

Herbert Schiller. *By Richard Maxwell.* Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003. 155 pp. ISBN 0742518477.

Renewed imperialism and accelerated state and corporate enclosure of information and communication; mass deception and new institutional and discursive formations in mind management in the “war against terrorism”; the burst of the Internet and telecom bubbles and current crises in the global “information economy”; possibilities and feasibilities of progressive national and global communication policies in the era of transnational capital . . . these are no doubt some of the urgent and profound issues an evolving global political economy poses for communication scholars concerned with the sustainability of democratic institutions and cultural environments in the twenty-first century. But from where are we to draw the intellectual resources for meaningful analysis of the role of information and communication in the current global political, economic, and cultural order? How to proceed with such a monumental historical and intellectual task? Professor Richard Maxwell’s intellectual biography of Herbert Schiller, the foremost critic of communication and the American Empire in the twentieth century, offers not only an indispensable intellectual guide to such issues, but also a powerful source of moral inspiration to today’s critical communication scholars and students.

In this contribution to Andrew Calabrese’s Critical Media Studies series, Richard Maxwell, a former student of Schiller and a Professor of Media Studies at Queens College, City University of New York, offers both a brilliant account of Schiller’s intellectual legacy and a compelling argument for why his ideas are of continuing importance in analyzing our current historical juncture. If Schiller’s work had a profound impact on the development of critical communication studies, the contribution of this single volume on Schiller may also be significant to the reinvigoration of the field.

Although a number of authors have written about Herbert Schiller’s contributions and influence, including in two special journal issues honouring him after his death in January 2000, Professor Maxwell’s contribution is so far the only book devoted entirely to an examination of Schiller’s life and work. Maxwell begins with a brief preface that frames the book as an effort to “synthesize Schiller’s work for a new generation of media and communications students” (p. x). The main text comprises an introduction, six thematically structured main chapters, and a conclusion. Maxwell includes an extensive, though admittedly not necessarily exhaustive, bibliography of Schiller’s 200 or so publications in English; as the author notes, not even “Schiller kept a complete record of his achievements . . . [a] catalogue and archive of his own work seemed to hold little fascination for him” (p. xi).

The introduction foregrounds the general features of Herbert Schiller’s political economic approach to communication scholarship. Maxwell emphasizes Schiller’s internationalist orientation, his focus on how the distribution of information-communication resources has contributed to constructing and sustaining relations of class domination within the global capitalist system, his conscious effort to address a general readership beyond the academy, and his methodology as well as his normative commitment to radical humanism and democratic communication.

The book’s first paragraph outlines Schiller’s own conceptualization of his contributions to the study of media and communication as a historical project, in which he aimed:

—to explain the centrality of communication in the imperial “American Century”; to assess the rise of military-industry enclosures around information vital for deliberative democracy; to document the social unrest and changing conditions that lead ruling groups to take greater control over sources of consciousness shaping and cultural expression; to reveal cultural-communication conditions of American imperialism; to deconstruct the hype of information and communication technologies and how instead they were sought, developed, and appropriated by military and corporate interests; and to

understand the aims and contradictions of national communication-cultural policies in order to establish a new international order. (p.1)

This was a daunting and ambitious intellectual agenda, yet Maxwell convincingly demonstrates that Schiller's seven single-authored books, seven co-authored and co-edited volumes, and myriad articles followed this agenda admirably.

Chapter 1 outlines the main contours of Schiller's intellectual biography and describes how the intersection of the macro-politics of twentieth century world historical development with the micro-politics of his life experience contributed to Schiller's making as a critic of the American empire. Chapters 2 through 6 systematically explore Schiller's writings in chronological order. Each chapter, as indicated by its title, centres around one of Schiller's single-authored books and its main thematic focus: "The Military-Industrial-Communication-Entertainment Complex," "Mind Management and the Shaping of the Informational Workforce," "Cultural Imperialism and the Limits of National Communication-Cultural Policy," "Deceptions and Contradictions of the 'Information Age,'" and, finally, "Culture Incorporated." In his conclusion, Maxwell highlights the continuities between Schiller's research and the issues communication studies faces today and outlines a research agenda for future critical communication studies. Notably, this is an agenda that combines theoretical critique of the existing order with constructive and practical policy development. Maxwell not only offers illuminating examples of research questions and topics about the current power structure that can be pursued by following Schiller's lead, but also elaborates a list of problems and principles in developing communication and cultural policy that challenges domination.

Along the way, Maxwell carefully and persuasively debunks a number of misconceptions about Schiller's work, including criticisms that Schiller assumed a passive media audience, that he was a technophobe, that his method was lightweight and lacking theoretical rigour and formal discipline, and finally, that his critiques were entirely negative and failed to propose practical alternatives. In making his case, Maxwell avoids the heavy-handed style of argumentation and polemical language that have characterized some of Schiller's critics. His purpose here is not simply to defend Schiller, nor to eulogize him, but to contextualize, elaborate, synthesize, and extend Schiller's ideas and to offer constructive guidance for future research and policy development. For example, by systematically dissecting Schiller's theoretical constructs—including the crucial concepts of "complex" and "the system"—and detailing what Maxwell calls the "Schillerian" interpretative empirical methods, a consistent set of procedures for "listening in" on power structures, Maxwell exposes the limits of mainstream communication research and demonstrates the power of the Schillerian analytics and rules of evidence in the study of power, noting that Schiller's radical eclecticism shared an affinity with that of C. Wright Mills and others. Throughout this process, Maxwell's aim is to make "useful procedures available for present-day power structure analysis of the political economy" (p. 29).

Similarly, Maxwell does an excellent job in historicizing Schiller's work and describing how Schiller modified his own ideas over the course of his long career. A key example here concerns how Schiller's formulation of cultural imperialism in *Communication and Cultural Domination* reflected his newly gained sensitivity to internal national power structures by incorporating the national leadership's class identification as a component of his analysis, along with a "clear recognition of the role played by a national ruling class dependent on foreign capital for its existence" (p. 70). This insight, Maxwell notes, was partly provoked by Schiller's increasing collaboration with Third World scholars, and it makes Schiller's account of cultural imperialism unique and one that will "stand out to many Third World readers as a realistic appraisal of the conditions in which national policy would be formulated" (p. 70). The book includes interesting accounts of how Schiller's methods and style of writing evolved in response to changing research subjects and the

changed conditions of academic research, including the decreased availability of primary government sources that resulted from the privatization of public information.

Although the subject matter obviously tends to frame the book around the work and ideas of “one great man” (and, ironically, a man the author asserts would not have liked to have been the subject of a book), Maxwell nonetheless manages to provide not only a comprehensive account of Schiller’s own intellectual biography, but also relevant accounts of scholars who had directly and indirectly influenced Schiller’s work, and also of scholars who were influenced by Schiller. This community of scholars, of course, included both those Schiller wrote against and those who wrote against him, as well as scholars whose work shared certain theoretical and methodological affinities. The story, however, does not end here. What is most significant is the book’s documentation of the extent to which Schiller’s work was shaped by the agendas and aspirations of domestic and international social movements struggling for a more democratic communication order and more just society. Thus, just as Schiller’s own radical students at the University of California, San Diego, and their social justice-oriented pedagogical goals inspired his book *The Mind Managers*, national liberation struggles and attempts by post-colonial nations at formulating national communication and cultural policy within and against the imperial system led Schiller to write *Communication and Cultural Domination*, a book that does not simply outline a descriptive thesis of cultural imperialism, “but rather presents a thesis of resistance against cultural imperialism” (p. 62) and was “Schiller’s contribution as a public intellectual to the ongoing deliberations over how to formulate a communication and cultural policy within and against the imperial system” (p. 62).

The result is that *Herbert Schiller* is not just a book about the scholarship of a single man, but a story about the genesis and evolution of a critical discourse on media and communication studies in all its concrete and varied world-historical, social, institutional, and biographical contexts. It is a narrative about the intersections between knowledge and the material and cultural conditions of its production, circulation, and reception as well as an account about the dialectical relationship between analyzing the world and changing it. The book exemplifies the best of cultural materialism, of intellectual history, of critical discourse analysis and the political economy and culture of communication scholarship; in short, of precisely the kind of critical communication scholarship that Herbert Schiller did so much to foster.

Although the book covers a lengthy historical span and engages with a vast range of substantive topics, it is written in a highly accessible style, perhaps homage to Schiller’s own priorities as a public intellectual. Maxwell fuses his extensive knowledge of the intellectual fields that Schiller traveled with masterful digests of Schiller’s major arguments, solid research, and a skilful selection of biographical material to make this text a fascinating and extremely engaging reading. The book is further strengthened by the infusion of Maxwell’s own incisive analysis of both the U.S. and international political economy of communication.

The book should appeal to a wide readership. Experts will find new insights and appreciate the opportunity to rediscover and reinterpret Herbert Schiller, reinvigorating their own research along the way. The novice will be thrilled at being introduced to the field of critical communication research in this holistic, yet concise and readable, examination of some of its core arguments and debates through the vivid story of its most original and influential analyst. The intermediate—and I have in mind here graduate students, and especially those who, like Schiller during his own studies, are struggling to finish while carrying a heavy teaching load and trying to raise a young family—will have their own reasons to read this book, not the least of which might be to find personal and academic inspiration through Schiller’s example of engaged and critical communication scholarship. Maxwell’s book will serve as an excellent core and/or supplementary textbook for under-

graduate and graduate courses in media and society, the political economy of information and communication, and the history of communication thoughts as well as for courses on methods in critical communication research. It should also be of great interest to media and information policy activists, alternative media practitioners, and political journalists struggling for a more democratic global and national communication order.

Finally, like Herbert Schiller's own work, this book will travel far and have a significant international readership too—not only because its subject matter is already well-known internationally, but also because of its significant intellectual and policy relevance to current issues and debates in global and national communication. As Schiller insisted so adamantly and as Maxwell highlights so well, power structures are not immutable and a lot is at stake in the realm of ideas, social consciousness, and policymaking.

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