Korea

CONTINUITY AND CHANGE: CROSS CULTURAL COMMUNICATIONS RESEARCH IN THE AGE OF TELECOMMUNICATIONS

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Sean McBride has noted that there has been a change in the center of gravity of power. The change has been toward culture-power. It has been propelled by changes on communications technology and control. In this paper I would like to sketch an historical perspective in which the social functions of communications may be seen, and describe an international comparative research project now underway. They illustrate my view of the theme of continuities and change in communications.

My perspective deals with homo sapiens as the story-teller in three broad eras: the pre-industrial, the print-industrial, and the telecommunications eras. The research plan that follows is an attempt to address what I see as a predicament of the age of telecommunications.

Homo Sapiens the story-teller

Scottish patriot Andrew Fletcher once said that if he were permitted to write all the ballads he need not care who makes the laws of a nation. Ballads, songs, tales, gestures, and images make up the unique design of the human environment. All animals react to things but humans act in a world of towering symbolic constructions, called culture, including art, science, law, religion, statecraft, and all other story-telling. Culture is the system of messages and images that regulates social relations, introduces us into roles of gender, age, class, vocation; gives us models of conformity and

targets for rebellion; provides the range of personalities, temperaments, mentalities said to be our "characteristics;" helps us rise to selfless acts of courage and sacrifice; and makes us accept (or even perpetrate) repression and slaughter of countless unknown people assigned to the appropriate categories of barbarians and other enemies. In other words, culture is that symbolic organizations that socializes us and cultivates our fantasies about a world we do not experience directly. It is a system of stories and other artifacts -- increasingly mass-produced -- that mediates between existence and our consciousness of existence and thereby helps shape both.

As we encounter something new, we interpret it in that symbolic context, we hold it up to that fantasy, and if it fits we call it real. Of course, that does not make it real; it only makes us behave as if it were. Therefore, it is all the more important to find out if it is and how it relates to a construction of reality that rests on authentic publics and public interests. If our fantasies do not reflect and express the requirements of a real world and of such a philosophy, we are victims of thought-control and exploitation, instruments of ultimate disaster.

There are basically three kinds of stories. The first are stories about how things work. They illuminate our all-important but invisible network of relationships. They depict facts and people and set them in action so that the hidden dynamics of their interplay can be seen and explored. We call this type of story fiction, drama, poetry, and other forms of art. Only artful creations can incorporate a full and compelling human vision of how things really work.

The second are stories about what things are. They provide some

verisimilitude to the larger mythology of how things work. They fill in that synthetic framework with selected facts -- news, anecdotes, descriptions, explanations -- to provide confirmation of a society's fantasy of its reality. Sometimes they undertake the difficult and risky task of challenging the mythology.

The third are stories of value and choice. As if to say: if this is how things work and what things are, then what should we do about them? What are our choices and what set of priorities should we follow? These are the exhortations, sermons, and instructions of all times. Today most of them are called commercials. They present styles of life to be desired and the choices to be made to attain them. (If they are to serve different values they must provide alternative tactics stemming from different versions of reality and visions of how things really work.)

Three cultural epochs

The three kinds of stories have been woven together in different ways in different cultural epochs.

First, of course, is the preindustrial way of providing explanations of how things work, what things are, and what to do about them. The preindustrial way is face-to-face. It depends on memory and on ritual. It requires a great deal of repetition and the accumulation of a limited set of stories about the origin of the Universe, about the meaning of life, and the ways of proper conduct. The leaders of the tribe could reach and tell or interpret the stories for each small community. That common way of thinking and living, later called religion, was of course also the socialization of children and the management of the affairs of the community. It

was relatively centralized, unified, stable, and total.

Then comes the industrial transformation. The first machine is the printing press. The first industrial product stamping out standardized commodities is the book. That paves the way for the transformations to come. Printing breaks up the ritual and the face-to-face community. Printed stories are movable packages of consciousness that can be taken -- often smuggled -- across hitherto impenetrable or closely guarded boundaries of time, space, language, religion, status. The book lifts people from their traditional moorings as the industrial revolution uproots them from their communities and cultures; it frees them from historic dependence on the ministrations and interpretations of their local chiefs and priests. The book can now be given to all who can read (a new class) to interpret as they wish and as far-away story-tellers' published works can interpret it for them.

Meanwhile people engage in long and costly struggles -- some still going on -- to tell stories and thus shape reality from their own points of view. The struggle is necessary for the formation of new identities and interests as the industrial age breaks the community into different and conflicting classes, mixes together religious and ethnic groups, and restructures the process of humanization heretofore confined by geography and relative stability. The way to achieve some control over the newly differentiating consciousness in a situation of unprecedented mobility and flux is to gain the right to select and write and publish stories (and thus create publics) stemming from radically different conceptions of reality existing in the same society. Notions of individuality and class consciousness are rooted in this era. The publication of

different types of stories creates and cultivates mass publics -- those loose aggregates of people who share some consciousness without ever meeting face-to-face -- necessary for self-government and much of economic, educational, religious, and cultural life in the print-industrial epoch. The industrialization of story-telling makes socialization and public-formation a product of the system of symbol mass-production.

Next comes the second industrial transformation. We enter the telecommunications era. Its mainstream is television, superimposed upon and reorganizing print-based culture. Television has its own characteristics. It is a centralized ritual, distant and pervasive and yet seemingly personal and face-to-face. It turns out and disseminates (often globally) a limited number of stories about how things work, what they are, and what to do about them, along with the stars, scenes, social types and other myths that make an otherwise diverse audience into a new kind of community: the modern mass public. In terms of its essential socializing functions television is more like tribal religion than like any selectively used medium preceeding it.

In the average American home the television set is on over 7 hours a day. Most people do not watch television by the program but by the clock. The majority do not even decide what to watch until they turn on the set. The viewing pattern follows the style of life of the family. If that is rich and diverse, television has a lighter role in it. Otherwise, television practically monopolizes cultural participation and dominates the cultivation of common consciousness as tribal religion did before the print era.

But television has abolished the old provincialism and

parochialism. No one is out in the sticks anymore, culturally speaking. One can be very young or very old, far from the center of things, lying in a hospital or locked in a prison and still live in the same cultural mainstream of the world of television as do most others more able, mobile, or fortunate.

For the first time in human history, the resident of the penthouse shares a great deal of the common culture with the inhabitant of the ghetto. The famous and the infamous, the celebrities and the criminals, the statesman and the spies and the cops and the parade of other culture heros and villains that makes up the common mythology now come into the home and are available to everyone. Television is the cement of cohesion in an otherwise diverse and divergent society. The world it presents even encompasses more of the great art and science and philosophy than a whole nation has ever shared before. So what is the challenge that the building of an authentic public philosophy is up against?

To answer that question, we have to review some evidence. It bears upon the reversal of the trend toward differentiation of consciousness according to individual and group interest, and the rise of a common environment of stories, ritualistically used, presenting a world according to television.

The world of television

We have moved away from the historic experience of humankind. Children used to grow up in a home where parents told most of the stories. Today television tells most of the stories to most of the people most of the time. The electronic pulpit and faithful messenger would be the envy of every Emperor and Pope who ever lived.

Children do not have five or six years of relatively protected development within the family and the neighborhood before emerging into the outside culture of school and reading. By the time they can speak, let alone read, they have absorbed hundreds of thousands of stories -- programs, news, commercials -- produced on the television assembly-line to the specifications of adult tastes and industrial needs. The pervasive mass ritual blurs, when it does not short-circuit, social distinctions rooted in subcultural and class membership, blends community consciousness into its mainstream, and bends that in the direction of its own institutional interests.

How does that work? What is the world according to television? To discover its main features and functions, we have to look at familiar structures in an unfamiliar light. Rituals rationalize and serve a social order. They make the necessary and inevitable appear also natural and right. In conventional entertainment stories, plots perform that rationalizing function. They provide novelty, diversion, and distraction from the constant reiteration of the functions performed by casting, power, and fate. The main points to observe, therefore, are who is who (number and characterization of different social types in the cast); who risks and gets what (power to allocate resources including personal integrity, freedom of action, and safety); and who comes to what end (fate, or outcomes inherent in the structure that relates social types to a calculus of power, risks and relative success or failure.)

When observed in that way, as we have done for over 20 years on an annual sample basis, the world of television drama is found to be one in which men outnumber women at least three to one; young people comprise one-third and older people one-fifth of their true

proportion of the population, and all other minorities have less than their share of the action but more than their share of the risks. The lessons learned from that, as we have found by surveying light and heavy viewers in otherwise similar groups, are those that tend to cultivate and confirm rather than challenge or change some of our stereotypic inequities and prejudices.

We have found that the heavier viewers (matched with light viewers on income, education, sex, age, and so on) are less likely to believe that women are as capable as men for responsible positions, more likely to be opposed to open housing, more likely to view older citizens as a vanishing breed, and are generally more likely to respond to our surveys in a way we would call sexist, racist and ageist.

The world according to television is also one in which violence occurs at the rate of 6 acts per hour in prime time and 25 per hour in children's weekend daytime programming. Violence is essentially a demonstration of power. It shows who can get away with what against whom. Exposure to violence cultivates a sense of relative powers, of one's risks and place in the social hierarchy, and a sense of heightened anxiety and insecurity about a world that is shown to be much more mean and dangerous than anyone has directly experienced. Insecurity leads to demands for protection, dependence on authority, and acceptance of repression if it comes in the name of security. Simple, strong, tough measures and hard-line postures -- political and religious -- appeal to anxious and alienated viewers perplexed by and resistant to change

In the world of television most people are professionals. Service workers and blue collar workers who occupy about 60 percent

of our population are only 10 percent on television. The average viewer of prime time television sees a stable cast of about 300 characters a week. Of those, about 44 are engaged in law enforcement and about 21 are criminals. The restoration of law and order is a chief feature of the ritual. And the most general characteristic of heavy viewers compared to similar groups of light viewers is a certain rigidity and resistance to change.

Despite the overwhelming presence of professionals, the process of education plays a small and ambivalent role. Surveys show that the more children and adolescents watch television, the lower their school and IQ test scores and educational aspirations seem to be.

We have found that, on the whole, television viewing is inversely related to church attendance, but watching syndicated religion, the so-called electronic church, is consistent with heavy viewing. Preliminary analysis of survey data confirm the impression that frequent viewers of electronic church programs are less accepting of women's and minority rights and more supportive of armaments than are similar groups of non-viewers.

These are some features and functions of the television mythology, a few of the many we have studied. But just as important as the individual findings are the results that show television reducing or eliminating differences in people's consciousness of the world around them, and absorbing viewers into its synthetic and homogenized mainstream. The vast majority of stories that make up the world according to television are made to uniform specifications of institutional service and sales. Relatively attractive though it may be, the world of television acts to screen us from, rather than mediate, the changing collective requirements of morality, equity

justice, and survival in a real world.

Liberation cannot be accomplished by turning it off. Television is for most people the most attractive thing going any time of the day or night. We live in a world in which the vast majority will not turn it off. If we don't get the message from the tube, we get it through other people.

Cross-cultural television research

Let us sum up the main argument so far.

The pre-industrial cultural system is characterized by ritual, institutional story-telling, organic mythic structures involving total communities, and a centralized (e.g. tribal) socialization process.

The print-industrial cultural system breaks up the ritual, decentralizes story-telling, legitimizes the plurality of story tellers, of parties, and of publics, establishes differentiated forms of entertainment and information, and creates multiple and competing streams of socialization.

The telecommunication cultural system features two different but interlocking tendencies. The first extends features of the print-industry system (as in the telephone, databanks, cable, cassettes, videodisc).

The second introduces and superimposes features of pre-industrial religion through broadcasting. Broadcasting, and particularly television, is a non-selectively used ritual. It is also highly institutionalized and centralized. It presents total national and international information systems to total and otherwise heterogeneous communities in highly compelling forms (called

entertainment). Thus broadcast television contributes to telecommunications culture a pervasive and standardized system of mass socialization.

The first tendency, which we can call informatics, precipitates a struggle for centralized control of all information, including that which controls the second tendency, the mass ritual, which in turn confers a large measure of social control.

Cross-cultural communication research should be a social intelligence operation to inform citizens and decision-makers and help design alternative systems providing choices in cultural policy.

We are embarked in collaboration with colleagues in many countries, including the Republic of Korea, on such a project.

The methodology of the research has been refined in our project called Cultural Indicators. It consists of the study of mass media content, called message-system analysis, and the investigation, through large-scale surveys, of the conceptions and behaviors that mass-mediated message systems cultivate, called cultivation analysis.

The comparative research attempts to discover which relationships between television viewing and conceptions of social reality are universal and which are specific to certain programming policies, structures, and audiences. Cross-cultural comparisons will also help participating countries understand the special characteristics of their own policies compared to those of other countries.

The lack of reliable comparative knowledge about the role of television and about the consequences of different systems and policies makes the process of planning, assessment, and decision making within each country difficult and unreliable. Theories about

the functioning of national and transnational program structures are based on selective impressions, economic and political rationales that lack systematic and comparative examination, and untested cultural assumptions. This research is designed to address those problems. Its purpose is to provide decision makers and publics in each country information about policies, content, and effects of its own television system in a broad international comparative perspective, and to assist scholars and researchers in each country to test and build theories and methods of further research about television in a comparative perspective. The project represents the first scientific effort to undertake such a task on a global scale.

In December 1987, a week-long sample of television programs was recorded in more than 20 countries in North and South America, Europe, Asia, Africa, and the Middle East. This sample of programs represents a unique resource, and will serve as the cornerstone of the research. This sample of programs also present an opportunity to conduct a special comparative analysis of the global coverage and impact of an event of international importance: the U.S.-Soviet summit meeting in Washington of December 7-9, 1987.

The general aim of the project is to examine relationships between national television policies and programs, on one hand, and viewers' conceptions of reality and society, on the other, in an international cross-cultural comparative perspective. How do these relationships vary among countries? Which effects of television are relatively "global," and which are specific to certain programming policies, structures, and audiences? How accurately do programs and their contributions to viewer conceptions reflect national policies? The comparative perspective will help participating countries assess

their own structures, policies, and institutional alternatives.

Procedure

The research is planned in two phases. The first phase includes the analysis of national television policy (mostly through interviews with broadcast executives) and the system of messages actually produced on national television in each country. The second phase consists mostly of surveys assessing the contributions television viewing makes to the cultivation of concepts and values of its audiences.

The policy analysis investigates the aims and process of decision-making affecting television programming in each country. It inquires into the legal, managerial, economic, logistical, organizational, political, and public representational aspects of programming policy.

Message system analysis provides information about the content of programs: their selections and treatment of events; the historical and social dimensions of the television world; its cast of characters; their occupations and actions; and the values that govern their fate. It focuses on the relatively unambiguous and commonly understood facts of portrayal. These are the features that can be expected to be shared in common by large and heterogeneous national publics, and that lend themselves to cross-cultural comparison. Similar analyses have been conducted in the Cultural Indicators project on annual samples of U.S. prime-time and weekend-daytime network dramatic programming since 1967 by trained analysts who observe and code various aspects of television content.

The joint training of analysts and testing of the reliability of

observations across cultures is the first major task of the multinational research. Native speakers will conduct the analysis using an agreed upon coding scheme under the supervision of the director of the research in each country. During both training and data collection (coding) stages of the analysis, coders work in independent pairs and replay their assigned videotaped programs as often as necessary. All programs in each national sample are to be coded by two separate coders working independently. Final measures of the reliability of observations are computed on double-coded program samples within as well as across countries. These measures of reliability provide the basis for determining whether corrections in the instrument of analysis or coder training are necessary. They also determine the acceptability of information for analysis and provide guidelines to its interpretation.

A joint practice session of at least one week with coders (or trainers of coders) in each country is needed to establish common methodology crucial to comparative analysis, and to develop joint strategies for reliability testing and the analysis itself. A quick exchange of a limited set of programs (two news units, one public affairs program, and one dramatic entertainment program) will help to determine and correct any problems in coder training or reliability.

Message system analysis is a flexible tool for making systematic, reliable, and cumulative observations of program content. The technique permits the identification of many aspects of the television world and leads to the testing of its contributions to viewers' conceptions of the real world.

That contribution is assessed in cultivation analysis. Usually based on the findings of message system analysis, cultivation

analysis asks about how and to what extent are the message systems composing the world of television integrated into different styles of life and reflected in thoughts and actions.

In order to assess the contribution of television's system of messages to viewers' conception of reality (and to behavior based on those conceptions), the participating teams will use a research strategy that recognizes the fact that television viewing may be integrated in different ways into different styles of life. These styles are relatively stable; once television has taken hold, it leads to few changes over time. The research task is to trace the steady, independent contribution of television as it interacts with culture, age, sex, education, income, and other social and media use characteristics. That task is accomplished by controlling for these characteristics and focusing on the conceptual and behavioral correlates of television viewing in otherwise relatively homogenous subgroups.

This investigation relates respondents' television viewing to their responses to survey questions about facts and values. The questions are usually based on the monitoring and analysis of the world of television. They typically have one answer closer to the facts in the world of television and another closer to the facts of the real world. The test of the degree to which television tends to cultivate the perspectives of its programming is the extent to which the amount of viewing is related to the likelihood of giving the "television answer" to these questions.

The results of our project will be three-fold. First, they will establish scholarly cooperation and joint development among research teams in cultural policy and communication. Second, they will

provide television policy-makers, scholars, and citizens in each country valuable information about the dynamics of their own system in an international comparative perspective. Third, they will help each country assess the extent to which its own television system of institutionalized and pervasive story telling cultivates its own national and cultural objectives.