

Utopian Psychology , Political Correctness, and the Expulsion of Objective Truth: CBS News and the Killian Memo Debacle

By

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From its origin in Marx, critical theory has shown a peculiar lack of interest in how to do things right. It has been content to be critical, as if undermining what is bad will, by itself, result in good. This is so with regard to psychoanalytic critical theory as much as with any other kind. And the utopian orientation of writers like Marcuse (1966) and Brown suggest why this is so. Utopia, after all, requires no management and, indeed, permits of none. For management is always about getting people to act in ways that they would not otherwise act. It is about power, that is to say, and power obviously has no place in utopia. In this regard, the critical management project may be said to consist in the attempt to destroy management in the name of utopia.

But psychoanalytic theory should be skeptical of utopianism, since psychoanalysis reveals its origin. Utopia is an image that refers back to the early state of fusion between infant and mother, before the indifference of objective reality intruded upon this intimate connection. This suggests that the target of critical management theory is reality itself, or at least the indifference of reality.

Part of the critique of indifferent reality, is the critique of objective truth. In the utopian project, truth cannot be seen as being independent of our wishes and desires, for it is only our fusion with maternal goodness that permits us to safely act on our desires. Objective language, what Lacan calls the symbolic, and hence any objective truth, could exist in our world only through intrusion and violation. The task, then, of critical theory, would be to expel the symbolic. Utopianism necessarily generates a Manichean outlook in which the forces of goodness struggle against the forces of evil, and in which there is no place for an indifferent, objective reality that stands apart from and outside this struggle. This struggle takes the form of what has been called, "political correctness," and which may be said to be a user guide to the Manicheanism of utopian language.

Political Correctness

From its beginnings in the university, political correctness has metastasized into every area of social relations. Even within the corporation, it has risen to unquestioned dominance over communication in the matters to which it applies.

If this control were just in the area of speech, it would be a matter of little concern to organizations. However, the merest reflection indicates that it cannot control

speech alone, since organizational decisions involves positions that are proposed and defended through speech. Hence control over speech through political correctness must imply control over organizational decision-making, and hence over every aspect of the organization. The implication of this is that the psychological dynamics that underlie political correctness come to be the underlying dynamics of the organization as a whole.

I have written extensively about the psychological roots of political correctness (2002, 2003, 2004) and will repeat only the rudiments here. In psychoanalytic terms, the key to the understanding of political correctness is the psychology of sex roles, which are based on primitive images of the mother and the father. In those terms, the father is seen as an obstacle to perfect fusion with the mother, which we all had, or imagine we had, in infancy, when that love was sufficient to make our lives perfect.

Now the father is not really the obstacle to that fusion, he only represents it. The obstacle is reality itself, which determines that we are all separate creatures, and not one with mother. The father has a place in the external world because he is not part of the early fusion with the mother. In the traditional Western psychology of sex roles, his life gains its meaning by his engagement with that world. He deals with the external world as a way of gaining the love of the mother through his achievement, by transforming it so that she can simply be her loving self. The father passes on to the children what he has learned about the world through this process of transformation. In this way they become members of society, and in that sense society reproduces itself. As members of the society, we come to partake of the same symbolic.

In these terms political correctness means the repudiation of the role of the father and his works. Its premise is that we could all have fusion with the mother if we could only get him out of the picture. So we attempt to destroy him, and to undermine the idea that he has achieved something worthwhile in the world, which is the basis on which he has asserted his claim -- he, that is, and anyone that stands for him.

Implicitly and explicitly, this outlook involves the rejection of the symbolic, the idea we have of objective external reality. The father is identified with reality in the family configuration, and he needs external reality so that he can engage it and transform it and in that way gain standing with the mother.

The dynamics of PC are essentially hysteric (Schwartz, 2004), which means that organizations under the control of political correctness have hysteria at their core.

Hysteria may be said to represent an attempt to undermine the father, reject the function he serves, and debase his works. But our shared, negotiated, structured understanding, the symbolic, is the product of the father and the paternal function. The meaning the symbolic offers refers to an independent, objective reality, which anyone can see and engage as well as anyone else.

Students of organization will understand that the structural elements of organization, definition of work, coordination, standards of performance, and so on, require the shared meaning of the symbolic, and the attendant definitions of truth and knowledge. Undermining them would make organization impossible.

This will be a problem that may be most visible in organizations whose primary purpose is itself truth and knowledge, such as the university and the news business. The purpose of this presentation will be to pursue this analysis through the case of a recent debacle at CBS News.

In this matter, a program designed to present damaging information about President Bush's career in the Air National Guard was quickly determined to be based on memos that were obvious forgeries. It was subsequently found that even the experts CBS had hired to authenticate the memos had warned that they were probably forged. William Burkett, the individual who turned out to be the source of these memos and the only witness to their veracity, described by CBS as "unimpeachable," was in fact a well-known crank with an obsessive hatred of Bush and a history of institutionalization for mental illness. Evidently, CBS' journalistic standards had broken down and its processes had become corrupted.

Of singular importance is the fact that CBS officials, specifically anchorman and managing editor Dan Rather, clearly believed that the story was true, even though the usual journalistic bases upon which truth is established were missing. The question is, what could he have meant by truth? My contention will be that the idea of truth he was using was rooted in hysteria. It thus had a different basis than empirical verification. It was rooted in a subjective feeling of truth. But this feeling has intrapsychic roots, and is not anchored in empirical reality. Truth conceived in this way subordinates objective symbolic interaction to fantasy. I will work from this to show how this idea of truth changes the nature of knowledge in organizations and must corrode every aspect of organizational behavior and functioning.

I will begin with a brief description of the memo debacle and then proceed to an exploration of the organizational processes that were responsible for it.

Burkett's Revenge

Our story begins with a CBS News program on September 8, 2004, during a closely fought and extremely bitter presidential election. In that broadcast, anchorman Dan Rather claimed to have evidence that President George W. Bush used political influence to get into the Texas Air National Guard during the Vietnam war, that he did not fulfill his commitment to the Guard while he was supposed to be serving, even to the extent of failing to carry out a direct order from his commander. These charges were supposed to be based on a number of memos to file that had been written by that commander, and recently obtained by CBS News, which placed copies of the memos on their web page¹.

Within hours of the broadcast, questions had been raised on the internet about the authenticity of the memos. The first feature that was recognized was that the memos were in a proportionately spaced font, which is common in the word processed documents we have today, but extremely rare on the typewriters in use when the memos were supposed to have been composed. Other indications that the documents were produced on a word processor became quickly apparent. For instance, the Times New Roman font in which the memos appeared to have been composed had not been developed at the time, superscript characters were employed that were not widely available, and, it ultimately turned out, not even possible on contemporary typewriters², and quotation marks were curled, making it possible to use different marks at the beginning and end of quotations, rather than

straight up and down as was dictated by the space limitations of a typewriter keyboard.³

These were only some of the issues raised about the typography. Many more problems emerged concerning the violation of standard Air Force and general US military forms and procedures, as well issues of discrepant facts. For example, it was found that a general who was supposed to have applied pressure to whitewash Bush's record had retired two years previously.

As the momentum of this criticism was developing, however Rather and CBS stood by the story. In a statement released on September 10, for example, they said:

This report was not based solely on recovered documents, but rather on a preponderance of evidence, including documents that were provided by unimpeachable sources, interviews with former Texas National Guard officials and individuals who worked closely back in the early 1970s with Colonel Jerry Killian and were well acquainted with his procedures, his character and his thinking.

In addition, the documents are backed up not only by independent handwriting and forensic document experts but by sources familiar with their content. Contrary to some rumors, no internal investigation is underway at CBS News nor is one planned.

But over time, these defenses crumbled. The "unimpeachable source" turned out to be a well known crank with an obsessive hatred of Bush and a history of mental illness, the sources familiar with Killian claimed that the support they were supposed to have given had been misrepresented, and the independent experts who were supposed to have authenticated the documents, in fact, were found to have doubted their authenticity. In the end, Rather and CBS had to admit that the documents were fakes, though Rather continued to maintain that they were still "accurate," whatever that could mean.

The official verdict, rendered by a commission CBS hired to investigate the matter, left no doubt that CBS had erred in airing the story:

The stated goal of CBS News is to have a reputation for journalism of the highest quality and unimpeachable integrity. To meet this objective, CBS News expects its personnel to adhere to published internal Standards based on two core principles: accuracy and fairness. The Panel finds that both the September 8 Segment itself and the statements and news reports by CBS News that followed the Segment failed to meet either of these core principles.

Although they were not willing to conclude with "absolute certainty" that the documents were forgeries⁴, the expert judgments that they included in their report did not leave much room for doubt. For example, they quote Peter Tytell, indubitably one of the world's leading authority in these matters, as concluding that "the Killian documents were not produced on a typewriter in the early 1970s and therefore were not authentic."

For the purposes of organizational analysis, however, the important issue was not whether the documents were fake or authentic, but whether CBS had sufficient grounds to assert that they were authentic when they broke this highly prejudicial

story in the middle of a presidential election. On that issue, there can be no doubt: all are agreed that they did not. The producer of the segment, Mary Mapes was fired, and four other executives were asked to resign. Rather himself was allowed to retire.

Organizational Analysis

The question for organizational analysis is how CBS could come to violate so deeply its own most important standards -- standards that could easily be said to define the very nature of its work. Answering this question was, of course, part of the task set for the Thornburgh commission, and they did provide some answers. Before turning to our own investigation, we should consider the validity of theirs.

Their claim was that CBS erred as a result of trying to get the story on the air as soon as possible. In making that claim they discounted the possibility that CBS was acting out of a political motivation.

Take the second item first time first. The Commission may not have come to the conclusion that CBS acted out of political bias, but their argument here is very weak, consisting largely in the denial on the part of Rather and Mapes that they had a political agenda⁵. There is, however, plenty of uncontested information in the public domain indicating Mapes' passion for the story, on which she had been working for four years, and her belief that it would have a powerful political effect. For example, consider these items:

- (1) Mapes was working with a freelance Texas journalist named Michael Smith. On July 23, he sent her an email saying: "I am close to something that the Bushies are worried about..." Mapes emailed back: "I desperately want to talk to you....Do NOT underestimate how much I want this story."
- (2) On July 30, Mapes sent an email to one of her superiors at CBS in which she said: "...there is some very interesting Bush stuff shaking out there right now...Re...his qualification [sic] and refusal of service in Vietnam, etc. Lots of goodies."
- (3) On August 3, she wrote: "There is a storm brewing in Austin re the Bush stuff....It is much more intense than it was four years ago and there is a strong general feeling that this time, there is blood in the water."
- (4) On August 31, Smith wrote to her to see whether she could arrange a book deal for Burkett, as part of a way to entice him to give them the memos. In the message, Smith maintained that one of the selling points would be that the information they were trying to obtain "could possibly change the momentum of an election." Her response: "that looks good, hypothetically speaking, of course."

These items and this line of argument bear also on the second element of the Thornburgh claim, which was that CBS simply rushed the story into press to gain a competitive advantage. This claim is buttressed by the fact that other news media were on the story. But if other news organizations were rushing the story into press, that simply opens the way to another question, which is clearly related to the issue of political bias, which is *why was this* the story that they were trying to bring out? This possibility was addressed by the Commission, who noted:

The Panel recognizes that some will see this widespread media attention not as evidence that *60 Minutes Wednesday* was not motivated by bias but

instead proof that all of mainstream media has a liberal bias. That is a perception beyond the Panel's assignment.

But while that issue may have been beyond the Panel's assignment, it does not have to be beyond ours. The issue of political bias in the media has been and remains a contentious one. I cannot resolve it fully at this point, but I do wish to point to two matters that point in that direction.

First is that there is a considerable history of apparently sloppy journalism in which falsehoods have been promulgated with flagrant disregard of the facts, all in the same political direction, and none of which were acknowledged until internet storms developed. A brief list:

- 1) A CNN story charging US forces with having used poison gas in Vietnam. The story was retracted when no believable evidence could be produced and the journalist most closely associated was fired.
- 2) An AP story reporting that a campaign audience for President Bush cheered when it was announced that former president Clinton had entered the hospital for a heart condition. Audio recordings of the event, which quickly became available on the internet, showed that no such thing happened. This story simply disappeared from AP's website, but not before having been picked up by newspapers across the country.
- 3) A CNN news executive, speaking to an international audience of important officials, said that US forces in Iraq had targeted and killed journalists. No evidence was produced and the executive was fired.
- 4) Most recently, Newsweek ran a story saying that, according to anonymous sources, US interrogators at Guantanamo Bay had flushed a copy of the Koran down the toilet. After the story provided the occasion for riots in which over a dozen people were killed, Newsweek acknowledged that it had no credible evidence for the story and retracted it.

Certainly, belief in the US that the media have a liberal bias is widespread. A recent study by the Pew Research Center called Trends 2005 found that twice as many people say news organizations are "liberal" (51%) as say they are "conservative" (26%), while 14% say neither phrase applies. The same study found that 45 percent of Americans believe little or nothing in their daily newspapers, up from 16 percent two decades ago.

The second is that stories critical of the left, though equally or more incendiary, have not been published or broadcast. During the course of the controversy, Dan Rather asserted that he had no bias, but that if an issue arose that if a serious issue arose that were as potentially damaging to the other side, he would certainly follow up on that. But there were several issues that were potentially damaging, and neither Dan Rather, nor any of the other mainstream media, followed upon them.

John Kerry's Magic Hat

In contrast with the obsessive concern with Bush's record during the campaign, Kerry's record was subjected to very little scrutiny, despite some very serious charges. One extensive set of accusations concerned Kerry's war record, and was laid by a group of Vietnam vets, comprising most of the people with whom Kerry had served in Vietnam, and including all of the officers in his chain of command. The

charges were intimated in a series of television ads, and detailed in a book called *Unfit for Command* by John O'Neill. Though their charges, and the supporting evidence, were widely circulated on the internet, the media gave no play at all to this group and their charges until almost two weeks after the story broke, when Senator Kerry denounced them. At that point, the news media, generally without mentioning the details of the charges, looked for ways to debunk them, and soon announced that they had been discredited. They were not discredited, but I cannot go into all the details here. I will briefly recount only one such charge, which is that Kerry made up a story about being in Cambodia on a secret mission.

Kerry made this assertion a number of times, first in a 1979 op-ed piece in the Boston Herald:

On more than one occasion, I, like Martin Sheen in *Apocalypse Now*, took my patrol boat into Cambodia. In fact, I remember spending Christmas Day of 1968 five miles across the Cambodian border being shot at by our South Vietnamese allies who were drunk and celebrating Christmas. The absurdity of almost being killed by our own allies in a country in which President Nixon claimed there were no American troops was very real. But nowhere in *Apocalypse Now* did I sense that kind of absurdity. ⁶

But the most important was in a debate in the Senate on a bill to provide aid to the contras in Nicaragua. There, Kerry said:

I remember Christmas of 1968 sitting on a gunboat in Cambodia. I remember what it was like to be shot at by Vietnamese and Khmer Rouge and Cambodians, and have the president of the United States telling the American people that I was not there; the troops were not in Cambodia. I have that memory which is seared -- seared -- in me. (Congressional Record - Senate of March 27, 1986, page 3594)

Kerry's fellow officers, and some of the enlisted men that had served under him, denied that he had ever been in Cambodia. And as the charge was bandied about the internet, none even of the men that he brought around with him as his "band of brothers" came forward to attest that he had been. In fact, as it turns out, his diaries, which he had given to his biographer Douglas Brinkley, told a contradictory story, which was that he had spent that night at Sa Dec, 50 miles from the Cambodia border. Brinkley quoted this diary entry: "Visions of sugarplums really do dance through your head and you think of stockings and snow and roast chestnuts and fires with birch logs and all that is good and warm and real. It's Christmas Eve."
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Unremarked by the news media, Kerry's campaign backed off from this story. First, they said that Kerry had patrolled the Mekong Delta somewhere "between" Cambodia and Vietnam despite the fact that there is no area between those countries, only a border. Then another spokesman told reporters that Kerry had been "near Cambodia."

But that doesn't do it. The point of Kerry's 1986 speech was that he personally had taken part in a secret and illegal war in a neutral country, and that he could therefore personally bear witness to the fact that the government was lying about the matter and to the effect that such lying had on him. But that was only true if he

was in Cambodia, as he had often said he was. If he was merely "near," then it can only be concluded that this candidate for the Presidency made up an elaborate and false story to support his position on an important matter of national policy. Yet this obvious conclusion was never even approached by the major news media of the United States.

Still, I have not yet come to the most fascinating part. In a long and hagiographic piece in the Washington Post by Laura Blumenfeld, widely dispersed on the internet, there is this:

... Kerry is reserved. He inherited it from his mother, along with her devotion to public service. "She taught us you stiff-upper-lip it," said his sister, Diana Kerry. "John is a man of the people. Of the little people, actually. He needs to project who he really is by simplifying."

And who is he, really?

A close associate hints: There's a secret compartment in Kerry's briefcase. He carries the black attaché everywhere. Asked about it on several occasions, Kerry brushed it aside. Finally, trapped in an interview, he exhaled and clicked open his case.

"Who told you?" he demanded as he reached inside. "My friends don't know about this."

The hat was a little mildewy. The green camouflage was fading, the seams fraying.

"My good luck hat," Kerry said, happy to see it. "Given to me by a CIA guy as we went in for a special mission in Cambodia."

Kerry put on the hat, pulling the brim over his forehead. His blue button-down shirt and tie clashed with the camouflage. He pointed his finger and raised his thumb, creating an imaginary gun. He looked silly, yet suddenly his campaign message was clear: Citizen-soldier. Linking patriotism to public service. It wasn't complex after all; it was Kerry.

He smiled and aimed his finger: "Pow." (June 6, 2003)

Now, as I have said, Kerry's fellow officers, including his entire chain of command, denied that he was ever in Cambodia, and they would know. Junior officers in such a command form a tight and cohesive group. They bunk together, eat together, go on missions together, and go on leave together⁸. One does not simply disappear and reappear without their comrades and commanders being aware of their absence. And the idea that he went on a secret mission for the CIA was absurd. Swift boats never traveled solo, and, being large and noisy, they were ill-suited for clandestine infiltrations. What is more, the idea that the CIA would choose a junior Lieutenant, with no more than three months experience "in country," and who had been well known as an opponent of the war in his college days, is beyond belief. Here again we have a case of apparent falsification which did not arouse the interest of any of the

mainstream news media. But if we can assume that the story is false, we also have to conclude either that Blumenfeld was the object of an elaborate charade, planned and choreographed by Kerry and his staff, or that he really did carry with him a hat that reminded him of an experience that existed only in his imagination. Neither of these possibilities about a man running for President were deemed worthy of consideration by any of the major news media of the United States.

I am almost finished.

As I have said, the Cambodia allegation was only one of many serious charges raised about Kerry's war record, even including questions about the sort of discharge he received⁹. They are too numerous to mention on this occasion, where it will only be mentioned that the most serious were not seriously investigated by the media. Yet many could easily have been resolved if Kerry had authorized the release of his military records by signing a certain form, called SF-180, as President Bush had done. Kerry said that he would do it during the campaign. He never did it and he was never called to account by the major news media for not doing so.

But that was during the campaign. After the campaign, on January 30, 2005, Tim Russert, on *Meet the Press*, managed to remember. He asked Kerry whether he would sign form SF-180. He said that he would. As I write this, in May, he has not yet signed it, even though there are many blogs on the internet that prominently display notifications of how long it has been since he said he would.

And then, the matter turning to Kerry's service in Cambodia, there was this:

MR. RUSSERT: And you have a hat that the CIA agent gave you?

SEN. KERRY: I still have the hat that he gave me, and I hope the guy would come out of the woodwork and say, "I'm the guy who went up with John Kerry. We delivered weapons to the Khmer Rouge on the coastline of Cambodia."

So delivering weapons to the Khmer Rouge it was. And a story that certainly would have been in its own right. One would think that it would have been news that the US, while fighting the communists in Vietnam at the time, supported the even more virulent Khmer Rouge communist insurrection next door in Cambodia. And if Kerry had "mis-spoken" and it was not the Khmer Rouge, who could it have been? Certainly the government of Cambodia didn't need a boatload of contraband guns. They had an army! But Russert did not blink an eye over this, and to this day, none of the other news media of the United States has, either

But let us take stock of this. My need here has not been to prove that Kerry lied about being in Cambodia, or for that matter about any of the other matters related to his war record. My need here has simply been to show that there was plenty of material, immediately available and widely circulated on the internet, to indicate that there were serious questions here about the character and dispositions of a man running for President. But, in contrast with its obsession with the record of Bush, the major news media have shown no interest in investigating these matters at all.

So what have we got here? Is this a demonstration of bias in the news media?

It might well be, but making that charge would be nothing new, or perhaps even interesting. It is, of course, a frequent charge, and is often supported by studies that show that those who work for the media are overwhelmingly liberal. But journalists claim that their political orientation is unimportant, since they can follow the canons of objectivity no matter what their orientation. I believe they are correct in that.

The idea of news media not having a political slant may well be an aberration. In many Western countries, it is understood that newspapers have characteristic outlooks and perspectives, and this is not believed to detract from the quality of their journalism. What is important for the quality of their journalism is that they understand a fact to be a fact, independent of themselves, and that they accept their subordination to the facts. What is important is not that a news organization be objective, but rather that it recognizes that its biases may get in the way of their understanding of independent reality, and that they try to keep that from happening. In other words, it needs to accept the importance of getting things right and does what it can to make sure that it has not gotten things wrong. And this is where CBS fell down. Telling the story that it wanted to tell became more important than whether or not the story was true. The problem with CBS News was not that it was biased, but that it had lost the idea that it ought not to be.

But how could a news organization lose that idea? Indeed, how could an organization that had lost that idea still be a news organization? And if it was not a news organization, what was it? And how did it make the transition from a news organization to whatever it became? These are the questions toward which I will now turn.

The point that I wish to make is that CBS News had become a fundamentally different type of organization than it had been. It came to be doing something else. Its meaning had changed. It had ceased to operate according to one underlying psychological dynamic and came to be operating according to another. It had changed from being Oedipal to being anti-Oedipal, and had become hysterical. These are theoretical points to which I shall return. First it will be necessary to get a more tactile sense of the organization's processes, especially with regard to the question of how, in the Burkett memo scandal, CBS News could have overridden the normal checks a news agency maintains to make sure it does not get things wrong.

CBS News in our time

In doing an organizational analysis of this sort, it generally makes sense to focus on the central role. In the broadcast news business, that would be the producer, Mary Mapes.

Most viewers don't know that on TV newsmagazines producers like Ms. Mapes do most of the important reporting. The on-air correspondents normally just parachute into the story at the end. (Fund, 2004)

To be sure, in this case, there was a bit of a difference:

The "60 Minutes" National Guard segment was an exception. Mr. Rather has acknowledged that he was deeply invested in the story, and when he learned Ms. Mapes had gotten the documents from Bill Burkett, a controversial former National Guard lieutenant colonel, he asked Mr. Heyward to take charge. In

an interview with the New York Times, Mr. Rather quoted himself as telling Mr. Hayward, "I have to ask you to oversee, in a hands-on way, the handling of the story." According to Mr. Rather, "He got it. He immediately agreed." (Fund, 2004)

However, while the role of the correspondent was larger than it usually is, the producer's role was still of paramount importance. Focusing on the producer in this case, Mary Mapes, quickly yields dividends. Several times in the accounts of CBS journalists and executives, the explanation given is that a belief in Mapes' integrity carried the day when there was an issue of verification. Her prestige was said to be so great that when she said, for example, that her source was unimpeachable, it was accepted without further investigation that her source could be trusted. For example:

Mapes' executive producer, Josh Howard said, "Mary Mapes told us her source made her completely confident about where they came from, and that they were authentic, and that made me confident..." (September 19 New York Times)

From a sociological point of view, it is clear enough what we have here. The organization suspended its own faculty of critical judgment, and relied on the judgment of a specific individual.. Instead of relying on their procedures to determine what they should do, they substituted her judgment. In psychoanalytic terms, Mary Mapes had been put in the position of the ego ideal. This is coterminous with the classical psychoanalytic view of the leader (Freud,). She was exerting, and they accepted, her leadership. But leadership is something that social science knows about. According to the standard account, leadership, or high status, generally goes to the individual who best represents the group's judgment of what a member of the group should be. In accepting Mary Mapes' leadership then, CBS News was saying something about its own identity. In exploring the mind of Mary Mapes, then, then we are also exploring CBS News as an organization.

The Mind of Mary Mapes

Let us begin with an account on the CBS News website

Mapes, 48, was described by colleagues on Tuesday as a dogged and talented journalist who made no secret of her liberal political beliefs.

She's only a few months removed from a career-defining highlight. Mapes took a story that had received little attention — the abuse of prisoners by American soldiers in Iraq's Abu Ghraib prison — and unearthed the photos that gave the story its visceral impact...

"She pursued stories very aggressively always," said Jeff Fager, executive producer of **60 Minutes**. "She definitely has an investigative sense. She was responsible for the bulk of the work on Abu Ghraib. That was her story."

The Dallas-based producer, who declined through a spokeswoman to talk with The Associated Press, also landed the first TV interviews with Strom Thurmond's biracial daughter and Hillary Rodham Clinton after her husband's impeachment. Mapes was almost jailed in 1999 for refusing a judge's order to

turn over a videotape of Dan Rather's interview with a white man convicted of killing a black man by dragging him behind a pickup truck.

She worked at Seattle's KIRO-TV before coming to CBS in 1989. In the 60 Minutes tradition, producers like Mapes wield tremendous influence on the stories and operate with a great deal of independence — a status earned after many years of proving themselves, Fager said.

John Carlson, a former commentator at KIRO-TV who is host of a conservative radio talk show in Seattle, remembers Mapes as a talented producer with whom he often argued politics in the newsroom.

Mapes was "quite liberal" and disliked the current President Bush's father, he said.

"She definitely was someone who was motivated by what she cared about and definitely went into journalism to make a difference," Carlson said. "She's not the sort of person who went into journalism to report the news and offer an array of commentary."

(www.cbsnews.com/stories/2004/09/22/national/printable644919.shtml)

What I think is important to understand about this account on the CBS News website is the apparent recognition that for Mary Mapes, reporting the news was secondary to "making a difference," in terms of what she cared about. This is hardly the profile of a person passionate about getting the facts right, but seems to be a dominant characteristic of the person, as recognized by CBS News and therefore, as I have said, a model of what CBS News took itself to be.

This is an important point. CBS News could well have employed Mapes for her virtues: doggedness, intelligence, etc. while avoiding her deficiencies by keeping them under observation. Knowing that she was passionately devoted to a political cause, they could have compensated for that in the way they used her material. However, their adoption of her as a model precluded that, and turned her into her own instrument of validation. This is what was involved in choosing her as a leader. In doing so, they subordinated their own concern for the truth.

This subordination of concern for truth to the drives of political passion is shown again in an account by John Fund (1974) of a remarkable incident in her KIRO period.

Former employees of KIRO, the CBS affiliate in Seattle where Ms. Mapes got her start in the 1980s ... told me that the seeds of CBS's current troubles may have been planted more than 15 years ago when Ms. Mapes was a hard-charging producer at KIRO. Before she left Seattle to become a producer at Mr. Rather's "CBS Evening News," Ms. Mapes produced a sensational report on a killing of a drug suspect by police that rested on the shoulders of an unreliable source whose story collapsed under cross-examination. Sound familiar?

Former colleagues of Ms. Mapes agree that she was a passionate practitioner of advocacy journalism. "She went into journalism to change society," says former KIRO anchorwoman Susan Hutchison. "She always was very, very

cause-oriented." Lou Guzzo, a former KIRO news commentator who served as counselor to the late Gov. Dixy Lee Ray, a Democrat, says advocates in journalism are fine, "but if you're as liberal and activist as Mary and work on the news rather than the opinion side, it creates problems."

John Carlson, another news commentator at KIRO from 1986 to 1993 and now a conservative talk show host, recalls frequently arguing with Ms. Mapes after going off air. "The joke was that I'd have to debate twice at KIRO," he recalls, "once on the set and then shortly afterward with Mary."

Mr. Carlson vividly recalls how Ms. Mapes's social advocacy landed her in trouble in a major story. In the mid- and late 1980s, the Seattle police undertook a series of raids on well-known crack houses. Many dealers were minorities, and there were allegations that the police were being racially selective in the use of force.

In the winter of 1987, officers announced themselves and knocked on the door of a known Seattle drug den. They then heard some noise and forced themselves in when no one answered the door. A low-level drug dealer named Erdman Bascomb stood up with a dark, shiny object in his hand. An officer fired, Bascomb fell, and officers pounced on the "weapon": a black TV remote control. Bascomb died.

The Bascomb shooting angered many people in Seattle, and officials quickly organized an inquest. Then KIRO aired an incendiary story titled "A Shot in the Dark," in which a previously unknown witness named Wardell Fincher accused the cops involved in the raid of lying. He said he saw officers arrive at the house, burst in with no warning and shoot Bascomb, who might not have even known the intruders were cops. The story shifted to possible criminal wrongdoing by the police. Mr. Fincher was summoned to the inquest, and previous witnesses recalled. The reporter for the sensational segment was Mark Wrolstad, now a reporter with the Dallas Morning News. The producer was his wife, Mar Mapes.

Fortunately for the cops, Mr. Fincher wasn't the only one at the scene of the raid that night. A reporter for the Seattle Post-Intelligencer, Mike Barber, was tagging along with officers. Mr. Barber observed the officers arriving at the house, knocking, announcing themselves and then entering. He was there when the shooting happened and when the ambulances were summoned. At that point, a man "reeking of alcohol" walked out of some nearby bushes and approached him. He wanted to know what had just happened. That was Wardell Fincher. But Mr. Fincher wasn't thoroughly checked out, so all this came out after the story aired. The police were eventually cleared but it took years and an unsuccessful civil-rights lawsuit by the Bascomb family to undo the damage.

By that time, Ms. Mapes had left Seattle, and no one I talked with who worked at KIRO at the time can recall her being disciplined in any way for her mistake. Instead, in 1989 she was fast-tracked to the "CBS Evening News" and later became Mr. Rather's hand-picked producer on "60 Minutes." "Maybe the National Guard mess would never have happened if she had been handled

properly back then," says one former KIRO reporter who still admires her work ethic and ability to break stories.

From the standpoint of our organizational analysis, this last paragraph is crucial. Not only was Mapes not disciplined for her failure to check out her source, but she was promoted shortly thereafter to a prestigious position at the network. CBS could not have been ignorant of this incident, in which her ideological zeal led to a lapse in journalistic standards; they simply cannot have thought it was very important.

But what was that ideological zeal, and how did it interact with journalism? What kind of stories did Mapes want to tell, and what kind did she not want to tell?

With regard to the first, in going over the two stories that brought Mapes the most fame, Mark Gimein, writing in *New York Magazine*, finds a consistent narrative in Mapes' productions:

Both the Abu Ghraib story and the story of Bush's National Guard files started as narratives of the military's punishing the lower ranks while protecting the privileged and well connected.

But all the people involved with the story at the start—Lawson, Charles, Mapes—believed that this was a story not just of a few American soldiers who abused their position, but of soldiers who were themselves mistreated by the military.

With regard to the stories she did not want told, *Washington Post* reporter Jennifer Frey tells this story, again about the KIRO period:

Even in her early years in the business, Mapes was driven, passionate and unafraid of ruffling feathers. [Mapes's close friend Lisa] Cohen remembers her clashing repeatedly with the KIRO news director ... bristling at publicity stunts she found journalistically distasteful.

"We had a very portly sportscaster," Cohen remembers, "and the news director thought it would be great publicity if we sent him out in a Santa Claus suit to show up live on people's doorsteps to give them one little bag of groceries. One little bag. Mary was assigned to it. She was horrified. She told him he couldn't do that, that it was unfair to these people, that they were giving them no warning, that it would embarrass them. If he was going to do something, she wanted him to do something meaningful."

To Cohen, that was classic Mapes: principled, unafraid to challenge, always willing to work harder than anyone else.

But while this view of Mapes does not need to be challenged, the story suggests more about Mapes and how she acted within her role. What the story says, and of course this is simply an adumbration of the Seattle witness story, is that she objected, passionately and in a sense paradigmatically, to a story that would embarrass and put somebody in a bad light. Who would that have been? Probably,

someone of low social class, for why would a middle-class person be embarrassed by such an event, and for whom else would the issue of the size of the benefaction be critical? What Mapes was passionate about that is to say, is not the telling of story in this instance, but the *not telling* of a story that would be insensitive to a person of low status.

This puts us in a position to form an hypothesis. It is that *what Mary Mapes was passionate and principled about, what she was unafraid to challenge authority about, and to work hard about, was political correctness*. By accepting the leadership of Mary Mapes, CBS News was affirming the importance of political correctness.

Political correctness and journalism

If this is so, it helps to resolve the issue of media bias. Media figures claim that, while they may have a certain political point of view, they can still be good journalists. I have agreed with that. All that is necessary is the recognition that one can be wrong. But if what has been called a bias is really political correctness, then the possibility of being good journalists disappears. The reason is that political correctness involves the repudiation of reality and it is inconsistent with the psychological assumptions that underlie good journalism. You can have bias and good journalism, but you cannot have both good journalism and political correctness.

We can see this contradiction play out in the mind of Mary Mapes with regard to her ideas about status.

As I have said the father is identified with reality in the family configuration, and he needs external reality so that he can engage it and transform it and in that way gain standing with the mother. What is true of the father's standing with the mother may be generalized to all status. For the politically correct, differences in status are regarded as illegitimate, and claims that some have earned their status by concrete achievement are dismissed as smokescreens to cover up oppression. If some have more status than others, That means that they have stolen that status from those who are of lower status. Within the ambit of political correctness, the meaningful and moral life is a project of reversing the effects of this collective crime. It means transforming the world so that those who have been deprived of status in the past are compensated with love, and those who have had more status are hated for their crime. But transforming the world, in this case, simply means transforming the way people feel. In the absence of an objective world, feelings are all there are. We can easily see the role that information media will play in this project. That will include those media previously given over to the task of journalism, but they will no longer be practicing journalism. Journalism will have died.

The reason why PC is lethal to journalism is rooted in its rejection of the idea of an objective world, an idea that PC absolutely cannot tolerate. If there were an objective world, people could legitimately gain status by achievement, by doing something beneficial in terms of our collective capacity to live in that objective world. Only through denying the possibility of achievement is it possible to reduce the world to the simple morality play of oppressors and oppressed. For this reason, the very idea that there is an objective world becomes an object of scorn and hatred. Obviously, this precludes the possibility of journalism recognizing the possibility that it has gotten the facts wrong. In the absence of an idea of an objective world, journalism could only mean the furtherance of the politically correct morality play,

but that isn't really journalism at all. What is it? The answer is simple. It is political correctness, which is an end in itself.

We can certainly see all this play out in the coverage of President Bush. Bush, I suggest, represents the father, which helps to explain why he is seen in this context as the arch oppressor. That is why no good can be ascribed to him, and why any attacks on him, no matter how spurious, ill-founded, and even bizarre are regarded as legitimate. They are legitimate because hatred of the father is the very source of legitimacy, the *epistemological bedrock*, as it were, of legitimacy. This is why the idea of Bush having gotten his positions in life, including his position in the Air National Guard, through illegitimate pressure gained so much traction.

Mary Mapes was wrong that the forged documents meshed perfectly with the known facts about George Bush. The Thornburgh Commission demonstrated that. But they certainly meshed perfectly with the *fantasy* she had about George Bush. That fantasy was, for her, the ultimate reality, and so it was for many others. When Dan Rather said that the documents were "fake but accurate", that is what he had in mind.

So far, we have looked at the psychodynamics of the memo debacle from the standpoint of the father's role, but what about the mother's role? In our account so far, we have considered the mother's role only under her aspect as the object of desire. Within this dynamic, her role is only a passive one. Doesn't the maternal role involve doing anything?

Well, the answer is yes and no. The maternal role involves doing things, of course, but this is always within the context of someone else's active agenda. So it is that we think of her as a care-giver, a help-meet, and so on. But can't she get beyond that? Can't she have her own outlook on life, her own agenda? Can't she act on her own behalf?

The answer is no, she can't act on her own behalf, but she doesn't have to. In her role as representing fusion, she is the one for whom things are done. Her role is to bring out such activity. For that, she doesn't have to do anything for herself, but simply to be herself. She is, after all, as the representation of fusion, sufficient exactly as she is.

What we can see here is that there is a complementarity of these two roles, but also a tension between them. The mother is perfect, but her life has no form. She requires the father to act on her behalf, because by herself she can form no agenda, no program. He is happy to do so, since action in pursuit of fusion with her gives the only meaning to his behavior that it can have, and he needs a meaning for his behavior because he cannot simply be, given his imperfection, who he is. But this complementarity also creates a mutual dependency. And with dependency comes tension, each party of the struggle trying to dominate the other. In psychoanalytic terms, the attempt on the part of the paternal role to dominate the maternal is referred to as the obsessive-compulsive character, in which the individual takes his own desire as a source of threat. When the maternal role tries to overcome the paternal, we have what is called hysteria, in which the individual, identifying with the maternal, takes herself as perfect in herself, and rejects subordination to any external agenda, and indeed even to the symbolic itself.

Critical Management and Hysteria

If we want to fully understand political correctness, we must see it as an essentially hysterical phenomenon (Schwartz, 2004). The individual, identifying with the perfect mother, and therefore with the sense that she¹⁰ is perfect by herself, rejects any kind of external constraint or determination or even meaning which does not revolve around hers. She identifies these as domination by an imperfect and oppressive father. Her object, then, is to reveal the imperfection of this father, implicitly contrasting that imperfection with her own perfection and declaring his agenda as something that she does not have to follow.

This brings us back to our original point about critical management theory. The dynamics I have described here explain the utopian element in critical management theory and explain why critical management theory has not concerned itself with how to do things better, but has been content to criticize.

At this point, however, we can see that there will be a problem with this. It is that everything we know about reality, embodied in the symbolic, was the product of the father's attempt to get close to the mother. Rejecting what she sees as his agenda means rejecting the idea of reality itself, and therefore all grounds for prudence, for taking conscious purposeful action, and, with regard to journalism, the idea that one's ideas can be contradicted by the facts.

All that is left is the very fantasy of being oppressed by the father, which becomes the self-justifying criterion of truth and the determinant of all meaning. It arises from inside the self, not through interaction with the world outside. It is the product of internal dynamics, which may have nothing to do with what is going on outside. Validation is accomplished, therefore, by reference to this fantasy, rather than by empirical investigation.

For the politically correct, and I believe for critical management theory as well, life revolves around a certain question, around which her life is organized. The question, which isn't really a question at all, but an assault, is "Who are you to tell me what to do?" The object here is undermining the father with this question, revealing to him that he has and cannot have a place within the mother's affections, since he has not and cannot earn a place. Psychoanalysis refers to this project of undermining as castration. It is all that the politically correct have in mind -- an end in itself.

This is a matter that can stand further elaboration. Political correctness and critical management theory are not projects aimed at reaching a desired state. The pleasure that keeps them going is the self-righteous rage that provides the emotional framework of the state of opposition. The hysteric lives to castrate the father, because the act of castrating provides her with all the meaning she can have. But that means there has to be a father. Of course, it does not take much to be declared an enemy, and political correctness has never lacked for villains to attack, even when she it has had to conjure one out of whole cloth, as it often has.

The point is that she is as dependent on him as any traditional housewife was dependent on her husband. In his absence she would still not have an agenda. The difference is that she is a parasite, rather than a partner.

As with any parasite, the danger is that she will, even if inadvertently, kill the host. The castrated father will not be able to do his job of protecting the family. In a world as dangerous as this one, such castration is essentially suicidal. The pure internal

focus of the politically correct assures that they will not know they are killing themselves until they are well and truly dead, and the rest of us along with them. This state of permanent, proto-suicidal moral assault is the project upon which CBS News embarked when it gave up journalism.

Looking at the matter this way helps us to understand certain matters in current journalism that might otherwise seem peculiar. For example, it explains why even minor imperfections in George Bush, the United States, the Republicans, all of whom represent the oppressive and constraining father, are blown up to hideous proportions, while nothing is made of the imperfections, even major ones, of those whom the father opposes. For example, at the time the media were filling themselves with images of naked terrorists at Abu Ghreib, the contemporaneous, filmed decapitation of a living kidnapped American received almost no mention. The reason is that the only project of political correctness is the castration of the father. There is no world beyond that. A corollary is that any hint that the father needs to fight terrible, common, and very real enemies would give him grounds to assert his claim to importance, and that cannot be allowed.

Conclusion and Generalization

What has been said of journalism applies, *mutatis mutandis*, to any organizational project that requires the belief that there is an independent reality which we must understand and accommodate, and about which it is possible to make a mistake. That means all organizational phenomena beyond the equivalent of a lynch mob. I have elsewhere (1992) argued that political correctness leads to a kind of organizational nihilism, in which the organization reorganizes itself around the aim of its own destruction. It now appears that critical management theory plays a role in that questionable project.

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¹ It is impossible to understand what happened next without an appreciation of the transformations that have happened in the transmission of information due to the rise of the internet. Until this time, the technology of broadcasting was extremely expensive, resulting in near-monopolies in the transmission of information. With the internet, the cost of information transmission dropped almost to zero, even to the point that the distinction between the transmitter of information and its recipient essentially vanished. Out of this, vast interactive networks, called (without elegance) the "blogosphere," developed around individuals who compiled "weblogs" or "blogs." These bloggers, who were themselves networked together, could transmit information that was made available to them by members of the networks who were not bloggers themselves, but who had expertise or interesting thoughts to contribute on various subjects. This network of distributed intelligence is what the "mainstream media," previously a centralized monopoly, came up against in the debacle.

² To be sure, there were typewriters that had superscript characters, but such characters were on the same sized block as the other typewriter characters, and appeared therefore on the same line. The superscripts in the memos were above the lines.

³ The point here is that a computer can figure out whether a quotation mark is at the beginning or end of a quotation, and make the changes by itself, so one key can suffice for two such characters. On a typewriter, having different quotation marks for the beginning and end of quotes would have required two keys.

⁴ Why they were not willing to come to an absolute conclusion, in the face of the overwhelming evidence they adduce, is an interesting question. My suspicion is that it arose from the way they understood their contractual relationship with CBS. The terms of their contract have not been made public. One fact that may have had an effect was that, under Texas law, committing a fraud with the intent of influencing an election is a felony. If the documents were fake, there would have been a fraud

committed, which CBS should have known was taking place. That would have made them guilty of a felony.

⁵ The other argument were to the effect that the editing process had made the story less incendiary than it otherwise might have been, and that the documents, if they had been authentic, would have provided important information. Neither of these arguments add much support, it seems to me, to their conclusion.

⁶ Maybe not quite so absurd. Nixon was not inaugurated as President until 1969.

⁷ Brinkley's book makes no mention of any diary entries that place Kerry in Cambodia on any occasion. In fact, they contain this:

"The banks of the [Rach Giang Thanh River] whistled by as we churned out mile after mile at full speed. On my left were occasional open fields that allowed us a clear view into Cambodia. At some points, the border was only fifty yards away and it then would meander out to several hundred or even as much as a thousand yards away, always making one wonder what lay on the other side."

He may be wondering still, since this was the last diary entry of his wartime experience.

⁸ Kerry's original picture of his "band of brothers" showed him with these fellow officers, not the enlisted men who served under him.

⁹ His honorable discharge was only granted years after his military career had ended, and only after President Carter had declared what amounted to an upgrade for many who had received less than honorable discharges. If he received a less than honorable discharge originally, it would probably have been for negotiating with the enemy and publicly advocating their position without authorization and while still an officer in the United States Navy.

¹⁰ Hysterics can be male or female, because we all have the capacity to identify with the primitive image of mother. In the instant case, it seems to me there is as much ground, if not more, to call Dan Rather hysterical than Mary Mapes. However, while the individual who identifies may be male or female, the object of identification is female, and for this reason we can use the female pronoun in the collective sense.