

Beltran S., Luis Ramiro (1979) **Farewell to Aristotle: "horizontal communication"**. Paris, UNESCO. 7 p. (International Commission for the Study of Communication Problems, no. 48).

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PP-AI-033

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**Farewell to Aristotle:
«Horizontal
communication»**

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FAREWELL TO ARISTOTLE: "HORIZONTAL" COMMUNICATION

by

Luis Ramiro Beltran R.

Bolivian development communication specialist and journalist
Vicepresident, International Association
of Mass Communication Research
Trustee, International Institute of Communication

This document is one of a series of documents, prepared for the International Commission for the Study of Communication Problems, established in application of Resolution 100 and the Guidance Notes of the Medium-Term Plan adopted by the General Conference of Unesco at its nineteenth session. As the Commission's mandate is of wide concern, this document, although being a preliminary text for discussion, is also being put at the disposal of those interested in the subject. Opinions expressed do not necessarily reflect the views of Unesco.

1979

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That which is utopian
is not that which is unattainable;
it is not idealism;
it is a dialectic process of
denouncing and announcing;
denouncing the dehumanizing structure
and announcing the humanizing structure.

PAULO FREIRE

INTRODUCTION

International communication used to be, for the most part, an area of still water. No longer. In the present decade it has become a focus of major, and often heated, controversy as part of a broader and increasing confrontation between developed and developing countries. Militant tension between them existed already. The developing countries had realized long before 1970 that their economic and political life was dominated by the developed countries to such a degree that development was impeded. What is new is the full realization that such a situation of dependence also exists in the cultural sphere. Moreover, the acknowledgement that communication serves considerably to promote all three types of neo-colonial domination clearly came about with this decade. (*)

Today Third World countries are struggling not only to bring about a real end to colonialism by obtaining fair treatment in trade and aid. They are simultaneously and relatedly pursuing the establishment of a "New International Economic Order" and a "New International Information Order." (***) As both these attempts are actively resisted by most developed countries, communication has now come to an arena of international conflict.

Manifestations of the conflict occur at different levels and in many places, mostly in the form of public discussion, which, since the middle of the decade, often reaches an extremely heated level.

However, the very conception of communication, as defined by the developed countries, is today also being contested by the developing ones.

(*) The author has dealt with this topic in some detail elsewhere (Beltran /1) in terms of the US-Latin American relationships.

For a summary of main events in the movement towards the New International Information Order see Gunter /2.

TRADITIONAL CONCEPTIONS OF COMMUNICATION

Attempts at defining communication can be traced back to Aristotle, who saw "rhetoric as being composed of three elements: the speaker, the speech and the listener, and perceived its aim to be "the search for all possible means of persuasion". Centuries later, and after much inquiry into the matter by many thinkers, this classical definition still seems to be at the root of almost all prevailing conceptions.

Lasswell: Communicators After Effects

Indeed, the most widely accepted definition of our age,, that of Lasswell/³ substantially advanced Aristotle's definition by adding two elements to it. Whereas Aristotle had identified the who, what and to whom of communication, Lasswell refined the scheme by stipulating the how and making explicit the what for, as follows:

A convenient way to describe an act of communication is to answer the following questions:

Who
Says What
In Which Channel
To Whom
With What Effect?

Lasswell saw communication as performing three functions: surveillance of the environment, correlation of the components of society and cultural transmission between generations. In doing so, according to De Fleur/⁴ Lasswell was attempting to temper the mechanistic influence of classical psychology's stimulus-response theory. He was taking into account contextual or situational variables stressed as intervening between S and R by the "social categories" and "individual differences" theories. His basic paradigm received prompt and widespread acceptance. His attention to some socio-structural considerations did not.

Transmission and Influence

From Lasswell on, the notion of transfer was to characterize many derived conceptions of communication. Such was the case, for instance of a definition - also extensively used - provided by Berelson and Steiner/⁵, p.527 : "The transmission of information, ideas, emotions, skills, etc. by use of symbols --words, pictures, figures, graphs, etc. It is the act or process of transmission that is usually called communication."

Similarly, the notion of influence (through persuasion) as the central goal of communication was to be included in several subsequent definitions, such as the following one by Osgood. /⁶ : "In the most general sense, we have communication whenever one system, a source, influences another, the destination, by manipulation of alternative signals which can be transferred over the channel connecting them."

Also abiding by Lasswell's paradigm, Nixon /⁷ stresses two elements of the process: the intentions of the communicator and the conditions under which the message is received.

From Electronics: Sources and Receivers

Subsequently, engineers Shannon and Weaver^{/8}, p. 4 came up with a mathematical theory of communication, which they defined as including "all of the procedures by which one mind may affect another."

Shannon and Weaver^{/8}, pp 33-34 conceive of a general communication system as being composed of five essential parts:"1. An information source which produces a message or sequence of messages to be communicated to the receiving terminal...2. A transmitter which operates on the message in some way to produce a signal suitable for transmission over the channel...3. The channel is merely the medium used to transmit the signal from transmitter to receiver...4. The receiver ordinarily performs the inverse operation of that done by the transmitter, reconstructing the message from the signal... 5. The destination is the person (or thing) for whom the message is intended." *

Schramm ^{/9} adapted this model, essentially constructed to describe electro-mechanical communication, to human communication, emphasizing the signal (message) encoding-decoding functions of mind. Defining communication as the sharing of information, ideas or attitudes and stressing in different terms the Aristotelian principle that communication always requires at least three elements (source, message and destination), he gave particular stress to the encoder and decoder components of the scheme. Schramm noted ^{/9},p. 4:"Substitute microphone for encoder, and earphone for decoder and you are talking about electronic communication. Consider that the source and encoder are one person, decoder and destination are another, and the signal is language, and you are talking about human communication".

Berlo ^{/10}, p. 30 also significantly contributed to the analysis of encoding-decoding operations in human communication, emphasizing the convenience of distinguishing source from encoder and decoder from receiver. He further advocated perceiving communication as a process (p. 24):"If we accept the concept of process, we view the events and relationships as dynamic, on-going, ever-changing, continuous...The ingredients within a process interact; each affect all of the others... Communication theory reflects a process point of view. A communication theorist rejects the possibility that nature consists of events or ingredients that are separable from all other events. He argues that you cannot talk about the beginning or the end of communication or say that a particular idea came from one specific source, that communication occurs in only one way and so on."

* "Noise", factors negatively affecting the message/channel element of the paradigm, was also a concept contributed by Shannon and Weaver.

From Cybernetics: Feedback for Control

Cybernetics added one more factor to the description of the process: feedback. This refers to control mechanism enabling organisms automatically to adjust to behavioural goals. These are essentially communication mechanisms. In fact, as Wiener/11, p. 9 understands cybernetics, "It is the study of messages, and in particular of effective message control..."

Although these concepts were intended to apply basically to the engineering and physiological domains, several theoreticians of human communication accepted them as useful for describing this latter process as well. For, if the sources were to obtain, through their messages, the effects upon the receivers which they intended, they needed to receive from these latter reactive clues as to the effectiveness of their persuasive attempts and, accordingly, adjust their messages to those goals. One example of such assimilation is to be found in the model proposed by Westley and McLean/12.

The Endurable Scheme: S-M-C-R

Finally, the human or social communication model derived from the interlinking conceptions reviewed here came to include the following elements as fundamental: Source - Encoder - Message - Channel - Decoder - Receiver - Effect. And its paramount purpose - persuasion - was stressed: "When people control one another, they do so primarily through communication" (Smith, /13 p.v).

The basic definitions and general schemes so far catalogued in this paper have permeated the scientific literature relating to communication, reproducing their key elements in several more specialized definitions. For instance, Hovland /14, p. 371 understood interpersonal communication as an interacting situation in which an individual (the communicator) transmits stimuli (usually verbal symbols) to modify the behaviour of other individuals (communicatees) in a face-to-face setting. Comparably, mass communication has been described in the following terms: "Every mass-communicated act can be broken down into five elements: communicators who transmit a given message through a channel to an audience with some kind of effect" (Blake and Haroldser./15, p. 34). Likewise, non-verbal communication has been defined as "the transfer of meaning involving the absence of symbolic sound representations". (Blake and Haroldsen, /15, p. 43.)

In summary, the traditional definition of communication is that of an act or process of transmission of messages from sources to receivers by means of the exchange of symbols (pertaining to codes shared by them) through signal-carrying channels. In this classical paradigm, the chief aim of communication is the communicator's intent to affect in given ways the behaviour of the communicatee; that is, to produce certain effects on the receiver's feeling, thinking and acting; in one word, persuasion. Feedback is seen as instrumental in securing the attainment of the communicator's goals.

EARLY CRITICISMS OF TRADITIONAL CONCEPTUALIZATIONS

Definitions are the product of thinking about experience and, in turn, at least to some extent, they orient practice. Basically, the traditional conception and the classical paradigm of communication were the result of experience involving communication in the United States of America and Western Europe. The model then reflected back on subsequent communication practice (production, teaching, research, etc.); not only in those countries but almost everywhere else in the world. Its impact proved particularly strong on communication training and research, activities which started some forty years ago. Textbooks and research reports, particularly between 1950 and 1970 have constantly borne the stamp of this paradigm.

No Transmission and No Act

Nevertheless, the pattern did not remain unchallenged for long, although its influence was to prove remarkably strong and penetrating and to ensure its survival until the present day. From different standpoints, a few precursors including Toch and MacLean began to question certain aspects of the traditional model. One scholar who gave voice to a major early criticism was David K. Berlo, chairman of the Department of Communication at Michigan State University. Berlo /16, pp 376-377 argued against what he labelled the "bucket" theory of communication as follows: "This viewpoint assumes that meanings are to be found in words or other symbols and that communication consists of the transmission of ideas from one individual to another through the use of symbols. This can be characterized as a process of dumping ideas from the source into a bucket - such as a film, a lecture, a book, a television programme or what have you - and shipping the bucket over to the receiver and dumping the contents into his head ...The communication position is that meanings are not contained in the symbols used but are found in the people who produce and receive those symbols. There are no right meanings for a symbol. There only are whatever meanings people have. Correspondingly, communication is not viewed as the transmission of ideas or information through the use of a message-media vehicle. Rather it is considered as the selection and transmission of symbols which have a probability of eliciting the intended meaning from the receiver." *

Two basic assumptions underlying the traditional conception are being questioned here. On the one hand the mechanical notion of knowledge transfer from one mind to another by means of signals transmitted via channels is replaced by the idea that symbols are only stimuli aimed by the sources at the receiver in the expectation that they would prompt the latter to retrieve the meanings involved from his own experience and thus, probably, obtain from him the behavioural responses intended. In a certain sense, this implied a non-passive role by the receiver. Thus, on the other hand the reformulation involved a relationship of interaction rather than one in which the action was performed only by the source/emitter of the stimuli. This, in turn, was rooted in the view put forward by Berlo of communication as a process. Moreover, with communication being perceived as an interactive process, the concept of feedback had to gain in relevance. Its two-way nature was therefore highlighted from a conceptual standpoint. Later, some of the leading specialists in the profession came to share this recognition, as can be seen from the following statement by Daniel Lerner /17: "We have studied communication as a linear

* Emphasis added.

operation in which a certain sender uses a certain channel to deliver a message to a receiver (an audience) who then is affected in some way by the message...Today, even sober professionals like ourselves recognize that two-way interaction and feedback are essential concepts in our thinking about communication and its future."

Referring to the traditional models of communication, Wilbur Schramm /18 himself admitted: "They were all built upon the idea of something being transferred from a sender to a receiver. I am going to ask whether this is any longer the most fruitful way of looking at communication". And, in assessing somewhat more socially oriented models, he added: "Their essential element is not something passing from sender to receiver, like a baseball from pitcher to catcher (perhaps with a batter between them to represent noise) but rather a relationship."

The partial amendment of the transmission concept, as well as its corollary, namely the interaction process, were evidently not resisted at the conceptual level. In fact, several scholars sincerely subscribed to them, as can be seen, for instance, in Gerbner's /19 definition of communication as social interaction through the exchange of messages involving cultural sharing. Models developed by Newcomb /20, Westley-McLean /12 and Schramm /21 now emphasized the audience as an active component of the process; so active in fact that it came to be called "obstinate" (Bauer/22).

Practice Betrays Theory

At the operational level, however, the established concepts had - and still have - but negligible application to every-day practice. For the most part, communication training still appears today to be based on the notion of transmission. And in research work, many - for instance, Brooks and Scheidel/23 Smith /24 and Arundale /25 - have noted that the majority of studies in fact still regard communication as a static phenomenon, while the academic community verbally professes adherence to the notion of process. Bauer /22, on the other hand, demonstrated how communication research was limited by the transmission paradigm. And Kumata /26 explained that adherence to old concepts and methods had produced one dimensional communication research unable to cope with complex and dynamic social realities.

Similarly although professional discourse does widely acknowledge the "two-way" nature of communication, its practice still conforms predominantly to the traditional unilinear S-M-C-R paradigm.

Katz and Lazarsfeld /27 demonstrated that the "hypodermic effect" of the mass media on the isolated individual in the "lonely crowd" was actually mediated by reference groups and through "influentials" in a "two-step" flow fashion. This gave opportunities to take account of social interaction considerations. Nevertheless, "...what they described as interaction between the receiver and his social communication network is generally still a one-way model" (Harms and Richstad, / 28, p. 10). Indeed, as Coleman /29 noted, communication researchers placed exaggerated emphasis on the individual as the unit of analysis, neglecting relationships between sources and receivers. The strong influence of social psychology on communication research later provided another

set of opportunities for perceiving communication as being affected by the structure containing it - as did the corresponding research based upon the very popular model of innovation diffusion. However, on the former, Zires de Janka /30, p.6 pointed out that "...the basic framework of the scheme was neither altered nor questioned". And, on the latter, several critics have noted that, in spite of its attention to certain socio-cultural variables, it failed to grasp the decisive influence that archaic social structures exert on communication (Cuellar and Gutierrez/31). Admitting these and other shortcomings, Rogers /32 strongly advocated research methodologies which take account of relationships, such as network analysis.

Research is not the only area of activity where the traditional model shows stubborn endurance. The practice of international communication constitutes an eloquent example of how at the international level also communication occurs essentially in a one-way flow from the developed to the underdeveloped countries. As has been extensively verified, US transnational news agencies and advertising firms control the great majority of the respective businesses virtually throughout the world. And what for years was proclaimed as "the free flow of information" has been found by research to be pretty much a one-way flow and not exactly free, especially in view of the uses made of news and advertising for purposes of propaganda and the manipulation of public opinion (Mattelart/33 ; Somavia/34; Reyes Matta /35).

Information: Not Equal to Communication

Another line of criticism focused on the confusion between information and communication which also stems from the traditional approaches. According to an Argentinian writer : "Communication is not an act but a process by which an individual enters into mental co-operation with another individual until they come to constitute a common awareness...Information, on the other hand is merely a unilateral conveying of a message from an emitter to a receiver...The dissemination on centralized informants of messages without feedback cannot be identified with the intersubjective co-activity of which communication consists (Nosedá, /36, pp. 6 and 8).

Likewise, a Peruvian scholar, Rafael Roncagliolo/37, p.1 has contended that "...we are witnessing a reduction in human communication - a concept which implies reciprocity - in favour of information and dissemination; that is, of all the modern forms of imposition by transmitters upon receivers that we continue erroneously to call mass communication". European scholars concur: "To communicate implies a two-way process, which has emotional as well as cognitive elements and which takes place in non-verbal as well as verbal forms. To inform on the other hand means a one-way process of predominantly knowledge-oriented, verbal communication" (Nowak, Rosengren and Sigurd, /38, p.1).

And an analyst of communication rights, Jean d'Arcy /39, predicts that: "The time will come when the Universal Declaration of Human Rights will have to encompass a more extensive right than man's right to information, first laid down (in 1948) in Article 19. This is the right of man to communicate."

The criticism so far reviewed in this paper can be summarized as follows:

- (1) Traditional definitions and models are unilinear, wrongly postulating a mechanical notion of communication as the transmission of information from active sources to passive receivers. Actually, there is no transmission; there is only the elicitation of meanings which already exist in people who, in decoding symbols, become actively involved.
- (2) Those models, moreover, are based on the mistaken notion that communication is an act, a static phenomenon in which the source is pre-eminent; communication is really a process where all elements operate dynamically. Thus it is essentially a matter of social relations, a phenomenon of multiple exchange of experiences, and not a unilateral exercise of individual influence.
- (3) Finally, the

models induce a confusion between information, which can be transferred by a unilateral act, and communication, which is broader than information, since its two-way nature necessarily involves interaction designed to identify common meanings and common awareness.

RECENT CRITICISMS: DIFFERENT CONCERNS

Most of the criticisms of traditional definitions and models of communication surfaced within the very society that had generated these latter: the United States of America. Thus, understandably, they included aspects of interest to that society and excluded others which were not. One of the latter aspects has been, most evidently that of persuasion. With very few exceptions, no objections to persuasion considered as the central aim of communication have been raised in the U.S. *. Behavioural manipulation of people through the media of communication have appeared to be natural and legitimate in that country. Already in 1957 Merton /40 had asked: "How can we analyze propaganda, films, radio and print in such a way that we can determine what is likely to produce given effects? ** For many years, many people concentrated on seeking answers: "The all-consuming question that has dominated research and the development of contemporary theory in the study of the mass media can be summed up in simple terms - namely, "what has been their effect?"...Persuasion is only one possible "effect" among many, but upon which great attention has been focused. It has been assumed that an effective persuasive message is one which has properties capable of altering the psychological functioning of the individual in such a way that he will respond overtly (toward the item which is the object of persuasion) in modes desired or suggested by the communicator." (De Fleur/7, pp. 118 and 122-23).

On the other hand, when attention was given to socio-cultural variables affecting communication behaviour, this seemed motivated essentially by persuaders having learned that individuals could not be most effectively influenced if seen as detached from their social context. Basically, the issue then became how best to use the social environment to help obtain audience responses corresponding to the purposes of communicators, or how to secure the individual's compliance with the norms and values of the social structure.

Ethical considerations about the nature and consequences of the communicator's purposes and manipulations, and related questions as to whether he has or has not an unlimited right to persuade have hardly been voiced on the U.S. scene. They were to emerge elsewhere.

Evidently, the classical paradigm had led researchers to concentrate their studies on the persuadability of the receiver, as an individual and as a member of social groups, so as to be able to help control his behaviour.

(*) One such exception was represented by Berlo /41, p. 14: "We now need to concentrate on...ways in which people use messages, not, as we have in the past, on ...ways in which messages can use people".

(**) Emphasis added.

"If from time to time attention has been given to some other aspect of the media, for example, to the nature of the communicator, the structure of media content, or the nature of the audiences, the ultimate purpose was to see how variations in these factors have influenced the kinds of responses that have resulted from exposure to the media." (De Fleur/4 p. 118). Not surprisingly, research on the source was particularly neglected (Zires de Janka /30 , Assman, /42 , Schramm /18, Halloran /43).

Persuasion: A Tool for maintaining the Status Quo

The classical paradigm also lead researchers to focus on mass communication functions in society, which had been expanded beyond Lasswell's basic propositions by Lazarsfeld and Merton /44, Wright /45 and others.

Whereas the focus on communications effects was designed to find out what the media do to people, the focus on its functions aimed at identifying what they do for people.

It was probably in Latin America that objections to both these orientations were first raised. In 1970, Armand Mattelart/46, pp 18-19 suggested that: "The study of effects indicates the therapeutical and operative nature of this type of sociology whose aim is to improve the relationship between a given audience and a message-emitting commercial firm... The analysis of functions indicates the preoccupation of such sociology with the receiver's motivation... Now, if we look for the common point between these observations, we shall see that neither of the two is conceivable without the researcher implicitly endorsing the existing social system."

The same author explained his assessment of functionalism as serving to promote the status quo by stressing "...the fact that the indicator of a rupture with the system (the dysfunction) is never considered in its prospective or transformational aspect...the dysfunction is never explicitly regarded as the basis for another system" (Mattelart/46 , p. 19).

Facilitating Mercantilism and Propaganda

The presence of a conservative bias in persuasion activities may not constitute an essential preoccupation in societies such as the United States of America. But it is a matter of serious concern to societies such as those of Latin America, especially in terms of international communication. Thus, naturally, several Latin Americans have subscribed to the early criticism of the traditional paradigm, such as that levelled against its mechanistic nature. However, they contented inter alia that acknowledging the fact that communication is a process falls short of divesting the system of its authoritarian affiliations (Gerace /47). Moreover, they understandably showed much greater concern with certain aims of persuasive communications than had been expressed in the U.S. As a result of their lengthy experience, Latin Americans impugned such communications as being a tool of mercantilism, propaganda and alienation. They saw them as factors both of U.S. external domination and of that exerted internally in each of the region's countries by power elites over the masses.

Latin American analysts recalled that propaganda had been deemed a necessity by the founding fathers of communication science such as Lasswell, who regarded propaganda as the "new hammer and anvil of social solidarity" (Lasswell /48 , pp. 220-21). They were aware that World War II represented the origin of mass communication theory, research and modern practice (De Fleur /4 ; Beltran/49). And they had reasons to feel that the traditional paradigm was well suited to the U.S. and West European post-war purposes of overseas economic, political and cultural empire building that keeps

countries such as those of Latin America in a situation of underdevelopment resembling that of the colonial period (Cockroft, Frank and Johnson /50).

Such preoccupations were substantiated by evidence of quasi-monopolistic control of international news, advertising, and film and television materials by the United States, as well as of related investments and policies of this country abroad (Beltran and Cardona /51). The analysts also expressed alarm when U.S. Congress investigations revealed that, beyond the overt propaganda activities of U.S.I.A., covert U.S. government activities in communication in and on Latin America and taken place not only to discredit but even to help overthrow some change-oriented and legitimately established governments of Latin America (Carvalho /52). And they noted that all such operations were instances of communication practice consistent with the undemocratic approach to communication as an act of one-way transmission and persuasion.

On the other hand, Latin Americans do not advocate feedback as understood in the classical paradigm. They feel that it represents a privilege enjoyed by the sources designed to allow their receivers to respond to the initiatives of those controlling the media (Gerace/47). They also point out that feedback is exclusively used to ensure that the message is adapted to the receiver so that he will both understand it and comply with the communicator's requests (Johannesen /53; Beltran /54; Mattelart/46).

Alienation: Imposing an Ideology

The Latin Americans are quite emphatic about the alienating influences of mass communication. Research has extensively documented the overwhelming influence of U.S. orientation content and financing on the mass media of the region. Several studies have revealed the inculcation of a series of alien values and norms amounting to the promotion of a whole "way of life": the capitalist ideology. This takes place through virtually all media but appears more pronounced via television, specialized magazines (including comics), transnational advertising in general, and foreign news. *

In addition to their concern about the consequences of such media content, the Latin Americans also object to certain non-traditional conceptions of communication, such as those of Marshall McLuhan /56. For instance, Antonio Pasquali /57, a Venezuelan philosopher and communication researcher, rejects as conservative the postulate that "the medium is the message". This is not to deny that the ubiquitous presence of the mass media today must as such have some effect on people. The objection is aimed at preventing such conformist statements from throwing a veil over the reality of the impact or harmful messages carried by the media. These viewpoints are shared

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For an overview of many of these studies, see Beltran /1_ and, for a study of the beliefs fostered in Latin America by canned US TV materials, see Beltran /55.

by other Latin Americans such as Diaz Bordenave /58, p. 21: "Despite whatever Marshall McLuhan may argue, the content of social communication media is relevant for the development of individuals and thus for national development". Latin Americans are not quite sure that the world has become a "global village", since millions of them have no access whatever to any mass media. And, if the marvels of electronics are indeed bringing all of mankind together, they fear that the "village" will be run, more than ever before in history, by the few and the mighty. On the other hand, Latin Americans are not alone in suspecting that, for all his stunning originality, McLuhan is not really too far from the classical conservative mentality in that - as has been pointed out by Finkelstein/59 - he can be regarded as the foremost spokesman of the Corporate Establishment.

Vertical Communication

"We cannot conceive of the exercise of power by individual A over individual B without some communication from A to B"(Fagen /60, p.5). Latin America is a cogent example of the truth of such a statement. A tiny minority of its population exerts power over the vast majority so as to secure overall domination. To do so, the oligarchic elites use mass communication as a tool for keeping the situation unchanged. This is often done in such undemocratic manners that it has come to be referred to as "vertical communication", in particular by such authors as Pasquali, Freire and Gerace. And what happens between social classes within each Latin American country also happens between all of them - considered as a dependant society - and the United States of America, their external dominator. In both cases the powerful subjugate the powerless with the assistance of communication.

The situation neatly corresponds to the linear nature of the classical paradigm, which does not favour democratic communication behaviour patterns, as the following observation suggests: "What often takes place under the label of communication is little more than a dominating monologue in the interests of the initiator of the process. Feedback is not employed to provide an opportunity for genuine dialogue. The receiver of the messages is passive and subdued as he is hardly ever given proportionate opportunities to act concurrently as a true and free emitter also; his essential role is that of listening and obeying...Such a vertical, asymmetric and quasi authoritarian social relationship constitutes, in my view, an undemocratic instance of communication...we must...be able to build a new concept of communication - a humanized, non-elitist, democratic and non-mercantile model." (Beltran/54 pp14-15).

Many in Latin America agree with such statements. (Gerace/47, p. 25) feels that it is urgent to formulate other communication theories better adapted to this region and to the Third World in general. A Paraguayan scholar has put it this way: "We must overcome our mental compulsion to perceive our own reality through foreign concepts and ideologies and learn to look at communication and adoption from a new perspective." (Diaz Bordenave/61 p. 208).

THE FREIREAN PERSPECTIVE: A LANDMARK

A door onto an avenue of fertile new perspectives was opened wide in the earlier 60s by a Brazilian Catholic teacher and philosopher of education, Paulo Freire. His view of education as a tool for freeing the masses from oppression by the elites earned him exile from his country in the middle of the decade. Since then, writing first from Chile and later from Geneva, he has seen his ideas spread internationally and tested even in Africa. Although he has focused his thought on new principles and methods of education at the group level, and essentially in rural contexts, his proposals have had, especially in Latin America, a significant impact on communication theory in general, including that relating to mass media formats.

Education for Oppression

Freire/62 launched a major critique of traditional education as tool for cultural domination of the majorities by the conservative elites. Just as Berlo had labelled the traditional transmission schema a "bucket" theory of communication, so Freire called classical pedagogy "banking" education. "Bankers" (teachers) are those representing the knowledge-rich (the members of the power elites who monopolize information together with almost everything else of value in society) who make "deposits" in the minds of the "poor" (ignorant) - the students - who are required passively to receive the "wealth" so transferred to them. The "deposits" contain the set of norms, myths and values of the oppressors. If the oppressed learn them well, they can hope to move up in the socio-economic, political and cultural structure presided by the oppressors. That is, they can "cash in" one day the "deposits" for the material goods that the "bankers" are willing to grant them in paternalistic fashion as a reward for conforming to their ideology and not upsetting the established order. In doing so, most of the oppressed tend to become oppressors since, although some may wish to act differently, they are "afraid of freedom". In this manner the exploited masses are themselves used to help secure the perpetuation of the system. And as Gerace /47, p. 66 pointed out: "Perhaps the worst oppression is that which fastens on the soul of man, turning him into the shadow of his oppressor."

Thus Freire /62, p. 39 warns that: "No pedagogy which is truly liberating can hold aloof from the oppressed by treating them as unfortunates and by presenting for their emulation models taken from among those of the oppressors. The oppressed must be their own example in the struggle for their redemption."

How "truth" is propagated

Behind "banking education" lies - Pinto /63 argues - a theory of knowledge which defines the relationship prevailing between a subject who knows and a reality object which is known. Such reality is understood as something static and finite. Moreover, both the subject who knows and the known object are regarded as metaphysical entities as well as fixed and distinct units. This accounts for the difficulties besetting the subject-object relationship. It is hard for the subject to comprehend the object. When eventually he manages to do so what is born is a relationship of ownership between the two. It is here, adds Pinto, that the notion of "truth" as the possession of the object arises. The "owner" then seeks to impose his view of reality as definitive and without alternative on the minds of others, who also receive it as definitive and thus not subject to doubt, criticism or challenge. Pinto concludes /63, p.14

"There is then generated between educator and learner a totally vertical social relationship: the educator-subject, owner of absolute truth, deposits (imposes) it into (or upon) the intelligence of the learner, who receives it passively (memorizes)... This verticality implies an intellectual domination of the educator over the learner, which is supported by a system of disciplinary sanctions so that the truth shall always be accepted without contestation."

Domestication rather than liberation

Such an authoritarian relationship, Freire feels, is manipulatory of persons, who are treated as things or animals. Regardless of how far this may at times be disguised by apparently non-ruthless teaching devices, it constitutes an offence against human dignity and freedom. Such "domestication" is only possible because the teacher, instead of helping the student to demystify reality, contributes to its further mythification. Thus the student is not allowed to discover that culture is superior to nature, that man is an historical being able constantly to transform his physical and social reality, and that the oppressed, rather than accepting such reality fatalistically, are capable of freeing themselves from it and constructing a different one. To keep society as it is, to prevent it from being critically assessed, the teacher never enters into real communication with his students; he merely imposes on them his "communiqués", preventing them from developing an independent consciousness of reality. For genuine communication - understood as dialogue aimed at actively sharing experiences and jointly re-constructing reality - would deprive such a teacher of his mighty advantage: manipulation. Freire stresses /64, p. 59 : "This is why, to us, education as the practice of freedom is not the transfer or transmission of wisdom or culture, it is not the extension of technical knowledge, it is not the act of depositing reports or facts in learners; it is not the "perpetuation of the values of a given culture", it is not "the effort of adaptation of the learner to his milieu".

In addition to submissiveness and passivity, lack of creativity is seen as one consequence of the "banking" type of education. Prevented from reasoning critically, the individual is inhibited from developing his imagination; his awareness of nature and social existence remains naive as the rulers prefer it to be. This may also foster selfish individualism and competitiveness among the oppressed rather than solidarity and cooperativeness. Thus society remains as if it were drugged, in order to serve the ends of the minorities which control education and communication.

The Media: agents of subjugation

Freire regarded the mass communication media as propagators of the myths, norms and values of the oligarchic minorities and, as such, vertical and alienating communication tools responsible for helping to bring about the subjugation of the oppressed. Referring to the interpersonal adult education format known as "agricultural extension", established in Latin America through U.S. aid, the scholar attacked it as being the opposite of true communication, since to educate is not to extend something from the "seat of wisdom" to the "seat of ignorance".

"For us" - the Brazilian scholar asserted - "education as the practice of freedom is, above and before all else, a truly gnoseological situation; * in which the act of knowing does not end in the object to be known, since communication is established with other subjects that are also knowledgeable." (Freire /64, p. 59).

Refers to the discovery of the world, including self-discovery.

TOWARDS DEMOCRATIC COMMUNICATION

With very few exceptions, early critics of the traditional conceptions of communication did not delve deep enough into the roots of what they criticised: economy and politics, the power game. One of those exceptions was the late C. Wright Mills /65, who denounced the mass media as promoters of a "psychological illiteracy" among the masses aimed at favouring the hegemony of the "power elites". Recently, Rogers/66, pp 51-52 claimed that "...the linear models imply an autocratic, one-sided view of human relationships" and rated the classical pattern a "passing paradigm". And Professor Lasswell himself, analysing in 1972 the future of world communications as related to the development of nations, came to anticipate two contrasting paradigms. He labelled one the "oligarchic model", serving the aims of transnational power centres: "In striving to consolidate an oligarchic world public order, the instruments of communication are used to indoctrinate and distract." * Lasswell labelled the alternative the "partipatory model"; "...mass media provide attention opportunities that generate and re-edit common maps of man's past, present and future and strengthen a universal and differentiated sense of identity and common interest" (Lasswell/67, pp. 16-17).

To a large extent, however, it has been Latin American analyses which have uncovered the roots of the classical transmission/persuasion paradigm at maintaining the status quo: the undemocratic nature of social relations within nations and between them. Indeed, virtually all Latin American criticism may be summed up in the expression "vertical communication"; that is, from the top down, domineering, imposing, one-way and manipulatory; in short, undemocratic.

Perceived in this light, communication is not a technical question to be aseptically dealt with, in isolation from the economic, political and cultural structure of society. It is a political matter which is largely determined by this structure and which, in turn, helps to perpetuate it. Thus, the search for a way out of such situations is focused on moving from vertical/undemocratic communication to horizontal/democratic communication. The search began mainly in the present decade, in several places, taking forms that varied in scope and approach but coincided in their aim: to democratize communication in its conception and in its practice.

Theoretical and practical advances

In diverse parts of the world, but especially in the less developed countries and notoriously in those of Latin America horizontal communication technologies are being tried out. These are face-to-face communication procedures, such as Freire's "conscientization", special combinations of mass media with group techniques, or group communication formats built around modern audio-visual instruments. In Peru, for instance, mobile video-tape units are being used for rural non-formal education in ways which give peasants opportunities for being not only receivers but also emitters of messages (Calvelo, /68, /69). In the same country, a major venture using simple media such as community newspapers and loudspeaker systems, is turning slum inhabitants into

* To Harms and Richstad /28 the oligarchic model "is seen as parallel to the linear, one-way transmission communication model that has been employed in the study of mass communication and other source-controlled systems".

active and autonomous communicators (Mata, Montesinos Mertz and Solezzi/70). And in Uruguay, audio-cassette units equipped with recording facilities are enabling cooperative farmers to share in a national-wide "teleforum" whose contents they themselves determine (Kaplun /71). Unesco is sponsoring studies, bibliographies and publications in this area of "mini-media" or "intermediate" communication technologies. International meetings directly and exclusively aimed at "participatory communication" have recently taken place in Yugoslavia and Ecuador. *

Several authors have contributed to the reformulation of the concept of communication. Few, however, have concentrated on this task sufficiently to achieve the systematic designing of models of democratic communication. Already in 1967, Moles /74 had mooted the notion of the "cultural cycle", involving "creator", "micromedia", "mass media" and "macromedia". In 1970 Schaeffer /75 proposed the "communication triangle" with the "mediator" as central. Concurrently, Williams /76 urged researchers to study communication as a relational phenomenon of "transaction".

At the beginning of the present decade, Johannesen /53 produced a valuable analytical summary of conceptualizations of "communication as dialogue". In critically analyzing communication as related to "mass culture", Pasquali/57 provided a sound basis for thinking about horizontal communication. Diaz Bordenave /77 made a perceptive evaluation of the initial evolution of the concept of communication towards a democratic model, which had been largely stimulated by Freire's thinking. Subsequently, Cloutier /78 formulated the "EMIREC" scheme, which attempted to bring together emitter and receiver. Elaborating on Freire's concept of "education for liberation" and at the same time drawing on pioneer experiments in Bolivia and Peru, Gerace /47 further exploited the nature of "horizontal communication" and Gutierrez/79 analyzed the notion of "total language". Almost invariably throughout these and similar works, dialogue was highlighted as the crucial agent of democratic communication, although its nature was not always dealt with in great detail.

A more recent and methodical approach is that taken by Fernando Reyes Matta/80 who developed in considerable detail a macro-operative "model of communication with active social participation". Rather than explicitly attempting to redefine communication, this Latin American analyst postulated a broad pragmatic blueprint for institutional organization designed to facilitate horizontal communication. Although concepts such as "the right to communicate," "access" and "participation" appeared to have been insufficiently defined, Reyes Matta sought to utilize them in interrelated ways. **

Finally, two U.S. researchers - L.S. Harms /81,/82 and Jim Richstad (Harms and Richstad/28) - undertook systematic pioneering work to interrelate the notions of communication "rights", "resources" and "needs". They arrived at an "interchange model of human communication", which, in spite of such limitations as its purely dyadic nature, offers insights likely to help

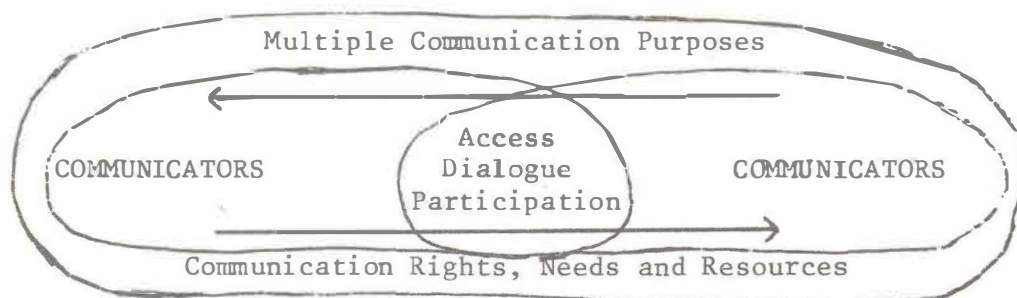
* Descriptions of other experiments of this kind have been made by Gerace /72 and Fraser/73 and others.

** Other recent efforts to conceptualize horizontal communication are those of Azcueta /83, Diaz Bordenave/84, Jouet/85,/86 and Pinto/87, CIESPAL/88 has published a preliminary report of its 1978 Quito meeting on participatory communication.

further democratization and shows considerable heuristic power. This model did not attempt to integrate communication rights-needs-resources with access-dialogue-participation in communication. And neither the model of Reyes Matta nor that of Harms and Richstad dealt specifically with communication purposes, such as persuasion.

The nature of horizontal communication

In the light of the criticisms, innovative proposals and other related considerations outlined above, the following definition is presented for discussion: "Communication is the process of democratic social interaction, based upon exchange of symbols, by which human beings voluntarily share experiences under conditions of free and egalitarian access, dialogue and participation. Everyone has the right to communicate in order to satisfy communication needs by enjoying communication resources. Human beings communicate with multiple purposes. The exertion of influence on the behaviour of others is not the main one."



Access is the effective exercise of the right to receive messages.

Dialogue is the effective exercise of the right concurrently to receive and emit messages.

Participation is the effective exercise of the right to emit messages.

The right to communicate is the natural entitlement of every human being to emit and receive messages, intermittently or concurrently.

Communication need is both a natural individual demand and a requirement of social existence to use communication resources in order to engage in the sharing of experiences through symbol-mediated interaction.

Communication resource is any energy/matter element - cognitive, affective or physical - usable to make possible the exchange of symbols among human beings.

Freedom is a relative concept. Absolute freedom is not desirable or viable. Each individual's freedom is limited by the freedom of others, this restriction being the product of a social responsibility agreement in the service of the common good. Each society's freedom is relative to the freedom of the other societies.

(*) Pragmatic but admittedly limited definitions of access and participation are contained in Unesco documents /89.

(**) This statement is based on one of Harms/81.

Egalitarianism is a relative concept. Absolute equality is not possible. Total symmetry in the distribution of opportunities for emitting and receiving messages is unattainable. Comparable opportunities are possible inasmuch as expanding opportunities to receive is possible and inasmuch as significantly reducing the concentration of opportunities to emit may not be impossible. Thus, a fair balance of proportions is sought; mathematical equivalence is not.

Exerting influence on behaviour patterns is a legitimate communication purpose on condition that it is not unilateral, authoritarian or manipulatory. That is to say, persuasion which is at least potentially mutual and which in effect respects human dignity need not be dismissed as an aim of communication. Even in such cases, however, persuasion is but one of the many and diverse goals of communication and should not be deemed the most important.

A few operative considerations

1. The free and egalitarian access-dialogue-participation process of communication is based upon the rights-needs-resources structure and geared to the fulfilment of many purposes.
2. Access is a precondition for horizontal communication since, without comparable opportunities for all persons to receive messages, there can in the first place be no democratic social interaction.
3. Dialogue is the axis of horizontal communication. For, if genuine democratic interaction is to take place, each person should have comparable opportunities for emitting and receiving messages so as to preclude monopolization of expression through monologue. (*) Given that, in such a perspective, these opposite roles are subsumed in a continuous and balanced dual performance, all participants in the communication process should be identified as "communicators", as Harms and Richstad correctly proposed. Thus the differentiation between the "source" and the "receiver" ceases to be appropriate.
4. Participation is the culmination of horizontal communication since without comparable opportunities for all persons to emit messages the process would remain governed by the few.
5. As regards its practical viability, access-dialogue-participation constitutes a probabilistic sequence. That is to say: in terms of degree of difficulty of attainment, access is at a low level, dialogue at an intermediate level, and participation at a high level. Getting more people to receive messages is deemed easier than creating circumstances which would make dialogue possible, while the latter is regarded as more feasible than effectively turning every person into a significant emitter.

(*) The conviction that dialogue - conversation - is at the heart of true human communication is held not only by such educators as Freire. Philosophers such as Buber/90 are strong advocates of this view as are psychiatrists and psychologists such as Carl Rogers/91 and Eric Fromm/92. Dialogue makes possible a cultural environment favorable to freedom and creativity of the type deemed by Jean Piaget to be most conducive to full growth of intelligence/93.

6. Access is essentially a quantitative matter. Dialogue is eminently a qualitative matter. And participation is both a qualitative and quantitative matter.

7. Access, dialogue and participation are the key components of the systematic process of horizontal communication. They are essentially interdependent. In other words, (a) the greater the access, the greater will be the probabilities of dialogue and participation; (b) the better the dialogue, the more useful access will be and the greater the impact of participation; and (c) the more and better the participation, the greater will be the probabilities of dialogue and access. All in all, the more access, dialogue and participation there is, the more communication needs will be satisfied and communication rights effectively exercised, and the more effectively communication resources will be used.

8. Self-management, illustrated by the outstanding Yugoslav experience with communication enterprises which are neither private nor governmental but run by the community, is deemed the most advanced and most all-round form of participation since it allows the citizens themselves to decide on policy, plans and actions(Unesco/89).

9. Feedback is a positive key feature of dialogue when it operates in a balanced multidirectional way whereby each person involved in a communication situation supplies and receives it in comparable proportions. Feedback is negative when it is one-way only, thereby fostering dependence, rather than balanced interdependence.

10. The practice of horizontal communication is more viable in the case of interpersonal formats (individual and group) than in the case of impersonal (mass) formats. An obvious technical explanation for this is the intrinsic difficulty of attaining feedback in mass communication. But the main explanation is political: the fact that the media of mass communication, for the most part, are tools of the entrenched conservative and mercantile forces controlling the means of production both nationally and internationally.

A word of caution and a word of hope

Restraint is indispensable. Horizontal communication is, conceptually, the exact opposite of vertical communication. Realistically, however, the former should not be regarded as being necessarily a substitute for the latter. Under given circumstances, it can be such. Under different circumstances, it can be a valid alternative. As Buber /94 pointed out, dialogue is not always possible. And it may be added, monologue is often not avoidable and sometimes is even necessary, depending on aims and circumstances. They may be viewed, Johannesen /53, p. 379 suggests, as extremes on a continuum. Ideally, all communication should be horizontal. Theoretically this is not always possible or, perhaps, even desirable. Thus, if vertical communication has, to some extent to remain on the scene, it should not be manipulatory, misleading, exploitative or coercive.

In conclusion to this presentation of a preliminary set of schematic propositions concerning horizontal communication (could it be labelled, the "horicom" model?) let us hope - paraphrasing Lasswell thirty years later - that it may also prove "a convenient way to describe communication".

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