



Re-Visiting an Old Friend: Updating “The Soviet Communist” Chapter of “Four Theories of The Press” to Empower 21st-Century Media Professionals

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What is perplexing about Four Theories of the Press (Siebert, Peterson & Schramm, 1956) is that it is difficult to situate the western media within any of the theories or examples. Ideally, it would be wonderful if American media systems conformed to the Libertarian or the Social Responsibility theories. Of the four – Authoritarian, Libertarian, Social Responsibility, and Soviet/Communist – the middle pair, Libertarian and Social Responsibility, most-idealize the objectives of media systems in a free, democratic society, and, at times, western media systems do embody some attributes of the two. In the spirit of John Nerone’s and his seven contributors 1995 update of Four Theories, this research aims to continue this academic conversation by further expanding one dimension of Four Theories – the challenge to modernize Marxist theory and bring it into the daily process of media management and practice as a way to energize media managers and professionals in the 21st century. The hermeneutical methodology of this analysis will draw from contemporary philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer’s (1975) assertion that individual understanding is key to making sense of the ever-changing broader perspectives that arguably create larger truths.

Keywords: Four Theories, Marxism, philosophy, value, alienation, journalism, media.

INTRODUCTION

Perhaps the most-apt description of *Four Theories of the Press* (Siebert, Peterson & Schramm, 1956) is that it does not in fact offer four different theories at all. Instead, as Nerone (1995) states: “it offers *one* theory with *four* examples” (p. 18) [emphasis added]. In its day, *Four Theories* aptly meshed with the world’s post-cold war historical moment. In spite of this, the theories or examples – depending on one’s point of view – have been a key component of media studies for more than five decades.

What has always been perplexing about *Four Theories* is that it is difficult to situate the western media within *any* of the theories or examples. Ideally, it would be wonderful if American media systems conformed to the Libertarian or the Social Responsibility theories. Of the four – Authoritarian, Libertarian, Social Responsibility, and Soviet/Communist – the middle pair, Libertarian and Social Responsibility, most-idealize the objectives of media systems in a free,

democratic society, and, at times, western media systems do embody some attributes of the two. After all, striving to be socially responsible, although not specifically stated, is hinted at in codes of ethics such as the Society of Professional Journalists (SPJ) when professionals are urged to “minimize harm,” “act independently,” and be “accountable and transparent” (SPJ, 2014).

The same is true for the Libertarian model of *Four Theories*, which views freedom of the media as an absolute and urges media outlets to act as a “watchdog” for society. Again, the U.S. media would love to embody these attributes, and, at times, the media do act as a watchdog, the most-famous example being *The Washington Post’s* Watergate investigation by famed Pulitzer Prize-winning journalists Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein in the 1970s. The Libertarian theory’s watchdog attribute is embodied in the character of the Pulitzer Prize categories of Public Service, Breaking News Reporting, Investigative Reporting, Explanatory Reporting, Local Reporting, National Reporting, International Reporting, and Feature Writing (The Pulitzer, 2017). Still, though, western media systems largely view *Four Theories* as an abstract theoretical model that chiefly has a motivational place in the classroom. It is seldom, if ever, debated in newsrooms as a tool for effectively framing news and feature stories or editorials.

Nerone, et al. (1995) skillfully refocuses *Four Theories* for the 20th century and beyond in *Last Rights: Revisiting Four Theories of the Press*.¹ They accomplish this by immediately noting that the original work’s popularity “... comes mainly from its brevity and simplicity” (p. 1). The liberal framework of *Four Theories* is undeniable since the idea was conceived by the National Council of Churches (NCC) and funded by the Rockefeller Foundation (p. 8). Early on, the overwhelming power of capitalism is evident. As Guback (1995) writes in *Last Rights*:

In the twentieth century, industrial capitalism has been the uncontested, dominant institution in the United States. As such, it has fostered an ideological climate that works to sustain the general interests of capital and the “free market” as an economic system. This has been evident, for example, in the political sphere (p. 9).

The above quote adequately frames one primary objective of this research: As media systems continue to evolve in the 21st century, capitalism wields more authority than ever, and the zeal for profit at times derails ethical and moral thinking. Because of the expansion of online news venues, traditionally printed newspapers continue to disappear. The total daily circulation of U.S. newspapers has steadily declined from a high of 62.8 million in 1985 to 34.6 million in 2016, a 44 percent decline (Pew Research Center, 2017). Although monthly online newspaper visits continue to grow – from 8.2 million in 2014 to 11.7 million in 2016 – the tradition and spirit of the daily newspaper continues to evolve (Pew Research Center, 2017). What is perhaps most startling to media professionals and instructors of media studies is the declining trust most Americans have in the media. At the dawn of the 21st century, Kovach and Rosenstiel (2001) were among the first to eloquently convey this core distrust. Their interviews for *The Elements of Journalism: What Newspeople Should Know and the Public Should Expect* revealed that in 1999 just 21 percent of Americans thought the press cared about people. This was down from 41 percent in 1985. Only 58 percent respected the press’s watchdog role, a drop from 67 percent in 1985. And, perhaps most startling, only 45 percent – fewer than half of those polled – thought the press protected democracy. In 1985, that figure had been 55 percent. And in the nearly two decades since Kovach and Rosenstiel’s research, the raw numbers have grown more distressing. A recent Gallop poll, for example, indicated that only 32 percent of Americans had a “great deal” or “a fair amount” of trust in the media to protect democracy (Swift, 2016). Other studies have the figure even lower. At the root of this evolution is the basic notion of profit and exploring this

¹ Other researchers have studied *Four Theories* in somewhat similar ways. For example, Ostini and Fung (2009) proposed a new model for national media systems that considered a multitude of factors including culture, national development, structural, and professionalism.

realm will hopefully both inform and empower media professionals and managers for future decades.

As online media outlets became more and more available to the public, traditional media companies felt an immediate impact, particularly in terms of declining advertising revenue. Eventually, however, many media organizations have been innovative in establishing new ways of melding traditional advertising with online methods and profits have rebounded (Yang & Ruiz, 2018). Additionally, the profits for mega media corporations have skyrocketed. News Corp, for example, which owns “The Wall Street Journal” and “The New York Post” reported profits of \$6.86 billion in 2015, and Gannett, which owns 93 daily newspapers in the U.S., reported profits of \$2.95 billion for the same year (O’Reilly, 2016).

Research Statement, Methodology and Literature Review

In the spirit of Nerone and his seven contributors² update of *Four Theories*, this research aims to continue this academic conversation by further expanding one dimension of *Four Theories* – the challenge to modernize Marxist theory and bring it into the daily process of media management and practice. This is a paramount concern in the 21st century as the constant push to achieve greater profit often gets in the way of ethical, democracy-maintaining journalism. For journalism to regain the respect it has steadily lost in the past 15 years, change must come from its core.

The mere suggestion of infusing Marxist thought and philosophy with capitalism might seem ultra-radical to many; however, Marxism in the 21st century is far different than it was when *Four Theories* was published in 1956, during the height of the Cold War. Marxist theory is now seen as more of a tool for social criticism than for revolution (Dupré, 1983; Luke, 1990; Haslanger, 2012). That social criticism begins with the fact that Marx refuses to separate culture from its natural basis and embraces its historical connection. As Dupré (1983) writes:

In discussing the concept of culture, we often forget that it is the outcome of a particular, historical process. Until we become aware of this process we fail to understand both the dynamic nature of the cultural reality and the inevitable relativity of our approach to it (p. 58).

For Marx, culture is a multi-faceted concept. As a broad notion, it has been used in ways that may be repellent to most Marxists “... whether to defend the notion of ‘art for art’s sake’ or, in a very different use of the term, to reject a materialist approach to anthropology” (Sahlins, 1976, as quoted in Bottomore et al., 1983, p. 109).

Bringing Marxist theory into the 21st century as a tool for empowering media professionals is both radical and innovative, but by updating, expanding, and modernizing that dimension of *Four Theories*, it merges the past with the present and offers enlightening prospects for the future. By dissecting and recasting core Marxian terms such as alienation and value, media managers and organizations will be urged to look at profit in new ways, which ultimately can have positive effects on the larger communities within which these organizations are embedded. To accomplish this objective, many of Marx’s original writings will be analyzed in hermeneutic fashion. Additionally, key philosophers such as Walter Lippmann, John Dewey, James Carey, and others will be drawn upon to add further context and depth.

² John C. Nerone was both the editor and a key contributor to “Last Rights: Revisiting Four Theories of the Press.” The other contributors were: William E. Berry, Sandra Braman, Clifford Christians, Thomas G. Guback, Steven J. Helle, Louis W. Liebovich, and Kim B. Rotzoll.

Another embedded concept to this research will be the ancient Greek notion of the polis, where the citizens assume a direct role in the construction and maintenance of the city-state/community. Philosophers such as Socrates saw not the leaders but the people as being the true “rulers,” since they, collectively, were responsible for selecting the rulers. This unfettered view of the collective will be instrumental to this paper’s challenge to media professionals.

The hermeneutical methodology of this analysis will draw from contemporary philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer’s (1975) assertion that individual understanding is key to making sense of the ever-changing broader perspectives that arguably create larger truths. Gadamer’s concept of the hermeneutic circle – which he expanded from Martin Heidegger’s thinking – emphasizes the circular nature of interpretation. As Gadamer (2000) views it “... understanding is always a movement in this kind of circle, which is why the repeated return from the whole to the parts, and vice versa is essential” (p. 190). The circle, according to Gadamer, is constantly expanding because the concept of the “whole” is relative since it is affected by the understanding of the individual parts. Contemporary philosopher Walter Ong (1995/1999) saw interpretation as an integral part of human existence, writing:

In a quite ordinary and straightforward sense, to interpret means for a human being to bring out for another human being or for other human beings (or for himself or herself) what is concealed in a given manifestation, that is, what is concealed in a verbal statement or a given phenomenon or state of affairs providing information (p. 183).

The human ingredient of hermeneutics is another primary motivation of this research. Nerone et al. (1995) well convey the “efficient and unfair manner” in which Marxism is dealt with in *Four Theories* (p. 125). Because of the historical moment in which *Four Theories* was written, i.e., the aforementioned Cold War era, Marxism was naturally shrouded with Stalinism, which resulted in the title of that specific chapter: “The Soviet Communist Theory of the Press.” Simply put, during this period Marxism was frequently paralleled with communism and naturally perceived as a threat. In the ensuing five-plus decades since *Four Theories’* publication, perception of Marxism, though not entirely free from the constraints of communism, has tempered somewhat. For this research to be relevant and achieve the most value, media professionals and managers must be open to considering change as the most-basic level – within themselves. This is why this research will not consider the *broad* implications of Marxist thought but instead will focus on *foundational* terms (i.e., alienation and value) that will hopefully act as the “seeds” of future change.

Specifically, this paper will explore the following research statement: By broadening the Marxist/communist chapter of *Four Theories* to include a deeper, more socially responsible interpretation of Marxism, media managers and journalists of the 21st century can strive for a form of media coverage that is less motivated by financial returns and more motivated by community building. Granted, this is no easy task in a country such as the United States where the success of nearly every business model is assessed by end-of-year profits. These profits are, admittedly, necessary in an era where multiple news outlets compete for limited advertising dollars. Infusing new thought within this profit dimension peripherally connects with the Social Responsibility component of *Four Theories* in that news organizations and managers are being challenged to think first of the long-term well being of their communities and (slightly) less about their profit margins.

The fact that *Last Rights* was published in 1995 alone suggests a need to further update the Marxism chapter to make it more relevant for 21st-century media professionals. Liebovich (1995), who wrote that chapter, is, for the most part, complimentary of Walter Schramm’s

original *Four Theories* chapter. Perhaps the greatest contribution Liebovich makes is stressing that we “now better understand the intellectual climate in which *Four Theories* was written” (p. 127). The press of that era was important but never the focal point for the implementation of revolutionary ideas. Additionally, the communist-controlled government [of that era] did indeed own virtually all media outlets. Private ownership was simply not accepted (p. 129). As Liebovich writes:

Media were not tools for the proletariat to support the revolution but propaganda vehicles for bureaucrats to protect their power and continually redefine the meaning of the vague, constitutional role of the press (p. 131).

Liebovich does cast an eye toward the 21st century, noting that the media of the future will become much more complex (which they have), underscoring the need for a marketplace of ideas in order to avoid “the kind of exploitation that Marx so greatly detested” (p. 132).

To deepen the above-stated research statement, this paper’s primary aim is to suggest how two foundational aspects of Marxism – alienation and value – can empower modern media professionals to critically assess their profession as well as the embedded economic component. The objective is not to “burn down” the traditional “house of journalism” and replace it via a Marxian revolution but instead to offer a Marxian-*informed* type of journalism that has as its objectives building and sustaining stronger communities. For Marx, the concept of community goes much deeper than a mere political community. As he writes in “Critical Marginal Notes on the Article ‘The King of Prussia and Social Reform’” in 1844:

But the *community* from which the worker is *isolated* is a community the real character and scope of which is quite different from that of the *political* community. The community from which the worker is isolated *by his own labour* is *life* itself, physical and mental life, human morality, human activity, human enjoyment, *human nature*. *Human nature* is the *true community* of men” (as cited in Tucker, 1978, p. 131).

The alienation and isolation from community frequently occurs when labor and profit enter into the dynamic and these concepts infuriated Marx, primarily because he saw the basic process of working – particularly when the labor is for oneself – as satisfying, invigorating, and productive. The act of working and its associated production component offers human beings a sense of identity and self-worth. At Toews notes in the introduction to *The Communist Manifesto* (Marx & Engels, 1848/1999): “Labor was the activity that defined ‘real’ life – concrete, sensuous existence in civil society – in contrast to the purely abstract formal life of the citizen in the sphere of laws and political institutions” (p. 33). When value (especially use-value and exchange-value) and profit enter the dynamic, workers become estranged and alienated from the process and begin to function as mere cogs in a massive machine.

The communal nature of humankind is expressly tied to labor, economics, as well as to the overall theme of this essay. As Marx and Engels (1845-46/1978) write in *The German Ideology*:

... the division of labour offers us the first example of how, as long as man remains in natural society, that is, as long as a cleavage exists between the particular and the common interest, as long, therefore, as activity is not voluntarily, but naturally, divided, man’s own deed becomes an alien power opposed to him, which enslaves him instead of being controlled by him (as cited in Tucker, 1978, p. 160).

The type of alienation and enslavement Marx and Engels mentions may have been in response to the historical moment of the middle 19th century, but it could easily apply to the present-day work climate, which has been disrupted by changing technology, the introduction of

technologically specific forms of work, and the natural temptation to increase profit margins (Witschge & Nygren, 2009; Powers, 2012). The resulting sense of alienation affects not only the work environment but also carries over into the realm of personal life. Our professional fates have gained great ontological power in the 20th and 21st centuries. Deetz (1994) has suggested that our professional lives are every bit as important to us as our family and spiritual realms.

The corresponding dimension of value is paramount to re-establishing a sense of order in the realms of work and personal life. When undertaking the seemingly basic concept of value, one must remember that it is arguably one of the most controversial topics within Marxist theory because of the divide between whether capitalism makes value redundant or whether value is a foundational concept because of capitalism (Steedman, 1977; Rosdolsky, 1968, as cited in Bottomore et al. 1983). Because of the depth and complexity of value, this research will concentrate only on the intersection between exchange and surplus value, which in simple terms is where excess profit can occur. Surplus value is a translation of the German word “*Mehrwert*,” which means “value added.” Within surplus value resides the embedded (and albeit pure) value of human work as well as the aforementioned phenomenon of alienation. Placing this within the modern-day process of media production and management will hopefully underscore the inequity between the value of the human subject and the reverence of the news-gathering process, an arguably necessary process for sustaining democracy.

Since *Last Rights* was published, journalism has been under fire from multiple vantage points. The term fake news³ has become a frighteningly common label since the 2016 election of Donald J. Trump. Research indicates that the widespread use of social media makes the circulation of fake stories easy and assures that they will reach a widespread audience (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2016). It has been estimated that up to 62 percent of adults in the United States get their news via social media, and, when it comes to fake news, Facebook has been one of the most-popular vehicles for dissemination (Gottfried & Shearer, 2016; Silverman, 2016).

Still, though, fake news gains enormous momentum through the naturally flowing currents of social media. One study into the Trump-Clinton presidential race noted that 115 pro-Trump fake stories were shared on Facebook 30 million times, while 41 pro-Clinton fake stories were shared 7.6 million times (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2016, p. 212). The unfortunate outcome is a recasting of reality itself. The verified form of “truth” that for decades was a primary objective for journalists has been recast into a *fuzzy phenomenon* that is open to constant debate. Even if fake news is not as widespread as some allege, it still has an embedded effect on people’s perception of their world. Many become confused, much like Lippmann’s bewildered herd and democracy ends up becoming threatened. Lippmann (1927/1993) greatly feared the relative ease that this metaphorical herd could be manipulated by slick propaganda, thus derailing critical thinking and the true spirit of democracy (p. 145).

Alienation as a New Form of Journalistic Empowerment

Marx sees man (or personkind) as “... *social* man, bound and shaped in social relationships, disciplined by production and social life” (Kamenka, 1983, p. xxiv). Alienation⁴ occurs within this social framework, and, for Marx, it is a multi-dimensional proposition. He embeds it within the value/profit system, particularly within surplus value. The worker becomes so distanced from the production process (and what the end result is sold for) that he/she no longer feels connected to the true purpose of work.

³ Although the 21st-century effects of fake news may seem unique, fake news, in different forms, has been around for centuries, the most-famous example being the Yellow Journalism era of the late 19th century, which was typified by renown battles between Joseph Pulitzer’s “New York World” and William Randolph Hearst’s “New York Journal.”

⁴ Marx preferred the word “alienation” and used it throughout his philosophy; however, Georg Luckács used “reification” in his 1923 book *History and Class Consciousness*. Reification is from the German word *Verdinglichung*, which literally means “making into a thing.”

Marxian alienation has a multitude of components. First and perhaps foremost, it is when (a person, group, organization, or society) becomes alien:

... (1) to the results or products of its own activity (and to the activity itself) and/or (2) to the nature in which it lives, and/or (3) to other human beings, and ... (4) to itself (to its own historically created human possibilities) (Bottomore et al., 1983, p. 9).

The competitive modern-day media world has become far removed from the largely industrial climate that fueled Marx's anger; however, the drive for profit continues to rule the present media landscape. After all, in true capitalist form, without profit organizations cannot effectively function. A common ground must develop between the function of a media organization within a democracy and its need to make a suitable profit. Perhaps that common ground is where Marx's view of alienation can be turned on its head and become more of an empowering tool for each individual journalist and media manager. This can occur if one dissects Marxian alienation and then recast it as a useful tool. In Marxian philosophy, alienation is always self-alienation, or, as Bottomore, et al. (1983) note "... the alienation of man from himself (from his human possibilities) through himself (through his own activity) (p. 10). This form of self-alienation becomes a grand call for the revolutionary changed that will end self-alienation.

But what if alienation were used to distance professionals – at least abstractly – from the lure of profit and closer to a grand vision of stronger communities? Granted, this is radical and most economically minded people may see it as fantasy, but one of the more debated issues in Marxism concerns the concept of the revolution. In *The Communist Manifesto*, Marx and Engels (1848/1999) characterize this social upheaval as "... a revolutionary re-constitution of society at large, or in the common ruin of the contending classes" (p. 65). Purists see it as a literal revolution where the bourgeois falls and the proletariat is victorious; however, debate inevitably revolves around the simple question: *What happens after the revolution?* Again, Marxian purists envision the rise of communism/socialism where the state controls all property and presumably takes care of everyone in a fair and equitable manner, but Marx is not completely clear on this (Marx & Engels, 1845-46/1978). Instead, there exists a broader, unclear post-revolution realm where a multitude of possibilities reside.

These are indeed radical times for media professionals and managers, so recasting Marxian alienation in a manner that empowers professionals instead of crippling them makes sense. Distancing themselves, at least abstractly, from the dazzling attraction of profit and challenging them to use thoughtful reporting and media management to build strong communities must be considered a viable objective.

But what constitutes an acceptable community, and how achievable is such a notion in the first place? The ancient Greek city-states were far from perfect – women had few rights, slavery was tolerated, and class systems were commonplace – but the word "polis" has a distinct philosophical appeal when visualizing strong communities in the 21st century (Hansen, 2006). In its simplest form, polis means city-state; however, it can also refer to a body of citizens and their inherent and collective responsibility to make society as noble and functional as possible. Plato and Aristotle considered the best form of government for a polis to be one that leads to *common good* [emphasis added] (Takala, 1998; Smith, 1999). Perhaps the most-useful way to view community is to envision it as a Platonic Form, something that is perfect and unachievable in the temporal world, yet still worth pursuing for the benefit of all (Plato, trans., 1999). When contemporary media professionals, whether they individual journalists or media managers, begin to alienate themselves (even partially) from the attraction of profit and focus more on the image of a strong community, the benefits can be astounding. Such a motivation can begin to move us from what Boorstin (1961/1992) terms, "the thicket of unreality which stands between us and the facts of life." This realm, he writes, is of our own making, through our wealth, literacy,

technology, and progress (p. 3). What Boorstin is challenging us to do is to think critically and act virtuously, which is a modern application of ancient Greek philosophy.

Reconsidering Value for The Sake of the Greater Good

In early May of 1875, Marx used the phrase “From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs!”⁵ to frame his vision of a world when “... the antithesis between mental and physical labor, has vanished; after labor has become not only a means of life but life’s prime want” (Marx, 1875, as cited in Tucker, 1978, p. 531). In its essence, this statement can and should be a battle cry for media professionals and managers of the 21st century in that it nicely compartmentalizes how value should be perceived if it is to empower strong communities. Value in and of itself is both a necessary and a superfluous element of Marxian philosophy. In one sense, some see value as so indelibly linked to capitalism that it becomes problematic when considering Marx’s basic analysis of exploitation. However, others see value as a necessary building block – a cornerstone if you will – of any logical understanding of money and capital (Steedman, 1977; Rosdolsky, 1968). In the context of *Four Theories*, value bifurcates between profit and the function of the media to assist in building and sustaining strong democratic communities. In the context of Marxist theory, value bifurcates between “exchange value” and “surplus value” with increasing profit being the ultimate objective in capitalism.

In the context of this analysis, value must intertwine with the background notion of the media’s responsibility to honestly and professionally inform society in a manner that will maintain a strong, effective democracy. Individual journalists have traditionally viewed their profession as one centered on the callings of public service, being society’s watchdog, and analyzing complex problems (Weaver et al., 2007). Those who consume the news, however, tend to perceive the industry as inherently bias (Rouner, Slater, & Buddenbaum, 1999; Morales, 2012). And it seems no matter how fervently media professionals embrace the notion of objectivity, the public continually fails to recognize that component when critiquing the media (Zúñiga & Hinsley, 2013).

Coincidentally, it is within this paradox of press perceptions that value can discover its greatest use. On a surface level, it may seem natural to view freedom of the press as a *valuable* entity. After all, the concept of a press system free of government interference is one of the core components of the First Amendment. However, when the issue of rights arises, whether it be freedom of the press, speech, religion, assembly, etc., each member of a community may have differing perceptions of what the term “rights” means. As Carey (1997) states: “*Community* is one of the most difficult, complex, and ambiguous words in our language” (p. 1). Arguably, the notions of community and rights can, and usually do, mean something slightly different to each individual. In his essay, Carey eloquently underscores how each of us should view (and value) the notions of community as well as freedom of the press. In terms of community, he notes that we “... owe one another the terrible loyalty of passengers on a fragile craft” (p. 5). He delves even deeper when it comes to rights, challenging everyone to consider, to value, and to respect the ultimate community, i.e., the Founding Fathers, before taking for granted his or her rights:

However, if we think of the Constitution not as the granting of a set of rights and immunities possessed by persons against the community but as a document that constitutes the community, that brings it into existence and lays out its form, the nature of a republican community becomes clearer (p. 12).

This succinct vision of what constitutes rights closely resembles what Dewey (1927/1988) termed the Great Community, where each participant in a community has an equal voice (at

⁵ Although this phrase is usually attributed to Marx, one of the first to use it was Louis Blanc in his 1839 essay “The Organization of Labour.”

least theoretically), and that a multitude of voices creates a collective that possesses a whole that is greater (and certainly stronger) than its individual parts. The concept is many times likened to the concept of a New England town meeting. Although pure in vision, Dewey's Great Community was (and is) criticized, most ardently by his friend Walter Lippmann, who felt that most people simply did not care about most occurrences unless they directly affected them (Lippmann, 1922/1997 & 1927/1993). Still, though, this unfettered vision of the Great Community can serve as another Platonic Form in that it offers 21st-century media professionals a view of what is achievable on a grand scale. It is up to them to make every attempt to come as close as they can to that perfect Form.

Theoretical Points Where Change Can Occur

When discussing the impact that revising the Soviet communist chapter of *Four Theories* to empower media professionals for the 21st century, change must begin at the level of theory and work its way into practice. This conversation can begin with these cornerstones, each of which has a practical application within Marxist theory and history.

Thinking over feeling: One unfortunate manifestation of the post-modern era, especially in the U.S., has been the urge to rely on how we feel to underpin our overall reasoning. Emotion is an unavoidable part of the human psyche, and the comforting aspect of feelings is that they belong solely to us and require no justification. "I feel this way, period." The conversation ends there (Hodges, 1997). Thinking requires us to take a distinct – and hopefully a well-reasoned – stance that, in turn, can be countered and perhaps proven wrong. This is the Socratic method of dialectic in action, which has as its objective moving all parties toward a higher level of understanding (Flew, 1979). It also illustrates how Marx systematically framed his critique of capitalism in an attempt to transcend traditional society toward something greater.

The individual vs. community: An underlying theme of this essay has been to underscore the significance of building strong communities through strong journalism. It must be emphasized, however, that vibrant communities (and democracies of that matter) begin with one ingredient: ethical, moral *individuals*. In nearly every case, strong communities also must be productive in an economic sense, and this is where the conflict between making a profit and becoming incredibly rich resides and wields great power. It is also where appreciating the wonder of individuality can begin change within the larger community. We are, after all, individuals first, and it is up to each of us to become an intricate piece of the mosaic of a grand community (to recast Dewey's thinking).

Independence vs. interdependency: This is an age-old debate but one that can play a role in this discussion and harkens back to Carey's quote of our being "passengers on a fragile craft." We are socialized to be independent subjects, due in large part to the notion of independence being such a key ingredient of American history. However, research has shown that we naturally seek a balance between independence, as in establishing ourselves as a sentient being, and interdependence, the need for us to rely on others (Lee & Tiedens, 2001). The challenge rests in expanding the notion of interdependency to include not only other beings but also the parallel social concepts of community and governing. A community of strong individuals is pointless and counterproductive if each is striving for his or her own wellbeing. Strong, ethical, productive communication and cooperation are equally vital.

Recognizing the value of distancing: This theoretical phenomenon usually is relegated to communication and film studies; however, the ability to metaphorically step back and/or above an object and view it from unique perspectives creates exciting possibilities for critical reflection and positive change for media professionals (Schrag, 2003). Applying

distanciation to the present state of media practice and management reveals a bleak picture, one where economics and profit too often take precedence over the greater responsibility of nurturing our communities. Conversely, by metaphorically distancing oneself from the media gathering and production processes and envisioning how they can become more efficient, responsible, and productive, a more-suitable framework begins to emerge that can serve as motivation for the future. This is quite similar to the deep social and economic analyses that fueled Marx's critique of the society of his era.

Limitations, Further Research, and Conclusion

This hermeneutic examination of the Soviet Communist chapter of *Four Theories of the Press* has focused on opening that particular chapter to fresh understanding and thought for the 21st century and beyond. It must be stressed that grappling with a topic as complex and deep as Marxism is no easy task; however, reshaping how media organizations and professionals view the linkage of news coverage and profit is vital to the survival of democracy as we know it. The people must have open access to truthful information, and recasting how media organizations view profit is one answer to this complex dynamic.

This research best should be viewed as a conversation that has as its objective creating *additional* conversations which will hopefully reverberate off one another and eventually ignite the fires of change. Beginning with the very basic Marxian terms of value and alienation is, arguably, the most-efficient manner to frame such a conversation. An obvious suggestion for future research might be to take additional Marxist terms such as base and superstructure, commodification, rentier capitalism, and/or social metabolism and examine how they can be used to critique the media production process.

Although hermeneutics seems a suitable methodology to breathe fresh meaning into *Four Theories*, other future research endeavors could use quantitative methods to test the effects of terms such as value, alienation and others on a select study population. The combination of the two types of research undoubtedly would produce exciting conversations.

One obvious limitation rests in trying to complete such a venture within a conference-length paper. When Liebovich updated the Soviet Communist chapter of *Four Theories* in *Last Rights*, he accomplished it in 27 book-length pages. Attempting to carry that discussion beyond the realm of books and move it into actual practice is no easy task but one that will require many more discussions such as this. Perhaps Marx and Engels best hinted at this when in 1846/1956 they wrote:

Ideas can never lead beyond an old world system but only beyond the ideas of the old world system. Ideas cannot carry anything out at all. In order to carry out ideas men [sic] are needed to dispose of a certain practical force (p. 160).

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