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Chapter 14
Communication, Power, and Organizational Politics

Abstract: This chapter describes recent trends in the study of organizational power and politics from a communication perspective. The chapter begins by tracing developments in conceptualizing power, control, hegemony, and resistance and then discusses methodological issues. We then elucidate recent insights in key research domains including communicating identity, the political workplace, as well as organizing for advocacy and democratic social change. The chapter ends with commentary on some key debates in the field. In each area, we address opportunities for further research.

Keywords: power (definitions), control, resistance, dissent, coercion, colonialism (and decolonization), intersectionality, heteronormativity, precarity, organizational policy, social change/social justice, constitutive model, sociomaterialism, capitalist reproduction

Organizational communication research addressing power situates organizing as a communicative struggle among competing interests. This chapter reviews conceptual developments, methodological issues, and major research trends related to communication, power, and politics, followed by a discussion of key debates.

1 Trends in Conceptualizing Communication and Power

Foundational organizational communication researchers drew from critical and social constructionist epistemologies to illustrate how struggles over meaning are constitutive of organizational life (Allen 1995; Clair 1993; Conrad 1983). Theorists linked relations of power and hegemony with the communicative naturalization and reification of sectional interests (Deetz 1992; Hardy and Phillips 2004; Parker 2003) and colonization of subjectivities (Holmer Nadesan 1996; Mumby and Clair 1997). Researchers increasingly connect organizational power with broader sociocultural discourses, such as queer theorizing of heteronormativity (McDonald, Harris, and Ramirez 2020) and decolonial theories excavating Western epistemological erasures (Cruz 2017; Pal et al. 2022). Researchers have also connected organizational power to embodiment via theories such as Foucauldian biopower, "aimed at controlling life itself" (Dempsey and Gibson 2017: 255) By contrast, Mease (2021) drew from the communicative consti-

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tution of organizations (CCO) tradition to define power as "the capacity to set forces into particular relations" (p. 25), and force as "the capacity to affect and be affected" (p. 25). This conception de-emphasizes human agency as it treats the material and social as mutually constitutive.

Recent research has also expanded communicative conceptions of control. For example, investigation of unobtrusive and concertive control (Barker 1993; Larson and Tompkins 2005) led to theorizing concertive resistance and collective advocacy (Wieland 2011; Zanin and Bisel 2020; Zoller, Strochlic, and Getz 2020). Research also illustrates how the comprehensiveness, interactivity, instantaneity, and opacity of digital algorithms extend rational and bureaucratic control (Elmholdt, Elmholdt, and Haahr 2021; Kellogg, Valentine, and Christin 2020) and forge new forms of panoptic control including peer coveillance and counterveillance (Berkelaar and Buzzanell 2014; Ganesh 2016).

Linked with control, foundational research conceptualizing hegemony as a dialectical negotiation among dominant and marginalized groups (Gramsci 1971; Mumby 1997; Parker 2003) drew attention to ways that managerial/leader imperatives are recursively accepted, rejected, and/or undermined by subordinates over time (Gálvez, Tirado, and Alcaraz 2021; James and Zoller 2017). The focus on covert and individualized resistance (Gagnon and Collinson 2017; Ybema and Horvers 2017) has shifted with increasing attention to overt and collective forms (Ganesh and Stohl 2013; Pal 2016; Rosile et al. 2021; Zanin and Bisel 2020) including transformational organizing (Cruz 2015; Dempsey, Parker, and Krone 2011; Ganesh 2018; Ganesh, Zoller, and Cheney 2005; Jensen 2021).

Researchers depict differing relationships between resistance and dissent. For example, Garner (2016) contrasted resistance as covert expression with dissent as overt expressions of concern about workplace policies, whereas Kassing (2007) theorized dissent as a form of resistance. This latter viewpoint broadens dissent to include everyday forms of disagreement and self-advantage along with principled expression (e.g., whistle-blowing). However, researchers largely situate dissent episodically within Weberian hierarchical relations of authority (e.g., upward and lateral dissent, circumvention) (Kassing, Fanelli, and Chakravarthy 2018), which may limit attention to shifting, fluid, and invisible organizing structures as well as systemic forms of inequality (Cruz 2017).

Moving forward, we need more conceptual development of resistance becoming domination, including investigating the organizing of Gramsci's (1971) subaltern counter-hegemony (see for example Burawoy 2012) and Freire's (1993) *conscientização* processes designed to prevent the oppressed becoming oppressors. In addition to theorizing consent, more work can examine the communicative negotiation of *coercive* power (Ali 2015; Burawoy 2012; Jacobson 2017; Moore 2014; Penny 2017), such as Harris's (2019) analysis of how university Title IX policies participate in violence. Coercion involves organizing and legitimizing state/civil violence, including intersecting discourses of colonialism, permanent states of war, and necrocapitalism that render certain bodies vulnerable, and indeed, killable (Banerjee 2008; de Souza 2023; Ganesh 2018; Mbembe 2003).

2 Methodological and Metatheoretical Approaches

These evolving conceptions of communication, power, and organizing are linked to methodological issues. As researchers from Marxist, feminist, postmodern, and decolonial/postcolonial perspectives contested positivist and realist metatheoretical positions that failed to account for the politics of data gathering and analysis (Allen 1996; Broadfoot and Munshi 2007; Buzzanell 1994; Deetz 1996), many adopted qualitative methods to understand contextualized experiences of political organizing. We briefly highlight some methodological developments linked to this "interpretive turn" in organizational communication.

First, ethnographic, bottom-up methods often highlighted employee perspectives (O'Connor et al. 2016) as well as non-dominant groups such as working-class families and unemployed people (Dougherty et al. 2018; Gist-Mackey and Guy 2019; Lucas 2011), sex workers (e.g., Blithe, Wiederhold Wolfe, and Mohr 2019), and low-income farmers (Carter and Alexander 2020; Pal 2016). Recent scholarship has begun to address the relative lack of access to everyday experiences of powerful decision-makers, such as male managers' use of sexist discourses (Tracy and Rivera 2010). For example, Carrillo Arciniega (2021) framed their study of diversity trainers' appeals to white men as "studying up" to connect the decision-making of powerful groups to structural inequality.

Second, more critical scholars are expanding qualitative methods to enact commitments to emancipatory social change via participatory action and advocacy research (Dutta and Thaker 2019; Linabary et al. 2021; Pal 2014; Parker 2020; Quinlan et al. 2020). This engagement may necessitate changing publication practices (see Parker, Oceguera, and Sanchez 2011) and more translational writing for practitioner audiences (e.g., Lutgen-Sandvik and Tracy 2012; Pauly and Buzzanell 2016).

Third, more work can be done to integrate quantitative methods in studying communication and power. Metatheoretical critiques of post/positivist theorizing should not lead to binary and oppositional treatment of methodologies. Quantitative research sheds light on the influence of authority on perceptions of deception (Dunleavy, Chory, and Goodboy 2010) and expressions of dissent (e.g., decisional control, supervisor relationships, and managerial rationalities) (Garner 2016; Kassing, Fanelli, and Chakravarthy 2018; Thompson, McDonald, and O'Connor 2020). Engaging multiple methods to study power requires scholars across research traditions to enact greater reflexivity regarding their orientation to dominant rationalities (Ellingson 2008; Field-Springer 2020; Pal 2014). For example, quantitative researchers may adopt a consensus viewpoint that reinforces the status quo and overlook hidden conflict (i.e., by positioning dissent as managerial feedback that benefits the entire organization or as a form of misbehavior). By contrast, critical scholars have begun to engage quantitative methodologies with explicit commitments to advance social justice goals (Garcia, López, Vélez 2018; Scharrer and Ramasubramanian 2021).

3 Developments in the Study of Communication, Power, and Politics

Next, we describe theoretical developments in major research domains including communicating identity, the political workplace, and nonwork organizing. We also discuss organizing in the context of policy and social change.

3.1 Communicating Identity

Research into the role of differences including gender, race, nationality, sexuality, and ability status in organizing power relationships (Biwa 2021; Cruz 2017; Fleming 2007; Gill 2014; Pauly and Buzzanell 2016) increasingly adopts intersectional lenses that highlight overlapping forms of inequality (Crenshaw 1989; Harris 2017; Parker, Oceguera, and Sanchez 2011). For example, research interrogates how dominance is reinforced though constructions of whiteness, masculinity, and heteronormativity (de Souza 2019; McDonald 2015; Parker and Mease 2009). Much of this scholarship reveals the interplay of marginalized and dominant rationalities marking the organizing process (Carrillo Arciniega 2021; Pal 2016), and connects with material outcomes such as closeting, harassment, and violence (D'Enbeau and Kunkel 2013; Dougherty and Goldstein Hode 2016; McDonald, Harris, and Ramirez 2020).

Decolonial/postcolonial research examines power and identity in terms of centering and erasing voices, highlighting tensions related to vulnerability and advocacy, and visibility and invisibility (Cruz 2017; Ganesh 2018; Irigaray et al. 2021; Kang and Krone 2022; Yousfi 2021). Pal (2016) investigated how farmers in Singur, India reasserted subaltern cultural values largely erased from mainstream knowledge in organizing against land acquisition. Reflecting more inclusive "ecologies of knowledge" (Santos 2015), researchers are rethinking disciplinary concepts through paradigms rooted in the Global South (Biwa 2021; Broadfoot and Munshi 2015). For example, Spiller et al. (2020) reconceptualized leadership from indigenous Māori practices of *wānanga*, Cruz and Sodeke (2021) reconfigured conceptions of liquidity based on Nigerian and Liberian market women and street hawkers' experiences, and Kang and Krone (2022) re-theorized technology, "organized dissonance" (Ashcraft 2006) and the four flows (McPhee and Zaug 2008) from the nonduality practiced by the Tibetan grassroots collective *niamle*. These insights challenge taken-for-granted assumptions in Western theories of power and politics.

3.2 Theorizing the Political Workplace

The workplace has been a central concern for identity research in organizational communication. Early critical research interrogated the politics of identity in work socialization processes, marking class, racial, and gendered assumptions in defining what constitutes a "real job", an "entrepreneur", a "professional", and a legitimate college major (Cheney and Ashcraft 2007; Cheney et al. 2009; Clair 1996; Gill and Ganesh 2007; Lair and Wieland 2012). Recent scholarship situates these processes within the increasing precarity of work. Research illuminates growing expectations for the entrepreneurial subject to continually adapt to meet neoliberal economic demands (Bryson and Dempsey 2017; Mumby 2019), including racialized systems for managing unemployment and job seeking (Gist-Mackey 2018).

Building on critical theories of organizational culture as a site of power/resistance dynamics (Mumby 1987), recent research highlights how workplace health promotion discourses reinforce neoliberal values (Dailey, Burke, and Carberry 2018; Ford and Scheinfeld 2016), depicting the ideal employee as a self-regulated, self-motivated corporate athlete, maximizing productivity and minimizing costs (Dale and Burrell 2014; James and Gill 2018). James and Zoller (2017) and James and Gill (2018) observed the growth of cult-like workplace fitness programs, including CrossFit, that incorporate evangelical leadership, peer surveillance, and pressure for conformity in ways that may legitimize abusive managerial practices (see also Sørensen and Villadsen 2018; Tourish and Vatcha 2005). Promoting digital health self-tracking technologies ("the quantified self") also enables new forms of corporate paternalism through self and organizational surveillance over things like exercise and sleep (Elmholdt, Elmholdt, and Haahr 2021).

More broadly, rapidly developing algorithmic technology affords nearly instantaneous managerial tracking linked to rewards and punishments, such as automated performance management systems for app-based delivery workers (Kellogg, Valentine, and Christin 2020; Veen, Barratt, and Goods 2020). Employees nonetheless resist incursions into privacy and freedom of expression, context collapse, and social media strictures (Thompson, McDonald, and O'Connor 2020). For example, although platform capitalism's "gig economy" creates vulnerabilities among contracted, home-based, part-time, and outsourced labor (Bryson and Dempsey 2017; Chattopadhyay and Pandit 2021; Gálvez, Tirado, and Alcaraz 2021), it has fomented collective organizing in response (Dutta and Kaur-Gill 2018; Gálvez, Tirado, and Alcaraz 2021; Rizzo and Atzeni 2020).

3.3 Expanding Beyond Work

Research has expanded our understanding of political organizing beyond the workplace, including volunteer work-life boundary management and professionalization

dynamics (Cruz and Meisenbach 2018; Ganesh and McAllum 2012). Collectives organized around particular faiths, politics, or ideological principles often encounter political struggles around interpretations of principles, missions, and priorities (Ban 2017; D'Enbeau and Kunkel 2013; Jensen and Meisenbach 2015). Research also illustrates how non-profit and activist organizations (e.g., social service organizations, food pantries) working with marginalized groups struggle with inclusion and client voice, and contest/reinforce the structural bases of inequalities (de Souza 2019; Ivancic 2017, 2021; Jensen 2021; Olufowote 2017).

Organizational communication scholars address the resistive potential of subaltern collectives and grassroots solidarity networks as spaces to articulate alternative imaginaries and promote social change (Dempsey 2011; Dutta and Thaker 2019; Kang and Krone 2022; Pal 2016; Zoller 2021). Although organizing protest movements remains undertheorized, more work attends to the communicative dynamics of mobilizing, connecting, and strategizing (Ganesh and Stohl 2013; Heath, Fletcher, and Munoz 2013; Pinazo Calatayud and Nos Aldas 2016; Zoller and Casteel 2022).

3.4 Organizing, Power, and Policy

Scholars increasingly investigate ways that dominance and resistance become embedded in organizational-level policy discourses, including workplace sexual identity (Compton 2016), Title IX (Harris 2019), and sexual harassment (Dougherty and Goldstein Hode 2016). A significant body of food security research links organizational policy with governmental and cultural politics (Dempsey and Gibson 2017; Ivancic 2021; LeGreco 2011; Okamoto 2017). For example, de Souza (2019) connected US food pantry aid with food industry political influence and presidential racializing of welfare programs, and Dutta and Thaker (2019) situated dalit women farmers' cooperatives with a larger movement to transform Indian agricultural policy.

Critical public relations and rhetorical organizational communication investigate industry influence over policy debates such as genetic modification (Henderson, Cheney, and Weaver 2015), challenging depictions of equitable dialogue in public relations research (Boyd and Waymer 2011). Additionally, Conrad's (2011) rhetorical punctuated equilibrium model explicated how corporate issues advocates maintain policy dominance, and dialectically, how non-elites collectively organize to open policy windows. Zoller and Casteel (2022) applied this model to #MarchforourLives activists' attributions of gun violence to weapons manufacturers.

Researchers have demonstrated how corporate social responsibility (CSR) discourses privatize policy debates (e.g., labor conditions and sustainability) while boosting organizational image and competitive advantage (O'Connor and Gronewold 2013; Pal and Jenkins 2014), including the garment industry's promotion of labor rights (Ban 2020), and the fast food industry's depiction of consumer responsibility for health (Ban 2016). More research can address roles for governments, NGOs, and trade unions in corporate accountability and multistakeholder certification (Mitra and Warshay 2016; Rosile et al. 2021; Zoller, Strochlic, and Getz 2020).

Finally, communication scholars have begun to critically examine power and inequality in our disciplinary policies (Ahn et al. 2021; Cruz et al. 2020; Dar et al. 2021; Mukherjee 2020). The #Communicationsowhite forum called "into focus the complicity of the academy in perpetuating existing racial and intersecting hierarchies" (Ng, White, and Saha 2020: 143) and promoted collective action redressing systemic inequalities in citation practices, editorial decisions, mentorship, and promotion. Ballard (Ballard et al. 2020) called for organizational communication scholars to promote anti-racism in *practice*. In that forum, Allen and Ashcraft (Ballard et al. 2020) noted the need for university leaders to name anti-Black violence in unwavering terms and learn how to address it, and Ganesh and Zoller (Ballard et al. 2020) called for all scholars, not just critical scholars, to challenge whiteness and Western worldviews in academic publishing and forge inclusive policies in our academic units.

3.5 Emerging Debates

We now turn to some key theoretical debates in the field. These debates center questions of agency and materiality, order, and approaches to social change.

3.5.1 The Constitutive Model

We see growing questions about the constitutive model's influence on the study of organizational power and politics. First, scholars have argued that social constructionist theories led scholars to privilege dynamics of order over disorder (Bisel 2009). We caution against the claim that social constructionism necessarily privileges order. Critical-interpretive traditions (e.g., feminist, Frankfurt school, poststructural, and dialogic) have long excavated hidden conflict from discursive closure (Clair 2000; Deetz 1992; Thackaberry 2004), addressed change/stability dialectics (Ashcraft 2006; D'Enbeau and Buzzanell 2011; Dempsey, Parker, and Krone 2011; Kang and Krone 2022), and investigated how paradox management reinforces or transforms status quo structures (see Putnam, Fairhurst, and Banghart 2016) via discursive opening and closure (Mease 2021; Vásquez, Schoeneborn, and Sergi 2016). Nonetheless, the amplification of flux and tension as a routine feature of organizational politics is important (Knox et al. 2015; Meisenbach 2008; Mitra and Buzzanell 2017; Sheep, Fairhurst, and Khazanchi 2016), particularly as a corrective to viewpoints equating overt power struggles with disorder. We should continue to grapple with the implications of framing social arrangements such as neoliberal precarity as disorder (Mumby 2019) versus a hegemonic form of order, or both.

A second debate about the constitutive model emanates from sociomaterial perspectives. For example, Kuhn, Ashcraft, and Cooren (2019) called for a decisive break from constitutive theories, drawing from feminist new materialism and Actor Network Theory. They charged the interpretive turn with erasing materiality by focusing on "what people and only people do" (Kuhn, Ashcraft, and Cooren 2019: 104). We encourage greater attention to issues of power in this proposed "turn". First, we caution against reinforcing modernist and post-positivist straw arguments that overlooked material theorizing in early social constructionism such as "accidentally" spilled coffee as embodied resistance (Hochschild 1983), the hierarchical organizing of work spaces (Bell and Forbes 1994), worker injury reporting (Zoller 2003), and protest signs (Ganesh and Stohl 2013). As Harris (2019) observed, feminist new materialism should *not* be interpreted as a break with longstanding feminist theorizing of materiality. However, we value increasing attention to material-symbolic relationships in organizing inequality (Harris 2019) such as Gist-Mackey and Guy's (2019) investigation of social support and financial precarity, and Dougherty et al.'s (2018) use of photovoice to offset symbolic privileging in interview methods.

Third, we question new materialist epistemological politics in claiming a ground that is "neither social constructionist nor realist" (Harris 2019: 26). On what (and crucially *whose*) grounds do we talk about what is "real" or true, and how is that implicated in power/knowledge relationships (Foucault 1980; Rorty 1979)? We also question the implications of theorizing responsibility if we view texts/objects as *independent* actors (see also Meisenbach 2018). Harris (2019) used feminist new materialism to theorize organizational responsibility for violence, yet viewing texts such as policy documents as objects with *independent* influence (Mease 2021) may ultimately disconnect those texts from their human creators and the political contexts in which they are interpreted, enacted, and/or resisted by particular organizational members over time within multiple hierarchies. We further question the implications for marginalized humans of promoting material agency while depicting humans largely as effects of discourses.

Moving forward, we need more dialogue centering social justice and voices of marginalized groups in rendering theories of agency and the material (Broadfoot and Munshi 2015). Zakiyyah Iman Jackson (in Muñoz et al. 2015) centered Black experiences in asking "What and crucially whose conception of humanity are we moving beyond?" (p. 215). Jackson (Muñoz et al. 2015) suggested that part of the appeal in "moving beyond the human" may be to reinscribe Eurocentric values and racial logics. Haritaworn (Muñoz et al. 2015) asked, "If we are interested in recovering things and beings that are continually rendered disposable as a result of colonial capitalism and cis-heteropatriarchy, why not start with anti-colonial accounts of the world that have a long history of resisting both human and nonhuman erasure?" (p. 213). These materiality debates are linked to conflicts regarding organizing and social change.

3.5.2 Role of the Researcher in Social Change

Critical traditions generally share a commitment to praxis, or theoretically informed emancipatory social change. However, "positive" organizational communication researchers have charged critical theorists with focusing on *problems* and failing to promote organizational flourishing such as wellness (Bisel, Kavya, and Tracy 2020).

We encourage greater attention to the role of power and difference in defining what counts as resistive, "positive", and "critical" and for whom. Positive psychology, for example, has militaristic roots and an individualist focus (Ehrenreich 2010; Ganesh and Zoller 2014). Taking a more dialectical approach, critical participatory action research with low-income and marginalized people promotes flourishing by fomenting agency in addressing social problems, but also recognizes and contests structural limits marked by power disparities (Dutta and Kaur-Gill 2018; Parker, Oceguera, and Sanchez 2011).

At the same time, researchers engaging embodied social change efforts face questions about their critical commitments. For example, researchers investigate the role of "alternative organizing" such as fair trade, cooperatives, and community sustainability in re-imagining and transforming late capitalism (Chertkovskaya and Paulsson 2021; Peredo and McLean 2020; Webb and Cheney 2014; Zoller 2021), yet many critics dismiss these efforts as inconsequential to or co-opted by capitalist relations. Similarly, some organizational studies scholars express fear that engaging management in social change projects via "critical performativity" (Esper et al. 2017; Huault et al. 2017) will blunt radical critique (Cabantous et al. 2016; Gond and Nyberg 2017). It is important to interrogate hegemonic reproduction within transformative movements (Hanchey 2018). However, treating capitalism as all-encompassing inhibits organizing for change (Gibson-Graham 2006). Privileging radical critique over managerial and other forms of engagement reflects elitism when it undercuts (even imperfect) material action addressing the needs of marginalized groups. We encourage recognition of actually existing alternatives to capitalist relations and contextualized assessments of their resistant potential (see Bryson and Dempsey 2017).

4 Conclusion

We believe that this review has pointed to multiple directions for future studies of organizational power and politics. The study of the communicative dynamics of dominance and resistance in the organizing process is central to major political challenges of our time, including growing inequality, political instability and violence, climate change, and the connected rise of pandemics. There is significant opportunity for engaged and intersectional organizational communication research to develop solutions to these challenges as they build insights into the political organization of society.

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Chapter 15
Piecing Together Inclusion: A Critical Overview of Organizational Inclusion Research and Praxis

Abstract: This chapter addresses the fragmented, complicated, and multilayered nature of inclusion in organizations and organizing. Specifically, we trace the historical origins of inquiry about inclusion and related concepts such as diversity and equity in the organizational communication field and other relevant disciplines. We then situate the ideological nexus that has characterized inclusion theorizing and practices. We describe the micro-, meso-, and macro-level explorations of organizational inclusion in communication inquiry and acknowledge the limitations that hegemonic neoliberal discourses impose upon inclusion praxis. We discuss how tensions, contradictions, and limitations are constitutive of inclusion scholarship and extend an invitation to lean into these complexities as entry points to advancing inclusion theory and praxis within the field of organizational communication.

Keywords: inclusion, diversity, equity, difference, intersectionality, business case, diversity management, materiality, relationality, functionalist tradition, critical tradition, institutionalization

1 Introduction: Constituting Inclusion

Theoretical and practical examinations of organizational inclusion are valuable, yet they have been frustratingly rare within the field of organizational communication. Inclusion can be defined as "people's belief that they can be safe, heard, engaged, fully present, authentic, valued, and respected, both as individuals and as members of multiple identity groups" (Ferdman 2017: 239). Often discussed in tandem with 'diversity' and 'equity', inclusion inquiry and praxis occupy a complicated space where calls for social transformation and tendencies toward institutionalization practices are in constant tension. For example, organizational practitioners tasked to develop strategies and programs to activate or increase institutional inclusion bump against the sedimented and de-radicalized record of institutional practices (Mease 2012). Indeed, due to the fragmented nature of its origins and applications, ideological underpinnings of inclusion remain in flux, and theorizing of the concept poses challenges that invite further exploration.

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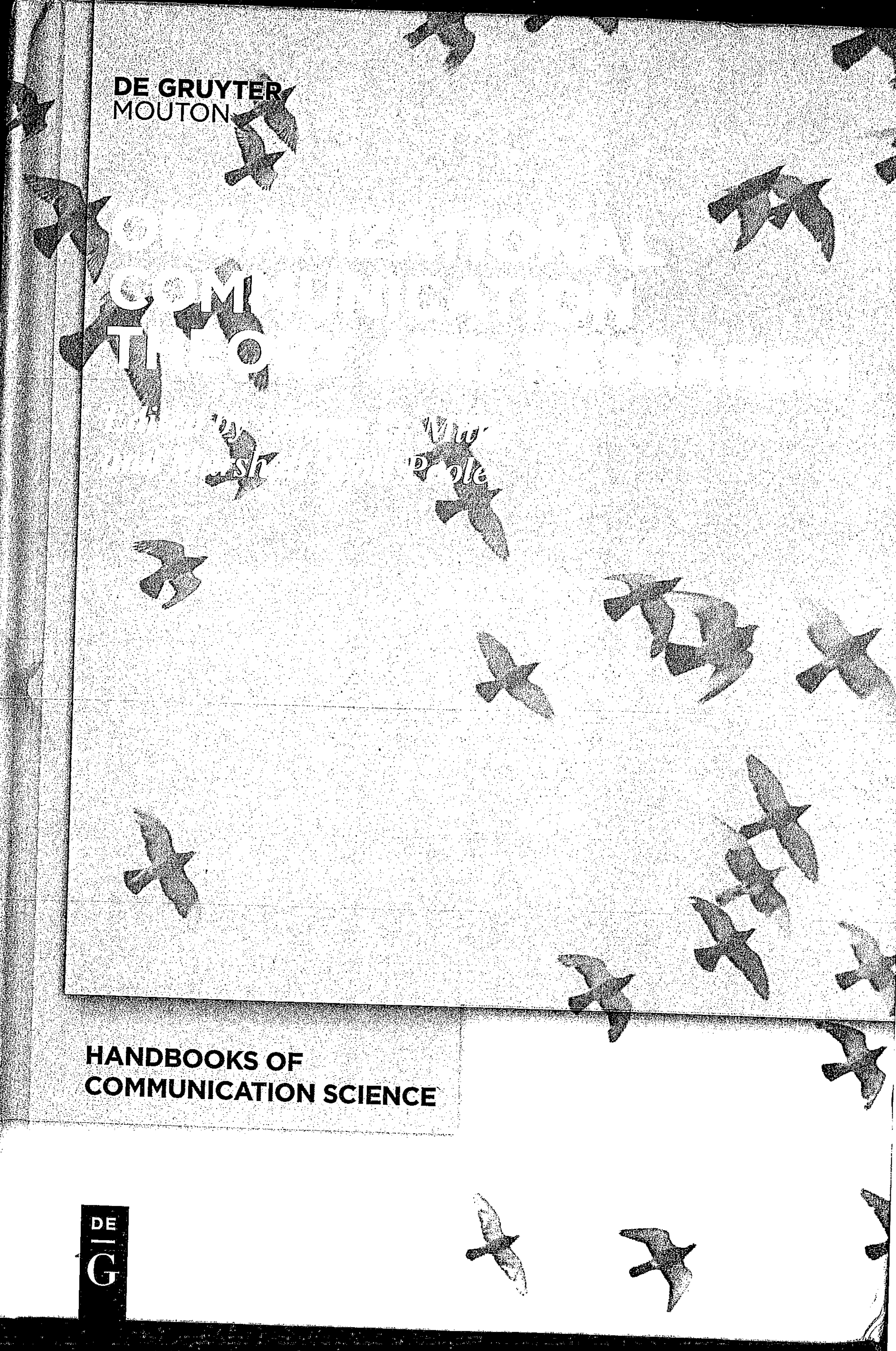
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