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## Internationalizing "International Communication"

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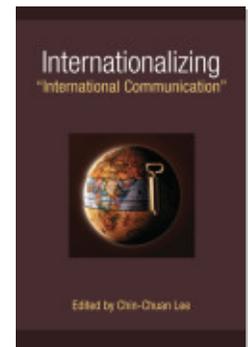
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## Cosmopolitanism and International Communication

### *Understanding Civil Society Actors*

Peter Dahlgren

Academic fields are (fortunately) never fully unified; there are always disparate voices and challenges to what is perceived as the dominant mainstream. This is intellectually healthy; internal contention in a field helps keep its participants alert. At this point in the history of international communication, however, it may be that we are seeing more than just the usual discussion and debate on the margins. There is a growing restlessness, a sense that the turbulent realities of the world over recent decades require some serious rethinking about what research in this field should be doing—and how it should be doing it. Proposing some new “paradigm” for international communication is far beyond the ambition of this chapter, however. What I wish to do instead, taking into account some of the common critiques of the field, is to explore one important trajectory that the study of international communication could incorporate, and to mobilize some of the key intellectual equipment that will facilitate that step. What I have in mind is the vast landscape of transnational civil society actors, and the alter-globalization movement in particular, with its use of online technologies. Moreover, I suggest that the analysis of these actors and their practices could be fruitfully analyzed through the lens of cosmopolitanism.

I build upon a number of central premises. First of all and on a very

general level, though he may overstate the case at times, I share the basic sensibility that Zygmunt Bauman tries to capture in his use of the adjective “liquid,” in regard to globalized late modernity (see, among his many works on this theme, the overview he offers in Bauman, 2007). This oft-cited term signifies the intensity of change and the seeming lack of permanence among structures and institutions at global and local levels, the fluidity of much of the cultural realm, as well as the growing challenges to maintaining stable life courses and identities. It is clearly not a measurable concept, but it signals a temperament that is willing to focus at least as much attention on impermanence as on that which still seems firmly entrenched in the world.

Further, I assume that among the key factors contributing to the rapid transformations we are seeing are the contemporary information and communication technologies (ICTs) and the uses to which they are put—by millions and millions of people all around the world. Yet another premise is the importance of taking into account the evolving political landscape of the world, both in the established democracies and in the newer, emerging ones. (The recent insurrections against several authoritarian regimes are of course also highly significant, but lie beyond the limits of this presentation.) These changing political landscapes are facilitating increased communication across national boundaries. The upshot here is that today we have a much wider range of actors who are engaged in various ways in politics in the global arena. Moreover, the character of politics and the modes of participation are taking newer forms as a result of the affordances of the ICTs.

I refer to these newer participants in politics in transnational contexts as civil society actors. While some of them and their activities may reinforce the older patterns of Western dominance of international communication, albeit in new ways, on other fronts we see new, non-Western actors and settings emerging. International communication research needs to seriously engage with these developments if it is to keep up with changing global realities. In particular adding civil society actors to the existing roster of nation-states, private corporations, official international bodies, and major media organizations would be an important step.

If we seek to understand such actors analytically, the recent and somewhat sprawling literature on cosmopolitanism—if carefully selected—can help us get theoretical handles on the contexts and the modes of agency involved, as well as the subjective horizons and normative visions of the actors. This literature derives from various currents in moral and political

philosophy and from social scientific efforts at various levels of abstraction. While the social scientific efforts as yet remain in the minority, I would argue that we still have here a very fertile terrain that invites engagement from scholars in international communication. The theoretic horizon in turn needs to be complemented with empirical strategies, and if the current critiques about the limitations that the traditional quantitative methods can offer are to be taken seriously, I would suggest that the terrain I am pointing to offers ample opportunity for using expanded methodological toolkits.

In what follows, I will first offer an overview of this perspective, situating it within the current discussions about international communication. From there I introduce the horizons of cosmopolitanism, and endeavour to establish its conceptual utility. Then I take up the changing media landscape and look at some civil society actors—social movements engaged in alter-globalization campaigns—to exemplify my argument. I end with a few short reflections on research methodology.

### Getting Our Bearings

#### *The Force Fields of the Field*

As in just about any field of inquiry, international communication has a number of tensions around what are suitable theories, concepts, methodologies, intellectual currents, in short: what the field is about. These discussions, in various versions, have been with us at least four decades and have in fact become quite “normal”—which we can take as a sign of health. Indeed, too much complacency may signal that a field has reached its twilight years.

One, admittedly oversimplified, way of rendering the current tensions is to see them at expressing the ambivalence between defining the field in a *narrow* and neat way, thus providing clarity and certainty of mission, reducing ambiguity. The other is to take an *expansive* approach, probing, exploratory, seeing what new intellectual elements can be incorporated—with the risk of contributing to fuzziness, too much heterogeneity, and fueling factionalism. This chapter lands firmly on the side of the expansive, and advocates engagement with phenomena and literature that have not seen as part of the field’s mainstream.

As several of the authors in his volume discuss, international communication has found itself in the force field between several meta-theoretic

horizons, or paradigms, over the past decades. From development and modernization, to cultural imperialism and globalization, there has been a quest for an integrative analytic vision. Even the most recent paradigm on offer, globalization, seems to fall short of delivering what is needed. Globalization theories encompass a very broad range of elements, issues, and debates; there is no unified theory to culled from all this. The term thus remains at an abstract level, and is not directly useful as a paradigm for the field. However, it offers concepts and perspectives that international communication studies can draw on. If globalization is theoretically too dispersed a concept, the various concrete historical—and empirical—developments that we associate with it remain of the utmost relevance.

The effort to establish an overarching paradigm should be abandoned since even its non-attainment serves a useful purpose of highlighting issues and clarifying positions. In the meantime, we also hear many calls, also in this volume, to continue with the de-Westernization of the field, opening it up to more scholars and perspectives beyond the United States and Europe. Few would argue against this goal, though most will acknowledge the array of difficulties involved. Yet it is a concrete aim that we all can share and strive for, and the perspective I offer here certainly points in that direction as well.

#### *The Global Media Environment*

Returning to the theme of the concrete manifestations of globalization, Tsan-Kuo Chang in his chapter underscores how the terrain of international communication began to change rapidly in the 1990s as other channels began to follow CNN's model from the 1980s of 24/7 TV news. With their national or regional bases, they began to seriously compete with the established channel such as the BBC and CNN, offering news and commentary from their particular view of the world. This heterogenization of what he calls the “global media environment” has had a major impact on the character of contemporary international communications, with new actors injecting new social and political angles into the transnational symbolic milieu. From our present historical location we can see that this global media environment is now undergoing yet another dramatic change in the face of the widely accessible ICTs and their affordances. This new era of digital communication allows actors all over the world to enter into international communication via a wide array of platforms and communicative modes on the Internet and its ancillary technologies, such as mobile telephony.

The sheer scale of this activity is altering the center of gravity of international communication, in the sense that the empirical realities of who is actually communicating what across national boundaries—and to whom, for what purpose, and with what effect—are undergoing profound transformation. The communicative spaces of transnational settings are now populated by millions of actors who previously had no position or role in these contexts. Even if we leave aside all the trans-border electronic communication that is essentially personal or private in character, we are still left with a huge range of individuals, groups, organizations, networks, and movements of many kinds whose communicative practices have to do with political, economic, social, or cultural realms and can in some way be described as “public.” All these actors and their practices defy easy classification, but as a first analytic step, however, let us speak of civil society actors, signifying people and groups who operate beyond both formal nation-states and major economic entities.

#### Civil Society Actors and Alter-Globalization

Transnational civil society actors vary greatly in their fundamental *raison d'être*. Some are humanitarian in their orientation, and others are engaged in social or cultural networking, for example diasporic or religious groups. Many of these actors are involved in various genres of advocacy, for themselves or as representatives of larger causes or interest groups. A good number of these actors work in tandem with large established international organizations such as the United Nations or the European Union, which actively consult with civil society organizations. Many such actors have become a significant factor at the level of policy making. There is a large range of explicitly political actors; some give voice to long-standing, protracted conflicts, others air newly emerged ones, while yet others are working politically to alter the behavior of governments, regulatory bodies, or corporations based on normative visions of global change. For some political actors religion is a motivational force. Many civil society actors display healthy democratic profiles. Others may have goals or use practices that are questionable, even from within the wide range of definitions and interpretations of democracy that circulate in the world today. Hate groups, racists, and others with obviously anti-democratic and uncivil visions of the world (e.g., terrorist organizations) fall outside the definition of global civil society given that their ambitions run counter to the ideals of democracy. However, there will no doubt always be a definitional gray

zone here about who are legitimate actors in global civil society, precisely because the concept of democracy itself remains contested.

In terms of organization we encounter here the broad terrain of non-governmental organizations (NGOs): non-profit organizations, activist networks, interest and advocacy groups of all kinds, including at times very amorphous social movements. Even alternative journalistic organizations figure here, the most well known being Indymedia. In short, there is an ever expanding domain of global civil society, where international communication is taking place in a myriad of crisscrossing patterns. One of the striking features about all this civic and political international communication is that the range of actors and the breadth of the ideological spectrum visible in global public spheres has become so much larger than it was prior to the spread of digital ITCs beginning in the mid-1990s. Thus, the rather unified and bounded view of international communication has become more heterogeneous, as the field begins to incorporate the perspective of global civil society. Some literature on these developments retains to a greater or lesser degree the framework of international communication, slotting global civil society into this tradition (e.g., Chandler, 2006; Eberly, 2008; Scholte, 2011), while other studies frame global civil society in terms of critical engagement with power relations on the transnational level. Such contributions often have little interface with the field as such, yet are obviously dealing with phenomena that have to do with international communication (e.g., Drache, 2008; Keane, 2003; Keck & Sikkink, 1998; Thörn, 2009; Walker & Thompson, 2008).

For my purposes, I want to identify a particular strand of global civil society analysis that derives from this latter, critical approach and focuses on what has come to be known as the alter-globalization movement, also sometimes called the global justice movement. It is comprised of a variety of movements, networks, and organizations that focus on a set of themes or issues, such as economic fairness, especially for countries in the global South, the environment, human rights, gender issues, labor issues, protection of indigenous cultures, and so on. The alter-globalization movement is thus also large and diverse in itself, but within this corner of global civil society there is a basic conceptual unity. It has to do with the struggles to find counter-hegemonic alternatives to the present trajectory of neoliberal societal development.

These activists are politically on the left, but it is largely a reformist movement, seeking to mobilize public opinion and to influence both lawmakers at different levels and corporate actors who are perceived to be do-

ing societal harm in transnational contexts. Another unifying aspect is that almost all of these actors have some kind of presence on the Internet; in fact, it could be argued that without these ICT affordances the movement would not be as developed as it has become. Even the media themselves can become the focus of such activities, especially the attempts to develop alternative media practices and more democratic public spheres. (Reports of such efforts, based on cooperation between activists and academics, are found in the two companion volumes by Rodriguez, Kidd, & Stein, 2010 and Stein, Kidd, & Rodriguez, 2009.)

A further element that pulls together much of the alter-globalization movement is that there is a loose, overarching organization that has been operating for the past decade, the World Social Forum (WSF)—which also has regional spinoffs, such as the European Social Forum.

With participants all over the world, and its roots in the global South, the WSF has a strong non-Western profile. It holds a major annual meeting, with tens of thousands participating; these began in Brazil as a counterpoint to the Davos meetings of global political and economic elites. The meetings seek to globally coordinate, build alliances, share knowledge and experiences, and develop strategies. The alter-globalization movement generally, and the WSF in particular, has been made academically visible in recent years; see, for example, Acosta (2009); Gills (2011); Hosseini (2010); Maeckelburgh (2009); Pleyers (2011); Sen & Waterman (2007); de Sousa Santos & Rodriguez-Garavito (2005); Smith, Della Porta, & Mosca (2007).

Just in passing, it should be mentioned that while the WSF and global civil society generally have benefited enormously from the affordances of ICTs and the networking they make possible (Castells, 2010), the impacts of technologies are always shaped by their interplay with social factors. The contingencies that make possible and delimit phenomena can never just be reduced to ICT's. Thus, analyses of international communication in this regard—and in fact more generally—must take into account the larger societal contingencies that come into play.

#### Cosmopolitanism and International Civic Communication

In another chapter in this volume, Silvio Waisbord argues forcefully for an increased cosmopolitan character of media studies generally and international communication more specifically. By this he means “an analytic attitude open to multiple perspectives and developments beyond geography. . . . At a time of unprecedented mobility of people, ideas, and goods,

as well as the porosity of political, economic, and cultural borders, world citizenship offers responses to critical issues and urgent needs.” I certainly concur, and would further assert that the theme of cosmopolitanism pertains not just to the character of the research and the researchers but also to the actors themselves and their practices, to those who are engaged in global civil society and alter-globalization, and what they do with their media. We find within the literature on cosmopolitanism a strong normative strain that offers an inspirational vision that “another world is possible” (to cite WSF’s slogan).

But there is more: ethical ideals and value commitments are also an important foundation for civic transnational practices. Modes of personal and group identity that extend beyond one’s own nationality, ethnic, or religious group, have shown be crucial in such forms of international communication. Thus, in the contemporary circumstances of globalization, many actors are motivated by thought that has its roots in versions of cosmopolitanism. This is definitely not about “moralizing”; rather, this horizon suggests that if we are interested in exploring the motivational grounds for international communication with global civil society and the alter-globalization movement, cosmopolitanism offers us a potentially useful analytic toolkit.

### *The Horizons of Cosmopolitanism*

The notion of cosmopolitanism is of course quite old; even Socrates famously claimed that he was not an Athenian, nor a Greek, but a citizen of the world. Immanuel Kant gave the concept a strong ethical dimension in his modern version of the world citizen; this element remains prominent even today, as the concept is being reinvented. Cosmopolitanism has in recent years become somewhat of a buzzword, but this does not per se make it useless or misleading. With the continuing integration of the world via the processes of globalization—albeit often in very uneven, unequal, and contested ways—the other, or rather the many others, come all the closer to us in our everyday lives. On one level we can see cosmopolitanism as an expression of concern for the other, transferred to global contexts. More specifically—and more useful for research—cosmopolitanism offers an analytic frame for approaching issues about social perceptions of and relations with distant others in the world. Morality, as the fundamental conceptions of right and wrong in human affairs—and ethics, as the application, or codification of morality into concrete norms of behaviour—constitute,

at bottom, the foundation of most human action, even if only implicitly. It thereby remains an important analytic angle of vision for understanding the social world, not least in the context of international communication.

It could be said that the actual status of cosmopolitanism in today's world gets at best mixed reviews. Yes, in the wake of globalization, many people across the globe have developed new horizons about themselves and the world they live in. We can note with enthusiasm that there is plenty of evidence that indicates a growth in engagement in transnational social realities and empathy for concrete human situations beyond one's own national contexts. And yet . . . many contemporary circumstances make the picture more sombre; the inventory of global ills that contest the growth of cosmopolitanism is woefully long. Not least, the media's role in these contexts is often discouraging, if familiar: they serve all too often to cement the mental boundaries between "us and them."

However, the enormous transnational difficulties that we face challenge us all the more to understand, to analyze, and this is evidenced in the extensive literature that has recently merged on cosmopolitanism. Much of it ranges over moral theory and political philosophy (Breckenridge et al., 2002; Brock & Brighouse, 2005; Nussbaum, 2006), addressing the vision of a better, more democratic global political order (Archibugi, 2008; Gould, 2004; Held, 2010) or ethical order (e.g., Sullivan & Kymlicka, 2007; Vernon, 2010); the notion of citizenship, and the issues of rights and inclusion in the contemporary global situation, not least in regard to the EU (e.g., Benhabib, 2006; Habermas, 2006). Other interventions address the socio-cultural preconditions for cosmopolitanism or its subjective dimensions (e.g., Appiah, 2007; Beck & Cronin, 2006; Hannerz, 1996; Kendall, Woodward, & Skrbis, 2009; Robertson, 2010). A few authors engage with cosmopolitanism in a critical way, framing it in terms of a critique of neoliberalism (Cheah, 2006; Dallmayr, 2003; Delanty, 2009; Harvey, 2009).

### *One or Many Cosmopolitanisms?*

Not surprisingly, all this diverse literature on cosmopolitanism encompasses a certain conceptual looseness. Kendall, Woodward, and Skrbis (2009), in their extensive review, insist that the notion lacks clarity and risks becoming all things to all people. Given that cosmopolitanism is framed in varying ways, the points of tension need to be made visible, even if they cannot always be resolved. These authors also note a certain degree of political naïveté in some of the literature, and in their view there is often an

implicit utopian drive to construct a new world of tolerant and responsible citizens, with little analytic insight on how to get there. Not least some of the literature tends to ignore major global divides, a point also made by David Harvey’s (2009) critical evaluation of several key authors. Discussions of cosmopolitanism would probably be more fruitful if the moral dimension were a bit more modest and if the concept could be developed more in an empirical manner.

In a recent publication, Corpus Ong (2009) discusses how theorists in various disciplines view cosmopolitanism, which he takes to be an “openness to the world.” He derives four basic categories, under which major authors are placed: *closed* (i.e., un- or anti-cosmopolitan), *prestige* (where status and privilege are closely associated with it), *banal* (an everyday, “ordinary” openness to otherness as an expression of one’s own identity), and *ecstatic*, a kind of visionary enthusiasm. Such a map can no doubt help one navigate through the literature—and one will likely find that quite a few authors end up in the “ecstatic” category.

A more specific issue that abounds in the literature has to do with the basic tension between universalism and the particular (or local, or national). Is there one set of cosmopolitan values and perceptions, a “one-size-fits-all”? The answers have political implications. In their introduction, Breckenridge et al. (2002) propose that the concept be used in the plural, and not be associated with the unitary, privileged position of the European tradition, since the motivation and capacity to reflect on those beyond one’s own culture is to be found in all regions of the world. The chapters of the book explore modes of cosmopolitanism in different regions of the non-Western world.

On the other hand, Bryan S. Turner (2002) draws on the sixteenth-century writer Michel Montaigne to develop a sense of universal cosmopolitan virtue. Turner sees Montaigne as espousing what he calls the softer (feminine) values of mercy, compassion, and tenderness—in response to the horrors of the wars of his time. Cosmopolitan virtue basically encompasses pacifist values that preclude violence and promote human agency and dignity. Turner argues that cosmopolitan virtue involves an opposition to suffering and “constitutes a standpoint that both transcends and unites different cultures and historical epochs” (p. xx). Indeed, he asserts that the vulnerability of the human body provides a starting point for an account of human commonality and compassion as the basis for a cosmopolitan ethic. For him, the UN Declaration of Human Rights is obviously a very cosmopolitan document, which he builds into his argument.

Thus, we can sense an unresolved ambivalence between cosmopolitanism as an expression of multiple empirical realities around the world and as a unitary global ideal, with universalist virtues. Turner takes a clear stand against moral relativism: cosmopolitan virtue is not compatible with indifference. However, one could respond that Turner's position is "easy": to reduce physical suffering is perhaps not so controversial. In situations that, for example, have to do with expressions of minority community membership in majoritarian cultural settings (e.g., apparel of religious expression), it may not always be so easy to identify an operable cosmopolitan ethic. And the espousal of universalism has not seldom stumbled into the terrain of ethnocentrism and cultural power.

### *The Power Dimension*

Thus, even if we cannot readily resolve this tension, in treating cosmopolitanism as a dimension of culture we at some point have to touch base with the themes of history and power, as Harvey (2009) argues. Culture in today's world is of course not some simple mirroring of the flow of economic and political power from centres to peripheries, yet the history of colonialism makes it difficult to deny the importance of these mechanisms (and here of course the structures of the media and the patterns of their representation loom especially large). In short, if globalization constitutes the key contemporary condition for the actualization of cosmopolitanism, then the prevailing power relations (and their historical origins) in the global arena would seemingly have importance for understanding the character and possibilities of cosmopolitanism.

Yet, the horizon of power does not always appear in the literature on cosmopolitanism; as with the literature on globalization, most versions avoid this topic. Global power can of course be approached from a number of angles, not least through the political economy of the world system, but the perspective of post-colonialism offers a significant cultural prism through which to view cosmopolitanism. Post-colonialism, in ways similar to cultural studies (with which it at times blends together), is sensitive to how culture and the production of meaning are always bound up in some way or other with relations of power.

It is interesting to note that in the past two decades or so that two key theoretic traditions—globalization (with its home largely in the social sciences) and post-colonialism (hovering more in the humanities)—have had relatively little encounter with each other. They seemingly exist in par-

allel universes, when in fact they should be very much entwined—even if this lack of interaction is beginning to be addressed (for example, see the collection by Krishnaswamy & Hawley, 2008). For cosmopolitanism, post-colonialism can serve to help alert us to the historical antecedents of a vast array of aspects where power, especially cultural power, has relevance: patterns of cultural influences, images of the other, identity processes, integration/assimilation, language use, institution-building, and so on. Conceptually and empirically cosmopolitanism cannot be reduced to a mere function of power, yet neither can power be ignored. If it is not obviously manifest, then it is always hovering there—in both micro- and macro- circumstances. Power evokes counter-power, so it is not simply a case of unidirectional and deterministic mechanisms, even though hegemonic positions are usually prevalent.

### Media and Civic Cosmopolitanism

#### *The Media Connection*

Oddly enough, the media have not figured extensively in the literature on cosmopolitanism. One major empirical effort to establish the contours of links between media use and cosmopolitan mind-sets is found in Norris and Inglehart (2009). Generally, it seems that exposure to global media will promote cosmopolitanism. However, the authors underscore the research complexity of establishing causal relationships, and make the point that there also many non-media variables at work. More focused efforts are found in Boltanski (1999), who addresses in a theoretic manner the theme of recognizing and identifying with distant others via news coverage of suffering; Chouliaraki (2006), who addresses this theme but in a more rigorously empirical manner; and Robertson (2010), who takes a broader look at television news, its journalists/editors, and viewers around the world to elucidate the role of the media in fostering cosmopolitan horizons. Lai (2008) probes these themes from the horizons of the Internet. This literature underscores the media's importance for cosmopolitanism, while at the same time reminding us of the limits of our knowledge in these matters.

Another angle on the media's connection to cosmopolitanism is found in Roger Silverstone's (2006) last major work. The book's style is more essayistic than empirical, and has more of the normative character of the dominant literature on cosmopolitanism. However, it assumes that the media play a decisive role in the constitution of late modernity and its forms of globalization. It provides a useful starting point for some reflections on

international communication and cosmopolitanism, with a focus on their relationship to democracy. More specifically, I want to highlight his basic ideas with an eye toward cosmopolitanism as a necessary element for civic agency in the modern globalized world, and the character of the media as a precondition for such agency.

Silverstone navigates carefully between optimism and pessimism, yet he clearly is conveying an ambitious vision. He also adroitly balances the tension between one or many cosmopolitanisms: he pushes strongly for a generalized shared ethics of responsibility for the other, but adamantly acknowledges that people's actions and moral frameworks must be contingent on their circumstances if they are to be meaningful and effective. He argues that media today have imposed conditions of cosmopolitanism on us: we can—and must—respond accordingly from the standpoint of our own lives. Not least, he is very much aware of the significance of power relations, especially in regard to the institutions and functioning of the media. This ushers us into the realm of democracy and civil society actors. However, I will first backtrack a bit and summarize his main points.

### *The Mediapolis*

In brief, Silverstone observes that the media are becoming what he calls “environmental”: they no longer can be seen as simply discrete flows of messages or information, but rather take on the character of dense symbolic ecologies that penetrate just about every corner of our existence. What he terms the mediapolis is composed of the vast communicative space of mediated global appearances. It is via the media that the world appears to us and where appearance constitutes the world. It is through the media that we learn who we are—and who we are different from, and where relations between self and other are conducted in a global public arena. The media establish connections and relationships; they position us in the world.

The mediapolis is both a normative and an empirical term. Empirically, it is something other than a rational Habermasian public sphere; it is cacophonous, with multiple voices, inflections, images, and rhetoric—it resides beyond logic and rationality, and it cannot offer any expectation of fully effective communication. The communications dynamic that Silverstone sees here he calls *contrapunctual*: each communicative thread gains significance at best only in relationship to others—together, the ensemble of tension-ridden, contradictory communicative interventions comprise the tumultuous whole.

Normatively, however, despite differences in communicative and other

forms of power, the mediapolis demands mutual responsibility between producers and audiences/users, as well as a capacity for reflexivity on the part of all involved, including recognition of cultural differences. This moral response is expressed in our responsibility for thinking, speaking, listening, and acting. It of course raises issues of the kinds of reality created by the mediapolis, the kinds of publicness, who appears—and how—as well as who does not appear. There is clearly an element of media power here: definitional control lies most immediately with the media organizations, but Silverstone emphasizes that there is still responsibility on all sides. Journalists, editors, and producers have a responsibility for the representations they offer, while audiences/users have an obligation to reflect on what they encounter and to respond in an ethical manner—both to the world portrayed and toward the media.

The notion of mediapolis is thus a challenge, a challenge to inequities of representation, mechanisms of exclusion, the imbalances of media power (via both state and capital), and “the ideological and prejudicial frames of unreflexive reporting and storytelling” (Silverstone, 2006, p. 37). The media, in their representations of the world, inevitably engage in what he calls boundary work: boundaries are constantly being drawn, reinforced, and altered between various constellations of “us and them.” In underscoring the significance of morality and ethics, Silverstone means that moral dimensions should become a focus of analytic concern, just as social, political, and cultural perspectives are part of our analytic approach to the processes of communication.

#### *From Morality to Global Civic Engagement*

In all this Silverstone admits that we have an enormous difficulty to deal with. The public, as the aggregate of the audiences of mediapolis, is hardly an efficacious agent. Thought, speech, and action are disconnected and compromised by absence of context, memory, and analytic rigour, and increasingly, by the absence of trust, and we witness patterns of withdrawal from the public realm into the private—in fact, precisely the major dilemmas confronting democracy. Though he does not have much to say in concrete terms about political agency, Silverstone’s political sensibility indicates that the mediapolis is not only a site for moral response, but, potentially, for practices. The cosmopolitan moral agent must move beyond the state of merely thinking about his or her responsibility; it must be enacted, embodied via some kind of action (which, in the context of the political, will often take some form of communication).

Such a proactive social ethics, which demands engagement with and responsibility for global others, points us toward cosmopolitan citizenship, which engages with the world not least via the mediapolis, in a manner that is strongly tied to some version of democracy. This link between cosmopolitanism and democratic civic agency—I call it civic cosmopolitanism—involves translating the cosmopolitan moral stance into concrete political contexts that benefit not just our own interests but those of globalized others. Cosmopolitanism becomes thus an inexorable dimension of contemporary global civic virtue and agency.

It is here, in a sense at the outer edges of his work, where I would like to pick up his baton and run with it. I have previously grappled with how to understand civic agency, that is, to comprehend the subjective realities that can promote people's engagement in politics and the role of the media in this regard (Dahlgren, 2009). I sketched such themes as the globalization of citizenship, civil society, and political activism, as well as the relevant media circumstances. However, the transnational dimension remained underdeveloped. There was really no conceptual connection between such agency and global moral responsibility. I find that Silverstone's book, with its promotion of cosmopolitanism and its normative anchoring, invites us, in a compelling manner, to better conceptualize those links.

In talking about the mediapolis, Silverstone tends to foreground the mass media, but underscores how the Internet and ancillary technologies are altering its basic parameters. He rightly points out that, in terms of publicness, the Internet requires the mass media as a referent, a context, to avoid spiraling away into small isolated islands. (The Internet itself has of course the character of mass mediated communication.) If we thus connect his framework of the mediapolis with the realm of net-based global civil society in general, and the alter-globalization movement and WSF in particular, we bring into focus a relatively specific and delimited group of actors who engage in international communication. We of course lose from sight the vast majority of people in online mediapolis who are not thus engaged, but in the interests of keeping an eye on possible research it is important to narrow our focus.

### Researching the Civic Cosmopolitanism of Alter-Globalization

Over the past decade and a half, a new generation of international communicators has been emerging across the globe, using ICTs in new and imaginative ways. Among these civil society actors is the alter-globalization movement, with the WSF. These actors are motivated in strongly norma-

tive terms; they have a variety of goals, all aimed at transforming the current direction of global development. They meet live, face to face, on many occasions, but also make extensive use of the digital media. They are operating in a mediapolis where they constitute counter-hegemonic voices to the dominant representations that support neoliberal mechanisms for driving society forward.

### *Empirical and Comparative Angles*

There are two obvious and complementary lines of empirical research open here. One has to do with the nature of the international communication that flows from these groups. Here we can distinguish that which is intended as internal communication—within and between groups, even across national borders. The other is communication directed to the outside world, to global publics, but even to decision makers, to power holders. I find the latter the more relevant one. A good starting place is the official website, [www.forumsocialmundial.org.br/](http://www.forumsocialmundial.org.br/), which is available in Portuguese, English, French, and Spanish. There are different kinds of information available, including journalistic news, organizational and mobilizational information, including developments in preparation for the next annual World Social Forum meeting. One can follow links and pursue topics, debates, and continue to the information made available by the vast number of specific participating networks, groups, and movements.

The other line of research has to do with the actors themselves, as individuals and members of collectivities. Their backgrounds, motivations, perceptions, organizational strategies, media use, and so on open up many avenues of possible research. The grounds for their civic identities and practices in particular, coupled not least to the cosmopolitan themes of global others, their moral horizons, offer fertile research possibilities.

Such research is very much in its infancy. Lai (2008) offers some conceptual starts in regard to online activism; the work of de Sousa Santos (2005) offers a number of important concrete insights on the horizons of WSF activists. Uldam (2010) takes some important steps in such explorations in studying the identities, commitments, and strategies of two groups engaged in global justice issues in London. A general line of questioning can be built upon the extensive work already done in national contexts, exploring what factors promote and inhibit civic engagement and participation in social movement and political groups, and also how the media may (or may not) help generate civic cultures (see Dahlgren, 2009 for an overview).

In such research efforts directed towards the actor and their media practices, the comparative dimension should be a strong guide: one could study comparable groups and their communication practices in different geographical locations, or the interface between such alternative political communication and mainstream versions. How do such communications “travel” in the global mediapolis, what impact does it have, how does it relate to mainstream forms of communication on such topics, and what does all this mean for the character of international communication? Western and non-Western dimensions could figure prominently here. Also, the on-line world is in rapid transition, and alter-globalization efforts are increasingly making use of popular platforms such as YouTube to gain access to larger audiences (see Askanius & Gustafsson, 2010). How does this alter their communicative strategies and their identities? What are the implications of inserting politics into a media environment that is so strongly tilted toward popular culture and entertainment? Comparisons of strategies in various sectors of the mediapolis and their political efficacy can be seen as a research theme of growing relevance. Possible data include the media productions of various groups, their coverage of events, and the discussions and comments that ensue.

There is of course an ethical dimension to such research: what motivates it, what knowledge will it generate, for whom will it be useful, and in particular what relationship and responsibility will one have to those one studies. Such issues need to be clarified in advance of any such undertaking—for oneself as a researcher and for those that one wants to research. Research on these actors and their practices can and should be incorporated into the broader development of the field of international communication, helping us to understand exactly in what ways it is evolving as a result of these developments.

#### *Negotiating Methodology*

Chin-Chuan Lee argues in his chapter that cultural meanings need to be taken more into account in the research of international communication. And Jan Servaes, also in this volume, takes up the methodological issue of moving beyond the strict quantitative approaches that have characterized the field and underscores, among other things, the need for focusing increased research attention on the power of culture. We need to understand agency from the point of view of the agents, from the meaning such action has for them. From my vantage point, these appeals direct us precisely

toward the importance of the normative and cultural frameworks of civic international communication actors, and these can be refracted at least in part through the prism of cosmopolitanism.

I find it unproductive to get locked into trench warfare over methodologies, since no one method is inherently privileged, no one approach a priori better or worse than any other. Rather, it is the kinds of knowledge we are looking for, the research questions posed, and the kinds of materials we have at hand that are ultimately decisive. Having said that, it would seem that any effort to probe the self-perceptions, motivations, and identity of social actors will at some point have to mobilize qualitative methods. Through depth interviews and onsite observations, processes of sense-making and reality construction can be illuminated. Likewise, in analyzing media products, the elucidation of meaning, the illumination of discourses mobilized, and not least the multi-media dimensions of much of the materials (visuals, sound, and text) suggest that qualitative methods are needed.

However, such approaches most definitely need not stand in opposition to quantitative procedures; the two have often been productively combined. For example, a quantitative overview of specific media materials can often provide an important profile, and will function very well together with deeper qualitative analyses of selected portions. The two strategies become complementary. Similarly, larger survey interviews of actors can serve well in relation to depth interviews with a more limited number. Over the past decades we have seen “cultural turns” in the social sciences, and the growth of qualitative approaches aimed at analyzing the processes of social construction, by which people produce meaning and define the social world and their place in it. We have seen this not least in the area of media and communication research, with an increase of cultural theories and methods. It is hardly controversial, and it would be puzzling if international communication were for some reason to define itself as off limits for such procedures.

Quantitative methods per se should not be automatically equated with “positivism,” nor are qualitative approaches an automatic guarantee of research quality. Rather, positivism has to do with what Habermas once called “a refusal to reflect.” As researchers, we always have to be alert not only about what we are studying, we must also periodically question our own assumptions and pre-understandings. That way we develop not just our field of inquiry but also ourselves. The study of mediated civic cosmopolitanism offers an opportunity to do both.<sup>1</sup>

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NOTE

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