communication audience is, in fact, composed of multiple audiences, diverse and culturally based, whose responses are distinctive, even unpredictable.

Accordingly, the value of a mass communication orientation has been dramatically challenged (e.g., Cathcart & Gumpert, 1983; Gumpert & Cathcart, 1985). Even McQuail (1987) has noted that the nature of the mass communication audience is shifting from a broad-based "public" to "audiences based on the appeal of certain kinds of content, stars, presenters, authors, etc. At the same time, this also implies, a reduction in the degree and strength of connection between audiences and organized sources. Ties are less likely to be normative and the control of media over their audiences is also lower" (p. 247).

The shift from the mass to diverse audiences occurred, McQuail (1987) has argued, because " 'the audience' is becoming more fragmented in social and spatial composition" and because the "distribution of media content is becoming more separated from production" (p. 247). Although McQuail does not draw the conclusion, his analysis could be a warrant for questioning the reliability and validity of *mass communication* as an enduring theoretical and research orientation for studying communication technologies.

In our view, analyses of media are misdirected if the object of study is mass communication. We believe media should replace mass communication as the more appropriate object of study, a substitution that is significant in terms of what is examined and how it is examined. In this regard, a variety of concepts and terms have been used to analyze media. For example, Gumpert (1970) has argued that the alternative to the study of mass communication should be the study of "mini-comm." He later argued that the alternative should be "uni-comm" (Gumpert, 1975). Almost 10 years later, Cathcart and Gumpert (1983) argued for the study of *mediated interpersonal communication* as an alternative to the study of mass communication. In any event, a variety of approaches exist for scholars seeking an alternative to the study of mass communication. Many of these alternative concerns coalesce around the term *mediated communication*.

Mediated Communication as an Object of Study and Analysis

As an appropriate object of study, mediated communication is any system of symbol-using in which communication channels function as intervening variables altering message intention. In *Mediated Communication: A Social Action Approach*, Anderson and Meyer (1988) have defined *mediated communication* as the product of

two quasi-independent systems of production and reception. In the production system of interlinked media industries, a community of practitioners produces a commodity content for its own end, or as a byproduct in the manufacture of advertising opportunities or commodity audiences. In the reception system, attendance is an intentional performance in its own right, and content is interpreted through its accommodation in the methods and practices of everyday life. (p. 47)

Although useful, this view of *mediated communication* is tied to media industries, a formulation that Anderson and Meyer (1988, p. 50, n. 9) have explicitly acknowledged excludes several other forms of mediated communication. Additionally, this view of *mediated communication* is linked to the intentions and decisions of media industries rather than to the unique formatting or production systems of each technology. Finally, although offering a conception that emphasizes diverse audience reactions, the approach bypasses any consideration of the cognitive structures that adhere in communication technologies. Ultimately, Anderson and Meyer view *mediated communication* in terms of its origins (e.g., media industries) and effects (e.g., interpretive everyday life frameworks), but they do little to identify the intrinsic features of mediated communication.

We see problems in a conception of mediated communication that focuses solely on media industries and bypasses any consideration of the cognitive consequences of technology. At the same time, we believe that *mediated communication* is an appropriate point of departure for isolating the object of study for critical analyses of media systems. Toward this end, we identify six intrinsic features of mediated communication.

First, *mediated communication* emphasizes the form more strongly than the content of messages. The issue here is not to repeat the form–content debate of the early 1920s (e.g., O'Neill, 1923; Sanford, 1922; Wichelns, 1923; Winans, 1923); rather, it calls attention to the forms and mechanisms organizing the relationships among communicators. In this context, Miller (1986) has concluded, for example, that media systems have shifted interpersonal relationships from an "individual" orientation to one in which "other people" are viewed "as undifferentiated role occupants" or "simplistic cultural and sociological caricatures" (p. 136).

Second, *mediated communication* calls attention to the technologies that determine, in part, the meanings attributed to the content of media messages. Elaborating this idea, Cathcart (1987) has maintained,

To claim that the message resides primarily in the narrative located in the verbal text is to miss the actual message, i.e., the one the audience receives and decodes. To ignore the interdiction of media codes and to concentrate on a verbal text, or even a pictorial text, as though verbal or pictorial content alone is what the audience receives

and processes, is to limit our analysis to a narrow and often unrealistic rhetorical act that has little or nothing to do with persuasion and the social construction of reality as it functions in contemporary American society. (p. 6)

Cathcart's analysis has been verified under more specific and controlled conditions. For example, Greenfield (1993) compared "the effects of an audio (radio) vs. an audio-visual (television) medium" (p. 4) and found that television and radio present different "opportunities to construct particular kinds of representations" and ultimately stimulate "different kinds of representational processes" that involve different "metacognitive levels of awareness" (p. 3). Accordingly, Greenfield has maintained,

> Cognitive processes—the basic processes by which we take in, transform, remember, create, and communicate information—are universal. But a culture has the power to selectively encourage some cognitive processes, while letting others stay in a relatively undeveloped state. As shared symbol systems, media are potent cultural tools for the selective sculpting of profiles of cognitive processes. A medium is not simply an information channel; as a particular mode of representation, it is also a potential influence on information processing. (p. 2)

Greenfield has concluded, "While individuals respond to and even create media, mass media are also cultural tools. They are both a shared cultural product and a shared cultural representation. To their audience, including children, media not only present culturally relevant content, they also present models and opportunities for particular representational processes" (p. 2).

Third, *mediated communication* highlights the distinctive language of each medium. The formal or formatting technology of each medium generates a distinct language. Cathcart (1987) has explicitly argued: "The mass media, of communication, which are both channel and transmitter of most contemporary rhetoric, cannot be passed off as simple neutral carriers of communication like the air molecules that carry the sound waves of the human voice" (p. 3). Pointing to the works of Ong (1982), Innis (1951), and McLuhan (1962), Cathcart has maintained that each medium "produces a language with its own grammar and syntax" (p. 3). In *Creating Media Culture*, Snow (1983) has formally identified the grammatical features, such as syntax and inflection, of different media systems such as newspapers, novels, magazines, radio, television, and film as well as the sociocultural consequences of these communication technologies. In this regard, Gardner's (1983) seven frames of reference and their corresponding types of intelligence parallel the kinds of information generated by media systems.

In a fuller statement of these views, we can conclude that every medium can be conceived of as functioning as a distinctive and coherent language or logic and cognitive system. The human nervous and cerebral systems literally react differently to the input of each medium. Insofar as the human nervous and cerebral systems are concerned, these different media create different kinds of information, which generate different cognitive understandings. As cognitive understandings vary from one medium to the next, different cultural and moral norms are invoked that govern why certain actions are preferred and taken rather than others.

Fourth, *mediated communication* emphasizes that the language of each medium affects perception and apprehension. Cathcart (1987) has appropriately asked: "What would the critic look for in the media dimension?" (p. 11). His response to this question draws attention to the production processes of each medium: "Just as spoken and written symbols make us attend to certain ideas and not others, so do media systems. Just as words and their ordering concentrate our thoughts, camera shots, cuts, dissolves and fades require us to attend to the logic of the lens and to ignore that which is outside the frame" (p. 11). In this view, the production components of a communication medium are selective channels that convey only certain types of information about events, not all that is important about them (Berg, 1972). As a result, only certain human sensory systems are stimulated. Additionally, the production channels of a medium are the most immediate context of message content, thereby generating a kind of information as important to apprehension as the information generated by content (see, e.g., Chesebro, 1984, 1989).

Employing more precise procedures, Pfau (1990) has explored the degree to which "media" function "as a distinct variable in social influence" (p. 195), focusing specifically on "whether television, as a result of unique channel characteristics, is more similar to interpersonal communication than to public address, print, and radio in the manner that it exercises influence" (p. 199). Pfau established "treatment conditions" in which subjects were exposed to "messages" that "remained constant across all communication modalities," with only the "intrinsic channel features" of each medium able to exert influence (p. 200).

> All messages were constructed so as to match as closely as possible total length, language intensity, and comprehensibility. Word counts and a contingency index (Becker, Bavelas, & Braden, 1961) were used to insure similarity in comprehensibility and length of messages. Care was taken to insure that all messages employed similar verb tense, modifiers, and metaphors (Burgoon, Cohen, Miller, & Montgomery, 1978).
> Two four-item, seven-point Likert-type scales were created to assess receivers' perception of message content. One four-item scale

evaluated the perceived quality of the information presented in the messages. A second four-item scale assessed the perceived strength of the case made on behalf of the product, candidate, and/or cause. Factor analyses were computed and supported the internal consistency of each of the two content dimensions. (Pfau, 1990, p. 201)

We may wonder if the content of any two messages can ever be equivalent if conveyed through two different media systems. However, Pfau's method suggests that a variety of procedures can be employed to identify content differences and adjust message contents to minimize their differences. We might want to see Pfau introduce other measures to determine that all content differences have been minimized, but based on the procedures he employed, Pfau has concluded that "television, like interpersonal communication, elevates person variables in the process of influence" in commercial, political, and social action persuasive messages significantly more frequently than radio, print, and public address do (p. 209).

The methods used by critics also can render similar judgments. In *Eloquence in an Electronic Age: The Transformation of Political Speechmaking,* Jamieson (1988) has isolated the role of media systems in political public address. She has maintained that "what we traditionally knew about eloquence cannot survive" in "this new environment" of electronic media (p. ix). Among other conclusions, Jamieson has maintained that technologies of the electronic age have shifted human communication from an oratorical to an interpersonal style (pp. 165–200).

Thus, regardless of the specific methods applied, it is possible to view production elements as variables that directly affect what people perceive and apprehend. In other words, an idea cannot be examined independently of the production system that gives it form and structure.

In this view, the production techniques of a medium constitute its basic grammar and establish the form and structure that give meaning to a message. For example, in order to create a cinematic message, a frame or single photographic image and the shot or single uninterrupted action of a camera must be used. The frame and the shot function as the basic units of film. At the same time, the frame and shot generate highly selective sensory stimuli because they isolate particular objects in a visuospatial context. In *The Rhetoric of Film,* Harrington (1973) has explored the range of relationships that exist between film production techniques and rhetorical figures. In contrast, the written mode focuses on words or abstract genres that are linearly and sequentially ordered. In *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word,* Ong (1982) has explored the communicative implications of print technology.

Fifth, *mediated communication* highlights the cultural systems created

and sustained by media systems. Ong (1982) has distinguished, compared, and contrasted the cultural and value systems linked to oral, literate, and electronic communities. In terms of the classical rhetorical canons, for example, an oral culture fosters and reinforces delivery and memory; the literate culture emphasizes style and arrangement; the electronic culture highlights invention. Thus, in Ong's view, media systems constrain human interaction, feature only certain rhetorical activities, and reflect, create, and sustain particular kinds of cultural systems.

Sixth, *mediated communication* focuses attention on the dominant societal metaphor fostered by the media in a culture. In *The Alphabet Effect: The Impact of the Phonetic Alphabet on the Development of Western Civilization,* Logan (1986) has argued that the ways in which communication technologies evolve "has influenced the development of our thought patterns, our social institutions, and our very sense of ourselves" (p. 18). For example, Logan has argued that "because of the neat and uniform way in which information could be organized on the printed page, typography also increased the trend toward uniformity, classification, and analysis" (pp. 193–194) that promoted "self-learning" (p. 195) and became "just about the only medium for the exchange of scientific ideas" (p. 195), which was critical to the development of the Scientific Revolution (pp. 193–209; see also Illich & Sanders, 1988). Additionally, a media orientation apparently can generate reliable and valid findings. Similar societal consequences have been reported when the shift from orality to literacy occurred in the Soviet Union in the late 1920s (Luria, 1976), in medieval England (Clanchy, 1979), and in ancient Greece (Havelock, 1963; see also Enos, 1990). All of this is a way of saying that a medium can be a dominant metaphor in a social system.

As the electronic age unfolds, perhaps to displace literacy as we have understood it, it also may create its own cultural metaphor. For example, Gozzi and Haynes (1991) anticipate that the dominant metaphor of the electronic age will be one of "empathy-at-a-distance" (p. 9) or "ironic empathy" (p. 32). They have initially reported that "the abilities of electric media to simulate people, experiences, and realities are growing," which is "changing" the "nature of knowledge" (pp. 24–25). Focusing on "models" such as "the ironic Johnny Carson, the martyred John Lennon, the humorous nerd Woody Allen, the poet Bob Dylan, the tough Humphrey Bogart, [and] the clear-seeing American Girl," they conclude that "these electric heroes and heroines" provide "one guide to wisdom in the new electric epistemology," a wisdom characterized by a "sense of ironic empathy, compassionate detachment, uninvolved involvement, [and] serious humor" (p. 32). At this moment, we are cautious, and we have yet to be convinced that "ironic empathy" will be the dominant metaphor of the electronic media age. However, we share Gozzi and Haynes's convic-

tion that the electronic media are capable of generating a dominant social metaphor.

By way of definition, we have suggested that six propositions define the parameters of mediated communication. To repeat, mediated communication emphasizes: (1) form more strongly than the content of messages; (2) technologies that influence the meanings attributed to the content of media messages; (3) the distinctive language of each medium; (4) how the language of each medium affects perception and apprehension; (5) the cultural systems created and sustained by media systems; and (6) the dominant social metaphor created by the media that constitute a social system.

This conception of mediated communication is by no means exhaustive or unique. McQuail (1987) has provided a convenient survey of alternative approaches. In addition, three of McQuail's conclusions regarding our approach are apt: (1) "New media and new and expanded uses of communication technology are being widely advocated on the basis of an implied theory of media technology determinism, which is also often a normative theory, giving positive weighing to the maximization of communication possibilities, especially in interactive forms" (p. 315); (2) the approach outlined here is in agreement with McQuail's view that "social progress is assumed to follow and be caused by the expansion of communication of all kinds" (p. 315); and (3) "One of the tasks for the normative branch of a communication science will be to formulate such propositions clearly and provide a framework for putting such theories to the test, under the conditions of information societies which do actually emerge" (p. 315).

If we conclude that mediated communication systems are, indeed, the appropriate object of analysis for a critic, the question turns to how a critical analysis is undertaken. Critical analyses are admittedly complex forms. We have found it most useful to think of criticism as a special type or kind of discourse. Cast in this way, we can initially ask: *What are some of the outstanding characteristics of criticism as a form of discourse?*

THE NATURE OF CRITICISM

Criticism is a practice, but it also constitutes a body of guidelines, techniques, and applied illustrations that can be used to analyze communication technologies as symbolic and cognitive systems. In this sense, the analysis of media ultimately stems from our understanding of what criticism is. Accordingly, the analysis of communication technologies can be understood as one form or type of discourse derived from a larger genre identified as *criticism*. Given these relationships between the analysis of

communication technologies and criticism, we explore conceptions of criticism itself.

In common parlance, the word *criticism* can refer to judgments that are predominantly negative, but the word also can identify evaluation designed to promote understanding of the objects under review. In this context, *Webster's* (1986) has aptly observed that *criticism* is frequently associated with "faultfinding disapproval and objection" as well as "the art of evaluating or analyzing with knowledge and propriety works of art or literature" or "similar considerations of other than literary matters (as moral values or the soundness of scientific hypotheses and procedures)" (p. 539).

Among rhetorical critics, a host of definitions of criticism can be found. We find Campbell's (1979) conception particularly useful, because it identifies the primary objective as well as the means that distinguish criticism from other forms of discourse. Campbell has argued that criticism is epideictic in end and deliberative and forensic in means (pp. 4–13). That is, the intent, objective, and purpose of criticism is to praise/dispraise, judge, or evaluate (see, e.g., Jasinski, 1992, especially p. 198). The means of doing so are deliberative and forensic, which is to say that to sustain a claim of praise or dispraise, a critic must be able to specify what should be (the deliberative) as well as offer reasons and evidence for the claim (the forensic). Thus, critics do more than state their own preferences or tastes; critics offer reasons and evidence for their claims and articulate the implications of their judgments.

Critical discourse has also been characterized as a process of describing, interpreting, and evaluating communicative acts. Brock and Scott (1980) have noted, for example, that the function of the critic is to

> indicate, to point out, to draw attention of others to the phenomenon. . . . In this respect, his purpose is descriptive. With more or less awareness of the implications of his activity, the critic endows with meaning the phenomenon to which he attends. . . . In taking responsibility for his shapings, the critic's purpose becomes interpretive. Finally, the critic judges. . . .
>
> The primary purposes of rhetorical criticism are to describe, to interpret, and to evaluate. These purposes tend to merge into one another. One purpose prepares for the next; the one that follows reflects back on the one that has been explicated. (pp. 18–19)[*]

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[*] An alternative to this conception of the "functions" of criticism, in which description, interpretation, and evaluation of criticism are identified as "dimensions" of criticism "as a form of discourse," may be found in Brock, Scott, and Chesebro (1990, pp. 10–22, especially pp. 15–16).