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Policing the Boundaries of the Sayable: The Public Negotiation of Profane, Prohibited and Proscribed Speech¹

What can be said, and what cannot, is a problem peculiar to the meta-discursive capacity of language tangled up in the human mandate for a world of moral order. Kenneth Burke captures this tension in his definition of man as “the symbol-using (symbol-making, symbol-misusing) animal, inventor of the negative (or moralized by the negative), separated from his natural condition by instruments of his own making, goaded by the spirit of hierarchy (or moved by the sense of order), and rotten with perfection” (Burke, 1969, p. 16). Similarly, Becker, states that what is not said and what cannot be said is one of the central elements of language use (Becker, 1981, p. 25). Both agree that we make and remake our social worlds, take up residence in them, moralize their righteousness, forget we made them (Carey, 1989), and as Nietzsche (1873) worried, ultimately, go to war over them.

However, the question of what can and cannot be said does not always enter the realm of public moral deliberation. Carbaugh (2007) suggests that cultural norms for speaking are not always well-established, clearly defined, or broadly adopted. Some norms, for instance, may “crystalize” in a discursive community to a greater or lesser extent. Norms for speaking that are well crystalized may never be brought to the level of explicit verbal reflection because their prohibition is self-evident and entrenched in cultural practice in that what cannot be said is simply not. Conversely, certain sayings take on such cultural force that they must be said, lest the failure to speak be marked as a violation of the moral order, e.g., a husband who fails to wish his wife a “happy birthday.” In the murky middle ground of norms for speaking lie those norms in a given speech community that are yet undecided and subject to public negotiation, wherein the future adoption of the norm, or not, is determined.

Wittgenstein (1922) in his *Tractatus* also takes up the issue of what can and cannot be said when he declares in the last sentence of the work, “whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must remain silent” (p. 90). Wittgenstein does not appear to be addressing the normative dimensions of speech, but rather the philosophical possibilities of expression in language, the potential limits of what language can or cannot accomplish. Wittgenstein claims that language does what it can, and what it can’t is ultimately impossible to explore because language would *a priori* be incapable of doing it. While this claim may be philosophically defensible, van Over (2012), in studies of talk about the inexpressible in moments of everyday life, suggests that interactants are likely to hit the presumed and negotiated cultural boundaries of expression before the limits of linguistic, or neuro-biological capacities are reached. Van Over’s work (2012) demonstrates the fundamentally cultural and negotiated nature of the limits of the “sayable” as interactants enact, maintain, and transform local and distinctive cultural premises about the uses and capabilities of linguistic expression.

Nor are these the only possible conceptualizations of the unsayable. To these we might add things that cannot be said because of a claimed capacity of a *particular* language, as in, “there’s no word for it in English, but there is in German,” or things that cannot be said because of a

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temporary failure of competence, “I can’t remember the word right now, but give me a minute, it’ll come to me,” or things that cannot be said because of a presumed non-temporary failure of competence, “he lacks the verbal prowess to describe it.”

Taken together, these considerations raise questions about the negotiation of the sayable, the premises of communication, emotion, place, personhood and relations (Carbaugh, 2007) that are presumed and enacted in that negotiation, and the moral and normative dimensions of speaking. This means that interactions where the sayable is made a topically relevant discursive problem are of particular interest as they both index the ongoing negotiation of the normative moral order, while illustrating the potentially competing taken-for-granted cultural premises that inform any given debate about what can or cannot be said.

Below, we examine three cases wherein a public negotiation of the normative dimensions of speaking are at play and analyze them from the vantage of Cultural Discourse Analysis (Carbaugh, 2007). We expose the *agonistic discourses* (1988/1989) that dramatize, here, competing premises of communication and emotion with particular implications for the practice of political speech. First, we explore talk about “race” and “racism” as politicians and pundits admonish or praise talk about race as either a *reification* of the social relevance of race, or as the means to *transform* racial inequality. Second, we examine the professional provocateur Milo Yiannopoulos and the controversy surrounding his various university speaking engagements, where Yiannopoulos and protesters clash over the potential harm of speech. Third, and in keeping with CuDA’s comparative mode (2007), we examine the negotiation of the moral order in Israeli talk radio as callers and hosts draw and redraw the boundaries of culturally appropriate speech surrounding the Holocaust.

In each case we conclude that in the ongoing public performance of deliberation over race, the speech of a provocateur, or the Holocaust, conversation on the purported topic is eschewed by an ongoing meta-discourse that draws in agonistic premises of communication and emotions. These agonistic discourses betray a fragmented cultural landscape lacking shared premises about the nature of communication. The analysis points to the tension between individual agency and the structuring force of culture as interlocutors employ cultural premises of communication and emotion that enable particular political behavior in accomplishing the sometimes strategic ends of interlocutors.

Studying the Unsayable

Research on the culturally distinctive ways communities have imagined communication to work and the different forms presumed to accomplish that work has been central for ethnographers of communication (Hymes, 1964). Numerous theoretical developments have evolved from that concern including Speech Codes Theory (Philipsen, Coutu, & Covarrubias, 2005), Cultural Communication (Philipsen, 1987), and Cultural Discourse Analysis (CuDA henceforth, Carbaugh, 2007). These developments have benefitted as well from complimentary approaches like conversation analysis, and discourse analysis broadly conceived.

In our chapter, CuDA, as articulated in the introductory chapters of this volume, forms the conceptual lens and analytical tool. The adoption of this approach is ideal for explicating sets of competing cultural premises in our three cases, which play a role in the ongoing maintenance of entrenched political discourse. To conceptualize and draw attention to the particularly agonistic nature of these premises when they are played dialectically against one another, we draw on the concept of “agonistic discourse” (Carbaugh, 1988/1989; 1996).

Agonistic discourse serves a variety of analytical purposes, prominently including the demonstration of how focused attention on cultural discourses that play on a “deep agony” between discursive symbols can “add to an understanding of its production, performance, and moral assessment,” and can “show how a single agonistic form constitutes a cultural communicative system of symbols and meanings” (Carbaugh, 1988/1989, p. 182). Carbaugh demonstrates the utility of the concept in his articulation of competing cultural symbols of “self” and “society.” He demonstrates that these terms are drawn into discursive moments, implicating both the cultural value and mandate of “individuality” but also function as a performance of community, as interlocutors participate in a “system of contrastive meanings” (p. 197).

Carbaugh draws on Burke’s (1969, pp. 19-23) formulation of the tension between “division” and “identification,” which we attend to here in our use of the concept to draw attention to the ways the enactment of cultural premises of communication and emotion can function to member speakers of particular discursive communities, or as commonly aligned with particular principles, while also by the inverse highlighting and contrasting those we are not like.

However, Carbaugh reminds us that at base the concept is a cultural one as “the functions and structures of the agonistic form may be identifiable generally, its cultural contents – its local radiants of meaning – vary cross-culturally” (1988/1989, p. 206). Thus, we employ the concept as a means of discovery of the local meanings and enactments of a system of symbols that pits interlocutors’ premises of communication and emotion against one another in a set of agonistic exchanges.

The relevance of the broader CuDA approach to a study of the (un)sayable has been demonstrated in previous research with great utility. One such exploration attends to enactments of silence performed by some American Indian students in a largely white U.S. university setting. Covarrubias and Windchief (2009) argue that American Indian silence, in some contexts, can be understood as an empowering and generative communicative action that serves to “particularize,” “perpetuate,” and “protect” cultural practices from non-Indians.

This identification of the use of a common cultural communicative practice, silence rather than the “telling of sacred stories” (p. 345) to outsiders, can then further serve to bond these students together in an enactment of communal membership and maintenance. We join this line of work investigating the meaningfulness of the boundary between speech and silence (Basso, 1996; Braithwaite, 1990; Carbaugh, Berry & Numikari-Berry, 2006; Carbaugh, 1999; Milstein, 2008; Molina-Markham, 2014; Scollo, 2004). The cultural boundaries of what can and ought be communicated, to whom, and with what consequences are explored in the following analysis, first in two different cases that investigate public political discourse in U.S. contexts, and then in the speech of public Israeli political radio call-in shows.

The Case of Speaking About Race: Transformation vs. Reificationⁱ

First, we study a number of instances where public discourse about racial inequality and discrimination, and appropriate verbal or non-verbal actions for addressing these, are deployed in conversation with particular premises about the nature and function of communication taken-for-granted in the saying. These premises presume the very act of speaking to be either a transformative act that can be used to remake an unjust world through the power of speech, or a reifying one, where to speak at all merely infuses existing conditions with greater strength and persistence. We present instances of talk where each of these premises is evident as well as a blended instance where an agonistic discourse pitting these premises against each other is enacted.

1: President Obama: White House Convening on Building Community Trust, 4/13/16
After meeting with a variety of constituents, including Police Chiefs from various communities, Obama offered an address summarizing his sense of the consensus on how best to move forward on improving race relations in policing.

1 Obama: And finally, there was broad agreement that this needs to be sustained. I didn't
 2 hear anybody around this table suggest that this problem is going to be solved
 3 overnight. Because the roots of the problems we saw this week date back not just
 4 decades, date back centuries. There are cultural issues, and there are issues of
 5 race in this country, and poverty, and a whole range of problems that will not be
 6 solved overnight. But what we can do is to set up the kinds of respectful
 7 conversations that we've had here -- not just in Washington, but around the
 8 country -- so that we institutionalize a process of continually getting better, and
 9 holding ourselves accountable, and holding ourselves responsible for getting
 10 better

President Obama notes that the problems highlighted by recent tensions between police and members of the African American community are the result of issues that “date back not just decades, date back centuries” (1:3-4). He continues that these problems “will not be solved overnight” contributing to his framing of the issues as particularly entrenched, presumably requiring powerful and sustained methods to address. His solution (1:6-7) is “respectful conversations”, but not conversations that can be had only once, or only in one place, but ones that must be had “around the country.” President Obama moves to forward “conversations,” a deeply cultural form of communicative practice (Carbaugh, 2007), as a powerful way of addressing historical issues of “race” and “poverty”.

Obama’s proposed solution of “conversations” relies on the premise that no singular communicative act is powerful enough to affect the required change, but perhaps “conversations” that continue across time and space can be leveraged to create transformative change, to make sure things are “continually getting better” (1:8). It is not necessarily given that communication be conceived as a proper and appropriate means of addressing “race” and “poverty”; in fact, as we see in later instances, other opposing premises can be and are invoked. However, Obama’s approach is not surprising either, given the centrality of “communication” in many U.S. cultural scenes (Katriel and Philipsen, 1981).

In the following instance, the agonistic nature of these cultural discourses is analyzed as Howard Schultz, CEO of Starbucks, announces a plan to write “race together” on coffee cups as a way of stimulating conversation about racism. Audio of the announcement is played on Fox’s TV show, *The Five*, where pundit Greg Gutfeld reacts. We first analyze Schultz’ announcement, followed by Gutfeld’s reaction.

2.1: FOX, The Five, 3/17/15

1 Schultz: What can we do to create more empathy, compassion, more understanding, not
 2 only within our own company but how can we do it so that we elevate that sense
 3 of humanity inside our stores with our customers. (.) So what if we were -- what

4 if we were to write “race together” on every Starbucks cup. And if a customer
 5 asks you what this is, try and engage in the discussion, that we have problems in
 6 this country with regard to race and racial inequality. You can do that with one
 7 customer a day, then we're making significant progress as we go forward.

Schultz states as his explicit goal the creation of “empathy, compassion, understanding” (2.1:1) and “humanity” (2.1:3). This can be accomplished, in his view, by “engaging in discussion” (2.1:5) on the “problems” of “race and racial inequality” (2.1:5-6) in the service of “making significant progress” to go “forward” (2.1:7). Schultz, then employs a term for talk (Carbaugh, 1989) cast here as “discussion,” and related to Obama’s “conversation.” His talk, like Obama’s, shares in the premise that talk can not only transform powerful social issues like “race and racial inequality” but also the very personhood of those who engage in the “discussion,” as they become more “human” through the discursive process.

Also, similarly to Obama, Schultz formulates “discussion” as a force productive of a new future, which can help “make progress as we go forward” or as in Obama’s talk “continually getting better”. “Discussion” or “conversations” then, are the preferred tools for producing personal and social change, and are the primary and appropriate means conceived for doing so. Conversely, silence is the perpetuation of the status quo, where inaction, a refusal to speak, is a tacit agreement to continue as we are, to not “get better”. Note here that the generative and transformative capacity of speech in “conversations” or “discussion” is not seen as something dangerous, or in need of control, as it might be (see below).

In the service of exposing the premises informing the above instances for explicit comparison with the instances that follow, and in keeping with the “comparative” analytical mode of CuDA, we offer the following articulation of cultural premises derived from the above analysis.

Cultural Premise 1: Talk can transform our reality into something better.

Cultural Premise 2: Difficult and persistent social issues, like racism, are best addressed through sustained conversation about the issue.

The instance below is Gutfeld’s reaction to Schultz’s announcement (2.1). Gutfeld enacts an agonistic discourse that challenges the presumed nature of communication that informs Schultz’s talk.

2.2: FOX, The Five, 3/17/15

8 Gutfield: When anybody ever says that they want to start a conversation, what they're
 9 saying is I want you to agree that we are right and you are wrong. So I will bet
 10 you the conversation on race will come down to you're probably an unconscious
 11 racist. You live in a racist country. And there needs to be change from within.
 12 But do not berate me on race while I'm holding a cup of hot coffee, because then
 13 it's going to be on you.
 14 ...
 15 And also, there's a fundamental misunderstanding here with what -- what
 16 Americans conceive in the world of conversation where race lies. We're not like
 17 the media. We don't like to sit around and talk about race, because frankly, most
 18 of us don't give a damn. We go on and do -- look at St. Patrick's Day right now.
 19 I'm seeing every color drunk out there, having a good time. They don't -- if you

20 think Ferguson is emblematic of the United States, then you're an idiot who only
 21 listens to CNN and MSNBC, because it's not. The only time race ever comes up
 22 is when somebody is looking for a fight. That's all it is.

For Gutfeld, racism is not the problem Schultz and Obama assert it is. Racism exists in the minority, in “Ferguson,” (2.2:20) and “conversation” (2.2:8) about race is for those “looking for a fight” (2.2:22). For him, only those who want to live in a world where race continues to matter would talk about it, because the rest of us “don’t give a damn” (2.2:18). For Gutfeld, *talk about race* is the real problem. “Conversation” does not serve the purposes Obama and Schultz presume of “getting better” but rather serves to transform the identity of your conversational partner into that of an “unconscious racist” (2.2:10-11). In this way, both Schultz and Gutfeld presume talk to have transformative power over identity; however, “conversation,” a term for talk also employed by Obama, where talk is presumed to be transformative of social life, is here problematized as a practice akin to media dramatization, where “conversation” as conceived by “Americans” (2.2:16) means “sitting around talking about race” (2.2:17), and hence worsening a problem where only a marginal one exists. In this instance, the taken-for-granted nature of “conversation” about race is one of reification, rather than transformation.

3: FOX Hannity, 3/20/15

Here, Riley, Hannity and Murdock discuss Dick Durbin’s criticism of the Senate for delays in Loretta Lynch’s confirmation to Attorney General. Durbin is accused of “playing the race card” and a discussion about motivations for Democrat’s talk about race ensues.

1 RILEY: The Left is obsessed with identity politics. They want to divvy us up by race and
 2 gender and so forth and then play us against one another. They claim, as Al Gore
 3 did, that they want a colorblind society. That's the last thing they want. They want
 4 to drag race into our national discussions, keep it front and center. That's what
 5 they depend on to garner votes from their constituents.

Riley attributes particular motivations to “the Left” (3:1) for continually “dragging race into our national discussions” (3:4). The purported goal of “the Left” in having these ongoing discussions is not, according to Riley, to achieve the “colorblind society” (3:3) they presumably desire, but rather to “play us against one another” (3:2) in order to “garner votes” (3:5). The ongoing “conversations” and “discussions” about race so fiercely advocated in the previous instances are not presumed to be productive of the purported goal of a post-racial world. Talk about race is presumed to be strategic, something that keeps race in the public consciousness, that reifies existing divides and boundaries, and that does so for political ends.

We can hear a competing premise of communication in strong contrast to the premises above.

Cultural Premise 3: Talk reifies conditions in their existing composition and may worsen an existing problem.

Presumably, then, the best and most appropriate way to address race in US society is silence. Because talk continually speaks race into being, silence is necessary, and is the only response that serves the counter-purpose of moving beyond the problems of racial division, hence:

Cultural Premise 4: Difficult and persistent social issues, like racism, are best addressed through sustained silence about them.

Having explicated a set of agonistic premises of communication that formulate conversation as either transformative or reifying, we next present an analysis of premises, again as in the first case, entwined in an agonistic discourse that formulates speech as harmless and provocative vs. powerful and dangerous.

The Case of Speaking as a Professional Provocateurⁱⁱ

We turn to Milo Yiannopoulos - a self-proclaimed ‘professional provocateur,’ British journalist, and former senior editor of the conservative website, “*Breitbart News*”. Between 2015 and 2017, Yiannopoulos embarked on his “Dangerous Faggot” tour that included stops at universities across the U.S., with the goal of talking about his views on free expression and entertainment.

His appearance at DePaul University – a private Vincentian and Catholic university in Chicago, Illinois - was spurred by an invitation from the DePaul College Republicans. Prior to this, there were various events on the DePaul campus that had led to racial tensions (Chang, 2016), leading to strong opposition from “Black Lives Matter” supporters regarding Yiannopoulos’s upcoming talk. These events resulted in a *change.org* petition (“Stop hate speech”) that called for the administration to cancel the talk. The “Yiannopoulos event at DePaul” reportedly had 550 audience members in attendance with hundreds more outside of the event space who protested the speaker’s presence on the campus. Approximately 15 minutes into the event, Black Lives Matter protesters took over the stage and did not allow the event to continue – and despite the presence of security and the arrival of the Chicago Police Department – the protesters were not removed. After approximately 25 minutes, Yiannopoulos stopped the event.

Our analysis shows that there exists an agonistic discourse between Yiannopoulos and the protesters regarding the cultural premises that underlie communication itself (Carbaugh, 2007). Yiannopoulos is known for making controversial statements, e.g. calling feminism a “cancer” (Yiannopoulos, 2016), Black Lives Matter “the last socially accepted hate group” (Kew, 2016), and has called for President Trump to deport ‘fat people’ (Mauff, 2017). In a CNN report (Lieberman and Urbany), when asked if he believes what he is doing is dangerous (a probable reference to his “Dangerous Faggot Tour” title), Yiannopoulos responded:

4: Yiannopoulos in CNN Interview, 2/2/2017:

- 1 No, it’s a joke. Do I look dangerous to you? Do I look like somebody that
- 2 students need to be protected from? I don’t think so. The whole point of it is
- 3 to draw attention to the absurdity of what the Left has been doing.
- 4 Muddying the waters between language and action, you know? You hear on
- 5 college campuses a lot these days threats to students “safety”. Well there is
- 6 no threat to student safety from people who have different political opinions
- 7 or different ideas. That’s ridiculous.

Similarly, on Bill Maher’s *Real Time* (2/17/17) he said:

- 8 What actually hurts people is things that actually happen in the real world. I mean, I

9 don't go on about it because I'm not a professional victim...But – what actually hurts
 10 people is like murder, violence – you know, that kind of stuff - mean words doesn't
 [sic]
 11 hurt people.

Yiannopoulos characterizes his goal (4:3): “to draw attention to the absurdity of what the Left has been doing.” He thus creates oppositional identities between himself and “the Left.”² This opposition is based on what he ascribes to the Left, i.e., an expansive view of the unsayable. For him, the Left censors speech due to ‘safety’ and in order to not ‘hurt’ people, which his premises of communication reject.

Yiannopoulos’s premises of communication differentiate speech and action as completely separate and distinctive entities. For him, words are not “things that actually happen in the real world” (4:8). Further, the things that happen in the real world are the only things that can do harm to individuals; specifically, such things as “murder” and “violence” (4:10). Concomitant to casting the activity in which he engages – public speaking appearances – as a “joke,” he simultaneously characterizes jokes as a type of activity from which students (his target audience) need not be protected. Students’ “safety” (a term he uses nonverbal ‘airquotes’ to mark in the video) is then noted as something that gets talked about on university campuses. Finally, the term “hurt” (4: 8,11) points to premises of feeling, emotion, and affect (Carbaugh, 2007). For Yiannopoulos, there is “real world” hurt, which includes harm that can be done to a person’s physical self, and the hurt that “mean words” (4:10) may cause to a person’s feelings. The latter of these does not count nor concern Yiannopoulos, which is made evident when he famously yelled, “fuck your feelings” to a female protester at a University of Houston event (Yiannopoulos, 2016).

We have gleaned from the propositions found in Yiannopoulos’s utterances the following premises of communication:

Cultural Premise 5: Speech is innocuous and because no speech should be censored, everything falls within the realm of the sayable.

Cultural Premise 6: Speech and action should not be equated.ⁱⁱⁱ

Yiannopoulos understands himself to be undertaking innocuous, non-harmful, non-threatening activity when he speaks, and he is not dangerous. Hence, these cultural premises, while not necessarily aligned with how communication theorists and practitioners understand the power or force of communication (see Philipsen, et al., 2005), are central to Yiannopoulos’s understandings of what he is (and is not) doing when he speaks. It is a cultural premise that encounters a deep agony (Carbaugh, 1988/1989) in the discursive struggles between the provocateur and his protesters.

In contrast to Yiannopoulos’s premises, those who protest him as a public speaker engage in the counter to the first half of this agonistic dialogue by deeming his communication as anything but innocuous and sayable.

5: *change.org* petition to DePaul administration, 5/24/2016:

1 The problematic and xenophobic statements and ideologies promoted by Milo

² On this opposition between ‘right’ and ‘left’ in a different context, see Dori-Hacohen and Shavit (2013).

2 Yiannopoulos are outraging. He perpetuates the dangerous systems of oppression
 3 that exist in our world and, as a result, on our campus. From the name of his tour
 4 which includes a homophobic slur—to the violently oppressive commentary he has
 5 made in the past, it is our belief that his presence will ultimately bring harm to the
 6 students on our campus... What makes Milo Yiannopoulos' presence as a speaker on
 7 campus particularly violent is the fact that he promotes—and attempts to legitimize
 8 many of the systems of oppression that currently affect marginalized communities,
 9 as well as being a vocal proponent of ideologies that constitute as hate speech... The
 10 systemic oppression of these communities is not a form of “intellectual thought”,
 11 nor is it just “someone’s opinion”. It is not a tool for an entertainer to use and
 12 classify as “pop culture” or “sensationalism” to turn a profit... It is real, it hurts
 13 people, and it kills.

6: Female student on DePaul Campus at live-streamed interview 5/24/2016 (Tubesocks, 2016):

1 He is violent. The words that he says – the rhetoric – racist, sexist bullshit – that is
 2 violent.

Protesters and petitioners alike characterize Yiannopoulos’s practice of communicating as “xenophobic” (5:1), “homophobic” (5:4), “racist”, “sexist” (6:1), “oppressive” (5:4), “violent” (6:2), and “hate speech” (5:9). They also state what Yiannopoulos’s speech is *not*: “a form of ‘intellectual thought’” (5:10); “just ‘someone’s opinion’” (5:11); a “tool” for him to use (5:11); “pop culture” or “sensationalism” (5:12). Beyond the characterizations of his speech are descriptions of what Yiannopoulos’s speech accomplishes in the world with various actions (e.g., “perpetuates” 5:2), “promotes” (5:7) and “attempts to legitimize” 5:7) the “dangerous systems of oppression” (5:2) that “currently affect marginalized communities” (5:8). Premises of feeling, emotion, and affect also play a role here, in that the petitioners call Yiannopoulos’s communication “outraging” (5:2), which seems to be combined with a sense of urgency by the petitioners to have him barred from speaking at the campus. Also, premises of relating and relationships are at play since petitioners place in contrast the “students on our campus” (5:6) and “marginalized communities” on one side and Yiannopoulos, an “entertainer” (5:11), who will “ultimately bring harm” (5:5), on the other.

The protesters’ cultural premises can be summarized in the following premises:

Cultural Premise 7: Speech is hurtful and not everything is sayable.

Cultural Premise 8: Speech and action should be equated.

This interpretive move references a clear counter in this agonistic discourse to the Yiannopoulos’s premises (CP5 and CP6 above). Unlike Yiannopoulos’s clear separation and distinction between speech and action, the protesters and petitioners do not share this cultural premise. According to them, the provocateur’s speech may commit heinous acts in the real world. Further, the protestors’ premise 7 also points to Covarrubias et al’s (2018) premise six of “symbolic agonistics;” specifically, that these “forecast adversarial emotive frames” (p. X). That is, the discourse between Yiannopoulos and the protestors clearly mark combativeness, anger, and “dig an emotional terrain” (p. X) that will extend beyond this one moment in time.

Further, while the petitioners labeled Yiannopoulos as one who engages in “hate speech” (5:9), there appears to be no distinction made by the petitioners between the interpretation of his speech as a *direct* cause of harm, hurt or even death to certain individuals and what Boromisza-Habashi (2013) terms an “audience-oriented interpretation” (p. 33). Specifically, an audience-oriented interpretation of hate speech is one that points to a third-party, in that the speaker may persuade and/or incite a third individual or group to commit real-world acts of violence on others. In this data segment, rather than make the claim that Yiannopoulos’s speech may incite others to commit heinous and harmful acts, the protesters and petitioners equate his speech with the act of violence. Here – the topic addressed or the arguments made by Yiannopoulos are not the focus of the talk; rather, for the speakers holding these cultural premises (CP7,8), the act of Yiannopoulos communicating is itself so destructive and violent to “students” and “marginalized communities” that it must be stopped.

We turn to our final case wherein the normative propriety of talk about the Holocaust, and what is presumed and enacted when speaking about it publicly, are foreground.

The Case of Speaking About the Holocaust^{iv}

When discussing the boundaries of what is allowed to be said (or the sayable) in Israeli radio phone-ins, we explore cultural premises of communication that inform the production and interpretation of talk in this context. In studying these premises, we can see a recurrent pattern regarding the setting of boundaries of communication as these are negotiated between the participants. Additionally, in our data, the negotiation of the sayable often leads to a performance of extreme emotions from the host, which is not the usual case in these shows, as such the sayable and the unsayable in this scene are part of the symbolic agonistics (Covarrubias et al, this volume) of the Israeli culture. In the following interaction, the caller begins criticizing left-wing supporters, which leads to the following exchange:

7: TTST, 13/12/2004, Host Dalik Volinitz, Caller: Yehoshua

- 1 H: you despise it for its political opinions.
 2 great part of it, in your opinion
 3 C: why do you insert words in my mouth?
 4 H: wait, sec let me wait a sec wait
 5 C: I am a Holocaust remnant ((sarid))
 6 H: I-
 7 C: I don’t despise any Jew.
 8 H: but but wait wait. wait.
 9 C: I I’m against
 10 H: Yohoshua, do me a favor. Goddam-took you two minutes and you
 11 brought in the Holocaust. Do me a favor. Leave the a- pay respect
 12 to the Holocaust. And don’t get it into this conversation.

The host describes the caller’s position as hateful towards certain parties in Israeli politics. The caller then protests this characterization, amid interruption and overlaps. The caller continues to hold the floor and uses his identity as a Holocaust survivor (although he refrains from this term and uses a different one in Hebrew) as the basis for his rejecting the host’s characterization. The host succeeds in securing the floor and then with extreme language

(Goddamn-, 7:10), which includes requesting a favor, he asks for the caller to “leave uh pay respect to the Holocaust”. The host then requests, directly, that the caller not use the Holocaust in the interaction.

The caller makes relevant his identity as a “Holocaust remnant” in support of his claim that he doesn’t “despise any jew” (7:5). This talk presumes the relevance of his identity and personal experiences to whatever follows, and enacts a premise that talk about the Holocaust is permissible, relevant, and necessary for a proper hearing of the meaning of his claim. For the caller, identity and meaning are intertwined and he appears to fear that his prior utterances will be misunderstood by the host (“I don’t despise any jew”, 7:7) if not put in context with his claim to identity, “I am a Holocaust remnant” (7:5). This premise can then be formulated as:

Cultural Premise 9: Identity and meaning are tightly connected in communication.

Yet, the host enacts the opposite premise. His talk presumes that the identity of a Holocaust survivor is not pertinent or allowable in the discussion, and that meaning can be expressed and interpreted without reference to this identity, “don’t get it into this conversation” (7:12). These are competing premises for communication and personhood, which are tightly connected to the boundaries of what is allowed to be said.

Although the segment includes references to emotion from the beginning, (‘despise’ 7:1,7), performance of emotion is limited. Yet, when the caller mentions the Holocaust, the host reacts with a performance of emotion by using the explicative “goddam” (7:10). That the host’s performance of emotion is not problematized or called into question in the interaction is suggestive of the appropriateness of such a response to mention of the Holocaust, and the legitimacy of the normative prohibition on such speech. The host provides an account for why such a reaction is justified and why such speech ought be prohibited -- out of respect, although it is unclear respect towards whom. The following agonistic premise can then be formulated:

Cultural Premise 10: Talk about the Holocaust is connected to powerful emotions, which may be harmful if spoken.

This premise appears further connected to a norm for speaking in this context that might be articulated in the following way: *Some topics, such as the Holocaust, should be treated with respect, demonstrated through silence.*

This segment also suggests that the mere invocation of the Holocaust is outside the realm of the sayable, yet this boundary is negotiable, and can be set at a different location in the talk as the following excerpt shows.

8: TSTT 31/01/2005 Host: Ehud Graf, Caller: Ben David

- 1 C: and I as a Holocaust survivor,
- 2 H: yes,
- 3 C: come and ask, why did it need to take sixty years.
- 4 *Later in the interaction*
- 5 H: As someone who tries uhm to look on thing uhm in a way, a fuller way.
- 6 Although I of course, was not (living) in the era, that you,
- 7 unfortunately, had to experience.
- 8 *And later*

- 9 C: maybe a blunt sentence, but I have no choice.
 10 That what, in the Holocaust, we had kapos, and here we have
 11 H: David. David. David. I really request. Please. Let's not let
 12 C: no no. there are here pre-kapos.
 13 H: no no no no no.
 14 C: they act like kapos.
 15 H: no.
 16 C: by the way.
 17 H: David. David. No. no more. No more (*ad kan, ad kan*). I also have some
 18 kind of a role, uh, god forgive me,
 19 C: ok. I thank you
 20 H: a humble.
 21 C: for letting me talk.
 22 H: no no no. I- no no. I want to ask you an additional thing.

The caller also establishes an identity of a Holocaust survivor (8:1). The host then accepts the invocation of this identity (8:2), unlike the instance above. Then, the caller brings up the Holocaust again (8:10), likely with some sense it may be provocative as he provides a disclaimer “but I have no choice” (8:9). The caller, then, appears to understand this use of the Holocaust is not the same as his initial claim to the survivor identity, as he invokes the Holocaust to compare some Israeli politicians to the pre-Kapo and Kapo -- the Jews who cooperated with the Nazis at the different concentration camps (8:10,12,14). Indeed, the caller's concerns are justified and the host rejects this comparison. He emphasizes his role as a host (8:18), while using strong repetitive language to prevent the caller from presenting this comparison. Moreover, he invokes a divinity plea in his efforts to stop this line of talk (8:18). The caller takes this stopping to be an end to their conversation, yet the host continues their discussion (not shown here).

This use of the Holocaust in comparing a current politician to someone who cooperated with the Nazis, rather than as a personal claim to identity, is cast as unsayable here. Although the caller may work on the premise that being a Holocaust survivor allows him to say difficult and blunt things, the host rejects this position. The caller's premise of communication appears to be shared with the prior caller (7), and while the host in this instance also appears to share in the premise that *identity and meaning are connected in communication*, he appears to share a premise of emotion with the host from the prior instance that *talk about the Holocaust is connected to powerful emotions, which may be harmful if spoken*.

The host's premises for speaking in this instance allow for the Holocaust to be invoked as a personal identity claim, but they become a normative violation when used as a means to degrade the identity of another, i.e., the politician in question. This norm might be formulated as: *One ought not use the Holocaust to impugn the character or motives of another*.

As in the other cases, saying the unsayable leads the host to set strong boundaries by using his role as host to empower his demarcation of the normatively sayable in this context. In both interactions, host and callers negotiate the boundary of the sayable as it relates to Holocaust discourse. In each instance, the normative boundary of the sayable is shifted, with the legitimacy of invoking a “survivor” identity informed by differing premises on the interconnectedness of identity/personal experience and meaning. However, norms also emerge for how the Holocaust might be invoked in discourse with one drawing the boundary at any mention, and the other

drawing the boundary at its invocation for political/social ends, rather than as a deeply felt claim to personal experience.

Discussion

While spatial limitations preclude a complete reprinting of cultural premises identified throughout, we draw attention to the overarching themes, where each case deals in some central way with *the consequentiality of speaking*. In the first case, agonistic premises of communication were enacted in discourse surrounding whether the very act of speaking reified social conditions or transformed them. This discourse is usefully understood as “agonistic” in the “system of contrastive meanings” that inform and motivate it. In this case, these contrastive meanings include prominent cultural symbols of “conversation” and “discussion,” which are meant in the premises of some members of the community to create identification and unity, while in others are presumed to be divisive when the topic is race. Race as a symbol is also part of this contrastive system as its invocation for some members is connected to the ongoing reality of poverty, oppression, and material inequality, while for other members it is a specious strategic manipulation meant only for political gain. This discourse then shares common features of other agonistic discourses employing Burke’s conceptualization of division and identification as in the “self” vs” “society” agon identified by Carbaugh (1988/1989).

In the second case, similarly agonistic premises of communication and emotion were enacted surrounding whether speaking functioned as an intellectual AND emotional act with harmful consequences or as a purely intellectually innocuous engagement. Here, the function of division and identification can also be located in this system of contrastive meanings as Yiannopolous and his supporters identify through the divisiveness of his rhetoric. Premises of communication then become a means by which to highlight membership in this community and bound those who are not alike.

In the third case, agonistic premises of communication and emotion were enacted surrounding whether speaking about the Holocaust was a necessary part of the meaning-making of the interaction or could be left out with no detriment, and whether speaking about the Holocaust was so emotionally powerful that its potential harm to listeners was unacceptable. Again, functions of identification and division in the contrastive symbol of the “holocaust” as its public deployment both members those “remnants” as having shared powerfully meaningful and relevant experience, while also creating division in the apparent violation of the public moral code characterized as a “disrespectful” use.

In each case then, the normative boundary of the sayable is shifted as interlocutors negotiate the meaning of the act of speaking at all. The question of what it *does* to speak is negotiated in interaction as cultural interlocutors bring differing premises to bear in the local enactments of the answer to this question. We propose this agon over *the consequentiality of communication* and the power it is presumed, or not, to yield as a broader question, agonized over in multiple cultural and cross-cultural contexts, akin to Carbaugh’s (1988/1989) identification of the “self” vs. “society” agon.

The analyses of the cases above suggest three main conclusions. The first of these stems from our noticing that agonistic discourse between and within speech communities oftentimes appears to be about a particular topic, e.g., race or the Holocaust; however, the real deep agony ends up being about what the members of each speech community understand the communication about the topic to be doing (or not doing). Communication about the topic

becomes the focus rather than the topic itself, which points to competing cultural premises of and for communication and emotion that underlie the agonistic discourse between interlocutors.

This potential obfuscation over whether we are debating the topic, or communication itself, obscures a potentially productive conversation examining members' taken-for-granted assumptions about the workings of communication, out of which might emerge an inter-subjective consensus that allows debate about the actual topic to proceed. Although, we recognize it is possible that the persistent shift of topical debate to meta-discursive commentary may be a strategic avoidance. Nevertheless, we conclude that there is a lack of common social consensus about the function of communication in social life. One can simply look at the stark distinction between the popular children's limerick "sticks and stones may break my bones but words will never hurt me," juxtaposed with the infamous biblical declaration, "in the beginning was the Word... and the Word was God" (John 1:1, The New King James Version) for evidence of this rift.

Our second conclusion, and following from the first, is that the field of Communication, as compared to disciplines like Psychology, has not well disseminated to the public what of our theories we are generally quite confident about. For instance, while Yiannopoulos frequently asserts the inactive nature of his speech, numerous theorists in the discipline have demonstrated the inherent connection between speech and action (e.g., Austin, 1962; Schegloff, 1995). Communication research suggests that talk has both the power to reify and transform; to be exploratory and consequential; to be a deeply personal testimony and a violation of fair play (as seen in our data). All communication serves multiple simultaneous functions of relational and cultural maintenance, as well as transformation -- this is a dialectic, not a dichotomy (Bakhtin, 1992). The question then, whether in a debate on race, the speech of a provocateur, or the Holocaust is most usefully formulated as: what are we making of this talk, to what purposes is it put, and toward what future does that lead us? What matters in determining whether a given communication act reifies or transforms, offends or identifies, harms or explores, are the participants, setting, topic, ends, and the sequential organization of previous acts to which the act in question is understood as relevant and responsive to, among others. Perhaps a better understanding about the practice of communication might allow us to focus instead on questions about the consequences of *particular* speech rather than on debates about speech itself.

Our final conclusion addresses the tension between agency and structure in our discussions of culture, cultural premises, and action. The notion of the cultural premise as a pre-conscious implicit taken for granted piece of a shared cultural symbolic system can seem to strip the agency of interlocutors as they produce their own meanings and interpret the speech of others. And while, this is not the way we use the concept here, it may seem, upon first glance, that a cultural premise functions something like a coding system in this machinery, passively sitting behind the scenes furthering the process of meaning-making. However, while cultural premises certainly can be said to form a shared foundation for the production and interpretation of speech, this work seeks to yield some agency back to interlocutors as the analysis presented here suggests that, in each case, the premises that are informing the discourse of each speaker also enable and compliment both their larger ideological positions, but also the accomplishment of their local strategic ends for the interaction.

For example, Yiannopoulos's cultural premises of communication that *speech is innocuous and everything is sayable* enable his particular brand of provocation and serve as a defense to those who would problematize the consequences of his speech, and which further provides him direct financial benefits. In the case of speaking about the Holocaust, the radio host's premises

of communication enable him to assert a local enactment of his authority as “host” to silence the caller, and in the talk of speakers aligned with conservative ideologies adopt premises of communication that enable the promotion of silence in response to racism as well as attacks on political opponents. A similar finding regarding the strategic use of agonistic discourse is articulated in Covarrubias, Kvam and Saito’s work in this volume.

This means that cultural premises ought not be treated as simply lurking behind the cultural scene, but may be (dis)aligned from a field of alternate premises precisely because they enable the kind of ideology and action desired by the speaker. To be clear, we do not mean to suggest that speakers choose premises from a cultural salad bar to suit their momentary strategic ends, but rather to point to the tension between the structuring force of culture and human agency within which cultural premises, and all human social life, exists.

Lastly, we adopted Cultural Discourse Analysis as our primary lens and analytical tool, but space limited our ability to fully explore other radiants that were active in our data. In retrospect, we find the particular strength of the approach in connecting discourse to the cultural environment in which it is produced, which is often drawn outside of the focal range of other approaches to the analysis of interaction. The flexibility of the approach to be productively put to a range of data whether gathered through ethnographic participant observation, or public mediated texts, to be of superior utility.

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ⁱ The data for the section titled, ‘The Case of Speaking About Race: Transformation vs. Reification,’ are conceptually bound by talk designed for public audiences, and disseminated through mediated channels, that include explicit reference to “race,” or “racism,” or “colorblind,” and “communication,” and/or “politics.” Data were collected through a search of these keywords in popular search engines, and private news media databases such as LexisNexis. Data were then included on the basis of explicit verbal attribution of racism, behavior characterized as racist, or the continuing social relevance of race to communication practices. Data were collected and reviewed until a saturation of the diversity of characterizations of the relationship between race and talk were achieved. Data from each of the available characterizations of the relationship between race and communication were included in equal number here, though no claims are made as to an equivalent regularity in discourse of these characterizations. Textual data that were already transcribed were not modified, and include a sufficient level of paralinguistic features for the purposes of this analysis. Data where audio sources could be located were transcribed in accordance with the practices of Conversation Analysis.

ⁱⁱ The data for the section titled, ‘The Case of Speaking as a Professional Provocateur,’ centered on an event that took place on May 24, 2016 on the campus of DePaul University – a Catholic and Vincentian private university located in Chicago, IL. Milo Yiannopoulos – British journalist, then senior editor for Breitbart News, and professional provocateur – was invited by the College Republicans of DePaul University to present as part of his “Dangerous Faggot” tour. A transcription was completed of a 25 minute video that was available online that begins with Black Lives Matter protesters taking over the DePaul stage until Milo Yiannopoulos called for the event to end. A second transcription was completed of segments of a 1-hour podcast (Episode 10 of the Milo Yiannopoulos Show) during which Yiannopoulos interviews two of DePaul’s College Republicans who were present during the DePaul event and protest. Two transcriptions of interviews with Milo Yiannopoulos that took place on February

2, 2017 and February 29, 2017 respectively were also completed. These transcripts as well as approximately 12 articles that featured news coverage of the DePaul event and its aftermath from news outlets that are on the continuum between conservative (Breitbart) and liberal (ThinkProgress) complete the data set for this section of our study.

ⁱⁱⁱ We note here that the formulation of Cultural Premises in this case reflect an innovative use of CuDA to discern the premises implicitly formulated in Yiannopolous's speech which are ratified in his follower's celebration of this discourse. Often premises are formulated initially through study of a given speech community, but in the case Yiannopolous's speech may function to call a community into being.

^{iv} The data collection for case 3 was part of a larger project discussing the public sphere in Israel as it is constructed by radio phone-in programs (and see Dori-Hacohen, 2014 for more details). Out of that corpus, all mentions of the Holocaust were collected, and the clearest are presented and discussed here.