

## NETWORK CRITICISM

### An Embodied Historical Approach

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Historical Criticism is a modern method that has been applied to biblical interpretation beginning in the eighteenth century, flowering in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Soulen-Soulen 2001, 78-81; Collins 2005, 1-26; Hayes-Holladay 2007, 53-71). Some of the traditional premises of the historical enterprise have come under intense attack in the last few decades, especially with the emergence of postmodern critique. Responses among historians to this critique are located along a continuum from the historical minimalists to the maximalists, from those who grant minimal (if any) historical value to the textual sources to those who wish to give the text the benefit of the doubt unless there are good reasons to consider the text unreliable in its statements (Collins 2005, 34-43). Rather than retreat from the criticism and take the stand of a maximalist or surrender to the critique and take the stand of a minimalist, I have chosen to reorient my historical approach entirely. In doing so, I have intended to address, as I see it, the failure of historical criticism on several vital fronts, while building on its strengths.

NETWORK CRITICISM is a revisionist approach to the construction of history. It is an EMBODIED HISTORICAL APPROACH because it understands physical embodiment of human beings in culture, society and material bodies to be essential to the creation and interpretation of cultural PRODUCTIONS (Slingerland 2008, 210-212). It understands a cultural PRODUCTION (like a biblical text), its ARCHITECT and its USERS, to exist within a complex WEB OF KNOWLEDGE and socio-cultural environments called MATRICES. The goal of NETWORK CRITICISM is to construct a KALEIDOSCOPIC DESCRIPTION of the PRODUCTION that explains its embeddedness within local WEBS OF KNOWLEDGE and socio-cultural MATRICES, and exposes the formation and maintenance of the PRODUCTION as a center of capital. In this way, NETWORK CRITICISM abandons the construction of linear systems of origin, causation and consequence as is traditionally pursued in historical analyses. Further, NETWORK CRITICISM does not privilege the construction of authorial meaning as is traditionally done in historical reconstructions. Rather it probes the PRODUCTION for traces of the ARCHITECT'S PERSONAL COGNITIVE NETWORK, seeking to simulate that PERSONAL NETWORK and situate it within known DOMAINS OF KNOWLEDGE and socio-cultural MATRICES. The PRODUCTION is not conceived to be isolated from the consequent interpretation as is the case with traditional historical criticism. Rather both the ARCHITECT and the PRODUCTION are located within an extensive CONVERSATION CLOUD that is fluid and perpetually engaged.

### *Historical Criticism*

Historical criticism developed in tandem with nineteenth century historiography (Morgan-Barton 1988, 40-92) and was articulated famously by Ernst Troeltsch in

the beginning of the twentieth century (Troeltsch 1913, 1914). Troeltsch understood historiography as an intellectual process that involves the selection of individual materials to fit particular projects, i.e., the creation of national histories, biographies, or developmental analyses. The historical critic seeks to make the selected materials as intelligible as possible, as if they were part of our own experience, by organizing them in terms of historical causality, conceptual entities, and their development (Troeltsch 1914, 720).

One of the premises of historical explanation is that events cannot be isolated from their historical conditions (Harvey 1966, 15). So historical critics seek to understand texts from antiquity by placing them in their historical context and interpreting them in light of the cultural conventions of their time. Historical critics focus on the historical roots and origins of ancient texts, studying the persons, places, events, and traditions, whether explicit or implicit in the text. Historical critics also use texts as windows into the past, attempting to use the information in the text to draw conclusions about the society and culture of the time in which the text was produced (Soulen-Soulen 2001, 78-81; Hayes-Holladay 2007, 53-71).

The historical critic works from the principle of analogy, that the past and present, in terms of human nature, are sympathetic. Historical critics think that we can determine what is historically plausible in the past because human nature has been fairly stable over the centuries (Harvey 1966, 14-15; Krentz 1975, 55-72).

The main interest of Historical Criticism is to determine the text's original meaning in its original historical context. This authorial meaning is given a hermeneutical privilege, not only as the primal meaning, but also as the meaning of the text that trumps all others. While historical critics are aware that their reconstructions of authorial meaning are provisional, at the same time they give their reconstructions objective authority. Subsequent meaning, if explored at all, takes the back seat, considered 'later' and insignificant to the authored meaning. With this emphasis, the historical-critical conversation sets limits to the analysis by determining what a text could or could not mean at a particular time in the ancient world (Collins 2005, 10).

In this analysis, the historical critic understands the text's own history and meaning in terms of its background, influences, and career. The career of the text is explored linearly, in terms of antecedents and consequences because it is understood that the phenomena of a person's historical life are correlated. When change occurs at any point, it affects all that surrounds it (Harvey 1966, 15). With this understanding, the historical critic seeks to determine the circumstances in which the text originated, its intended audience, its preservation and redaction, and its transmission in terms of influences, sequences and consequences.

The historical critic recognizes that historical scholarship is an ongoing enterprise open to revision. It is a dynamic process that reflects the fact that new evidence is coming into play continually. Paradigms are in flux because new data causes rifts and shifts. So the historical critic understands the results of criticism to be provisional and probable, rather than stable and absolute (Harvey 1966, 14-15).

The historical-critical endeavor works on a dialectic platform where critics attempt to persuade each other logically by appeal to empirical and interpretative evidence that are mutually acceptable and shared (Collins 2005, 11). It is this public

dialectic platform, where the conclusions can be communicated and rationally assessed by others, that allows the historian a qualified objectivity (Harvey 1996, 43; Cook 1988, 1; Momigliano 1984a 51, 1984b 253-269; Ginzburg 1989, 96-125; cf. Appleby-Hunt-Jacob 1994, 259; Evans 1997; Dobbs-Allsopp 1999, 235-271).

Historical critics also attempt to work at a distance from the text, with a hermeneutic of skepticism, and even suspicion. Since the beginning of modern historiography, historical critics questioned received accounts of the traditions they studied. Historical interpretation often involves reading a text against the grain, that is, reading behind or beneath the text to retrieve the things unsaid or unintended. Historical critics have come to recognize that the received accounts reflect, foster and perpetuate certain biases and interests as they relate to social, economic, and political capital.

The centrality of skepticism within the historical approach has meant that the approach encourages and generates its own critique. There are certain hazards in the historical approach that have been known and discussed for some time: history as invented narrative and the imposition of meaning on meaninglessness (White 1973, 1978; Rorty 1982; Jenkins 1995); the questionability of narrating objective and neutral knowledge or empirical facts (Novick 1988, 415-629; Appleby-Hunt-Jacob 1994, 129-237; Wilson 1999); the immense gap between the modern perspective and a past that can only be observed through its textualization (Munz 1977; Bentley 1999, 143); the contamination of history with the prejudices and ideologies of the interpreter (Smith 1990); the selection and privileging of data (Smith 1978/1993; 1988, 1-18); the employment of sources that are other-than-historical in perspective or nature (Miller 1993, 11-28); the limitations of the evidence available to the historian (Collins 2005).

These hazards have become even more pronounced in light of the postmodern discourse, which is modernity in its most extreme critical guise. The postmodern discourse is skeptical of truth claims because it sees all meaning as constructed rather than inherent. So it questions concepts like unity and progress, grand narratives and systems, objective knowledge and universals. It tends to favor cultural relativism, pluralism, discontinuity, and heterogeneity (Eagleton 2003, 13; cf. Adam 1995).

As this debate has raged in philosophical and literary circles, I have become increasingly sensitive to my own approach to texts. While I agree that the historian, by participating within the dialectic process of logical appeal, operates with a qualified objectivity, I also am acutely aware that in the process the historian is imposing the modern self on the historical project. While I take as my standards the skepticism and distance of the historian, I also realize the value of immersion in the subject from the inside, from the indigenous perspective. While I think that it is possible to circumscribe authorial meaning, I also know that this process is a constructive one requiring a different approach than historical critics have typically employed. While I agree that historical-critical conversation is successful in limiting the possibilities of meaning that a text could have had in any given time period, I also know that this meaning is limited by the sources known to us today, and that when new sources become available to us the hermeneutical limits will change.

As I have conducted my research, I have been asking serious questions about the historical critical studies I am reading and those I myself am generating. What does it mean to the historical enterprise when texts are forced to fit the logic of a modern person, when modern logic is privileged at the expense of the logic of the subjects themselves? What does it mean to the historical enterprise when historians snag what they can from the sources to construct systems of backgrounds, influences and linear causal developments that may never have existed in history? What does it mean to the historical enterprise when we construct an author's intent, and then understand this construction as primary and authoritative? What does it mean to the historical enterprise when we understand the message of the text to be separate from the extended conversation that the text was part of and fueled? What does it mean to the historical enterprise when we treat texts as disembodied discourses, as intellectual histories with no real connection to the material human beings who produced them – to their tangible material bodies or to the material culture they inhabited? To address the concerns that these questions raise, I have been working to reconfigure my historical approach in a transparent and responsible way. This reconfiguration has resulted in a revisionist approach that I am calling NETWORK CRITICISM.

### *Description of Network Criticism*

NETWORK CRITICISM is a critical and pragmatic approach to cultural PRODUCTIONS that seeks to understand and analyze them as conduits of connectivity. The word NETWORK is carefully chosen not only because it conveys the importance of the cultural PRODUCTION as a PRODUCTION embedded within dynamic systems of meaning-connectivity or NETWORKS OF KNOWLEDGE, but also because it carries with it the force of the verb TO NETWORK and its inference that the PRODUCTION is created and endures for personal and professional gain. The PRODUCTION is associated with or networked with certain NODES that are activated in the indigenous WEB OF KNOWLEDGE. The PRODUCTION is created and endures within the local social and cultural MATRIX, for personal or professional gain, for some type of capital, whether this is intentional or not, whether this is structural or not.

### *Network Locality*

The ARCHITECT and the USERS are understood to be situated or located cognitively within a number of dynamic WEBS and DOMAINS of knowledge. In addition, the ARCHITECT, the USERS, and the PRODUCTION are understood to physically inhabit local socio-cultural MATRICES. The ARCHITECT is an embodied person(s) responsible for the PRODUCTION. The USER is an embodied person(s) using the PRODUCTION. As embodied people, the ARCHITECT and the USERS have mentally active PERSONAL COGNITIVE NETWORKS. A WEB represents the broad indigenous repository of knowledge cognitively assessable to the ARCHITECT and USERS. A DOMAIN OF KNOWLEDGE represents a shared sphere of knowledge associated with a particular identity and affiliated with multiple PERSONAL COGNITIVE NETWORKS. A MATRIX is a

locally lived social and cultural environment that the ARCHITECT, the PRODUCTION, and the USERS inhabit. The MATRIX is the creative ground of the PRODUCTION, heavily shaping its endurance and use. Although two or more PERSONAL COGNITIVE NETWORKS may share a DOMAIN of knowledge, the individuals do not have to share the same socio-cultural MATRIX. In fact, their MATRICES, more often than not, will prove divergent.

### *The Personal Cognitive Network*

The PRODUCTION reflects the ARCHITECT's PERSONAL COGNITIVE NETWORK. Consequent responses to the PRODUCTION or employment of the PRODUCTION reflect the PERSONAL COGNITIVE NETWORKS of the USERS. The ARCHITECT and USERS are understood to be embodied individuals who have integrated NODES from their local WEBS of knowledge into their own dynamic PERSONAL COGNITIVE NETWORKS (Slingerland 2008). Because of this, the PERSONAL COGNITIVE NETWORK is susceptible to the conditions of memory, both in terms of personal memory and socio-cultural memory (Halbwachs 1952/1992; Carruthers 1990; Zelizer 1995, 214-239; Schwartz 1996, 908-927).

The PERSONAL COGNITIVE NETWORK is the network that is activated for the ARCHITECT and the USER cognitively, what has been compressed from the local WEB OF KNOWLEDGE and serves as the individual's PERSONAL NETWORK ARRAY or SOURCE INPUT, along with the available cultural FRAMES. The PERSONAL NETWORK simplifies and embodies cognitively at HUMAN SCALE what is present beyond HUMAN SCALE in the local WEB OF KNOWLEDGE. The PERSONAL COGNITIVE NETWORK is an integration of only those things necessary for the ARCHITECT to produce the PRODUCTION and the USER to make meaning of the PRODUCTION at HUMAN SCALE. This means that the PRODUCTION reflects a COMPRESSION of meaning. To decompress the meaning is a dynamic constructive process that opens the COMPRESSION back into the local WEB and DOMAINS OF KNOWLEDGE to rouse its connectivity and condensed meaning (Lakoff-Johnson 1980; Fauconnier 1994, 1997; Coulson 2001; Fauconnier-Turner 2002). This COMPRESSION of meaning works not only in the linguistic realm, but also in the physical realm as physical sites of compressed meaning when objects are made to function as MATERIAL ANCHORS (Fauconnier-Turner 2002; Hutchins 2005, 1555-1577), when actions are made to function as PERFORMANCE ANCHORS, and when locations are made to function as LOCALE ANCHORS.

### *The Production Nexus*

This approach understands the PRODUCTION to be part of a PRODUCTION NEXUS. The PRODUCTION has at least one ARCHITECT with an activated PERSONAL COGNITIVE NETWORK, who inhabits local socio-cultural MATRICES. The PRODUCTION reflects the activity of the ARCHITECT's PERSONAL COGNITIVE NETWORK grounded within a number of WEBS, DOMAINS, and MATRICES.

The PRODUCTION NEXUS also includes the USERS that the PRODUCTION was created for, called the PRIME USERS, with their own activated PERSONAL COGNITIVE NETWORKS and MATRICES. The PERSONAL COGNITIVE NETWORKS of the ARCHITECT and PRIME USERS do not necessarily have to be affiliated with the same DOMAINS or

MATRICES, although they likely will. Since the ARCHITECT is creating the PRODUCTION for the PRIME USERS, the ARCHITECT is framing the PRODUCTION in such a way that it will be understandable to the PRIME USERS, keying into common DOMAINS OF KNOWLEDGE and referencing common MATRICES.

### *The Extended Nexus*

The PRODUCTION is enmeshed in an EXTENDED NEXUS of CONSEQUENT USERS, including their activated PERSONAL COGNITIVE NETWORKS and MATRICES. The PERSONAL COGNITIVE NETWORKS of the CONSEQUENT USERS may or may not be affiliated with the same DOMAINS or MATRICES. In fact, more often than not, their DOMAINS and MATRICES will be divergent from each other, and divergent from the DOMAINS and MATRICES of the ARCHITECT and the PRIME USERS. The CONSEQUENT USERS are ARCHITECTS of their own PRODUCTIONS, and these PRODUCTIONS may have their own EXTENDED NEXUS.

### *The Conversation Cloud*

The concept of the CONVERSATION CLOUD is taken from the realm of modern technology. Cloud computing is the term used to designate the range of individual computers that connect into a pool of common files and software. The computer users share these files and use these resources for their own purposes. Often a cloud is formed around a set of documents that individuals share, modify and discuss in an ongoing manner.

The concept of the CONVERSATION CLOUD is similar. The ARCHITECT and the USERS are understood to participate in a CONVERSATION CLOUD, a multi-constituent ongoing larger conversation in which the PRODUCTION is created and endures. The CONVERSATION CLOUD is reflected across various PERSONAL COGNITIVE NETWORKS, while inhabiting a number of different local socio-cultural MATRICES. A conversation can take place in any direction, move across time, present in various configurations, and project as multiple, sometimes competing, vectors.

An ARENA is the active location across the WEBS, DOMAINS and MATRICES that serves as a platform for a specific CONVERSATION CLOUD. The ARENA consists of the unspoken assumptions and referential horizons of the ARCHITECT and the USERS. It is the necessary shared ideological platform that supports the subsistence of the CONVERSATION CLOUD. This platform is reflected in the PERSONAL COGNITIVE NETWORKS of the ARCHITECT and the USERS.

The CONVERSATION CLOUD also has a pragmatic SCAFFOLD that grounds the fluid movement of the conversation within history and secures its capital. In whose interest is this conversation? For what purpose does it endure? What is at stake behind the rhetoric? The answers to these types of questions is the SCAFFOLD that fosters the conversation.

### *The Global Web*

The modern scholar has access to a GLOBAL WEB that was not known to the ARCHITECT and the USERS. This includes knowledge of other comparable cultural PRODUCTIONS and socio-cultural MATRICES. The resources from this GLOBAL WEB allows the modern scholar to produce an OVERLAY NETWORK, that can be superimposed on the simulated

PRODUCTION NEXUS and EXTENDED NEXUS in order to provide us with a deep view of the ARCHITECT, the PRODUCTION, and its EXTENDED USER-HISTORY.

### *Application of Network Criticism*

Although we can never penetrate or reconstruct the minds of the ARCHITECT or the USERS, the PRODUCTIONS have left traces of the ARCHITECT's and the USERS' PERSONAL COGNITIVE NETWORKS, and the WEBS and DOMAINS OF KNOWLEDGE within which they were operating, and the socio-cultural MATRICES within which they were living. By carefully tracking and mapping this information, for any PRODUCTION we can reconstruct a KALEIDOSCOPIC DESCRIPTION of its PRODUCTION NEXUS and its EXTENDED NEXUS. This is the ultimate goal of NETWORK CRITICISM.

#### *Step One Simulating the Networks*

We begin with the simulation of the PERSONAL COGNITIVE NETWORKS of the ARCHITECT and the USERS. The process of NETWORK SIMULATION involves running deep probes into the PRODUCTION and its USE in order to identify and then map the traces of the PERSONAL COGNITIVE NETWORKS of the ARCHITECT and the USERS and the parameters of the CONVERSATION CLOUD. This is done by tracing the traces of the PRODUCTION and the CONVERSATION CLOUD from the inside, privileging the utterances and understandings of the ARCHITECT and the USERS themselves.

Specific NODES and ARRAYS in the PERSONAL COGNITIVE NETWORKS should be identified and tracked. Sensitivity to the shifts in their significance, meaning, and employment over time and among USERS should be identified. Vectors of movement, (re)configuration and competition of NODES and ARRAYS should be tracked within and across the PERSONAL COGNITIVE NETWORKS of the ARCHITECT and the USERS. A NODE is a single cognitive point in the WEBS OF KNOWLEDGE and the PERSONAL COGNITIVE NETWORKS. An ARRAY is multiple cognitive points in the WEBS and NETWORKS, points which form a discrete cluster of knowledge.

The goal of NETWORK SIMULATION is to create an INSIDER MAP, to understand and describe the PRODUCTION from the perspective of those closest to it, namely the ARCHITECT and the USERS, and to determine the parameters and margins of the CONVERSATION CLOUD.

#### *Step Two Running the Overlay Network*

Scholars access a GLOBAL WEB that includes information that was not accessible to the ARCHITECT and USERS. This is the knowledge we have of other comparable cultural PRODUCTIONS and socio-cultural MATRICES. Access to this GLOBAL WEB of cultural data and resources allows scholars a PANORAMIC VISTA. We can create an OVERLAY NETWORK from these global resources and PANORAMIC VISTA. By superimposing the OVERLAY NETWORK on top of the SIMULATED NETWORKS of the ARCHITECT and USERS, we are able to view the ARCHITECTURE of the PRODUCTION NEXUS and the EXTENDED NEXUS.

Running the OVERLAY NETWORK is the process of determining the correspondence between the SIMULATED NETWORKS and the GLOBAL WEB resources in the OVERLAY NETWORK, their interfaces and disjunctures. This is done by superimposing the OVERLAY NETWORK on the SIMULATED NETWORKS and mapping the coordination between their NODES and ARRAYS. What is the interface between NODES and ARRAYS in the resources of the GLOBAL WEB and the SIMULATED NETWORKS of the ARCHITECT and USERS? Where is there disjuncture?

When NODES and ARRAYS interface across the SIMULATED NETWORKS and certain WEB resources in the OVERLAY NETWORK, it suggests that the PERSONAL COGNITIVE NETWORK is grounded in a common local WEB for source input and framing. EMERGENT STRUCTURE correspondence should be tracked too. EMERGENT STRUCTURE is a NODE or ARRAY in the network that is a novel or distinctive structure. It is developed through a cognitive process called double-scope blending (Fauconnier-Turner 2002). When a novel or distinctive NODE or ARRAY is shared by more than one PERSONAL COGNITIVE NETWORK or WEB, there is interface between EMERGENT STRUCTURES (Robbins 2007: 163; Robbins 2009: 188, 228, 240-41 et passim). If there is an interface between EMERGENT STRUCTURES, this suggests a DOMAIN FIT or, possibly, a MATRIX FIT. In other words, if the ARCHITECT's PERSONAL COGNITIVE NETWORK shares an EMERGENT STRUCTURE with a resource in the GLOBAL WEB, it can be determined that both share a particular DOMAIN OF KNOWLEDGE and/or inhabit a particular MATRIX. In these cases, it may be possible to locate the PRODUCTION within a particular DOMAIN OF KNOWLEDGE and/or a specific socio-cultural MATRIX. In these situations, SITES OF CONVERGENCE may have been identified.

Caution is advised since NODES and ARRAYS may present in multiple forms or (re)configurations, in which case they are identified as PRISMATIC NODES and ARRAYS. The NODE and ARRAY can be compressed differently across the networks, carrying within them larger networks that require decompressing. It is also possible that the NODE and ARRAY has linked differently, even dissonantly, across various networks and webs.

### *Step Three Constructing a Kaleidoscopic Description*

At this level, we move our analysis from the particulars of the INSIDER MAP and the OVERLAY NETWORK to broader generalizations and constructions based on the critical and theoretical view of the modern scholar who operates at a distance from the PRODUCTION. This DEEP VIEW allows us to construct a KALEIDOSCOPIC DESCRIPTION of the PRODUCTION NEXUS and the EXTENDED NEXUS. From within this DEEP VIEW, it may be possible to run projections of the KALEIDOSCOPIC DESCRIPTION into virtual historical environments. This type of description leaves behind linear causalities and developments, influences and backgrounds, origins and consequences, the preeminence of the author and authorial intent. It replaces these with a dynamic and relational view of the PRODUCTION as a conduit of connectivity of meaning and capital within larger networks of knowledge and socio-cultural matrixes.

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