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1992

Holaday, D. (1992). Globalizing the communication curriculum. In Conference on Communications in a Changing Asia : Manila, July 16-18, 1992 : programme. Singapore: Asian Mass Communication Research & Information Centre.

<https://hdl.handle.net/10356/93340>

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Address to the session on "New Media Environment in Asia: Implications for Communication Education and Training" at the AMIC Conference on "Communications in a Changing Asia," Manila, Philippines, July 1992.
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I want to talk about globalizing the communication curriculum. By "globalize" I am not referring here to the need for more textbooks to be produced outside the US (though this is a real concern which has recently received some attention from AMIC). Nor am I referring to the need for courses to include material on a wider variety of national and international contexts (another important concern which is now being discussed in connection with global media networks, global journalism, and integrated marketing strategies). What I am referring to is the need to make a concerted effort to respond to the new cultural environment within which we are educating and training our students, in Asia and elsewhere.

Anthony Giddens' notion of "globalization" as a central element of the conditions of "high modernity" provides a point of departure. Giddens makes it clear that media are essential to the process of globalization. The mediation of experience through the visual images of TV, film and video has made possible, or created as an essential element of modern life, the "interlacing of social events and social relations 'at distance' with local contextualities." (Giddens, 1991:21) He deals at length with the idea that this

intrusion of distant events into our daily lives is "psychologically problematic." But, he stops short of accepting that we have entered a "new phase of social development beyond modernity -- a postmodern era."

(ibid:p.27) Other scholars, Jameson of course, but also recently a number of communication scholars including Sut Jhally and Ian Angus, and sociologist Todd Gitlin, are taking seriously the possibility of a profound disjuncture in the world's cultural environment precipitated by the global proliferation of media images. I think we should seriously entertain this possibility, because I see, or believe that I see, the direct impact of this new cultural environment on our students. In my attempt to articulate what I consider to be an appropriate response to this condition as it has affected our students, I will be drawing directly upon my recent experience as part of the effort to initiate a degree program in mass communication in Singapore. So, my subject is globalising the communication curriculum, and my point of reference is Singapore.

Two things immediately stand out. First, is the enormous popularity of the subject. One-third of the students admitted to the Arts & Sciences Faculty at NUS chose mass communication as one of their preferred subjects; most put it as their first choice. For every student admitted to the department, five applied, and among those who completed the first year, a surprisingly high percentage (90%) chose to continue into the second year. This phenomenon is, of course, not unique to Singapore. A colleague teaching in the US said recently that despite attempts to make the subject less popular by making requirements more stringent and admission procedures more elaborate, enrollment there continues to rise.

The second striking phenomenon is the pervasive belief among students in the importance of mass communication for their own lives. What

I sense here is not so much the calculated movement toward employment opportunities, although this is clearly present, as a general conviction that "the media is where it's at," or as some students have put it: "Mass com is not a dead subject." This is different from the old romantic notion of becoming the reporter on the beat or the lust for the smell of printer's ink. These students are coming into the classroom with the sense that their lives are controlled by the media, and wanting to gain some of that control for themselves, or at least, to be on the inside of the institutions which they believe to be exercising that control. I glean this from student applications and tutorial discussions; from numerous references to CNN's coverage of the Gulf War, and from widespread expressions of interest in advertising and image-making for other purposes. All of this points, it seems to me, to a pervasive desire among students to take control of the images they see all around them all of the time.

These immediate observations are, I believe, symptomatic of the deeper cultural shift over the past twenty to thirty years which I mentioned earlier in my reference to the notions of globalization and postmodernism. I believe that the students' intuitive sense of the importance of the media and their apprehensions about control over their lives accurately describe their situation, and indeed, the situation in which we are all living. As Sut Jhally and Ian Angus recently put it, "We live in a world continually transformed by a proliferation of images. Media representations substitute for social action needed to address "real life" concerns." Jhally and Angus go on to describe what they see as the essence of the postmodern stage of culture, which they locate in the fact that "the distinction between images and real life ... can no longer be regarded as tenable. Social representations constitute social identity. The real is always mediated through images." (Angus & Jhally, 1989: 1-6) These scholars, along with most scholars engaged in this debate,

recognize that there is a profound anxiety associated with this new cultural and media environment. For the purpose of the present discussion, this might aptly be described as an "anxiety of control." I take this anxiety of control to be the driving force behind the current popularity of communication studies, as well as the basis for what I have briefly described as the prevailing attitude of its new recruits.

So, I want to suggest that we make a concerted effort to respond to this condition. Indeed, I believe that we cannot not respond. In my view, the curriculum we have begun to develop in Singapore reflects the pressure brought to bear on it by the students' anxiety of control. The problem is to articulate the exact nature of that pressure and to give it direction; that is, to take control of the curriculum. There is an irony in this, or rather a variety of layers of irony, which will quickly become apparent as I attempt to describe where I think we are and where I think we are going in the development of the communication curriculum in Singapore.

Let me suggest at the outset that we are at a juncture which can be roughly characterized by succeeding attempts to Westernize, Asianize, and now Globalize the curriculum. It should be evident that the first of these phases corresponds to the development communication emphasis in the sixties and seventies, and the next to the emphasis on cultural imperialism and dependency theory which peaked with the NIO debate in the eighties. Now, we see all around us the evidence of this new phase in the sheer frequency of use of the terms "global" and "globalization" in connection with media and communication. (Note here Tomlinson on succession from cultural imperialism to globalization. Tomlinson, 1991.)

There is, however, a qualitative difference in the sort of intentional response we can make as teachers and policy makers to this new pressure to change the curriculum. When the underlying assumption was that the West could provide direction for the rest of the world (as in the early days of Lerner and Schramm), Western assumptions were embraced without question and put in place at the heart of the curriculum. Where it was later believed that there was a need to assert Asian values against the imbalance of cultural and informational flows from the West, it was natural to look for Asian values and philosophical assumptions to underpin the teaching and research in communication (as in Dissanyake's effort to look for Asian theories of communication). Of course, this attempt to identify stages vastly oversimplifies the history of these developments. But it serves to illustrate the sort of intentionality that could be infused and give direction to the entire educational enterprise in those earlier times. In the present, emerging era of globalization, as I understand it, the possibility of this sort of positive and intentional response has vanished.

The problem for students of communication, as expressed by Jay Blumer and Michael Gurevitch, is to "get a conceptual grasp on an escalating, yet formless, sprawling and globe-shaking, process that may be impinging of people's (sic) senses of their places in the world and the power of regimes to effect their wills within it." (Gurevitch 1991: 179) As Giddens puts it, globalization is a process from which "no one can opt out." The process embraces us all, and by its very nature, exceeds our control. Like the sorcerer's apprentice, our devices and our media appear to have taken on their own intentionality.

Global markets are perhaps the easiest example to grasp, and they provide a ready metaphor for our condition as a whole. The almost

instantaneous exchange of capital worldwide is something few would claim to understand, and even fewer would dare say they could control.

Tomlinson, recently described the situation this way:

"Rumors about the US economy can produce activity on the Tokyo market which may have the effect of increasing interest rates, and thus mortgages, in the UK. The cultural experiences of people caught in these processes is likely to be one of confusion, uncertainty and the perception of powerlessness. For who (can they believe) is to blame? All that can be answered here is 'global market forces.'

(Tomlinson, 1991: 176)

Tomlinson also uses the example of global environmental changes as an example of our technology and our best intentions gone amok.

But, perhaps the best comment on the conditions under which we, as teachers and concerned professionals, are trying to exercise guidance for the next generation of communication scholars and practitioners, is Jameson's analysis of postmodernism (as the cultural logic of late capitalism). He holds up for our scrutiny and ridicule the very process of designating stages of cultural development through which the postmodern critique of modernism is made possible, and thus plays on the idea of gaining the critical distance necessary for his own critique. Without pretending to fully understand Jameson's thesis, it is evident to me that the pervasiveness and all-consumingness of the process of postmodernism as expounded by him best captures the futility of our attempts to control or respond rationally to its "progress" as it affects our students and our

classrooms. It is this new lack of a vantage point from which to gain critical perspective which underlies the challenge to the curriculum.

So here is the first layer of irony. What would it mean to globalize the curriculum? Would it mean that in our attempt to gain control of the curriculum, we must let it become all-inclusive and let it go out of control? This may, in fact, be the way the process is experienced from the vantage of a teacher trying to devise and revise curriculum in these times. In this situation, it sounds absurd to talk about "globalising the curriculum" as if this were an aim we could consciously set for ourselves. But, our response, of course, need not be simply to mirror the conditions which have produced the anxiety of control in our students. Looking back over the experience of this past year in Singapore, there appears to be a definite direction in our response to this challenge, aimed at gaining some critical distance. As I attempt to describe our response, I must emphasize that these are my impressions of where we are and where we are going in Singapore.

In retrospect, it appears that one very important addition to our reading list was Rohan Samarajiva's "The murky beginnings of the development communication field." This controversial article points out, through some solid archival research, that the development communication stage of the communication curriculum, the stage in which Westernization was the order of the day, was built upon some false assumptions, or rather upon a hidden agenda having to do with the US involvement in the Cold War. According to Samarajiva, only a tiny portion of the massive, unacknowledged survey of communication behavior in the Middle East, devised for what Lerner called the "Sykewar", was used to expound his thesis in The Passing of Traditional Society. Yet, Lerner gave the impression that his work for the book stood alone, and was done for the sole purpose of

helping the undeveloped develop themselves. This had the effect initially of hiding some of the work's underlying assumptions. Of course, most scholars did not have to wait for Samarajiwa to see beneath the surface of that book. But, Samarajiwa's clear and well-documented analysis of the context in which the work was done now stands as the definitive critique. He points out the ethical problems associated with not revealing funding sources and with allowing local assistants to work without knowing the risks to themselves. But, the important lesson for us now is not so much the ethical one, though this remains important, as it is the pedagogical one. We can learn something about how to help our students confront their present situation by applying the same sort of contextual analysis to our own present assumptions. To illustrate this point, I tell my students the story of strong man McGillicutty-- a story which I learnt from my teacher Ray Birdwhistell.

Birdwhistell claims that he was walking down a road in Scotland when he saw a man holding up the front end of a car with one hand and changing the wheel with the other. Birdwhistell remarked to the man that he must be the strongest man in the world. The man put the car down and said, "You ain't seen nothing until you've seen strongman McGillicutty, who lives up the road." Birdwhistell walked on and saw a man holding up a house while his wife repaired the foundation. Same remark, same response. Finally, he came upon the real strongman McGillicutty, who had one hand placed firmly under his bottom and was holding himself up in mid air. I tell my students that what they should understand from this story is that we are all strongmen McGillicutties; and, if they think McGillicutty looks ridiculous, imagine an entire population holding themselves up by their bottoms but believing themselves to be standing on firm ground. So, what I am saying to my students with this story is that a sort of self-reflexive contextualization, working outward from our present condition, may be the antidote for the lack

of critical distance which our present cultural environment, by its confusion of reality and images, imposes on us.

Let me give an illustration from our research in Singapore (a study of the recent Singapore election done in collaboration with AMIC) which may give a clearer sense of how we are trying to put this process of contextualization into practice. The concept of agenda setting is among the most commonly used illustrations, in texts and classroom, of what our studies of media can show us by way of understanding the world we are living in and the role of media in that world. In our study, we set out to examine agenda setting research and the assumptions on which it rests to the sort of contextual analysis which Samarajiwa's work exemplifies. We attempted to apply agenda setting theory in Singapore, showing that it is inappropriate to this context, and by implication that it is anchored to a US context. In the US, the public expects the media to report on and comment on anything and everything. It does not cross the mind of most Americans that there are things which the media do not talk about. This may be a consequence of the sort of liberal democracy theory within which the US Press and broadcasting institutions, and much of their audience, implicitly operate. The constraint which this places on agenda setting theory, in terms of its application outside the US, may not be immediately obvious.

Agenda setting theory states, to use Bernard Cohen's classic phrase, "the press may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about." (Cohen, 1963:13) It does so by selecting issues for emphasis. But, what happens, we asked in our research, in a society like Singapore where people know that the press does not talk about anything and everything, and, indeed, where it is understood that there are certain things which

simply are not said? We tried to show in our study that what is not in the media may also be setting the agenda. That is, in a more general sense, we wanted to show how the theory of agenda setting, as presently formulated, is inappropriate to Singapore.

This then raises the question of what sort of theory might replace agenda setting when we try to consider the effects of news on a global scale. We do not have a ready answer for this. We now have some idea as to what is wrong with the answers which our present assumptions support. This is, admittedly, a sort of "negative" progress. But, it is progress nevertheless, and it challenges us to think again and to be creative at the very basic level of underlying assumptions.

In the spirit of this challenge, I will hazard a guess as to what might replace agenda setting theory by following through the rather convoluted, postmodern logic which this example suggests. The logic goes something like this: If what is not in the media can tell us what to think about, then what can we say about what is not not in the media and its relation to what we think? What is not not in the media is what we have traditionally referred to as media content. But now, simply from the way we have asked the question, we can see that content is enclosed in a larger interpretive space comprised of a special categories of what is not in the media. To use a visual metaphor, we can see content as a line, we can see the contours of that line, and we can step back and think about that line. To use Bernard Cohen's terms, if agenda setting theory has forced us to think about how the media is telling us what to think about, then we now see that we need a theory which allows us to think about thinking about how the media tells us what to think about. We are led to consider a new image of communicator and audience engaged in dialogic tactics, anticipating, as in a chess game, not how

content might effect an audience, but how it might be effective, or conversely, be made ineffectual. This comes closer to the reality of Singapore media. The US case, where interpretive space is choked out and jammed full of content, is but one possibility in a spectrum of possibilities within a global context. This would be a more broad-based theory, one that acknowledges the power of what is not said, and for that matter, what cannot be said.

Let me conclude by pointing out one implication of all this for our students. Previously, students were asked implicitly to join a Western intellectual enterprise, and then later to join a force to counter that Western enterprise. Now, at this stage of our development, students are being asked to join a global enterprise, or rather, to join none. They are being asked to prepare themselves to make seminal contributions to the understanding of communication at the level of basic assumptions. It may be argued that this has always been the case. But, students are being thrown upon their own resources as never before, as members of a global community of scholars. This is not by our intention or design, but by the nature of the cultural environment in which they are growing up. It is evident that entering this global cultural environment is not a return to the sort of simple global village that McLuhan predicted. It is, rather, a sortie into the complexities of postmodern hyperspaces, replete with ironies -- a reflexive world of images dissolving into realities and back again into images.

In sum, students are coming to us in hordes, driven into our arms by an anxiety of control. I am suggesting that the curriculum should respond to this situation, and that one way we have begun to respond is by including reading and research to encourage and support self-reflexive contextualization. In the end, perhaps the best we can offer them is the

capacity to accept that their situation is indeed out of control, and to give them some of the tools they need for gaining some critical distance on it.