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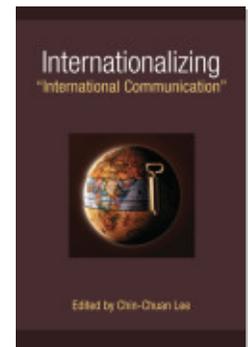Published by University of Michigan Press

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Window Shopping

On Internationalizing
"International Communication"

Elihu Katz

When Professor Lee asked me to accept his invitation to open this conference, I immediately agreed—that is, until he told me what it is about. Whereupon I demurred, protesting that I hardly know anything about international communication and certainly nothing about internationalizing it. CC persisted, however, and challenged me to reconsider my own research and writing and to decide which of us is right. We made a bet, so to speak, for which the cost (at least to me) is that I have spent the past six months trying to decide whether I have any standing in this field. He said that it would be OK, as an oldtimer, if I were to share whatever I found, even autobiographically. It occurred to me only later that CC might be worrying that he had asked the wrong person to write an introduction to his book on media imperialism (Lee, 1980) some thirty-five years ago!

So, let us do exactly that. In part 1 of what follows, I will unashamedly review what I think I have done that might qualify me *in* international communication, even if, at the time, I did not think of this work as explicitly international. I will do this chronologically, more or less, as if I were searching my CV for keywords. Following which, in part 2, I will try to make some observations about what, if anything, I have learned on this narcissistic safari, as I try to find meaning in the series of relevant projects

on which I shall report, and especially on their sequence. You'll have to decide which of us won the bet, CC or me.

Part I

The place to begin, I think, is as a graduate student recruited by Paul Lazarsfeld to join in analysis of a massive data set concerning public opinion and media use in four Arab nations, plus Greece and Turkey. This was the study made famous by Daniel Lerner (1958), then of MIT, under the title *The Passing of Traditional Society*, subtitled *Modernizing the Middle East*, and well remembered in several of the papers being presented at this conference. It was commissioned by the Voice of America at the outset of the Cold War in the 1950s. My role in the project was a minor one (Katz, 1952) but I remember being impressed by Lerner's introduction of the concept of "empathy," which he attributed to the kind of media exposure that produced a substantive reply to a survey question such as, "What would you do if you were Prime Minister?" Or what would you write about if you were editor of the local newspaper? Rather than answering, as most people did, "Who me, editor of a newspaper?" there were other, more media-literate respondents who could imagine themselves in these roles. These were the newly modernizing individuals, Lerner argued, they had psychological access to the world outside the village; they were the harbingers of a radical transformation. In his introduction to Lerner's book (1958), David Riesman translated "empathy," somewhat skeptically perhaps, as "window shopping." In separate papers, published later, Lazarsfeld (1952) and Charles Glock (1952) spoke of the theoretical and methodological potential of extending communications research internationally.

During the same period, I began work on my dissertation which, ultimately, appeared as *Personal Influence*, coauthored with Lazarsfeld (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955). The aim of the book was to redirect attention away from the power of the media to effect short-run change in opinions and attitudes and toward the more complex, and more sociological, interaction between mass media and interpersonal networks. Ultimately, this "two-step flow of communication," proposed by Lazarsfeld in the 1940s resulted in a revival of interest in the process of diffusion of innovation. Rather than focus on individual change, diffusion research aimed to track the spread of change throughout a community over time (Rogers, 1962; Katz, Levin & Hamilton, 1963). This shift in emphasis reconnected the mainstream search for the persuasive powers of the media with sister sciences interested in such

things as the spread of fashion, social movements, technological change, and epidemics. Outstanding in this respect was the pioneering work of rural sociologists whose studies of the diffusion and adoption of new farm practices had been a continual concern (Katz, 1960). These sociologists then turned their attention to programs of initiating and evaluating projects of rural development overseas. Their technological emphases complemented the projects of development and modernization that occupied political science-oriented scholars at MIT, Stanford, and elsewhere. Both of these trends were rather ill-fated, in that they were criticized for being too self-serving of the Western powers that supported them, as this volume will remind us. Yet, it led to the healthy realization that diffusion was a primordial process that is invoked to explain how Christianity, for example (Stark, 1997) managed to make its way around the world long before there were media of mass communication.

A very different kind of international communication occupied me as I began to commute between the Universities of Chicago and Jerusalem. Together with Brenda Danet, then a student, later a colleague, we found interest in problems of intercultural communication between Western-style bureaucrats confronting the mass of new-immigrant clients who had arrived in Israel from more traditional societies (Katz & Danet, 1973). Our observations came not from media content or from survey research, but from protocols of face to face encounters with customs officials, traffic policemen, health workers, and so on. Anecdotally, at first, we found passengers bargaining with bus drivers over the fare, or arguing over proper behavior in a queue. We met health officers in well-baby clinics preaching family planning over the objections of their clients' husbands. We studied the language of appealing to authority—implicitly invoking reciprocity, altruism, and norms—and learned much about how the representatives of these disparate cultures perceived each other.

After a few years in Israel, somebody decided that I was just the right person to head the task force that would, finally, introduce television broadcasting. Israelis had resisted the introduction of television for some years, until the so-called Six Days War convinced them that it was no use continuing to debate the pros and cons of TV, once the Arab states had all established their own channels, and no less important, after Israel began to realize that it was an occupying power. However unqualified I was, administratively and technologically, how could one decline this kind of invitation? And I did not (Katz, 1971). I will not tell you this story, however, even though it involved an intercultural clash between me and what seemed to

me the suddenly alien culture of the CBS capitalists who had been commissioned to help in the process. At the same time, it was the beginning of my love affair with the public broadcasting of the BBC. I am mentioning this episode not only for its intrinsic interest but because it was also a prelude to a sequence of subsequent work that, finally, deserves to be labeled international communication research.

The first of the projects that followed my short career as an impresario was a grant from the Ford Foundation via the International Institute of Communication to trace the transplantation of television broadcasting from the capitals of the West to the Third World. The object was to observe the process whereby television "diffused" from the capitals of the West to what were then known as developing countries. In other words, I was given the opportunity to observe elsewhere what I myself had done in Israel. My partner in this project was Professor George Wedell who, like me, had taken leave from his university (Manchester) to serve as first secretary general of the Independent Broadcasting Authority, Britain's newly established commercial channel. Between us, and with the assistance of Dov Shinar and Michael Pilsworth, we studied the "promise" and the "performance" of television in twelve countries on three continents (Katz & Wedell, 1977). While the rhetoric of "promise" resounded with slogans relating to "national integration," "cultural renaissance," and "economic development," we found, in the 1970s, that television broadcasting was narrowly concentrated in the major cities, and that the popular programs were American reruns. Students of programming flow confirmed this pattern (Nordenstreng & Varis, 1974; Tunstall, 1976; Schiller, 1969) at the time, even though it would soon change, as the popularity of local programming overcame that of imported programs—although the formats of those programs may still originate elsewhere (cf. Sorokin, 1941 on stimulus diffusion). We thought of naming our book *Waiting for Kojak*, but we lost our nerve.

Research that accompanied these projects—economic and political—were equally subject to protests of self-interest and paternalism. Here, too, there were loud outcries against "cultural imperialism." Several papers in this conference review the relabeling of these studies as modernization, then imperialism. It was alleged (Schiller, 1969) that Hollywood films and American sitcoms had created new forms of dependence, taking the place of colonialism and economic exploitation by the West against the rest. These debates led Tamar Liebes and myself (Liebes & Katz, 1990) to undertake a study of the cross-cultural "reception" of the U.S. nighttime soap opera *Dallas. Dallas* captivated audiences almost everywhere—although

there were a few exceptions, like Japan. Our study organized focus groups (of three couples each) in six different sub-cultures to view episodes of the program in their own homes. We wanted to see whether viewers in the several subcultures varied from each other in their attitudes and under-standings, and more generally whether there was evidence for or against the allegation of "cultural imperialism." We called our book *The Export of Meaning*.

While blockbuster programs like *Dallas* bring the world together—albeit not at the same time—certain "media events," such as the live broad-casting of historic occasions, can do so even better, and what's more, at one and the same time! This is the most dramatic attribute of the electronic media since the telegraph; it made possible being present and active in more than one place at the same time. This third of the three projects I want to describe was a partnership with Daniel Dayan of Paris that began in 1977 when Anwar Sadat of Egypt came to talk peace with Israel, and continued until 1992, when our book was published (Dayan & Katz, 1992). It deals with a genre of television that fulfills the Durkheimian function of integrating a nation or the world. It invites people everywhere to sit down with their closest others in celebration of a ceremonial occasion to which they are personally invited—almost like Christmas or Thanksgiv-ing or the Passover Seder—with the knowledge that everybody else in the same society or the whole world is co-present. Thus, Israelis and Egyptians cheered Anwar Sadat, whose three-day visit was broadcast live—linking the two countries via TV for the first time. Much of the Western world watched too, but it was ignored in the other Arab states. Nobody doubts that this rare example of media diplomacy contributed to the peace treaty that was signed shortly thereafter—but also to the subsequent assassina-tion of President Sadat. Another classic example of this kind of interna-tional communication is the live confrontation between John Paul II and the Communist rulers of the Polish people. Again, it is widely believed that this ceremonial visit of the first Polish pope—as broadcast live on Polish national television and, later, distributed on film—was a first push toward the dismantling of the Eastern European regimes. Not all "media events" are "conquests" of this kind, however. The Olympics and the World Cup (Mondial) are "contests." And the live broadcast of the Kennedy funeral or the funeral of Princess Diana, which engaged the whole world, not as somebody else's trauma but as our own. These are three different "scripts," of course, but each is an interruption of routine—a broadcasting holiday, so to speak—that invites our participation and affirmation.

Let me include mention of my paper on the coverage of the first Gulf War (Katz, 1992). It applies as well to the massacre at Tiananmen Square. These events saw the emergence of media coverage aiming at a world audience, not a national one. No less important, their reports were live and direct from the scenes of the action—from the roof in Baghdad, if you recall. My point is that they circumvented the role of the editor who could give it context. We were offered an embedded view, so to speak, describing something to us and to the world, but without explaining under whose auspices this was taking place. It was an ostensible beginning of "broadcasting without frontiers," but it raised a new set of problems. It focused on the live broadcasting of popular protest.

I will conclude this list almost where it began by reporting on my membership n a recent project centering on communications and diasporas (Katz & Blondheim, 2010). We tried to understand how "imagined communities" (with a dutiful nod to Benedict Anderson [1983]) held together, even in dispersion, and in the absence of any tangible contact with a remembered homeland. Our focus was on the Jews, though we might equally have focused on the Chinese, because that was the case we knew best. More than imagination was involved, of course. There were economic and cultural ties—and premodern channels of communication that were invented and activated. And it seems more than coincidence that the Jews subsequently made major contributions to the establishment of media institutions, new and old, beginning with the telegraph (Blondheim, 1994).

Part II

Even if some of this is relevant to the theme of the conference, the real question is "What have I learned?" Let me try to answer, sometimes based on findings from these studies and experiences, sometimes based on the inspiration of calling them back into consciousness.

1. A first point to make, I think, is that international communication preceded national communication, rather than vice versa. As the history of diffusion research makes clear—the case of early Christianity, for example—messages moved freely across cultural divides and natural borders, long before these were organized into nations, and long before the era of mass communication. Of course, problems of rhetoric, reception, and resistance prevailed even then.

2. Indeed, it might be said that media and messages and, of course, language served as building blocks for the consolidation of nations, as we learn

from scholars such as Gabriel Tarde (1898) and Benedict Anderson (1983), and their followers (such as Jaap van Ginneken, 1992). Translations of the Bible into the spoken languages of different regions in Europe reinforced the emergence of national entities.

3. Once established, I think it is fair to say that nations did their best to interfere with the flow of communication across their borders. Nations began to patrol the traffic in communications. Internally, they tried to educate and entertain, to inform citizens of what they were expected to know and deny them what they were not expected to know, while externally they tried to use communication to expand empire as the ancient Egyptians (Innis, 1951) and modern-day Hollywood have tried to do, or to disinform and defame their enemies. The International Telecommunications Union still allocates broadcasting frequencies and still attempts to control the reach of national signals, though that has become all but impossible in today's age of satellites.

4. If technological theories of media can help explain the emergence of nation-states and mega-structures like the Protestant denominations (Eisenstein, 1980), for example, the self-same theory should predict that the free flow of information—that is, the internationalization of international communication—should contribute to the rise of global structures and the demise of nation-states. Is this what we are now seeing as the former prerogatives of nations are being overruled by the globalization of human rights and of economics? Monroe Price (2002) and several of the volume's chapters here (Sparks, for one) suggest that it is too soon to make such generalizations, and that nations still exert sovereign power, and that they surrender sovereignty only under the umbrella of formal treaties. Yet, the famous case—undocumented, I believe—of East Germans tuning into the relative prosperity of Germans on the other side of the Wall is a good example of international communication. It may not coincide with the theory of "revolution of rising frustration" that developmentalist researchers have advised us to reject, but it comes pretty close.

5. Even when messages reach their destinations, there is no assurance that they will be decoded as their senders intend. Most of the history of research on mass communication has been devoted to the study of effects, that is, the success of mass persuasion campaigns in the very short run. And, ironically, what we have to show is only how surprisingly ineffective the media are in this domain. Even though we hardly believe it ourselves, the truth is that propaganda and advertising don't persuade very well, either domestically or, a fortiori, internationally (Schudson, 1984). If diffusion

research shows greater success, it is because it is more about things than about ideas and because research tends to report on things that take off rather than on failures. In any case, it is worth noting that persuasive effects, however much studied, are hardly the most interesting types of effects. If I invoke only my own experience with international projects, as reviewed here, I would highlight (1) the near-universal success of the BBC in gaining the trust of most of the world (from the study of Arab countries); (2) that the institutionalization of broadcasting and likely the new media as well—administration, technology, content—look much alike the world over and that governments are losing control of the media to international interests who consort with them; (3) that communication and culture are rapidly superseding geography in the creation of international alliances (Kraidy & Khalil, 2009) even while breaking the national audience into segments and networks (Turow, 2006; Katz, 1996). (4) that the critical abilities of viewers everywhere are more fully developed than is usually thought, but that the everyday of mutual understanding required for cross-cultural communication still has a long way to go; (5) that exceptional "media events" can nevertheless gather the whole world together and unite it in a shared heartbeat as in the Diana funeral or for a favorite football team; (6) that the live broadcasts of Sadat and the pope prove that the media can sometimes contribute to peace and reconciliation, even while the same media can be used by nations and groups to terrorize the world as in 9/11—also a kind of "media event" (Katz & Liebes, 2007; Dayan, 2009)—and as in the threats of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

6. Let me conclude where I began, by returning to Lerner's concept of empathy and to Riesman's window shopping. Recall that Lerner was proposing that the media—those were the days of radio—affect modernization by expanding individual horizons, inviting identification with theretofore unfamiliar roles, and enlisting participation in a newly opened public sphere. Without spelling it out, Lerner was suggesting that a major effect of media exposure is identification with remote others and the trying on of new identities. In using, or perhaps misusing, the concept of empathy, he was pointing to the idea of identification, which, astonishingly, is almost altogether absent in the catalog of media effects. It is a central concept in cinema studies—who doesn't identify with the stars?—but has been strangely missing in media studies. Although the concept is too individualistic to fully explain the developmental process, it also implies, indirectly, that the media contribute to the creation of polities and public spheres.

The concept of empathy has suddenly reappeared—sixty years later—in

connection with the new genre of communications research that deals with "distant suffering," to quote Luc Boltanski (1999). There is a sudden rush of interest in the emotional, cognitive, and, especially, moral aspects of mediated witnessing of widespread tragedy. Under what conditions, these authors ask, do people rise to the challenge of doing something to right a wrong, or save a life, in response to what they see on the nightly news or learn about from the Internet? When do people get up from their TV sets to demand that their governments intervene? When do people mobilize to donate money to cope with a far-away disaster? In the past, this question had hardly been asked (Ball-Rokeach, Rokeach, & Grube, 1984 is an exception), and has resurfaced only now in the writings of authors such as Ellis (2000), Peters (2001), Chouliaraki (2006), and in the collection edited by Frosh and Pinchesvki (2009). It follows the unnerving assertions that there are "no more secrets," as Meyrowitz (1985) has taught us, and now, even worse, that "there are no more excuses." We have run out of ways of saying "I didn't know!" It is in this connection that the concepts of "empathy" and "compassion" have been resurrected in order to explain everyday arousal and action, and to revive the idea that the media have the power to empower.

I am not now thinking of media events, which bring the potential power of television into full view. I am thinking, rather, of the everyday effects—including those of the nightly news—that we dismissed as limited. Lazarsfeld found comfort in the idea that effects were limited, arguing that it was safer for democracy that broadcasters and their oligarchs cannot easily arouse listeners and viewers to do their bidding. Sometimes we regret this, of course, as when we observe how difficult it is to induce people to stop smoking, for example. So perhaps we should applaud those of our colleagues who have refused to abandon studies of the conditions under which media can be effective in the short run, especially with respect to the suffering of others. Is so-called compassion fatigue just another case of "limited effects" or are viewers actually motivated to respond but unable to identify the means that might enable them to do so (cf. Wiebe, 1951)? We should be asking again, as Hallin and Mancini (1984) once did, whether there are cultural differences involved here. Is it still true that while Americans view the nightly news (or whatever news they view nowadays) that they have another beer and go off to sleep, while Italians news viewers, upset by what they have just seen, don their overcoats and go off to the piazza to discuss it with their friends before going to register their feelings at the local offices of the political parties or trade unions? It is time to renew more problem-

oriented comparative studies that go beyond the structural emphases of the Columbia group, and beyond even the comparative work that the Hallin/ Mancini team (2004) has done more recently. It is widely thought in the United States, for example, that the tragedy of Haiti enlisted an unusually large outpouring of support in money and in services. Is this true? Is it equally true of other countries? How did this compare with the response to the East Asian tsunami of several years ago, or the tragedies of Darfur or Kosovo or Rwanda? If there are big differences here, we should be asking about the parts played by media systems and media images along with differences in cultural proximities and available means.

As far as images are concerned, Iyengar and Kinder (1987) have suggested in a study of the depiction of homelessness that the very personification of social problems that is characteristic of television leads viewers to conclude that the victim is to blame for his/her own plight, while the ostensibly cold statistics of homelessness are more likely to direct viewers' attention to systemic problems. Paul Slovic (1997), for one, disagrees. His experiments seem to show that an individual victim or person in need arouses more sympathy than a group of such people, or, a fortiori, a statistic of their helplessness. And what of protest and revolution? Have we any comparative evidence of arousal to action in defiance of oppression that can be attributed to the media? There seems to be some evidence from Eastern Europe in 1989, when large numbers of provincial Czechs took to the streets to express solidarity with their fellow countryman massed in Wenceslas Square. More recent protests in Korea provide an additional example—but, by now, the new small media have entered the scene. Whether these new media are the new media of collective action is a matter of growing debate (see, e.g. Gladwell, 2010).

David Riesman's somewhat cynical translation of empathy as "window shopping" is probably closer to the facts. It is a lot easier, of course, to tour the tragedies of the world with the ever dwindling number of foreign correspondents than to do anything about it. It is rather closely linked to Lazarsfeld and Merton's (1948) "narcotizing dysfunction." Limited effects, that is, is still the better bet. But even Riesman's more sober view goes some way to explaining the overthrow of the Berlin Wall.

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