



Thomas, Sari (Editor). *Studies in Mass Communication and Technology. Volume 1: Studies in Communication.* Norwood, New Jersey: Ablex Publishing Corporation, 1985.

Thomas, Sari (Editor). *Communication Theory and Interpersonal Interaction. Volume II: Studies in Communication.* Norwood, New Jersey: Ablex Publishing Corporation, 1985.

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These volumes present forty-six articles selected on merit from the proceedings of the Fourth International Conference on Culture and Communication held in 1981 at Temple University. As one would expect from a conference with that broad a mandate, the reader of these volumes is like an air traveller in the desert: we skip from oasis to oasis. As one also expects, some stops are more fruitful than others. But the journey is worth the effort. The quality of the papers is generally high.

The first volume (*Mass Communication and Technology*) begins with an informative article about European-American conflict over transborder data flows and concludes with a paper entitled, "The Camberpot: A Most Private Medium." Between these oddly matched bookends we find papers as diverse as an analysis of public broadcasting in Britain and the United States, a case study of television as an acculturation resource in Mexico, and a paper on museums as communicators of culture. Not surprisingly, television is the technology seizing the lion's share of attention.

The second volume (*Communication Theory and Interpersonal Interaction*) is similarly eclectic, not to say motley. Papers run the gamut from an analysis of family violence as communication to the use of works of fiction as aids in teaching interpersonal communication to papers valiantly trying to clear the thickets of verbiage choking the meaning from the concept of ideology. Here we find a paper informing us that women are more likely than men to squint and blink during public arguments. What the significance of that is I cannot say and the researchers make no effort to inform me.

This diversity of content is paralleled by diverse approaches. Some papers are long on empirical results and short on analysis; others are long on theory and short on hard data (or soft, for that matter). More admirably some papers supply some of both and better still a few papers supply much of both.

In short, depending on research interests the reader will linger over some articles, dally with others and skip others altogether.

Later in this review I will recommend some papers worth a linger. Nevertheless, the overall impression created by these volumes is that communication research is alive and well and galloping off in all directions. One longs for a few powerful organizing paradigms but there is no use crying over spilt Utopia's.

Obviously editing a collection of this kind is mined with hazards. Editor Sari Thomas copes admirably. In a concise introduction we are told the selection process stressed two criteria: a paper should present some data and/or theory not typically available and the collection as a whole should represent highly contemporary communication issues. But objectives are achieved. Thomas also has made the intelligent decision to permit the papers to stand or fall on their merits. Each volume is divided into five sections but no section is preceded by an introduction where the editor in a few pages vainly attempts to summarize volumes of past research. I recommend this approach to other editors. Finally, the papers are generally short (sometimes only a few pages, rarely straying beyond ten) and are mostly free of jargon. One detects the hand of a firm and judicious editor.

As in all collections some papers stand out. An example is one by Al Gonzalez. He has struck a very nice balance between theory and a case study to illuminate an on-going economic and cultural struggle in Ohio. Octavio Paz, the fine Mexican poet, is probably best known north of the Rio Grande for the book, *The Labyrinth of Solitude*, an analysis of Mexican cultural traits. Gonzales neatly summarizes the guts of the Paz argument and then attempts, successfully in my view, to apply the analysis to the campaign of the Farm Labor Organizing Committee (FLOC), which represents mestizo farmworkers in Ohio. Gonzales argues that the traits identified by Paz can be detected in the rhetoric and campaigning of Farm Labor Organizing Committee. Since these traits are misunderstood by Anglo-Americans, the Farm Labor Organizing Committee's credibility with the public at large is hurt. To briefly illustrate: Paz argues that one deep trait of Mexicans is that of "Fiesta." In Gonzales' words this "suspends the insecurity of life to allow a release from the silence and reticence which predominate (sic) Mexican moods." This shows up in farmworker conventions organized by the Committee, says Gonzales. "When the passing of resolutions becomes tedious, business is abruptly suspended so a Marachi band can play." These festival aspects are misunderstood by the owners of farms as evidence of a lack of sincerity and commitment by the farmworkers. Both Paz and Gonzales are worth a read.

Another worthy paper is by Edward Wachtel. He stands in the tradition of those scholars who speculate that television (and other technologies) are in the long run fundamentally altering the way Western civilization orders reality. Here he zeroes in on television's potential to alter the growing child's conceptions of the spatial organization of his immediate environment and the world. Piaget argues that our conceptions of time and space emerge slowly over the first twelve years of life. We learn about spatial relationships by watch-

ing, manipulation and by moving about. But, asks Wachtel provocatively, what happens nowadays when huge hunks of the first twelve years of life are spent with television. Television offers us a world already organized, that is, the camera decides what will be attended to. A child watching television is watching space passively, not manipulating it and certainly not moving about in it. On television space and time are altered; we zip from London to Buenos Aires in an instant, from 1948 to 1984 in the same instant. Wachtel thinks heavy television viewing may retard the development of adequate conceptions of space. He is careful to point out that there is little empirical evidence thus far to support this. Nevertheless, his paper is a welcome departure from the usual television effects study which tend to focus on the effects of television on social attitudes and behavior.

Howard H. Frederick Jr. supplies an informative paper on the use of content analysis in Eastern Europe. He points out that this use only began during the 1970's. Marxist scholars had argued, and still do, that content analysis builds on a foundation of faulty theoretical assumptions. Frederick supplies a useful and tightly-written summary of the Marxist critique of content analysis. The problem then for the Eastern Europeans has been how to rebuild content analysis on what they regard as a scientific foundation, one not cracked by Western notions of objectivity, a foundation free of class bias, and a foundation sturdy enough to support a critique of modern capitalism. He examined thirty-two studies using content analysis from six Eastern European countries. They ranged broadly over many topics. One looked at the dissemination of socialist values in Serbo-Croatian comic books. Many of the units of analysis the Eastern Europeans use would not disturb even the most conservative of Western scholars. But others, categories such as sensationalistic, capitalistic, or enemies of the state are ones not often found in the journals stocked by my university. In short, Marxist content analysis is value-laden and proud of it. This was one paper that needed more space. Frederick doesn't have room to supply enough of the details of the thirty-two studies to make his contention that these developments in Eastern Europe hold important lessons for us totally convincing.

Leslie Rado has been looking at death -- or at least the efforts of contemporary experts to figure out just what death is and when it can be said to occur. Perhaps the ultimate form of power is the power to define. Rado has searched the professional journals of the medical profession and of ethicists, moral philosophers and theologians, to examine their arguments "regarding their cultural authority to define death and influence public policy." As it happens these two groups not only disagree about how death should be defined, they disagree about what kind of issue defining death is. Physicians are likely to see this as a technical issue to be determined by experts, that is, themselves. Ethicists are more likely to see this as a matter of public determination. This difference, says Rado, affects decisions about with whom the two groups will communicate. Physicians say they write for and listen to other physicians. Ethicists say they read the medi-

cal journals as well as many other sources. Rado detects a hierarchy of exclusion with physicians at the top discoursing with other physicians and ethicists at the bottom taking on all comers. The debate over defining death continues. Indeed, death, properly defined or not, promises to overtake the participants sometime before they reach agreement.

In another paper Charles E. Osgood continues his game efforts to interject notes of sanity in the quest for ways to halt nuclear stock-piling. Here he outlines GRIT (Graduated and Reciprocated Initiatives in Tension-Reduction), his scheme for drawing back from the precipice of nuclear disaster. A couple of things are impressive about Osgood's efforts. One is his personal grit in sticking to his cause. He stumbled on the acronym GRIT two decades ago; there hasn't been much in those two decades to encourage anyone who wants to see the stock-piling rolled back. The second is his effort to use his research into how the mind processes information as a basis for a program of political action. One hates to be cynical, but one suspects Osgood's approach reeks too strongly of sense and sanity to influence greatly the course of history.

Vincent Mosco has been reading his Dallas Smythe -- and his Durkheim, Daniel Bell, Raymond Williams and others. He's mixed that with some astute observations of his own to produce a fine paper entitled, "Home Sweet Factory: Perspectives on Mass Society." He reviews three perspectives on the analysis of leisure. The first views leisure as the payoff for what we endure at work. A second more radical approach sees leisure as a continuation of work by other means. The "boob" slumped before the tube is part of the audience commodity, someone being sold to the advertisers by the networks. A third perspective seeks to deepen the second perspective by seeing the private sphere (home life) partly as an area for the production of audiences, but also as an arena for the struggle of individuals against becoming commodities. Mosco's purpose is to sort out some of the language used in analyses of this kind. He suggests that distinguishing only between the public sphere and the private sphere is not enough. He thinks three categories are necessary. The public sphere would be social activity where people come together to swap opinions on various issues. The private sphere would be those activities associated with intimacy and family, love and hate. The third sphere is the audience sphere, "that area of human activity that capital has shaped into a marketable commodity."

One concludes a review of this sort with a sense of profound guilt. Highlighting a half dozen papers necessarily means omitting a dozen papers equally worthy of mention. Among these are a paper hypothesizing a relationship between the mass media's insistent harping on consumerism and the development of stagflation. Another looks at the impact of imported television programming in Brazil. The list obviously could be continued.

Communication research is galloping off in all directions. Many of the papers in this collection gallop off in directions a reader can profitably and enjoyably ride along.