Communication in the Age of Negotiation

by Stanley A. Deetz

I have enjoyed my tenure as an association officer and have learned much from it. The past couple of years have provided an opportunity for me to become more intimately acquainted with the field, to listen to members of our community, and to become more familiar with their work and problems. My tenure has also provided me an opportunity to help develop the International Communication Association as an organization and the professional study of communication. I feel fortunate that I also have been able to continue working on my own research, and with a variety of fantastic students. What has made this time easiest and most exciting for me is that these activities have not been separate or different activities. Doing interesting research, working with students, and promoting the study of communication and the development of the Association have been driven by the same goals and have been mutually supportive. Each has helped provide a particular type of a communication disciplinary response to our wider social situation. It is not simply the questions: Have I published? Have I taught well? Is the field respected more? Is the Association stronger? A more core concern that made these activities meaningful has been the impact on the societies in which we live.

I believe that communication studies are not only an important and interesting professional activity, but are an extraordinarily important part of our contemporary response to a set of new and changing social situations. Whether we approach this response as a professional society or as researchers and teachers, the way we define the situation to which we are responding is important. During the past several years we have worried about the status of the field. We have had many discussions about promoting the work of communication programs and communication scholars. We have defended the field from attacks from the outside. Much of this has been necessary. Universities are changing, resources are in short supply, and support from external communities has not been great. I do not believe, however, that we will make the important contributions that are necessary by engaging the problems at this level. Fundamentally, we need to make a different type of contribution rather than to simply engage in more promotion of our activities. Showing the relevancy of our work, or even choosing more relevant (or fundable) topics, will not provide important leadership, provide lasting security, or fulfill our social responsibilities. I have

Stanley Deetz (Ph.D., Ohio University) is professor of Communication at the University of Colorado–Boulder. His research interests include organizational theory, organizational communication, and communication theory.

already discussed at length communication studies as a disciplinary activity. Here I wish to look at the contemporary context to which our work must respond, and then turn to conceptions of communication that aid in that endeavor.

Rarely are societies influenced by the answers discovered in social science research and rarely have the social sciences been more respected because they have provided more or more right answers. As Kenneth Gergen and Richard Rorty have argued, social scientists have had an impact when they have provided new and more interesting ways to think about and discuss everyday social events. Some in our field have been on television and in the news because of their studies and data. However, their impact has come from clever expressions, evocative metaphors, and stories that help frame a way of thinking. Claiming a space different from more data and clever rhetors is key to having meaningful impact. Providing the public with a vocabulary for their own perception and discussion of events and problems is social science at its best.

I believe that communication studies can provide a novel and helpful vocabulary, a useful way for the public to see and talk about their situation. The discourses of biology, economics, individualism, and therapy may be largely dominant, but I believe that they fail to serve the public well. We should not make these vocabularies ours. We should help foster a distinct discourse of greater potential that focuses on what is problematic in our contemporary context and provides a way to discuss these problems. Communication is not just a phenomenon of study, but can provide important new explanations (see Deetz, 1994). Powerful disciplines, compelling theories, and productive research arise in relation to human situations lending insight into them and transforming them at once.

Describing Our Contemporary Situation

How shall we characterize our current situation? We do not lack for grand expressions of the character of our times. These come from those both with the "fi" and "phe" profit (prophet) motives. The proximity to the millennium probably adds to the tenor. Globalization and age of information stand alongside other prophetic pronouncements competing for our attention, or better, our way of attending to the problems and potentials in our situation. Clearly, our time is filled with great changes, and it is tempting to give it a unique historical status. All generations probably have seen the changes in their time as radical, progressive, and threatening to life as they knew it. Their changes were seen as more central and probing than those of earlier generations. We all wish we were special. However, we need not make claims of historical exceptionalism to take seriously the importance of the choices we must make. Social changes at the ending portions of the last century gave rise to sociology and psychology, and changed much about how people understood themselves and their relations to others. Social changes at the last millennium clearly established concepts of human rights and due process. Fundamental changes are taking place

today that challenge and provide potentials for the quality of our life together. These changes, however, are not well expressed in our current ways of talking about ourselves, our institutions, or our social relations.

Ongoing Social Changes
Several changes seem apparent and widely discussed, even if what they mean is often contested. Globalization has taken place, and technological developments have led to new ways of being connected with each other. We have a lot more contact with peoples and communities unlike ourselves, much greater interconnectedness and interdependence with others, and a breakdown of many traditional boundaries and the institutions made possible by them. Allow me to characterize these changes before suggesting what they mean to communication studies.

Although the total diversity and social heterogeneity on the planet probably has been reduced over the past few centuries, the experience of human heterogeneity by most individuals has increased. Telecommunication and transportation developments regularly place us in contact with people who are quite different from ourselves. Our workplaces contain more diversity than in the past including the mixing of people different from each other on most every humanly denoted distinction. Certainly segregation still exists (based in different human, social, and geographic boundaries), but still, the assumption of a homogeneous community and workplace sealed off from others is relatively rare today.

Even where direct contact is less frequent, interdependency and interconnectedness still exist. Employment and environmental choices in one region quickly have influence on neighbors and, often, globally. Increased interdependence arises in many ways. Current business relations, for example, leave pricing dependent on a global labor market, and supplies and parts dependent on scattered areas of the world. Highly volatile toxins and large-scale concentrated operations make environmental issues regional and, often, global. The globalization of high-consumption lifestyles provides for the possibility of global warming, atmospheric ozone depletion, rain forest destruction, and other potential global crises. Even apart from global issues, teleconnections make events and problems in even isolated areas immediately available to the world community.

Further as interconnectedness and interdependence increase, institutions that represent mechanisms for the representation of the "common good" decline in their capacity either to make decisions or enforce them. Perhaps this has been clearest in regard to the state. For much of the modern period, the state has served as the principal site for maintaining the general order, resolving conflicts, and providing a value orientation to continued development. The modern period, coming to an end, could well be described as the age of the political and the age of the democratic state. In our contemporary situation, however, the state system has been both attacked and eroded in many ways. Global markets, global financial systems, and free market ideology have effectively moved large portions of commerce away from state control. As life is more

defined by consumer products and the resources to acquire them, this separation assumes greater significance. Virtually all proactive decisions regarding the use of natural resources, the development of products, the distribution of income, work relations, and even education and child-rearing practices are now being made in commercial sites (see Deetz, 1992). The state, at best, reactively promotes the commercial enterprise and cleans up the various social messes created by the commercial system.

As many have shown, the average person in most societies is more a consumer than a citizen. Individual marketplace decisions have replaced socially based political discussions. This changes the nature of decisions, our manner of engagement, and how power relationships work. The press and public cynicism about politics and the inability of political entities to make major decisions are visible manifestations of deeper changes that have already transpired. The substitution of economic transactions for political discourse is of general social concern. It also must be of concern for communication scholars. Much of our work is tied to the idea that discussion matters, that talk represents values better than consumption. Most of us would doubt that economic transactions can substitute for discussion in promoting self understanding, developing creative alternatives, or representing the common good.

Further, mass communication continues to globalize. Disney and others have created massive culture industries where virtually no community is shielded from the enticing display of dominant American values. This can be read both positively and negatively independent of one's feeling about Disney or other promoted value or religious systems. The culture industry has weakened the hold of traditional cultures, making debate and cultural choice in heretofore closed communities possible. However, it has often precluded value debate by a type of cultural imperialism. The asymmetry of promotional opportunity and resources merely leads to a closed and noncontestable culture being replaced by another. Global news has a similar ambivalence. Clearly the understanding of the problems and concerns, and even tolerance, of other people is enhanced. To some extent, a world community has developed. At the same time, however, more and more of our significant experiences are mediated by others with unknown and inaccessible agendas. We respond not to the events but to the events as shown, told, and promoted by others.

Furthermore, the development of massive information systems has continued to change the very nature of knowledge and the relation of discussion to it. Mass-distributed opinion and commercially sponsored knowledge artifacts stand in a strange autonomous, anonymous space, where community standards of knowledge production and critical judgment disappear. Retrieval replaces exploration, argumentation, and assessment as the principal route to truth. The relation to others follows a similar path. Recognition of important changes should neither lead us to the utopian dreams of commercial sponsors nor to the various varieties of technophobia. New technologies are being embraced. Even with mixed and uncertain results, business, government, and schools are dedicating incredibly large portions of their resources to implementing these technologies. Although their significance can be overstated, clearly they are part

of our contemporary situation. Like mass media before them, the Internet and the various aligned systems alter human relations and social institutions in important, if not always fundamental, ways.

I believe that all these are significant changes. Together, they provide a mosaic of our contemporary situation filled with intersecting and accentuating themes, contradictions, and ambivalence. Each entails serious issues open to exploration and discussion. I do not wish to pull one out as more important to communication studies than others. I believe that the intensity of the discussions of specific changes may lead us to overlook the more core issue. Thus, I think it is useful to think of the array as an impressionist painting where if one squints or acquires enough distance a picture emerges. What I think emerges most significantly in looking at these developments is the way they have eroded social consensus and provided a context where people must work out a world together without easy or lasting consensus. The challenge for communication scholars is to develop ways of understanding and interacting that can help people live in this, what many have called, postmodern world.

The Issue of Social Consensus

Social consensus was largely unproblematic in the traditional world. Dominant worldviews retold in grand narratives were passed along from generation to generation. Members largely agreed on the nature of people and events, why bad things happened, the language and concepts to be used, and what life opportunities were to be expected. Largely these were uncontested in any fundamental way. Because the possibility of encountering different ways of understanding the world were minimal, one's particular cultural view could be universalized as the way things are or were intended by Gods and nature. Appropriate authorities and institutions upheld the consensus in their own domains. Even in the Western world, with its development of modern science and open attack on traditional worldviews, consensus was still considered possible and desirable as organized by science and its authorities.

Global connectedness, in many different ways, relativizes cultural consensus. The primary props of naturalization and neutrality give way to understanding the contrived nature of the consensus and the advantage it gives to dominant groups. In a more subtle and complicated way, the same erosion of consensus occurs in societies dominated by Western science. In more contemporary societies social consensus must be constantly recreated in a contested field with visible understood alternatives. The language of the postmodernists heightens our attention to the way consensus works and has become problematic in our contemporary context. I think that their descriptions of social life are useful without following any particular camp's larger philosophical theories. Even in doing this, however, I do not think I depart far from people's experiences of their own everyday lives.

Communication researchers, like everyday people, have at their disposal theories and conceptions developed in homogeneous societies where underlying social consensus could be assumed. In such societies talk assumed a consenual background and discussion happened within the confine of broader

agreements, rather than being about consensus or within an open field where consensus was a product of the interaction. In traditional societies, one's worldview was confirmed even in the spaces of disagreement. However, what about situations where to admit the conflict itself challenges one's worldview? For example, the discussion as to whether "race" exists is far different from the question of the relative degree of racism in the judicial system. A prior consensus on the former is necessary for a discussion of the latter. Prior consensus is increasingly at issue across many aspects of contemporary life.

What at one time could easily be considered the essence or identity of a person or thing is now considered a fleeting product. Life has a verb-like rather than a noun-like quality. For example, gender and personality qualities are more clearly seen as activities than as stable properties. Personal identities, whether based on gender, class, employment, or familial roles, are relatively fluid and not easily fixed in meaning or expectation. Take, for example, the difficulties of a labor–management split in many of our highly participatory workplaces. Boundaries and markings slip away and become contested. Personal identities, social ordering principles, accepted knowledge, and shared values all become relatively tenuous accomplishments today. Most of us experience this in our most mundane daily existence. When I grew up in an isolated Indiana farm community, I had no question that my parents were authorities, and neither of my parents had any question of what their daily duties entailed. My own 4-year-old clearly sees me as more of a resource in his environment than an authority. My wife and I sometimes call each other three or four times a day to determine who is doing what and when. My life, like that of many others, is more a constant negotiation than a set of presumptions. Coordination is a constant accomplishment, often begun anew each moment.

Am I simply soft or unfocused? No, I think I, like others, make out the best I can in a very different world. The tough thing is that I have to work out a lot with others. The good thing is that I get to work them out with others that I love rather than accepting that which is simply given to me. For all of us, the institutional and authority structures that previously reduced life conflicts and provided relatively fixed and coherent scripts cannot be simply assumed or sustained in an easy fashion. Suspicion, resistance, and alternatives seem endlessly available. What appears to a natural order, a specific god or gods, or even a method or procedure often falls flat outside our own community.

Many today think of this as a crisis situation. They cite the presence of violence, crime, drug abuse, cults, sensationalism, and suicides as evidence of the deterioration of the social world. This deterioration is often blamed on television, family, government, social entitlement, and other favored targets. Although difficulties and crisis potential abound, I see this situation as one of tremendous opportunity and potential, if we develop the abilities to work well within it. We do not need faith in a new integrated consensus, whether commercially sponsored or democratically founded. I believe that with careful attention to communication we can learn to live happily in a world filled with continuous fundamental negotiations, and that people in such a world can make much more satisfying decisions together. Our situation requires that we

make more joint decisions at the same time that it is more difficult to do so. Our new situation provides freedoms as well as difficulties. The literature on society often either glorifies the new freedoms or laments the losses. Few recognize our situation as neither good nor bad, but one in which we must make choices. Communication processes are central choices. Freedom and crisis are not necessarily contradictory. Freedom comes in the decline of authority relations and assumed social orders—the various ways life was defined for us. With this freedom comes insecurity, confusion, and mere opportunism that lead to a longing for a past and/or social problems. In this situation, new orders are promoted daily and a contrived consensus can replace organic ones with the hope for affirmation rather than discussion. I think we can do better than that. I believe the genuine contribution of communication study comes precisely in providing something different and better.

The Native Solutions

If the diagnoses sketched here have validity, we should find everyday people, as well as scholars, trying to provide a response. I believe that there is clear evidence that "native" responses have developed to our new situation but that the most common of these offer little potential. These native solutions entail the development of particular ways of seeing, thinking, and talking about the world that identifies specific problems and proposes solutions. As in the case of most native solutions, they draw on leading social themes, trying to reclaim and reapply them to this situation. I identify three here: a new traditionalism, science and commerce, and personal opportunism. I will suggest that each of these discourses misrecognize central features and opportunities in our situation partly because of the inadequate theories of communication that they share. None of these native solutions provides much hope for the future. Each stalls the prospect of direct engagement in better choice making.

New Traditionalism
Despite the wide discussion of globalization and the "global village," a new type of tribalism has emerged at many places in the world. Often this includes an appeal to traditional orthodox religious principles or ethic exclusionary politics. Often the discourse makes explicit concern with the downfall of authority and eroding consensus. The past is held up as a time when things made sense and people knew their place. In these movements there is an attempt to fix human identity, social-ordering principles, and shared knowledge. Most often, we attribute these beliefs to religious sects and conservative fringes, (e.g., the "religious right" in the United States). However, similar responses to our situation are made by others who are not usually described as traditional-ists. The section of New Jersey where I lived has experienced a flood of new residents. They represent a kind of second wave of suburbanization. The "Country Classics," "Heritage Hills," and "Fox Runs" developments they make home are new conclaves of homogeneity—middle-class projects and ghettos.

These represent attempts by people to move from uncertain and fluid worlds where they feel out of control to boundaried retreats of consensus. Building patterns and pricing arrangements create a new tribe. The exclusions are rarely along class or ethnic lines in any simple way. They rarely denote a particular view of the world and how it should work. Although the views are liberal and secular, the consequence is very little diversity and self-referential logic of discussion. A certain "middle-classness" exists, largely focused on being protected from an increasingly complex external world filled with problems residents themselves participate in creating. Their kids are discouraged from playing with others from outside their development. They take comfort in the fact that others live their lives as they do.

Neither new nor old traditionalism offers much hope for the human community. In any of its forms it tends to be exclusionary, deprecating, and even violent toward others. Much of its members' time and energy is put into securing boundaries and acquiring the resources for separation, rather than making decisions together. Ultimately, I doubt that reactive groups of this sort can survive. Because such groups cannot be sealed off from the wider society (as with traditional communities), they must either constantly retreat further, or finally begin to participate in wider social decision-making.

Science and Commerce

A second native solution is distinctly modernist in character. It is based in a utopian view of science and commerce widely accepted by universities and scholars, and supported by powerful economic sponsors. Such a discourse holds out for a new integrated world order based in the new telecommunication capacities and global business. Benjamin Barber referred to this as the "McWorld." However, it is not based primarily on the sale of sodas and hamburgers. Disney perhaps best exemplifies the close tie in Western value systems among orderliness, integration, and technological innovation as massive cultural politics. The discourse openly proclaims the death of ideology and the political. It presents a contrived social consensus arising out of marketplace and scientific ideologies in its place.

This is Bill Gates's way to the future. His is a global system overcoming old boundaries placed in the direct service of people, or, as MCI commercials proclaim, "the Internet knows no age, gender, race, or nationality. What a great time to be alive." However, the boundaries, logics, language, and preferences of these systems are overlooked and universalized as science was before them. The prophets of the information age have become the priests, constantly promoting the consumption of more information, more cultural products, and more goods and services.

The public sphere as a place of deliberation and discussion and the political arena, more generally, are openly deprecated. Except for the ways they promote business interests and technology, all values are held as backward looking and threatening to the utopian world they foresee. Economic development is seen as based on increased consumption; consumers make good world citizens.

Nonindustrialized regions are encouraged to industrialize and industrialized areas to move to high-end technologies.

This response includes a liberalism less common to the new traditionalists. It prides itself in its cosmopolitan diversity. However, the embracing of diversity is directed at reducing irrational responses to others than at embracing genuine differences and learning from them. The cosmopolitan is Teflon-coated, and the exotic is tasted but given no standing. It is a food court or Tiger Woods diversity that may be multiethnic or even multiracial, but not multicultural. The ultimate goal is integration into a techoscientific consumer world society rather than the respect of difference and the fullness of human experience. When Taco Bell opens in the local U.S. mall, it adds the thinnest sense of diversity. When Taco Bell opens in Mexico City, the cycle is complete. A mass-reproduced simulation now returns to drive the real out of the market.

Little future resides in this path. The environmental consequences alone give us pause for thought. The consensus created is thin. It only partly fulfills human needs and is emotionally impoverished. Thus, we remain insecure and empty, needing something more to fulfill us. This sets in motion an endless quest for more to keep the system running and to assure a place for one's self in it.

Cynical Opportunism
Our situation also has given rise to a new form of opportunism. In mobile, fluid situations, without strong consensus and communities, certain individuals, groups, and companies learn to act opportunistically. The decline of surveillance of behavior, voluntary compliance with larger social values, and lasting relationships allows the engagement in practices that are harmful to others, but of self-advantage without penalty. In fact, the more mobile and less committed an entity, the greater its advantage. For example, with globalization of business, companies that are able to move operations quickly and are not attached to the development or value system of a particular society are clearly advantaged.

The same is true of individuals. For many, moral standards fall by the side. Unfortunately, as it becomes clearer to some that opportunism pays, cynicism grows. Situational mobility presents many short-term advantages, with the long-term costs borne by others. The difficulties of assigning blame or even predicting the consequences of activities in complex situations provide considerable cover. The lack of systemic thinking makes "tragedies of the common" commonplace. Let me give a simple example. Because of highway congestion, nearly all turns in New Jersey are made from the right-hand lane using "jughandles" for "U" and left turns. It is not uncommon for long lines to develop waiting to make the right turn. As you wait in the line there are always a percentage of people who zip by to the left only to cut in at the turn-off. Every kindergarten student in New Jersey already understands that "cutting" is not a good thing, but what happens in this particular situation? Because the individual remains anonymous, the rudeness he or she visits upon people he or she will never see again leaves the activity without consequences (except for the growing, and even somewhat understandable, highway rage). There is a

momentary advantage for the rule violator, and no clear mechanism for the community to assert itself against the violator. In fact, those who stay in line appear to be the more irrational. The system survives, however, precisely because most people choose to comply voluntarily against their own personal advantage. If everyone tried to pass on the left and cut in, the highway would quickly become impassable.

The example is a good metaphor for our larger situation. A similar structural arrangement exists in universities and many other places. In my own university work, many of the things I do routinely (e.g., spending time with students with problems, developing instructional innovations, or grading rigorously) are quite irrational. I am a tenured full professor with little to be gained or lost from any such activity. More importantly, in a large, anonymous university, if the activity cannot be documented through a publication, grant, or student rating, it has no currency. Opportunistically, I should do other things. I suspect this accounts for the tacit instructor-student contract in many large universities: "I'll leave you alone if you leave me alone." Such a practice, when widespread, undermines the educational enterprise. Even if disadvantages do finally accrue to the institution, these are likely to fall most heavily on those who are not opportunists. The tragedy of this became clear to me when I realized that I would not want my own children to attend the type of institution in which I worked.

Do not get me wrong. I am not saying that people are more or less moral than in the past. The structural arrangement has changed. The difficulties with the structural arrangements are not just that they are unfair. Massive dislocations are already occurring. In time, more people will become cynical and opt for the opportunistic track. A society cannot function for long with a large percentage of its people choosing to do whatever they can to book first class on their own self-described Titanic. Some of the concern with the so-called "Generation X" is that the person growing up today understands the structural situation better than the rest of us. Too many, not only are many of the remaining shared social principles seen as arbitrary and made by others who gain personally from them, but there are no apparent alternatives to a world structured in this way. Cynicism and opportunism become the only aware responses.

Misleading Conflicts

Not only is each of these ways of thinking through our contemporary situation problematic, it also has constrained our capacity to discuss alternatives. The discourse of each of these responses elaborates a criticism of the other two. The traditionalists bemoan the secularization and consumerism of the technoscience-commerce practitioner and the moral depravity of the opportunist. The science and commerce folks point out the backward-looking of the traditionalists and the groundlessness and relativism of the opportunists. The opportunists further note the "out-of-touchness" of the traditionalists vis-à-vis and the master plans of the science-commerce people. Opposition to any of these positions is quickly transformed to the expected criticism of one of the others. The possibility of new options gets lost. All three alternatives fail in that they do not meaningfully confront our situation. Rather, they react in different ways to the symptoms of it.

It is precisely the escaping of these limited alternatives and the way they frame the conflict that communication studies has to offer. None of the alternatives helps us work out a life together.

The Age of Negotiation

The principal need of our time is to develop the capacity to make mutually satisfying decisions in contexts where fundamental consensus is absent. In this sense, we have entered what is most usefully described as an age of negotiation. It is a time, contra the traditionalist and the science and commerce people, when lasting social consensus is neither possible nor desired. Yet, it is a time, contra the opportunists, when we must make decisions together. Communication studies is in the best position to help us accomplish this.

This is not to say that most communication theories or communication teachers and researchers aid in this goal. Quite to the contrary. Many communication scholars are embroiled with the age-of-information conception. Many still treat communication as a phenomenon best explained psychologically, sociologically, or economically. Still, within communication studies, some have begun distinctive work that, if pursued, can aid society in significant ways. These studies are based on a very different concept of how life and communication work. These scholars are able to help us productively deal with the erosion of consensus and to actualize the new freedoms offered, as well as to provide important collective action. We may well have the opportunity to engage with each other in ways no one has been able to in the past. Although I think that it is important for us to understand our problems, this is not a time to lament them. For we, perhaps more than any other group of teachers and scholars, have the opportunity to contribute to the larger community, and are beginning to develop the concepts to do that. Allow me here to sketch a few of these directions.

Participation Versus Control

We must consider the goals of communication analysis itself. Most studies focus on control. Like most native theories of communication, the attempt is to look at processes of persuasion, influence, compliance gaining, uncertainty reduction, social integration,and information transmission. As many have shown, communication studies across our many topical contexts have been tied to administration and its promotion. This is no surprise, for when fundamental consensus exists, consensus reproduction and maintenance are primary activities. Historically, only occasionally has the concern with communication been one of the advancement of open participation and our capacity to make decisions together. Even within democratic societies, expanded communicative activity (but rarely participation) has been the central goal. Much of the reason for this rests within the communication concepts inherent in liberal democracy itself. For liberal democracy, communication is about expression and advocacy. The presumption is that if everyone argues from his or her interest, a productive

decision will magically arise. Quite apart from what we know about the likelihood of this in practice through divorce courts and the U.S. Congress, it is conceptually very weak. The 18th-century situation and problems to which this conception was a response were quite different than what we face today. The philosophy of control embedded in both the conceptions of social sciences, expertise, and communication is tough to break, but it must be broken if we are to make our contribution.

The difference between a philosophy of control and one of participation was brought home clearly to me during my Fulbright to Sweden. I was asked to give many addresses as I traveled, and I was pretty good at it. Audiences were responding. I was asked to do more. A few people even suggested that I teach Swedes more about the art of speaking. I was feeling good. The real lesson came, however, when a friend sincerely asked me one day whether I thought that by speaking so well I might be silencing others. This was a much more interesting concern, matched only by the response to my advice given to a media regulator on improving the "dismal quality," and hence viewership, of Swedish TV. "Why would we want people to watch more television?"

Recently more of our studies have started to take the promotion of participation seriously. The central question focuses on how to engage in communication so that more positions are represented in the decisions we eventually make. Here, issues of creativity and mutual benefit are prominent. How can we talk in ways in which the discussion is enriched, that positions mutually change, and that apparently unnecessary discussions are initiated? If we focus on participation rather than control as a goal, many core communication concepts are transformed.

Even as scholars are beginning to make advances in the study of participation, our textbooks and programs of study often lag far behind. This is especially unfortunate, because it is through our undergraduate students that we most completely and powerfully engage with the wider society. For all of the discussion of the promotion of our field of study, we often omit our most important audience—the audience most likely to engage fully with us and to impact on society. A new social discourse is not likely to arise from our journals, conferences, or press releases about our work. Our students are extraordinarily important. Our text and curricula hardly do them or us a service.

Part of the problem is relevancy in a simple sense. One cannot imagine the circumstances under which one would ever use the material there. The endless definitions, names, and paragraph reviews of studies might at best be relevant to someone intending someday to go to graduate school and attend our conferences. However, to what end, beyond the test, would the average student use this? Students do not need more names for what they already know. They need insightful conceptions that allow them to see things and respond in situations that they could not see or do in the absence of the concepts.

Relevancy is not the only issue, though. Partly because of their reviewish nature, but more often from their theoretical impoverishment, most texts do not deal seriously with issues of participation at all. Most are totally dominated by a philosophy of control. If participation is a concern at all, it is reduced to liberal-

democratic issues of free speech. Issues of public information and clear expression are presented devoid of any careful attention to the politics of experience or social constructionist processes. Communication is clearly seen as the administration of a world rather than the central process of making a world with others.

Our texts join with information and media professionals, to reproduce a dichotomy between opinion and knowledge. The educated presumably stand on the side of expertise and authority against myth and the popular. In this communication, knowledge and control form a tight system. The need to move beyond the battles between opinion and authority is missed. In a world of contested knowledge claims, knowledge is not communicated. Knowledge is a critical social product accomplished in communication. Learning to participate in knowledge production overcomes both opinion and authority.

Taking the "Other" Seriously

Our liberal-democratic heritage focuses on communication as self-expression. In the U.S. we have a constitutional guarantee of the freedom of expression, but no guarantee of that which is more central to participation, that all relevant positions be developed and known. Couple expressionism with the desire for consensus, and it is no surprise that the "other" is to be transformed through communication. In contrast, many scholars have come to understand the importance of the "otherness" of the other. It is by the otherness that the self is productively transformed. The very capacity to escape the fixity of one's own views and homogeneous community is through seeking the other—that which is different and cannot be denied. Without that, communication is reduced to the reproduction of already possessed meanings. The full benefits of our negotiation, as well as its rightness for all, are based in the retention of the "other." The notion of communication as "to make common" has all too often been read as to make alike, rather than to understand the productivity of mutually holding our differences in relation to each other. The challenge of the "other" in a heterogeneous society is responsible for both the erosion of social consensus and the space of freedom to make a more satisfying world with them, freed from historical dominations. To the extent that self-presentation makes our own otherness available to the other rather than as an attempt to control them, we initiate important social discussions.

One of the tricks of communication that we are beginning to understand is how self-presentation can initiate rather than close discussions. Still, few of our common models of interaction draw attention to the meaning-formation processes in interaction, and most miss the core relation of otherness to it. This is gradually changing. Some argumentation theorists, among others, are doing much to help us understand this negotiative potential. This is a direction we must embrace.

Concerns with Forum and Voice

If our society is to realize its negotiative potential, we need both forums (i.e., places to talk), and voice (i.e., an ability to speak for ourselves). Both forums

and voices are insufficiently developed in contemporary society. The need for forums is somewhat easier to conceptualize and has been subject to more attention by communication scholars and others. Most of the concern with forums has been closely tied to everyday concepts of freedom of speech and the marketplace of ideas. These discussions tend to follow the belief that, if sufficient opportunities are present for discussion, better, more representative decisions will be made. A place for speech is assumed to provide the opportunity for new ideas and negotiation. Forums alone, however, offer little guarantee. I have studied many workplace participation programs. Only occasionally do they represent the interests of participants better than other systems. More often, they are used to entice workers to buy into decisions made by others. Similarly, although the Internet has much potential to provide places for negotiation, rarely does it do so. More often, the talk there is better described as "show and yell." This should be of little surprise to most of us. Neither longer nor more faculty meetings, in any consistent way, increase faculty control over decisions that influence faculty lives or those of their students. In longer meetings, bladder size may be the most important determinant of influence. At best, forums are a necessary but not sufficient condition for participation. Further, forums developed following communication models of liberal democracy are significantly different from those aimed at participation and negotiation.

This does not mean that the availability of forums is not important. Clearly, access to mass media and the Internet, as well as the development of employee participation programs, offers possibilities. Unfortunately, excessive attention to issues like these strip energy away from equally important issues and give a false sense of accomplishment when they are instituted. A good example of this is the wiring of schools for the Internet with the presumption of democratization. Just how much usage will be given to implicit and explicit commercial messages coming in and the social and experiential effects of such usage remain unclear. What is clear is that other essential forms of literacy are often underfunded and pushed aside.

Not only is it true in contemporary society that access to major forums is limited, and participation in them skewed in favor of certain groups, access alone is only a beginning of understanding contemporary needs. The way we engage in forums is a critical concern. The primary concern has to be directed to the constitutive communicative processes through which meanings themselves are formed. It is of little value to proclaim that meanings are in people if we do not ask whose meanings we're talking about. Freedom of speech, and even places of speech, offer little if the meanings expressed are a result of distorted formative processes. Liberal democracy and the humanism sponsoring it offer little if the ideas being expressed are framed in social processes that preclude certain alternatives and cannot be contested. As feminist groups have carefully shown for years, "the personal is political." The political analysis of the personal must reside along.side the political analysis of the public. In contrast to expression, developing the type of discussions that help us develop the full variety of human experiences is essential for us to be able to make mutually satisfactory decisions together. The sociality of communication, where individu-

als are understood as end products of active historical process, is overlooked for the individual as the possessor and expresser of meaning. Communication analysis needs to focus on the social process that leaves certain ideas to be advantages in formation as well as expression. Acquiring "voice" is central to this.

We have known this, of course, for some time. What is remarkable is how little of it has found careful presentation in our texts and public discussions. As many communication organizations lined up to fight censorship of the Internet, the much more significant implicit censorship through the commercial, routine-based, and thought-formation process remained academic. The most critical forms of censorship are those that lead to certain ideas never being thought, perceptions never made, and feelings never felt. Many communication professionals in these discussions oddly turned up on the side of Disney, Gates, pornography, and violence, but not on the side of open discussion and mutual decision-making in society. I do not believe this represents well the positions of either scholars or the public. I think many lack the concepts to attend to the world carefully and to talk about it productively in ways that voice their values, concerns, and desires. This is our job.

The discussions of voice in its various dimensions by feminist and cultural studies scholars are contributing much. They are showing us how we can construct situations so that people not only have a right to speak, but the opportunity to form and construct meanings that, if brought to the public places of discussion, can make meaningful differences in the way the larger public thinks through issues.

Focused attention on voice alters contemporary discussions. The access to the Internet has allowed a large number of people (some of whom were excluded before) to acquire information. However, that information is largely contrived and developed within the interests of a limited number of particular groups in society. The process by which that information is produced and the interest of those who sponsor it remains invisible and not open to discussion. Interests hidden behind neutrality hamper discussions that produce voice. The important possibility of negotiating different types of information and knowledge is lost. The critical questions of whose knowledge and which community's way of forming it are not asked. In contrast, we must ask, is this the type of technologically assisted connection that allows us to engage in a discussion that encourages alternatives to arise and investigation of construction processes that enhance the possibility of voice?

Contemporary communication systems rarely enhance voice. News media tend to polarize and simplify issues and engage in activities that express known positions rather than initiate discussion that creates not-yet-known ones. Conflicts tend to be normalized and reported in ways that fix positions rather than aid negotiation.

Advocacy Versus Negotiation
Further, alone with our all too often alignment with information models and liberal-democratic theories of communication, comes an encouragement of advocacy rather than negotiation. This is not a new concern. Anyone going

through divorce court or looking at the costs of litigation in the U.S. understands the costs of a model of communication focused on the expression of self-interest rather than a commitment to mutual goals. Despite awareness of the problems of the focus on self-interests, and even advice to the contrary, many communication scholars fail to see the relation between their conceptions of communication and these difficulties. Even the more rational models of negotiation still view communication in a derivative form focused on the expression of interests rather than the invention of ways of living together.

The most basic issue is the way the conception of communication in connection with democracy focuses on the "saying" rather than the "deciding." If you ask people what democracy is, most people will describe democracy as the capacity to engage in free expression—to argue for their point of view. Rarely is democracy described in relation to the capacity to make mutually satisfying decisions with others. We have missed the productive side of communication to make choices together for the sake of the reproductive side, which is to present one's self. Even with communication scholars, mutual decision-making becomes a lost part of communication. Thus, not only is the sociality of meaning, knowledge, and person formation overlooked for the sake of ideas, interest, and information that are already there, but so is the sociality of making decisions. The study of communication is reduced to a psychological process in a social context, rather than to the central process by which the psychological and social are formed.

Allow me to give a quick example. Last fall I was often asked to give my opinion on political debate. Many asked me who won, what I thought of the various candidates' styles, and what I thought of the rules for the debates. Much focus and energy went into perfecting the debate format and, of course, winning. I found the entire discussion rather uninteresting. The idea of debating itself was the central communication issue. What I would like to see is the two candidates sitting at a table with a leading social problem before them. Within the next hour I would like to see them bring to bear their various kinds of knowledge and understanding of events, to try to form a perspective on what mutual interest really is, and to generate new mutually acceptable conclusions. The U.S., for example, would be better served by a president who was capable of learning from and making a decision with people who are different from himself or herself. I would like to see how he or she pursues understanding another, reframes issues to locate useful rather than meaningless conflicts, and accounts for variety in decision making. I am more interested in how presidents invent ideas to solve different people's problems than in their ability to sell an existing point of view.

We do not need to look only at these episodic political processes. Meetings generally fall to an expressionist form of democracy, as if "to say" is the same as having "decided" together. Most of you have sat in faculty meeting, as I have. All having a say does not mean that we have talked in a way that relevant ideas and positions have been developed or considered. Having a meeting is not itself a democratic act. It does not assure the type of negotiation needed in our time. There, as in many places in society, we believe in instant democracy.

Unfortunately, having a meeting is to decision making much as photocopying is to reading. Such an inadequate view often leads us to engage in activities that deprecate mutual decision-making. For example, we decide students need to learn to work in teams, so we assign group projects without training in decision making. The outcome is not unlike faculty meetings. Most are more convinced at the end that democratic processes are inefficient and often counterproductive. However, they have not done democracy nor communication for that matter, they have done speech.

Similar concerns can be raised across areas of communication studies. When we look at mass media news, for example, studies abound looking at the effects of media on public opinion and other social behavior and understanding. But relatively few studies have looked at effects on deliberation and people's capacity to talk in ways that help them make decision with others. Clearly more in our field are beginning to tackle these issues. If we are to acquire the skills not only to survive the age of negotiation but realize the potential in it, we must do better.

Overcoming the Many Faces of Discursive Closure

Clearly some communication scholars are doing better. In organizational studies, for example, various scholars are getting very good at showing how many employee and stakeholder participation programs fail to be democratic. The problem is not a lack of forums or any simple form of managerial control. Different forms of cultural, concertive, and unobtrusive controls, including disciplinary self-control and routinization, severely limit discussion, decision making, and democracy. When looked at in this way, the central problems of participatory communication are not economic or institutional, but everyday communicative micro-practices. The problem is not opportunity or rights. It is much more subtle.

A central concern in learning to live in the age of negotiation is the recovery of suppressed conflicts. The discovery of deeper conflict leads to a more thorough understanding of the otherness of others and even portions of ourselves. It pulls us to new ways of seeing things and moves us toward the capacity to make decisions together. With recovery of conflict, we have a better opportunity to represent the full variety of human experiences and desires. Scholars in other areas of study are beginning to pursue similar directions. Sophisticated communication theories are being developed in many places. We should not be left behind in either developing theory or in applications.

Communication scholars can aid the process of negotiation by directly teaching that an important, if not central, goal of good communication is participatory decision-making. A growing portion of the field is beginning to provide a discourse that allows us to understand discursive blockage and suppressed conflicts and enables us to move towards productive recreations of life. It is in our interest as a field to promote these activities. It is our obligation as a profession. This should not eliminate other types of work and other types

of interests. It should direct our time and energy to the social needs of our time. Instead of defining ourselves in terms of problems dominant groups in society have defined for us, we should be providing a vocabulary to help the larger society see and understand its challenges and opportunities. We need to help reconstruct the way people relate to each other, focusing on the fluid heterogeneous nature of contemporary societies. We must help our societies claim their negotiative potentials by providing communication understandings that reconfigure social interaction. The old consensus has eroded. We probably cannot go back, but we do have more and less attractive futures. The most attractive future is not the one you have, I have, or anyone has in mind, but the one we openly make together.

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