Media Globalization and the Cultivating Role of TV Consumption
Discussion with Professor Glenn Smith/EST

Video The Electronic Storyteller. Featuring George Gerbner. 30 min www.igc.org/mef

At the end of this session, you should be able to understand:
- The Relationship between Socialization and Culture
- History of Human “Cultivation”
- Effects of TV on Socialization (Gerbner)
- Casting and Fate
- TV Stereotyping/Storytelling about gender, class, race, minorities…
- The Global and Local Politics of Storytelling-Modern Conquest
- Characteristics of Global Communication Today (Thompson)
- Global Role of U.S. Media
- Do Alternatives Exist?

Questions for our Class Discussion--Pairs discuss the following topics:
- Does Gerbner depict a realistic picture of the contemporary media landscape?
- How much is the “mainstream” population affected by TV stereotypes and storytelling?
- Is resistance against global media conglomerates futile?
- What alternative forms of media are feasible?

Socialization and Culture
- Human Socialization is basically about “story telling”
- How we ARE
- How things WORK
- What to DO
- Culture=stories and meanings governing human behavior and attitudes within a given societal organization and historical period

History of Human “Cultivation”
- Face-to-face stories transmitted from one generation to the next
- Images, sculptures, and buildings that let us understand power and order
- Printing=revolutionized story telling through industrialized re-production available to all
- Electronic media=most important TV which reaches into everyone’s life from cradle to grave. Children now are born into TV & watch up to 7 hours a day.
- Dwindling effect of parents, church, school. Instead media are controlled by a few global conglomerates and uncontrolled media czars

Effects of TV on Socialization?
Cannot simply be measured as “before” and “after” because it is a constant stream of “cultivation” or “socialization” of how to perceive violence, buy marketed commodities, or vote.

A stable set of images is constantly nourished, sustained and reinforced.

Certain “cultural” artificial stories become quasi “second nature” and form deeply our beliefs, knowledge, feelings, attitudes…

Nobody can escape-everyone is somehow touched by TV and media “story telling” or our times→global effect is strengthened by the worldwide grip of a few media conglomerates that shape our opinions

George Gerbner

The media-violence debate addresses the wrong questions. The usual questions---Does television violence incite real-life violence? and "Isn't that what viewers really want?---are symptoms rather than diagnostic tools of the problem. They obscure, falsify, and even trivialize the issues involved" (p.27)

"Not all violence is alike. Violence is a legitimate and even necessary cultural expression. Individually crafted, historically inspired, sparingly and selectively used expressions of symbolic violence can balance tragic costs against deadly compulsions. However, such tragic sense of life has been swamped by violence with happy endings produced on the dramatic assembly-line. This 'happy violence' is cool, swift, painless, and often spectacular, designed not to upset but to deliver the audience to the next commercial in a mood to buy." (p.29)

Gerbner’s TV research

Distinction b/w “heavy” TV (4+hours/day), “medium”, and “light TV viewers (>1 hour/day)

Heavy viewers absorb TV messages differently and “deeper”

TV effect on “creating” violence is negligible (5%) BUT TV cultivates a certain image of “risk,” “fear,” “insecurity” of world and life which can and is often abused/manipulated by the call for protection, authoritarian leadership, repression, policy protection, punishment, executions/death penalty…

Fears are reinforced by interested parties and TV images where they are relatively benign (subway) and downplayed where they are serious (car driving, every 13 minutes one deadly accident)

Casting and Fate

It’s not the TV plots that leave a mark but the casting of the main characters as aggressors, victims, and bystanders.

Examples:

Gender-streaming
Stories about class and poverty
Race, racism, and segregation
Age-ism
Portrayal of minorities, strangers, other cultures, etc…

All above is intertwined
TV Genderization
- Girls are portrayed as having a more limited and restricted number of gender roles compared to boys
- Boys are more tough & aggressive while girls are sexy, seductive, and weaker
- Women age faster and are portrayed differently/more evil at “older” age (35+)
- Female actors careers decline with age but male actors careers more likely improve

TV Stories about Class
- Promotion of unrealistic world or carefree comfort
- Lower income and poor people are strongly underrepresented and almost “invisible”
- Certain occupations are more frequently portrayed than others: cops/criminals, doctors/nurses, lawyers…
- Since poverty, unemployment, etc is never really addressed in TV shows viewers are not confronted asking for solutions except for individualist responses.

Race stories in TV
- While African-Americans are meanwhile almost equally represented, Hispanics and Asians are strongly underrepresented
- African-Americans have a bi-furcated image:
  - With fully incorporated middle class status, so that it seems as if racism, inner-City poverty & despair, unemployment, and inequality is not any more a problem and therefore affirmative action and other remedies not anymore relevant or important
  - Above average involved in crime, drug, violence and therefore better kept aside & segregated from (housing, marriage, friendship….)

The Global and Local Politics of Storytelling-Modern Conquest
- While in the past hegemonic ideas, values, images, and stories were transported through military, political, or educational means
- In the present they are transported through cultural means, in particularly the media controlled by a corporate “dictatorial” elite waging “cultural wars” or conducting “cultural imperialism”
- Media organize, direct, and implement the conquest of our minds and feelings. They do not only influence our entertainment but our values, perceptions of power, justice, right and wrong, our fears and hopes…. More than 1 billion persons are reached daily by global media

Global Communication Today is Characterized by (Thompson, p. 208)
- Variations and inequalities in terms of access to the global networks of communication
- The emergence of transnational communication conglomerates as key players
- An asymmetrical flow of information and communication products
- The social impact of new technologies, especially those associated with satellite communication

Global Media & Entertainment
- Major U.S. TV and film studies generate 50-60% of their revenues overseas
- Major music companies earn 70% of their revenues overseas
7 firms, all part of conglomerates, dominate the global film market
5 firms dominate the global music industry
Major Hollywood studies expect to generate $11 bio from global TV rights to their film libraries in 2002, up from $7 bio in 1998

Largest Global Media Companies in Terms of 2000 Assets Were:
- Time Warner (U.S.)=$28.5 bio
- Walt Disney (U.S.)=$25.4 bio
- Viacom (U.S.)=$20.0 bio
- Seagram (Canada)=$14.8 bio
- News Corp. Murdoch (Australia)=$14.1 bio

Example of the distribution of TV among World’s Poor Population
Dharavi, a shantytown in Mumbai (Bombay, India)
• Buying a house or access to indoor running water is unavailable
  BUT
• Penetration of TV: 85%, Pressure cooker: 75%, Mixer: 75%, Gas stove: 56%

Small villages in Africa have just one TV (powered by a generator) paid by penny contributions of villagers and running a few hours every night

Global Role of U.S. Media
- U.S. consumer values are promoted abroad because of the hegemonic and one-sided penetration of global markets by a more and more monopolized and privatized U.S. culture and media industry
- U.S. media’s cultural imperialism abroad is matched by its domestic colonization of the U.S. population
- U.S. is a trendsetter in global cultural politics
- U.S. media also promote English language
- Commercialization and commodification of cultural products on a global scale is a main feature today

Do Alternatives Exist?
- Do alternative forms of “storytelling” and “mainstreaming” exist that are fair, equitable, just, and less damaging to our children?
- Alternative media
- Global network culture “from below”
- Deconstruction of media and their cultivation messages (“Bowling for Columbine”)
- Culture of non-violence (children TV, non-violent topics)
- Public participation in making decisions about cultural investment and cultural policy
- Digitalization also opens new opportunities and dynamics for non-corporate media outlets and initiatives

Summary:
Gatekeeper Role of Media
- Media as “gatekeepers” have tremendous power in
Setting cultural guidelines and the values transported
Influencing content and presentation
Shaping the political discourse
Media need to be challenged to report fair, accurate & to avoid stifling critical thinking ➔ Ask QUESTIONS to detect bias

Critical Questions for Media Users
1: Who are the sources? Are they reliable?
2: What is the freedom of journalists?
3: Who owns and controls media?
4: Is there a lack of diversity?
5: From whose point of view is the news reported?
6: Are there double standards?
7: Do stereotypes skew coverage?
8: What are the unchallenged assumptions?
9: Is the language loaded?
10: Is there a lack of context? What is omitted?
11: Do the headlines, pictures, and stories match?
12: Are stories on important issues featured prominently?
13: Are facts personalized & emotionalized?

How Can One Make the Best Out of the (Global) Media?
1. Use diversity and compare news reporting and interpretation domestically AND abroad.
2. Consult regularly web-based sources and “alternative” or dissident media who challenge the status quo (“muckrackers”)
3. Do not buy anything by its “face value.” Permanently check 11 questions
4. Learn how to select and sort out information. Try to get the “big picture” instead of being deceived by overblown tidbits of irrelevant information
5. Become critical of your & our own cultural “America-centrist” bias
6. Try to be fair, just, honest & non-hypocritical in your judgment