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CHAPTER 1

A Cultural Approach to Communication

I

When I decided some years ago to read seriously the literature of communications, a wise man suggested I begin with John Dewey. It was advice I have never regretted accepting. Although there are limitations to Dewey—his literary style was described by William James as damnable—there is a depth to his work, a natural excess common to seminal minds, that offers permanent complexities, and paradoxes over which to puzzle—surely something absent from most of our literature.

Dewey opens an important chapter in *Experience and Nature* with the seemingly preposterous claim that "of all things communication is the most wonderful" (1939: 385). What could he have meant by that? If we interpret the sentence literally, it must be either false or mundane. Surely most of the news and entertainment we receive through the mass media are of the order that Thoreau predicted for the international telegraph: "the intelligence that Princess Adelaide had the whooping cough." A daily visit with the New York *Times* is not quite so trivial, though it is an experience more depressing than wonderful. Moreover, most of one's encounters with others are wonderful only in moments of excessive masochism. Dewey's sentence, by any reasonable interpretation, is either false to everyday experience or simply mundane if he means only that on some occasions communication is satisfying and rewarding.

In another place Dewey offers an equally enigmatic comment on communication: "Society exists not only by

transmission, by communication, but it may fairly be said to exist in transmission, in communication" (Dewey, 1916: 5). What is the significance of the shift in prepositions?[1] Is Dewey claiming that societies distribute information, to speak rather too anthropomorphically, and that by such transactions and the channels of communication peculiar to them society is made possible? That is certainly a reasonable claim, but we hardly need social scientists and philosophers to tell us so. It reminds me of Robert Nisbet's acid remark that if you need sociologists to inform you whether or not you have a ruling class, you surely don't. But if this transparent interpretation is rejected, are there any guarantees that after peeling away layers of semantic complexity anything more substantial will be revealed?

I think there are, for the body of Dewey's work reveals a substantial rather than a pedestrian intelligence. Rather than quoting him ritualistically (for the lines I have cited regularly appear without comment or interpretation in the literature of communications), we would be better advised to untangle this underlying complexity for the light it might cast upon contemporary studies. I think this complexity derives from Dewey's use of communication in two quite different senses. He understood better than most of us that communication has had two contrasting definitions in the history of Western thought, and he used the conflict between these definitions as a source of creative tension in his work. This same conflict led him, not surprisingly, into some of his characteristic errors. Rather than blissfully repeating his insights or unconsciously duplicating his errors, we might extend his thought by seizing upon the same contradiction he perceived in our use of the term "communication" and use it in turn as a device for vivifying our studies.

Two alternative conceptions of communication have been alive in American culture since this term entered common discourse in the nineteenth century. Both definitions derive, as with much in secular culture, from religious origins, though they refer to somewhat different regions of religious experience. We might label these descriptions, if only to provide handy pegs upon which to hang our thought,

a transmission view of communication and a ritual view of communication.

The transmission view of communication is the commonest in our culture—perhaps in all industrial cultures—and dominates contemporary dictionary entries under the term. It is defined by terms such as "imparting," "sending," "transmitting," or "giving information to others." It is formed from a metaphor of geography or transportation. In the nineteenth century but to a lesser extent today, the movement of goods or people and the movement of information were seen as essentially identical processes and both were described by the common noun "communication." The center of this idea of communication is the transmission of signals or messages over distance for the purpose of control. It is a view of communication that derives from one of the most ancient of human dreams: the desire to increase the speed and effect of messages as they travel in space. From the time upper and lower Egypt were unified under the First Dynasty down through the invention of the telegraph, transportation and communication were inseparably linked. Although messages might be centrally produced and controlled, through monopolization of writing or the rapid production of print, these messages, carried in the hands of a messenger or between the bindings of a book, still had to be distributed, if they were to have their desired effect, by rapid transportation. The telegraph ended the identity but did not destroy the metaphor. Our basic orientation to communication remains grounded, at the deepest roots of our thinking, in the idea of transmission: communication is a process whereby messages are transmitted and distributed in space for the control of distance and people.[2]

I said this view originated in religion, though the foregoing sentences seem more indebted to politics, economics, and technology. Nonetheless, the roots of the transmission view of communication, in our culture at least, lie in essentially religious attitudes. I can illustrate this by a devious though, in detail, inadequate path.

In its modern dress the transmission view of communication arises, as the *Oxford English Dictionary* will attest, at the onset of the age of exploration and discovery. We have

been reminded rather too often that the motives behind this vast movement in space were political and mercantilistic. Certainly those motives were present, but their importance should not obscure the equally compelling fact that a major motive behind this movement in space, particularly as evidenced by the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa or the Puritans in New England, was religious. The desire to escape the boundaries of Europe, to create a new life, to found new communities, to carve a New Jerusalem out of the woods of Massachusetts, were primary motives behind the unprecedented movement of white European civilization over virtually the entire globe. The vast and, for the first time, democratic migration in space was above all an attempt to trade an old world for a new and represented the profound belief that movement in space could be in itself a redemptive act. It is a belief Americans have never quite escaped.

Transportation, particularly when it brought the Christian community of Europe into contact with the heathen community of the Americas, was seen as a form of communication with profoundly religious implications. This movement in space was an attempt to establish and extend the kingdom of God, to create the conditions under which godly understanding might be realized, to produce a heavenly though still terrestrial city.

The moral meaning of transportation, then, was the establishment and extension of God's kingdom on earth. The moral meaning of communication was the same. By the middle of the nineteenth century the telegraph broke the identity of communication and transportation but also led a preacher of the era, Gardner Spring, to exclaim that we were on the "border of a spiritual harvest because thought now travels by steam and magnetic wires" (Miller, 1965: 48). Similarly, in 1848 "James L. Batchelder could declare that the Almighty himself had constructed the railroad for missionary purposes and, as Samuel Morse prophesied with the first telegraphic message, the purpose of the invention was not to spread the price of pork but to ask the question 'What Hath God Wrought?'" (Miller, 1965: 52). This new technology entered American discussions not as a mundane fact but as

divinely inspired for the purposes of spreading the Christian message farther and faster, eclipsing time and transcending space, saving the heathen, bringing closer and making more probable the day of salvation. As the century wore on and religious thought was increasingly tied to applied science, the new technology of communication came to be seen as the ideal device for the conquest of space and populations. Our most distinguished student of these matters, Perry Miller, has commented:

> The unanimity (among Protestant sects), which might at first sight seem wholly supernatural, was wrought by the telegraph and the press. These conveyed and published "the thrill of Christian sympathy, with the tidings of abounding grace, from multitudes in every city simultaneously assembled, in effect almost bringing a nation together in one praying intercourse." Nor could it be only fortuitous that the movement should coincide with the Atlantic Cable, for both were harbingers "of that which is the forerunner of ultimate spiritual victory . . . ." The awakening of 1858 first made vital for the American imagination a realizable program of a Christianized technology. (Miller, 1965: 91)

Soon, as the forces of science and secularization gained ground, the obvious religious metaphors fell away and the technology of communication itself moved to the center of thought. Moreover, the superiority of communication over transportation was assured by the observation of one nineteenth century commentator that the telegraph was important because it involved not the mere "modification of matter but the transmission of thought." Communication was viewed as a process and a technology that would, sometimes for religious purposes, spread, transmit, and disseminate knowledge, ideas, and information farther and faster with the goal of controlling space and people.

There were dissenters, of course, and I have already quoted Thoreau's disenchanted remark on the telegraph. More pessimistically, John C. Calhoun saw the "subjugation of electricity to the mechanical necessities of man . . . (as) the last era in human civilization" (quoted in Miller, 1965: 307). But the dissenters were few, and the transmission

view of communication, albeit in increasingly secularized and scientific form, has dominated our thought and culture since that time. Moreover, as can be seen in contemporary popular commentary and even in technical discussions of new communications technology, the historic religious undercurrent has never been eliminated from our thought. From the telegraph to the computer the same sense of profound possibility for moral improvement is present whenever these machines are invoked. And we need not be reminded of the regularity with which improved communication is invoked by an army of teachers, preachers, and columnists as the talisman of all our troubles. More controversially, the same root attitudes, as I can only assert here rather than demonstrate, are at work in most of our scientifically sophisticated views of communication.

The ritual view of communication, though a minor thread in our national thought, is by far the older of those views—old enough in fact for dictionaries to list it under "Archaic." In a ritual definition, communication is linked to terms such as "sharing," "participation," "association," "fellowship," and "the possession of a common faith." This definition exploits the ancient identity and common roots of the terms "commonness," "communion," "community," and "communication." A ritual view of communication is directed not toward the extension of messages in space but toward the maintenance of society in time; not the act of imparting information but the representation of shared beliefs.

If the archetypal case of communication under a transmission view is the extension of messages across geography for the purpose of control, the archetypal case under a ritual view is the sacred ceremony that draws persons together in fellowship and commonality.

The indebtedness of the ritual view of communication to religion is apparent in the name chosen to label it. Moreover, it derives from a view of religion that downplays the role of the sermon, the instruction and admonition, in order to highlight the role of the prayer, the chant, and the ceremony. It sees the original or highest manifestation of communication not in the transmission of intelligent information but in the construction and maintenance of an ordered, meaningful

cultural world that can serve as a control and container for human action.

This view has also been shorn of its explicitly religious origins, but it has never completely escaped its metaphoric root. Writers in this tradition often trace their heritage, in part, to Durkheim's *Elementary Forms of Religious Life* and to the argument stated elsewhere that "society substitutes for the world revealed to our senses a different world that is a projection of the ideals created by the community" (1953: 95). This projection of community ideals and their embodiment in material form—dance, plays, architecture, news stories, strings of speech—creates an artificial though nonetheless real symbolic order that operates to provide not information but confirmation, not to alter attitudes or change minds but to represent an underlying order of things, not to perform functions but to manifest an ongoing and fragile social process.

The ritual view of communication has not been a dominant motif in American scholarship. Our thought and work have been glued to a transmission view of communication because this view is congenial with the underlying wellsprings of American culture, sources that feed into our scientific life as well as our common, public understandings. There is an irony in this. We have not explored the ritual view of communication because the concept of culture is such a weak and evanescent notion in American social thought. We understand that other people have culture in the anthropological sense and we regularly record it—often mischievously and patronizingly. But when we turn critical attention to American culture the concept dissolves into a residual category useful only when psychological and sociological data are exhausted. We realize that the underprivileged live in a culture of poverty, use the notion of middle-class culture as an epithet, and occasionally applaud our high and generally scientific culture. But the notion of culture is not a hard-edged term of intellectual discourse for domestic purposes. This intellectual aversion to the idea of culture derives in part from our obsessive individualism, which makes psychological life the paramount reality; from our Puritanism, which leads to disdain for the significance

of human activity that is not practical and work oriented; and from our isolation of science from culture: science provides culture-free truth whereas culture provides ethnocentric error.

Consequently, when looking for scholarship that emphasizes the central role of culture and a ritual view of communication, one must rely heavily on European sources or upon Americans deeply influenced by European scholarship. As a result the opportunities for misunderstanding are great. Perhaps, then, some of the difference between a transmission and a ritual view of communication can be grasped by briefly looking at alternative conceptions of the role of the newspaper in social life.

If one examines a newspaper under a transmission view of communication, one sees the medium as an instrument for disseminating news and knowledge, sometimes *divertissement*, in larger and larger packages over greater distances. Questions arise as to the effects of this on audiences: news as enlightening or obscuring reality, as changing or hardening attitudes, as breeding credibility or doubt. Questions also are raised concerning the functions of news and the newspaper: Does it maintain the integration of society or its maladaption? Does it function or misfunction to maintain stability or promote the instability of personalities? Some such mechanical analysis normally accompanies a "transmission" argument.

A ritual view of communication will focus on a different range of problems in examining a newspaper. It will, for example, view reading a newspaper less as sending or gaining information and more as attending a mass, a situation in which nothing new is learned but in which a particular view of the world is portrayed and confirmed. News reading, and writing, is a ritual act and moreover a dramatic one. What is arrayed before the reader is not pure information but a portrayal of the contending forces in the world. Moreover, as readers make their way through the paper, they engage in a continual shift of roles or of dramatic focus. A story on the monetary crisis salutes them as American patriots fighting those ancient enemies Germany and Japan; a story on the meeting of the women's political caucus casts them into the liberation movement as supporter or opponent; a tale

of violence on the campus evokes their class antagonisms and resentments. The model here is not that of information acquisition, though such acquisition occurs, but of dramatic action in which the reader joins a world of contending forces as an observer at a play. We do not encounter questions about the effect or functions of messages as such, but the role of presentation and involvement in the structuring of the reader's life and time. We recognize, as with religious rituals, that news changes little and yet is intrinsically satisfying; it performs few functions yet is habitually consumed. Newspapers do not operate as a source of effects or functions but as dramatically satisfying, which is not to say pleasing, presentations of what the world at root is. And it is in this role—that of a text—that a newspaper is seen; like a Balinese cockfight, a Dickens novel, an Elizabethan drama, a student rally, it is a presentation of reality that gives life an overall form, order, and tone.

Moreover, news is a historic reality. It is a form of culture invented by a particular class at a particular point of history—in this case by the middle class largely in the eighteenth century. Like any invented cultural form, news both forms and reflects a particular "hunger for experience," a desire to do away with the epic, heroic, and traditional in favor of the unique, original, novel, new—news. This "hunger" itself has a history grounded in the changing style and fortunes of the middle class and as such does not represent a universal taste or necessarily legitimate form of knowledge (Park, 1955: 71-88) but an invention in historical time, that like most other human inventions, will dissolve when the class that sponsors it and its possibility of having significance for us evaporates.

Under a ritual view, then, news is not information but drama. It does not describe the world but portrays an arena of dramatic forces and action; it exists solely in historical time; and it invites our participation on the basis of our assuming, often vicariously, social roles within it.[3]

Neither of these counterposed views of communication necessarily denies what the other affirms. A ritual view does not exclude the processes of information transmission or attitude change. It merely contends that one cannot understand these

processes aright except insofar as they are cast within an essentially ritualistic view of communication and social order. Similarly, even writers indissolubly wedded to the transmission view of communication must include some notion, such as Malinowski's phatic communion, to attest however tardily to the place of ritual action in social life. Nonetheless, in intellectual matters origins determine endings, and the exact point at which one attempts to unhinge the problem of communication largely determines the path the analysis can follow.

The power of Dewey's work derives from his working over these counterpoised views of communication. Communication is "the most wonderful" because it is the basis of human fellowship; it produces the social bonds, bogus or not, that tie men together and make associated life possible. Society is possible because of the binding forces of shared information circulating in an organic system. The following quotation reveals this tension and Dewey's final emphasis on a ritual view of communication:

> There is more than a verbal tie between the words common, community, and communication. Men live in a community in virtue of the things which they have in common; and communication is the way in which they come to possess things in common. What they must have in common . . . are aims, beliefs, aspirations, knowledge—a common understanding—likemindedness as sociologists say. Such things cannot be passed physically from one to another like bricks; they cannot be shared as persons would share a pie by dividing it into physical pieces . . . . Consensus demands communication (Dewey, 1916: 5-6).

Dewey was, like the rest of us, often untrue to his own thought. His hopes for the future often overwhelmed the impact of his analysis. Ah! "the wish is father to the thought." He came to overvalue scientific information and communication technology as a solvent to social problems and a source of social bonds. Nonetheless, the tension between these views can still open a range of significant problems in communication for they not only represent different conceptions of communication but correspond to particular historical periods, technologies, and forms of social order.[4]

The transmission view of communication has dominated American thought since the 1920s. When I first came into this field I felt that this view of communication, expressed in behavioral and functional terms, was exhausted. It had become academic: a repetition of past achievement, a demonstration of the indubitable. Although it led to solid achievement, it could no longer go forward without disastrous intellectual and social consequences. I felt it was necessary to reopen the analysis, to reinvigorate it with the tension found in Dewey's work and, above all, to go elsewhere into biology, theology, anthropology, and literature for some intellectual material with which we might escape the treadmill we were running.

II

But where does one turn, even provisionally, for the resources with which to get a fresh perspective on communication? For me at least the resources were found by going back to the work of Weber, Durkheim, de Tocqueville, and Huizinga, as well as by utilizing contemporaries such as Kenneth Burke, Hugh Duncan, Adolph Portman, Thomas Kuhn, Peter Berger, and Clifford Geertz. Basically, however, the most viable though still inadequate tradition of social thought on communication comes from those colleagues and descendants of Dewey in the Chicago School: from Mead and Cooley through Robert Park and on to Erving Goffman.

From such sources one can draw a definition of communication of disarming simplicity yet, I think, of some intellectual power and scope: communication is a symbolic process whereby reality is produced, maintained, repaired, and transformed.

Let me attempt to unpack that long first clause emphasizing the symbolic production of reality.

One of the major problems one encounters in talking about communication is that the noun refers to the most

common, mundane human experience. There is truth in Marshall McLuhan's assertion that the one thing of which the fish is unaware is water, the very medium that forms its ambience and supports its existence. Similarly, communication, through language and other symbolic forms, comprises the ambience of human existence. The activities we collectively call communication—having conversations, giving instructions, imparting knowledge, sharing significant ideas, seeking information, entertaining and being entertained—are so ordinary and mundane that it is difficult for them to arrest our attention. Moreover, when we intellectually visit this process, we often focus on the trivial and unproblematic, so inured are we to the mysterious and awesome in communication.

A wise man once defined the purpose of art as "making the phenomenon strange." Things can become so familiar that we no longer perceive them at all. Art, however, can take the sound of the sea, the intonation of a voice, the texture of a fabric, the design of a face, the play of light upon a landscape, and wrench these ordinary phenomena out of the backdrop of existence and force them into the foreground of consideration. When Scott Fitzgerald described Daisy Buchanan as having "a voice full of money" he moves us, if we are open to the experience, to hear again that ordinary thing, the sound of a voice, and to contemplate what it portends. He arrests our apprehension and focuses it on the mystery of character as revealed in sound.

Similarly, the social sciences can take the most obvious yet background facts of social life and force them into the foreground of wonderment. They can make us contemplate the particular miracles of social life that have become for us just there, plain and unproblematic for the eye to see. When he comments that communication is the most wonderful among things, surely Dewey is trying just that: to induce in us a capacity for wonder and awe regarding this commonplace activity. Dewey knew that knowledge most effectively grew at the point when things became problematic, when we experience an "information gap" between what circumstances impelled us toward doing and what we needed to know in order to act at all. This

information gap, this sense of the problematic, often can be induced only by divesting life of its mundane trappings and exposing our common sense or scientific assumptions to an ironic light that makes the phenomenon strange.

To a certain though inadequate degree, my first clause attempts just that. Both our common sense and scientific realism attest to the fact that there is, first, a real world of objects, events, and processes that we observe. Second, there is language or symbols that name these events in the real world and create more or less adequate descriptions of them. There is reality and then, after the fact, our accounts of it. We insist there is a distinction between reality and fantasy; we insist that our terms stand in relation to this world as shadow and substance. While language often distorts, obfuscates, and confuses our perception of this external world, we rarely dispute this matter-of-fact realism. We peel away semantic layers of terms and meanings to uncover this more substantial domain of existence. Language stands to reality as secondary stands to primary in the old Galilean paradigm from which this view derives.

By the first clause I mean to invert this relationship, not to make any large metaphysical claims but rather, by reordering the relation of communication to reality, to render communication a far more problematic activity than it ordinarily seems.

I want to suggest, to play on the Gospel of St. John, that in the beginning was the word; words are not the names for things but, to steal a line from Kenneth Burke, things are the signs of words. Reality is not given, not humanly existent, independent of language and toward which language stands as a pale refraction. Rather, reality is brought into existence, is produced, by communication—by, in short, the construction, apprehension, and utilization of symbolic forms.[5] Reality, while not a mere function of symbolic forms, is produced by terministic systems—or by humans who produce such systems—that focus its existence in specific terms.

Under the sway of realism we ordinarily assume there is an order to existence that the human mind through some

faculty may discover and describe. I am suggesting that reality is not there to discover in any significant detail. The world is entropic—that is, not strictly ordered—though its variety is constrained enough that the mind can grasp its outline and implant an order over and within the broad and elastic constraints of nature. To put it colloquially, there are no lines of latitude and longitude in nature, but by overlaying the globe with this particular, though not exclusively correct, symbolic organization, order is imposed on spatial organization and certain, limited human purposes served.

Whatever reality might be on the mind of Bishop Berkeley's God, whatever it might be for other animals, it is for us a vast production, a staged creation—something humanly produced and humanly maintained. Whatever order is in the world is not given in our genes or exclusively supplied by nature. As the biologist J. Z. Young puts it, "the brains of each one of us does literally create his or her own world" (1951: 61); the order of history is, as Eric Vogelin puts it, "the history of order"—the myriad forms in which people have endowed significance, order, and meaning in the world by the agency of their own intellectual processes.

Ernst Cassirer said it, and others have repeated it to the point of deadening its significance: man lives in a new dimension of reality, symbolic reality, and it is through the agency of this capacity that existence is produced. However, though it is often said, it is rarely investigated. More than repeat it, we have to take it seriously, follow it to the end of the line, to assess its capacity to vivify our studies. What Cassirer is contending is that one must examine communication, even scientific communication, even mathematical expression, as the primary phenomena of experience and not as something "softer" and derivative from a "realer" existent nature.

Lest someone think this obscure, allow me to illustrate with an example, an example at once so artless and transparent that the meaning will be clear even if engaging complexities are sacrificed. Let us suppose one had to teach a child of six or seven how to get from home to school. The child has driven by the school, which is some six or seven blocks away, so he recognizes it, but he has no idea of the relation between his house and school. The space between

these points might as well be, as the saying goes, a trackless desert. What does one do in such a situation?

There are a number of options. One might let the child discover the route by trial and error, correcting him as he goes, in faithful imitation of a conditioning experiment. One might have the child follow an adult, as I'm told the Apaches do, "imprinting" the route on the child. However, the ordinary method is simply to draw the child a map. By arranging lines, angles, names, squares denoting streets and buildings in a pattern on paper, one transforms vacant space into a featured environment. Although some environments are easier to feature than others—hence trackless deserts—space is understood and manageable when it is represented in symbolic form.

The map stands as a representation of an environment capable of clarifying a problematic situation. It is capable of guiding behavior and simultaneously transforming undifferentiated space into configured—that is, known, apprehended, understood—space.

Note also that an environment, any given space, can be mapped in a number of different modes. For example, we might map a particularly important space by producing a poetic or musical description. As in the song that goes, in part, "first you turn it to the left, then you turn it to the right," a space can be mapped by a stream of poetic speech that expresses a spatial essence and that also ensures, by exploiting the mnemonic devices of song and poetry, that the "map" can be retained in memory. By recalling the poem at appropriate moments, space can be effectively configured.

A third means of mapping space is danced ritual. The movements of the dance can parallel appropriate movements through space. By learning the dance the child acquires a representation of the space that on another occasion can guide behavior.

Space can be mapped, then, in different modes—utilizing lines on a page, sounds in air, movements in a dance. All three are symbolic forms, though the symbols differ; visual, oral, and kinesthetic. Moreover, each of the symbolic forms possesses two distinguishing characteristics: displacement and productivity. Like ordinary language, each mode allows

one to speak about or represent some thing when the thing in question is not present. This capacity of displacement, of producing a complicated act when the "real" stimulus is not physically present, is another often noted though not fully explored capacity. Second, each of these symbolic forms is productive, for a person in command of the symbols is capable of producing an infinite number of representations on the basis of a finite number of symbolic elements. As with language, so with other symbolic forms: a finite set of words or a finite set of phonemes can produce, through grammatical combination, an infinite set of sentences.

We often argue that a map represents a simplification of or an abstraction from an environment. Not all the features of an environment are modeled, for the purpose of the representation is to express not the possible complexity of things but their simplicity. Space is made manageable by the reduction of information. By doing this, however, different maps bring the same environment alive in different ways; they produce quite different realities. Therefore, to live within the purview of different maps is to live within different realities. Consequently, maps not only constitute the activity known as mapmaking; they constitute nature itself.

A further implication concerns the nature of thought. In our predominantly individualistic tradition, we are accustomed to think of thought as essentially private, an activity that occurs in the head—graphically represented by Rodin's "The Thinker." I wish to suggest, in contradistinction, that thought is predominantly public and social. It occurs primarily on blackboards, in dances, and in recited poems. The capacity of private thought is a derived and secondary talent, one that appears biographically later in the person and historically later in the species. Thought is public because it depends on a publicly available stock of symbols. It is public in a second and stronger sense. Thinking consists of building maps of environments. Thought involves constructing a model of an environment and then running the model faster than the environment to see if nature can be coerced to perform as the model does. In the earlier example, the map of the neighborhood and the path from home to school represent the environment; the finger one lays on the map

and traces the path is a representation of the child, the walker. "Running" the map is faster than walking the route and constitutes the "experiment" or "test."

Thought is the construction and utilization of such maps, models, templates: football plays diagrammed on a blackboard, equations on paper, ritual dances charting the nature of ancestors, or streams of prose like this attempting, out in the bright-lit world in which we all live, to present the nature of communication.

This particular miracle we perform daily and hourly—the miracle of producing reality and then living within and under the fact of our own productions—rests upon a particular quality of symbols: their ability to be both representations "of" and "for" reality.[6]

A blueprint of a house in one mode is a representation "for" reality: under its guidance and control a reality, a house, is produced that expresses the relations contained in reduced and simplified form in the blueprint. There is a second use of a blueprint, however. If someone asks for a description of a particular house, one can simply point to a blueprint and say, "That's the house." Here the blueprint stands as a representation or symbol of reality: it expresses or represents in an alternative medium a synoptic formulation of the nature of a particular reality. While these are merely two sides of the same coin, they point to the dual capacity of symbolic forms: as "symbols of" they present reality; as "symbols for" they create the very reality they present.

In my earlier example the map of the neighborhood in one mode is a symbol of, a representation that can be pointed to when someone asks about the relation between home and school. Ultimately, the map becomes a representation for reality when, under its guidance, the child makes his way from home to school and, by the particular blinders as well as the particular observations the map induces, experiences space in the way it is synoptically formulated in the map.

It is no different with a religious ritual. In one mode it represents the nature of human life, its condition and meaning, and in another mode—its "for" mode—it induces the dispositions it pretends merely to portray.

All human activity is such an exercise (can one resist the word "ritual"?) in squaring the circle. We first produce the world by symbolic work and then take up residence in the world we have produced. Alas, there is magic in our self deceptions.[7]

We not only produce reality but we must likewise maintain what we have produced, for there are always new generations coming along for whom our productions are incipiently problematic and for whom reality must be regenerated and made authoritative. Reality must be repaired for it consistently breaks down: people get lost physically and spiritually, experiments fail, evidence counter to the representation is produced, mental derangement sets in—all threats to our models of and for reality that lead to intense repair work. Finally, we must, often with fear and regret, toss away our authoritative representations of reality and begin to build the world anew. We go to bed, to choose an example not quite at random, convinced behaviorists who view language, under the influence of Skinner, as a matter of operant conditioning and wake up, for mysterious reasons, convinced rationalists, rebuilding our mode of language, under the influence of Chomsky, along the lines of deep structures, transformations, and surface appearances. These are two different intellectual worlds in which to live, and we may find that the anomalies of one lead us to transform it into another.[8]

To study communication is to examine the actual social process wherein significant symbolic forms are created, apprehended, and used. When described this way some scholars would dismiss it as insufficiently empirical. My own view is the opposite, for I see it as an attempt to sweep away our existing notions concerning communication that serve only to devitalize our data. Our attempts to construct, maintain, repair, and transform reality are publicly observable activities that occur in historical time. We create, express, and convey our knowledge of and attitudes toward reality through the construction of a variety of symbol systems: art, science, journalism, religion, common sense, mythology. How do we do this? What are the differences between these forms? What are the historical and comparative variations

in them? How do changes in communication technology influence what we can concretely create and apprehend? How do groups in society struggle over the definition of what is real? These are some of the questions, rather too simply put, that communication studies must answer.

Finally, let me emphasize an ironic aspect to the study of communication, a way in which our subject matter doubles back on itself and presents us with a host of ethical problems. One of the activities in which we characteristically engage, as in this essay, is communication about communication itself. However, communication is not some pure phenomenon we can discover; there is no such thing as communication to be revealed in nature through some objective method free from the corruption of culture. We understand communication insofar as we are able to build models or representations of this process. But our models of communication, like all models, have this dual aspect—an "of" aspect and a "for" aspect. In one mode communication models tell us what the process is; in their second mode they produce the behavior they have described. Communication can be modeled in several empirically adequate ways, but these several models have different ethical implications for they produce different forms of social relations.

Let us face this dilemma directly. There is nothing in our genes that tells us how to create and execute those activities we summarize under the term "communication." If we are to engage in this activity—writing an essay, making a film, entertaining an audience, imparting information and advice—we must discover models in our culture that tell us how this particular miracle is achieved. Such models are found in common sense, law, religious traditions, increasingly in scientific theories themselves. Traditionally, models of communication were found in religious thought. For example, in describing the roots of the transmission view of communication in nineteenth century American religious thought I meant to imply the following: religious thought not only described communication; it also presented a model for the appropriate uses of language, the permissible forms of human contact, the ends communication should serve, the motives it should manifest. It taught what it meant to display.

Today models of communication are found less in religion than in science, but their implications are the same. For example, American social science generally has represented communication, within an overarching transmission view, in terms of either a power or an anxiety model. These correspond roughly to what is found in information theory, learning theory, and influence theory (power) and dissonance, balance theory, and functionalism or uses and gratifications analysis (anxiety). I cannot adequately explicate these views here, but they reduce the extraordinary phenomenological diversity of communication into an arena in which people alternatively pursue power or flee anxiety. And one need only monitor the behavior of modern institutions to see the degree to which these models create, through policy and program, the abstract motives and relations they portray.

Models of communication are, then, not merely representations of communication but representations *for* communication: templates that guide, unavailing or not, concrete processes of human interaction, mass and interpersonal. Therefore, to study communication involves examining the construction, apprehension, and use of models of communication themselves—their construction in common sense, art, and science, their historically specific creation and use: in encounters between parent and child, advertisers and consumer, welfare worker and supplicant, teacher and student. Behind and within these encounters lie models of human contact and interaction.

Our models of communication, consequently, create what we disingenuously pretend they merely describe. As a result our science is, to use a term of Alvin Gouldner's, a reflexive one. We not only describe behavior; we create a particular corner of culture—culture that determines, in part, the kind of communicative world we inhabit.

Raymond Williams, whose analysis I shall follow in conclusion, speaks to the point:

> Communication begins in the struggle to learn and to describe. To start this process in our minds and to pass on its results to others, we depend on certain communication models, certain rules or conventions through which we can

> make contact. We can change these models when they become inadequate or we can modify and extend them. Our efforts to do so, and to use the existing models successfully, take up a large part of our living energy. . . . Moreover, many of our communication models become, in themselves, social institutions. Certain attitudes to others, certain forms of address, certain tones and styles become embodied in institutions which are then very powerful in social effect. . . . These arguable assumptions are often embodied in solid, practical institutions which then teach the models from which they start (1966: 19-20).

This relation between science and society described by Williams has not been altogether missed by the public and accounts for some of the widespread interest in communication. I am not speaking merely of the contemporary habit of reducing all human problems to problems or failures in communication. Let us recognize the habit for what it is: an attempt to coat reality with cliches, to provide a semantic crucifix to ward off modern vampires. But our appropriate cynicism should not deflect us from discovering the kernel of truth in such phrases.

If we follow Dewey, it will occur to us that problems of communication are linked to problems of community, to problems surrounding the kinds of communities we create and in which we live.[9] For the ordinary person communication consists merely of a set of daily activities: having conversations, conveying instructions, being entertained, sustaining debate and discussion, acquiring information. The felt quality of our lives is bound up with these activities and how they are carried out within communities.

Our minds and lives are shaped by our total experience—or, better, by representations of experience and, as Williams has argued, a name for this experience is communication. If one tries to examine society as a form of communication, one sees it as a process whereby reality is created, shared, modified, and preserved. When this process becomes opaque, when we lack models of and for reality that make the world apprehensible, when we are unable to describe and share it; when because of a failure in our models of communication we are unable to connect with

others, we encounter problems of communication in their most potent form.

The widespread social interest in communication derives from a derangement in our models of communication and community. This derangement derives, in turn, from an obsessive commitment to a transmission view of communication and the derivative representation of communication in complementary models of power and anxiety. As a result, when we think about society, we are almost always coerced by our traditions into seeing it as a network of power, administration, decision, and control—as a political order. Alternatively, we have seen society essentially as relations of property, production, and trade—an economic order. But social life is more than power and trade (and it is more than therapy as well). As Williams has argued, it also includes the sharing of aesthetic experience, religious ideas, personal values and sentiments, and intellectual notions—a ritual order.

Our existing models of communication are less an analysis than a contribution to the chaos of modern culture, and in important ways we are paying the penalty for the long abuse of fundamental communicative processes in the service of politics, trade, and therapy. Three examples. Because we have looked at each new advance in communications technology as an opportunity for politics and economics, we have devoted it, almost exclusively, to matters of government and trade. We have rarely seen these advances as opportunities to expand people's powers to learn and exchange ideas and experience. Because we have looked at education principally in terms of its potential for economics and politics, we have turned it into a form of citizenship, professionalism and consumerism, and increasingly therapy. Because we have seen our cities as the domain of politics and economics, they have become the residence of technology and bureaucracy. Our streets are designed to accommodate the automobile, our sidewalks to facilitate trade, our land and houses to satisfy the economy and the real estate speculator.

The object, then, of recasting our studies of communication in terms of a ritual model is not only to more

firmly grasp the essence of this "wonderful" process but to give us a way in which to rebuild a model of and for communication of some restorative value in reshaping our common culture.

NOTES

1 For further elaboration on these matters, see chapter 4.

2 For an interesting exposition of this view, see Lewis Mumford (1967).

3 The only treatment of news that parallels the description offered here is William Stephenson's *The Play Theory of Mass Communication* (1967). While Stephenson's treatment leaves much to be desired, particularly because it gets involved in some largely irrelevant methodological questions, it is nonetheless a genuine attempt to offer an alternative to our views of communication.

4 These contrasting views of communication also link, I believe, with contrasting views of the nature of language, thought, and symbolism. The transmission view of communication leads to an emphasis on language as an instrument of practical action and discursive reasoning, of thought as essentially conceptual and individual or reflective, and of symbolism as being preeminently analytic. A ritual view of communication, on the other hand, sees language as an instrument of dramatic action, of thought as essentially situational and social, and symbolism as fundamentally fiduciary.

5 This is not to suggest that language constitutes the real world as Ernst Cassirer often seems to argue. I wish to suggest that the world is apprehensible for humans only through language or some other symbolic form.

6 This formulation, as with many other aspects of this essay, is heavily dependent on the work of Clifford Geertz (see Geertz, 1973).

7 We, of course, not only produce a world; we produce as many as we can, and we live in easy or painful transit between them. This is the problem Alfred Schutz (1967) analyzed as the phenomenon of "multiple realities." I cannot treat this problem here, but I must add that some such perspective on the multiple nature of produced reality is necessary in order to make any sense of the rather dismal area of communicative "effects."

8 The example and language are not fortuitous. Thomas Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962) can be seen as a description of how a scientific world is produced (paradigm creation), maintained (paradigm articulation, training, through