

Introduction & Panel One

Sarah Banet-Weiser

Good morning everyone. My name is Sarah Banet-Weiser. I am the dean of the Annenberg School, and it is my absolute pleasure to welcome you all to this symposium, “Academe in the Age of Social Media: Scholarly Inquiry at Risk?” This symposium is co-sponsored by the Center for Media at Risk and the Center on Digital, Culture and Society. I will just say just a few things about the theme of the symposium. We opened last night with an incisive, sobering, but also inspiring call to action with keynotes by Rebekah Tromble and Todd Wilson, who both demonstrated that the timing of this symposium could not be more important.

Over the past year, we have witnessed attacks on scholars and media practitioners based many times on what they post on social media, at universities around the world, at Penn and here at Annenberg. We've also learned that collective action is our way forward in this time of crisis in the university sector. And I'm really grateful to hear the words of both Rebekah and Todd last night to inspire us in that direction. There are reasons why scholars engage with social media, and many times they are at risk for doing so. As the conference program points out, social media and academe have an ambivalent relationship.

As a feminist scholar, I personally have an ambivalent relationship with social media and am notoriously averse to it. I opened a Twitter account about ten years ago. I don't use it anymore. Apparently I have been told that I have a LinkedIn profile. It

says I'm an Associate Professor, so it's been a while. I've never had a Facebook account. I've never had an Instagram. And I really don't know how to make a video on TikTok. But I have researched and written about social media, especially in the context of feminism, misogyny and racism for over a decade.

And over that time, I've seen the landscape shift. The rise of new platforms, the evolution of online discourse, or the devolution, I should say, especially in terms of misogyny and racism, and the increasing influence of digital activism. These have all played a role in shaping the current environment that we're going to be talking about today. These changes have brought both challenges and opportunities, highlighting the need for ongoing vigilance and adaptation, and addressing issues of inequality, discrimination and other dynamics of power. So, there's no simple answer to “what we do about social media in the context of academia?” After all, it is touted as a space for open expression and academic freedom. Yet we know, often painfully so over the past year, that these concepts and the parameters around them are fiercely debated and seem to be malleable in different circumstances.

When billionaires own social media platforms, they organize and regulate them according to their own interests and their own profits, not the interest of the public. We know academics who have been fired or disciplined because of their extramural speech on social media. Despite claims of academic freedom, we also know, through robust research and scholarship, that social media spaces

can be spaces for not only communicating about our scholarship, but also for finding community and solidarity. And we have incredible people here today who have offered us a glimpse of what this means or what it could mean, right?

Moral panics are, from my perspective, not the answer. And we need to acknowledge that social media has been the context for robust activism and political activity. We've recently seen a broad migration of scholars from Twitter to Blue Sky, which seems to me to at least support the notion that social media can be a space for vigorous academic discourse, and not just hate and conspiracy theories. So today we will be discussing the relationship of academe to social media, featuring insights from a group of remarkable scholars and practitioners who are here to share their thoughts.

The director of the Center for Media at Risk, Barbie Zelizer, and the director for the Center on Digital, Culture and Society, Guobin Yang, along with the students and postdocs and staff affiliated with each of their centers, have put together a super exciting program, and I'm sure we will all benefit from it.

So along with Guobin, I'd like to introduce Barbie Zelizer, who is the Raymond Williams Professor of Communication here at Annenberg. She is also a former journalist herself, and her brilliant work on journalism, culture, memory and images is very well known. I'm not going to talk about your scholarship right now, but rather mention that your scholarship and your vision has shaped your

subsequent vision for the Center for Media at Risk, where programs, events and projects are launched to learn more about how uneven power dynamics and authoritarian regimes, among other things, pose multiple risks facing media practitioners, journalists and academics globally. Every December, The Center for Media at Risk organizes a symposium. It's kind of the highlight of the year for Annenberg. Often in collaboration with other centers, and they focus on a particular theme that impacts media practitioners, journalists and academics, from image-based sexual abuse to global politics to social justice campaigns, and today, to academe and social media. So please welcome Barbie Zelizer.

Barbie Zelizer

Welcome, everybody. It's delightful to see you less than 24 hours since I saw you last night. I'm here on behalf of myself and Guobin, who is, of course, the director of the Center on Digital Culture and Society. And I'm very pleased to welcome you to part two of a part one that happened last night, thinking about how academe in the age of social media affect, transpose and transform scholarly inquiry at risk - without a question mark.

This year's symposium builds on a repository of intellectual interventions that get rolled out, I would say, pretty regularly here at Annenberg, with the aim of getting ahead of problems before they implode. This year's focus - what, if anything, happens to scholarly inquiry when academe is permeated by social media - has turned into an extraordinarily unsettling and acidic harbinger about academic autonomy moving forward. I

don't think any of us can look ahead and feel good about what is coming. At a point when whole fields of study, academic centers, institutions of excellence, topics of research and approaches to what constitutes research are facing intimidation, punitive action and possibly erasure and closure. We have no choice, as we heard quite eloquently last night from Rebekah and Todd, who demonstrated with an eerie precision that was at the same time both terrifying and inspiring. We heard that there is no choice but to tackle together what may be coming down the road and strategize against it. The tension between social media and academe is morphing as we sit here.

The intensifying scrutiny and intrusion of political, commercial and public arenas in academic life, made possible by social media's spread of academic ideas, raises serious questions about how to protect academic freedom, how to sustain academic integrity, and at the same time, to realize that academics need social media and their affordances to survive.

So, from both our centers, we asked, what about social mediatization puts the academy at risk? Phrased more hopefully. How does the academy withstand social media's growing encroachment? As we aim for an understanding that will let us live integrated lives as both risk-taking intellectuals and decent human beings, it might be useful to keep reminding ourselves that the question "can we be both?" is never as certain as we'd like it to be. For this, we look to our terrific panelists to give us all the answers. We also depend on a dozen invited

interlocutors spaced out amongst you, unknown to anybody, who are going to enrich and challenge what we think we're agreeing on and when needed to think anew about where we might go instead.

As with other events, this symposium depends on the doctoral student organizing committee who took all the decisions to bring you here. They fleshed out the topic, selected speakers, organized them into conversations, and helped motivate everything about today's event. So, I'm going to embarrass the heck out of them and ask them to stand. Anjali DasSarma, Liz Hallgren, Jenny Lee, Valentina Proust, Natasha Williams.

Look at them. Know their faces, study their bios. Everything good about this symposium is on their shoulders. Ask them about anything you're not sure of, and you can also blame them if anything goes wrong. Other folks we are indebted to include, I'm going to just do a first name basis here, Rich, Edwin, Kyle, Shawn, Deb, Frank, Peter, and Deonte each of whom makes it possible for us to do the work we do here at Annenberg. But finally, we cannot get underway without mentioning the fabulous trio who got us here. Sophie Maddocks, Madison Miller, and Trang Dang. Stand up please. They kept their wits. They kept their sense of humor. And they kept their sense of proportion throughout, helping to deliver what I am sure is going to be a memorable day. So welcome to all and let's get started.

Anjali DasSarma

Good morning. Thanks for that, Barbie. Welcome to our first panel of the day, and

thank you so much for joining us for what is sure to be a very generative day. My name is Anjali DasSarma, and I'm a doctoral student here at Annenberg studying journalism, history, critical political economy and cultural studies and race. I'm also a steering committee member, as Barbie mentioned, at the Center for Media at Risk and a Fellow at the Media Inequality and Change Center and the center for Advanced Research in Global Communication. Today's first panel of the day is on Pasts and Presents, so we'll be discussing cross temporalities of academic work, historical precedents, reflexivity, asymmetry and the dynamics of today's precarious challenges. I will first introduce our esteemed panelists, and they will speak on these topics for about 10 to 15 minutes, and then we'll open to our audience Q&A.

Our first panelist is Dr Nick Couldry, who is a sociologist of media and culture. He is a Professor of Media and Communications and Social Theory at the London School of Economics and Political Science, and since 2017, he's been a faculty associate at Harvard's Berkman Klein Center for Internet and Society. He is the author or editor of 17 books, including *The Mediated Construction of Reality; Media, Society, World: Social Theory and Digital Media Practice; and MediaSpace*. His latest books include *The Space of the World; Data Grab: The New Colonialism of Big Tech and how to fight back; Media: Why it Matters; Media, Voice, Space and Power*.

Our second panelist will be Dr Jayson Harsin. Dr Harsin is a professor in the Media, Communication and Culture and the History and Politics departments; The

Director, Center for Media, Communication and Global Change at the American University of Paris in France. A theorist of what has been called "post-truth politics." Dr Harsin's work has for over 20 years focused on political deception from a critical cultural perspective, emphasizing the influence of promotional and celebrity culture, as well as the technological, political, economic causes in practices of political trust making and truth telling. He coined the concept "rumor bomb" in 2006 and "regime of post-truth" in 2015, prior to "post-truth" being declared word of the year. Dr Harsin has taught at Northeastern University, The New School, CUNY, Baruch College, and the American University of Paris.

Our final panelist will be Dr Guobin Yang, who is the Grace Lee Boggs Professor of Communication and Sociology at the Annenberg School for Communication and the Department of Sociology at the University of Pennsylvania. He is the Director of the Center on Digital Culture and Society and Deputy Director of the Center for the Study of Contemporary China. His current research focuses on digital activism, pandemic storytelling, and narrative and performance approaches to the study of digital culture. He is the author of *The Wuhan Lockdown: The Red Guard Generation and Political Activism in China*, and the award winning *The Power of the Internet in China Citizen Activism Online*. So please join me in welcoming our first panelist, Dr Couldry.

Nick Couldry

Thanks Anjali, and thanks to all the organizers. It's really wonderful to be

back at the Annenberg. And it's an honor to be in this conversation, especially as a Brit. So I am a Brit, and I love America. I've been here between 40 and 50 times in my life, and this is the third time this year. And because of that, even though I was so moved by last night's keynotes, I won't pretend to talk to your pain. And I'm also not, with your permission, going to talk about social media, even though I've just got a book coming out next Tuesday in the US called *The Space of The World: Can Human Solidarity Survive Social Media?* And what if it can't? Discount leaflets outside. Instead, I'm going to keep to my script, which was written before I knew what was going to be said last night, which is about a different but closely related challenge to academe that is already coming at us. Though it may take a few years to fully arrive. And this is the role of AI in our work practices.

But first, let's just ask what is scholarship? I see it as a practice of embodied knowledge, distinctively expressed in individual thinkers, writers, and speakers. It's without question a privileged form of reflexivity about self and society that has for some decades, at least in most democracies, been protected. But I don't think we can assume it will go on being protected or even respected. Before we get to why, let's remember that it is a privilege we're defending. And I want to draw here on a thinker definitely from the past, Pierre Bourdieu, who made this point super clear in his book *Pascalian Meditations* from 1997, where he pointed out that the term scholarship derives from the word scholar, which in Greek means leisure. That does not mean lots of free time. It means an institutionalized separation

from the spaces of general economic production.

And this is even more germane when we consider critical scholarship, scholarly insight that asks the difficult questions about social or political reality on the basis of a person's and a discipline's accumulated thinking, writing and speaking. This, too, depends on separation from general economic production. We've seen recently how hard it is to speak critically within social media companies like Meta or tech businesses like Google. You know who I'm talking about.

The risks to scholarship, especially critical scholarship, that I want to discuss with two very different types. The first, which I won't say much about since you know it much better than me, is the risk to practices of thinking, writing and speaking that come when the possibility of anything like a liberal governance space is threatened, as in today's US, and not just in the US. Since, as Nesrine Malik observed in *The Guardian* two weeks after the US election, progressives now everywhere may need to acknowledge how little can be done by liberals in a broad sense, in a truly neoliberal world, a world where all possible brakes on corporate power and its extreme political expression are removed. This is what Rebekah and Todd spoke so eloquently about last night.

But I want to talk more about a different risk to scholarship that is the focus of new work that I'm doing. And this is the emerging social contract for the adoption of AI in work and leisure in many societies. Consider our scholarship here

in the academy as a form of labor. What will I propose as a way to save time, effort and money? Due to our social construction of scholarship as something worth supporting. I'm not talking here about the obvious cases where scholars rightfully use AI to carry out what are intrinsically calculative tasks, for example, generating hypotheses about protein structure or the disease's genetic code that scholars can then evaluate and deploy under their control.

I'm talking here about today's emerging norm, that AI is the rational way for societies and individuals to produce knowledge and the associated habits and values that are installing AI as routine in all sorts of work, including the work of scholars and students. AI, for me, represents a transformation across wider society of the nature of knowledge. There's nothing particularly unusual about what's going on with AI in the academy versus other forms of white-collar work. And, as Todd reminded us, blue-collar work. But the costs to scholarly work of AI's widespread adoption could be quite distinctive. I fear that we risk undermining the very idea and value of scholarship, making critical scholarship that criticizes social or political reality particularly vulnerable. I cannot produce the reflexive, embodied stance on the world of a critical scholar, or indeed any scholar. Yet I can simulate outputs of such scholarship, putting the systems through which we judge scholarship to have any value at all under particular strain.

So why am I so concerned about AI? And let me stress, my concern is not about individual scholars using generative AI in

a dumb or even smart way, but about the impacts for the whole environment in which scholarship is, over the long run meaningful. In five minutes, I can only give a few pointers to what seemed to be important for thinking about AI, not just as a technology, but as a way of transforming social and economic relations.

First of all, I think we need to remember that AI is an ideology, not a technology. And that's not just me speaking. I'm quoting here two still employed Microsoft researchers, Jaron Lanier and Glen Weyl. The discourse of AI operates as what Bourdieu, in his book *Acts of Resistance*, called an inevitable abstraction that, like mainstream economics within neoliberalism, acquires a power almost to legislate for the social world. Second, understood as a social transformation, AI is an emerging new social construction of knowledge and expertise we've known in sociology for more than half a century, since Berger and Luckmann that social reality is constructed, and how we define the sources of knowledge is among the most important elements in that construction. And yet there is hardly any public debate. Or maybe this is an attempt to trigger it. It's amazing. There is hardly public debate right now about this very transformation. There are school teachers, and there are others who are speaking up, and they've been completely ignored.

Third, I want to follow Nick Dyer-Witford and colleagues in their wonderful book *Inhuman Power*, which was written a few years before AI even took off. And I want to argue with them that AI is transforming everyday

knowledge in very particular ways that exactly suit capital, prioritizing business values such as speed, apparent efficiency, labor saving and devaluing other potential values, intuition, experience, reflexivity, insight that, of course, serve businesses less.

The result, I believe, will be to reshape - potentially fundamentally - the cognitive inputs to production in all sorts of domains, including our own. And in the project that I'm starting, I call this "corporatizing the mind." One could put basically the same point in decolonial terms, is what STS scholar Paul Dourish calls a colonial knowledge enterprise that superimposes its version of rationality hegemonic on other versions in STEM subjects.

Just this year, some have started to fear the overuse of AI may transform research culture for the worse, producing monocultures where everything focuses around the prompting and interpreting of AI's calculative power. But in the Social Sciences and Humanities, the results might be even more drastic. Discounting work that does not use large scale AI and still prefers - for reasons no one can understand anymore - smaller qualitative inputs, including the scholars' own reflections on what's going on, producing, in the economy and the academy, a labor force partly automated and still partly human.

Maybe that management is more effectively able to control than ever before. There's a wonderful Ted Chiang story, only three pages long, which imagines a world where there is no human labor left in the academy. But

there are still journals that people who were once academics can still read if they feel like it. It's too early, of course, to say exactly what form the widespread adoption of AI will take in any profession, including academia, but right now, I believe the most likely outcome is what former union organizer Jason Resnikoff recently argued has been the result of automation throughout modern history. Not necessarily or only the abolition of jobs, but their degradation, their division into a number of less satisfying tasks which are more easily redistributed between multiple people. Whatever the detail, this is likely to undermine the idea of the individual scholar who is relatively autonomous from corporate and governmental power and whose autonomy is expressed in their distinctive way of thinking, writing and speaking. Whose license to be critical is based on society's respect for that distinctive history of individual and collective work that the scholar embodies. So scholars who regard themselves as critical, not least but not only in the US, face a very uncomfortable irony that the need for critical scholarship to unite in defense of a university environment of free speech and free thought becomes acute exactly at the time when AI's general adoption across society threatens to undermine the very framework for valuing knowledge and expertise on which scholarship, and particularly critical scholarship, depends.

So what to do? My initial thoughts are these. First, as academics whose role involves supporting each other, training those who want to become academics, representing our practice to students and society more widely, we need to be very clear in defending our autonomy over our

own work processes in the face of externally sponsored pressures, such as efficiency or time and labor-saving in other forms of work, which algorithmic power has already transformed. Hybrid thinking what Annenberg alumnus Aaron Shapiro calls “calculation” has become normal. In other words, integrating AI into work patterns and then trying to game it on various levels. I doubt this will help us, because it's exactly the value of our forms of reflexivity that is at stake. Concede that value to business services (that's what AI are, business services) and we have already given up the space that we should be defending.

Second, given that, as you put it, the very idea of scholarship depends on the socially granted privilege of scholars. That is a certain separation, a protected separation from direct involvement in economic production. It's unwise to defend our autonomy as a privilege. Let's instead defend our autonomy as academic workers in solidarity with workers in other sectors who are similarly challenged: lawyers, health workers, care workers, journalists, communication workers. And, as Todd said yesterday, non-academic workers in our own institutions. In fact, any workers whose labor risks being devalued by AI based practices that they absolutely do not control.

Third, given the institutional concentration of resources in which our individual privilege as scholars is embedded, we need in defending our autonomy to be very clear about what is at stake for others outside the university, in universities surviving as places of free speech, thought and relatively

autonomous labor framing, this is about the rest of society having sympathy with us, is exactly the error against which Bourdieu himself always warned academics, exaggerating our importance from a site of implicit privilege and being blind to the limitations of the individual academic voice. On the contrary, let's focus - and I think this is what we were talking about last night - let's focus on what acting together as critical academics we can build for wider society.

Perhaps a space for a counter imaginary that is still willing to name and challenge today's rising inequalities, not just in economic inequalities, but also exactly the symbolic inequalities that Bourdieu was so skilled in expressing. Let me quote a passage from Bourdieu's *Pascalian Meditations* that although it was written a quarter of a century ago, still speaks poignantly to today's much darker neoliberal times. He writes. “Power over objective chances governs aspirations and therefore the relation of anyone to the future. Below a certain level of such power, aspirations burgeon detached from reality, as if all discourses about the future had no other purpose than to fill what is no doubt one of the most painful of wants the lack of a future.”

The universities where critical scholars I believe will thrive, may still thrive, need also to be a place where the widest possible range of people can still imagine their futures, while respecting different futures. Others might want to build a place of many futures whose values surpass the exclusionary frames of those who want to close this down. At the heart of Bourdieu's work on scholastic privilege, then, was the tension between

the need to grasp how that privilege emerges socially. That is, out of inequalities of resources and status, of course, closely linked to race. And yet the need to hold on to the values which at its imagined best, scholarship can embody. And, as he puts it, and yes, in language that we might today want to formulate slightly differently, there is still value - social, political and intellectual - in the goal of universalizing the means to the universal.

I don't see much prospect of protecting our roles as scholars unless we defend that principle in some form. Let me underline that this is not a principle for which AI, however extraordinary it's calculated magic can optimize because AI represents not the democratization of knowledge, but its automatization on terms that corporations, not individuals, will control. So, to sum up, the wager at the heart of the university as an idea that Bourdieu so powerfully expressed, is absolutely still worth making, but it must now be renewed and rethought in ways that are firmly oriented beyond the academy and not just within it. Thank you for listening.

Jayson Harsin

Hi. Thanks, first of all, to Barbie and Gobin. And also to Madison and Trang for their help in getting me here today. It's really a pleasure to be here. And also to Anjali for your wonderful questions that prompt our presentations. I want to take us to what might seem like a slightly idiosyncratic perspective, partly because others at the conference are more qualified to talk authoritatively about what I might call exogenous or external

risks and threats to scholarly inquiry of communication and media studies. I'm talking especially about endogenous risks to critical scholarly inquiry, which are no doubt different from some other kinds of scholarly inquiry. Different risks are differentially experienced, of course, depending on one's place and privilege ranging, of course, from race, gender, class, sexuality to also one's linguistic capital. For example, hegemonic global English, one's resources, and one's institution ability to travel, have access to expensive databases that archive our knowledge production and so forth in the context of privilege.

And as an aside, I think this may be my first mantle panel in 15 years, and so I better take advantage of the privilege and do the best I can here to address these issues. And I'm going to focus on two risks to critical scholarly inquiry experienced differentially across global academic spaces. The first refers to theories and methods of communication and media, and the second with unequal distribution of resources in scholarly inquiry.

So exogenous risks and threats to scholarly inquiry were well presented last evening, I think, especially from a US perspective in the keynotes and in past years. I know in this symposium, for example, that featured Sahana Udupa and Cherian George speaking about extreme or hate speech and how those dynamics and context of power relations vary around the world. We've heard and will hear more about trolling, doxing, intimidation, and political attempts to influence research agendas by defunding, as Todd Wolfson described last night.

Further, as Nick emphasizes, in a way we can also count among those risks the naive faith in AI as a proxy researcher, partly thanks to the fact that publishers like Taylor and Francis are selling our knowledge production to ChatGPT.

Leaving aside the fact that their representation of academic knowledge is not always accurate, we have the risk that they become deployed as both researchers and teachers. But can they conduct and effectively present critical scholarly inquiry? Not to mention just scholarly inquiry? More precisely, then, what might it mean in the critical tradition of communication and media research, to think about the risks to scholarly inquiry in the social media age? In communication and media studies, critical scholarly inquiry has always been at risk from outside and inside the academy, and also within the discipline itself. But the challenges and risks to it have evolved thanks to critical reflection on the critical tradition, or from within it, and to the shifting conjunctures that overwhelm it.

So first, we may have different ideas about what critical and critique as common enough terms across the university mean. Of course, lots of scholars consider that they do critical work. But in the history of the institutionalization of communication and media research in the US and then globally as a degree-granting subject of study and in social and political research generally, “critical” has a specific meaning in history, and in that specific history. An emphasis on history itself is crucial in contextualizing and theorizing current studies and their findings. Many

of you know this history well, but the point here is also about the importance of remembering and the past, and how that is active in the present.

As Rupali Mukherjee has noted in her provocative *Critical Race Archaeology of Communication Studies*, many of the accounts of Communication Studies history in the US stressed the critical administrative divide represented by Lazarsfeld and the Frankfurt School, the latter primarily represented by Theodor Adorno. When the two worked together at Columbia on the famous radio project, first the Princeton Radio Project, but swapped by Rockefeller Foundation, as Jeff Pooley notes, for another elite partner, which aimed at very politically, in a very politically circumscribed way, many of you know, to study the effects of radio on public opinion and mass culture.

Adorno, it turned out, was dismissed from the project for violating the ban on critically scrutinizing the industry. Also, as Pooley has recently written about in many histories of the field, this is the famous event that generated Lazarsfeld's distinction between administrative and critical communication research, the two often being reduced to positivistic, descriptive, industry and government friendly, and funded research versus qualitative, interpretive and critical research, which can't help but bite any hand that feeds it. In 1941, Lazarsfeld wrote that administrative research quote “is carried through in the service of some kind of administrative agency or public or private character, and is subject to criticism from two sides.” On the one hand, there are the sponsors themselves, some of whom feel that they have not

really got their money's worth. From another side comes an objection directed against the aims of which prevail in the majority of current studies. They solve little problems generally of a business character, and we could say also governmental character, when the same methods could be used to improve the life of the community, if only they were applied to forward looking projects related to the pressing economic and social problems of our time. A third objection, he says, lies in the uniquely critical perspective that all such communication research should, besides whatever purpose it is serving, also place its findings in a larger historical context: the role of media and communication in the present social system, he says.

Associating Max Horkheimer with the development of critical research approaches, Lazarsfeld finds that critical approaches, unlike administrative ones, situate research findings in, quote, "prevailing social trends of our times." In a commentary on critical and administrative research in *Communication and Media Studies* at the time. In 1983, in the famous ferments in the *Journal of Communication Issues*, Smith and Van Duyn further characterize administrative research by its commissioning agents and their interests corporate, government, or some other institution, and their methods, usually quantifiable survey and content analysis. Smith and Van Duyn emphasize that the findings of administrative research are useful for critical researchers, but have to be put in the context of more structural and historically specific conditions that they wish to change in the name of social justice.

Thus, the theory of communication, especially as a transmission of information from sender to receiver through a channel and method to document it and help practitioners understand how to improve have been mutually reinforcing. At its extreme - I'm quoting the positivist conception of media - content would reduce it to a message devoid of any ambiguity, and so accessible solely by quantitative methods. Right? What are the risks of critical scholarly inquiry in all of this? In the most recent ferment in the field commentaries in 2018, new concerns were expressed about a kind of creeping neo positivist hegemony in the field.

Writing on the fascination with AI, computational analysis, and big data sets specifically, Fuchs noted, the newest trend and dominant paradigm and digital media studies is the rise of big data analytics and computational social science approaches that command vast amounts of research, funding, interest, and visibility. They associate this, in effect, with a kind of descriptivist neo positivism and neo administrative, that is to say, liberal reformist at its most critical, not critical theoretical, this neo positivist acquired critical tendency is perhaps nowhere more glaring than in the avalanche of studies, both driving and in response to the panic around disinformation and misinformation media effects.

The subfield is dominated by computational methods of content analysis, often mixed with surveys and experiments. There, one finds a common ahistorical appropriation and

representation of questionably fruitful concepts like disinformation and misinformation. Instead of working through the history of information - true or false - and its relationship to communication theory, one finds an uncritical embrace and operationalization of a communication concept as transmission of information years after work by scholars such as James Carey, Michael Schudson and Barbie Zelizer pointed us to the fact that news is narrative, rhetorical and pleasurable, not simply a conveyor belt of context free facts. And that doesn't mean that news and political speech don't contain statements of fact either. It's just that they are problematically reduced to them.

For a book I'm currently writing on the topic, I've based my critique of mainstream misinformation studies on a literature review of over 400 articles with keywords or titles "disinformation" and "misinformation" since 2016 in the top 20 high impact journals in Communication and Media Studies. The literature I find repeatedly constructs or misrecognizes, I would argue, an object domain of analysis as informational when it is better viewed as deceptive political speech. Characterizing it as the latter no doubt attracts very different methods and orientations to problematization. As Lakoff and Johnson taught us, conceptual metaphors have effects. Thousands of articles and books reduce complex communication artifacts, flows and contexts to information whereby any formal characteristics are reduced to ideational stimuli, which are then measured to produce cognitive bias effects. Only about 20% of the articles I

found pay any attention at all to the actual presentational features of communication.

Such methods fail to help us better understand why audiences or users find the content appealing in the first place, how it could possibly be persuasive or influential, except for the fact that it seems to mirror one's own ideological views. And this literature constantly speaks of information as if James Carey's *Communication As Culture* had never been written. Where we recall, he wrote critically of the behaviorist and functionalist tendencies in mainstream social scientific communication research. Speaking of a "theoretical clumsiness" that mainstream social scientific approaches had to symbol use in communication processes, often just taking it as a stimulus and then moving to looking at psychological needs and structures that explain it.

Moving towards my conclusion, let me now shift to a second point about endogenous threats to critical scholarly inquiry. Several recent scholars have reminded us that the historical development and self-critique of critique require more than a questioning of positivist descriptivism and a concern for social justice, to a question like "what are the risks to scholarly inquiry?" Critical scholars are always going to answer with a qualifying question of risks for whom and where. Last evening, Todd Wolfson in the US context mentioned, for example, how women and people of color and generally programs that are oriented towards research on injustice and power are the first to be attacked for defunding and that we can expect this to happen to

those of us in the United States. I'm only here, luckily, for a short time.

In her critical race archaeology of US Communication and Media Studies, and to some degree that of the field internationally, Roopali Mukherjee writes that US communication took hold as a service profession geared mostly to the status quo interests of corporations, advertising agencies and state bureaucracies interested in managing postwar domestic concerns over communism, the race problem and the working class populations agitating over industrial labor conditions, at the expense of seeing articulations to global racial oppression tied to the legacy of colonialism, in the larger context of critical social theory.

Amy Allen has argued that scholars identifying with the critical tradition must build on the epistemic and normative resources of modernity, including hyper reflexivity, hyper reflexivity, whereby Europeans and Euro-Americans have a responsibility to be willing to unlearn the taken for granted privilege of their traditions and learn to think inside of the moral languages of their historical others, is well known that we are connected through contemporary and residual historical processes of globalization.

Social fact wise, we experience that history and those relations differentially through asymmetries of power. The main categories through which that history and those kinds of power imbalances are experienced today are not exactly the same across the variations of US academic experience and the institutions that we find ourselves in, say, India,

Senegal, France or the UK. Muslim colleagues, for example, in India, fear Islamophobic discrimination and violence of Hindu nationalists. Colleagues at universities in Senegal face very different political, economic and cultural risks in a local and global context, trying to assimilate into a francophone scholarly context, not to mention a global English one. Many studies, of course, over recent decades have shown the hegemony of Anglophone research, with research published in English being 50 to 200% more likely to be cited.

A study by Asubiaro and colleagues earlier this year concludes that the dominance of Anglophone scholarship is correlated with prominent research indexes like Web of Science and primarily index that primarily index Anglophone journals. They write “journals published in Europe, Oceania and North America were more likely to be indexed in Scopus and Web of Science compared to other world regions. Journals published in sub-Saharan Africa were the most underrepresented and were four times less likely to be indexed than those published in Europe.” The analysis also offers a quantitative breakdown of journal publication languages, highlighting how Scopus and Web of Science disproportionately indexed English language publications and all other regions.

So these are just some of the many ways, I think, that we have to think critically about the critical tradition and also about scholarly inquiry. Today, more globally, thinking about the power differentials in

the way that our opportunities are structured.

This prompts us to ask about the relationship of our work to the past and power relations of knowledge production and authority. In all of the ways I've discussed, a critical approach requires a reflexive openness to other perspectives while insisting on a historical orientation towards contemporary risks to critical scholarly inquiry, always asking for whom and where. Thanks.

Guobin Yang

Good morning, everyone. So the organizing team were thinking about speakers, I didn't know, I had no clue that I was going to be speaking. But I'm very happy and honored to have this opportunity. And so I'm going to start with, as you see here, something about the Blue Sky. And I came up with a title which I will read. It is "Blue Sky and Mellow Yellow. Lessons of media work, campus organizing and repression from the 1960s." So I'll start with the good news, which we all know now, which is that after the corruption of X, academics have all moved to Y. I mean, we've all found Blue Sky, right?

We're all on it now, and we're already using it, actually, even to cover this symposium. There's a lot of excitement. Just two days ago, I think two days ago, Senator Elizabeth Warren moved there too, and she posted. And this is the first and only message posted on her Blue Sky: "I heard this is a good place to talk about taxing the rich, breaking up big tech and ending Washington corruption." I think it was a very inspiring, morale boosting message. I haven't seen any

starter packs for senators, but there are lots of starter packs for academics. So last night I typed "starter packs" into the Blue Sky search function, and one of the first results that popped up was this: Somebody posted a list of the starter packs with the hashtag philosophy, all related to philosophy one way or another. And you know we can see aesthetics too right, it is already second starter pack for aesthetics, ancient Greek biology too, epistemology too, feminist global history. And I'm not going to read all the way down the list, but you see it.

So I saw people posting starter packs soon after I moved there. And I moved there about three weeks ago and I thought, well, these starter packs look pretty cool. It's particularly cool to see yourself on a starter pack. So being a Blue Sky newbie, I thought I might put together a starter pack or two. And I thought, you know, I just edited a special issue on Chinese Internet studies. Why not put all the contributors to my special issue on the starter pack? And I did some quick search and found unfortunately, not too many of my contributors are on Blue Sky yet. There are many other excellent internet scholars who are not part of my special issue. Who shall I include or not include. I can't possibly include everyone because it will be too long and because I don't know anyone anyway. And it's also not cool to leave anyone out. So, I decided not to create a starter pack on Blue Sky.

So I could be wrong, but there seems to be some kind of competition to create starter packs. They instantly become a status symbol, and it reminded me of Doctor Alice Marwick's wonderful book

Status Update, published more than a decade ago, which tells stories about how Silicon Valley creates a culture which compels the tech professionals to go on Twitter and compete, to go on Twitter and become a micro-celebrity there. Because at that time it was being celebrated as a form of participation culture. You know, it's a status symbol.

Our keynote speakers yesterday reminded us of the importance of campus organizing under the current conditions of precarity and threat. Will Blue Sky be useful for such academic organizing and collective action? I'm not sure yet. It certainly is too early to tell because I've been there only for three weeks. Meanwhile, I thought we might look to the past for some inspiration, especially to the 1960s. Again, because our discussions and keynote speeches last night reminded me of the 1960s and 1960s was a period of intensive, effective, powerful campus organizing. And that kind of organizing thrived under conditions of severe political repression and surveillance. So, turning to the 60s, some years ago, I taught a graduate seminar on the global 60s, and I taught it because I had discovered a wonderful digital archive of the 1960s underground press.

So if you can access the Penb library catalog, type in "independent voices" and you will find an online digital database and the Independent Voices, an open access collection of an alternative press. Connect to it and you will see. Oh, how come it's gone? Oh, there it is. You see this page? Independent Voices with over 21,000 items of alternative and

underground publications from the 60s and 70s. It's a little small to read, but I know there are 777 items listed under Black Americans, over 7000 under campus organizing, feminism 2858, LGBT 928, Latino 1568. Little magazines, all kinds of little magazines, 2382. Native American 405. These were only one sample, but it's an impressive sample of the underground publications that appeared in the 60s in 66, 67, 68, which were crucial years for campus organizing, community building and communication.

They were the internet and social media of the time, and they were published, issued under conditions of heavy surveillance and repression. As I mentioned, two students in my seminar wrote and later published a co-authored paper on the surveillance of the underground press. Our former students, Elisabetta Ferrari and John Remensperger, and this is the article that they published just a few years ago: *When under surveillance always put on a good show. Representations of surveillance in the United States. Underground press, 68 to 71*. It's a remarkable article about all the various forms of surveillance of the underground press, as well as the tactics of resisting surveillance and repression.

I'll just read one paragraph to give you a sense of some of what was happening in the 1960s. This was on page 264. "The FBI developed a series of inventive techniques to deceive the activists of the New Left, discredit them, and even instigate them towards violent action, as was later documented by the Church Committee, the United States Senate Select Committee, tasked with investigating the intelligence activities

directed at American citizens. The FBI engaged in elaborate schemes to turn activists against each other, often taking advantage of visible fractures in the movement. In particular, the FBI wanted to instigate personal conflicts or animosities between New Left leaders and create the impression that leaders are informants for the Bureau or under law enforcement agencies.” The FBI also sent out anonymous letters, for instance, to inform parents of college and university students about their activities or to expose faculty members activism to college administration administrations. Even more disturbing, the FBI was involved in violent actions against the New Left and its publications. From the ransacking of headquarters to the firebombing of the offices of several underground newspapers.

So one instrument among many of repression they mentioned in the article was to use drug charges against underground press editors and reporters. According to one of these underground newspapers, there is a coalition of them which is called *Underground Press Syndicate*. “The rate of arrest of underground journalists for drugs was 100 times the general rate of narcotics arrests”. So Betty Ferrari and John also wrote about tactics for resisting surveillance, and they mentioned quite a few, such as public denunciation, legal challenges, but also jokes and humor. There was a story of playful resistance against repression, which I know that they know very well, but they didn't talk about in their article.

So, I would like to end by sharing that story. And it is the story of the so-called

Great Banana hoax. if you know Donovan's song *Mellow Yellow*, you will remember it. Scenes of getting high from smoking bananas. In 1967, stories about smoking bananas became viral in the underground press. The entire hoax was to tease and mock the police who were cracking down on youth and drugs. And I'll just show one example here. The first issue was published on October 10th, 1966, and this issue is a long story about about bananas. And I'll just read this little letter to the editor. Very small font. You probably can't see it, so let me see whether I can see better from my laptop. Just to give you a sense: “The other day at the Telegraph Avenue Co-op, I noticed two suspiciously off beat gentlemen lurking in the fresh produce section. Investigation revealed that these men are members of the infamous Berkeley PD narcotics narco squad. I would guess that they have been assigned to observe persons buying large quantities of bananas. The reason for this is apparently the expectation of the part of the BPD that possession of a certain quantity of bananas will shortly be a criminal offense. Here is our kitchen tested version. Peel a ripe banana, scrape from the inside of the peel the white fiber and dry it in the oven. Then crumble and roll into banana joint or better smoked in a pipe. The high is gentle.”

You see all these pictures. Other underground press newspapers were printing stories or making up stories like this as a way playful resistance. So, my time is up. So, I'll just say that it was in the middle of all this kind of underground publishing activities, sometimes very, very intensive meetings, but other times playful jokes and humor. The most

powerful anti-war movement was happening at the time and endured for years. So as such, I think the stories of the 1960s, I hope, provide some good food for thought.

Anjali DasSarma

There's so much to draw from all of these talks about inclusion and exclusion, exogenous and endogenous automation, and academic expectations of sympathy. So thank you all so much. We'll now bring our audience into this discussion for a Q&A, so please wait until you have the microphone before speaking and then please introduce yourself.

Audience member

I gotta hold this thing. Thank you. It's very interesting. I wanted to bring Nick's AI stuff into the social media stuff. And I also recently signed up for Blue Sky. I have to say that I don't know how many people read their opaque privacy policy. They do sell all your information to merchants. So just to say that. What struck me about the connection between AI and social media in the sort of bottom line area of academia is that if you look at undergraduate courses, it seems to me that there is a real movement to teaching both or using both in ways that really raise some interesting problems and questions.

There are increasing numbers of courses that students seem to be demanding about how to be a social media person, right? And in the AI area, the real password now seems to be "AI prompts." I don't know if you've heard that term, or another term is "prompt engineering."

And so what's happening at the sort of bottom level or non-code critical ethereal area of academia is that some professors are feeling that this is the way we ought to treat AI and social media as part of the way life is. I mean, that's the excuse that's given. And I think that there's something to that. Students feel that they have to go out and get jobs to be prompt engineers. And it's something that we ought to consider as part of what we're talking about.

Nick Couldry

Well, I do agree. And I could have talked about the links between AI and social media, and that's really important. I mean, people think about Facebook. Meta's declining, but their profits have gone up in the era when they've developed extremely powerful AI. Meta is the second largest owner of the most advanced computer chips in the world, after Google. Meta needs to be taken very, very seriously in the AI space, and it's because of its use of AI. Generative AI, it's most advanced AI, that it has become able to overcome Apple's challenge to it through the change in the iOS terms a few years ago, and now it's even more profitable.

So there are these deep links, and I think this point about AI prompts is extremely important. I could have gone on for hours about AI. I think one area that's really important is co-optation. And the way I read Generative AI, and I'm not to deny it could be fun sometimes, is it's the sugared pill that we learn we have to take to enter the world that has not been designed by us, which is the world of AI. Or to put it in terms of colonial history

and, you know, in the book on data colonialism, which Ulysses and I published earlier in the year, we had to face the choice. Do we bring in AI a lot? Which Generative AI came out as we were writing the book, we had our model already developed. We were trying to talk to a general audience, and obviously we could not ignore Generative AI.

It was unthinkable and it threw us off balance for a week or so. And then we realized, hang on a minute, this is exactly what we were talking about five years ago. This is a colonial data grab. The most obvious sort. Everything we've ever created is now an input to a machine of data extraction. If that's not a colonial land grab, I really don't know what is. We wait to see what happens to the lawsuits, but let's just push that one stage further in relation to prompting, which is what Generative AI requires with a chatbot. You have to prompt it. There's a technical reason for that that the AI can't get precise enough.

Put it in another term, and I hope you won't see this as too violent a comparison. But if you go back to the first 230 years of colonialism in Latin America, Cortez found he needed a translator for the indigenous languages. He found a married one. So data colonialism has now acquired a native translator and that is Generative AI. Sorry to depress you yet again, but I think clarity is the beginning of optimism.

Bianca Zamora Perez

Hello. I'm Bianca. I'm a first year at Annenberg, and I really loved all of the talks. I promised my question is going to

connect each. I was wondering a little bit about how you guys think about how the academy and how we think is actually becoming more how everyone else has to think, because a lot of the ChatGPT prompts change our experience of information. For example, instead of reading W.E.B. Du Bois's theory on double consciousness, you just get a regurgitated bullet point list of what that means. But that has significant impacts because as Guobin was talking about, press has always been working to educate the oppressed not economically, but there have been people trying. And one of the newspapers that was on there started as a Mexican political group on campuses that was actively trying to educate the masses. And they would go to prisons and educate incarcerated people. And they were part of those small press newspapers.

But now, even Google does the same. And I think of Safiya Noble's work or Shoshana Zuboff's work and how like what we see is not only what is relevant or what even is popular, it's what is paid for. And I think we in the Academy have the privilege of reading all of these texts, taking the time to read them. Whereas if you're working at, like a grocers or a McDonald's or Acme, you don't have that privilege. So to what extent is AI mediating information for us? Being what the rest of the world is experiencing, but only now coming closer to us? And how do we deal with that sort of privilege?

Guobin Yang

I think it's a very important question and related to what the activists were doing in the 1960s. I think we need as media

scholars, to think about what kind of media work we should do, what kind of media work is important. You know, we publish books, we publish academic journals. Is that the kind of media work that is important nowadays? The reason why there was a proliferation of all these underground press in the 60s and 70s was because the activists and students and intellectuals felt that mainstream media were not covering the kind of issues that were important to them. So, they have to have their own alternative press. Some of them were very small. Others, you know, have a national circulation of over 100,000 copies. Very often it's small communal efforts. Small groups of people are investing a lot of time, sometimes their own resources in order to make these things work.

So I think that's something that's still very important for us. And that's why, you know, we think about what can we do on Twitter or Facebook or Blue Sky, as opposed to what can we do. There are a lot of these zines and some things that already, you know, that are material, tangible and in a sense more enduring. Last night there was this important discussions about strategies of meeting the current challenges. I think one strategy has to be tactical. Lets do small things in small groups and communities, because we understand the difficulty of large scale organizing for a sustained period of time. But small groups of organizing can sustain longer tactical efforts, small efforts, I think, including doing media work, varieties of media work. So that would be my response. Thank you.

Jaysin Harsin

Thanks for that question. And to build on what Guobin was just saying, when you talk about feeding Du Bois into ChatGPT. I mean, it's interesting again, the way that it tends to eliminate context, nuance. And that fits exactly with what I was saying about some of these tendencies with computational methods to study social media and to try to give us a descriptive analysis of flows and power and relations and so forth.

But then what Gobin was saying is interesting to me as well, in the sense that I think that we do need to think tactically. And yes, maybe books and articles are not the way, especially in the global context, that I was speaking of, of these power asymmetries and resources that are available. Maybe things like podcasts, right, are very effective. And I mean, I think about some of the most impactful work on me when I was a student like you out there who are grad students, were these interviews with people like Stuart Hall, or even Foucault, right? I mean, some of the Foucault interviews were more influential, more impactful for me than trying to read through some of the books. It pushes us to try to be more concise, to break down the ideas, and we have a more conversational relationship with a larger public. And I agree, if that's the kind of thing we're talking about, we need to think about these other genres, right? To get out of our typical ways of thinking about communicating knowledge.

Audience member

I want to ask a little bit of a provocation, and it's actually building off of Bianca's

question. And I think it comes from my own discomfort. There's lots of things that were uncomfortable about the day after Trump came in, but one was the ongoing conversation, the ongoing, I would say, obsession with how to define his politics. Was he a fascist? Was he a fascistic populist? Was he an autocrat? Was he an authoritarian? I mean, at some point I just wanted to say "it doesn't matter. Right?" And so I guess I want to ask if there is something about the structure of critical knowledge, of academic knowledge that is undermining our ability to imagine alternatives. And I'm thinking about things like the penchant for detail, the fixation on juxtaposition, the assumption of this kind of oppositional stance. I mean, this is what we do and it has its real value. But at this point in time, I wonder if we are not cutting short our own potential to think more capaciously. And it's not just about the difference between the elites and academics versus publics, right? It's much more about what kind of evidence can stay the line. Particularly when we are under attack. And I want to say those were three great talks.

Guobin Yang

I think that's something I've been thinking about for a while. What is sometimes called "Trumpism" or whatever Trump is labeled, we've contributed to that discourse. In other words, I think coming back to the question of critical reflexivity, we might also want to think about the kind of effects intended or unintended of the academic discourse in the general public discourse. After 2016 when so much research energy went into the analysis of Trump and whatever. There

are so many Trump related articles and books and so on. That's something he would be delighted to know that it's happening, because that's the kind of attention that he needs. We might want to rethink about when to pay that kind of attention? Or maybe we should pay more attention to other people, to people around us and tell their stories.

Nick Couldry

Could I say something on that? I mean, I think this is exactly the unease I tried to convey through my speech, this ambiguous ambivalence of where we are today. Yes, we know how to respond as critical academics to what's just happened, but we also know that's really not enough. It's no good. We have to find a new common language. I think of Raymond Williams. His attempt to find a different language to express the violence of class inequalities in Britain and the common culture. He had to evolve that. Then it became academic-ized. But initially it was not an academic thing. And the way I put it is we have to find a common language. That means trying to insist on certain questions that we're not going to stop asking. And also, I was trying to imply at the end, change the way we think about what universities are. And I'm not saying we weren't already thinking about this. It sounds like some great things are going on here. But if we still see it as part of our defending our autonomy, defending the walls around this building or the walls around LSE and saying we need the money to keep those walls up to some degree, because we've got to do some thinking - that's not going to work.

Lauren Tokos

Hello. My name is Lauren Tokos. I'm also a first year student at Annenberg. My question kind of pivots from the discussion that's been going on from these last few questions. But I'm curious how you suppose the integration of AI into the technological infrastructure of scholarly journal publishing, indexing, rankings, etc.? And by this, I mean the integration of AI into the project management software that journal editors and journals use to publish, which is obviously brokered, usually through B2B deals between journals and/or their and their publishers and AI firms. How do you suppose that phenomenon might affect the pressures and culture of academic publishing? Especially as it relates to professional mobility. And what avenues of resistance do you think will be the most prevalent or popular? Should the integration of AI into scholarly publishing pose a threat to editors' authority?

Nick Couldry

I don't want to approach it from the point of view of AI. It relates to the way that Jason approached this question, which I found very beautiful, that he took us through the history we already know. And let's not forget that history as a way of interpreting the question which was found in journals. Right? So I think AI obviously has some uses as a device to make stuff present to us, but this sense that we constantly have to merchandise ourselves, we have to fit with the requirements of the of the system. I absolutely resist that. Many platforms like Academia.edu and whatever I refuse to

be part of because I don't like their systematizing approach.

And just one thing I would say I'm struck by how since the election, the word revolution has come up a lot on the right wing. And I heard it just when I was in the bathroom yesterday. It was so exciting. I had to stop my shower and write something down. I heard the BBC Business News on the Today Program (and we still in Britain have a radio program that a lot, at least to the middle class, is really listened to). Every morning the Business News interviewed someone from Florida who's very excited by Trump coming in, and she said, "it's great. It's going to refashion crypto and fashion, which we shouldn't be calling it crypto anymore because it implies something furtive, which it is absolutely not. Let's call it the digital asset revolution". Now, it's interesting when the word revolution is already itself being co-opted by the right, because perhaps they fear a counter revolution might be building. But we absolutely mustn't give up on that word. So again, it's a small way that we can just say, "no, I'm not going to do that," but we can't do that individually. We have to do that collectively, I would think. Start saying no to some of these imperatives will be my answer.

Megan Genovese

Hello, my name is Megan Genovese. I'm one of the interlocutors. I'm interested in the relationship of academia as this place historically, of leisure, of being apart from the public and social media, as a place of intense publicness. And the invisibility of academic labor because of its historical removal from economic production. And

now, with social media being a way of seemingly exposing that labor, and yet it mostly just exposes individual laborers without explicating or making a value proposition for the kind of labor that is invisible. It is inside of our heads, mostly. And now I also want to add in AI as sort of like restoring that sense of invisibility. It's always going to be invisible. It's a black box. Somebody else owns it, and we can't ever expose it. You can't even have that publicness of "this is the person who's doing it". So, I just want to bring up that tension and ask what you think of that relationship of publicness, the publicness of the individual, the publicness of the labor of academic work?

Guobin Yang

We can go back to the very beginning of social media, as first generation of internet users, we remember the excitement of discovering these new technologies for both social activities and research and how seductive that could be. And at the time, and still, of course, there's a lot of free access to everything. But we didn't know at that time that our data could be extracted. As a form of neo colonialism, like Nick wrote about. Thinking about our recent migration from X to Blue Sky that reminded me of that early history. I have that excitement again. But at the same time, I think it would also be difficult to say that we can totally disengage from these programs and social media platforms. We have to design strategies and tactics of engaging these.

And there has been a lot of work actually, in recent years about what kind of

resistance might be possible, appropriating the algorithms for the purposes of activism, for instance, for purposes of advocating for social change, for purposes of publishing and publicizing useful academic knowledge.

Jayson Harsin

I mean, I think that I'm ambivalent about the degree to which we should adapt to these platforms. I would say we need to politicize. This goes back to what Nick was saying. I think we need to in a different sense, in different words, politicize the temporality and rhythms of the public. You're talking about the extreme publicness of social media, but it has a certain kind of publicness that is anathema to the slow thinking that Nick is talking about, which is absolutely vital for the work that we do, and is also, of course, as many political theorists like Sheldon Wolin when he was still alive, wrote, you know, is absolutely crucial to thinking and discussing together and solving problems and listening to one another, right? It can't all be accelerated. That's a way of control. Right?

Nick Couldry

I think it's a great question. And I had the same ambivalence about Blue Sky because I personally am a great believer in the fediverse and Mastodon and so on, and I can bore you about why I think that's the better solution. And Blue Sky is a standalone profit platform that's going to make a profit and so on. But I'm on it because Mastodon is not working right now for various reasons, and Blue Sky is a place where things can be discussed amongst people I want to talk to and so

on. But it's a form of labour that is quite ambiguous. So on the one hand I think we have to put the work in. As Rebekah said last night, it's a lot of work to build up followers. I'm prepared to put that work in because I do want to speak to people and I'm not ashamed of that. On the other hand, I think we need to preserve, if you pardon the academic phrase, our relative autonomy in relation to which means won't let its metrics define us. That's the way I put it. We hold onto our relative autonomy while doing the work when we need to do it.

Juan Llamas-Rodriguez

Thank you all. I'm Juan, I'm faculty here at Annenberg. This question is inspired by Jason's presentation, but I think it applies to what everyone's been saying. It strikes me that some of the work that the non-critical communication side does, ideological work is sort of normalizing the terms that are being used right in thinking about misinformation and disinformation becoming something very specific that is really hard to then separate. And I wonder if we're seeing something similar with using AI and the whole concept of artificial intelligence. Even in trying to think of critical AI studies already cedes the ground of the ideology of what we call artificial intelligence. So I'm wondering if speaking to the idea of the panel, if you can think of what we can learn from past ideological struggles over terms or concepts or epistemologies that can help us think about how not to cede that ground. Both practically, but also intellectually. To not just attach critical to something to say, "what are the issues with that?" but also to say "this isn't intelligence in any way". So how do you

disrupt that? How do you think of an alternative? In the ways that I think Barbie was talking about is how does critical scholarship become generative rather than only deconstructive in that sense. Right?

Jayson Harsin

I mean, the metaphors that we use are important. I mean, you use the strategies that these political consultants use when they're when they're advising these politicians. It's not artificial intelligence, it's real ignorance, right?. And keep repeating that over and over again or something better than that, that I'm sure you can think of right now.

Nick Couldry

I just wanted to answer it by way of having a dialogue in a sense with Jason, because I love your paper, and the way you took us back to the history is great. But to be honest, when I wanted to write a book about what the problems with social media are, I had no choice but to read all the literature from Political Science on Political Communication, even economics about polarization. And, of course, we would supplement that work for reasons we all in this room know. But I also couldn't deny that they were pointing at things that I think needed to be pointed to, and often with some precision.

Quantitative work does have precision. It can sometimes open up certain possibilities. So, I suppose I reached a position of a slightly, if you like, ecumenical view on method given the bigger object, which was the tragedy of the way social media has evolved. So, it

goes back to Barbie's point that I think that maybe at times when we don't need to defend the specific tools we've evolved in our polarized space, we may be open to other tools, people from other parts of the Academy that are still worried by the same broad object, but we're definitely we wouldn't agree with methodologically. So I don't disagree with your critique at all, but I think nonetheless, I think we're at a point where maybe we just have that openness to a whole range of ways of approaching this, the fundamental topic

Jayson Harsin

I think I was trying to say something different. It's really interesting, Nick, because I was looking at your old book, *Inside Culture* last night, and, you know, if James Carey was talking about a certain kind of theoretical and methodological clumsiness that mainstream social science in communication and media demonstrated before symbol uses, he talked about it in a kind of Keatsian way.

Nick pointed out, of course, a kind of methodological laziness of textual analysis, dominant textual analysis, and especially cultural studies approaches to media in the 80s and 90s. Right. And was trying to urge us to more methodological rigor.

On the other hand, what has happened is something that's completely the opposite of that, a kind of methodological rigor has largely been abandoned. Again, the temporality of this computational stuff and surveys, constant surveys and experiments that just overwhelm us. Like you're saying, Nick. I mean that quantitative knowledge that's produced is

important to us. It just has to be reframed.

And also it can't explain, usually that humanistic side of communication which we have to rediscover. I think that's what we're seeing with all this panic about post-truth and mis- and disinformation is we have to return to that aspect of communication that is fundamentally humanistic, and it's not predictable and quantifiable in the same way. But guess what? AI testing knows that that's important. They're constantly playing around with form and looking at effects, etc. And so do political consultants. Just talk about, say, a stimulus is said, and then these people believe that. And then there's a correlation and cognitive bias. That's not enough.

Guobin Yang

Just to add quickly to what I think is a wonderful question. Not only do corporations and governments create categories and labels and concepts as a form of domination, our own categories and theories are also forms of power. We should be aware of that. That's why ethnography, understanding of everyday experience, becomes extremely important because when we create very abstract categories, we already assume we are the people who understand these categories. And there are others that may not understand that, but there's also a sense of abstraction from people's everyday experiences that involve some kind of distortion. So I would also be, again, self-reflexive and self-critical when it comes to our own efforts to develop theories and conceptual apparatuses,

apparatuses. These are also instruments of power and instruments of ideology.

Audience member

I'm wondering if we can think about the overlaps between social media's relationship to academia and the publishing industry. John Thompson's book *Books in the Digital Age* from about 20 years ago talks about the uneasy relationship between a commercial publishing industry and an academia that essentially outsourced its tenure and promotion process to a commercial industry. Right. And in an industry where citation counts aren't all that different from likes, if we're talking about not caring about metrics, we do live in an academic system built on metrics already. So how do we resist that system, particularly when the commercial publishing industry isn't all that different from social media companies in that they are trying to make money and they are paying their workers and all of those things, how do we resist those systems that we've built our entire careers on?

Guobin Yang

The University of Pennsylvania is responsible for that. Because it all started with Benjamin Franklin, when he said that if you are working hard, make sure your boss knows. Hear the hammer at work. Midnight after midnight. That was the example for Weber of *Protestant Ethic and The Spirit of Capitalism*. So, behind all this is that kind of capitalist competition that is at the root of the metrics. And nowadays, of course, metrics becomes a spectacle in itself. Scholars have written about how metrics

can be a spectacle. I think if we trace the origins of this development, we trace to the history of the University of Pennsylvania.

Nick Couldry

That's a great question again. And I think the honest answer is, I think it's okay to say we got it wrong, that all of us have been formed in that system. All of our careers have been formed in the growth of neoliberalism. And we can't just reverse that overnight, clearly. So maybe we have to start talking very openly and directly and in league with other people outside academia about the costs of measuring because they're just corroding almost every aspect of society. Now, we obviously know why measuring is important because of the rationality of capitalism, but it's having huge costs, and we need to talk openly about it.

And as I said, hold on to the slow thinking that can't survive under those conditions. I think it affects how we meet, where we meet, the modalities through which we meet with each other, what we think it is to have a university, a place to which every one turns together, a space of commonality. We have to redefine all that. And that does mean collectively refusing various management inputs. But I would say it's also a site of neoliberalism in its more advanced forms. So it's not as if I individually have the answers or I'm going to suddenly put my hand up. We have to help each other to carry the huge costs of that sort of resistance. But you're right to put the finger on it. We're all complicit in this order.

Anjali DasSarma

I'm struck by the resonance of Dr Harsin's question about what risks and for whom and where. And with that, I think we'll draw this panel to a close. So, I just want to say thank you so much to all of our panelists and all of these amazing generative questions, which we will surely continue over lunch, which is upstairs. So thank you everyone.

