

Gouldner's "Critical Theory of Language": Recovery and Creation of Alternative Definitions of Reality

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Abstract: The goal of this article is to systematize the "Critical Theory of language" inspired by the work of the late sociologist Alvin Gouldner. In particular, this analysis will focus on the following texts: *The Crisis of Western Sociology* from 1970, *Renewal and Critique of Current Sociology* from 1973, *The Dialectic of Ideology and Technology* from 1976, *The Two Marxisms* from 1980, and *Against Fragmentation* from 1981. The methodology used is theoretical analysis, which has led to the conclusion that Critical Theory in its Gouldnerian variant is mainly inspired by the traditions of Romanticism and Hermeneutics, Marxism and Psychoanalysis, and has with affinities with the Frankfurt School and the New Left. Additionally, the central concepts of Gouldner's Critical Theory of language are public debate, rationality, reflexivity, dialogue, and the antinomic distinctions between sources and media of communication, dominant and dominated definitions of reality, and direct and mediated communication.

Keywords: Alvin Gouldner, Critical Theory, language, dialogue

Introduction

Throughout the 1970s, sociologist Alvin Ward Gouldner, schooled in a unique variant of American Critical Theory and heir to the New Left and Radical Sociology currents, made a series of reflections that, like his early work, contributed to a Critical Theory of language, communication and discourses² (Fraga 2021; 2022). This work, while relevant to the wider theory, was not systematized as such by the author and thus fell into partial obscurity. Consequently, we would like to reevaluate Gouldner's reflections and its significance for the fields of language, communication, and discourse.

As such, we will concentrate on the exegesis of the Gouldnerian works of the aforementioned period, namely, *The Crisis of Western Sociology* from 1970, *Renewal and Critique of Current Sociology* from 1973, *The Dialectic of Ideology and Technology* from 1976, *The Two Marxisms* from 1980, and *Against Fragmentation* from 1981. In addition, we will also deal with other minor writings from the same period in order to produce a richer and more in-depth systematization of Gouldner's contributions to the issues of communication and speech.

In all cases, the analysis will be a theoretical one that is, an analysis of concepts, their interrelations, and said concepts' ties both to social problems and to political propositions. Ultimately, notions such as "empathic dialogue", "symbolic union" and "bridging" emerge as key concepts of a Critical Theory of language, all of which we will define and interweave for their subsequent use in social research and political efforts.

Communication, Empathy, Understanding, and Expressivity

Gouldner's 1970 book, *The Crisis of Western Sociology*, is known for certain ideas, but not always for having deployed critiques both of Liberalism and Positivism, nor for defending Hermeneutics and Romanticism. In his opinion, the basic problem of Liberalism is that although it evaluates things and means in terms of certain ends or goals, the goals themselves are not usually questioned; rather, they are taken as natural in the common sense of society at a given time and place. This is so because, for Liberalism, the selection, and also the pursuit, of life goals, are considered as private matters and transparent and direct results of individuals conceived as absolute knowers and ultimate judges of their own interests, needs and values. Therefore, Liberalism argues that the life goals have no value in a collective, open "public debate", where they could, nevertheless, be enriched by being questioned, criticized, and possibly modified (Gouldner 1973, 70). This utilitarian focus of Liberalism on the means, to the detriment of the ends, had already been highlighted by the Critical Theory of the so-called Frankfurt School (Horkheimer 1973, 15-68).

Within the various scientific disciplines, both natural and social, the Positivist school was nourished by Liberal philosophy. Positivism implied a research method of aseptic detachment from the subjects/objects studied, facilitating their external manipulation. Its goal was to gather supposedly neutral information about the world, which would nevertheless serve to control it. The reaction to the positivistic position was that of the Hermeneutic school. Hermeneutics, in contrast to Positivism, demanded a method of "understanding", of "clinical intuition", or of "historical empathy", i.e., of intimacy with the subject/object studied in order to better "communicate" with it. Likewise, Hermeneutics sought to produce knowledge that was relevant to the interests, needs, and values of those subjects, especially insofar as it broadened their awareness of the world and their place in it. As is known, Gouldner built his Reflexive Sociology as an explicit heir to the Hermeneutic tradition (Gouldner 1973, 446).

In fact, the Hermeneutic tradition in the social and human sciences was closely linked to the philosophy of Romanticism. *Sturm und Drang*, the German cultural movement that was the precursor of Romanticism, shaped fundamentally not only new feelings -different from the demure feelings of French Classicist Enlightenment- but also new ways of expressing these feelings -in a more exalted way than Positivist scientism, also originally French-. Later, properly Romantic thinkers such as the brothers August and Friedrich Schlegel would come to define and classify "new languages", that is, certain new theories and concepts to communicate and express new feelings (Schlegel 1971, §116). It was at this time that the Romantic vocabulary, as distinct from the Classical, arose. This influenced not only the sciences but also many diverse spheres of life, from the arts to politics (Gouldner 1979, 310).

Just as Gouldner is nourished by Hermeneutics, his Critical Theory is also heir to Romanticism. He takes care to show that, to the extent that Romanticism rejects the reification of subjects/objects, it expresses a resistance to -and a critique of- the rules and limits of the nascent liberal, utilitarian, individualistic and egoistic society of the nineteenth century. Therefore, it assumes for this very reason an emancipatory point of view for humanity. According to Gouldner, the Romantic infrastructure then permeated Hermeneutics, which is visible in thinkers ranging from Wilhelm Dilthey (1989) and Hans-Georg Gadamer (1997), to Karl Marx (1982) and Max Weber (2015), and the aforementioned Frankfurt School of Critical Theory. Moreover, the Romantic tone travelled from Germany to the United States and penetrated the so-called Chicago School of Sociology (George H. Mead 1934; William Thomas 1907; Robert Park 1996; Florian Znaniecki 1919) and later its heretical disciples, from Radical Sociology to Symbolic Interaction-

ism and the Dramaturgical Perspective (Erving Goffman 1974; Howard Becker 2009).

Gouldner's Reflexive Sociology asserts itself as the next link in this chain. For him, the key to a social science with a romantic slant is that it allows itself to be analyzed from a "literary point of view" (Gouldner 1979, 29). Works framed in this style are written in a particular genre, preferring, "the strange to the familiar, vivid ethnographic detail to cold taxonomy, sensory expressiveness to dry analysis, naturalistic observation to formal questionnaires," (p. 313) and the marginal or alternative point of view to the conventional or routine point of view. In this sense, Romantic Social Theory is a variant of Critical Social Theory ³ (p. 317).

Understanding, Dialogue, Polemics, and Discussion

In *The Sociology of Today: Renewal and Critique* from 1973, Gouldner affirms the need to analyze the world, and then transform it, from the standpoint of a Critical Theory. However, he is quick to clarify that if the researcher were to make a mere "voluntarist assertion" of an alternative position, i.e., mere "wishful thinking", little could be achieved in the direction sought. On the other hand, theoretical postulation at the discursive level must be combined with the establishment of material conditions, of a social infrastructure, that can make what is desired more attainable, while at the same time propitiating the creation of even more novel perspectives. The key, then, is first to achieve a "critically justified understanding" of the kind of institutionality that would be preferable, and then to put that understanding into practice by grounding it in new community forms. Thus, Critical Theory is not only about the "literary invention" of new forms of sociability but also, about the construction of new collective social structures in which they can be deployed (Gouldner 1979, 97-98).

At the same time, Gouldner states that Critical Theory has two aspects or moments. First, there is a "polemical" or combative aspect, which has to do with the creation of tensions, conflicts, questionings, and struggles against the "conventional definitions of social reality". This undermines its existential foundations -which are the institutions that sustain them-, and thus opens cracks in the given social world. Of course, this combative aspect implies the political commitment of social researchers as it requires opposition and resistance against authorities and established cultures. Second, there is also a constructive aspect to Critical Theory whereby, within the liberated social space that critique carves out, new communities are created⁴(Gouldner 1979, 98; 120). But not just any kind of communities: critical communities. These will be those founded on "rational discourse" since, as has been shown by key critical thinkers, the development of rational discourse goes hand in hand with the aim of eliminating as far as possible any use of force, violence, power, and domination (Habermas 2010a, 498-499).

The search for rational discourse is not a sectarian need of social researchers but a universal need; Its benefits -of greater coexistence and horizontality- would be felt positively within any social group. To name another example of these benefits, vital requirement of any collectivity based on rational discourse is the commitment of its members to truth, understood as a value to which a strong positive sign is assigned. Therefore, such collectivities should have and/or cultivate certain genres and motives, and be open, anti-dogmatic, anti-authoritarian, etc., for which the practice of "denunciation" as a form of combative criticism is fundamental (Gouldner 1979, 99-100). This is very similar to what other radical social thinkers have called the "politics of truth" (Wright Mills 1961, 82).

All this, however, should not make us lose sight of the fact that although rational discourse is an end as well as a means, it is not the only goal of Critical Theory. On the contrary, the ultimate end of Critical Theory -and critical practice- is the realization of humanity, which undoubtedly implies the liberation of reason, though not exclusively, but also and in equal measure the liberation of all other human capacities. The human being is an incarnated being, which is why the respect and well-being of their bodily dimension, of their animal aspect, is also of great interest. In fact, the latter can only be achieved by respecting and seeking the well-being of all other "mute subjects and objects" that exist around the human being. The human being is only one type among several other living beings, with whom the human has a kinship -precisely of an animal or embodied kind-, that must come to the surface if they are to be able to unite with them materially and symbolically. For the human being to transform the world cannot mean to dominate it (Gouldner 1979, 102; 105). This is what other New Left intellectuals have called the "reunion with nature" as a prerequisite for liberation (Marcuse 1969, 28).

The search for "hermeneutic understanding" among human beings and between them and the rest of nature is not something that can be achieved simply through the normal, everyday practical use of "ordinary languages". Rather, hermeneutic understanding requires a partial overcoming of ordinary language, a subtle going beyond it, using certain "extra-ordinary languages" specifically oriented to that end. It is the task of critical social researchers and, therefore, of Critical Theory to create these novel languages, as well as to help others to speak, write, think, and act on them. In other words, it is their task to mediate between ordinary and extra-ordinary or traditional and liberating languages. Indeed, social researchers are creators of concepts not only in the sense that they produce knowledge, but also in that they reform languages, or in other words, modify cultures (Gouldner 1979, 104-106).

But if all social theory, all research, and all knowledge about the social implies a reflection on society and its multiple parts -spheres, regions, groups-, then the social researcher must first reflect on themselves or, rather, on their own role, positioning, desires, limitations, capabilities, etc. Thus, each critical social researcher first engages in a "dialogue with himself" to be able to engage later in a dialogue with others -with other researchers, with other people in general, and with other subjects/objects in the world-. This reflexive character of dialogue is also what allows any knowledge generated to be critically evaluated (Gouldner 1979, 110). It is because of proposals such as this that later authors will imitate Gouldner in pointing towards the need for a "Reflexive Sociology" (Bourdieu and Wacquant 2005, 61-215).

With this reflexive character, critique can then engage in a "selective understanding" of the given universe, examining it in terms of the social forces that have favoured it and those that have repressed it. In other words, Critical Theory analyzes both what is observable, what is evident, what is real, and what has been erased, hidden, silenced⁵It is in this sense that we speak of hermeneutic understanding: there is no authentic interpretation of the world if the existing and functioning systems are not related to the structures, processes, and phenomena that enable or constrain them (Gouldner 1979, 396). Thus, thinkers contemporary to Gouldner put forward similar ideas, such as that of analyzing the deep infrastructures that make surface appearances possible (Althusser 1979, 65), or that of studying the historical regimes of what can be said and what cannot be said in each society (Foucault 1997, 15).

Critical Theory, in analyzing the silences alongside the voices, departs from the natural or current interpretations of the social. To depart from the empirically observable in this way, the social researcher needs a justification that is a solid, well-argued theoretical system; only armed

with theory can the critical subject challenge the evident to move, instead, in the direction of the imagined. In this sense, Critical Theory provokes an uprooting, but it does so with a view to overcoming the evils of the present. Indeed, critique aims to transform the world by first helping to deepen the consciousness of the masses, then facilitating debate and discussion of new ideas, and finally accompanying their implementation (Gouldner 1979, 391; 398).

Communication Media and Publics; External and Internal Censorships

In his seminal 1976 book *The Dialectics of Ideology and Technology*, Gouldner historicizes and criticizes the modern public sphere. In conceptual terms, the modern invention of "publics" prompts the development of rational discourse, as they are defined as collective spaces cleared for the development of communications concerning "information" relevant to a community, that is, "news", and its interpretations, whether shared or not. Public discourse can be critical to the extent that there is sufficient security in the collective space so that "what is said and heard or read can be questioned, denied, contradicted". But this will only be possible if the participating members of the public sphere feel that they can "express themselves openly, without fear of sanctions" other than those derived from the "argumentative logic" itself in its deployment by private individuals. In other words, "the rationality and critical nature of public discourse" depends on all participants having been previously detached from their current powers and privileges, so that once they have entered the space of debate, they cannot impose their ideas on others by force or coercion. It is essential, then, that the normal systems of domination -for example, but not exclusively limited to, the class system- be predefined as "irrelevant for discussion" in the public sphere. To continue with the example, both the ideas of the rich and the poor can prove to be valid or illegitimate. In other words, all people must enter the debate as equals in this specific but actually very broad sense (Gouldner 1978, 132-133).

In this more than explicit dialogue with the Habermasian "theory of communicative action" and his analysis of the public sphere (Habermas 1981; 2010), Gouldner agrees that not only class power but "every source of social domination inhibits dialogue" -such as gender, age, ethnic, national, etc. power systems-, undermines the rationality and the open and critical character of public discourse. But even more so, our author shows that it is also necessary to avoid, together with the source of domination between private parties -men and women, blacks and whites, etc.-, other sources of domination of public entities towards private ones, whereby there have been historical situations in which a vigilant and punishing state has repressed the free deployment of ideas in debate. In fact, this was the normal situation in pre-modern times, which is why the invention of the "bourgeois public sphere" constituted an advance in rationality, since state and community life were no longer the exclusive affairs of a single group of nobles or notables, but increasingly matters in which everyone could and should intervene. However, the bourgeois public, too, quickly finds its own limitations when it avoids questioning its own foundations, such as capitalism, colonialism, or patriarchy. A truly open public sphere should begin by critiquing these structures and processes (Gouldner 1978, 133; 138-139).

A thorough critique of "censorship" is in order here as well. In the eighteenth century, censorship was criticized as an external force that opposed or sought to limit people's capacity to express their opinions, since rationality was conceived as an absolute characteristic of every human being -or at least of every white adult and proprietor man - However, already in the nineteenth century, the possibility that no subjectivity is completely rational began to be explored. Thus, from the

social sciences it was shown that the ideologies of individuals depended on their social position (Marx and Engels 1970, 55), that their categories of thought were influenced by belonging to a certain culture and to specific groups (Durkheim 1993, 38-41), and that every self was constituted by social repressions and unconscious elements (Freud 1977, §II). All these elements not only reduce human rationality but also shape it by definition and in an inescapable way. Censorship is then no longer only something exercised from outside, by others, but something internal to each person. The "grammar of rationality", then, can never be something pure and complete.

The Marxist and Freudian critiques -which Gouldner inherits- question and doubt if the self is a unified subject with a harmonious set of interests, desires, and needs and, instead, sees men and women confused by internally antagonistic aspirations. In psychoanalytic terms, the *id*, *ego*, and *superego* may contradict each other. If the *superego* is "the introjection by the individual of the grammar of rationality" of group or social -but always collective- rationality, it may well be hindered by the unconscious and chaotic appetites of the *ego*, or by the individualistic narcissism of the *ego*, and *vice versa*. In the first case, something that we might call a "grammar of irrationality" would emerge; In the second case, something like a "grammar of strategic or egoistic rationality" -instead of a collectively negotiable rationality- is present (Gouldner 1978, 165-166).

If censorship is "that which limits what can be said", we can begin to see that its existence is not simply a violation of rationality but a condition of possibility. This means that "if there isn't something that one cannot say, rationality is impossible. The grammar of rationality, like all grammar, is a censor and a foundation of language". Censorship, then, begins to be understood as a necessity of rationality (Gouldner 1978, 166). From this understanding, it is vital to distinguish between different types of grammars, depending on what they censor in each case. For example, one can censor truth, or one can censor lies; One can censor criticism, but one can also censor violence. To better differentiate these types of grammars, I would like to give them names (Marcuse 1965, 105-123). Thus, in cases of censorship of truth or criticism, we are faced with what we would like to call a grammar of fascist rationality. Alternatively, in cases of censorship of lies -think of the contemporary phenomenon of fake news created and disseminated by digital trolls- or of censorship of violence -such as the prohibition of public expression of Nazi slogans and symbols from the post war period onwards- we are dealing with what we might call a grammar of progressive rationality.

This is the ambiguity of Modernity's birth. On the one hand, its concept of reason are founded on certain traditions which seek to protect from questioning; on the other hand, its concept of reason commits it to a permanent revolution against tradition. This is visible in the multiple historical struggles against censorship, where sometimes the criticism of one type of language implied the defense of another -for example, between state censorship, psychic censorship, social censorship, etc.-. What defines a grammar of critical rationality is to grant the real and concrete possibility that, at some time or another, all things could and might be subjected to criticism, and that all ideas and practices are asked to justify themselves. But also, the key is that such a grammar of critical rationality can speak openly and directly about the various forms of repression, oppression, and censorship (Gouldner 1978, 166-167).

Gouldner then posits the need to shape the "politics of a linguistically grounded Critical Theory". His main goal is to "bring about change in linguistic codes or communication practices" through a political effort. To do so, a linguistically grounded Critical Theory must first become aware of the historical fact that, since the dawn of Modernity, all "linguistic behaviour" has been affected by what other theories call the "ideological apparatuses of the state": legislation and the

police, schools and colleges, various forms of "information media" -newspaper, radio, television, the internet (Althusser 1979, 28-29; Bourdieu 1997, ch.10). The increasingly extensive diffusion of these institutions and the successive reforms that took place within them with growing influences on the human population was not, as is well known, exempt from all imaginable forms of inequality, domination, repression, etc. The only way to deal with these inequalities is to try to counteract them through constant progressive political pressure on the state and on the market, on the family and on education, and on the media of all sorts.

Particularly with regards to the "communication media", one cannot lose sight of the fact that the news created by them is always -as the name itself indicates- a "mediation of official narratives" that is, a selective representation of information which occurs independently of the ideological orientation of the media in question. In effect, "the media mediate", the ability to cut, euphemize, graph, magnify and suppress, is always located in a position of intermediaries between the different publics and the official administrators of the different institutions, organizations, parties, movements, monopolies, etc. (Gouldner 1978, 162-163; 193).

Rational Discourse, Face to Face Communication, and Rotation between Speakers and Listeners

Let us now turn to an investigation of what is "rational discourse" and what about it is so important to defend from the standpoint of a Critical Theory of society. To begin with, rational discourse's fundamental rule is "self-foundation", i.e., the mandate that every assertion outlined must be argued in discourse. This requires several steps. First, the speaker must become aware of their assertions and reflect on the presuppositions on which they rest, assumptions which they must then explicitly state. Rationality, in this sense, is the capacity to problematize what was hitherto taken for granted, transforming merely spoken -or written, or symbolized, or gesturalized- resources into subjects of study that are closely examined. In other words, rationality is the ability to think about thinking, to speak about language. This brings rationality closer to meditation; it is in principle an infinite task -each assumption builds on a previous assumption, the latter on another, and so on *ad infinitum*- (Gouldner 1978, 70; 77).

If reflexivity has no end, it is difficult to imagine that one can spend a lifetime simply reflecting. The problem arises of where to draw the line between that which will be put under study and that which will not. To avoid arbitrariness or bias in this definition, the basis of such rationality can only be assured by the listener - rather than by the speaker. Indeed, the only guarantee can be that the listener always has the right to question the speaker's presuppositions. But this right is neither absolute nor arbitrary. Every listener becomes a speaker after a while, and the roles are always reversed. Rational discourse thus implies a rotational division of labour, in which the speaker of the moment has a vested interest in his assumptions, while the hearer has a vested interest in his critical capacity. Rationality, then, resides in "dialogue" as a constant exchange (p. 78).

Given the above, the cultural *status quo* of a given time and place is always potentially subject to questioning and, thus, there is a potential for permanent cultural revolution (Trotsky 2015: 16). Although it is obviously impossible to critically examine all cultural symbols at the same time and in the same act, there is nothing in principle that prevents every symbol from eventually being "questioned" or put under reconsideration (Gouldner 1978: 187). This risk, inseparable from any society that fosters some degree of rationality, has from ancient times been called *anomos*

-the lack of lasting rules (Plato 2014)- and more recently "anomy" -the inability of rules to guide human actions- (Durkheim 2014, 12). Although the name sounds pejorative, it is an unintended consequence -or is it?- of the incessant search of the human being to improve, to surpass himself, to transcend.

The connection between rationality and critique effectively presents the requirement that there be people whose lives are not absolutely dominated by the rules of some traditional, overly closed community, and for whom rules will therefore not go unnoticed and unexamined. On the contrary, it requires people who have experienced some level of uprooting, separation, disengagement from at least some of the surrounding cultural forms. It requires people who can unite and disunite, give and take away adhesion, voluntarily and deliberately, from constant negotiations with a view to reaching "mutual understanding", and who can build "agreements" and even alliances on the basis of "understanding". It requires spaces that regulate persuasion and hinders coercion, that is, it requires an "ecology of speakers who cannot order each other around" because they have relative equality which has been previously guaranteed allotting certain resources that enable them to resist compulsion (Gouldner 1978, 80).

A distinction must be made here between persuasion of "interpersonal language" in the sense of convincing by a "good argument", and persuasion as "manipulative rhetoric". Although there will never be an "ideal linguistic situation" in which everyone is equal regarding material and symbolic resources, it is feasible to imagine situations in which the subjects in the debate consider each other as subjects, rather than as objects to be used instrumentally as means to selfish ends (Habermas 2010b, 258-259). In this, the key lies in fostering "face-to-face communication". Such communication, unlike what happens with communication mediated by the mass media, is twofold. On the one hand, it is true that in direct interaction, dominant ideas and practices are often reinforced, especially as transmitted by the mass media or other ideological apparatuses. But on the other hand, face-to-face interaction often leads to the testing and questioning of the dominant ideas and practices and of the information transmitted in the media, since in face-to-face interaction "conflicting information" with the former can and often does circulate (Wright Mills 1963, 591-593).

Another distinction to be made at this point, then, is that between "sources" and "media". The media are the "channels of transmission" of information to the public and are generally monopolized. The sources of communication, on the other hand, are individuals and groups, in all their variety. It is the sources that create the information that is then, for better or worse, transmitted by the media. In the case of individuals and groups seeking to create alternatives to the dominant information, it is now clear that their possibilities of transmitting such information are greatly hindered by the presence and nature of the media. Yet, there seems to be no other way of transmitting them if such ideas are to reach large masses of the population (Gouldner 1978, 193-195; 220-221).

Therefore, a Critical Theory of the media must devise mechanisms to put constant pressure on the media to conform to the standards they themselves claim to apply in terms of autonomy and professionalism in their reporting⁶. It must constantly generate the critical examination of its contents but also of its institutionality, of its relationship with companies, parties, nations, and other social sectors, and must publicly unmask every time it inhibits public discourse. We have already seen that lying is as serious as censorship. A Critical Theory of the media must strive to create organizations, associations, and movements specialized in the control of the media and their definitions of reality, as well as focused on the creation of alternative descriptions of the

world against the official ones. A Critical Theory cannot repeat without questioning what the media classifies as relevant or irrelevant, factual or opinionated, good or bad, etc. It must "speak the silences" of ordinary language, demystify the repressed, unveil the falsehoods; In other words, it is as much a matter of uncovering the hidden as of discovering the unknown⁷. To illuminate and clarify, it cannot use a twisted or opaque language. Nor, of course, can it remain silent about its own interests, desires, and presuppositions (p. 154-155; 204).

Paleosymbolism and Multilingualism

In his final book published in 1981, *Against Fragmentation*, Gouldner defines the intriguing concept of "paleosymbolism". Paleosymbols are those symbols acquired in the early stages of the socialization of each person -that is, in childhood-, in a way that is saturated with affectivities and which, for this reason, show a closed or highly elusive character in the face of their critical examination (Gouldner 1985, 235). In the adult future, those worldviews that "resonate" with the paleosymbolism acquired within this or that culture and this or that group will be deeply felt as true because they will agree with -and reinforce- what the subject perceives as his or her own experience. This is another reason why some descriptions and explanations of the world dominate over others. However, once a rational adult adopts a definition of the world as the true one, paleosymbols, so long buried deep in his subjective constitution, can surface in their consciousness, which may eventually enable the adult's critical questioning through participation in public debate (p. 69-70).

In this sense -and in a supplementary interpretation to the above-, every definition of the world, and every articulated theory about it, is among other things a recovery of the self, of those structures of beliefs sedimented and forgotten within the subjectivity of each person, group, and culture. This is why so often the discovery of a new theory, or of a meaningful explanation of the world, is often described as a new "birth". The articulated definitions of the world are then more than intellectual artifices; They are experienced as the recovery of something that, one senses, was already there, waiting to be discovered. And that is why, by modifying the dominant definitions of the world, one can also have an impact on the deep structures of an entire culture and of all those who have been socialized in it (p. 70-71). This recovery of the self also converges with the practice, currently prominent in psychoanalytic therapy, of the recovery of the unconscious (Freud 1977, §I). And it also converges with the doctrine, typical of German philosophy, which conceives history as the process of unfolding of a consciousness that seeks to overcome its own fragmentation (Hegel 1985, 12; Marx 2006, 555-664).

Social researchers, especially those with a critical perspective, specialize precisely in raising awareness of the partially hidden yet dominant definitions of the world, and in their modification. For this reason, it is logical to observe the affinity of intellectuals with certain theories and practices that tend to seek to combat fragmentations and to re-unite totalities. As we have already said, this is conveyed through the building of bridges between ordinary languages -especially the languages of the various dominated groups critical intellectuals seek to accompany- and technical or extra-ordinary languages⁸. For all definitions of reality accepted and promoted by centres of economic, political, or cultural power are much more easily and frequently credited; They are given greater public attention and offered greater credibility even before any critical inspection has been carried out, in comparison to the definitions held by subordinated groups. In short, it is the task of critical theorists not only to recover sub-privileged realities, but also to rescue the sub-privileged sources of definitions of reality (Gouldner 1985, 245; 283; 297). The creation of

alternative definitions of reality is, of course, linked to the question of creativity. One of the ways of creating something new has to do with uniting what was previously separated. This allows for the recontextualizing of each of the previous ideas in the logic of the others, transforming each pre-existing entity into something different, and the whole into something different from the sum of its parts. This also serves to transcend dualistic, dichotomous definitions of reality into more complex and subtle ones (p. 198). Of course, to be able to unite two traditions, currents or perspectives, the fluid handling of two or more theories, views, logics, or languages is necessary. In this sense, "bilingualism" and "multilingualism" are fundamental capacities for critical social research, and indeed for all critical action in the social world, with the "translation" that goes back and forth between different languages being a uniquely powerful skill (Mignolo 2003, 29-68).

Multilingualism is the way through which the great forms of creativity imply certain intellectual deviation. Creativity always means some kind of rupture with tradition, thanks to the handling of multiple logics that facilitate alternative perspectives, and which distance the subject from the hegemonic paradigms of a time and place. Multilingualism is another way of building bridges, typical of the intellectual role, and of any critical social actor. Creativity, then, does not depend on innate talent or genius but on skills that in principle anyone can cultivate. It all begins with refusing to be limited by conventional languages, theories, traditions, or worldviews, venturing to seek novel solutions to the social problems in which one is immersed or that surround each individual and group (Gouldner 1985, 204-207). Creativity, as a capacity to transform the definitions of the world, entails perspectival incongruence (Burke 1966, §I).

Conclusion

After delving into Alvin Gouldner's later texts, we can systematize his rich but otherwise dispersed "Critical Theory of language". To do so, in this conclusion, we will first see which elements of Gouldner's Critical Theory are informed by the legacies and debates from earlier schools of thought. Then we will be able to order and finish defining the fundamental concepts for a Critical Theory of language.

In discussion with Liberalism and Positivism, Gouldnerian Critical Theory affirms that "public debate" must deal with the ends as well as the means of human action. It also asserts that it is necessary to combine the discursive dimension as well as the material dimension of the issue, which results in the notion of "critical understanding". Similarly, Critical Theory contains a polemical aspect together with a constructive aspect, which results in the notion of "rational discourse".

Inheriting elements of Hermeneutics and Romanticism, Gouldnerian Critical Theory focuses on the categories of "understanding", "communication", and "empathy". Its goal is the creation of new languages to express new feelings, and it does so through an ethnographic, naturalistic, and sensory scientific-literary style.

On the other hand, drawing on elements of Marxism and Psychoanalysis, Gouldnerian Critical Theory takes up the idea that censorship is not only external but also internal to the individual self -as shown by the concepts of ideology in Marx and of the unconscious in Freud. The grammar of rationality that Critical Theory defends can never be absolute, for it is at once coerced by society -the *superego*-, by a strategic or egoistic rationality -the *ego*-, and by the unconscious -the *id*. For this reason, a distinction can be made between a "grammar of fascist rationality", which

censures truth and criticism, and a "grammar of progressive rationality", which censures lies and violence. In this sense, a "grammar of critical rationality" calls for a justification of all ideas and actions and talks about the different forms of censorship -cultural, psychological, economic, political, etc.

Also inheriting elements of the current known as the New Left, Gouldnerian Critical Theory takes up reflections of authors such as Charles Wright Mills and Herbert Marcuse. Like the former, he exhibits a "commitment to truth" and to the "practice of denunciation"; He maintains that the public is critical if it supports contradicting the accepted without fear of sanctions; and he distinguishes between the potential of "face-to-face communication" *versus* the limitations of "mediated communication" *via* information monopolies. With the latter, Gouldner shares the goal of a "symbolic union" between speaking subjects -human beings- and mute subjects/objects -other living beings.

Finally, drawing on elements of the variant presented by Jürgen Habermas of the Frankfurt School of Critical Theory, Gouldner agrees with several of its propositions: that all forms of social domination inhibit open dialogue, that a distinction must be made between persuasion by good argument and persuasion as manipulative rhetoric, that public debate about social reality can be facilitated by providing good arguments about alternatives to it, and that the rationality of public discourse depends on all speakers being considered equal in the debate.

Having considered the commonalities and divergences, we can now finally systematize the key elements of a Critical Theory of language. It is a "linguistically founded Critical Theory", since it seeks to change the existing linguistic codes and communicative practices through constant pressure on existing institutions -family, school, market, state, media- in which it observes various inequalities, oppressions, and repressions. In other words, it seeks the "creation of extra-ordinary languages" that might mediate and reform ordinary languages. In this sense, it is also a "Critical Theory of the media," for it must construct mechanisms and institutions to control whether the media allows or inhibits public discourse, to unmask its definitions of reality and to present alternative definitions of it.

For it is true that the modern public sphere is an advance over previous eras, but today it can only be a critical public sphere if it questions the very foundations of Modernity, such as capitalism, colonialism, patriarchy -and its related social problems, such as racism, xenophobia, ethnocentrism, but also exclusion, pauperism, vulnerability, etc. If "rationality" means "critical examination", then "cultural revolution" is not only a risk inherent to all rationality, but its historical necessity. Thus, the Critical Theory of language must analyze both the voices -the dominant, the hegemonic- and the silences -the dominated, the subaltern- of a given culture.

A prerequisite for the deployment of such a rational discourse is that people go through experiences of uprooting in open communities that do not hinder their self-questioning. Another prerequisite is that there is a more or less equitable distribution of resources, so that everyone can resist coercion by others to submit to certain ideas and practices. A third prerequisite is that the basic rule of all rational discourse is that of its "self-foundation", which implies reflexivity, awareness, and explicitness of presuppositions. Indeed, "reflexivity" is to engage in a dialogue with oneself in order to be able to engage in a dialogue with others. "Dialogue" is the only guarantee of rational discourse, for it is only in this mode that a speaker affirms, and a listener questions, but then a reversal of roles necessarily comes along.

The major problem is that the dominant definitions of reality in a culture are also reproduced through the transmission of "paleosymbols" during childhood, which makes them very difficult to criticize. But if Critical Theory has as its goal the "recovery of under-privileged definitions of reality", then it must begin by distinguishing between the sources of communication and the media, that is, between the creation of information and its subsequent transmission and possible distortion. This "creation of alternative definitions of reality" requires "creativity", and creativity is conveyed through "multilingualism". It is necessary to handle multiple languages and their logics to build bridges between diverse ideas and to see things differently. In one phrase, a Critical Theory of language is based on "perspective incongruence".

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Notes

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²Thus, Gouldner stresses the centrality of the problem of language: "While I do not think that the world is even remotely language alone, it is so to an important degree: persons, events, processes, institutions, etc. are expressed in a system of communication. Our perspective disposes us to look for any aid to their understanding: to disciplines dedicated to the analysis of speech or silence, of texts or subtexts, of spoken or written forms of communication, be it the sociology of language, sociolinguistics, or even literary criticism" (Gouldner 1983, 35).

³In his 1980 book *The Two Marxisms*, Gouldner defines the critical task as follows: "Criticism belongs to the realm of philosophy and the art of interpretation. [...] Criticism especially illuminates hidden, silenced possibilities. [...] Criticism, then, aspires to make human potency manifest; it is founded on a humanism optimistically convinced that humanity can make and remake the world" (Gouldner 1983, 84-86).

⁴Gouldner states in another text: "To say that a Reflexive Sociology is radical does not mean, however, that it is only 'critical' or negating; it must be concerned with the positive formulation of new societies, of utopias, in which men can live better, as much as it is concerned with criticizing the present" (Gouldner 1973, 455).

⁵Gouldner refers to this task of helping to keep accessible what society silences not only Critical Theory, but also "Socratic theory", in reference to Socrates, the great Athenian critic (Gouldner 1975, 7).

⁶Thus, in the paper titled "Towards an Agenda for Social Theory in the Last Quarter of the Twentieth Century", Gouldner calls for "opening the interface between social theory and cultural criticism -which includes philosophical, artistic, scientific and media criticism-. For we do not conceive of theory production and politics as heroic forms of enclave, but rather, along with cultural criticism, they should be part of everyday life, helping to make it more bearable, manageable, and meaningful" (Gouldner 1978, xii).

⁷For Gouldner, criticizing a definition of the world implies "conceiving it as an object of culture, to be understood in the same way we try to understand a novel, a film, a play, an architecture, a life or an event. [That is,] to consider it as including shadows, silences, and subtexts beneath the text, locating them in the common human condition" (Gouldner 1983, 22). And a little further on, he adds "if there is something systematically silenced in a field of discussion, it is the responsibility of the critical theorist to highlight it" (p. 32).

⁸Elsewhere, Gouldner explains that the building of bridges between ordinary and extra-ordinary languages is also a "linking of pure reason and practical reason", or of knowledge and morality, as Immanuel Kant (2004; 1961) would have put it (Gouldner 1975, 7).

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