduly influence the discussion: “…the structures of an ideal speech situation immunised against repression and inequality…”(Ibid p26). The more these ‘ideal speech situation’ intentions are disregarded the more communication is ‘strategic’ – that is the more communication is merely used as an instrument for enforcing power relations in a one dimensional world which is presumed as
objective – that is immutable through the processes of discourse. Communities have a more humanity-nurturing ‘lifeworld’ when discursively created ontological possibilities multiply and expand, rather than narrow down to the one type of world possibility. This escape from repressively determined thinking is possible if the organisations people are involved with strive to keep discussions as near to the ideal speech situation as possible. In other words, a public relations process which genuinely fosters understandings, encourages individuals to use their own abilities to think for themselves. It does not set out to get people to think along predetermined lines – which seems to be the purpose of most of the textbook theories which we have discussed in this chapter. Habermas illustrates his notion of strategic action in the context of ontology like this:

With regard to ontological presuppositions, we can classify teleological action as a concept that presupposes one world, namely the objective world. The same holds for the concepts of strategic action. Here we start with at least two goal directed acting subjects who achieve their ends by way of an orientation to, and influence on, the decisions of other actors. Success in action is also dependent on other actors, each of whom is oriented to his own success and behaves cooperatively only to the degree that this fits with his egocentric calculation of utility. Thus strategically acting subjects must be so cognitively equipped that for them not only physical objects but decision making systems can appear in the world. They must expand their conceptual apparatus for what can be the case, but they do not need any richer ontological presuppositions (Ibid. p87).

I offer this passage from Habermas as a précis of the argument I am trying to illustrate in this chapter by depicting the selective and instrumental use of theory in standard public relations textbooks. The argument follows on from the epistemological discussion in chapters two and three and my argument that “theory”, as used by orthodox public relations, is deliberately utilitarian, anti-critical anti-reflective. Orthodox public relations, for the reasons given in chapters four and five cannot afford to encourage people to think in the post-objectivist manner implied by full blown application of the rhetorical turn. In broad terms, orthodox public relations’ purpose in life is to attempt to get the mass
of people, people who are in a pre-assumed capitalist culture, to think in certain ways preferred by dominant interests. In the ideology to which orthodox public relations conforms, ‘target audiences’ are encouraged to think in terms of their own “egocentric calculation of utility”. Orthodox public relations is therefore part of the “cognitive equipment” delivered in a way which is of utility to these “strategically acting subjects”. Habermas’s conception of ‘lifeworld’ on the other hand implies that people can actually reason in a post-objectivist manner, although Habermas’s communicative action approach does not use the term post-objectivism. People whose ‘lifeworld’ is preserved, i.e. not intruded by strategic action, do not have to think purposive rationally - that is in a fashion pre-ordained by the objective ontology which ‘mind moulding forces’ (to borrow from Bernays) such as public relations, try to fix them into. Habermas’s notion of the ‘lifeworld’ implies that thinking can take place, uninfluenced by strategic action, in the discursively liberated condition which he reserves for ‘communicative action’. This is a state where communication conforms to universal pragmatics, and as near the ideal speech situation as possible. In this state there is no preordained way of thinking. There is no over-arching authority which subtly influences people to think in such and such a way. People are left to reason ‘freely’ in terms of the original cultural influences and education which they posses. As a consequence in the ‘lifeworld’ objectivist pre-suppositions may dissolve. One presupposition which could dissolve is belief in the existence and continuity of an inevitably capitalist world where people have to calculate their own self interest, as opposed to a community interest. Habermas constructs his notion of lifeworld as the obverse of objectivist constructions of the world by adapting notions from phenomenology:

To begin with I would like to replace the ontological concept of “world” with one derived from the phenomenological tradition and to adopt the pair of concepts “world” and “lifeworld”. Sociated subjects, when participating in cooperative processes of interpretation, themselves employ the concept of the world in an implicit way. Cultural traditions, which Popper introduces under the catchphrase “products of the human mind” plays different roles depending on whether it functions from behind as a cultural stock of knowledge from which the
participants in interaction draw their interpretations or is itself made the topic of intellectual endeavour (Ibid. p82).

For Habermas a lifeworld is healthy if it is free to provide the concepts with which people are able to freely reflect on ‘their’ notion of the ‘world’. It is unhealthy if its concepts have been ‘colonised’ – taken over in a deliberate opinion forming process - such that it is only possible to conceive of the world in a way which serves dominant interests. This aspect of communicative action has similarities to Putnam’s notion of conceptual relativism. Both Putnam and Habermas are post-objectivist in that their theories allow people to see the same thing in a different way. However Putnam is concerned with alternative rational arguments. Habermas on the other hand implies people’s thoughts can be determined by the access or control which they are allowed in respect of the idea forming symbolization bases of their pre-existing culture. The implication of Habermas’s approach for public relations is that communication which aims to observe the ideal speech situation promotes fairness and enriches democratic community life. Habermas is scathing about the modern definitions and use of the term ‘public opinion’. He says ‘public opinion’ once meant ‘the will of human communities’. He says it has now become a tool of the marketeer, the politician and big business. It is used as a concept for theorising how to manipulate democracies in ways which serve people who have financial power (Habermas. 1971. p62-86). “Public relations” as such is mentioned rarely in name by Habermas (Habermas. 1994. p226; Habermas. 1997. p367; Habermas. 1996. p2) When “public relations” is mentioned it is in the context of the distortion of the notion “public” and the notion “public opinion” into a malleable concept – a bending of the public’s will and genuine self interests to the interests of dominant organisations. The “public sphere” which should be comprised of theoretically open and free arenas of unfettered discussion and thoughts in the interests of all free citizens is instead:

...dominated by the mass media and large agencies, observed by market and opinion research, and inundated by the public relations work, propaganda and advertising of political parties and groups (Habermas. 1997. p367).
…publicity…Originally a function of public opinion…has become an attribute of whatever attracts public opinion: public relations and efforts recently baptised “publicity work” are aimed at producing such publicity (Habermas. 1996. p2).

Despite this obviously out of hand dismissal of public relations as evil, some of the admittedly rather few serious current theorists of public relations do draw on Habermas, notably Leeper (1996) as well as a number of untranslated German public relations theorists headed by Gunter Bentele of Leipzig University. Both the attraction and the repulsion of Habermas to public relations theorists is not hard to see. On the one hand Habermas’s life work is addressed to just that area of human endeavour which public relations claims as its own territory – the ethical management of some of the most important aspects of organisational, political and institutional communication to masses of people. Habermas critiques these communications with an ethical, humanitarian and left wing, political intent.

The difficulty of adopting Habermas for the public relations establishment, including those who I have labeled the “cognoscenti” among public relations academics, is to do with the contradiction implied and discussed in this chapter and elsewhere throughout this thesis. The contradiction is this: The public relations establishment – its firms, its associations and the bulk of its academics – claim at every opportunity that public relations is ethical and “in the public interest”. However, as I think I have strongly argued in this thesis – orthodox public relations can be viewed as privatised rhetoric for privatised governance. It is about strategic action rather than communicative action. As such, although in many instances few would object to its more benign activities, in some instances its deployment in favour of the public interest is very hard to justify. I suggest this difficulty of justification is apparent in the depictions of petit public relations versus orthodox public relations in the case studies. My suggestion is that public relations can only find general credibility among the public and in the general academic sphere of opinion (that is genuine “opinion” in Habermas’s terms) if it lays itself open to the sort of critique outlined by Habermas. I use other aspects of Habermas’s ideas in chapter ten.
Conclusion

This chapter drew attention to the importance of theory to public relations. The importance of theory is admitted by the orthodox public relations industry, but in a different sense to the importance meant here. The orthodox industry and its academia see theory as an instrumental tool for doing public relations better within criteria defined by dominant economic interests and an aligned conservative politics. This conservatism spreads into academia and leads to an outmoded theoretical approach which limits a proper understanding of public relations’ role in society. It also limits understanding of public relations as such. Even petit public relations lacks ready to hand, intellectually rigorous modes of analysis. The next chapter, chapter ten continues to build on more current approaches for understanding the phenomenon of public relations, particularly the approaches inspired by Habermas. The final chapter eleven returns to a criticism of public relations academia. Just as the review of public relations textbooks in this chapter points to deficiencies in the academic status of this field, so a major 1999 commission on public relations education displays deficiencies by its conservative approach to public relations theory.
Chapter Ten

New Suggestions For Public Relations Theory, More Exposition of Habermas

Introduction
This chapter extends chapter nine’s critique of the orthodox public relations textbook use of theory and builds on my introduction to Habermassian theory there. The chapter starts by further explaining the approach of Habermas. I then use the critique of Habermas by Farrell in an attempt to reconcile Habermassian theory with rhetoric to make Habermassian theory even more relevant to analysing public relations. In return I explain why it is necessary to prioritise Habermas’s basic perspective over that of the rhetorical theorists. The reason is that Habermas takes what I suggest is the correct, essentially European view of society as oppositional. The new rhetoricians, by contrast I suggest, unnecessarily take a naïve, generally US centred view of society as consensual. This naïve view, as I explained in chapter three, is one which risks making rhetorical theory impotent for analysing the realities of the public relations process. Before leaving Habermas however I have to repair an aspect of his theory to do with his notion of ‘perlocution’. This is an aspect which, without the repair, would make impotent my advocacy of public relations to be carried out on behalf of oppositional groups – the petit public relations which I give examples of in the case studies. The chapter finishes by summarising some theories of postmodernism, as opposed to Habermas’s late modernism, in order to show that there are in fact a range of very apposite, but neglected approaches to theorising public relations. I again put these theories into the context of the Habermassian schema.

I will argue that public relations is an essential and unavoidable “thinking organising” aspect of late modern individual and social functioning. By “public relations” I include the deliberate and planned implementation of practices such as lobbying, media relations, employee communication, corporate design, community relations, shareholder relations, crisis management, issues management and so on. I also include practices similar to these which are carried out in many “non-business” parts of society – such as by the oppositional groups discussed in the case studies. I also include the research and evaluation
activities which are used to maximise the effectiveness of both these strands of commercial and community practices. One of the assumptions which I have made in the discussion below, is that the reader shares an approximate agreement with me on the concepts of modernity and late modernity or postmodernism. I suggest that the last two terms can sometimes be used interchangeably. My notion of modernity is drawn from writings including those of McCarthy (1991) who agrees with and summarises Habermas’s notion of modernity. Modernity or the modern period is understood as an unprecedented period of technological advance, starting in the 17th century, which was unleashed by and co-terminus with, “The Enlightenment” – the application of science and reason to almost all spheres of understanding. In McCarthy’s and Habermas’s terms, a fundamental consequence of modernity has been the toppling of superstition and dogmatism – that is tyrannically, traditionally or religiously imposed irrational beliefs – as the principle reference points for people’s understanding of how the world works and their part in it. Instead, people are charged with coming to their own understandings by their own reasoning. Initially people’s reasoning could be based on putatively sound and reliable “scientific” understandings. However, more recently, contradictions in Enlightenment thinking have been seized on in order to challenge some of the political and social conceptualisations which have been built upon “scientific knowledge”. This has led to a situation where:

The retreat from dogmatism and superstition has been accompanied by fragmentation, discontinuity and loss of meaning. Critical distance from tradition has gone hand in hand with anomie and alienation, unstable identities, and existential insecurities. Technical progress has by no means been an unmixed blessing; and the rationalisation of administration has all too often meant the end of freedom and self-determination (McCarthy.1991. pvii).

Surely it is an overstatement for McCarthy to imply that before The Enlightenment, before modernity, the bulk of people were “free” and “self-determined”? What seems to be

\[\text{20 See also Toulmin and Perelman in chapter two on the relationship between “Modernity” and “The Enlightenment” and their dates.}\]
the nub of the McCarthy/Habermas anxiety is rather a disappointment over what the Enlightenment promised, but has so far, in their terms, failed to deliver. They are concerned about an inadequate rate of flow of, what we might call “mental freedom” as a consequence of individuals and society becoming enlightened. By this I mean that they are among those disappointed by paucity in the level, quantity, strength, profundity and breadth of dispersal of reason and understanding of important aspects of knowledge among people in general. They are disappointed, like other members of the Frankfurt School before them, because of what they see as the consequent dearth of appropriate libertarian political social and cultural actions which they presume would flow from such freed, rationally informed thinking. Habermas’s argument, following Weber in one tradition and Marx in another, is that because of the specific, pressing and unavoidable economic position which many people find themselves in, particularly their financial position, they are constrained to “reason” in certain ways. In a passage arguing how his Theory of Communicative Action can account for the way people are produced to think in an ‘instrumental way’ which limits their understanding of the world, Habermas writes:

As I have argued above, when labour is rendered abstract and indifferent, we have a special case of the transference of the communicatively structured domains of action over to media steered interaction.21 This interpretation decodes the deformations of the lifeworld 22 with the help of another category, namely ‘communicative action’…In modern societies… the inner logic of communicative action becomes practically true23. At the same time, the systemic imperatives of autonomous subsystems penetrates into the lifeworld and through monetarisation and bureaucratization, force an assimilation of communicative action to formally organised domains of action. It may be that this provocative threat, this challenge

21 People are made to think in terms of the financial and legal ‘realities’ rather than from the possibilities beyond these limits because they are in a systems which renders them as ‘workers’ or ‘the labour market’. They are not enfranchised as fully rounded human citizens. Habermas sees money, power and the law as powerful ‘media’ for directing thought. These media are beyond the control of ordinary people and ordinary communities.
22 This interpretation makes plain the damage done to how people would otherwise ‘naturally’ or ‘humanly’ think.
23 In modern literate societies with democratic politics, good education and an open information apparatus, the ability to freely communicate with each other enables us to reach valid understandings in dialogue with our peers.
that places the symbolic structures of the lifeworld as a whole in question, can account for why they have become accessible to us\textsuperscript{24} (Habermas. 1991. p402-403).

This ‘directioning’ of people’s reasoning is further constrained if they do not have other, more human ways of thinking about themselves, about other people and about the way the world works. These other ways of thinking could be made available to them if they are permitted a better quality of “lifeworld” – that is a better range of common sense understandings about how things could be. The implication is that it is always in the interests of dominant players who want to maintain the status quo which favours them, to do what they can to shape that lifeworld – to promote certain possibilities of understanding for their target audience while demoting other possibilities. Now this is beginning to sound like a theme relevant to public relations endeavour.

Habermas acknowledges that even with the best will in the world from all societal and political forces, it is unlikely that societies will ever get to the “ideal speech situation” where there is no distortion or weighting of the lifeworld mechanisms of conception:

\[\text{...I tried to delineate the general pragmatic presuppositions of argumentation as specifications of an ideal speech situation. This proposal may be unsatisfactory in its details, but I still view as correct my intention to reconstruct the general symmetry conditions that every competent speaker must presuppose are sufficiently satisfied insofar as he intends to enter into argumentation at all (Habermas. 1991. p25).}\]

Such an “ideal speech situation” “excludes all force…except the force of the better argument” (Ibid. p25). By the ‘exclusion of all force’ Habermas means that in order for people to break out of this reification, this blinkered existence, there should be no unfair distortion of the ability of the participants in any communicative situation to come to a

\textsuperscript{24} This (economic systems) pressure on our more human (lifeworld) understanding of how the world should be, has become so out of control that, like Dewey, these distortions of the ‘lifeworld’ are now becoming apparent to us. We are used to and familiar with reaching our understandings freely through ‘communicative action’ with each other in a near ideal speech situation. Pressures to change this freedom of ideas formation are now so blatant that they are obvious.
rational understanding in terms which are in their own genuinely best interests. Efforts to work towards an ideal speech situation are vital for Habermas because of his subscription to: “a communications-theoretic turn that goes beyond the linguistic turn of the philosophy of the subject” (Ibid. p397). The communications theoretic turn implies the following:

If we assume that the human species maintains itself through the socially coordinated activities of its members and that this coordination has to be established through communication – and in certain central spheres – through communication aimed at reaching agreement – then the reproduction of the species also requires satisfying the conditions of a rationality that is inherent in communicative action (Ibid. p397).

What Habermas is arguing here is that the world is not conceived by individual knowing subjects qua individual subjects. Nor is it dictated in a determined manner to consciousness by the structure of languages and symbolic systems – the culture in which the individual resides. Languages and symbols, as well as power relations are the media in which understandings arise, but understandings only arise inter-subjectively through notions shared via communication. Habermas argues that in traditional culture the shared linguistic experiences are set. Blind belief, rote understandings and irrational superstitions bring people into line with their shared mental orientation towards the world. Matters such as their role and fate in the world are encompassed by their superstitions as handed down by the shaman or priest. Post Enlightenment however these not-for-debate certainties are shattered. In consequence a different sort of communicative effort is needed for individuals to keep in touch with understandings, in a sense to stay sane – to stay in touch with social reality. Rather than simple observance and meek acceptance, communicative efforts are now taken up with questioning, arguing and reasoning in ways which ensure individual self-preservation and success. People are now rather different beings. They are individuals set free to reason. But there is an intellectual price for this freedom. Instead of intellectually relaxing in the sure certainties of the traditional cosmology, their place in life, their fate, the intellectually “freed” modern individual now has to keep one eye on their practical circumstances and the other on what they might aspire to. Their lives are no longer dictated
by the stars or whatever other aspects of an all encompassing belief system. Their lives are instead subject to how they individually perceive and reason about their world in communication with everyone else who is engaged in the same, individualistic, reasoning process. Thus the quality of their communication with others – what they are permitted to know – what thinking tools they have access to – and what knowledge possibilities they are disbarred from – is vital to individual understanding and self-preservation. Habermas discusses practical circumstances and aspiration in terms of, respectively, purposive rational action and communicative action. Habermas develops his notion of purposive rational action after discussing how this term is used by Weber:

The reference point from which Weber investigates societal rationalisation is, therefore, the purposive rationality of entrepreneurial activity as it is institutionalised in the capitalist enterprise...[this entails]...An ethic of conviction that systemises all spheres of life and anchors purposive-rational action orientations in the personality system in a value rational way (Protestant Ethic); A social subsystem that guarantees social reproduction of corresponding value orientations (religious congregation and family); and a system of compulsory norms that is suited by its formal structure to require of actors a legitimate behaviour, the purposive rational, exclusively success oriented pursuit of their own interests in an ethically neutralised domain (civil law) (Habermas. 1991. p218-219).

For Habermas purposive rational action is the every day “realistic” behaviour of people. Purposive rational action involves thinking and behaving like obedient participants of a particular economic system which requires us to act “instrumentally” and plan “strategically” to achieve “success” (Ibid. p285):

By contrast I shall speak of communicative action whenever the actions of the agents are coordinated not through egocentric calculation of success but through acts of reaching understanding. In communicative action participants are not primarily oriented to their own success; they harmonise their plans of action on the basis of common situation definitions. In this respect the negotiation of definitions
of the situation is an essential element of the interpretive accomplishments required for communicative action (Ibid. p287-286).

Communicative reason stems from communicative action. It is made possible by the individual’s participation in a sphere of thinking and behaving where ideas are free from the dictates of these instrumental systems of how life apparently has to be led. If social communication is free of partial interests, the individual is participating in communicative action – that is modes of communication and consequent understanding – which enable her to reason in all sorts of other ways. These are ways which may be really in her and her community’s interest, rather than ways which have been dictated by the dominant systems (see the case study on London public transport arguments). Habermas argues that:

A subjectivity that is characterised by communicative reason resists the denaturing of the self for the sake of self preservation. Unlike instrumental reason, communicative reason cannot be subsumed without resistance under a blind self-preservation. It refers neither to a subject that preserves itself in relating to objects via representation and action, nor to a self maintaining system that demarcates itself from an environment, but to a symbolically structured lifeworld that is constituted in the interpretive accomplishments of its members and only reproduced through communication (Ibid. p398).

The implications of Habermas’s schema for public relations should by now be becoming apparent. Habermas suggests that the very understanding of the sort of world, including the social/political world in which we live, is only made possible by the way we communicate among ourselves. He suggests that one of the two important sources of our communication is the social and economic systems in which we live. These are systems which perpetuate themselves by delivering us information which is conducive to that perpetuation. There is little incentive for a political system to put out messages to the effect “don’t support this political system – change it”. Similarly there is little incentive for an employment system to put out messages to the effect of: “don’t go along with the
assumptions and imperatives in this system of employment – change them”. In a similar respect, corporations, associations of corporations, groups of professionals, the supporters of abstract institutions such as the institution of the family and so on are unlikely to put out messages about these systems to the effect of: “don’t have a good regard for the existence, style of operation or importance of us.” Instead, the types of messages emanating from these aspects within society are far more likely to be self-justifying or even self-promoting. They will be messages which will seek to perpetuate the types of thinking which encourage the maintenance of those systems. We are talking about “systems” here in the terms in which Habermas takes up Parsonian attempts to explain the actions of social actors as systemic occurrences (Habermas. 1989. p199-283; Mayhew. 1997. p81-118; Parsons. 1951).

In *The Theory of Communicative Action* Habermas devotes a chapter to what he calls the uncoupling of “lifeworld” originating communication with its consequent style of understandings, from systems communication which has different, more instrumental effects on understanding. He suggests that the sorts of communication generated by social and economic systems initially looks for concepts in the lifeworld which will enable thinking and understanding to take place along the lines conducive to the perpetuation of the systems. As previously discussed these are lifeworld concepts generated by the lifeworld of the thinking individual, that is by their local community experiences in the culture which produces and sustains their mental ability – their ability to think using the languages, symbols, narratives, metaphors, shared experiences of the society which they reside within. However when these languages and symbols, etc. are not necessarily of a type conducive to producing the sorts of understandings which the systems require, then the systems try to deliberately inculcate methods of conceptualisation – symbols, words, myths, alternative examples and modes of narration – which will enable thinking to proceed along the lines the systems prefer. This process is called the “colonisation” of the lifeworld:

…with the institutionalization of the monetary medium, success-oriented action, steered by egocentric calculations of utility, loses its connection to action oriented by mutual understanding…purposive activity gets free of normative restrictions…In the end systemic mechanisms suppress forms of social integration
even in those areas where a consensus dependent coordination of action cannot be replaced. That is, where the symbolic reproduction of the lifeworld is at stake. In these areas the mediatisation of the lifeworld assumes the form of colonization (Habermas. 1989. p196).

In the above quote the “institutionalization of the monetary medium” can be taken to be a powerful effect of the economic system. “Mutual understandings” and “normative action” are aspects of how people left to relate with each other, out of the reach of powerful “systems” influences, would otherwise think and carry on as human communities. Applied to the Australian Association for the Public University (APU) case study for example, we can take the above passage from Habermas to mean that – among the university community there would be sets of shared meaning notions – symbols, languages, myths, narratives and so on which we could say comprise a “lifeworld” – which generates a conception of “the university”. There similarly have to be shared meaning notions of transport in London and life in London generally. In relation to the other case study there also have to be shared meaning notions of what is safe in sewage disposal. However, in a utilitarian culture which is driven and led by money and success rather than humanity and internal agreements among the communities concerned (the university community; Londoners; Australian townspeople), the “common-people-generated” conceptions of those matters are at risk of take-over by concepts generated by the proponents of dominant organisations in the economic, social and professional systems. In the sewage sludge case it was perhaps the professional system of the water engineers, which generated the most obvious systems communications. This system’s instrumental communication was typified by the creation of the word “biosolids” and made the most blatant play at colonising the conceptualisations and thus the understandings emanating from the “lifeworld” of the local residents. In the case of transport in London, sections of the London community organised a counter-ideological campaign to contest and repulse thinking notions of what was good for transport in the capital as promoted by road construction and road haulage interests and their political allies. The systems here were those of organised economic and social activities which had given rise to institutions supporting massive, private road transport and massive private car use as well as to allied road construction and political institutions. The
interests and mode of thinking within these institutions had constituted a whole political, employment and financial investment and profit system which clashed in its imperatives, and thus its communications, with notions emanating from the lifeworlds of London communities. The latters’ lifeworlds represented and thus construed the situation, and their interests, as different from the thinking in those systems. The Australian Association for Public Universities example is another clear instance of systems notions overriding or replacing (colonising) lifeworld notions. Colonisation took place as putatively national or global economic imperatives invaded the former conceptualisations of universities held by most members of the university community. These invading concepts were the imperatives originally articulated by Education Minister Dawkins and other university reformers. This lifeworld colonisation has involved the replacement of notions and narratives of academic freedom with notions and narratives of the business-like, efficient turning out of academic “product”. Habermas sounds a dire warning against allowing systems imperatives to get out of step with lifeworld imperatives – i.e. society being run along instrumental lines for the benefit of the systems of society rather than actual people located in society. He points to the mainly student disturbances of the late 1960s and 1970s as a revolt against inhuman systems. These systems were to do with the US war machine, environmentally destructive industries as well as patriarchal and racial systems or institutions. These systems’ communications were getting out of step with how people were now thinking in a more human (lifeworld) manner:

If we take the view that the growth of the economic-administrative complex [systems] sets off processes of erosion in the lifeworld, then we would expect old conflicts to be overlaid with new ones. A line of conflict forms between on the one hand, a centre composed of strata directly involved in the production process and interested in maintaining capitalist growth as the basis of the welfare-state compromise, and on the other hand a periphery composed of a variegated array of groups that are lumped together (Habermas. 1989. p392).

We can perhaps identify groups of people from the case studies who are among a “variegated array of groups” who are not “directly involved in the production process and
interested in maintaining capitalist growth”. There may be, perhaps, the disillusioned academics; the concerned Australian townspeople; and the citizens of London threatened by commercial transport proposals. Of course all these groups are in some ways involved with the production process and capitalism. However they are not as directly involved and interested as the corporate and therefore remote and lofty leadership of universities; the owners of road haulage and road construction firms and their employees; and the professionals bent on changing the disposal of sewage sludge. The implication of this aspect of Habermas for public relations is that insensitive systems activity – in his terms strategic action which involves instrumental communication – can provoke a situation where a range of protest groups comes into existence. A major concern for Habermas in this and related passages is the durability and effectiveness of such a lifeworld backlash. The “variegation” generally means that it is not united or durable. The London case study in this thesis may be offered as an illustration of a range of “lifeworld” propagated oppositional groups coming into being. These groups’ emergence is peculiar however in that their promotion was helped and they were encouraged and protected by a major and well funded socialist regional authority. Also these particular variegated flowers were abruptly snuffed out by central government. It was impossible for most of these groups to mount a defence for their continuance without the patronage of the GLC because of their diversity and ad hoc nature. However, unlike the Habermassian project, this present thesis is concerned with public relations – i.e. with attitudes and reputations – rather than with concrete political actions and institutional formation. As such one might claim that, although organisations over stepping the mark in terms of their instrumental approach to communication may not provoke the creation of oppositional groups and street riots, they may none-the-less bring about considerable ire across a range of discreet interest groups. As we have seen in the biosolids example, in the postmodern or late modern situation where the power of “authority” to mesmerise recedes to very little or nothing, it is dangerous for any organisation to risk an instrumental communication strategy which overtly aligns itself with dominant systems imperatives. It might be noticed that in my suggested strategy to the APU, the plan is to first investigate a number of other organisations where the current ‘system’ of economic rationalism, depreciation of professional status and so on, may be producing similar discord.
Other professional organisations may be experiencing similar ‘lifeworld’ unease to that being felt by academics. The implication of course is that the university corporate management systems of thought, which are in line with dominant social economic systems, may be clashing with the lifeworld understandings in potentially allied organisations. The campaign suggestion involves attempting to light “variegated” protest fires on a number of fronts where “processes of erosion in the lifeworld” may be sparking a potential backlash. A central question of the above debate for the public relations practitioner is: “am I working on behalf of one of the systems of society or does my work flow out of the lifeworld of the audience I am targeting, or out of some other encompassing and thus justifiable shared set of lifeworld concepts and assumptions?” On the other hand “Am I involved in a mission of ‘colonisation’?” “If public relations is defined as ‘in the public interest’ (see definitions A and B page 31) how do I reconcile a public relations work motivated predominantly by systems imperatives?”

As previously flagged in this thesis, we will now turn to a critique of Habermas’s theories particularly in respect of Habermas’s notion of “perlocution”. We will also look at allegations about Habermas’s over-reliance on dialectic as opposed to rhetoric when he suggests how the reasoning individual comes to understandings. Habermas is criticised for eschewing a proper appreciation of rhetoric by Farrell (1993) and Mayhew (1997):

Public discourse cannot function without the use of influence, but influence ultimately fails if it cannot be redeemed. The question is not whether all public discourse can be made to conform to Habermas’s high standards for communicative action, an ideal that could be realised only if all public voices were willing to forswear the rhetorical mode and all public ears became deaf to appeals based on influence (Mayhew. 1997. p254).

Farrell as well is concerned to depict Habermas as shunning rhetoric in favour of the more “pure” realms of dialectic:

However within universal pragmatics, rhetoric constitutes a crude sub set of perlocutionary speech. For Habermas this means that it is denied any of the
reflective validity claims that he presupposes for the illocutionary realm known as communicative action (Farrell. 1993. p194).

Habermas sets out a position towards rhetoric at the start of his *The Theory of Communicative Action*. In analysing Toulmin’s notion of argumentation Habermas suggests:

The three analytical aspects distinguished above can provide the theoretical perspectives from which the familiar disciplines of the Aristotelian canon can be delimited: Rhetoric is concerned with argumentation as a process, dialectic with the pragmatic procedures of argumentation and logic with its products. As a matter of fact, from each of these perspectives a different structure of argumentation stands out: the structures of an ideal speech situation immunised against repression and inequality in a special way; then the structures of a ritualized competition for the better arguments; finally the structures that determine the construction of individual arguments and their interrelations (Habermas. 1991. p26).

In Habermas (1994. p187) when attacking Derrida, as highlighted by Farrell, Habermas does not attack or dismiss rhetoric, rather he criticises the way rhetoric has been used and prioritised:

Derrida is particularly interested in standing the primacy of logic over rhetoric, canonised since Aristotle, on its head…Derrida proceeds by a critique of style, in that he finds something like indirect communications, by which the text itself denies its manifest content in the rhetorical surplus of meaning inherent in the literary strata of texts that present themselves as nonliterary. Thanks to their rhetorical content, texts combed against the grain contradict what they state, such as the explicitly asserted primacy of signification over the sign, of the voice in relation to writing, of the intuitively given and immediately present over the representative and the postponed-postponing (Habermas. 1994. p187-189).
The above quotes from Habermas do not rule rhetoric out. Rather they place rhetoric as an essential part of the argumentation and communication process. By prioritising logic Habermas seems out of step with the well known phrase from Aristotle: “Rhetoric is the counterpart of dialectic” (Aristotle. 1991. p66). However a few pages later Aristotle proclaims:

Finally, proof is achieved by the speech, when we demonstrate either a real or an apparent persuasive aspect of each particular matter…Thus it turns out that rhetoric is, as it were, a kind of offshoot of dialectic and the study of ethics…In fact it is a fragment of and parallel activity to, dialectic, as we said at the outset…(Ibid. p75).

The nub of Mayhew’s and Farrell’s argument with Habermas is the latter’s incorporation of rhetoric into a notion of argumentation which is built with notions taken from Austin and Searl. Habermas’s “argumentation” involves universal pragmatics – the etiquette or procedures which are necessary to bring about understandable speech – as well as the ideal speech situation. Mayhew and Farrell want rhetoric seen as a separate agent which stands for the persuasions and influences which, as it were, intertwine with the dialectical process of arguing out logical matters. They are not satisfied that Habermas in fact equates rhetoric – that is Aristotle’s prescriptions for the best rhetorical practice – with the ideal speech situation. Instead Farrell wants to:

…extend Habermas’s revisions without damaging the core normative perspective of his project…Two very different contemporary rhetoricians figure prominently in this revision…Perelman’s key insight, entailed in his movement from a view of persuasion as effect to a reflective vision of conviction through the adherence of a competent audience, is that audience receptivity is a normatively significant condition…For Burke…there is no contradiction ultimately between discourse practice that is always suspect and practice that is the best available embodiment of human civility (Farrell. 1993. p203-204).
Farrell wants to challenge the notion that the lifeworld can be a pure, detached realm of calm logical understanding. Instead he says:

…this friendly extension aims to decentre the autonomous speaking subject through a renewed acquaintance with the world outside: the contexts, audiences and appearances which muddy, complicate, and constitute meaning in ordinary life (Ibid. p203).

It is not enough that in Habermas’s argumentation the systemisation and teaching of rhetoric in the Aristotelian tradition is in fact given the place of the “ideal speech situation”: “the structures of an ideal speech situation immunised against repression and inequality in a special way” (see above). Habermas’s treatment of rhetoric and the Aristotelian tradition in relation to argumentation is illustrated by his notion of argumentation as:

The fundamental intuition connected with argumentation can best be characterised from the process perspective by the intention of convincing a universal audience and gaining general assent for an utterance [rhetoric]; from the procedural perspective by the intention of ending a dispute about hypothetical validity claims [dialectic]; and from the product perspective by the intention of grounding or redeeming a validity claim with arguments [logic] (Habermas. 1991. p26).

In the above passage Habermas equates the ideal speech situation with the process of correct persuasion. That is persuasion where all the factors of what it is that brings about persuasion is known by reference to the definitive exposition of rhetoric as given by Aristotle. This is because Aristotle first dissects and investigates all the parts of the rhetorical process before putting together recommended methods of use of the rhetorical operation suitable for application to the polis. This equation of rhetoric with the ideal speech situation seems to go against the grain of Farrell’s notion of the new rhetoric tradition which in his terms involves “muddying” and “complication” and in the terms he
quotes from Burke: “always suspect practice that is the best available embodiment of human civility” (see above).

One aspect in the argument between Habermas and these new rhetoricians is whether it is feasible for Habermas to claim that an hygienic region of interpersonal understandings actually exists apart from more polluting (muddying) influences of how the world is delivered for perception. On the other hand Farrell uses the term “ordinary life” (see above). It seems to me that a major distinction which lies between the “new rhetorical” and the “Habermassian” paradigms, as presented above, is the difference respectively, between a theoretical “wholeness” and a theoretical “bifurcation”. I see this difference and this difference’s importance for theorising public relations in the following way:

According to my view, expressed at many points in this thesis, the public relations industry came into existence and continues in its dominant usage as an ideological instrument of unification. It primary purpose was and is to reconcile potential disparate thinking – the division of attitudes between big business and its publics, the division between individuality and corporatisation of the individual, the divisions which existed in a multi ethnic and geographically dispersed United States during the First World War. I argue that the project to bridge corresponding divisions continues on under globalism in the worldwide multi-national and multi ethnic situation. By this I do not just mean corporations and people in different countries are managed with the assistance of public relations processes to communicate and cooperate together. What I mean is that orthodox public relations sponsors unification under the “instrumental thinking pre-requisites” of purposive rationalism – purposive rationalism as described earlier in this chapter. This is purposive rationalism designed on the basis that we are now within the systems of a global economy. This contrasts to the early 20th century when public relations sponsored the “instrumental thinking pre-requisites” of purposive rationalism, primarily for Americans, on the basis that America was developing a specifically American corporation oriented purposive rationalism. Now Habermas it seems to me lends better tools for conceptualising this purpose of public relations than do the theories of rhetoric.

Habermas’s theories, originally based on the Marxist tradition of class division, lend themselves to a notion that there is predominantly an eternal contest between different motors of understanding production and retention. These motors are (1) the original
‘lifeworld’ cultural notions of communities which they originally have and (2) the notions which certain, essentially economic led systems would like to see people adopt. This is the implication of Habermas’s concept of ‘lifeworld’ and its colonisation by systems which is a fundamental aspect of his theoretical approach. The domination of thinking by the deliberate intervention of the economic systems, using methods including public relations, results in a situation where:

In the end systemic mechanisms suppress forms of social integration even in those areas where a consensus-dependent coordination of action cannot be replaced, that is, where the symbolic reproduction of the lifeworld is at stake. In these areas the mediatisation of the lifeworld assumes the form of colonisation (Habermas. 1989. p196)

The economic system comprises the powerful organisations with their depth of legal status, their wealth of financial influence, their political and customary power which is so magnified and broadcast by contemporary media, legal and educational systems. Now contrast this conceptualisation of a contest over how people think with a schema which claims there is such a thing as “ordinary life” and which claims “there is no contradiction ultimately between discourse practice that is always suspect and practice that is the best available embodiment of human civility” (see above). It is almost as if the ‘new rhetoric’ paradigm is already subsumed within the corporatist ideology which claims there is no social division. But this is the ideology which saw the US Socialist Party disappear under a welter of “anti-red” and anti-Russian witch-hunting at the beginning of the 20th century (see chapter four). In the rhetorical paradigm, as harnessed to public relations, there seems to be little recognition of the overarching political situation in respect of the power of corporations over society. Heath as discussed in chapter three does not follow through the implications of the eclipse of the rhetorical mode of public governance with the rise of tyranny and anti-democratic sentiments in both the ancient Greek and the Roman periods (see Vickers and Kennedy as discussed in chapter three). One can in this way understand the relevance of Habermas’s depiction of rhetoric as the ideal speech situation in these classical eras in the light of such tyranny driven eclipse. The ending of transparent public
government in classical times, public government facilitative by a democratically spirited rhetorical process, meant a reversion to winning the argument in secret and by force “instead of the force of the better argument” (see Habermas’s definition of the ideal speech situation above). What I am suggesting is this. There is potential for public relations theorists to apply new rhetorical theory in a way which points to the history of how rhetoric was taken up in some classical eras. In some classical eras rhetoric was used in a supremely public way and in a supremely democratic way. It was seen in action in the public forums. In the most democratic Greek and Roman periods rhetoric was not an unseen power (Cutlip 1994). It was not devised, as it is now, on the computer screens in the back rooms of public relations departments (chapter three). Discussing rhetoric in this way would expose the current anti-democratic uses which public relations is put to. But the current rhetorical scholars of public relations do not do this. This was the argument of my chapter entitled “Privatised Rhetoric for Privatised Governance”. Because of this failure, or because of the ways the notion of ‘rhetoric’ is malleable, even to the extent of disguising public relations activity, I instead suggest that the theories of Habermas are more suitable for getting an understanding of what goes on in public relations. Leading public relations cognoscenti, as represented by Heath, (see chapter three) advocate rhetorical theory as the new route to understanding public relations. But I would warn that the particular construal of rhetoric in each theoretical approach needs careful consideration (also see Toth below). If rhetoric is construed in a way which reduces its efficacy as a tool of critical study of public relations practice, then its use as an approach to theory is not suitable for application to the contemporary problems surrounding the nature and use of public relations. This argument is more than one of simple epistemological preference or theoretical disposition. As a statement of a priori starting perspectives, the choice of theoretical approach has a concrete effect on the way that it is possible to conceive of public relations practice and what I claim to be its operation at both the lifeworld and the systems levels. For me there is no contradiction with public relations activities operating at the lifeworld levels. It only seems like a contradiction because of the deeply ingrained association of public relations operating at the systems levels which is explained or implied throughout this thesis. In fact, I suggest, persuasion and rhetoric can be seen in my case studies to be operating at the lifeworld level in order to maintain the views of the protesters and to stop those views from
being colonised. This does however bring us to a problem highlighted by Farrell about Habermas’s use of the notion of “perlocution” and Habermas’s preference for expressing the operations of the lifeworld as illocutionary operations only.

According to the *Penguin Dictionary of Philosophy* the term “perlocution” originated with J. L. Austin and means the ultimate effect of a speech act on an addressee. “Locution” is the term which stands for “saying something” that is the three-fold combination of the sound, grammar and intent-to-mean-something – the actual activities which are involved in saying something. “Illocution” is the term which stands for the overt message contained in the “locution”… eg (a) “jump through this hoop” or (b) “have a nice day”. “Perlocution” is the actual, consequent effect of the locution. For instance possible perlocution associated with the above illocutions, depending on the contexts in which they are said, may be: (a) “I got her to play with me in this way (hoop jumping)” or “I made him realise he would not get anywhere in this job until he performed such and such pre-requisites”. (b) “I’ve wished you to have a nice time for the rest of the day” or “I’m treating you courteously in this commercial situation in line with the way I have been trained to terminate customer transactions with a smile and a happy remark and you are presumably smiling and will come back to buy again.” However there is a difference between Habermas’s rendition of “perlocution” and the originator of the term J. L. Austin. For Habermas perlocution does not have a choice of the intended or unintended, overt or covert effect of the speech act. In Habermas’s use in the context of communicative action perlocution is only the covert and intended aim of the speaker:

By contrast, [with illocution] the perlocutionary aim of a speaker, like the ends pursued with goal directed actions generally, does not follow from the manifest content of the speech act; this aim can be identified only through the agent’s intention (Habermas. 1991. p290).

Also:

A speaker who wants to be successful may not let his perlocutionary aims be known, whereas illocutionary aims can be achieved only through being expressed.
Illocutions are expressed openly; perlocutions may not be admitted as such...Perlocutionary acts constitute a subclass of teleological actions which must be carried out by means of speech acts, under the condition that the actor does not declare or admit to his aim as such (Habermas. 1991. p292).

By contrast J. L. Austin has no such requirement for perlocutionary acts to be covert implications of illocutionary actions (see Austin. 1977. p101-132). This can be demonstrated by viewing the contrast between locutionary illocutionary and perlocutionary speech acts which Austin gives as examples to illustrate the differences:

Locution:
He said to me “Shoot her!” meaning by “shoot” shoot and referring by “her” to her.
Illocution:
He urged (or advised, ordered, etc) me to shoot her.
Perlocution:
He persuaded me, or got me to shoot her.
Locution:
He said to me. “You can’t do that.”
Illocution:
He protested against my doing it.
Perlocution:
He pulled me up. Checked me. Stopped me. Brought me to my senses, etc (Ibid. p101).

It is clear from the above example that Austin originally only meant the term “perlocution” to refer to the consequent effect of what was said. There is no requirement for that consequent effect to have come about because of some disguised intention in the locution or illocution. Clearly one can be overt in persuading or dissuading as above and still be performing perlocution in Austin’s terms. By the same token there is nothing in Austin’s schema to bar perlocutionary effects from coming about unintentionally. What if
X unintentionally persuaded me to shoot Y by praising Y’s achievement and thus fed a
dangerous jealousy in me which X did not suspect? What if unbeknownst to Y her cheery
good morning pleasantries lifted my dark mood and diverted me from the evil mission I
was embarking on? Habermas’s covert intentional notion of persuasion for perlocution is
created for application to the notion of commutative action because he finds the contrast
between illocution and perlocution an appropriate distinction which helps to build up his
important conceptual bifurcations. These are the bifurcations between the concepts of
lifeworld and system which corresponds to the bifurcation between the concepts of
communicative action and strategic action. Habermas is almost apologetic about this
incorporation of the term “perlocution” into his schema in a manner which can be claimed
to be a modification of perlocution. This modification has consequences for the way
Habermas has to be interpreted in order to take up his approach for understanding public
relations activity… Habermas says:

Perlocutionary effects, like the results of teleological actions generally, are
intended under the description of states of affairs brought about through
intervention in the world. By contrast illocutionary results are achieved at the level
of interpersonal relations on which participants in communication come to an
understanding with one another about something in the world. In this sense they
[perlocutionary effects] are not innerworldly but extramundane. Illocutionary results
appear in the lifeworld to which the participants belong and which forms the
background for their processes of reaching understanding. They cannot be intended
under the description of causally produced effects. I would like to suggest that we
conceive perlocutions as a special class of strategic interactions in which illocutions
are employed as a means in teleological contexts of action (Habermas. 1991. p293).

One has to be sympathetic with Farrell for criticising this Habermassian
employment of the term “perlocution” along the lines that:

Despite numerous belated attempts to reinterpret the evidence, the split
between illocutionary and perlocutionary communicative acts is simply

My principal difficulty with this redefinition of perlocution and its reservation for systems or purposive rational applications as opposed to lifeworld applications can be illustrated with reference to the case studies. Habermas appears to be reserving a sacred mission for illocution as an untarnished, virginal receptacle of meaning which upholds the purity of the lifeworld. Using illocution real people, genuine communities, draw their identities undistorted by systems influences. Logic drawn from illocution gives people their most human and ‘good-life’ ways of seeing, in a detached, uninfluenced “understanding the text” kind of a way. It is only in the hurly-burly of strategic actions and the purposive rationalism of the capitalist produced systems realms that perlocution happens. That is, it is only in the external and mundane region of life that people are persuaded to do certain things without this motivation being generated purely by their rational comprehension of their situation. If people are motivated in this (Habermassian) perlocutionary manner this is tantamount to reification and to the Iron Cage bureaucraticisation of their behaviour. I dispute Habermas’s notion of perlocution in two ways. Firstly, as we have seen, as originally intended by Austin, perlocution can operate in all of the covert, overt, intentional and unintentional modes and in any combination of these. But perhaps more importantly in relation to the case studies, perlocution both in Habermas’s sense and in Austin’s can be shown to be an indispensable aspect of the lifeworld. That is, I suggest that contrary to Habermas’s implication, in order for the lifeworld to operate, it has to be mobilized in some active manner. One cannot just sit back and trust to some rarified operation of logic to prevent potentially dangerous spreading of sewage sludge. Logic has to be mobilised by the vehicle of campaign, otherwise being “right” does not “mean” anything – you might as well have been wrong or illogical in your thinking as far as “lifeworld” phenomena go. How would dialectic on its own lead to sensible transport or other contestable policy arrangements in London? The governmental and legal forums which are responsible for such policies in London simply do not work on the basis of dialectic – detached logical disputation about what is “right”. They work on the basis of dialectic in partnership with
Public Relations and Contemporary Theory

New suggestions for PR theory

dialectic’s counterpart rhetoric – or in this case public relations campaigning. I argue for the similarity between rhetorical practice and public relations campaigning in section d. of chapter three. Similarly, moves in the direction of “proper” university education, as favoured by the APU, could only come about as the result of a campaign whatever the erudition of this particular set of dialectically capable ladies and gentlemen. Contra Habermas, in order for his conception of “lifeworld” to have any meaning *vis-à-vis* the practical reality of the operations of the social system, there has to be a persuasive performance of lifeworld concepts as well as those concepts in themselves. There has to be perlocution as well as illocution in the lifeworld. In this sense I argue that Habermas is wrong when he says:

Thus I count as communicative action those linguistically mediated interactions in which all participants pursue illocutionary aims, and only illocutionary aims, with their mediating acts of communication. On the other hand, I regard as linguistically mediated strategic action [strategic action is extra-lifeworld action] those interactions in which at least one of the participants wants with his speech act to produce perlocutionary effects on his opposite number (Habermas. 1991. p295).

I agree with Burke’s notion of logology here (discussed in chapter one) in the sense that Habermas overlooks the practicality that there is always an economy of knowing. There is an economy of knowing in the sense that all the potential subscribers to a lifeworld cannot always know that they have all the possible potentials of the lifeworld appropriate to their situation. They have to have this lifeworld perspective brought to them in order to counter the strategic perspectives of the systems which they may otherwise be thinking within. The Aristotelian paradigm of rhetoric, to which Habermas subscribes, (above), privileges logic over rhetoric. For this reason we may allow that once the alternative perspectives are put to these potential inhabitants of the lifeworld they will be able to ultimately make up their minds whether to subscribe on the basis of logic as they see it. However, in order for this mind changing operation to be performed economically, and in the face of powerful systems perspectives - systems perspectives sometimes promoted by
expensive public relations campaigns - these lifeworld aspects have to be put deliberately, skillfully and persuasively. If we are not to allow for this campaigning, counter-dominant public relations aspect of lifeworld activity, how is the colonised lifeworld to be decolonised? Surely my case study examples provide ground for the argument that decolonisation cannot occur by dialectic alone? To try to be true to Habermasian principles we could perhaps suggest that the counter campaign, that is the mobilisation and rhetorical projection of lifeworld logical concepts, is quite in line with Habermas’s notion of attempting to achieve an ideal speech situation? This mobilisation tries to reintroduce the force of the better argument into the public arena in line with Habermas’s notion of an Aristotelian rendition of the conduct of the rhetorical process as discussed above.

**Public relations, fragmentation and social structure**

This section of the thesis offers a discussion of how contemporary theories suggest thinking processes bind society together. It suggests that as the *raison d’etre* of public relations is to influence thinking processes, then surely the activities of public relations must be relevant to many of those theories of society. Furthermore, if, as Habermas and McCarthy suggest (above) modern and late modern capitalist society is in a state of fracture because of the dissolution of traditional thinking processes, what significance does this fracturing have for public relations? Can contemporary theory be used to reveal public relations as taking advantage of these fractures as the vehicle of alternative narratives for particular interests? Or on the other hand is public relations, on a global scale, one of the inevitable consequences of a fractured society as it sucks in modes of understanding which will explain society to itself?

There seems to be a broad agreement among a considerable diversity of social theoretical approaches that society functions in a manner that involves shared understandings and attitudes resulting from those understandings. The social action theory of Parsons deals with this consolidation of thinking under the terms of shared values which result in normative actions or “norms”:

Within the area of control of the actor, the means employed, cannot in general, be conceived either as chosen at random or as dependant exclusively on the
conditions of action, but must in some sense be subject to the influence of an independent, determinate selective factor, a knowledge of which is necessary to the understanding of the concrete course of action. What is essential to the concept of action is that there should be a normative orientation, not that this should be of any particular type (Parsons. 1968. p45).

Also:

It follows from the derivation of normative orientation and the role of values in action as stated above, that all values involve what may be called a social reference. In so far as they are cultural rather than purely personal they are in fact shared. Even if idiosyncratic to the individual they are still by virtue of the circumstances of their genesis, defined in relation to a shared cultural tradition; their idiosyncrasies consist in specifiable departures from the shared tradition and are defined in this way (Parsons. 1970. p12).

Parsons discusses Durkheim and Weber who from different starting points investigate the previous binding of society by religion:

From the point of view of integration of the social system, therefore, religious beliefs constitute the paramount focus of the integration of the cognitive orientation system in its implications for action (Parsons. 1970. p368).

Also:

…it is interesting to point out the extraordinary close correspondence of Durkheim and Weber…[for Weber] a society can only be subject to a legitimate order…in so far as there are common value attitudes in the society. This, again is exactly where Durkheim emerged in his interpretation of the possible meaning of the social reality. (Parsons. 1968. p669-670).
As Durkheim puts it:

Thus religion acquires a meaning and a reasonableness that the most intransigent rationalist cannot misunderstand…Before all it is a system of ideas with which the individuals represent to themselves the society of which they are members, and the obscure but intimate relations which they have with it (Durkheim. 1976. p225).

Parsons progresses our discussion:

With the waning of religious interests, science and the philosophical problems hinging upon science came to form perhaps the main preoccupation of minds with a bent for systematic theorising. And science came to be widely looked upon at the rational achievement of the human mind par excellence…it provided the main point of reference in the formulation of what was meant by the norm of rationality itself (Parsons. 1968. p57-58).

Nietzsche, as we have already seen in footnote 18 of chapter five [p97] contemporaneously with Durkheim and Weber, remarks on the “herd-like” way that people’s thinking depended on its association with the thinking of others:

My idea…is that consciousness does not really belong to the existence of man as an individual, but rather to that in him which is community and herd…we have no organ at all for knowledge, for ‘truth’: we know (or believe or imagine) precisely as much as may be useful in the interest of the human herd…even what is called usefulness is in the end only belief (Nietzsche. 1977. p66-67).

With the advent of postmodernism this “cohesively-thinking” basis for society is thrown into crisis. Notions of how society may be directed on a massive scale by the cognitions inculcated into individuals, as presented by the above theorists, are challenged. The exception is Nietzsche who in any case suggested that understandings are rather
transitory epiphenomena build over a more determining, animal instinct (Ibid. p66). Postmodern theorists, that is some of those theorists subscribing to the new movement in cultural theory dating from the 1970s, suggest that the conscious cohesiveness, pointed to by the earlier theorists, has either broken down in postmodern times, or that this cohesiveness was always a fiction. Best and Kellner (1991) summarise some of the different approaches to depicting this lack of cohesion: For Foucault: “modern power is relational power that is exercised from innumerable points… and is never something acquired, seized or shared.” (Ibid. p51). The innumerable exponents of the innumerable points, we might say - including public relations people - struggle over their ways of depicting the world by presenting their particular discourses – their particular ways of presuming and communicating the world – as a way of defending and perpetrating their influence. In contrast to Foucault’s power and linguistic processes, for Deleuze and Guattari the material operation of capitalism produces social and psychic fragmentation by progressively inventing further sub-divisions among people as consumers and producers. People are continually and disparately alienated from a cohesive understanding of human existence by having to perform stranger and stranger tasks as producers and at the same time are inculcated with stranger and stranger desires as consumers of weirder and more novel products and services (Ibid. p89). Public relations might be involved here in normalising strange production or marketing the strange products. In *Life in Fragments: Essays in Postmodern Morality* (1995) Zygmunt Bauman suggests:

> We may say that the activities of government, like most of our life activities, tend to be nowadays fragmentary, episodic and inconsequential… Commitments [familial commitments, jobs, political loyalties] are all until further notice (sic), and eternal rights are as mortal as eternity itself has become (Bauman. 1995. p282).

Bauman’s book is about the need to institute a system of ethics in order that morality is upheld in this era of fragmented social mores. The problem is of course how does one stabilise a cohesive morality when so many social notions are in unstable movement? Harvey’s (1992) *The Condition of Postmodernity* suggests how this rootless fragmentation of attitudes and understandings is taken advantage of by current economic
forces. He also implicitly expresses Foucault’s concepts of the struggle for power by the projection of particular discourse:

Postmodernism has come of age in the midst of this climate of voodoo economics, of political image construction and deployment, and of new social class formation. That there is some connection between this postmodern burst and the image making of Ronald Reagan, the attempt to deconstruct traditional institutions of working class power (the trade unions and the political parties of the left), the masking of the social effects of the economic politics of privilege, ought to be evident enough…The street scenes of impoverishment, disempowerment, graffiti and decay become grist to the cultural producer’s mill, not…in the muckraking reformist style of the late nineteenth century, but as a quaint and swirling backdrop (as in Blade Runner) upon which no social commentary is to be made. Once the poor become aestheticized, poverty itself moves out of our field of social vision (Harvey. 1992. p336).

Harvey is here enlisting the postmodern critique of social theory to give an updated Marxist perspective on contemporary society. What he says here has many facets of interest for the study of public relations. One issue which we have come across in the history section of this thesis is the “muckraking” journalism of the turn of the 19th century. This was the investigative and exposé journalism which is noted in the history sections of most major public relations textbooks. This journalism brought the excesses of major corporations and trusts (monopoly controlling conglomerates) to widespread public and political notice. The implication in Harvey is that in 21st century culture, social awareness has now been worked upon in such a way that some of these sorts of transgressions which should be “muckraked” are now misrecognised or not recognised as transgressions. This misrecognition is devised with means similar to that of the image making of Ronald Reagan where a B-movie actor is attached in voters minds to notions which made him US President. In the same period, Harvey presumably has Thatcher’s UK particularly in mind when he talks about the loss of left wing political institutions. These were institutions such
as trade unions, left controlled local and regional government and publicly controlled institutions generally. Such non-private institutions, for instance the Greater London Council, were lifeworld generating refuges of the left before their demolition, financial sequestration or privatisation. Harvey says this ideological effort helps to allow aspects of urban culture which were formerly understood to be negative – scenes of urban decay – to now be depicted with no value judgment attaching to them. They become merely backdrops to politically neutral drama or comedy.

The above extracts, I suggest, provide material for a discussion about, if not the actual shifting of social perceptions in the 20th century, then at least shifts in the theorisation about social perception. I suggest that all the theorists quoted are in general agreement that the sort of society we have is to do with the sort of thinking of the people in it and vice versa. The theorists of postmodernity quoted, in line with McCarthy and Habermas appear convinced that there is considerable divergence of thinking, attitudes and social understandings in the contemporary period. Many of them view this as a “fragmentation” of former more cohesive-across-the-society thinking modes. I suggest the implication of the above is that thinking in society, – that is, the terms of understanding of the way the world works and people’s role and possibilities within that world – were more cohesive in the Western World at the start of the 20th century than at the end of the 20th century. This is not to deny of course that disruption over that time is generally accepted as beneficial in some respects, for instance disruption to do with the place of women in society and disruption to do with the notions of social classes. Harvey, Deleuze and Guattari however would seem to insist that conceptualisations are still not what they should be. Some important social conceptualisations are motivated by a re-grouping of the capitalist imperative which reintroduces injustices by legislative and ideological practices which desensitise current understandings in favour of the perpetuation of dominant politics. Although not overtly a Marxist, Foucault provides a schema for envisaging a, what we might call ‘war of construal’. His thesis is about the production of hegemonic discourse associated with the dominant power relations in society. (Foucault’s use of discourse is discussed in the case study section of this thesis page 136).

I would suggest that much of the above discussion about theorists at either end of the 20th century can be encapsulated within a modified Habermassian paradigm. Habermas
deals with and incorporates many of the implications of Parsons, Weber and Durkheim’s sociology in his notion of systems. For Habermas systems involve the thinking of society which comes out of the social actions of people produced by their necessary involvement in the dominant economic processes of capitalism. The lifeworld is the other repository of meaning. This is a repository which in principle arises from a more immediately to hand and private inter-personal, social and cultural life which is often associated with the benign sounding term “community”. As we have already seen, however, I propose a modification to this Habermassian schema. This involves a discussion of just how immune can a lifeworld situation be from the ideological vagaries of the postmodern condition? In asking the latter question with its implications for the whole concept of Habermas’s lifeworld I would like to protest that I am not breaking faith with the general concept of a lifeworld and communicative action. Rather my point goes back to the difficulty with the term “perlocution” and Habermas’s insistence that communicative action and thus lifeworld processes are purely illocutionary and thus can only take place at the level of logic and the dialectic. My argument is that lifeworld processes cannot be “purely” illocutionary because this simply is not the way the world works. Any lifeworld devoid of its own ability to generate rhetorical practice would simply not survive. This is why I permit the inclusion of perlocution both in its overt and its Habermassian covert guises and thus permit the inclusion of rhetorical processes into the lifeworld sphere. This opening of the lifeworld sphere is I feel necessary if the construction of counter-to-systems conceptualities are to be preserved, nurtured, projected and made into counter-systems-colonisation campaigns.

Such a balanced informing of the lifeworld through both dialectic and rhetoric is, I feel, necessary in order to respond to the implications of postmodern theoretical analysis. If, as Foucault suggests, power and its discourse emanates from throughout the social world then the discourse of lifeworld notions needs (rhetorical) broadcast along with all these other power plays. Remember here I am using the Aristotelian notion of rhetoric which Habermas reminds us springs from dialectic and privileges logic. As such I suggest this modification is not out of line with Habermas’s principles and notions of lifeworld communicative action as conforming to the ‘truth approaching’, pre-requisite etiquette conditions of universal pragmatics. In terms of Deleuze and Guattari (see above) their very critique surely comprises an aspect of understanding which should be incorporated into the
lifeworld and (rhetorically) promoted. Bauman, like many other postmodern writers, through this modified Habermassian perspective, can be seen to be essentially lamenting the fracturing of the lifeworld. Bauman’s concern, in the terms I am propounding here, would be that there needs to be some common ethical themes which do none-the-less run through a plural, fragmented life world. This common ethical theme is of course already present in the Habermassian schema running through the very operation of the lifeworld, or lifeworlds. This common theme is the notion of discourse ethics. We can take discourse ethics to mean conformity to universal pragmatics, and/or conformity to the ideal speech situation, and, as I suggest I have discovered in the above discussion: conformity to the special rendition of the ideal speech situation which Habermas gives as rhetoric in the Aristotelian and therefore “honest-democratic-communicative-process” sense of rhetoric. In the chapter ‘What Is Universal Pragmatics’ which draws from Karl-Otto Apel, Habermas elaborates what I have called the “etiquette conditions” at great length. But he summarises them as: a. Uttering something understandably; b. Giving the hearer something to understand; c. Making himself thereby understandable; d. Coming to an understanding with another person (Habermas. 1979. p2). These sketched rules are later elaborated in this and other texts to make the point that the situation has to be non-coercive in any way: overtly, contextually, or by virtue of unequal access to information or educational factors.

In this section I have opposed ‘new rhetoric’ ways of theorising public relations to Habermassian ways in order to draw attention to some of the ideological implications of public relations vis-à-vis contemporary society. These are the ideological implications described in the historical discussion of chapter four. The above modified Habermassian theory is also meant to help answer what I pose elsewhere in this thesis as Lasswell’s question, rather than Lasswell’s statement. I elaborate what I call Lasswell’s statement and Lasswell’s question in chapter eleven. Lasswell says the techniques of public relations are well known, what he wants to know is their effects on society. That is, I hope I have presented theory of use for explaining what role public relations plays in society. I have not been concerned with finding or manufacturing a utilitarian theory which suggests how the process of public relations could be carried out more effectively. In the first instance what this approach to potentially theorising public relations is meant to signal is simply that public relations should be theorised in terms of its role in social formation as well as the
social formation’s implications for the practice of public relations. That is, as explained in chapter nine, the very notion of theorising something in a particular way makes, as it were, an intellectual political policy statement that public relations should be thought of in this manner. That is, simply by using critical theory to understand the effects of public relations on society, we signal that critical theory should be used to understand the effects of public relations on society. I have argued elsewhere in this thesis about public relations’ “unseen power” status and the history of its origin (chapter three) as a method for influencing how people should see and relate to their society. I have to agree with Stauber and Rampton (1995) that there is considerable expectation on the part of the public relations cognoscenti that public relations operates best when it is unseen and thus not analysable in the ways my theoretical discussion suggests it should and can be theoretically viewed.

The next implication of the above discussion is that there should be an attempt to display the implications of the above discussion in an empirical manner. That is...can we show public relations having effects on the lifeworld? Can we show public relations having effects on systems “on the ground” as it were? Can we correlate the modality of systems with the modality of public relations? Can we correlate histories of lifeworlds with histories of public relations activity? Can we chart the volume, the quality, the progression of public relations measures with time and the geography of public relations activity, against, what might be characterised as the development of postmodern modes? In other words does a lot of public relations activity stem from the centres which emanate postmodern sentiments or thinking schema? Or can we put together a map of cultural history which shows intensive public relations work anticipating, and could it be, producing, the postmodern outlook? Of course these last few questions require a substantial research project. Figures on public relations volume, growth, quality, geographic spread etc are rather scant. What I am suggesting here however is that this, and many related new projects of this nature are warranted. They are warranted because of the important link between public relations and society which I hope I have been able to explain in this thesis. I have attempted to justify the argument for a wider, society and culture oriented theorisation of public relations. This should be a theorisation which draws on theories of rhetoric, Habermassian theories, and theories to do with the postmodern / late modernity perspective. My preference for rhetorical theory is justified in the following manner...I have claimed that public relations
is the modern rhetorical practice. Heath (in my first chapters) is quoted as advocating that public relations be at least theorised with the approaches of rhetorical theory. Other advanced scholars of public relations seize upon the efficacy of rhetorical theory for understanding public relations. But if rhetoric is the counterpart to dialectic, and even postmodernity’s sceptic Habermas gives a place to rhetoric in his schema, then all dialectical practices, i.e. logical argument involve rhetoric. Now surely it can be admitted from the above that reason is to do with understanding, shared understandings and the ways that these shared understandings are dispersed and collected. Surely they are dispersed and collected in order to drive, or form what some would call the norms of society? Others might talk about the same process in terms of the disparate points of power in society, the reifications, the lifeworlds, the systems, the desires, the hyper-realities and so on. But why cannot we have a theoretical discussion about the “norms”, the “reifications”, “systems”, “lifeworlds” multiple points of power projecting discourses and so on, in the three case studies in this way? All sorts of theoretical concepts can be projected onto the concepts of society involved in the three case studies and each of the case studies contains a justification to suggest that some of the major activities depicted within them, both on the part of the dominant players and on the part of the resisters, were heavily involved with public relations practices. If this can be admitted then surely a theoretical study of public relations involvement with society in these matters in these case studies at the level indicated in this thesis is warranted? In fact I suggest that there is a warrant for studying public relations as the rhetoric of modern society generally. Furthermore I suggest that such a study would find that, in its orthodox form, public relations will be shown by such a study to be best characterised as “privatised rhetoric for privatised governance”. But such a conception is only possible if the oppositional nature of society, implicit in Habermas’s theory, is constantly kept in mind.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has argued for the relevance of the Habermassian perspective in public relations theory. It has further flagged the dangers of the rhetorical approach to public relations theory while still maintaining that rhetorical theory, informed by some Habermassian perspectives, would none the less be valuable for analysing public relations.
This chapter concludes my own personal suggestions for how public relations might be better theorised. It is placed after the chapter on the current state of theory in public relations textbooks in order to stress the contrast between the poverty of theory in those textbooks and a direction which might be possible. It is also placed as the penultimate chapter to a concluding chapter which looks at the likely future directions of public relations scholarship, in order to make a further contrast – the contrast to how this scholarship is likely to develop. The juxtaposition I suggest enables one to be worried about the poverty of theory which is also evident in these future plans. There is an increasing amount of work emerging which is in a similar vein to this thesis. However, as the concluding chapter will explain, I do not feel sanguine that this work will make changes to the teaching of public relations in universities in the short term which I feel is needed.
Chapter Eleven

A Critique Of Current University Teaching And Research Of Public Relations Theory

Introduction
Co-author of Toxic Sludge Is Good For You: Lies Damned Lies and the Public Relations Industry: John Stauber admits that he himself engages in public relations. He says anyone who tries to get a message across to the public is engaging in public relations with a small p and small r\textsuperscript{25}. Stauber and the authors he cites\textsuperscript{26} are eager to expose unethical manipulation of public opinion and few would criticise them for this. In his critique Stauber seizes on Bernays’ book Propaganda to compare Bernay’s vision of “The conscious and intelligent manipulation of the organised habits and opinions of the masses”\textsuperscript{27} with Hitler’s exercise of the same activity\textsuperscript{28}. Exhibiting distinction as a rhetor, Stauber flourishes this Hitlerian Quod Erat Demonstrandum to label public relations as beyond the pale. But Stauber’s own contradiction and obvious skill in this area throws into question attempts to convict public relations activity as anti-democratic. Public relations textbooks and practitioners may be too sanguine about the uses public relations skills may be put to. But even the most trenchant critics - by their very use of the same measures - testify that public relations is valuable. This implies a need for a more level-headed examination by those from both sides of the argument into the ways public relations activity influences society. Despite my criticisms of current public relations textbooks, it has to be admitted that this level-headed examination has started in a few universities as a small number of public relations lecturers and researchers apply Critical Theory and Cultural Theory understandings to the subject. The rationale at the start of this thesis suggested that these investigations have the potential, not only to endow university public relations study with insights into what is legitimate public relations activity and what is not, but also to make public relations a ‘respectable’

\textsuperscript{26} Sharon Beder, Susan Trento, Joyce Nelson, David Michie, Alex Cary, Ben Bagdikian, Nicky Hager, Bob Burton, Sheldon Rampton.
Public Relations and Contemporary Theory

The current state of public relations education

university subject. This thesis has been partly about urging on these level-headed investigations and about offering my own contribution to this work. This final chapter looks at some of this level-headed work in progress and at the academic environment which it is going on within. This chapter reflects on how quickly, or, in fact, whether, these level-headed approaches are likely to be taken up. In making this assessment I particularly draw on a major review of public relations education: the report of the 1999 Commission on Public Relations Education.

My research, reading and discussions with colleagues via the Internet and at conferences overseas and in Australia during the course of my PhD candidacy, particularly during the last full time year of this study, has led me to the conclusion that there is a considerable task ahead if the goals implied above are to be reached. In my opinion one of the biggest difficulties in placing public relations on a more acceptable academic basis stems from a situation already touched on in the case study in this thesis involving the present condition of “the university”. The difficulty arises from what I would suggest are rather simplistic and too sanguine approaches to the concepts of both “public relations education” and “the university” itself. These are the approaches which I feel are held by many public relations educators and practitioners as well as many of their colleagues in the public relations industry and other parts of the academy. I have this concern particularly in view of my re-reading of public relations history in chapter four. What I had hoped to say, as a conclusion to this thesis, was that public relations scholars and teachers, increasingly informed by cultural and critical theory, will soon be able to securely underpin the practice of public relations. This underpinning will result from the application of theories of a type which would make public relations “respectable” within the university as well as more credible generally. This hope came from my belief that public relations could be far better understood if its activities were exposed to radical and systematic analysis via the methods of cultural and critical studies including the approaches of new rhetoric – new rhetoric informed by oppositional approaches. Such a critique would show the real place of public relations vis-à-vis society, making the benefits of public relations plain while at the same time exposing the foibles. The result of such an analysis would be to set public relations on a sound and ethical footing. However there are a few sticking points. Not the least of these is the contested notion of what the university itself is. My difficulty revolves around the
following questions: Is “the (contemporary) university” a respected region of society which is seen as reserved for independent thought – a generator of greater truths and ways of understanding for the benefit of people in general, independent of particular interests? Or is the contemporary university at odds with this ideal and in fact on a mission which is captive to specific and partial ideologies?

In trying to answer these questions I will first look at a few critiques from people who condemn universities’ moves towards a corporate culture which they say jeopardises universities’ basic ideals. These critics see universities being converted into assembly lines for producing vocationally oriented proto-professionals at the expense of exposing students to sufficient, genuine liberal studies and social critique. Public relations practices are often used to promote the corporate ethos. By promotion of the corporate ethos I mean the effort to seek public acceptance for large, united, commercial, or commercial-style organisations which are run under some utilitarian imperative to deliver goods, services, “knowledge” or profit in an efficient, “quality” and often mass-marketed “product”. This is as opposed to universities run as collegiate co-operatives where organisational issues and outcomes are of secondary importance to discussion, enquiry, research, debate, the expression of, and respect for, sometimes dissenting and minority schools of thought and so on. The collegiate university model would not be commensurate with concentration on the currently ruling imperatives to mass market “product”, product which is measurable in simplistic, numerical or other quantifiable ways, for instance “how many graduates got jobs in their first year out?” This does not mean that the collegiate model would not be concerned about how many graduates got jobs on their first year out. The collegiate model however would place more emphasis on the nature of the education of those graduates rather than on number counting. A question which I would like to pose below is: does, and if so how does, this coincidence of the contemporary university’s corporate imperative, affect public relations education’s ability to reflect upon itself? Within the contemporary university, public relations academics must reflect upon their activities within the context of an institution and institutional practices which can now be said to embrace most, if not all things corporate. Another main theme of the below discussion will be the thorough review of public relations education which took place in 1999 in the United States – the birthplace, the home and the motor of the modern public relations industry. This comprehensive examination resulted in
systematic recommendations for the future of public relations education. These recommendations will impact globally – not just in the United States. The review was accompanied by academic articles published in *Public Relations Review*. Although there is repeated reference to “critical thinking” in that literature it is unclear what “critical thinking” is meant to imply. In many educational texts critical thinking is equated with “sound reasoning” or “logical thought” rather than with the social critique envisaged throughout this thesis. Richard Paul in a substantial text *Critical Thinking: How to Prepare Students for a Rapidly Changing World* supports the proposition that it is important for people to think better because:

> The new form of “wealth” will no longer principally reside in the number of dollars in American pockets. Rather it will reside in the quality of the minds of our workers (Paul. 1995. p.6).

The quality of thinking here is expressed as a kind of individual’s “human capital” or “exchange value”, reminiscent of Marx or Bourdieu’s suggestions. The use of the term “critical thinking”, as opposed perhaps to the term “critical theory;” “critical studies;” or perhaps something like: “reflective self-examination of the discipline” underlines a continuing dearth of social critique from within the community of public relations scholars. As we will see there is some such critique, but it appears to be still confined to erudite journals, conference compilations or other specialist publications and does not seem to have much consequence for the education of thousands of graduates in public relations who leave university with public relations qualifications each year. I will be asking if it is possible that the far reaching initiatives flowing from the 1999 commission which are presently underway in public relations education at universities, mostly in America, but also world-wide, will miss an opportunity to enlist such meaningful critique. I will be arguing that such fundamental, rigorous and sound “academic” critique is increasingly necessary. It is necessary in an area of activity where I suggest the currently aporic historical analysis and where unsympathetic general public criticism, are reducing any hopes of public relations being recognised as a legitimate profession. I will be arguing this last point with reference to my previously made suggestions about the history of public
relations and the apparent obscuring of theoretical aspects and inferences of this history. The chapter will conclude with some suggestions about how contemporary public relations academics and their allies in professional associations might respond to this less than satisfactory situation.

The literature would seem to suggest that most of the issues to do with the contemporary university raised in this section apply generally in the UK, US and Australia, although Australian examples are more familiar to the writer of this thesis. Contemporary critiques on “the university” tend to include some or all of the following components: Universities are to do with “academic freedom”, that is the right to propose and propagate notions and understandings which may be in contradiction to those of the authorities who are in power in the society (Coady. 2000; Russell. 1993; Coaldrake & Stedman. 1998; Menand. 1996). This freedom has venerable antecedents which are recorded at different points in history back to the ancient Greeks (Hoye. 1997; Patterson. 1997. p16). Next there is a long standing debate about the balance between “utility” and “liberal studies” in universities. In other words, how much should universities be vocationally oriented and how much should they prioritise academic and intellectual development of individuals with teaching which does not immediately produce a surgeon, a journalist, an engineer, a teacher, a social worker? How much should universities propagate the arts and sciences independent of their application in vocations and professions? (Newman. 1854; Coady. 2000; Pelikan. 1992; Evans. 1999). Many writings in this vein refer back to mid 19th century Cardinal John Newman’s prioritising of “Liberal Education” over “Utility” in sections such as:

This process of training, by which the intellect, instead of being formed or sacrificed to some particular or accidental purpose, some specific trade or profession, or study or science, is disciplined for its own sake, for the perception of its own proper object, and for its own highest culture, is called Liberal Education (Newman. 1987. p174).

These debates about academic freedom and the ultimate purpose of “the university” then become embroiled in a political contest over the social, economic and technological
circumstances and direction and access to the contemporary university. As the 20th century progressed there was a re-think about the university’s economic and social role as the education of populations became more important for economies and as populations in general demanded better education. Access increased for those who traditionally had not been given access to a university education. These were large numbers of intellectually able people barred because of the hitherto rationing of university places among only the wealthy or the bright who won a scholarship or passed some rigorous form of selection. From the 1960s, as this rationing declined and a broader range of the population entered higher education, there were accusations that universities were too conservative and were defending the “grand narratives” of establishment ideas. However this politically ‘left’ criticism was superseded by multiple strands of an unclear, postmodern critique. Some writers critical of postmodern thinking characterise the latter approach as a situation where nobody seems to have any faith in the “correct way” of thinking. Such critics sometimes see a danger of postmodern thinking leading to a collapse into utilitarian expediency where institutions such as the contemporary university, or the news and information media, cease to be guided by any particular social rules or morality. Such critics ask the question: How can the academic subjects which are the fields of Liberal Studies be defended and advocated when their prestige is continually undermined by theoretical critique which implies that disparate academic subjects are all part of the same word game of a discredited grand narrative? Why not just pick a word game – a particular narrative which justifies the position one wants to advocate across a number of disciplines? Now, in terms of public relations, is there not a danger that just such a cynical approach might assist or covertly justify a professional course which is bringing in a lot of money just when the government says universities have to bring in a lot of money? Critics suggest that the danger of postmodern thinking approaches is that any set of guiding principles may be followed if they appear useful at that particular moment and are presented persuasively enough in terms of the immediate material and political needs of the university institution (Crittenden, 1997; Readings. 1997; Smith & Webster. 1997). In brief the argument of this set of critics is that defensible Liberal Studies are being asset stripped, hollowed out and converted to ‘utility studies’ in a situation where far more people are accessing the services of the cash strapped, corporatised, postmodern university. This emphasis on utility, contingent
thinking and mass access is accompanied by a reduction in the rewards, working conditions, autonomy, credibility, job security and thus the administrative and political power of academics to determine the principles and the standards of universities. The casualisation of academic staff is singled out for concern in both the Australian and the American literature. Instead of power in universities being held in a collegiate way among communities of respected scholars it is now held in a line management way from the university executive downward – the corporate model (Coady. 2000; Readings. 1997; Nelson. 1997; Wernick. 1991. p154). As General Secretary of the (Australian) National Tertiary Education Union: Graham McCulloch famously said at the 1997 National Council, “Academics are simply paid employees now.” This “corporatisation” of the university is associated with a loss of priority for Liberal Studies and instead a promotion of professional and vocational studies. The situation is currently so bad for arts faculties that it leads to pleading to make a liberal studies-utility link which might be characterised as a “sell out” by liberal studies to utility. For instance a feature article in the Higher Education section of *The Australian* by Professor at Queensland University: Roly Sussex was sub-headed: “Who says the bachelor of arts degree is non-vocational mind therapy? It’s time for the humanities to stand up and be counted” (Sussex. 2000). The implication of the heading is that contemporary “Liberal Studies” is having to justify itself in terms of utility. From the US Carey summarises the social danger of this erosion:

The central point is this. With the spread of professional education through undergraduate life and the professional spirit throughout all education, the central issue…is whether education is to be understood in instrumental or noninstrumental terms. Professional education is necessarily instrumental and inevitably, to some degree, ideological. But only insofar as the education at the core of university life is conceived as non-instrumental can education be insulated from the purposes which political and economic interests wish to project onto it…The dismissal of education as necessarily ideological implies not only that education is an instrument available for exploitation by hierarchically entrenched groups, but that it can be nothing else (Carey. 1993).
Crittenden (1997) sets out a manifesto for the ‘re-taking’ of the university by the forces of collegiality. He includes such lines as:

…The first objective of the teaching program is to provide an advanced liberal (or general) education for all students…

…In my view the two most basic studies for the coherence of a university education are philosophy and the history of ideas...

…Historically, universities have always included some professional or occupational studies along with liberal education…

…The expansion of occupational studies is not in itself at odds with the distinctive role of universities as long as two key conditions are satisfied. First, all who enroll in an occupational program should undertake some form of liberal education at university level. Second, the nature of the occupation should be such that its effective practice depends upon a substantial body of related theoretical knowledge (Crittenden. 1997. p10).

Crittenden goes on to suggest that there are many worthy occupations which do not warrant university education because of this theoretical knowledge requirement. This brings us to the discussion about public relations, utility, liberal studies and theory in the context of the contemporary corporatised university. The question which this chapter of the thesis poses is the following: is the current university academically robust enough to provide a legitimate quality of theoretical knowledge to the profession of public relations? To be tempted by a pun… This is not an academic question. It is not an academic question because there is no point in public relations being “fitted out” with a fine suit of theoretical clothes which are principally taken from the utilitarian and postmodernist fashion racks of an economically motivated, corporate style of university. It simply will not wash with the public in general. It is only if the Liberal Studies ideal of “the university” is defended rigorously that its theoretical work will have any respect and currency. And it is only if public relations allows itself to be critiqued in the most thorough way by institutions which are genuinely authoritative in the eyes of the public in general, that there is any hope that such an exercise of critique will be taken seriously. It is from this platform that we move to
the other stages of this critique to discuss whether the evidence so far, in particular the evidence of the 1999 commission on public relations education, indicates that credible public relations education is or is not taking place in universities.

Critique in public relations education and research

(1) Education

In 1999, 47 educators and practitioners representing eight major, mostly American public relations and communication associations, formed a commission to examine and report on public relations education. Many of the academics involved and their colleagues published papers on public relations education in the Spring 1999 edition of Public Relations Review. The full report of the commission was made available on the web site of the Public Relations Society of America, one of the contributing organisations. The report was dated October 1999. The web report and the articles convey the impression of a university discipline which is becoming more sure of itself and assertive in planning for its place in the university system. Much of the report and the articles are taken up with suggesting “ideal” curricula at both undergraduate and postgraduate level. The perspective of this present critique is to ask whether the papers and the report convey an apparent self-reflective understanding of the role of public relations in society in general, or whether this very important review was more an inward looking shuffling of resources. As Lasswell wrote in a chapter entitled “The Public Relations Function” in 1941:

We are well informed about the strategy and technique of many specialists in the field. There is no mystery about the variety of channels or the versatility of the symbols at the disposal of the practiced expert. But there has never been an exhaustive and dispassionate study of the whole public relations function in the daily practice of modern society (Lasswell. 1941. p73).

This present thesis asks the question whether the commission’s suggestions on improvements to public relations education are of the kind which Lasswell says are lacking or of the kind which he suggests are abundant. Later we will apply this same question to public relations research. We also ask questions about the commission’s apparent lack of
attention to the prestige of “the university” in the context of the importance for university critique to carry weight outside the university as discussed above.

The 16,000 word report of the Commission on Public Relations: Public Relations for the 21st Century: A Port of Entry as presented on the Public Relations Society of America web site in June 2000 mentioned “liberal arts” eight times and “business” 16 times. There are two references to the International Association of Business Communicators. None of the contributing organisations have “Arts” in their title or appear obviously dedicated to the liberal arts. The report mentions “critical thinking skills” once; “critical thinking” once; “critical thinking and problem solving” twice; “Critically analyse and synthesise the body of knowledge” once; “critical essays” once; and “rhetorical-critical approaches” once. The last three “critical” aspects appear in the context of Masters teaching. The word “theory” appears 30 times. It is usually applied in a general sense such as, when it is used as an isolated word in a list of other aspects of study, eg: “as well as theory, research, communication processes, planning,” or when it is part of vertical lists which include “public relations theory” as one of the lines. It is occasionally applied in a clearly instrumental sense:

Students should be taught within an environment in which they learn to provide leadership through use of communication, social and behavioural science theory and research techniques to help organizations analyze and solve problems and take advantage of opportunities that have public relations consequences.

Very occasionally “theory” appears in a more sociological sense such as when it is associated with “philosophy of science” in the section on PhD studies. The word “ethics” appears 13 times. The word “philosophy” appears 5 times. The word “university” appears nine times not as part of a name or location. In particular “university” appears in a quote from former chancellor of the University of California at Berkeley: Dr. Clark Kerr. This quote gives the report its sub-title:

Some new professions are being born; others are becoming more professional, for example, business administration and social work. The university
becomes the chief port of entry for these professions. In fact, a profession gains its identify by making the university the port of entry (Kerr. 1995).

The choice of Kerr as an exemplar caps off the clearly instrumental tone of the commission’s report. In the first edition of the book which the commission quotes from Kerr writes:

The basic reality for the university is the widespread recognition that new knowledge is the most important factor in economic and social growth. We are just now perceiving that the university’s invisible product, knowledge, may be the most powerful single element in our culture affecting the rise and fall of professions and even of social classes, of regions and even of nations (Kerr. 1972).

Kerr’s 1970s use of corporate terminology in relation to the university, e.g: “product” and his celebration of the utility of the university, is in line with the general tone of the 1999 commission’s report. Although the report is clearly about the location of public relations in “the university” - the celebrated and by implication, prestigious “port of entry”, there is no discussion of the contemporary controversy over of this location. There is no reference to the current state of the contemporary university in the terms discussed in the first section of this chapter. The application of ethics and of “philosophy” in public relations studies are left unexplained. Similarly “critical thinking” which showed up as a priority need from employers of graduates, is not explained. As suggested above, “critical thinking” in the context of the report, would seem to imply logical reasoning or sound decision making skills as in standard texts on critical thinking (Paul. 1995; Wilen. 1994; van Hooft, et. al, 1995; Barry & Rudinow. 1990). It does not seem to be applied in a way related to the “Critical Theory” or “Critical Studies” of the neo-Marxist Frankfurt School which engage with comprehensive critique of ideological practices in society. One is left to assume that, certainly at the undergraduate level, the commission is recommending no radical change to the existing style of the university teaching of public relations. This is an existing style which some might say is discredited by its lack of a political-science and cultural/critical theory context. There is no explicit call to the study of the political and
ideological effects of the practice of public relations. Further there seems to be no consciousness of the ambiguities of the teaching of a central practice of “the corporation” within an organisation which is rapidly corporatising, despite the considerable controversy which this corporatisation has caused - certainly in the UK and Australia.

A reading of the collection of articles on this subject in the spring edition of Public Relations Review 1999, which was drawn on by the commission, gives a mixed impression of how seriously academics take the notion of a meta-critique of public relations education in the university. It is not clear if they are addressing Laswell’s desire for “an exhaustive and dispassionate study of the whole public relations function in the daily practice of modern society.” These articles have intriguing lines which may hint in this direction among dozens of more mundane lines on recommendations for the ideal curriculum. However what priority these academics put on an ‘academically free’ project as opposed to a more instrumental mission to deliver conventionally competent practitioners and teachers of orthodox public relations practice, is not made clear.

The undergraduate studies level discussed by these articles are mainly concerned with: resourcing pedagogy (Coombs & Rybacki); comparing the education outcomes desired for graduates by employers and academics (Dostal Neff et. al.); another paper similar to the latter (Stacks et. al); an introductory paper to the studies which the commission drew on (Kruckeberg & Paluszek); academic assessment methods (Rybacki & Lattimore); and clarification of the undergraduate curriculum (Van Leuven). The Dostal Neff et. al. paper includes the desire by academics to have students: “understand the relationship between public relations and society”. A paper from Miller and Kernisky stresses the “persuasive,” “rhetorical” and “theory” characteristics of public relations. When the papers deal with Masters and Ph.D. level public relations education they sometimes allude to more comprehensive sociological underpinnings to the activities of public relations. Toth refers to “cultural studies/analysis” and says: “students should have a working knowledge of society, the liberal arts…” Russell writes a mostly, seemingly business studies narrative about the need for team building and various business skills, but has a line on the need for: “rhetoric/communication/cultural studies and/or liberal arts.” Vasquez and Botan in their paper; “Models for theory-based M.A. and Ph. D. programs” hint at a cynicism which may underlie much of the public relations intellectual project:
As the field has developed however, the demand for theory based training in public relations has become greater, in part to fulfill the need for qualified university instructors who possess both the skills needed to teach the practice and the academic and theoretic credentials needed to successfully meet the intellectual challenges inherent in schools of liberal arts and sciences (Vasquez and Botan. 1999).

Also:

Theory is central to the body of public relations knowledge and is necessary for advancing public relations as an academic field of study (Ibid).

But after this indication of credentialism Vasquez and Botan are clear about the instrumental purpose of the research and use of theory for M.A. and PhD. courses:

The goal of the theory-based M.A. program is to prepare graduates for study in a theory based PhD. program, rather than for the professional practice of public relations…The goal of the PhD. program is to prepare graduates for a career of teaching, research and service (Ibid).

Presumably undergraduates who will mostly go out into industry do not have to burden themselves so much with notions of what they are doing in and to society? One cannot help forming the impression from reading some of these papers that sometimes concepts such as “cultural studies” “rhetorical studies” and even “liberal studies” are simply thrown in as a matter of protocol. There is very little in the way of explaining the importance of these subjects or of their priority or place within curricula which are bristling with more self-evident lines such as: “Handle the media professionally;” “plan for and manage crises effectively” and so on. As discussed previously in this thesis, if one looks at “theory” in the present public relations textbooks “public relations theory” would seem to mean a smorgasbord of all sorts of different sociological, communications and
psychological suggestions handed down from a century of various academic disciplines. There have been attempts to define specifically “public relations theory”. For the last two decades these attempts have centred around James Grunig. However, as I discussed in chapter nine, Grunig’s contributions can be seen as the production of instrumental theory for the operation of orthodox public relations rather than theory, such as that of Habermas, which can be used to place public relations within the wider social context. Following the recent text edited by Heath (2001) it would seem that public relations theory may be heading in the direction of rhetorical theory. However, as argued in chapters three and ten, this is still a direction which attempts to handle theory as an instrumental tool of the application of public relations, rather than as a critique of public relations vis-à-vis society in a sense which would satisfy Lasswell. One can be excused for thinking that whenever “theory” is mentioned by most public relations writers the term is meant to be understood and employed in predominantly instrumental ways to solve public relations “problems,” instead of, as we might say, to solve Lasswell’s “problem of public relations in general”. This jumble of approaches which has no over arching narrative, epistemology, or common theme, other than instrumentalism, might be seen as a vivid example of postmodernism at work in the contemporary university. If one theory does not suit one’s purposes “for advancing public relations as an academic field of study” (Vasquez & Botan. 1999), one is allowed to have another dip in the theory barrel to find an approach with more utility.

In reflecting on the commission on the future of public relations education one is in the end still unclear just what sort of theoretical notions about their work and its involvement with society the majority of graduates will take with them to their first jobs. It seems unclear whether “Lasswell’s Question” will be answered, or even posed in the minds of many university educated public relations practitioners in the 21st century. What seems likely however is that there will be continuing criticism from other, more traditional academics within the university who see this utilitarian, professional education activity expanding and perhaps displacing some of their activities and jobs. The likelihood is that concerns about the authenticity of “the university” will be accelerated by universities embracing the relatively uncritical teaching of an increasingly sophisticated pedagogy in what is at base a collection of skills, including the skill of critical thinking. In order for the teaching of public relations at university to leave a genuinely positive impression with the
public in general, two things need to be achieved. Firstly faith in “the university” as an independent realm of academic freedom has to be re-established. Secondly only genuine “academic” subjects should be admitted there. Public relations can only be a genuine academic subject if everyone involved with its teaching agrees publicly that there is a long way to go before there is a genuine critique about what public relations does in society. As Lasswell saw, public relations’ role in society needs to be theorised as a whole and this project needs to be separated from the present confusion where “theory” is usually enlisted by public relations academics in an instrumental way to serve the ends of utility only. If this project of improvement is not carried through, the distaste of the public in general for the practice of public relations will meld with a growing decline of prestige of the university and decline of prestige of university academics.

(2) Writings on public relations theory

This section acknowledges that, despite the pessimism expressed above, there is some valuable theoretical work on public relations going on in universities, albeit on a minority basis, and on a basis which is not taken up by the textbooks. I will offer a critique of these positive developments in terms of the “utility” versus “liberal studies” theme of university education which runs through this chapter.

Botan and Hazleton (1989) start the book which they edited: Public Relations Theory with an implication that the theories in it are intended to help people carry out the practice of public relations more expeditiously as well as to enhance understanding about public relations generally:

Theories may be viewed as functional solutions to problems, and it is the extent to which theories contribute to solving the problems associated with understanding, teaching or practicing public relations that will determine their worth (Botan and Hazleton. 1989. p11).

As befits the introductory chapter in a book on theory Botan and Hazleton point out that “metatheories” – that is the sets of overriding assumption within which people construct their theories: “are frequently unrecognised and influence choices of theory as well as method” (Botan and Hazleton. 1989. p7). In the next chapter Grunig, who is
perhaps the best known contemporary theorist of public relations, states his metatheoretical assumptions as the influences of models of symmetrical communication, systems theory and “interest group liberalism” (Grunig. 1989. p37). He says interest group liberalism:

…views the political system as a mechanism for open competition among interest or issues groups. Interest group liberalism looks to citizen groups to champion interests of ordinary people against unresponsive government and corporate structures (Ibid. p39).

For Grunig, if his two-way symmetrical model of public relations is faithfully employed, that is if corporations take notice of, and respond to, the wishes of citizens to the same extent that citizens have to take notice of and respond to corporations, a fair society will emerge:

Eventually I hope public relations will be practiced in a way that will make it a highly valued and effective force for resolving social conflict and improving the societies in which we live (Ibid. p41).

But surely the notion of “improving the societies in which we live” is, in itself a problematic term. One person’s “improvement” may be another’s tyranny depending on their relative political perspective and cultural analysis. For instance in chapter four I suggest that during the “Progressive Era” some social conflict was indeed resolved and some would say American society was improved. However others, including Dewey would later lament the cost in terms of the rise of ‘corporateness’ and the loss of individuality. But in any case Grunig’s sanguine, pluralist metatheory, which presumes citizens are able to mobilise in the way he describes, would seem to be challenged by, what is seemingly only an incidental aspect of Dozier and Lauzen (2000). Dozier and Lauzen would seem to go some of the way towards answering “Lasswell’s Question” and introducing liberal studies into mainstream public relations theory by employing critical theory to study activist groups. It must be said that Dozier and Lauzen would seem to be on the side of the
established public relations industry in this endeavour rather than the activists. They find they need to alert public relations scholars to the efficacy of critical theory because:

The world view of the critical school – which sees the mass media (and, inferentially, public relations) as a means of protecting and extending the influences of the wealthy and powerful – does not fit comfortably with the prevailing world views of scholars who study public relations (Dozier & Lauzen. 2000. p15).

Adoption of a critical studies perspective would be useful (have utility) because; “public relations scholars must consider unintended consequences of public relations practices at the society and individual levels.” (Ibid. p3) and because:

Public relations – as a management function in organisations – may have little tactical or strategic interest in adjusting to such powerless people. Powerless publics, however, should be of great interest to scholars of public relations, precisely because they are not adequately accounted for in the practice of public relations (Ibid. p12).

Dozier & Lauzen do not adopt a concept of materialism to underpin what might be considered economistic or even neo-Marxist theory implications. They do however adopt the interesting concept of “deep pockets” in its stead … “Many social movements directly affect the success or failure of organisations with deep pockets and public relations departments.” (Ibid. p13) … “Critical theory and research on the other hand, takes the public relations scholar outside the relationships between powerful organisations and publics with deep pockets...” (Ibid. p16) … “At the macrolevel, the net effect of such subsidies is to drive out viewpoints that lack patrons with deep pockets to underwrite the information subsidy.” (Ibid. p18). The latter quote is in relation to the media relations of well resourced organisations. Clearly Dozier & Lauzen are not as hopeful as Grunig about either the capabilities of activist groups or the intentions of corporations and other powerful organisations to engage in symmetrical relationships with their shallow pocketed publics. The apparently necessary turn to critical theory by Dozier & Lauzen’s is tinged with
ambiguity however. They point to the unusualness of their approach within (orthodox) public relations scholarship:

Critical theorists play an important role as gadflies and critics of contemporary empirical-administrative research in public relations...the gadfly role is an important one for critical theorists as they stimulate the rest of us to examine our own work reflexively and critically (Ibid. p16).

This quote would seem rather worrying. On the one hand it implies that on the whole public relations research scholars and by implication the university teachers of public relations, are not reflexive or self critical. Such an assertion would confirm some of the worst fears about public relations in the university which are expressed in this thesis. The specific “gadfly” who Dozier & Lauzen refer to is Karlberg (1996) who opens his article with the express intention of (as I am putting it) answering “Lasswell’s Question:”

Despite the pervasive influence of public relations, very little effort has gone into understanding its role in, and effects on, contemporary society…there has been inadequate academic effort to explore the wider social implications of public relations activity…Any review of the literature demonstrates that, to date, public relations research has been overwhelmingly instrumental (Karlberg. 1996. p263 - 265).

In contrast to Dozier & Lauzen, Karlberg writes in a straightforward style about the lack of professional experience or material resources of groups which wish to oppose the manipulative and patronising effects of organised public relations (Ibid. p267). Karlberg points to the inadequacies of the symmetrical model approach to public relations theory with its pluralist society assumptions. He advocates that public relations resources should be made available to oppositional groups in a similar way to the provision of civic journalism or public journalism – journalism resources which are sometimes organised by sympathetic professionals or academics for oppositional advocacy. Karlberg mentions among the handful of scholars who we might say are concerned about “Lasswell’s
Question:” Toth, Gandy, Pearson, Heath, Cheney, Dionisopolous and from a right perspective Olasky. The writings of these scholars are included within the books *Public Relations Theory* and *Rhetorical and Critical Approaches to Public Relations*. Another US book in the same genre is *Public Relations and Rhetorical Criticism*. In a similar vein from the UK comes *Critical Perspectives in Public Relations*. For the rest of this section I will briefly examine some more recent, similarly oriented articles, chapters and papers. These are some of the writings from the special edition of the *Australian Journal of Communication* Vol. 24. No. 2. 1997; some of the articles in *The Handbook of Public Relations* edited by Heath in 2001; and some of the papers to two 2000 international conferences concerned with public relations theory. This chapter and chapter six were presented as papers at those conferences.

The special public relations theory edition of the *Australian Journal of Communication* Vol. 24. No. 2. 1997, is sub-titled “On the Edge”. The editors say this is in recognition of the fact that the contributors are writing:

…on the edge in terms of theory and of geography. Public relations scholarship stands challenged to converse with an array of competing paradigms and discourses in a range of cultural contexts…What was once mainstream is in imminent danger of becoming irrelevant (Ibid. pix).

The “Edge” refers to actual distance from the US of the mostly Australian, New Zealand and UK special edition contributors as well as their intellectual distance from the “dominant North American paradigm” of theory. Below I present a very brief summary of some papers in this special edition, again from the point of view of whether they appear to answer “Lasswell’s Question” and the utility versus liberal studies perspective.

Judy Motion suggests how Foucault and Fairclough’s approaches to discourse can be used as aids to understanding how, what might be called self-managed public relations activities, can create an image or “public identity” for individuals. These discourses might for instance be produced by the choice of political topic and language which a speaker uses (Motion. 1997. p10) or even their hairstyle (Ibid. p13). The approach is reminiscent of Goffman’s *Presentation of Self in Every Day Life*. The approach would seem intended to
inform more comprehensive public relations programs on gender equality issues by suggesting how ideas and attitudes are narrated through discourses created with certain symbolic measures. This approach would seem to work at the level of “Lasswell’s Statement” rather than “Lasswell’s Question” although the approach fits in with my notion of petit public relations – the public relations of the ordinary people, of ordinary life – rather than the reservation of public relations and its concepts to the ambit of dominant organisations. The application of re-theorised public relations notions to feminist interests might be seen as liberal studies thinking in the sense of not using the public relations paradigm in its usual corporation dominated, instrumental manner. Instead a reconceived public relations is used to empower individuals.

Leitch and Neilson are concerned with the: “power differentials between discourse participants” (Ibid. p17) in “one dimensional public relations” (Ibid p18). They refer to Habermas and use concepts including “lifeworld” and “wars of position” (Ibid. p29) and the “multiple subject positions occupied by individuals” (Ibid. p30) to describe a more complex notion of “publics” and their “relations” than is common in public relations textbooks. These textbooks tend to prioritise a simplistic use of systems theory for understanding peoples’ relationship to organisations and issues. While potentially an instrumental aid to the practitioner, this article is clearly a critique of many of the presumptions of mainstream public relations textbooks. In that sense it opens the field of public relations to the potential for wider political and cultural criticism. One is still watching out for this sort of thinking in mainstream textbooks.

L’Etang is as scathing as she is erudite about the lack of philosophical and epistemological attention and general intellectual rigour in the treatment of the notion of “the truth” in public relations education and research. L’Etang suggests:

Critical theories about rhetoric and philosophy can widen the teaching and understanding of the concept of persuasion that may otherwise be limited to psychological functionalism. Such debates can aid the development of public relations and propaganda theory and take the debate beyond the simplistic ‘propaganda = lying = bad, public relations = truth = good’ definition (Ibid. p49).
L’Etang is clearly operating across the realms of both the vocational “utility” realm of the university and the “liberal studies” of the university. She is making a contribution to answering “Lasswell’s Question” and preserving the stature of the university in terms of the professional colonisation discussion of the first section of this chapter. L’Etang’s contribution is acknowledged in a following paper in the same volume by one of her American public relations theorist targets for criticism: the aforementioned Robert Heath.

As introduced above, the three other sources of this review of interesting, more recent theory in public relations are the *Handbook of Public Relations* which is a 2001 compilation of 62 papers, mostly by American scholars of public relations. It includes some papers from some of the leading contemporary theorists of public relations. The *Handbook* is prefaced by editor Robert Heath who says: “I believe that this handbook, short of being perfect or comprehensive, distinguishes itself by what it says. Even the casual reader can sense a revolution, or an evolution”. The next source is *Perspectives on Public Relations Research* which is a 2000 compilation of 9 papers associated with the International Public Relations Research Symposium. The symposium, which attracts mainly European scholars, was held for its seventh consecutive year at Lake Bled, Slovenia in July 2000. The third source is 11 conference papers to the two-day public relations seminar “The Business of Organising Identities” at Stirling University, Scotland in June 2000. Stirling is the base of two of the leading UK exponents of “esoteric” theory in public relations: Jacquie L’Etang and Magda Pieczka. There was a contingent from Waikato University, New Zealand at the Stirling seminar. Both the Stirling seminar and the Slovenian symposium were also attended by North Americans and Australians, including myself. As this thesis chapter obviously cannot go into great detail over the total of 82 papers, this section will instead proceed by short summaries of each of these sources followed by comments on three papers from each source which seem to me to be relevant to my thesis.

The *Handbook of Public Relations* is not a compilation of exclusively theoretical papers. Its section headings are: Defining the Discipline; Defining the Practice; In Search of Best Practice; Public Relations in Cyberspace; and Globalising Public Relations. Many of the papers show a determined mood of suggesting how public relations can be carried out better as opposed to a critique or theorisation of public relations. None the less most papers enlist notions from the smorgasbord of instrumental and critical approaches which have
been applied to public relations, some of which have been encountered in various parts of
this thesis. What might be described as the leading theoretical paper of this collection –
Heath’s paper on ‘A Rhetorical Enactment Rationale for Public Relations: the Good
Organisation Communicating Well’ has already been described in some detail in chapter
three. It succeeds the first chapter in the book which is from James Grunig entitled ‘Two-
Way Symmetrical Public Relations; Past Present and Future’. In his chapter Grunig defends
his two way symmetrical model of public relations – the theory which, as noted elsewhere
in this thesis, has been a leading public relations theory for about two decades. I have
already noted Grunig’s comments that his theory was formed under the influence of, what I
would describe as the conservative, pre-cultural studies perspectives of: symmetrical
communication, systems theory and ‘interest group liberalism’. As such it is interesting to
look at a few of Grunig’s defensive comments in respect of the newer theoretical
approaches which challenge his perspective. He writes:

...critical scholars...typically have viewed public relations as ‘necessarily
partisan and intrinsically undemocratic’ (L’Etang. 1996. p105). Thus to them, the
symmetrical model represents a utopian attempt to make an inherently evil practice
look good...Pieczka (1996) also objected to the use of the symmetrical model as a
normative theory of how public relations should be practiced as well as a
descriptive theory of how public relations is practiced...In a professional field such
as public relations, I believe scholars must go beyond criticising theories; they also
have the obligation to replace theories with something better – an obligation that
many critical scholars do not fulfill...Moloney (1997) wrote that this naïve utopian
portrayal of the two-way symmetrical model has been adopted by public relations
educators in the United Kingdom, particularly as a way of justifying the teaching of
public relations when the popular perception of public relations is one of
opprobrium (Grunig. 2001. p16-17).

Grunig goes on to criticise critical scholars for distorting his theory as presuming a
pluralist society (Ibid. p17) and for over playing the power of organisations to dominate
citizens. He makes the claim in his defence:
Indeed many public relations practitioners believe their organisations have lost control to activist groups. It is ironic that activist groups often use public relations to enhance their powers vis-à-vis corporations and government agencies (Ibid. p18).

I suggest that Grunig’s anti-critical studies remarks confirm the charge of conservatism and the essentially political-culturalraison d’être which I have tried to show has accompanied the practice of public relations from its inception. The last quote in particular demonstrates I believe the quite inappropriate belief in the presumed “ownership” of public relations practice by dominant organisations. I advocate the adoption of the differentiating notions of “orthodox” public relations and “petit” public relations in order to overcome this question of ‘ownership’. Why should it be “ironic” that the APU, Londoners who want a livable city and Australian Townspeople; “use public relations to enhance their powers vis-à-vis corporations and government agencies”’? In an e.mail

Steve: Good to hear from you again. I don't think you're interpreting my view of activist groups correctly, however. I have always believed that they practice public relations as much as any other organization. In fact, I have had my graduate students study the public relations of activist groups for several years. I reported some of this in my article in the January 2000 issue of the Journal of Public Relations Research and in the Handbook of Public Relations. Read pp. 18-20 more carefully. The only reason I said it was “ironic” that activist groups use public relations "to enhance their power" is that many critics have said that activist groups do not have power. The irony is that they use PR to enhance power that critics say they lack. My argument with those who study the public relations of activist groups is that I don't think they should practice public relations differently from other organizations. I do not believe that pure asymmetrical techniques are necessary--nor violence, direct action, or the like. Activist groups have to form relationships like anyone else. If you're implying that my theoretical approach is modernist rather than postmodernist, I would take strong issue with that also. I concur with Derina Holtzhausen (also in the January 2000 issue of JPRR) that public relations is a postmodern force in organizations that gives voice to public in management decision making--an in-house activist. I also probably would not agree that public relations should be rhetoric alone. As I understand rhetoric, it is mostly about arguing and debating and not about listening and collaborating. Isocrates did more of the latter, though, I understand, in comparison with Aristotle. When groups argue and debate they seldom listen to each other and end up playing up to sympathetic publics alone. As a result, conflict escalates with rhetoric and is not resolved. Bob Heath, it seems to me, does seem to be trying to integrate classical rhetoric with a more symmetrical approach. Perhaps that's why you're critical of him. I just finishing the final chapter of our third book on the Excellence study, which is a complete report and analysis of the data. Only a week ago I finished the chapter on models of public relations, which address these issues. Some of the conceptualization is the same as in the Handbook, but I also have added new material. Plus all of the new data are included. I'm also critical of what Jackie [L’Etang] and Magda [Pieczka] have said about the symmetrical theory. I believe they have used it as a straw man for their arguments without really understanding what they are criticizing. The theory is not organization-based, modernist, utopian, etc. Anyway, I'll attach that chapter to this message as well as the table of contents. This chapter will be published within the year, but you shouldn't cite it yet. Should you want to cite it, though, let me know and I'll figure out a way to do so. Best wishes for your dissertation.
Grunig suggested to me that he is merely pointing out an irony. He himself does not subscribe to this ‘ownership’ notion (see footnote). This being the case, Grunig is at least supporting my suggestion that many in the field of public relations are surprised by, or dismissive of, non-dominant groups using public relations. The “irony” involved in dominant organisations not recognising oppositional groups as equally entitled to use, and in some instances being very capable of using public relations, corresponds with the attitude of the times which saw the creation of the practice of public relations. This was a time, as outlined in chapter four, when dominant organisations used the methods of public relations in order to re-take the political initiative from troublesome oppositional groups. It is therefore perhaps not surprising that an idea may have become ingrained that ‘we’ the dominant groups know how to get control of the situation by skillful and well resourced public relations. ‘They’, the oppositional protesters, including at one time, a significant left wing body of opinion, do not have the organisation or the money to do this. It seems to me that it needs a left perspective where thinking has not been incorporated into the predominantly American corporatist mode in order to point out that…in modern democracy citizens should be allowed at least the same privileges of resort to rhetorical practice as they had in classical times and this rhetoric should not be privatised for the use of privatised governance only.

Shirley Leitch and David Neilson’s chapter in the *Handbook of Public Relations*, is titled: ‘Bringing Publics into Public Relations: New Theoretical Frameworks for Practice’. In this chapter Leitch and Neilson write:

There are obvious parallels between J. Grunig and Hunt’s (1984) two-way asymmetrical model and Habermas’s (1987) theory of instrumental rationality as well as between J. Grunig and Hunt’s two-way symmetrical model and Habermas’s theory of communicative action…However a major point of departure between the two lies in J. Grunig and Hunt’s attempt to attribute communicative action to systems organisations, whereas Habermas’s communicative action is characteristic of the lifeworld alone (Ibid. p132).

Jim Grunig [e.mail 24/1/01]
Leitch and Neilson identify some of the issues raised in my thesis and adopt, inter alia, Habermassian concepts in an attempt to solve them. One of their concerns is that:

Further development of the conceptual framework of public relations is also required before we can begin to develop links with appropriate theory on communicative ethics (Ibid. p138).

Leitch and Neilson say they raise more questions than they answer and suggest that there is much theoretical work to be carried out and that: “The development of a truly public centred public relations in both theory and practice, is a challenge that still confronts us as we enter the 21st century” (Ibid. p138).

In ‘The Mystery of Public Relations: Unraveling Its Past, Unmasking its Future’ Fritz Cropp and David Pincus suggest there is no one notion of what public relations is or what it should be used for. This they suggest explains the welter of the different definitions and theories of the field (Ibid. p193) which has contributed to its: “willy-nilly fragmentation [and] worsening public image” (Ibid. p194). Cropp and Pincus refer to the “mystery” of public relations and suggest this mystery has to be solved in order to save the profession. After discussing the possibility of changing the name – a recurring theme in the public relations field – they conclude that an important aspect of a successful future for public relations must be the increase of business education among its undergraduate students. While fully in favour of all aspects of education for undergraduates, I suggest that this chapter maintains the restricted vision which I have attributed to the orthodox public relations cognoscenti. I suggest a major point which Cropp and Pincus, and many writers in the same vein miss, for reasons which I have repeatedly explained and tried to explicate with the use of theory, is to do with public relation’s raison d’etre as a producer of reality. What Cropp and Pincus and similar people appear to overlook is that the production of reality is one of the most fundamentally disputed realms of society in late modernity. Nietzsche would seem to think that an individual’s, or small groups’ production and defence of a particular reality is an epiphenomenon which is likely to be over-determined by the vagaries of far more powerful herd-like impulses (footnote 16, chapter five).
European (including Australian and New Zealand) left informed academic approaches however tend to take issue with such defeatist determinism. In contrast, a wide vein of American attitudes, as displayed by the public relations cognoscenti, do not even seem to realise the possibility of such dissent and divergence. I suggest that it is this cultural aporia on the part of many of the predominantly American establishment of the public relations industry and academia, as exampled by the Cropp and Pincus chapter, which has for so long been the cause of the poverty of theory in the field of public relations.

The preface to the 2000 *Perspectives on Public Relations Research* advertises that the book will:

Provide valuable insights into the theories underpinning current public relations thinking and practice and illustrate the diversity of perspectives that characterises this evolving disciplinary field. Key issues discussed include: [*inter alia*]…the feminisation of public relations…the function of rhetorical study in our understanding of modern corporate dialogue…international perspectives…the impact of culture…historical-German perspectives (Ibid. preface).

In her article in *Perspectives on Public Relations Research*: ‘Public Relations and Rhetoric: history, concepts, future’ Elizabeth Toth writes:

In studying the contributions of rhetorical perspectives to the field of public relations, the predominant thinking has concerned a corporate advocate or person. While traditional rhetorical theory focused on identifiable individuals as senders or speakers, rhetorical scholars studying public relations have argued that organisations use individuals to craft messages that will represent the corporation or organisation in the contest to win public opinion…the application of organisational rhetoric to the practice of public relations relied on a metaphor distinct from the traditional rhetorical view of a contest or wrangle in the public sphere…(Ibid. p129-134).
Here Toth is warning about the particular way that rhetoric has been taken up by public relations theorists. This is a warning which I also sound, particularly in chapters three and ten of this thesis. Toth goes on to summarise the application of rhetorical theory to public relations during the 1990s. She conveys a - to me - rather disappointing picture of the instrumental use of the tools of rhetorical studies and concludes, appearing to share my concern:

However, rhetorical studies of public relations may have reached their greatest concentration in the 1990s. Little followed the book of articles by Toth and Heath [Elizabeth Toth and Robert Heath] published in 1992. It may be that the rhetorical perspective has been too critical of public relations without the directions provided in these studies to further rhetoric’s critical aims (Ibid. p141).

I enlist Toth’s comments in favour of my argument about the general mood of the suppression of, the steering away from, theories which offer the most potentially potent and meaningful critique of public relations. I have previously argued that this suppression and avoidance is impelled by the conservative nature and history of public relations. I suggest that the corporatised university, where academic freedom is limited, allows this situation to prevail.

In his article: ‘Public Relations: the cultural dimension.’ Toby Macmanus, who teaches public relations at a UK university and works with Maloney, cites Raymond Williams, Stuart Hall, Geertz, Bourdieu, Dewey, Mead, Carey, McLuhan, Baudrillard, Jameson, Habermas and Giddens to establish principles of culture, communication and society in preparation for his discussion. In his conclusion Macmanus says:

This chapter has sought to illustrate how the discipline of public relations is embedded within a broader framework of social theory and culture…In the way that Habermas, in his early work used the idealized notion of the ‘public sphere’ as a foundation to critically evaluate western society, so Banks’s notion of an idealized community oriented public relations offers a basis for a critical evaluation of public relations (Ibid. p174).
Macmanus explains Banks’s notion of an idealized community as:

On the basis that all organisations for better or worse, help to constitute the fabric of communities, [Banks] concludes that all organisations have a social responsibility for ‘nurturing the development of positive and supportive communities’…Public relations communication should therefore be directed to that end, as well as seeking to secure for the organisation a favourable reputation (Ibid. p172).

According to Macmanus, Banks’s thesis stems from a revision of Kruckeberg and Stark’s (1988) thesis that an important purpose of public relations is that: “it should recreate or maintain the sense of community that has become eroded by the effects of modern mass communication and transportation” (Ibid. p172). I have already expressed my opposition to Kruckeberg and Stark’s thesis in chapter three. Macmanus’s project by contrast would seem to be in line with my thesis in alerting people to, not just the efficacy of contemporary cultural and critical theories to a study of public relations, but rather the intellectual responsibility of ethical public relations scholars to pursue this direction of research.

In the introduction to Perspectives on Public Relations Research, Moss, Verdic and Warnaby write:

While current thinking about public relations theory remains dominated by the work of a relatively small number of largely US-based scholars, their work has come under increasing critical review from an emerging body of international scholars, often working from different disciplinary traditions, who are bringing fresh and sometimes challenging insights to bear on existing conceptual frameworks and models of public relations… (Ibid. p3).

I hope that this present thesis illustrates the above point and illuminates some of the debates and disciplinary politics surrounding the problematics to do with these: “fresh and sometimes challenging insights”.

286
Most of the papers to the two-day public relations seminar “The Business of Organising Identities” at Stirling University, Scotland in June 2000 were in line with a major implication of this present thesis. This is the implication that the work of public relations, and allied activity, fixes the identities and creates the culture in relation to the organisations or institutions which the public relations work is carried out on behalf of. The papers at this seminar were, I suggest, predominately to do with public relations activity which involved asymmetrical communication – the projection of an understanding, rather than symmetrical discussion. The most asymmetrical example, a paper about a misleading program of publicity to cover up harmful genetic modifications to commercially farmed salmon in New Zealand, showed rhetorical activity pushed well beyond the limits of any approved rhetorical techniques, ancient or modern. This paper was more about the ethical implications involved in the cover up than any theorising of, what was a series of blatant and quite unsubtle activities (Kay Weaver and Judy Motion). There was a paper on public relations work for the Scottish Government which discussed various stages of distrust and reconciliation between the main Scottish politician and his rhetoricians as well as a discussion of contemporary Scottish political public relations. The paper was perhaps more about difficulties in public relations practice rather than about theory (David Miller). Another, more overtly theoretical paper used Bourdieu’s theories to conceptualise the way political parties position themselves in public consciousness (Juliet Roper). To my mind the papers overall could be characterised as: The polite application of cultural theory to the public relations process. I would argue that they could be used as furthering the argument about the significant impact which public relations and allied practices have on worldviews. My criticism however is that I feel the papers were designed more for discussions among students of cultural studies than for discussion among students of public relations. I did not feel that any of them were directed to delivering a hard impact, of the type implicitly advocated by this thesis, on the implications of public relations practice which is needed.

Increasing criticism of public relations and calls for more intellectual rigour

There is an increasing and increasingly detailed, intelligent literature which carries scathing attacks on the contemporary practice of public relations: Beder (1997); Carey
Ewen (1996) in particular mounts a vigorous and detailed 470 page critique to justify his claim that:

PR experts, political consultants, social psychologists, merchandisers, advertising copywriters and the like…target particular groups in an idiom they will perceive to be their own. Democracy has given way to demography as the prevailing American faith (Ewen. 1996. p405).

Ewen argues that the expert handling of communication is now catastrophically pervasive and out of the control of ordinary people. For Ewen, claims that public relations can be beneficial to society are usually a mockery. He advocates sound education in the processes of public relations and other communication management in order to counter this pathology of democracy and to salvage the processes of communication which are vital to democratic society (Ibid. p410-414). Ewen charts the rise of public relations out of the activities of the late 19th century and early 20th century press agents. He examines the public relations pioneers, notably Ivy Lee and Edward Bernays. As discussed in chapter four of this thesis, the cumulative effect of many early 20th century public relations initiatives, such as Ivy Lee’s public opinion rehabilitation of the hated Rockefellers, as well as a massive Government sponsored campaign to promote nationalism and the “American Way” during the first world war, seems to have been a cessation of radicalism and protest against capitalism. By the 1930s there was widespread acceptance of the corporation associated with: “a superficiality of the American soul” (Dewey. 1931. p25-27).

I have already drawn attention to the view that in reading the above 1990s critics of the operations of public relations one can draw a parallel between the raison d’etre of public relations at both ends of the 20th century. I have suggested that protests at Seattle, Davos, the City of London and in Melbourne in 1999 and 2000 would seem to stand in for some of the radical organisation and protests seen in late 19th century America. If one reads back from the concerns of authors such as Beder, Hager & Burton, Nelson, Stauber & Rampton, and Trento perhaps what we see are the global environmental and political controversies which are among some of the most significant public opinion concerns of the
The current state of public relations education

clients of 21st century public relations. If the parallel to the beginnings of public relations can be drawn, the intriguing question is: what sort of political cultural-change is now being woven into the psyche globally, partly with the assistance of public relations, which compares to the creation of the de-individualised American at the start of the 20th century? What are the radical groups or political movements world-wide which will diminish or disappear - partly as a consequence of many pieces of advice to global organisations about how they should adapt themselves, so as to cause least offence to public opinion? What homogenous political-cultural type of individual and community will appear, or is appearing, which can be attributed in part to the pouring of public relations balm over contentious issues? There seems to be a correlation between this posited task and some of the 1999 public relations education commission priorities. On the third page of the report the following knowledge and skill requirements are listed: “multicultural and global issues; fluency in a foreign Language; Applying Cross-Cultural and Cross-Gender Sensitivity.” Another extra requirement compared to the early 20th century activity of public relations is that public relations now operates in a very educationally and media savvy, sophisticated intellectual climate. Again the commission can be said to be attempting to meet this challenge with a comprehensive curriculum. I suggest that it remains to be seen however if the commission genuinely engages with some of the intellectual issues raised in my thesis. These are issues which, as I indicated in chapter five, were perhaps more candidly faced up to by the public relations practitioners of yore.

In the face of public relations’ intellectual controversies, which are spelled out in this chapter, UK public relations academic Kevin Moloney (1999) issues an intellectual call to arms in order to create a meaningful discipline of public relations education for the 21st century. In my words he calls for an approach to the discipline which answers “Lasswell’s Question” and re-establishes the academic credentials of the university:

Sociologists, media and cultural studies people and political economists see…[public relations as an aspect of persuasive communication]…through prisms such as the public space, ideology, truth and ethics, organisational culture, the role of rationality and persuasion in consumer and citizen decision-making, asymmetries of structural power and influence in society. In most of their literature they
have…associated public relations negatively with emotion rather than reason; with power and control rather than with equity; with subordination rather than equality, with propaganda rather than rational, informed, respectful discourse…Have we the intellectual self-confidence to address them? To argue for another set of questions?…It follows that there has to be process of curriculum addition and amendment and a new direction to the research agenda, not excluding engagement with other, critical academics (Moloney. 1999. p27-29).

I wrote the bulk of this thesis at the end of two years of intensively coming to grips with and then developing, computer mediated and international videoconference methods of teaching public relations. Coming from a cultural studies first degree and part-sociological theory masters background, on top of 17 years of PR and journalism industry experience, the synergy, in fact the necessity of understanding public relations through the prisms indicated by Moloney seem self-evident to me. Having neglected a previous interest in keeping up to date with theoretical developments in public relations I had assumed there would be ample positive news to report in this thesis about the new theory directions and consequently informed teaching curricula which were developing for public relations in universities. Instead my perception now is that public relations is at a crossroads. There are a number of people beckoning it on in the direction which I had expected it to be travelling. But my suggestion at this point in time is that the theoretical road is not very wide or well traveled.

Conclusion

I suggest that the material in this chapter demonstrates the contention that public relations as a university subject is seriously under-theorised to the extent that its academic status must be questioned. I have shown that there is a considerable tension between critical scholars of public relations such as Moloney, L’Etang, Leitch & Neilson and Karlberg on the one hand with, on the other hand Grunig, Cropp & Pincus, Dozier & Lauzen and others who either eschew critical theory or take it up selectively for instrumental purposes. I would characterise the divide as between, on the one hand, those who want university public relations education to be about clearly understanding the role of public relations and
its effects in society. On the other hand are those who feel they can only sanction theory development from the perspective of serving the public relations client better. The first approach may threaten the identity and the whole basis on which the client operates. The second approach starts out from the basis that the identity and perspective of the client are sacrosanct. This approach must therefore bar itself from contemplating some of the perspectives of the first approach. It must bar itself because of the destabilising effects which adopting the assumptions behind some theoretical approaches would entail for the identity, the culture, even the justification of the continued existence of the client. This division into two distinct academic camps plays itself out in many currents of academic thought towards public relations. One emerging divide can be seen in the different ways rhetorical theory is being taken up by scholars of public relations. Toth signals this differential take up and worryingly suggests that the 1990s rhetorical perspective may have been “too critical of public relations”. A concern here is that co-editor of her 1992 book *Rhetorical and Critical Approaches to Public Relations*: Robert Heath, may try to lead rhetorical theory in a way which is not “too critical of public relations”. In chapters three and ten I suggest this may be a way which presumes a pluralist, rather than an oppositional basis for understanding the sort of world which public relations works within. In chapter ten I argue that rhetoric has to be informed by a critical, Habermassian perspective in order to maintain academic integrity. I suggest that the material in this chapter eleven illustrates the clearly un-won fight to make public relations a legitimate university subject. It illustrates the inescapable conservative-political nature of the practice of orthodox public relations. This is a political conservatism which finds a warm welcome in a university system which is captive to economic imperatives, rather than guided by wider educational principles. It appears to me that, if the rationale outlined in chapter one is to be achieved, it is unavoidable that there will be considerable dispute among the different wings of public relations academics for some years to come. This dispute, already underway, was characterised by one of the significant figures in this dispute, who is named in this thesis, as involving: “blood on the carpet”. The phrase was used to describe a confrontation between the different groups when they came together at an important international conference. My perspective on this dispute is that the effects of public relations on our lives are far too significant to be ignored by university academics. I agree with orthodox public relations
scholar and historian Cutlip, as well as the critics, that public relations has been an “unseen power” throughout the 20th century. It is only by making this power seen that we can properly understand its effects on our lives and start to reclaim some of the dignity which we lose when we succumb to perceiving the world through the instrumental spectacles which others would have us wear. For this reason public relations SHOULD be made a university subject, a genuine university subject – something which it is not at present. However it can only become a genuine university subject if universities themselves are alive to their true role in our society. If university academic freedom is not paramount, there will be scant support for academics mounting intellectual projects which risk meddling with such a useful cash cow. It may be that public relations, as a subject in its orthodox form, will prove too seductive to the executives of the contemporary corporate university. If this seduction prevails, this glitzy sounding ‘emerging’ subject (as it is politely called in some quarters), which attracts thousands of students, will remain an under theorised subject with a primarily vocational training curriculum. This is a curriculum which unfortunately, in many instances, trains undergraduates how to maintain the mystification of the mass of people – the very opposite of what universities are supposed to be about.

End of Thesis
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307


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