Hidden Dimensions of Hall in Media Ecology

Donna Flayhan

There is no doubt that Edward T. Hall's *The Silent Language* (1959) and *The Hidden Dimension* (1966) are canonic texts within the area of intercultural communication studies. Hall's work is referenced in the majority of intercultural communication studies and it is commonly referenced in studies of international relations and cross-cultural corporate communication. Within the areas of North American Cultural Studies and Media Ecology, however, Hall's work implicitly permeates the thinking and writing taking place yet is rarely explicitly pointed to as foundational. In this essay I explore the symmetry between Hall's early definitions of communication and culture and the definitions used by leading cultural studies and media ecology scholars such as James Carey, Joshua Meyrowitz, and Walter Ong. I also discuss the symmetry between founding media ecologist Harold Adams Innis's ideas on form, time, and space with Edward T. Hall's work. The symmetry in definitions of communication between Hall, Carey, Myerowitz, and Ong and the symmetry in approaches to form, time, and space between the works of Hall and Innis are not the only reasons to state that Hall's work represents neglected roots within Media Ecology. In the last section of this work I argue that Edward T. Hall's theoretical ideas and sites of analysis are as central to the media ecology scholarship of Joshua Meyrowitz as are the ideas of Harold Adams Innis and Marshall McLuhan.

Definitions of Communication: Carey, Meyrowitz, Ong, and Hall

James Carey, Joshua Meyrowitz, Walter Ong, and Edward T. Hall all study communication and culture from a ritual view of communication: Carey is most self-conscious and explicit in using and advocating a ritual model of communication; Meyrowitz tends to see the world through the ritual view; Ong's work embodies a ritual approach to communication studies; and Hall

advocates a ritual approach to communication in his overt definition of communication (Carey, 1989; Meyrowitz, 1985; Ong, 1982; Hall, 1959).

With a ritual view of communication, one understands communication as a process, a process in and through which society is created, maintained, and transformed--a process within which the world is made to mean (Carey, 1989; Gronbeck, Farrell, and Soukup, 1991). A transmission view of communication is concerned with the sending of messages over distances for purposes of control. In the transmission view, messages are viewed as things, things that are injected into the heads of receivers by senders and media are mere channels for the sending; in the ritual view "messages" and "channels" are experienced by "receivers" within a complex of previously internalized and enacted cultural experiences. Indeed the concrete thingness that the word message connotes makes it awkward to use in defining a ritual view of communication: the ritual view is more concerned with processes than with products (messages), with biases of media than with neutral or noisy channels, and with active participants than with manipulated or resistive receivers. While the ritual view of communication claims a longer heritage than the transmission view of communication, it has experienced a marginalized existence in America in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Carey, 1989).

In James Carey's (1989) hallmark collection of essays, *Communication As Culture: Essays on Media and Society*, he critiques the American effects tradition not only for its bankrupt political allegiances to administrative research (for examples of this type of critique see Adorno, 1969; Hall, 1982; Hardt, 1992), but for its inadequate theoretical model--a transmission view of communication. Carey opts to look around and behind scholarship carried out (consciously or unconsciously) with a transmission view of communication in order to discover a more useful, often marginalized, active, and engaged scholarly tradition. In his argument for "A Cultural

Approach to Communication," Carey looks back to the work of John Dewey for the marginalized

understandings of the concept of communication. In discussing Dewey, Carey writes (1989, p.

14), "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 is his work."

Carey goes on in the essay to define and explain the conflicting approaches to communication

that have coexisted in American discourse since the late nineteenth century (1989, p. 14). While

both definitions have religious origins, they reflect different views on types of religious

experience. Carey lays out a definition of a transmission view of communication (1989, p. 15),

> The transmission view 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 and
> transportation.

He then defines a ritual view of communication (1989, p. 18),

> 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
> 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
> belief.

Thus Carey argues that we recover a rich tradition that emphasizes process over product in the

study of human interaction, forms of communication, and culture.

In *No Sense of Place* (1985), Joshua Meyrowitz explicitly challenges the exclusive message or content focus of the American effects tradition, while implicitly rejecting a transmission view of communication. Meyrowitz writes (1985, pp. 13-14):

> The general failure of researchers to demonstrate clear and direct effects of media content on social behavior has led to many modifications in theory and approach over the last sixty years. The old "hypodermic needle" theory (popular in the 1920s)...has been abandoned by almost all researchers. The tendency, instead, has been to put additional variables in between the stimulus and the behavioral response. Individual differences, group differences, the role of influential peers, stages of cognitive development, and other social and psychological variables are now seen as muting, changing, or negating the effects of the message. But ultimately, the new models are still based on the concept of a response to a stimulus--the message.

Thus Meyrowitz, in a desire to study the impact of the bias of forms of communication on social behavior, abandons the transmission model of communication in his approach to medium theory, yet retains the vocabulary of effects and social behavior in places where Carey uses terms such as meaning-making and culture.

In addition to the common ritual approach to, and advocacy for, the study of communication, consciousness, and culture, both Carey and Meyrowitz fit within a North American cultural studies tradition as a consequence of the major theoretical influences on their works. While cultural studies is a somewhat amorphous concept, in this essay I describe a distinctly North American form of cultural studies that developed along the margins of the social scientific traditions that dominated scholarship in Canada and the United States throughout most of the twentieth century. This tradition of North American cultural studies is qualitative, interdisciplinary, historical, process and interaction oriented, deals with the social construction, maintenance, and transformation of reality, and is more concerned with form than with content.

British cultural studies has its roots in literary studies, history, and academic marxism as exemplified in the post-World War II bottom-up histories and literary studies of Richard Hoggart (*The Long Revolution*) and E.P Thompson (*The Making of the English Working Class*), the 1970s television and technology studies of Raymond Williams, and the 1980s ideology and audience studies of Stuart Hall. In a sense, British cultural studies tend to vacillate between bottom-up histories or receiver/audience studies and top-down ideology studies: analysis of degrees of resistance or complicity in the working class versus degrees of hegemony and domination of the ruling class.   Whether active, resistive, or oppressive, all deal exclusively with content not form. In contrast, North American cultural studies has its roots in Sociology, Anthropology, Classics, and even Economics. Moreover, North American cultural studies tend to focus on form rather than content and on the historical and social construction of reality as a dynamic and interactive process.   In the North American cultural studies tradition to be outlined below, it is striking that the scholars are doing qualitative analyses not of content or ideology, but of formal processes of everyday interactions and social norms with a decidedly interdisciplinary bias. In British cultural studies social control and norms come from the ideology and hegemony of the ruling class and are imposed upon the working class, in North American cultural studies social control and norms are exerted on individuals through social situations and cultural norms enacted in the formal processes of everyday interactions.

As indicated above, North American cultural studies has its roots in a variety of academic disciplines that were beginning to be dominated by social scientific, quantitative, reductionist, and narrow specialization in the 1920s, 30s, 40s, and 50s. While British cultural studies and the Critical Theory of the Frankfurt school directly confronted the bad politics and government and corporate privileging of this trend, North American cultural studies simply flourished along the

margins in a variety of disciplines with a decidedly interdisciplinary bent that ultimately

encouraged a focus on communication and culture in fields as disparate as English and

Economics. While the mainstream academic tendencies in the U.S. and Canada were pushing

scholars to reduce, quantify, categorize, and specialize, marginalized Sociologists such as

Charles Cooley and George Herbert Mead laid an interactionist, process, social self dimension

to scholarship that clearly influenced Erving Goffman's (1959) *The Presentation of Self in*

Everyday Life, which in turn influenced a myriad of current cultural studies scholars. The early

work of Clyde Kluckhon (1949) *Mirror for Man* was also influenced by Cooley and Mead and in

turn influenced the 1959 seminal book in intercultural communication studies *The Silent*

Language by Edward T. Hall.

Edward T. Hall's chapter named "Culture is Communication" in *The Silent Language*, is

strikingly similar to James Carey's collection *Communication as Culture* written three decades

later and discussed above. This quote from Hall demonstrates how he was overtly defining

communication and culture while working along the margins of the new field of Information

Theory. Hall writes (1959, p. 95),

> Talking is a highly selective process because of the way in which
> culture works. No culture has devised a means for talking without
> highlighting some things at the expense of other things. It follows
> that writing is a symbolization of a symbolization. Communication
> theory takes this process one step farther. The principal [sic] difference,
> as I see it, between the electronic engineer's approach and the approach
> of the cultural-communication specialist is that one works with highly
> compressed symbolic data while the other tries to discover what happens
> when people talk, before the data is stripped of overtones. When
> considering all life as communication we see a spectrum covering a wide
> range of communication events.

While James Carey is most conscious of the idea of an (North) American cultural studies

tradition and his fit within it, and its most prominent member (Hardt, 1992, p. 196), even he

understates the continuity in method of these marginalized and interdisciplinary scholars scattered throughout North American academia in the middle of the twentieth century. When Carey argues for a distinctly (North) American cultural studies tradition, he draws upon the work of John Dewey and Chicago School sociologists such as George Herbert Mead, James Cooley, and Robert Park. He also draws upon the work of sociologist Erving Goffman, Sociology of Knowledge scholars Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, and anthropologist Clifford Geertz , and founding media ecologist Harold Adams Innis (Carey, 1969; Carey and Kreiling, 1974; Carey and Sims, 1976; Carey, 1989). Thus Carey does indeed serve as a current representative of media ecology and North American cultural studies based on the theoretical influences alone. The roots in the ritual approach to communication defined explicitly by Hall are absent in the intellectual histories of James Carey but they run parallel as demonstrated above.

Meyrowitz also draws upon most of the same scholars as does Carey but he also draws explicitly upon the work of Hall. Meyrowitz tends to view his work solely within the confines of media theory, and discusses how his work is at odds with the dominant force in media theory-- the effects tradition with its exclusively media content focus. Like Carey, Meyrowitz draws upon the work of Mead and Cooley, Goffman, Berger and Luckmann, and Geertz. Meyrowitz also draws upon social-psychologist Stanley Milgram and anthropologist Edward T. Hall. Both Milgram and Hall emphasize the social production of meaning, its situational and culturally contingent nature, and draw upon theorists already mentioned as fitting into this loose tradition (Hall, 1956; Meyrowitz, 1979; Meyrowitz, 1980; Meyrowitz, 1985; Meyrowitz, 1993; Meyrowitz and Maguire, 1993; Meyrowitz, 1995).

As stated above, Ong's approach and work embodies a ritual view of communication and consciousness, providing an alternative model to transmission view approaches to

communication studies. Though rare, Ong does pose a direct challenge to the dominant

transmission view in communication scholarship. Ong is particularly concerned with the

exclusive approach to media as mere channels or conduits. Ong writes (Quoted from Gronbeck,

p. 12; originally from Ong, 1977a, p. 46; 1981a, p. 198; 1982b, pp. 176-177),

> Unreflective reliance on models has generated the term
> "media" to designate new technological ways of managing
> the word, such as writing, print, and electronic
> devices. The term is useful and I use it regularly
> here. But it can be misleading, encouraging us to
> think of writing, print, and electronic devices simply
> as ways of "moving information" over some sort of space
> intermediate between one person and another. In fact,
> each of the so-called "media" does far more than this:
> it makes possible thought processes inconceivable
> before.

Thus Ong does have a clear sense of how his work in media theory is fundamentally different

from most media studies scholars, yet for the most part his scholarship itself provides the

strongest argument for the richness of a ritual approach to the study of communication,

consciousness, and culture.

In addition to the common ritual approach to, and advocacy for the study of, communication,

consciousness, and culture, in Carey, Meyrowitz, Hall, and Ong, Hall has something else in

common with Media Ecology. Hall focuses on form, or hidden structure of interaction, rather

than on content.   While Hall's focus on form over content comes in his analysis of face to face

communication in cross-cultural contexts, Carey, Meyrowitz, and Ong focus on form over

content in analyses of mediated communication.

It is clear that Carey, Meyrowitz, and Ong draw upon the Media Ecology works of Innis and

McLuhan for the form over content work.

Ong's literary, anthropological, generalist scholarship places it within a North American

cultural studies tradition. Ong's implicit approach to culture puts him in the same field as Carey and Meyrowitz, yet his deep affinity and continual interrogation of the self, the I, the individual, consciousness--this makes his work an embodiment of a unique aspect of a North American cultural studies: the fascination with the interaction between the individual and the social (for a discussion of this aspect in American cultural studies see Gronbeck, 1991; for examples in Ong's scholarship see Ong, 1967a; Ong, 1967b; Ong, 1971; Ong, 1977; Ong, 1982; for original source discussions of the I, Me, Self, and Society see Mead, 1929). Fascination with this site of inquiry is clear in Mead (his students's notes) as well as in the Symbolic Interactionist tradition (Couch, 1990).

In contrast to the direct ties between the works of Carey, Meyrowitz, and Ong and the ideas of foundational Media Ecologists Harold Adams Innis and Marshall McLuhan, Edward T. Hall's writing in *The Silent Language* (1959) makes no reference to Innis's works published in 1950 and 1951. Hall does, in *The Hidden Dimension* (1966), reference McLuhan's *The Gutenberg Galaxy* (1963) and *Understanding Media* (1964) but it is not at all clear that the ideas in *The Hidden Dimension* come from McLuhan in any way. Indeed Hall's work in that book are clearly elaborations of the ideas put forth in the "Space Speaks" chapter of *The Silent Language.*

Interestingly, like Innis and unlike McLuhan, Hall is most interested in time and space as important dimensions to highlight when examining form and communication. Thus it seems fair to say that Hall and Innis were simultaneously developing similar ideas regarding the centrality of time and space to understanding human communication.

Theoretical Symmetry: Hall and Innis, Time and Space

The works of Edward T. Hall and Harold Adams Innis have much more in common than one may initially think. While Innis is examining media, empires, and monopolies of knowledge,

Hall is examining cross-cultural communication styles that lead to mishaps, miscommunication, and misunderstandings. Yet fundamentally, Innis and Hall are both analyzing communication by focusing on *form* rather than on content. Moreover, the defining elements of analysis when studying forms of communication, for both Innis and Hall, are *time* and *space*.

Innis's concepts of time bias and space bias deal explicitly with communication technologies. In *The Bias of Communication* (1951) and again in *Empire and Communication* (1950) it is clear that the most important aspects of a medium of communication, according to Innis, are durability (time bias) and transportability (space bias).

Media with a time bias endure over long periods of time but do not easily transport across space. Stone and clay tablets, pyramids, and other heavy, somewhat permanent media represent forms of communication that tend toward longevity of a culture that are restricted to particular geographical areas. Media with a space bias on the other hand, such as papyrus and pamphlets, transport easily across space but do not endure over time (until the printing press allows for many mechanically reproduced copies). Modern electrified forms of communication such as the telegraph, radio, television, and the internet are all space biased and lead to both the expansion of empire and, simultaneously, to the destruction of empire through the breaking of monopolies of knowledge.

In all of Innis's work, we see that he comes back to the concepts of time bias and space bias whether he is talking about the rise and fall of empire due to space biased media (*Empire and Communication,* 1950) or to the endurance of past cultures and the transient nature of more recent cultures and empires due to time biased (or lack thereof) media (*Bias of Communication,* 1951).

In Edward T. Hall's work, he is not discussing media with time bias and space bias, rather, he is discussing how the hidden structures of time and space are learned culturally and operate on levels out of awareness. In *The Silent Language* Hall's chapters on "Time Talks: American Accents" and "Space Speaks" lay out the formal rules of face to face interaction that appear to be "just the way things are" regarding time and space.

In Hall's work, the hidden formal dimensions of time and space, that appear as reality but are culturally learned and mostly out of awareness, exert incredible pressure on people during social interactions—indeed they shape and mold those interactions. Approaches to time and social use of space (proxemics) determine the way people are perceived and interacted with, and they vary culturally. In Innis's work, the hidden formal structures of media as related to time bias and space bias exert incredible pressure on cultures and even empires. In Hall's work, the hidden formal structures of time and space exert incredible pressure on individuals within and across cultures. [Expand]

Thus the underlying theoretical unity of form, time, and space make the 1950s works of Innis and Hall foundational in later works on media ecology. Next I will examine the work of Joshua Meyrowitz to show how those hidden dimensions of Hall are as central to much of his analyses as are the works of Marshall McLuhan and Erving Goffman.

Hall's Influence on McLuhan and Postman Influences Gumpert and Meyrowitz

While there is symmetry in the works of Harold Adams Innis and Edward T. Hall as discussed above, there is no evidence that Innis was directly influenced by the works of Hall. In contrast, two other founding scholars in the area that has come to be called Media Ecology, Marshall McLuhan and Neil Postman, refer to Edward T. Hall directly in their speeches and written works dating back to the late 1960s (see *Understanding Me: Lectures and Interviews, by Marshall*

McLuhan, for examples dating back to 1967). With the indirect symmetry between Hall and

Innis and the direct influence of Hall on McLuhan and Postman, it is no wonder that the works of

Gary Gumpert and Joshua Meyrowitz (both heavily influenced by Innis, McLuhan, and Postman)

have ideas from Hall embedded throughout them. See, for example, the way that Gary Gumpert

is able to move between discussions of interpersonal communication and mediated

communication in his co-authored text *Inter/Media: Interpersonal Communication in a Media

World* (3rd Edition, 1993). In the Media Ecology work of Gary Gumpert, Hall is clearly a heavy

influence but this is not surprising since Hall's original work is interpersonal rather than

mediated. In contrast, Joshua Meyrowitz emphasizes mediated communication over

interpersonal communication in his Media Ecology works but relies just as heavily (if not as

overtly) on Hall as does Gumpert.

Hidden Dimensions of Hall in Meyrowitz's Media Ecology

In contrast to the obvious influence of McLuhan and Goffman on Meyrowitz, here I examine the

subtle yet pervasive influence of the ideas of anthropologist Edward T. Hall.   It is, I will argue,

this hidden influence of Hall that explains the richness of Meyrowitz's analyses of the

relationship between the public and politicians and the public and celebrities. It is also this

hidden dimension of Hall that explains why Meyrowitz's "Lowering the Political Hero to Our

Level" (1985) Media Ecology work, and his "Visible and Invisible Candidates" (1994b) critical

content study seem completely at odds.

   In the theoretical framework set up in *No Sense of Place: The Impact of Electronic Media on

Social Behavior* (1985) it is clear that Meyrowitz is indeed merging the theories of Innis and

McLuhan with those of Erving Goffman. Meyrowitz explains that he is taking a face to face and

rather static theory of impressions management and social situtationism (Goffman) and merging

it with a dynamic, abstract theory of media forms (Innis and McLuhan). This merging of

Goffman and Media Ecology allows Meyrowitz to take off in his first two case studies regarding

the merging of childhood and adulthood and the merging of feminine and masculine realms. The

way in which electronic media (particularly television) alter access to information (which used to

be place and situation bound) and thus alter social roles is clearly explained in those two case

studies. However, in Meyrowitz's third case study, "Lowering the Political Hero to Our Level,"

he claims to be applying that same theoretical framework to politicians and citizens. Yet if one

examines the arguments used to support his analysis in that case study, it becomes clear that in

this instance, Meyrowitz is merging Media Ecology and Hall, not Goffman.

   In the chapter "Lowering the Political Hero to Our Level," Meyrowitz explicitly states that he

us using a theoretical framework based upon space biased electronic communication technology

altering access to "back region" information.   While that is indeed what Meyrowitz is doing in

the earlier case studies "The Merging of Masculinity and Femininity" and "The Blurring of

Childhood and Adulthood," it is not the theoretical foundation for the specific arguments and

examples presented in "Lowering the Political Hero to Our Level." The theoretical foundation

for "Lowering the Political Hero to Our Level" and other works such as (1997) "Shifting Worlds

of Strangers: Medium Theory Changes in "Them" vs. "Us," and (1994) "The Life and Death of

Media Friends: New Genres of Intimacy and Mourning" are based upon an implicit theoretical

framework of space biased electronic media combined with visual and aural biases (television,

now internet too) changing "who" we interact with at particular proxemic distances. In these

works, Meyrowitz is not talking about access to information ala Goffman, rather he is describing

proxemics, or the social use of space, as discussed in Hall's work.   It is Hall's proxemics, not

Goffman's impressions management, that explains why we judge presidents the way we used to

only judge friends.

Other works with this hidden dimensions of Hall include, "Intimate Strangers," "The Media Foster an Absurd Intimacy with Strangers," "Death of a Media Friend," "We Became a Nation of TV Mourners," (Meyrowitz, 1977; Meyrowitz, 1980; Meyrowitz, 1982; Meyrowitz, 1985; Meyrowitz 1990; Meyrowitz, 1994a). It is this hidden influence of Hall with an emphasis on proxemics (the social use of space) in face to face intercultural interactions that Meyrowitz blurs with his understanding of the visual and audio bias of television. This understanding of Hall explains the richness of Meyrowitz's analyses of the relationship between the public and politicians and the public and celebrities..

When Meyrowitz gives the detailed support for these "intimacy" arguments, we find many visual and aural descriptions of perceptions in social interaction, not specific discussions of patterns of access to information. The subtle but pervasive influence of Hall in this area of Meyrowitz's analysis of politicians and the public accounts for why we, in some ways, seem to sense so much about politicians today (Meyrowitz's medium theory work), but know so little about politics (Meyrowitz's critical analysis of news content work). The compatibility between Meyrowitz's medium theory and Meyrowitz's critical content studies is important because it demonstrates that critical content studies and media ecology studies compliment one another to paint a better picture of the social world, rather than compete with one another as if only form analyses or content analyses can tell us the "truth" about the social world. It also helps us to understand why medium theory, or media ecology, tends to focus on social and political change whereas critical content studies tend to focus on social and political continuity (Hall, 1956; Hall, 1959; Meyrowitz 1985; Meyrowitz, 1994b).

Conclusions

Throughout this essay I have discussed the symmetry between the definitions of communication among Media Ecologists such as James Carey, Joshus Meyrowitz, Walter Ong, and Edward T. Hall. I have also highlighted the symmetry between Harold Adams Innis and Edward T. Hall regarding the common theoretical focus on form over content with particular attention to the dimensions of time and space. I discussed the direct, if often overlooked, influence of Hall on the works of Marshall McLuhan and Neil Postman that rippled into and permeates the work of Gary Gumpert. Finally, I demonstrated that Hall's ideas heavily permeate particular aspects of the work of Joshua Meyrowitz. This all adds up to a clear pattern demonstrating that Edward T. Hall has done an amazing job of revealing to us the hidden dimensions of the relevance of non-mediated cross-cultural communication theories for studying mediated communication. Now we, as Media Ecologists, should reveal to ourselves how Hall has been actually been central to our thinking.

On May 9, 2002 *Newsday* ran an article "The Role of the Mother" which explored the contrast between the roles of most television mothers as "sweet, loving, and agreeable" versus the role of movie moms as "anything but." The journalist interviewed Meyrowitz who explained "Marshall McLuhan called [television] a 'cool medium.' Meaning its information is not as well defined, not as filled in and intense as movies." On television, Meyrowitz explained, "You have to be a softer image to be successful on it. People who yell and shout a lot on television, with few exceptions, tend to be rejected." Is it really mostly McLuhan that Meyrowitz is relying upon to make this argument? Hidden in the background of this important point is Meyrowitz's implicit understanding of Edward T. Hall's notions of proxemics. At the average proxemic distance from the TV set to the TV viewer, with a close-up of the actor, the tone of voice should

be in sync with a personal distance close phase (Hall, 1966).   The mediated proxemic distance

with television is much closer to the proxemic distances in face to face relationships. We yell

from afar, not close up. Mom's yell and beat their shoes on counters in movies; they hug, kiss,

and speak softly on television. We, as audience members, wouldn't tolerate someone yelling "in

our face" without judging the actions as inappropriate and outrageous. Why? It isn't because the

medium is hot or cool, it is because of what we know from the hidden structures of social

interaction that were revealed so clearly in the work of Edward T. Hall.

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