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December 11, 1967

Dr. William Stephenson
School of Journalism
University of Missouri
Columbia, Missouri 65201

Dear Dr. Stephenson:

I am glad you sent me your observations on the symposium papers. I had just read The Play Theory of Mass Communication and it struck me as one of the few genuine theories of communication we have. So I was pleased to see that you picked Brouwer's and my papers for the same reason. You will be interested to learn that Marten Brouwer will be visiting on our faculty in the spring and through the next academic year.

I think our approaches are complementary. As you note, I am quite content to "dump" all the informal mass-of-communication postulated by Brouwer and yourself into the minds of people as their "images." There must be some division of labor, and I am not a psychologist. For the same reason, I have not "taken all the emotion out of communication"; I left it where it belongs, in the domain of subjectivity, and am glad that you deal with it so well.

Some further comments on your observations. My "operationalizing" is not in the realm of images (minds) because that is not where I do my research. It is in the area of institutional process and message analysis, and is sketched on pages 437-444 of my paper. I study the structure and operations of the mass media as organizations composing message systems to their "image." You and others would then presumably study the subjective images held by people in relation to the objective images (message content) that I identify as resulting from certain industrial and corporate operations. These operations are quite different in different societies, as my own studies indicate. One reason is that the industrial organization behind them is different. So my approach to the "industrialization of culture" leads directly to your suggestion of international tensions as a focus of study. Have you seen my articles on "press Perspectives in World Communication" and "Ideological Perspectives in Newspaper Reporting" (J.Q. Summer 1961 and Autumn 1964, respectively)?

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One problem I have with your play theory is that I find the concept of play itself (including pleasure, entertainment, etc.) incomplete. Obviously not all things that give pleasure (or play) are, in fact, the same. To imply that "play is the message" is as unsatisfactory as to say that "the medium is the message." And, in fact, much of your own research does not necessarily rest on, or illuminate, the play theory. For example, I see no necessary relationship between Q methodology and play theory. While I also contend that communication has intrinsic rewards and is, in fact, as necessary to human life as is e.g. eating (and should be as pleasurable), that is no more to equate its functions with play (or pleasure) than those of food with taste sensations alone. I think you would agree with all that, but I missed (perhaps overlooked) your own elaboration of these relationships.

Do you expect to come east in the near future? I would like to follow up on the implications of your paper, and Brouwer too will be here after January.

Sincerely yours,

GG:kaf

George Gerbner,
Dean