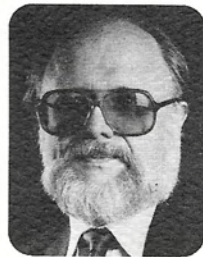


**1988**  
**B. AUBREY FISHER**  
**MEMORIAL LECTURE**

**1988  
B. AUBREY FISHER  
MEMORIAL LECTURE**

*"Rhetoric,  
Organizational Communication,  
and Sartre's Theory of Group Praxis"*

**By**



**Michael Calvin McGee**  
University of Iowa

DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNICATION  
UNIVERSITY OF UTAH  
OCTOBER 20, 1988

## I. INTRODUCTION

I want to thank you for this opportunity to develop an argument I have wanted to make for years about the centrality of group communication to all the fields of communication studies that housed Aubrey Fisher's many eclectic interests. I will argue that this relatively unattended specialization within the field ought to be its conceptual center.

My method of proceeding might be a bit scatter-brained and mirthsome—at least that was the first reaction of my friend and colleague John Lyne. He heard my title and crossed the line of chuckle right into giggle. When I asked what was so funny, he said "Sounds like you're going to Utah to play 'connect the dots'." I caught the reference to the child's game in the comic pages every Sunday. John clearly appreciates rhetoric, and though we have shared a laugh or two at the expense of some papers in group and organizational communication that probably shouldn't have been written, he is Scott Poole's classmate and Randy Hirokawa's colleague, so I know he has respect for the better work that is done in that area. Both Sartre's marxism and his existentialism are considered *passee* by some, but I know John reads the old master with some appreciation. Because he likely does not object to any of the parts of my discourse, I guess John must simply be reacting to the appearance that these subjects have nothing to do with one another.

And in that impression, John is not alone. Nearly everyone in the field would agree that rhetoric, organizational communication, and Western marxist theory *à la* Sartre are such separate discourses that they must be considered separately. I hope to persuade you that this appearance is deceiving. All three bodies of theoretical discourse require a similiar concept to refer to human beings acting in concert. Rhetoric needs a theory of audiences, organizational communication needs a theory of groups, and social theory needs a theory of class. My claim tonight is that when Sartre theorized class as a special instance of groupness, he exemplified a strategy of thinking that will prove as useful in rhetorical theory and in organizational communication as it ought to have been in marxist social theory.

"An argument...about the centrality of group communication to all fields of communication studies that housed Aubrey Fisher's many eclectic interests."

## II. SARTRE'S DEBATE WITH LOUIS ALTHUSSER

Sartre will be remembered for such literary efforts as his play *Huis Clos* and for his magnificent definitive statement of the philosophy of existentialism, *Being and Nothingness*. But in my mind his greatest work was his last major book, *Critique of Dialectical Reason: The Theory of Practical Groups*. It appeared in Paris in 1960, but it was quickly lost in the *avant-garde* reconstruction of philosophical problems that swept France from the mid 1950's to the mid 1970's. Claude Levi-Strauss, Roland Barthes, Jean Piaget, and company were busy developing structuralism, and its methods semiotics, as legitimate alternatives to positivism and behaviorism in social science. Louis Althusser, Lucien Goldmann, and company were taking the principles of structuralism directly to politics, offering a unique Western marxist interpretation of social problems. Jacques Lacan was rereading Freud and revolutionizing our understanding of psychoanalysis. In this company, Sartre was old-fashioned. By May, 1968—the watershed year in French intellectual life—his book had withered into insignificance. He was washed to sea by new wave after new wave (Michel Foucault and company, Gilles Deleuze and company, Jean-Francois Lyotard and company, Jean Baudrillard and company). By the time the book was translated into English in 1976, even New Left Books, the publisher that makes its list available to less wealthy readers, was forced to charge \$35.00 to break even on production costs.

Sartre's basic problem with his audience was that while the rest of the intellectual world was looking to ideas of structure to explain contemporary politics, Sartre wanted us to look more closely at the dynamics of human interaction. Let me explain this tension by describing, as I understand it, the origins and context of the debate where Sartre found himself a universal and all-too-fixed target.

After World War II, Sartre's thought took on an increasingly political cast. Along with Andre Malraux, he was widely thought of as the major intellectual apologist for the French Left. Of course, he was not an active Communist Party member who demonstrated his good faith by adhering to an orthodox party line. He believed that marxist politics were fundamentally correct, but that they needed far more rigorous intellectual defense than

they had been given. He recognized that a number of theoretical difficulties had beset classic 19th-century statements of marxist theory, making it increasingly less acceptable to anyone who bothered to think critically. The most important of these difficulties is the problem of *class dialectics*.

The idea of a social class is now so well-accepted that it is not clearly associated with marxism at all. Sociologists and economists have tried to make divisions among upper, lower, and middle classes into bland categories based on the division of wealth. Membership in a socio-economic class, however, is like belonging to a club with no privileges. You belong in the group by virtue of your income, but the class is not active, and you are not considered virtuous or vicious because of the degree to which you are a good citizen of your class. You'll never see a Ruling Elite Club float in the Rose Bowl parade. Indeed, for most writers, *class* is simply a technical term making it easier to think about differences in the quality of life that result from wealth and prestige.

This neutered conception of *class* is missing its most useful feature. Classes of people are enabled or disabled by the amount of money they have to spend on the things in life they want, and it is also true that each class will develop its own culture, doing and valuing what they can afford to do and enjoy. But Marx said more than this: He suggested *that classes make war on each other*. The opposites in the dialectic of history were classes of people struggling against one another for control of the wealth of the society. When wealth was divided along capitalistic lines, the contending classes became the familiar *bourgeoisie* and *proletariat*, capitalists and workers. Each of Marx's predictions about social and economic justice depends not just on the existence of these opposite classes, but on their internal homogeneity and their capacity to act in unison as a group. This is what gave 19th-century marxism its internationalist flavor. The fact that you were a worker gave you more in common with a worker in Dusseldorf or Peiking than you had in common with American capitalists who were your neighbors.

In the 20th-century, Marx's notion of *class* becomes problematic, for the more experience we have with social systems, the more evident it becomes that the sort of *class* he described is neither homogeneous nor active. Marx talked about wealth, but his real subject

was survival. Poverty for him was watching your children starve, and the contradiction between capital and labor was the stark contrast between subsistence and conspicuous consumption. This situation prevails today in contrasting life in Los Angeles with life in most third-world countries, Ethiopia, for example. But it does not prevail for very large numbers of people (considered as a proportion of total population) in any of the advanced industrial states. Yes, we are disgraced because we do little to relieve the wretched conditions of the homeless who wander the streets of every major and most minor American cities. But the number of Americans existing at the subsistence level while laboring for the benefit of oppulent capitalists is relatively low, a small percentage of the total population.

Once you get past the problem of survival, the question of wealth is always correlative. That is, the determination of how much wealth is enough wealth is a matter of taste, ambition, and desire, not necessarily a matter of *class interest*. Stated simply, classes are not at war with one another. If there is an opposition between the bourgeois and the proletarian, it is either an academic opposition with little consequence in practical politics, or it is a cultural opposition worked out at the box office as a contest to see if the chips-and-beer "plain folks" style of life is better or worse than the caviar-and-champagne "rich and famous" style of life. No one cares that 90% of America's wealth is in the hands of 3.4% of Americans—for most Americans, the remaining 10% is enough to make do.

The fact that *class* has become an increasingly minor consideration in the politics of advanced capitalism, rather than the increasingly major force Marx thought it would be, is enough to make marxist social theory seem to be no more than a party line. Some 20th-century marxists, however, Sartre among them, suggest that the problem could lie with deficiencies in the conception of *class*. For Marx, especially in his later writings, the socio-economic classes were treated as objective categories. He seems to have thought it self-evident that class identity and unity would follow from experiencing similar life conditions, and that motives for action were built into proper perception of one's advantages and disadvantages in confronting those life conditions. It follows from this that a description of the *context* of class-life conditions common to all class members—is also and simultaneously an adequate explanation

"Sartre's  
basic problem  
with his  
audience was  
that while the  
rest of the  
intellectual  
world was  
looking to  
ideas of  
structure to  
explain con-  
temporary  
politics, Sartre  
wanted us to  
look more  
closely at the  
dynamics of  
human  
interaction."

of the formation and function of class. A formal way of stating this might be to say that context produces class and clearly entails class identity, unity, and motive. This inference led Marx, and most marxists of both the 19th and 20th centuries, to theorize *class* as a consequence of social organization. They might have done better, Sartre suggested, to look at *class* as a special case of group formation and political action in general. Classes are historical forces only when they act in unison and produce political effects. The decisive questions in theorizing *class*, therefore, concern group formation, group consciousness and group action. We should be theorizing class identity, unity, and motive directly.

Sartre developed such a theory of practical groups, and I will sketch it for you in a moment. I want to give you a clearer idea of the rhetorical problems Sartre faced in creating his theory; however, before you can understand the ingenuity of his theoretical strategy, you need glimpse the ingenuity, perhaps the genius, of his opposition.

Sartre's most important opponent was Louis Althusser. Althusser (like other Western marxists such as Horkheimer, Adorno, Gramsci, and Lukacs) addressed the problem of the apparent failure of class dialectics. Unlike Sartre, however, he was an active member of the French Communist Party, and in the eyes of the political left, this gave Althusser a presumption of moral superiority. (We're all familiar with this old bromide about the relationship of theory and practice, aren't we? Why engage in the critical study of morals and politics when you could be practicing both and improving the conditions we force upon the oppressed? Why listen to David Eason teach you critical thinking about journalistic practice when you could be learning how to write "feature stories," thus making yourself more employable by the *Salt Lake Tribune*?)

In addition to their apparently greater degree of political correctness, Althusser's responses (Althusser, 1971) had the additional advantage of riding the tide of intellectual fashion in France. He relied on the objective structure of social control institutions to explain how the capitalist elite had impeded the progress of the dialectic and thus temporarily forestalled the march of history toward scientific socialism. Unlike most other orthodox marxist thinkers, Althusser followed Gramsci in the argument that ruling elites maintain their power less through direct action than

through social organization. It is true that the police and armies (what he called the "repressive state apparatus" will intervene with bloody force to forestall attempts at reform and revolution. But the far more effective means of social control is basic socialization itself, controlling what each generation will take to be "reality" by conditioning people from cradle to grave to believe that the way society is now organized is natural, necessary, and fundamentally good. Just as society formally organizes a repressive state apparatus into institutions such as police, courts, prisons, and armies, so too it organizes socialization into an "ideological state apparatus." Thus each institution of society responsible for acquainting citizens with the structure and rules of the community participates in perpetuating an economic and political order that favors the elite and oppresses the poor. Schools, churches, families, the work-place, newspapers, television, and all the popular arts that have a didactic quality about them are "sites" where capitalist ideology is taught as the silent, subtle, but most significant lesson. You get a different angle on social control at each site where basic socialization occurs, but the fundamental lesson of cooperating with dominant politics is the same. Because there are so many effective teachers of it, located in so many different places, your participation in the ideology of advanced capitalism is "overdetermined," produced by so many causes that only a hermit who never came down from the Wasatch Mountains could escape.

Althusser departed from 19th-century orthodox marxism in two ways that make him a very significant figure in contemporary social theory.

First, as I have just suggested, he changed the concept of *ideology* so drastically that we needed the new word *hegemony* to keep it clear that you can successfully resist at one site where ideology is learned, but succumb to the state at others. Run from the state to religion, and religion will do the job. Run from religion to home and family, and all the books you read to learn how to be good at parenting will simultaneously teach you the dominant ideology. We do not have a single, rigid interpretation of the world as a result of capitalism, Althusser claimed; rather, we have a multiple, flexible interpretation of the world that defends ruling class interests even when it seems that ruling class interests are being attacked.

*"Sartre's most important opponent was Louis Althusser. Althusser... addressed the problem of the apparent failure of class dialectics. Unlike, Sartre, however, he was an active member of the French Communist Party, and in the eyes of the political left, this gave Althusser a presumption of moral superiority."*

Secondly, Althusser abandoned the orthodox marxist attitude toward *history*. Old marxism studied history to discover principles of causation, the reasons why a thing came to be in the first place. So, for example, you would study the history of economic transformations and political turmoil that accompanied them in order to find out what determined that a bourgeois class would emerge. In contrast, Althusser's analysis of the ideological state apparatus presupposes that the decisive object of study is not the origin or *production* of the bourgeois class, but its *reproduction*. History is not a study of causation so much as it is a study of "re-causation," an idea of explanation dependent on the principles of generation in a biological sense.

Althusser did not depart from 19th-century orthodox marxism in two ways that bear importantly on our understanding of Sartre's project in his *Critique of Dialectical Reason*:

First, he continued to view *dialectic* as an objective historical force rather than as a system of logic; something which is *manifested* in particular relationships (something to be observed in the clash of opposing political ideas, for example, or in the Utopian vision of a proletarian revolution) rather than *created* in particular relationships (chosen as a strategy of explanation in theory, for example, or of persuasion in political action).

Second, he continued to think of *class* as an objective social category. Although he made great strides in explaining how individual human beings are socialized to think that they fit into the category "bourgeoisie," for example, he said nothing new about the "groupness" of a social class, the phenomenon of whole classes thinking as with one mind, speaking as with one voice, acting as if in one body.

I have taken so much time describing Althusser's thought, not just to show you what a difficult set of rhetorical problems Sartre faced, but also to demonstrate that 20th-century marxist social theory has the same blind spot clearly apparent in contemporary rhetorical theory and in contemporary organizational communication theory. That blind spot is a tendency to begin one's thinking about a subject, not in the subject itself, but in the *context* or *field* of the subject, and then to discover little more about the subject than has already been noticed in descriptions of the context or field. Though there are myriad points of clash between Sartre and Althusser,

I think it's not too oversimplified to suggest that most of them derive from Althusser's commitment to draw inferences from a structured context and Sartre's contrary commitment to draw inferences from the human inclination to *make* structured contexts. Althusser wants to describe dialectic and class in terms of a world where context is a kind of prison that is simply there. Sartre wants to describe dialectic and class in terms of a world where human action subtly creates its own constraining context.

### III. A TERMINISTIC DESCRIPTION OF SARTRE'S THEORY OF PRACTICAL GROUPS

It's time now to sketch Sartre's theory of practical groups. I've given it such a dramatic build-up, however, that a preliminary word of caution is in order. I do not regard the theory of practical groups I'm about to describe as the right, true, or best possible theory. It is only an illustration of the kind of theory I believe we should look for. Sartre asked old questions in a new way, and he came up, not just with new answers, but with a new way of answering. And it's the way of answering I'm recommending for your consideration.

Let's pose the question with reference to rhetoric and organizational communication as well as social theory: These three different bodies of theoretical discourse have a similar blind-spot, the tendency to treat the context or field of investigation as an objective, necessary starting-point for serious scholarly inquiry. Further, each body of discourse prominently features a very similar concept, a term meant to signify the phenomenon of human beings thinking and acting in concert: No rhetorical theory is complete without an accounting of the *audience* targeted by persuasive discourse (in Aristotelian terms) or constituted into a unit through identification (in Burkean terms). No theory of organization communication is complete without an accounting of *groups*. No theory of society is complete without an accounting of the *classes* into which human societies are apparently divided. Finally, in thinking about audiences, groups, and classes, the three bodies of theoretical discourse typically speak about things unconnected with groupness. In rhetoric, audiences are discussed in terms of the speaker's perceptions and the constraints of the rhetorical situation. In organizational communica-

"I do not regard the theory of practical groups I'm about to describe as the right, true, or best possible theory... Sartre asked old questions in a new way, and he came up, not just with new answers, but with a new way of answering. And it's the way of answering I'm recommending for your consideration."

tion, groups are described either as wholly arbitrary, or as products of "inputs" extraneous to the immediate communication situation. In social theory, the classes are discussed as a consequence of the division of wealth and labor in a particular society. This all leads to a common-denominator question: What is *groupness*, and how can we account for it?

Sartre adopts an unusual strategy of response for a marxist, the view of radical empiricism we ordinarily associate with hermeneutics and the sort of metaphysics Martin Heidegger championed. (Of course this is not surprising, since Sartre was probably the central figure in the popularization—if not in the development—of existential philosophy.) Sartre wants to know how it is in everyday life that we are able to distinguish a chance collection of human beings from an organized group of human beings, what it is that members of a group do to signal their groupness. He, then, follows this line of thinking by asking how it is in everyday life that we are able to recognize *degrees* of groupness and to respond to our perceptions that some groups are more legitimate and natural than others, more permanent and noteworthy than others. Sartre's arguments are elaborate and intricate, but I think I can adumbrate them here without doing them violence by using a terministic strategy: Fundamentally, the theory is an articulation of eleven terms that signify types of human groups and the relationships that prevail among individuals in groups. The groups are related to one another developmentally, so that one group type emerges from a transformation in a more primitive group type. I think I can give you a good idea of the theory by defining the eleven terms and discussing each stage of the developmental process.

The necessity of Sartre's first term, *ensemble*, illustrates the thing I find so fascinating about his theory, his attempt to think about all groups in human experience along lines intrinsic to the groups themselves rather than with regard to their origins or their purposes. If you think about it, there is a paucity of terms in any language to signify groups, though the number of different kinds of group in any advanced culture is almost countless. In the English language we usually feature *group* and *organization*. We have other terms (*corporation*, *team*, *club*, and *association*, for example), but these refer more to the structural function of groups in relation to one another than to anything internal to the group

itself. The terms, in other words, give us no clue about how one's behavior or consciousness of belonging or pattern of communication differs in *association* as opposed to *club*, for example. Interestingly, unless we use the word *group* itself technically (as I have done throughout this lecture), we have no generic term to signify all groups at once. This is the reference Sartre reserved for *ensemble*. An *ensemble* is any collection of individuals however constituted, regardless of context, together for whatever purpose.

Sartre's second and third terms, *alterity* and *reciprocity*, describe relations among human beings. They are a dialectical pair drawn directly from the "Self-Other" or "I-Thou" dialectics so familiar in Sartre's earlier work, in Martin Buber, in Jose Ortega y Gasset, and in Heidegger, among others.

A relationship of alterity is the relationship that prevails among strangers. You recognize the humanity of the other people around you, and you do not mind "sharing your space" with them, for you have been taught that they have just as much right to be there as you do. You are usually noncommittal, neither friendly nor hostile. If communication occurs at all in a relationship of alterity, it is highly conventionalized and reveals little about the speakers. The Other, the Alter, is just another material part of your environment, the equivalent of a rock or tree, for all practical purposes a hunk of meat you have no interest in.

The opposite of alterity is reciprocity, the relation that prevails among people who know at least a little bit about each other. You are usually committed in a relationship of reciprocity, one way or the other; that is, you're friendly (most of the time) or you're hostile. In either case, your conduct indicates that you *care* about the relationship, that the other is capable of pleasing you or agitating you. You are willing to adapt your plans and alter your activity in light of your perception of someone else's expectations of you. And you expect reciprocation, that others will take you into account as they act. Though it may be very reserved, communication in a relationship of reciprocity is more abundant and more self-disclosive than in relationships of alterity. You are more than a hunk of meat. In reciprocity, others recognize at least an element of your subjectivity, acting on the faith that your personhood is similar to their own.

"Sartre wants to know how it is in everyday life that we are able to distinguish a chance collection of human beings from an organized group of human beings, what it is that members of a group do to signal their groupness... Fundamentally, his theory is an articulation of eleven terms that signify types of human groups and the relationships that prevail among individuals in groups."

Sartre's fourth and fifth terms are also a dialectical pair, derived from his belief that alterity and reciprocity characterize all relationships. Sartre claims that the first, and most general, difference we notice among the various kinds of ensemble is evidence of degrees of alterity and reciprocity. He uses the term *series* to signify an ensemble each of whose members is determined in alterity by the others. An ensemble of people waiting for a bus or in line to purchase a ticket to a film recognize themselves, and are easily recognizable by others, as a collection of individuals brought together by more than the rules of chance. They may be able to call each other by name. But their relationship is defined more by the bus or the film than by anything intrinsic to their groupness. They are a distinctive ensemble because they exist in a relationship or alterity to one another, despite other outward signs that they may have more in common than waiting in line. (Bus riders in American society, for example, could be assumed to have an economic condition in common, if that's the only transport they can afford, or common political opinions, if they're committed to mass transit as a way cutting down on air pollution.)

Sartre reserves the term *group* to signify the dialectical opposite of a series. A group is an ensemble each of whose members is determined by the others in a relationship of reciprocity. An ensemble of diners at the same table in a restaurant, for example, may see another individual they know and invite that person to join them. Everyone is eating, just as everyone at a bus stop is waiting for a bus. But the meal is a subordinate feature of the event, something the ensemble is doing that has very little to do with the conditions of their being together. They are a distinctive ensemble because they define their existence together as a relationship of reciprocity, ready to identify the person asked to join them as "my friend" or "my business associate" or "our old professor's newest student." (As a footnote here, you may be interested to notice that, in Sartre's terms, researchers using the clinical approach to the study of group communication have yet to study groups at all. Their insistence on studying "zero-history" groups in a task-oriented laboratory setting means that they are always studying a human *series*. They must always either forge and force a *sense* of reciprocity in the series before their study can begin, or ignore reciprocity as an interesting variable in group behav-

ior.)

I must be clear that the relationship between series and group is a dialectical one. These are not distinctive categories into which we can file the ensembles we encounter in everyday life. Every ensemble possesses a degree or a potential for both alterity and reciprocity. This situation might be an example of an element of reciprocity in a series: If one person in line for a movie ticket in downtown Salt Lake addresses another, the other will likely reciprocate, respond to the communication so as to suggest that he or she speaks English and is capable of a reciprocal relationship. And if we imagine a group most rigidly insistent on its reciprocity, still an element of alterity is noticeable: A monastic order in the Catholic church, for example, dresses in uniform, performs the same daily rituals, and practices a belief in the universal brotherhood of Christians. But if a member of the order from Italy visits a monastery in Canada, he will, at least initially, be defined with regard to the rest of the group in a relation of alterity.

Sartre's sixth term has to do with the potential for groupness evident in some series. A series which is capable of constituting a group is called a *gathering*. In principle, every series could constitute a group; but only a few have that potential practically. Unless you are together in an alien culture and isolated by your clumsiness with an alien language, your culture and your language are insufficient common denominators to form a group. An "American Club" in Calcutta makes some sense, but I'd be surprised to find a group by that name in Provo. A gathering must have some substantial interests in common apart from their current relations of alterity, something people care about that can become the basis of reciprocity. Suppose, for example, that the ensemble waiting for a bus rides the same bus every day, and that the bus is always driven by the same jovial, out-going bus driver, Joe Nitfritz. Joe goes out of his way to call each rider by name as he greets them with a hearty "Good morning!" Each rider, still in relations of alterity with one another, develops a relation of reciprocity with Joe. If for any reason Joe wanted to form a group, or someone else wanted to form a group with Joe as the focal point, it is likely that the series could be transformed into a group. It is, therefore, a gathering, in this example a gathering around Joe Nitfritz.

*"Unless you are together in an alien culture and isolated by your clumsiness with an alien language, your culture and your language are insufficient common denominators to form a group. An "American Club" in Calcutta makes some sense, but I'd be surprised to find a group by that name in Provo."*



"Suppose, for example, that the bus riders enjoyed themselves so much, felt so good about the good deed they did for old Joe, that they wanted to stay together and do similar deeds in the future. They like each other, and they want to continue to experience the reciprocity they discovered. So they form an organized group, the Greater Salt Lake Joe Nitfritz Benevolent Society."

Sartre is now in the process of showing developmentally how groups can become more and less permanent features of the social landscape. His seventh term is *fused group*. A fused group is a newly-formed group, dialectically opposed to seriality in its overriding consciousness of reciprocity, and as yet unstructured. When a gathering is transformed into a fused group, it is preoccupied with the newly-discovered conditions of reciprocity among its members that permit a sense of groupness. Even if it is to be a task-oriented group, one that has a problem to solve, very little attention will be paid to the task until all the possible relations of reciprocity have been discussed and established. This is the stage of "getting to know each other." Suppose, for example, that after a long career as a bus driver, Joe Nitfritz announces his intention to retire to each of the riders as they board his bus one day. One, or more, or all of the riders are pleased for Joe, but sad that he will not be driving their bus anymore. The next day at the bus stop, someone mentions his or her feelings about Joe's retirement. The others are taken aback, for a person in a relationship of alterity seems to have read their minds, said something with which they could identify. Stories are told about each rider's relations with Joe. Names are exchanged. Someone suggests that Joe deserves a party. Someone else suggests that the people at this bus stop could cooperate to give just such a party. Telephone numbers are exchanged. One rider notices that another is wearing a particularly attractive hat. Another rider is surprised to find that she has been working for the same company a fourth rider works for. Let's get together for a drink after work tonight and talk about this some more. In a few short minutes, a fused group has been created from a gathering. (As a footnote here, you might notice that the "fantasy-chaining" observed by Bales and Bormann is likely evidence of what Sartre would call the moment of fusion when a clinical series decides to make itself a group.)

A fused group is capable of *being* together in a newly-discovered spirit of reciprocity; but it is not capable of *acting* together in more than rudimentary ways (as, for example, talking together when we consider speech to be a form of action.) Sartre's eighth term signifies the sort of group that is capable of cooperative action. A *pledged group* is a group which develops from a fused group

through an organized distribution of rights and duties that are enforced by a pledge. The decision to act together entails a distribution of labor, for it would be unproductive chaos to imagine every group member doing everything necessary to produce a group action. Suppose, for example, that our bus riders meeting for a drink after work decide that they will, in fact, give Joe Nitfritz a party in honor of his retirement. They'll make a real spectacle of it, holding it right there on the bus with all the local radio and television stations alerted of this unusual event. One rider agrees to take charge of decorations and refreshments, if another will help with the logistics of getting cake, cider, bunting, and balloons to the bus. A third rider works for a radio station and thinks she could manage the publicity. A fourth rider lives next door to the bus company dispatcher and thinks he can arrange to decorate the bus before Joe comes to work. A fifth rider works for a jewelry store and thinks they can get a good deal on a gold watch, if folks would agree to chip in to cover the cost. A sixth rider only works part time, and so has all afternoon to coordinate these activities by telephone. Notice that the *pledge* in this case is the commitment to honor Joe. The party is not a pledge, but a task. The group exhibits a rudimentary structure because a division of labor is necessary to make the party happen. An element of power, in the form of moral suasion, has entered the group, for each person is subject to bearing guilt for the group's failure if his or her part is not done. The pledge is not just a declaration of intention, but a means of enforcement: "What do you mean you haven't checked out the gold watch yet? Don't you want to do something nice for Joe? Didn't we all contribute?"

As I've just suggested, the pledged group exhibits rudimentary structure as a consequence of division of labor; but the structure is temporary, brought into being by the group's commitment to act. Structure, in other words, is a feature of the pledged group, but not an essential or defining feature of the group. Sartre's ninth term, *organized group*, calls attention to the group making its structure an abiding and permanent feature of its identity as a group. An organized group inscribes itself, writes itself down, formalizes rights and duties by defining membership responsibilities and transforming some members into office holders. The pledge is still the locus of the group, but the pledge is now

more general, written in such a way as to imply that the members have made a permanent commitment. Suppose, for example, that the bus riders enjoyed themselves so much, felt so good about the good deed they did for old Joe, that they wanted to stay together and do similar deeds in the future. They like each other, and they want to continue to experience the reciprocity they discovered. Further, they think they did a real service that would be appreciated in the future by other Joe Nitfritzes. So they form an organized group, the Greater Salt Lake Joe Nitfritz Benevolent Society. Their idea is each year to give a party for a city employee about to retire who best exemplifies the good cheer and service of Joe Nitfritz. They write themselves down in a constitution and set of by-laws, arranging for regular meetings, and establishing a committee structure to deal with the business of choosing and honoring exemplary public employees. Still tied to the willingness of "founding members" to act together, still based on the radically empirical reciprocity among "founding members," the group nonetheless anticipates its continuation into an indefinite future. In a word, by inscribing itself, the group makes itself *historical*. It will attract new members, and those new members may not even know Joe Nitfritz or care about him. The group is now a group by two measures, by the continued reciprocity of its members and by the formalized pledge which describes their organization.

Over time, as the original members of an organized group lose interest or die off, relations of reciprocity lose significance, perhaps even cease to be characteristic of the group. The formalized pledge, however, lives on, for it has been written down, and discourse is not so mortal as human beings. The tenth term Sartre conceptualizes is meant to signify groups characterized more by their structure than by task or reciprocity. This is the familiar social term *institution*. In Sartre's vocabulary, an *institution* is a group which develops from an organized group through the ossification of its structures and the reemergence of seriality within it. The most obvious change in moving from organization to institution is an accretion of new members whose only radically empirical connection to other members is through common commitment to the group pledge. The more important point, however, may be that the pledge of the group becomes less important to members than accomplishing the subordinate tasks anticipated by the

group's structure. It is not difficult to imagine, for example, that the committees of the Joe Nitfritz Benevolent Society would be perceived in a hierarchy of prestige. The decorations committee is just a bunch of "gofors," a member might think. The awards committee would be better to be on, because you'd at least get to shop for interesting gifts. But the real plum, what I really want to do, that's the selection committee. Those guys have the real clout, because they get to choose who gets this year's award. So politics enters the group. But notice that this is still a relation of reciprocity, a hostility based on envy and desire for prestige that you expect to be reciprocated as you compete politically for high status positions within the group. The more interesting phenomenon is the reemergence of seriality within the group. As you go about the business of the awards committee, for example, the people you associate with most are on that committee. That committee may meet four times a month. The group as a whole may meet only every other month. In a meeting of the whole group, you might find yourself not even recognizing some new member who is on the decorations committee. Indeed, if power relations have really permeated the group, identification of the new member as belonging to the decorations committee may be enough in itself to determine that you'll relate to him or her only in alterity.

The largest ensemble Sartre considers, his eleventh and last term, is *class*. Remember that he engaged this whole elaborate thought system so that he'd be able to explain why orthodox marxist accounts of the dialectic of class conflict are unsatisfying and empirically irrelevant. For Sartre, the social *class* is an ensemble of ensembles, specifically a totalization (or a unified whole) of multiple institutions, pledged groups, and series. I must apologize for changing tactics on you right here at the end of my lecture, but it is in discussing *class* that my terministic strategy breaks down. I can't continue the thematic example of the Joe Nitfritz Society because I must get you to think about the groupness of a group of groups, and this is entirely too intricate for this occasion and for my feeble rhetorical resources.

The basic point is that social classes have to discover and agree upon conditions of reciprocity among member ensembles that are roughly parallel to the transformation of a gathering into a fused group. The proletarian

*"In a word,  
by inscribing  
itself, the  
group makes  
itself  
historical.  
It will attract  
new members,  
and those new  
members may  
not even know  
Joe Nitfritz  
or care about  
him. The  
group is now  
a group by two  
measures, by  
the continued  
reciprocity of  
its members  
and by the  
formalized  
pledge which  
describes their  
organization."*

*"In short, Sartre alleges, the intellectual problem to solve, if you are interested in the success of leftist politics, is locating the means to transform the ensemble-of-ensembles called "the working class" from something resembling a gathering into something resembling a pledged group."*

class, for example, is not homogenous, as so many 19th-century marxist theories assumed. Yes, there are common experiences based on one's position in the economic structure; but these are only *potential* loci of reciprocity, the same sort of potential for groupness that lies untapped in a gathering. The situation is complicated by the fact that many of the members of a class are already grouped. Some, the French Communist Party, for example, are already institutionalized, marked by internal politics and seriality which is inconsistent with, and actually works against, the development of class reciprocity. Other groups, though they are not institutionalized, are pledged along lines specific to their activity, and even though they are still determined in relations of reciprocity, those might not be the same relations of reciprocity necessary for the emergence of class. The Rainbow Coalition in American politics, for example, is a group that might participate in class politics; but it is already pledged in light of a common reciprocity with a charismatic leader, Jesse Jackson. Is reciprocity with Jackson consistent with the reciprocity necessary to transform class from a gathering to a fused group? Finally, the class gathering also includes series of people who are only hunks of meat to one another, despite having all of the requisite common experiences to fund the development of reciprocity. Workers on the assembly line in Detroit, for example, could coalesce into a group useful to a working class—that was the dream of the American labor movement. But in their minds, their work is only a meal ticket. They do not want to think about their work except while at work. They live for their time away from work. Since the latent conditions for a politically active reciprocity among them all derive from their activity in the workplace, their attitude toward the relationship between work and leisure makes developing reciprocity a negative and uncomfortable rhetorical activity. In short, Sartre alleges, the intellectual problem to solve, if you are interested in the success of leftist politics, is locating the means to transform the ensemble-of-ensembles called "the working class" from something resembling a gathering into something resembling a pledged group.

I said at the beginning of this section that I was less interested in advocating Sartre's theory than in recommending his way of answering problems. Let me make that point again for you by comparing the approach you have just heard with that of Althusser. Recall that Althusser placed the onus of responsibility for

the failure of French leftist politics on conditions outside the community of French leftists. By revising out attitude toward history and theorizing the problem of ideology as a matter of reproduction rather than a matter of production, he attributed the failure of the left to the ingenious rhetorical skill of capitalist state organizers, their ability to create a hegemony by reproducing ideology at multiple sites, overdetermining that all who live in capitalistic societies will embrace values at odds with their true interests. In contrast, Sartre restated in elegant form the Shakespearean claim: "The fault, dear Louis, lies not so much in the skill of our opponents as in our own lack of understanding and skill." He suggested that marxist theory and marxist politics had approached the central concern of class dialectics from the wrong angle. Class is a special case of groupness, and the dialectic is a special case of the relationship of members in a group. Describing class as a determined effect of economic and political structure is akin to trying to determine the number of teeth in a horse's mouth by studying the horse's available food supply. Reducing the dialectic to a static system of objective structural relationships is akin to trying to describe human thought and interaction without ever studying human beings in the process of thinking and acting.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

If this were Chataqua, where three-hour lectures were not uncommon, and if your patience and my wit and voice held out, I could end with a Cartesian harmony, being very elaborate in showing you how Sartre's approach to groups should effect the development of rhetorical theory, group and organizational communication research, and the theory of social control. That would not only be dull and laborious; however, it would also defeat one of my purposes in choosing this subject for public lecture. I think we should realize that the questions we ask are more important to the development of knowledge than the provisional answers we discover. I think we should take care about the way we ask questions in our field. The point of theory is to *think*—explanation is just a chance and momentary victory in a continual quest for knowledge that is valuable, mostly, for its own sake. Sartre's theory of practical groups, therefore, does not exist to be borrowed or merely applied in new contexts. It exists as

an inspiration to find dots to connect, and then to connect them. If you are a rhetorician, I'd like you to think about Sartre's strategy of asking questions that could as well be about *audience* as *class*. I'd be pleased if you agree that our theories should address the "groupness" of audiences, that accounts which amount to little more than demographic description of the individuals in front of a speaker are conceptually, intellectually impoverished. If you are an organizational communication researcher, I'd be pleased if you think about the advantages of Sartre's rich understanding of groups. Even if it suits you to keep conceiving groups and organizations as only the context of communication, I'd like you to think about how the nature of relationships changes the identity of the group. I find it difficult to believe, for example, that the communicative process of decision-making is essentially the same in a fused group as in an organized group, or that the clinical study of a series will yield reliable generalizations about the pattern of communication in a pledged group. If you are a social theorist, I'd like you to think about how well Sartre's strategy of radical empiricism responds to the problems of social order. Even if it suits you to keep conceiving the dominant ideology as an objective prison of the mind, I'd like you to keep in mind that these relations of domination are lived, acted out by human beings whose primary interest lies less in the objective alterity of their domination than in the subjective comfort of whatever relations of reciprocity they can manage to develop. Marx, himself, recommended "bottom-up" thinking in his debate with Feuerbach, and if we follow his suggestion, this means that we should study *class* as an instance of groupness, not as a determined, ossified structure of capitalism.

If you are none of these things, or, heaven help you, if you are all of them, I'd like you to understand that no matter how few articles appear in our professional journals under the heading of group communication, the study of group communication is nonetheless the conceptual center of any communication study. Understand groups and group communication, and you have mastered one of the most important elements of any communication or social theory.

Thank you for your time and your patience.

## V. REFERENCES MENTIONED IN THE COURSE OF LECTURE

Adorno, Theodor W. *The jargon of authenticity*. Trans. Knut Tarnowski and Frederic Will. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press (1973).

Adorno, Theodor W. Sociology and empirical research. Trans. Graham Bartram. In: Paul Connerton, ed., *Critical sociology*. New York: Penguin Books (1976), pp. 237-57.

Althusser, Louis, *Lenin and philosophy and other essays*. Trans. Ben Brewster. New York: Monthly Review Press (1971).

Althusser, Louis, *Montesquieu, Rousseau, Marx: Politics and history*. Trans. B. Brewster. London: NLB (1972).

Bales, Robert Freed. *Personality and interpersonal behavior*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston (1970).

Barthes, Roland, *Elements of semiology*. Trans. Annette Lavers and Colin Smith. New York: Hill and Wang (1967).

Barthes, Roland. To write: An intransitive verb? In: *The structuralist controversy: The languages of criticism and the sciences of man*, Richard Macksey and Eugenio Donato, eds. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press (1972) pp. 134-56.

Barthes, Roland. *SIZ*. Trans. R. Miller. New York: Hill and Wang (1974).

Baudrillard, Jean. *For a critique of the political economy of the sign*. Trans. Charles Levin. St. Louis, MO: Telos Press (1981).

Baudrillard, Jean. *The mirror of production*. Trans. M. Poster. St. Louis, MO: Telos Press (1975).

Baudrillard, Jean. *Simulations*. Trans. Paul Foss, Paul Patton, and Philip Beitchman. New York: Semiotext(e) (1983).

Bormann, Ernest G. Fantasy and rhetorical vision: The rhetorical criticism of social reality. *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 58: (1972), 396-407.

Buber, Martin. *I and Thou*. Trans. Ronald Gregor. New York: Scribner's (1958).

Deleuze, Gilles, and Guattari, Felix. *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and schizophrenia*. Trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press (1983).

Deleuze, Gilles, and Guattari, Felix. *On the line*. Trans. John Johnston. New York: Semiotext(e) (1983).

Deleuze, Gilles, and Guattari, Felix. *Nomadology: The war machine*. Trans. Brian Massumi. New York: Semiotext(e) (1986).

"Even if it suits you to keep conceiving groups and organizations as only the context of communication, I'd like you to think about how the nature of relationships changes the identity of the group."

Foucault, Michel. *The order of things: An archaeology of the human sciences*. New York: Random House (1970).

Foucault, Michel. *The archaeology of knowledge*. Trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith. New York: Harper Colophon (1972).

Foucault, Michel. History, discourse, and discontinuity. *Salmagundi* 20: (1972) 234.

Goldmann, Lucien. Structure: Human reality and methodological concept. In: *The structuralist controversy: The language of criticism and the sciences of man*, Richard Macksey and Eugenio Donato, eds. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press (1972) pp. 98-124.

Goldmann, Lucien. *Power and humanism*. Trans. Brian Trench and Tom Wengraf. Nottingham, UK: Spokesman Books (1974).

Gramsci, Antonio. *The modern prince and other writings*. Trans. Louis Marks. London: Lawrence & Wishart (1957).

Gramsci, Antonio. *Selections from the prison notebooks*. Ed. and Trans. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith. New York: International Publishers (1971).

Gramsci, Antonio. *Selections from cultural writings*. Ed. David Forgacs and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith. Trans. W. Boelhower. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press (1985).

Heidegger, Martin. *Existence and being*. Introduction and analysis by Werner Brock. Trans. Douglas Scott, R. F. C. Hull, and Alan Crick. South Bend, IN: Regnery/Gateway (1949; rpt. 1979).

Heidegger, Martin. *An introduction to metaphysics*. Trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson from the 7th German ed. New York: Harper and Row (1962).

Heidegger, Martin. *Being and time*. Trans. Ralph Manheim from the 3rd German ed., New Haven, CT: Yale University Press (1959).

Heidegger, Martin. *Early Greek thinking*. Trans. David Farrell Krell and Frank A. Capuzzi, New York: Harper & Row (1975).

Horkheimer, Max. *Critical theory: Selected essays*. Trans. Matthew J. O'Connell. New York: Seabury Press (1972).

Horkheimer, Max. *Critique of instrumental reason*. New York: Continuum (1974).

Horkheimer, Max, and Adorno, Theodor W. *Dialectic of enlightenment*. Trans. John Cumming. New York: Seabury Press (1972).

Lacan, Jacques. Of structure as an inmixing of an otherness prerequisite to any subject whatsoever. In: *The structuralist controversy: The languages of criticism and the sciences of man*, Richard Macksey and Eugenio Donato, eds.

Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press (1972) pp. 186-200.

Lacan, Jacques. *The four fundamental concepts of psychoanalysis*. Ed. by Jacques-Alain Miller. Trans. Alan Sheridan. New York: W. W. Norton (1977).

Levi-Strauss, Claude. *Structural anthropology*. Trans. Claire Jacobson and Brooke Grundfest Schoepf. New York: Basic Books (1963).

Lukacs, Georg. *History and class consciousness: Studies in marxist dialectics*. Trans. R. Livingstone. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press (1971).

Liotard, Jean-Francois. *The post-modern condition: A report on knowledge*. Trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press (1984).

Malraux, Andre. *Anti-memoirs*. Trans. Terence Kilmartin. New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston (1968).

Marx, Karl and Engels, Frederick. *The German ideology*. In: Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected works*, 9+ vols. Moscow: Progress Publishers (1976), V, 36-37.

Ortega y Gasset, Jose. The self and the other. *Partisan Review* 19: (152) 392-409.

Ortega y Gasset, Jose. *Man and people*. Trans. Willard R. Trask. New York: W. W. Norton (1957).

Ortega y Gasset, Jose. *Man and crisis*. Trans. Mildred Adams. New York: W. W. Norton (1958).

Piaget, Jean. *Structuralism*. Trans. and ed. C. Maschler. New York: Harper Torchbooks (1970).

Piaget, Jean. *Genetic epistemology*. Trans. E. Duckworth. New York: W. W. Norton. (1971).

Sartre, Jean-Paul. *Being and nothingness: An essay in phenomenological ontology*. Special abridged edition. Trans. H. E. Barnes. Secaucus, NJ: The Citadel Press (1956).

Sartre, Jean-Paul. *Critique of dialectical reason: A theory of practical groups*. Trans. Alan Sheridan-Smith. London: NLB (1976).

Sartre, Jean-Paul. *Essays in existentialism*. Ed. Wade Baskin. Secaucus, NJ: The Citadel Press (1965).