RECENT PhD DISSERTATIONS IN CULTURAL AND COMMUNICATION STUDIES

EDITED BY

NICHOLAS W. JANKOWSKI

The volume of scholarly production in the field of cultural and communication studies has been rapidly increasing during the past decade. Much of this work, however, remains unknown or inaccessible to most of the academic community. A few dissertations are released by small commercial publishers, houses usually without the infrastructure for international marketing and distribution. This means that even in the best of circumstances, most quality academic dissertations become known and available to no more than a fraction of the potentially interested scholars.

Euricom, through involvement in the service *Scholarship On-demand Academic Publishing,* is committed to increasing access to quality dissertations, and is initiating a section within the journal *Javnost—The Public* for this purpose. We intend to regularly present abstracts of a select number of recent PhD dissertations here, along with contact information of the authors and degree-granting institutions.

Institutions and authors who would like to propose recently completed titles for this section of the journal are requested to send copies and abstracts to the editor of this section at the following address:

Dr. N.W. Jankowski
Department of Communication
University of Nijmegen
P.O. Box 9104
6500 HE Nijmegen, The Netherlands
email: N.Jankowski@maw.kun.nl

SCHOLARSHIP

SEIJA RIDELL

POLITICS OF SENSE-MAKING: THE RECEPTION OF TV NEWS FROM A CRITICAL GENRE PERSPECTIVE

(LANGUAGE: FINNISH. ORIGINAL TITLE: TOLKULLISTAMISEN POLITIIKKAA: TELEVISIOUUTISTEN VASTAANOTTO KRIITTISESTÄ GENRENÄKÖKULMASTA)

Contact information: Journalism Research Centre, University of Tampere, P.O. Box 607, 33101 Tampere, Finland, email: tiseri@uta.fi

The thesis explores both theoretically and empirically the conventionalised processes of meaning in the reception of television news. Starting from a constructionist and critical Cultural Studies framework it develops a social-semiotic notion of genre and employs it in examining the ways people routinely follow and make meaning of TV news. The daily practices of reception are approached in terms of "politics of sense-making," in other words, as having actual social implications. The data of the study were generated in 15 group discussions (altogether 45 participants) and include a TV news programme watched in each group session.

The study starts from the critical hegemonic view of news and current affairs journalism, outlined in the early years of British cultural media studies. The unexploited theoretical and empirical potential of Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding model is elaborated further by transforming it into a genre model. A social-semiotic genre model is developed by complementing Hall's semiotic model with recent attempts within rhetorical and pedagogical studies to redefine genre as pragmatic communicative action that is connected with the formation and sustenance of "virtual communities."

A social-semiotic conception of genre is refined and its analytic field of competence specified in discussion with critical discourse analysis (CDA) ad developed by Van Dijk and Fairclough. It is shown that the specificity of critical genre analysis is — in contrast to the CDA — in the way it conceptualises the processes of meaning in terms of semiotic action that relates the micro and macro aspects of social reality.

The theoretical part concludes by presenting a three-dimensional model of genre where the presentational, interpretative and practical aspects of mass-mediated meaning form a conceptual whole. The social-semiotic genre model produces a double focus for empirical analysis. Most importantly, the model stresses the importance of analysing the TV news text as an integral part of the study of TV news reception. The rhetorical idea of addressivity or mode of address relates textual analysis with the analysis of reception. Mode of address has to do with the genre-specific discursive ways through which the TV news text persuades the viewers to adopt particular positions of intelligibility and along with them memberships in "imagined communities."

After having outlined the social-semiotic conception of genre the study gives an overview of the culturally-oriented TV news research up to the present time. Observations by Cultural Studies news research — both textual and reception studies — form a point of comparison for the analysis in this study's empirical chapters. From the critical genre perspective, one important finding of the cultural study on TV news

is the transparency effect produced in TV news text as well as the outsider role thereby offered to the viewers. Noteworthy is also the observation by cultural researchers of TV news reception that when talking about news in "official" situations people tend to fashion themselves as dutiful (political) citizens.

The methodological choices and tools of the study are subsequently described. As regards textual analysis, reformulated literary narratological tools are presented. In discussion with reception analysis, on the one hand, and media ethnography, on the other, the use of group discussions for generating reception data is discussed. Due to their interactional characteristics, group sessions are suggested to contain specific potential for the emancipatory purposes of critically-oriented Cultural Studies audience research. Finally, the process of conducting the group discussions as well as the coding, analysing and interpreting the data are described.

In the first empirical chapter, a narratological analysis is presented of the TV news programme viewed in the group sessions. Instead of offering an interpretation of the news text, the genre-specific frames of meaning and the positions of intelligibility, discursively constructed for the viewers, are explored. The textual analysis acts as a point of comparison when examining the meanings produced by participants in the research sessions.

In three subsequent chapters, participant talk is analysed. First of all, the viewers' definition of TV news as a genre is constructed. What is most noteworthy in viewers' definition is the unproblematic trust expressed in the transparency of the TV news form which is seen to guarantee a window-like view on real events. Secondly, the daily role of TV news viewing as well as the reasons participants give for following the news are described and analysed. Strikingly enough, despite the negative feelings of boredom, frustration and anxiety, connected with the routinised viewing of TV news, the utmost importance of the genre as a privileged reality discourse is very much underscored by the participants. Thirdly, the meanings produced from the TV news programme viewed during the group sessions are analysed. Here the talk on two particular news items is given closer examination. The main observation here is, again, that the assumption of the transparency of TV news form strongly influences the way TV news and the specific items are interpreted. In the case of foreign news items, the assumption fosters feelings of distance and alienation in regard to the events, actions and people seen in the news. As regards domestic news items, the transparency effect prevents participants, among other things, from problematising and negotiating the quite monolithic way of representing the (Finnish) "nation" in TV news.

A main result of the empirical analysis thus is the apparent rhetorical effectivity of TV news in reception. This effectivity, for its part, brings to the fore the question of symbolic power relation between the viewers and TV news as a cultural form. The assumption of news as an indispensable reality discourse acts as an internalised dynamic of controlling meaning production as well as suppressing and directing the opinions and talk on TV news. In the research situation the dynamic of news genre manifested itself, for example, in the various strategies the participants employed to immediately water down the critique of TV news that emerged as part of the group interaction. Moreover, it actualised in the way participants policed the presentation of "inappropriate" — personally or emotionally charged — opinions in the sessions. What is noteworthy, however, is that the dutiful (political) "citizen talk," so much stressed in earlier reception studies, did not manifest itself. Instead, the "existential" importance

of the news in providing sense of immediate contact with the existence and continuity of shared reality was very prominent.

In the final chapter, the results of the study are summarised and conclusions presented regarding the politics of sense-making in TV news reception. It is contended that the viewers actively (re)produce the belief in the transparency of TV news and thereby its status as an unquestioned reality discourse. As a result, in making sense of the news they contribute also to the maintenance of the prevalent cultural and social structures. It is emphasised, however, that when assessing this "politics of sense-making" the symbolic power relation between TV news and the viewers must be taken into account. In other words, due to their subordinate audience position in the structures of media industry and, more specifically, because of their ignorance of the practices of TV news making, people have minimal opportunities to question the generic "news contract" they so willingly and unproblematically seem to accept. This sets at least two major challenges for future Cultural Studies research on TV news reception. Firstly, it should contribute actively to critical news literacy. Secondly, instead of examining ever more closely people's everyday reception and use of the news in their role as an audience, Cultural Studies research should offer people fora for acting as publics. This requires that the ethical and political implications of the methods currently employed in studying media reception are (self-) critically reflected upon and new, more interactive, empowering and emancipatory forms and practices of empirical research developed.

ANK LINDEN

COMMUNICATION POLICIES AND HUMAN RIGHTS IN THIRD WORLD COUNTRIES: TOWARDS A HUMAN-RIGHTS-BASED FRAMEWORK FOR COMMUNICATION DEVELOPMENT POLICIES

Contact information: University of Amsterdam, Department of Communication, Oude Hoogstraat 24, 1012 CE Amsterdam, The Netherlands, email: linden@puku.unza.zm

This study intends to determine the significance of universal human rights for designing national media policies in Third World countries. In many such countries, public media and communication are scarce. There are no or few possibilities to freely express one's opinion or obtain or exchange information. Lack of access to the public media and their vulnerable position are obstacles for freedom of information, the right to development and unimpeded access to the public media are the cornerstones of a democratic society. People have the right to be critical consumers an d producers of information. This study explores how the Human Right to Development (recognised in the UN General Assembly in December 1986) could be used as an instrument for

putting the issue of information and communication development on the public agenda.

The main research question of this study is: "Which guarantees are necessary to foster a human-rights-based communication development policy that promotes the independence of public media, increases people's access to independent public means of information and communication, and ensures that these media are not abused to promote or legitimise human rights violations?" The study is divided into four parts. Part I provides a historical analysis of the subject "Communication and Development." Part II presents a survey of theories, policies, and planning in relation to development and communication. Part III focuses more specifically on the intentions of the Dutch government as a leading Western donor country and contains the results of four case studies in fifteen indigenous experts in the field of communication and development. Part IV of the study focuses on future prospects for communication policies.

Third World civic society. Ordinary people in Third World countries have little access, neither as consumers nor as producers, to national media such as the press, radio, and television which are controlled by their governments. In efforts to make public media contribute to development, Third World citizens repeatedly face the following obstacles: authoritarian governments and centralised control; vested interests of national and international media organisations; lack of financial resources; low standards of professional training; and underestimation of indigenous communication patterns. Local communities do not make use of their indigenous communication networks (music, theatre, dance) and of small interactive media when these are available. Therefore, the divide between economic, political, and cultural structures is matched by a gap in communication media.

The case of the Netherlands, a donor country. Information and communication prove to be ambivalent dimensions of Dutch foreign and development policy, with structural cohesion and co-ordination being largely absent. The protection of freedom of information and a free flow of information refers to the civil and political rights, and comes within the political competence and responsibility of the Minister for Foreign Affairs. The use of information and communication (media) to increase the quality and efforts of development interventions refers to economic, social and cultural rights, and comes within the competence and responsibility of the Minister for Development Cooperation.

A quantitative review covering the period 1978-1995 was executed for this study. Disbursements were diversified into four communication categories: telecommunications and telematics, pluriformity of public information media, development support communication, and small-scale cultural activities. Analysis of the results shows that approximately 65% of all disbursements in this period went to the category of telecommunications and telematics, mainly for the supply and installation of telecommunication infrastructures (mainly by Dutch companies); approximately 16% went to disbursements in the category of pluriformity of public information media. Hence, bilateral aid was dominated by capital-intensive expenditures for infrastructural telecommunication facilities and mass media appliances.

The Dutch contribution to information and communication development is prominent in international debates, but disjointed in political practice. The quality and effectiveness of international co-operation will only improve when the divergent information and communication activities are better geared to each other and are subject to improved co-ordination.

One of the conclusions of this study is that the mainstream theoretical perspectives for development and communication, UNESCO's recommendations in the 1960s, have proved to be based on an inadequate assessment of the political-economic and socio-cultural realities in Third World countries. They gave a rather biased answer in propagating the availability of sufficient quantities of mass media to convey the message of modernisation and economic well-being. As interviews with communication experts conducted in this study illustrate, Third World practice has proved this to be an oversimplified and inadequate approach: efforts to translate theories and recommendations into national policy and planning have foundered; the full potential of information and communication technology has not been realised; and present policies are elitist and geared towards government-support communication instead of development-support communication. Hence, there is a hitch in the coherence between the design of development approaches in theory, the formulation of national communication policies, and the strength of existing power structures in Third World countries in practice.

An important question is if and how present research could make any contribution to policy decisions. Communication theories and models are mainly current in the academy; confronted with actual practice, theoretical models are often discarded because they prove to be inadequate as working instruments. Another challenge to further theoretical exploration is how to develop long-term policy and planning strategy, while urgent problems require instant and practical solutions at the same time. Finally, research is mainly being done by Western scholars who, in their home countries, are part of a middle class that is virtually absent from Third World countries.

Necessity and scope for a national Information and Communication Action Plan. To make use of the full potential of ICT, information and communication development should be put on the national and international development agendas. A National Information and Communication Action Plan (NICAP) provides a framework for co-ordinating and streamlining communication activities by all actors concerned and for guiding the course of genuine development, as described in the Declaration to the Right to Development. It serves both as a strategy for achieving sustainable development and as a basis for implementing universal human rights, which is one of the outcomes of the 1993 UN conference on Human Rights.

Preparing the NICAP should be entrusted to a statutory board composed of stock-holders with a reputation for service to the public (including government representatives, public and private sectors, and non-governmental organisations). A policy advisory committee should be established whose membership includes independent professionals from the fields of human rights, communication policy and development, and representatives of the international community (like the UN Commission on Human Rights and the Human Rights Committee). Local task forces should address the key information and communication issues contained in the NICAP. Task force reports with the views of local communities should be available for consultation by all implementers.

The main feature of a National Information and Communication Action Plan is its participatory nature. The NICAP must be presented and debated in interactive consultation with partners at all levels of society. Their comments, criticism, and recommendations are incorporated in the final plan. The NICAP must be an integral part of the country's National Development Plan and should include a definition of

the country's policy objectives and approaches, an assessment of the people's needs, and a strategy to realise these objectives through the mobilisation of human and material resources.

Finally, this study puts forward a human-rights-based framework for formulating communication development policies in Third World countries. This instrument aims to promote the independence of public media, to increase people's access to public means of information and communication, and to ensure that these media are not abused as a vehicle or legitimisation of human rights violations, It takes into account the rights and obligations of the four major parties involved: Third World countries - as the central subjects of development and active participants in and beneficiaries of the development process; formal Third World state representatives; donor govern- ments — as bilateral partners of Third World governments; and the international community. It hopes to achieve this, finally, through a revision of political power structures in Third World countries, a greater impact of donor conditionalities, and a better use of the international community's strategic position to promote universal respect for, and observance and protection of, all human rights and fundamental freedoms.