HUMAN COMMUNICATION THEORY Original Essays

Frank E. X. Dance / EDITOR

HOLT, RINEHART AND WINSTON, INC.

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CONTENTS

MASS MEDIA AND HUMAN COMMUNICATION THEORY

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I

The fundamental questions raised by media of communications are usually those of new or different ways of looking at life.

When printing became a practical possibility, it disturbed existing assumptions about the capacity—and right—of ordinary people to acquire knowledge beyond their own experience, and about the point of view from which public knowledge was to be produced.

The questions raised by mass media today are similarly profound. These questions reflect the cultural transformation of our time. To take the full measure of this transformation, we have to start at least 100 million years ago—give or take a few million.

Lush forests covered the land from the Arctic Circle across the Sahara Desert to the Antarctic. Arboreal existence in damp tropical forests freed the forearms of one group of mammals from having to carry the burden of the body, and shaped these forearms into strong, sure, delicate instruments. Deft manipulation required a hand that could grasp, a brain that could do the same, and an exceptionally large and complex control system. This came about with the development of erect posture and the ability to focus

the eyes on small objects at arm's length. The ability to grasp with the hand and the mind literally developed "hand in hand."

The last million years robbed hominoids of their "paradise." The featherless and furless creatures were hard-pressed to develop all their resources of collaboration, community, and communication—and thus to transform themselves into *Homo sapiens*.

Communication is the most uniquely "humanizing" element of the pattern. It is unique especially in its symbolic representation and re-creation of aspects of the human condition, in forms that can be learned and shared. Only the hominoid brain could regulate the body, respond to the immediate environment, and still retain the reserve capacity and mechanical calm necessary to hold an image long enough to reflect on it, record it, store it, and retrieve it in the form of messages. This ability was the prerequisite for human communication—social interaction through messages. Communication in the broadest "humanizing" sense is the production, perception, and grasp of messages bearing man's notions of what is, what is important, and what is right.

For a long time the messages and images that compose the fabric of popular culture were woven by the tribe and village out of the same homespun yarn of everyday experience, which also gave rise to the folkways of rearing, teaching, and preaching. The process was mostly interpersonal. It was slow-moving and fixed as long as the local and limited circumstances that governed it were fixed. Studies of Japanese folklore, for example, suggest that in the closed traditional rural village people knew each other so well that one could understand what his neighbor was intending to communicate even from his facial expression or his slightest move.

As more and more people became aware of cultural influences beyond their own tribe or village, social interaction became primarily oral and increasingly regional rather than purely tribal. It was still adjustable to time, place, circumstance, function, and yet was long-enduring. A tale heard from one's grandfather and told to one's grandchild would span a century. Until recently, then, the common culture in which man learned to think and act "human" seemed part of a relatively fixed universe, like the air in which a young bird must learn to act like a bird.

After a long, slow build-up, the industrial revolution burst into the cultural sphere. Instead of the age-old process of filtering-down and person-to-person transmission of most that ever comes to a human, we have the mass production and almost simultaneous introduction of information, ideas, images, and products at all levels of society and—at least potentially—in all inhabited parts of the globe.

A change in man's relationship to the common culture marks the transition from one epoch to another in the way members of our species are "humanized." The rate of this change has increased (and the life-span

lengthened) to such an extent that different generations living side by side may now be "humanized" in different ways and live in essentially different (but overlapping) cultural epochs.

The shared communicative context of messages and images through which a culture reveals the varieties, limitations, and potentials of the human condition is no longer woven out of a homespun yarn of private everyday experience. Even the meaning of "everyday experience" has changed. Much of our experience is in a new type of cultural environment. We listen to the morning newscast or music program while we sip our breakfast coffee and drive to work. The commuter reads his newspaper oblivious of the "real" world around him. Much of our behavior is in response to things we do not directly "experience." What happens in Paris, Moscow, Tokyo, Havana, Washington, Berlin, New Delhi, or London; what happens in art, science, technology, medicine, education, public administration—all these and many other constantly changing relationships affect us quickly and profoundly. Faraway storytellers mass produce new tales every hour and tell them to millions of children, fathers, and grandfathers *at the same time.* Never have so many people in so many places shared so much of a common system of messages and images and have the assumptions about life, society, and the world imbedded in them while having so little to do with their making. The fabric of popular culture that relates elements of existence to each other and structures the common consciousness of what is, what is important, and what is right, is now largely a manufactured product.

The new situation is a radical transformation in the ways members of our species become human. Social structure and industrial organization have a more central and direct bearing upon the common consciousness than ever before. With the ability of industrial societies to produce the material requirements of subsistence and welfare, the strains and stresses of a social system come to be transferred to the mass-cultural sphere. The struggles for power and privilege, participation in the conduct of human affairs, more equitable distribution of resources, all other forms of social justice, and, indeed, for survival in a nuclear age, are increasingly shifting from older arenas and methods of struggle to the newer spheres of control, contest, and attention in mass-produced communications.

To sum up: The ways we reflect on things, act on things, and interact with one another are rooted in our ability to compose images, produce messages, and use complex symbol systems. A change in that ability transforms the nature of human affairs. We are in the midst of such a transformation. It stems from the mass production of symbols and messages—a new industrial revolution in the field of culture. New media of communication provide new ways of selecting, composing, and sharing perspectives. New institutions of communication create new publics across boundaries of time, space, and status. New patterns of information animate societies and

machines. Along with other dramatic changes, we have altered the symbolic environment that gives meaning and direction to man's activity.

These developments present new problems and demand fresh insights. But the new also sheds light on the old. An assessment of basic communicative processes and cultural traditions is part of the response to the transformations of our time. The search for a new grasp on the affairs of man crosses established disciplines, strains the organization of knowledge, and leads to the emergence of new fields and new schools.

A part of this search is the quest for a theory that might help us to study, understand, judge, and control the conduct of events in which mass media and mass communications play an increasingly significant role. There is no such theory now. Most attempts to construct theories have taken parochial or tangential approaches of established disciplines or the partial view of journalistic scholarship.[1]

After exploring definitions of terms and concepts, I shall note some of these contributions. The work of political scientists and others concerned with the public policy functions of mass media will receive a greater share of attention than will those of sociologists, social psychologists, psychologists, and others to whom this volume devotes separate chapters. Finally, I shall attempt to summarize some of my own notions and questions (derived, of course, from the work of many others, and spelled out in greater detail in other publications) pointing, hopefully, toward a theory of mass media and mass communications.

II

Communication can be defined as "social interaction through messages." Messages are formally coded, symbolic, or representational events of some shared significance in a culture, produced for the purpose of evoking significance [Gerbner, 15]. The distinction between the "communication approach" and other approaches to the study of behavior and culture rests on the extent to which (1) messages are germane to the process studied, and (2) concern with the production, content, transmission, perception, and use of messages is central to the approach. A "communication approach" (or theory) can be distinguished from others in that it makes the nature and role of messages in life and society its central organizing concern.

[1] Since this essay was written, *Theories of Mass Communication* by Melvin L. De Fleur (New York: David McKay Co., Inc., 1966) has given further impetus to theoretical analysis, viewing the study of mass communication "emerging as a new academic discipline in its own right" (p. xiii). Other significant new publications whose thrust is consistent with the present effort but whose relevant contributions could not be noted in this essay are *Perspectives in Mass Communication*, by Alex S. Edelstein (Copenhagen, Denmark: Einar Harcks Forlag, 1966), and *Politics and Communication*, by Richard R. Fagen (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1966).

Media of communication are the means or vehicles capable of assuming forms that have characteristics of messages or that transmit messages. *A Dictionary of the Social Sciences* defines *mass* media as "all the impersonal means of communication by which visual and/or auditory messages are transmitted directly to audiences. Included among the mass media are television, radio, motion pictures, newspapers, magazines, books, and billboards." [27, p. 413]. Two features of the definition receive further elaboration. One is the technical means of transmission, and the other is the nature of the audience. Joseph T. Klapper considers the technical means sufficient. He writes: "The term connotes all mass media of communication in which a mechanism of impersonal reproduction intervenes between speaker and audience. By this criterion radio, screen, books and other media of impersonal communication would be classified as mass media" [35, p. 3]. This definition appears to exclude only such communications as drama, personal conversation, and public address.

The nature of the audience is emphasized in a definition offered by Gerhard D. Wiebe, who writes: "The two essential characteristics of mass media are: (i) their product is easily available—in a physical sense—to most of the public, including a sizable number of people in all major subgroups; and (ii) their cost is so small to the individual that they are generally available to these same people in a financial sense" [81, pp. 164–5]. This criterion emphasizes the size of the audience and appears to exclude not only personal communications but also the more expensive or less readily available communication products such as hard-cover book and educational film. A further qualification is introduced by M. Sherif and C. W. Sherif, who assert not only that a large audience is necessary for the proper usage of the term but that mass media must "reach millions of people simultaneously or within very brief periods of time" [73, p. 562]. Another conception of *mass* is emphasized by Wirth, who writes that the mass media of communication transcend "the peculiar interests and preoccupations of the special and segmental organized groups and direct their appeal to the mass" [88, p. 10]. This conception stresses not only the size and heterogeneity of the audience but also the contention that members of the audience respond to the communication as separate individuals.

Perhaps the most comprehensive attempt to delineate essential characteristics of mass communication comes from Wright [89, pp. 12–15]. In addition to modern technology, he writes, mass communication involves distinctive operating conditions, primary among which are the nature (1) of the audience, (2) of the communication experience, and (3) of the communicator. First, "mass communication is directed toward a relatively large, heterogeneous and anonymous audience." Secondly, "mass communications may be characterized as public, rapid, and transient." And third, the communicator in mass media usually works through a complex corporate or-

ganization embodying an extensive division of labor and an accompanying degree of expense.

Common to most definitions is the conception that mass media are technological agencies and corporate organizations engaged in the creation, selection, processing, and distribution of communications that are (or can be) produced at speeds and in quantities possible only by mass-production methods. Mass media, therefore, provide the broadest common currencies of public interaction in a society.

This broad "public-making" significance of mass media of communications—the ability to create publics, define issues, provide common terms of reference, and thus to allocate attention and power—has evoked a large number of theoretical contributions. Other theories of mass media have their origins in political thought, social-economic analysis, and historical-artistic-literary scholarship.

Until recently the motivation for theorizing about the mass media came mostly from a desire for or resistance to cultural change. It came from philosophers and revolutionists, defenders of "classical" or of "folk" cultures, critics of "elite" and aristocratic traditions, propagandists and propaganda-analysts, historians and sociologists embroiled in a "popular culture debate," economists and lawyers defending or fighting the trend toward cultural oligopolies, and crusaders alarmed by the drift of events or dismayed at the tenacity of the *status quo*. It is only in the last few decades that, whatever the motivation, theorizing has come to reflect a growing body of systematic information and scientific methodology becoming available for the serious student.

III

The allocation, distribution, and exercise of attention and power are always related to communication (whether over roads, or by water, wire, or air). In recent times the possibility of nearly simultaneous large-scale social interaction through mass communications changed the nature of politics. "As we look back upon previous social aggregations," wrote Louis Wirth [88, p. 2],

> such as those of the ancient kingdoms, or at their greatest extent the Roman Empire, we wonder how, given the primitive communications that obtained, such impressive numbers and territories could be held together under a common regime over any considerable span of time. If we discover, however, that these aggregations were not truly societies but were little more than administrative areas, creatures of military domination along the main arteries of communication from some center of power, and that the economic base of their cohesion rested on exploitation of the outlying territories and peoples by the

power-holders at a center through their representatives who were scattered thinly over the territory, the magnitude of these aggregations does not seem too impressive. Mass societies as we find them today, however, show greater marks of integration. They are aggregations of people who participate to a much greater degree in the common life and, at least in democratic parts of the world, comprise people whose attitudes, sentiments and opinions have some bearing upon the policies pursued by their governments. In this sense mass societies are a creature of the modern age and are the product of the division of labor, of mass communication and a more or less democratically achieved consensus.

The possibilities inherent in a "more or less democratically achieved consensus" motivated many political scientists and social critics to theorize about propaganda and mass communications. In an early statement on "The Theory of Political Propaganda," Harold Lasswell [38, p. 627] defined propaganda as "the management of collective attitudes by the manipulation of significant symbols," and wrote:

Propaganda rose to transitory importance in the past whenever a social system based upon the sanctions of antiquity was broken up by a tyrant. The ever-present function of propaganda in modern life is in large measure attributable to the social disorganization which has been precipitated by the rapid advent of technological changes. . . . Literacy and the physical channels of communication have quickened the connection between those who rule and the ruled. Conventions have arisen which favor the ventilation of opinions and the taking of votes. Most of that which formerly could be done by violence and intimidation must now be done by argument and persuasion. . . .

"Propaganda analysis" made a contribution to mass media theory in developing methods for the systematic and comparative examination of large-scale, mass-produced message systems. Such examination need not be restricted to messages of persuasive intent. Students of propaganda such as Jacques Ellul [14] have come to feel that a total cultural perspective—such as can stem from political, commercial, or any other single basis of mass media ownership and control—constitutes the most pervasive form of "propaganda." A study of political perspectives inherent in nonpolitical news reporting [Gerbner, 22] seems to bear out this contention.

Ithiel de Sola Pool sketched the rise of political theory and research in mass communications [62]:

Studies of politics of a kind that could be included in a bibliography on communication start with the ancient Greeks. Among the classic studies are Plato's *Gorgias*, which considers morality in propaganda; Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, and John Stuart Mill's *System of Logic* (1846) which analyze the structure of persuasive argumentation; Lenin's *What is to be Done* (1902), a large part of

which is devoted to a discussion of the role that an all-Russian newspaper might play in the revolutionary politics of the Bolsheviks; Milton's *Areopagitica* and Mill's *On Liberty* (1885) which consider the systematic effects of permitting freedom of expression in communication; Dicey's *The Development of Law and Opinion in England in the Nineteenth Century* (1905) which considers the effects of the ideological context on public actions; Marx's *German Ideology* (1832), and Sorel's *Reflections on Violence* and Pareto's *The Mind and Society* which distinguish the social function from the truth value of beliefs.

While all of these are books on communication, only some of the most recent ones (e.g. Lenin's *What is to be Done*) focus on mass communication as such. The growth of mass media to the point where they dominate the communication system of society is a phenomenon of recent times. Every society has some communication system for man is a communication animal, but only in the last century have we had the emergence of an extraordinary phenomenon—societies organized around mass media systems.

The growth of mass media has had many profound effects on the quality of life. With the growth of the mass media there have also arisen exaggerated beliefs in the efficacy of the propaganda. A number of factors are responsible for the myth of the all-powerful propagandist. In the period after World War I the extreme right in Germany, unwilling to admit that their nation had been defeated in battle, proposed the myth that German victory had been snatched away from the soldiers by civilian acceptance of allied propaganda. This belief in a "Schwindel" led to much writing about the supposed magical powers of propaganda.

In the United States advertising and public relations men were disseminating the same illusions since overestimation of propaganda was often useful in selling their own services. Popular writers who have believed their claims have written books about the vast powers of "The Hidden Persuaders". . . .

One cannot doubt that if the mass media were non-existent or differently structured our politics would be different. The point we are trying to make is that the effects of the mass media must be conceived much more broadly than simply as persuasion of people to accept the views presented in the media. The mass media have many more subtle and complex effects both through what they say and through their existence as institutions. . . .

Political scientists have paid more attention to the non-persuasive effects of communication than have some other social scientists. Perhaps this has been because they were interested in the ideologies being communicated and their use in power politics, even where persuasion was minimal. For example, Harold Lasswell has long argued the importance of securing exact quantitative data on the distribution in the world of ideological symbols. In the 1930's he initiated the use of content analysis as a device to compare political propaganda in different times and places. This research was continued at the Library of Congress during the Second World War and at the Hoover Institute during the post-war years. The RADIR studies at the latter Institution canvassed the

political symbols used in editorials in major newspapers in five countries over a 60-year period. They demonstrated such trends as a decline in attention to ideas of property and a rise in concern for welfare [60, 59, 40].

In his recent book on *The Future of Political Science,* Lasswell described some of the reasons for and circumstances of pioneering political studies in mass communications [43, pp. 161–162]:

It is generally recognized that the scientific study of communication has made giant strides in recent decades. An important date in the growth of the field was the early 1930's, when the Humanities Division of the Rockefeller Foundation and the Social Science Research Council interested themselves in the state of knowledge regarding propaganda and communication.

An observer of the academic world of the time might have taken it for granted that the initiative for accelerated research would originate with specialists in linguistics. After all, students of language were primarily responsible for investigating the most distinctive social patterns devised by man in aid of mutual comprehension. But the observer would have been mistaken. The most successful step was taken by political scientists. They provided a unified map of the field that brought specialists of many kinds to sudden awareness of a common frame of reference. The step was taken because political scientists were increasingly aware of the strategic significance for arenas of power of the control of communication. Looking at the many practitioners and technicians of the arts of communication at local, national, and international levels, political scientists were startled by the lack of communication among them.

The committee appointed by the Social Science Research Council to report on the situation was composed, for the most part, of political scientists who had previously concerned themselves with the use of guided communication by political parties, pressure-groups, or by official agencies in war and peace. The integrative, community-wide perspective of political scientists had already begun to make an impression on schools of journalism by seeking to transform the curriculum from overabsorption in ephemeral technicalities.

The conferences and bibliographic aids prepared by the council's committee were helpful in bringing together the fragments of knowledge and the diversities of technique among political scientists, historians, journalists, advertising men, public-relations experts, social psychologists, sociologists, and many other specialists [39, 41].

Acting as team members or as independent research workers, political scientists conducted descriptive or analytic studies and devised or adapted many data-gathering and data-processing procedures. Among technical innovations can be mentioned various modes of analyzing content and of interviewing message-senders and receivers.

A summary of "Recent Trends in Political Theory and Political Philosophy" by Karl W. Deutsch and Leroy N. Rieselbach [10, pp. 150–153]

stressed the contributions of cybernetics as well as of content analysis. The authors posed the "great issue that concerned theorists from Aristotle to Montesquieu—to what extent is human nature uniform in politics, and to what extent is it shaped by the spirit of times and of countries or peoples. . . ?"

A major approach toward finding answers to these questions is through the study of communication [they suggested]. The theory of communications and control—sometimes also called cybernetics, that is, the theory of steering or of government—arose in the late 1940's and the 1950's in science and technology, but some of its intellectual implications were spelled out in the work of Claude Shannon, Norbert Wiener, John Von Neumann, W. Ross Ashby, George A. Miller, Colin Cherry, Herbert Simon, Allen Newell, and others. Some inferences have been drawn from this body of thought to the theory of government and politics. This general theoretic configuration of communication channels in a society; of language and culture as habits of complementary communication; of the media of mass communication, their content and their control; the memories held by individuals and groups; the visible and invisible filtering mechanisms influencing the selective perception, transmission, and recall of information in large populations or small social groups or within the minds of individuals. Communication theory further permits us to conceive of such elusive notions as consciousness and the political will as observable processes. It defines the latter as the process by which postdecision information is so selected and censored as to subordinate it to the outcome of the predecision messages which "hardened" into the decision. Independent evidence for this process of subordinating post-decision or postcommitment messages has been presented recently within another theoretical framework by Leon Festinger and his associates.

From the viewpoint of communication theory, the content of message flows and of memories is crucial. It is the content of the memories recalled for purposes of recognition of items in current messages from the outside world—it is this content which often determines which messages will be recognized and transmitted with special speed and attention, and which other messages will be neglected or rejected. The consonance or dissonance of messages, of memories and of several projected courses of action is thus decisive for behavior. The dissociation of items from old memories and their recombination to new patterns is seen from this viewpoint as an essential step in the processes of initiative, of innovation, and of essential human freedom. Communication channels do have an influence upon the composition of message flows and memories, and hence on the content of their ensembles, but the content of messages in turn may change the operating preferences and priorities—that is, the values—of the system. . . .

The study of the content of messages has been getting a strong impetus from the development of electronic computing methods of content analysis, lending powerful technological support to the long-standing interest in content analysis pioneered earlier in the Stanford studies by Harold Lasswell and his associates and now being reissued in revised editions [40, 59, 60]. A new series of Stanford

studies, this time called "Studies in International Conflict and Integration," under the leadership of Robert C. North, Richard Brody, Ole Holsti, and others, is making extensive use of content analysis by computer, within a communications-oriented framework of concepts [57, 58].

Several major recent studies have stressed channel configurations and political communication systems. They have done so, however, usually in combination with an effective concern for the content of the messages transmitted and remembered, and of the value changes produced in the course of time. Outstanding studies of this kind are the volume edited by Lucian Pye on *Communications and Political Development* [63]; Daniel Lerner's *The Passing of Traditional Society* [45]; and the prize-winning volume by Raymond Bauer, Ithiel Pool, and Lewis Dexter on *American Business* and *Public Policy* [2].

Karl Deutsch also made a contribution in the application of theories of communication and control to problems of nationalism and political integration. He described how a study of the flow of everyday communication transactions can help determine the extent to which people belong to a particular community [9]. Deutsch again stressed the importance of message and memory systems, and suggested methods for using communication transaction flow analysis as an indicator of political cohesion.

Murray Edelman, working in the tradition of Lasswell, Mead, Burke, and Dewey, contributed an incisive analysis of the significance of symbolic acts and content to the political process itself [13]. Summarizing relevant research and theory, Edelman suggested that the myths, rites, and other satisfactions of the electoral and legislative process may confer a sense of public participation, which is only indirectly, if at all, related to what administrators and courts actually do. There is an intricate interplay between the actual allocation of power and benefits on one hand, and the cultivation of beliefs in the reality and rationality of the allocating institutions, on the other.

These contributions stress different aspects of the relationship between the processes of mass communication and the dynamics of social policy. They spell out how the patterned flow of messages, both hierarchical and lateral, defines consensus and community, delineates functional cohesion and effective policy-making, and cultivates public-belief systems. Mass media are dominant shapers of this flow because they are the only agencies of public acculturation capable of mass-producing and distributing common systems of messages beyond previous limitations of face-to-face and any other personally mediated interaction.

IV

Combining the political and sociological approaches are the contributions of C. Wright Mills, [especially 55, pp. 332–340, and 56, pp. 306–324.] Semi-

nal works in the political economy of mass communications are those of Harold Innes [30, 31] and Dallas W. Smythe [77, 78]. Harvey Levin has contributed one of the few systematic economic studies of media ownership and operation [46]. Organizational and decision-making studies have been reported by Breed [6] and Gieber [26].

Probably the best review of the sociologically and social-psychologically oriented contributions to mass-media theory and research has been given by Charles Wright [89]. His *Mass Communication: A Sociological Perspective* summarizes contributions to a theory of mass media functions developed elsewhere by Lasswell [42], Merton [54], Lazarsfeld and Merton [44], and Wright himself [90], as well as theories of mass media advanced by Inkeles [29], Siepmann [75], and Siebert, Peterson, and Schramm [74].

Wright's discussion of "The Sociology of the Audience" [89, Chap. 3] presents the conclusions of pioneering studies on patterns of influence and information diffusion, and such theoretical implications as "selective exposure," the "reinforcement effect" and the "two-step flow" theory. The latter theory, developed by Merton [53] and Katz and Lazarsfeld [33] suggests that some mass media content reaches audiences indirectly through the mediating efforts of opinion leaders. The theory affected much subsequent research and led to a call for a more sophisticated treatment of social structures. Wilensky tried to resolve the paradox of simultaneous growth of structural differentiation and cultural uniformity by reexamining media exposure and response patterns [84, p. 196]. He suggested that, on the whole, "men who have confidence in the major institutions of American society tend to distrust 'TV and radio networks'; men who trust media distrust other institutions. Finally, men whose social relations are stable tend to have fluid party loyalties. *To be socially integrated in America is to accept propaganda, advertising, and speedy obsolescence in consumption.*" (Italics in the original.)

Pioneering works in the historical-artistic-literary tradition are those of Gilbert Seldes, Leo Lowenthal, Raymond Williams, and Marshall McLuhan. Seldes [70, 71, 72] has called for, and contributed to, the development of a "physics, or perhaps the physical geography, of the popular arts." Lowenthal [47, 48, 49] traced the origins of the debate about popular culture in the eighteenth century and sketched some historical perspectives for contemporary analysis. Raymond Williams [85, 86, 87] discussed culture and society in the light of the "long revolution" in mass communications and education. Marshall McLuhan [50, 51, 52] started from Harold Innes's contention that monopoly over the raw materials and media of communications confers control over knowledge, and developed a theory that argues that any technology ("extension of man") creates a new environment whose content is the old technology in altered form. Furthermore, contends McLuhan, the shift from print to other media produces

a basic change in the "ratio of the senses" dealing with the external world, and thus a new "rationality;" hence "the medium is the message."

Contributions of Richard Altick [1], Ian Watt [80], and Richard Hoggart [28] sketched parts of the social and literary background against which the massive cultural transformation of our time may be examined.

The role of mass media in national development, social change, and international communications has received increasing attention in the work of Daniel Lerner [45], Lucian Pye [63], Leonard Doob [12], Wilbur Schramm [69], W. Phillips Davison [8], and their collaborators.

The most prolific writer, researcher, summarizer, and popularizer in the field, Wilbur Schramm, left his mark on nearly every aspect of mass media theory and research [66, 67, 68]. Anthologies edited by Bernard Rosenberg and David Manning White [65], Eric Larrabee and Rolf Meyersohn [37], Lewis A. Dexter and David Manning White [11], Norman Jacobs [32], Bernard Berelson and Morris Janowitz [5], and Charles S. Steinberg [79] contain selections (and bibliographies) reflecting much of the significant theoretical and research contributions of recent decades. More specialized summaries of research on content analysis have been written by Bernard Berelson [3], Budd and Thorp [7], Pool [61], and North et al. [57]. Joseph T. Klapper summarized research on the effects of mass communication [36]. Berelson's critique of "The State of Communication Research" [4] evoked dissent in the same publication by Schramm, Riesman, and Bauer, comment by Elihu Katz [34], and new surveys of the field by David Manning White [82, 83]. A "Quantitative Group" presented a symposium on the research of a decade published in the *Journalism Quarterly* [64].

The growing body of research and the almost inexhaustible fund of theorizing have not yet produced historically inspired, empirically based, institutionally oriented, comparative and critical theories adequate to the study of the cultural role and public policy significance of the mass media. The following notes attempt to raise some issues and advance questions pertinent to such a theory.

V

A central concern of the study of communications is the production, organization, composition, structure, distribution, and functions of message systems in society.

Concern with these patterns and processes involves basic questions of popular culture and public policy, especially in societies where mass-produced message systems provide widely distributed common currencies of social interaction. The questions are necessarily those of social science.

Practitioners in the arts and industries of communications; policy-makers in business or government; critics, participants and observers of popular culture—no matter how perceptive and well-informed in their own spheres of interest—do not have systematic, objective, and reliable information about the overall operation of the cultural processes in which they—and all of us—live and work.

The cultivation of dominant image patterns is the major function of the dominant communication agencies of any society. There is significant change in that process when there is a change in the clientele, position, or outlook of the dominant agencies of communications in culture. Such change, when it occurs, changes the *relative meaning* of existing images and behavior patterns even before it changes the patterns themselves. The history and dynamics of continuities as well as of change in the reciprocal relationships between social structures, media-message systems, and image structures are the "effects" of communications in culture.

Mass communication is the extension of institutionalized public acculturation beyond the limits of face-to-face and any other personally mediated interaction. This becomes possible only when technological means are available and social organizations emerge for the mass production and distribution of messages.

The key to the historic significance of *mass* communication does not rest on the usual concept of "masses." There were "masses" (large groups of people) reached by other forms of public communication long before the advent of modern mass communication. But new means and institutions of production and distribution, the mass media, provided new ways of reaching people. These news ways were not only technologically, but eventually also conceptually and ideologically different from the old. They were associated with and coming at a time of general transformation in the productive base of society. Their cumulative impact burst upon the Western world in the age of revolutions which was to shake the old foundations of world order and to introduce into the language most common words dealing with society, communications, and industry. The continuing transformation brought about not only concentrations of people but also a conception of "masses" related more to the movement of messages than of people. This is a conception of "mass" publics as groups so large, heterogeneous, and dispersed, that only mass production and mass distribution systems are capable of reaching them with the same messages within a short span of time, and thus of creating and maintaining some community of meaning and perspective among them.

The key to the historic significance of mass media is, therefore, the association of "mass" with a process of production and distribution. Mass communication is the technologically and institutionally based mass production and distribution of the most broadly shared continuous flow of

public messages in industrial societies. The rise of mass media to popular cultural dominance in the twentieth century represents a major continuing transformation in human affairs, extending the impact of the industrial revolution into the cultural field.

The media of mass communications—print, film, radio, television—present institutional perspectives, i.e., their own ways of selecting, composing, recording, and sharing symbols and images. They are products of technology, corporate (or other collective) organization, mass production, and mass markets. They are the cultural arms of the industrial order from which they spring.

Mass media perspectives reflect a structure of social relations and a stage of industrial development. American mass media, for example, established as adjuncts of an already high degree of productive development, became generally consumer and market oriented. In countries where mass media were established at less advanced stages, as agents of planned industrialization, these media are more oriented toward production and development.

Mass media policies reflect not only stages of industrial development and the general structure of social relations but also particular types of institutional and industrial organization and control [16, 17, 18]. Corporate or collective organization, private or public control, and the priorities given to artistic, political, and economic policy considerations govern their overall operations, affect their relationships to other institutions, and shape their public functions [19, 20, 21, 22].

Popular self-government is possible when people, acting as citizens, collectively create policy alternatives rather than only respond to them. This can come about when knowledge of events and ways of looking at events are public, that is, shared with full knowledge of their being shared. Private systems of "knowings and viewings" have to be transformed into public systems of "knowings and viewings" in order to form publics whose perspectives will bear upon social policy in ways that can create policy alternatives. The process by which private knowledge is transformed into public knowledge is literally the process of *publication*.

Publication as a general social process is the creation of shared ways of selecting and viewing events and aspects of life. In its most advanced form, it is mass production and distribution of message systems transforming private perspectives into broad public perspectives. This transformation brings publics into existence. Once created, these publics are maintained through continued publication. They are supplied with selections of information and entertainment, fact and fiction, news and fantasy or "escape" materials, which are considered important or interesting or entertaining and profitable (or all of these) in terms of the perspectives to be cultivated.

Publication is thus the basis of self-government among large groups

of people too numerous and too dispersed to interact face-to-face or in any other personally mediated fashion. That is why "the press" has a special place in the constitutions and laws of all modern states. Publication is the formation and information (and "entertainment") of publics; the creation and cultivation of public perspectives; the ordering and weighting of shared knowledge; the maintenance through mass-produced message systems of vast and otherwise heterogeneous communities of perspective and meaning among people who could interact no other way. The truly revolutionary significance of modern mass communications is its "public-making" ability. That is the ability to form historically new bases for collective thought and action quickly, continuously, and pervasively across previous boundaries of time, space, and status.

These notions of what I called elsewhere the institutionalized approach to mass communications [23] present mass media as creators of technologically produced and mediated message systems, as new forms of institutionalized public acculturation, and as the major common carriers of social interaction and public-policy formation in modern societies. Thus conceived, studies of mass media revolve around problems of message system theory and analysis, institutional process theory and analysis, and the investigation of relationships between message systems, social and organizational structure, image formation, and public policy. A theory of mass media would, therefore, deal with these questions: How do media compose and structure their message systems at different times and in different societies? How are message-production systems and mass-distribution systems organized, managed, controlled? What perspectives and what patterns of choices do these systems make available to what publics? In what proportions, and with what kinds and degrees of attention, emphasis, and appeal do they weight these choices? What general systems of public images, and what common perspectives on existence, priorities, values, and relationships does each structure of choices tend to cultivate?

When we ask about the composition and structure of mass-produced message systems, we ask about mass media content. When we ask what types of mass-produced message systems tend to be produced under different cultural, institutional, technological, conditions, we ask about mass media content in a comparative setting [20, 22]. In the analysis of content, we want to know about the dynamics of representation of what is, what is important, what is right, and what is related to what else. That is, we want to know the distribution of attention (selection and frequency of topics); the ordering of items in some order of priority (by emphasis); how items are evaluated or judged in context and in relation to some norm; and what groups of items tend to cluster together in certain contexts.

When we ask about influences, relationships, decision-making procedures governing the mass-production of message system, we ask about the

institutional process in mass communications [21]. And when we ask about information flow, cultivation of images and belief systems, formation and maintenance of publics, delineation of issues and weighting of choices in given frameworks of knowledge, we are asking about communication consequences of mass media content and process.

It may be premature, only 30 years or so after the pioneers have begun to ask such questions, to speak of the emergence of a discipline devoted to the search for answers. But the questioning has become more systematic and persistent, methods of research have become more sophisticated and rigorous, theorizing has become better informed and disciplined, and academic organizations have been established to lead the search for answers and the quest for a theory.

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