Review Paper


Reviewed by Donald F. Theall

Abstract: John Peters’ Speaking into the Air: A History of the Idea of Communication is an important contribution to the discussion of the history and theory of communication. Peters opens up new ground for discussing the evolution of an idea of communication. He eloquently interrelates communication, its technologies, and their social impact with philosophy and literature. The book is open to criticism for its marketing of the idea of communication while presenting an idea of communication. From a Canadian perspective, Peters demonstrates a U.S. bias, short-changing significant contributions to history, theory, and the history of theory from Innis and McLuhan to Heyer and Crowley. Nevertheless, this well-written, scholarly work is a vital and important starting point for a major re-evaluation and debate concerning these issues.


John Durham Peters’ Speaking into the Air is not only a welcome invitation to further developing what has been a relatively minor aspect of communication studies, but it also is one of the most powerful assertions of a position with respect to the still evolving media revolution since Marshall McLuhan’s groundbreaking Gutenberg Galaxy (1962). Although the approach of the two authors differs, Peters’ approach being marked by a well-crafted literary and academic style and a dialectical, but continuous, mode of exposition, they share an ability to startle and

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shock the generations for which they were written. But if McLuhan is a poetic prophet of the media world, Peters is more a poetic philosopher (perhaps in the style of a prosaic Lucretius). Peters’ book is important not only because it is intelligent and provocative, but because it makes a strong case for assigning again to history and to the history of theory a central role in communication studies. As if that were not enough, it insists upon the crucial importance of religion, myth, philosophy, art, and literature to the understanding of any ideas about communication.

Before I turn to a précis of Peters’ complex, unfolding arguments, I will note that perhaps the subtitle should not have been A History of the Idea of Communication but either A History of an Idea of Communication or A History of Some Ideas of Communication. Following the adage that the history of Western philosophy is the history of the wake of Socrates—which is often joined to New Testament Christianity, Peters opts to provide a Platonic-Christian history of the idea of communication (adapted, it would seem, to avoid confrontations with an age of “political correctness”). In that context his history of an idea of communication begins with the classic debate between Plato and Jesus, which is reinterpreted as a debate between dialectic (communication as person-to-person dialogue) and dissemination (communication as one person “speaking into the air,” from writing to TV or the Internet).

Before turning to the critically important questions raised by Peters’ analysis, it is important to review the way his book develops the argument. His introduction establishes the historicity of communication, then explores various senses of the term “communication” (though the examination certainly does not come close to embracing the full range of meanings of communication presented in Raymond Williams’ [1983] Keywords). He particularly explores some selected theoretical debates of the twentieth century, including Ludwig Wittgenstein, C. K Ogden and I. A. Richards, John Dewey, Martin Heidegger, and Sigmund Freud, as well as Walter Lippman, H. D. Laswell, and Georg Lukacs. Peters emphasizes a division between works probing “possibilities and limits of communication” and those looking at the problem of “large-scale communication to the many,” thus setting up the tension between dialogue and dissemination that pervades the book. He takes a particular interest in “therapeutic and psychological theories,” partly preparatory to an examination of the role of the “other” in any understanding of communication.

Immediately following his introduction he sets up in great detail the tension between the Socratic practice of communication—the dialogic—and the Christological—dissemination. While most of this is not new material, his exposition is lively, challenging, and interesting, marked by an understanding of philosophical and theological issues, which is relatively rare in American discussions of communication theory and history. In the process he continues a theme from the introduction that will permeate his argument concerning “the angelogical dream of mutual ensoulment” (p. 30). Concluding that “there is no indignity or paradox in one-way communication,” he suggests that “dissemination presents a
saner choice” for the idea of communication (p. 62). In a move that may surprise many scholars in the field, he then proceeds in the next chapter, taking off from the “angelological dream,” to explore what he dubs “the spiritualist tradition,” although he does present it as “a history of an error” (chapter 2, pp. 63-108).

The spiritualist tradition as Peters sets it up may be surprising to some since it embraces everything from Mesmer and Madame Blavatsky’s baboon to Augustine, Locke, Hegel, Kierkegaard, and Marx—all of whom in one way or another shared the dream of significant one-to-one communication. Clearly he has to distinguish between the different purposes that these figures had for providing “ideas foundational to the modern notion of communication.” His history of the spiritualist tradition begins with the Gospel of John (which he contradistinguishes from the other three gospels that present communication as dissemination) as “the first Christian source for the characteristically double mixture of tragicomic breakdown and soulful unity that still informs communication theory” (p. 66). This fourth gospel, writes Peters, “dramatizes the antinomy of transparency and obstruction in communication” (p. 67). These Christian and Neo-Platonic questions he pursues by an exploration in which he privileges Augustine’s thought over that of the Scholastics, discussing Augustine’s doctrine of sign as well as his angelology. Augustine wants interpreters to avoid “servitude to the letter” (technical difficulties or interference in transmission) in favour of “liberty of the spirit” (p. 69). In the process he can point out that Augustine’s examples of “means are often in fact what we would call media of transport and communication” (p. 81).

Although Peters’ analysis of Augustine is extensive, interesting, and documented by a knowledge of the texts, the Scholastics and their Renaissance successors as, in fact, Aristotle, become incidental glosses, as they should be in a Platonic-Christian account of the idea of communication. For example, at one point, Peters incidentally cites a gloss of Aquinas that provides a “beautiful example of the dream of communication” (p. 76). With John Locke in the seventeenth century, Peters argues that “communication” shifted from matter to mind, since previously for Augustine, Aquinas, and others, the term communicare in Latin meant “to share or make common.” This new sense of the term develops with figures in British science such as Francis Bacon, John Glanvill, Bishop John Wilkins, and Isaac Newton through their discussion of such “physical processes as magnetism, convection and gravitation” (p. 78). But Locke, in keeping with studies in the history of ideas in the mid-twentieth century, really becomes the pivotal figure who translates angelology into an Enlightenment philosophy of mind. Locke, in fact, offering an individualistic politics, understands communication “not as a kind of speech, rhetoric or discourse, but as the ideal and result” (p. 81).

It may initially seem odd, but as Peters presents it, it makes sense to see the path from Augustine through Locke to Mesmer and nineteenth-century spiritualism. The argument is a reinterpretation of Johann Gottlob Fichte’s calling the animal magnetism of Mesmer the “physicalization of idealism,” since Mesmer and spiritualism represent extensions of yearning for that undistorted, direct com-
munication of interior being that begins with Plato’s dialectic. Although Peters also allows that “notions of mesmeric control, transmitted to hypnotism in crowd psychology, also appear in visions of mass communication and of mass communication gone bad in the twentieth century” (p. 93). Paralleling the appearance of telegraphy and photography in the mid-nineteenth century is the rise of telepathy, since Peters demonstrates that the electric telegraph was a solid metaphor for opening access to the spirit world. (He also points out that The Spiritual Telegraph, the name of a leading New York City spiritualist weekly, was also a phrase applied to the table rapping in seances.) Besides, Daguerreotypy also resembled the spiritual telegraph, since it was seen as haunted or as usurping God’s place. These phenomena and connections are traced through a discussion of psychical research and the mystique of the ether. Peters pointedly concludes that “Wireless induction replaced the City of God as the way to commune like the angels” (p. 106).

He concludes this stage of the argument by analyzing Rudyard Kipling’s story “Wireless” and Upton Sinclair’s Mental Radio (1930), a work in which he discusses his wife’s ability to receive images at a distance. Throughout this exposition, Peters uses extensive literary examples, particularly from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. His accounts of the “vision of spirit” are accompanied by analyses and/or quotations from Franz Kafka, Jorge Luis Borges, Samuel Beckett, and T. S. Eliot, whose writings reflect modern communication in all its troubles. Kafka’s writings play the most prominent role as key literary examples in Speaking into the Air. Yet Henry Adams, Walt Whitman, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, and particularly Herman Melville’s “Bartleby the Scrivener” all figure prominently at various stages in this historical journey. Their presence has a double importance in that Peters is constructing an argument privileging American pragmatism in understanding problems of communication. As he clearly states, he is following Habermas in taking “seriously the liberal faith in dissemination, deliberation and openness…. I am taking a similar risk to call for the legitimacy of mass communication, at least in principle” (p. 127). This statement occurs following his discussions of Locke and spiritualism in a chapter in which he analyzes the importance of Hegel, Marx, and Kierkegaard in contributing a “more robust vision of the spirit” toward this history of an idea of communication. (It is quite interesting to note in passing that he assigns the discovery of McLuhan’s insight that “The medium is the message” to Kierkegaard, with his sense of irony and paradox.

In the subsequent chapter, “Phantasm of the Living, Dialogues with the Dead,” he explores how “every new medium is a machine for the production of ghosts,” with respect to the new technological media of the photograph overcoming time and the telegraph overcoming space. Such spectral emanations can be applied to other media such as film, where “the joining of the phantasmatic body and voice of the actor was a long trend in the normalization of cinema” (p. 143). Gordon Allport, reflecting back on appearing in “person” in the 1930s, outlined the phantasmatic nature of mass media, and from his discussion of the living
and the dead, Peters derives “two key existential facts about modern media”: (1) the ease with which the living may mingle with the communicable traces of the dead; and (2) the difficulty of distinguishing communication at a distance from communication with the dead. This leads him to conclude that “Communication with the dead is the paradigm case of hermeneutics” (p. 149).

The phonograph provides an even stronger case for the link with the spirit world as exemplified in the dog, Nipper, of the Victor advertisements. For Peters the time-binding quality of phonography makes it an even more shocking emblem of modernity than the photograph. And in a kind of echo from Harold Innis that appears in Friedrich Kittler’s _Discourse Networks_, it is not too surprisingly pointed out that “Phonography and film attack the monopoly on the storage of intelligence once held by writing” (p. 162). But the ultimate in phantasms and the dead comes with discussions of the postal system with its dead-letter offices, Comstock’s attacks on pornographic mail, and Brandeis and Warren’s 1890 _Harvard Law Review_ piece on the invasion of privacy. “Dead letters represent the pathos of the letter that never arrives; Comstock of the letter that arrives under cover; and Warren and Brandeis, of the private missive that is intercepted and broadcast to the public” (p. 176).

Since Peters’ arguments and expositions are rather carefully worked out and thoroughly annotated, it is not possible to do justice in a review to the intricacy of his thought or the scope of his relatively encyclopaedic knowledge. Having established the pervasive desire for one-to-one communication that is significant and undistorted and having indicated the difficulty in achieving such a linking of interiority, _Speaking into the Air_ begins to examine the possibilities for authentic communication and for closing the chasm with particular reference to the role of the body in human communication. The obvious challenge to communication theory mid-nineteenth century was the drift into accepting solipsism, which seemed to respond to two options of communication as interaction at a distance based on Maxwell’s physics: (1) the dream of spirit-to-spirit communication; and (2) the haunting prospect that even touch itself is an illusion, since it only operates across an actual gap in contact. In this context and in a kind of post-Marcussian interpretation of Freud, Peters suggests that the intellectual history of communication in the contemporary world is a record of the erotic complications of modern life. So the body becomes the crucial element in contemporary communication theory, counterpointing the spiritualism of the earlier tradition.

This tension between the body and the spirit is a pervasive one throughout Peters’ history, since he believes arguments from the spirit have always presented a problem to developing the idea of communication, but that the primacy of the body begins to assert itself with the move from modernity to the twentieth century. He plays with this motif both with respect to the immediacy of the body, but also with the notion of being in touch—something that certainly originally characterized and still characterizes the use of the telephone. Yet Kafka, who Peters sees as “the greatest theorist of organizational communication” (p. 203), perceived that in the telephone there were the roots of contemporary paranoia through an “inability
to distinguish inner projections from outer messages” (p. 201). And reflecting on the telephone scene in Kafka’s *The Castle*, it seems apparent that the *deus absconditus* (Pascal’s hidden god, who fascinated the French Marxist Lucien Goldmann [1959] as well as Marshall McLuhan) has “moved into the infernal machines of administration” (p. 202).

The strategy in *Speaking into the Air* is to associate the unfolding development of media with the sophistication through modification of the idea of communication. Next radio emerges, providing what is described as a “brief shining moment of dissemination … washed over by a blood of dialogism” (p. 211)—provided one accepts Peters’ shift of the signification of dialogism from that of Plato to that of Mikhail Bakhtin, in which multiple voices layer discourse. And once again radio is compared by writers like William James and Rudyard Kipling with the pickup and amplification as in seances. The problem continues to be one of simulating presence—the live broadcast—which the critique of mass communication in the 1950s confronted with the conventional idea that such communication captures only the “abstract potential for alienation” (p. 217). So the chapter on authentic connection ends with a subsection entitled “Hoc Est Corpus, Hocus-Pocus,” playing on the words of the consecration in the Latin Mass—*Hoc est corpus meum* (“This is my Body”)—and leading to a conclusion in which, since democracy and eros are the twin frames for popular reception of each medium:

If success in communication was once the art of reaching across the intervening bodies to touch another’s spirit, in the age of electronic media it has become the art of reaching across the intervening spirits to touch another body. Not the ghost in the machine, but the body in the medium is the central dilemma of modern communications. (pp. 224-225)

In other words, the tension developed is between the medium as ethereal or spiritual and the eros of the individual body, which is not specifically a presence in the medium, although perhaps made such by live presence or simulation, so that the concluding chapter flirts with virtuality in relation to “Machines, Animals and Aliens: Horizons of Incommunicability.” As might be expected, communication is treated as contact without touch, “a symptom of the disembodiment of interaction” (p. 228). It is important that a corollary to saying this is:

The large social significance of the media, so often debated throughout the century, lies less in such classic social worries as their effects on children, representation of women, transformation of politics, or diffusion of mass culture than in the rearrangements of our bodily being, as individuals and bodies political. (p. 226)

So machines, aliens, and naturally animals become an “other” against which to measure the importance of this dramatic and critical transition. This leads into the world of smart machines and cyborgs explored by Donna Harraway and others. According to Peters, articulating the key question for communication theory today is “how wide and deep our empathy for otherness can reach, how ready we are to see ‘the human as precisely what is different’ ” (p. 230). Discuss-
sions of machines, Turing tests, the cabalistic significance of the discernability of identicals as envisioned in Walter Benjamin and Borges, the question of empathy with animals, and alien communication conclude the argument, evoking some of the unspoken aspects of mainline communication studies that have nevertheless permeated theory and literature in the twentieth century. But all of this is to assert that the problem of communication is not that we think of animals, aliens, and machines as exotic, but that we fail to recognize that it is we who are exotic. With an extended closing image of dolphins swimming in a world where dissemination and dialogue would be indistinguishable, Peters concludes with the ambivalent and evasive image of “a polylogue in which everyone spoke and everyone heard ... perhaps the vision we should take away from a century’s attempt to make contact with alien creatures” (p. 261).

John Peters’ work is important to communication studies because he opens up communication scholars’ need to develop a broad and deep sense of intellectual history, philosophy, and the contribution of the arts, particularly literature, to the study of communication. Furthermore, he writes with a skill and adeptness that suggest he appreciates the values of the rhetorical tradition. He also expands the perspective of the work of James Carey (1989), tracing it back into its roots in liberal education and classical values as well as tracing it in the direct line questioning the relation of communication and Christian theology. While this all remained largely implicit in Carey’s work, Speaking into the Air raises it to a level of explicitness, justifying (though not actually recognizing that it does) some of the reasons for the major impact of the work of Marshall McLuhan in the 1960s (interests in philosophy, Christian theology, the humanistic liberal tradition). With the strong endorsement of some senior figures in communication studies and an equally strong reception in non-academic reviews, Peters’ book is likely to have a significant impact on communication studies—particularly in the United States—and programs elsewhere influenced by mainline U.S. communication studies.

That being given as well as the crucial importance to develop finally a central emphasis for a philosophical and intellectual as well as a technological history of communication, Speaking into the Air is a mixed blessing. At the outset I suggested that Speaking into the Air should have been subtitled A History of an Idea of Communication, since although its narrower claim about the importance of dissemination and the centrality of orality as dialogue in one evolution about ideas concerning communication is indisputable, it is in the end a history that is highly selective. First, it omits any major consideration of the history of the trivium (the study of grammar, logic, rhetoric) and its aftermath in contemporary language and communication studies, even though such arts of communication as grammar, dialectic, and rhetoric deriving from Aristotle must necessarily have implied some idea of communication. (In the book there is virtually no discussion of memory as a major component in ideas of communication.) Second, there is the centrality of the poetic in conceptions of communication up until the Enlightenment, a corollary with which Peters flirts but does not really engage, for he fails to see the emphasis on the educative role in poetic theory about all the arts as engaged with
a concept of communication. Third, he opts for a Platonic-Christian focus on thought about communication rather than an Aristotelian or Arabic one (and, of course, leaves out any contributions non-Western cultures might have made to current ideas of communication). Fourth, while bringing in issues about angelology and their role in spiritualism, he bypasses the affinities that spiritualism, astrology, and alchemy have with the unfolding of the history of science and technology.

Speaking of angelology, Peters also seems to be completely oblivious to McLuhan’s discussions and critique of “angelism” in relation to communication in his posthumous book completed by Bruce Powers, *The Global Village* (1989). This is particularly important since McLuhan, with his interest in Yeats (mentioned by Peters), is targeting many of the same figures interested in the esoteric, the spiritualist, and other such mysticisms from the nineteenth and early twentieth century. Could McLuhan’s favouring of robotism somehow fit with Peters’ commitment to dissemination and his fascination with communication between humans and aliens or machines? Whatever the problems McLuhan raises in that work and elsewhere with respect to people dreaming of communicating angelically, they are certainly relevant to Peters’ argument, if for no other reason than that they are straightforward and raise the problem within the context of classical thought, Christian philosophy, Victorian thought, and modes of gnosticism.

From the perspective of a Canadian interested in the history and theory of communication and in the history of theories (ideas) of communication, Peters’ treatment of Canadian contributions to these areas is particularly disappointing. He seems to reduce the contributions of Harold Innis (1950, 1951) and McLuhan (1943, 1962, 1964, 1970, 1988) to footnotes on Cooley’s late-nineteenth century-work; he dismisses the left-oriented aspects of Innis’ writings, since he seems to associate all left-wing ideas of communication with Marx (so no references to Arthur Kroker appear in the book). Since semiotic and ethnolinguistic ideas of communication do not interest Peters, he does not even allude to Paul Heyer’s important work, *Communication and History* (1988), an account of the growth of interest in communications that would have complemented that of Peters along with the work of, among others, William Warburton, Max Müller, William Dwight Whitney, Robert Park, and Edward Tylor. The obvious answer for such omissions is Peters’ argument that dismisses the relevance of the semiotic and the anthropological to his idea of communication. Yet Heyer’s arguments as well as those of Innis, which differ from Peters’ view, obviously deserved a greater presence and a genuine rebuttal in his work, since Heyer is also the co-author of a widely used anthology of key articles on the history of communication.

Yet all of this is minor compared to the nearly complete absence of McLuhan’s major contribution to the history of ideas of communication, as well as the history of media, *The Gutenberg Galaxy* (1962). The problem here is not that Peters does not know McLuhan’s work, for it is a ghostly presence throughout *Speaking into the Air*. McLuhan’s work (1943) on classical and medieval grammar, logic, and rhetoric; on figures such as Augustine, Francis Bacon,
Ogden, Richards, Dewey, and many others; McLuhan’s having introduced the significance of modern literature and the arts into discussions of communication; his previously mentioned concern with robotism and angelology—all are immediately relevant to Peters’ discourse. Yet in keeping with most American communication theory, Peters obviously ranks McLuhan below Innis and both of them as subsidiary to the main line of American communication theory from Cooley through James Carey.

The real point here is that there are many possible histories of one or another ideas of communication, although there is a tendency within the United States to virtually tie the only valid idea of communication to transcendentalist-influenced pragmatist theorists whose work came into focus in the Chicago school. Peters’ history obviously functions within this account, updating it with detailed attention to postmodern themes and to the revelatory nature of literary works in understanding the evolution of an idea of communication. His book should be welcome with its weaknesses as well as its very considerable strengths already mentioned, but it should also invite the beginnings of a major debate about the multiplicity of ideas of communication that have informed twentieth-century debates about the rise of powerful media of dissemination.

Such a discussion needs to return to questions raised about the role of anthropology, semiotics, the pragmatists, and contemporary philosophies other than those of the postmodernists (Derrida, Levinas, et al.). There have been significant and important ideas of communication from Edward Sapir (1951) to Gilles Deleuze (1972), and there is a necessity for considerable debate about them. There is an important dissident tradition involving figures such as Baudrillard and Paul Virilio (Genosko, 1999). Peters himself opens up the question of the role of the arts, particularly literature, in understanding ideas of communication, but there is considerable need to extend that discussion and to broaden the examples. Wyndham Lewis and James Joyce are needed in the discussions of modernists speaking of communication as well as Borges, Eliot, Pound, Woolf, and others. But there is an even greater need to include representatives of all the arts, which Peters’ favouring of literature does not do.

Peters’ book also avoids one of the most central issues for the history of an idea of communication paralleling the relationship between the arts, popular culture, and communication theory: the history of the convergence of media from the beginnings of the emergence of electromagnetism. This convergence also occurs early in the history of ideas of communication, since the Christian liturgy and its accoutrements (the cathedrals with their stained-glass windows and paintings) are visual, performative, and an intimation of multimedia, just as classical drama, in terms of which Aristotle defined poetry, was a blend of dance, music, visual setting, and all the accoutrements of ritual. And it provides at least one idea (there are certainly others) of communication rooted in the past and sparked off again by modern technology. Besides liturgy, there is the whole involvement of the ancient rhetorical tradition of dissemination, with the reality that there are important supplements to speaking, including gesture, visual aids, demonstration, and the like.
Certainly to articulate a primarily speech-oriented base for the idea of communication, it is also necessary to deal with alternative possibilities—possibilities within which there are a rich series of alternative directions recorded in the patristic and scholastic literature that Peters uses in speaking of angelology.

This is not a simple criticism, since it underlines the triple problem of whether writing, speech, or digital, neural signals involving all the senses and movement, gesture, etc. not only are but always have been somewhat recognized as being at the root of human communication, concealed by the theories that pervade *Speaking into the Air*. The digital, neural may seem to be, in contrast to writing and speech, a strictly contemporary phenomenon supported by cognitive science, yet Peters’ account has not questioned the possibility of there being equivalents for the digital-neural perspective in contrast to the oral or literate in historical accounts. Admittedly Peters, through playing with touch and by partially advancing Derridean notions of writing, expands the implications of “speaking into the air” to include TV and film as modes of dissemination and includes photography as a complement to telegraphy in the beginnings of electromagnetics communication. His orientation is still to the voice and to the spoken word with a privileging of a language—but a language distinct from that of Wittgenstein, the semioticians, the structuralists, and ethnolinguists.

As already noted, there are conflicting historical traditions such as Aristotle, who saw painting as silent poetry and poetry as speaking pictures and analyzed drama as a mixture of media; the practices of various liturgies; and particularly the grammatico-rhetorical tradition within which the complexity of language is embedded. As has frequently also been pointed out, the cathedral was a multimedia presentation. Peters is right in stressing dissemination as a complement to the dialogic, but the historic trend of the convergence of media brings about a new medley of speaking and writing, creating new possibilities of languages constructed out of a medley of conventional media and art forms, creating a blend for most if not all of the senses and emphasizing the intersensory.

Yet *Speaking into the Air* provides a rich, well documented, and useful foil to the avoidance of issues of theory, history, and the history of theory in the field of communication studies. It opens up the discussion to the important contributions of philosophers, theologians, mystics, and poets to our understanding of the complexity of the ideas clustered in contemporary communication. It also raises the need for a critique of theory, history, and the history of theory, which is grounded almost exclusively in Euro-American culture. Such clusters of ideas seem to create the paradox involved in the context of Peters’ title, which comes from St. Peter’s First Epistle to the Corinthians:

> Now, brethren, if I come unto you speaking with tongues, what shall I profit you, except I shall speak to you either by revelation, or by knowledge, or by prophesying, or by doctrine?

> And even things without life giving sound, whether pipe or harp, except they give a distinction in the sounds, how shall it be known what is piped or harped?
For if the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle?

So likewise ye, except ye utter by the tongue words easy to be understood, how shall it be known what is spoken? for ye shall speak into the air. (1 Cor. 14:6-10 AV)

There are, it may be, so many kinds of voices in the world, and none of them is without signification.

John Peters’ history explores aspects of our understanding of communication with relation to revelation, knowledge, prophesy, and doctrine as well as human experience, cultural production, and science fiction. In the final analysis, it presents a world where communication must always remain vague and frustrating. The ability of people to communicate with one another or with the “other” (whether animal, alien, or machine) is jeopardized by the very nature of dialogic interchange. So it makes a case for dissemination, although that can be a mode of manipulation as well as information. Although ensnared in its dyadic trap of dialogue and dissemination, which evades the true complexity of ideas of communication, Speaking into the Air is an informative, intriguing, and in many areas an adequate history. Yet it somehow fails to encompass the genuine complexity that should mark a contemporary idea of communication.

References


