

Many Voices, One World

COMMUNICATION AND SOCIETY
TODAY AND TOMORROW

● Sean MacBride ●

● Elie Abel ● Hubert Beuve-Méry ● Elebe Ma Ekonzo ●
● Gabriel Garcia Marquez ● Sergei Losev ● Mochtar Lubis ●
● Mustapha Masmoudi ● Michio Nagai ● Fred Isaac Akporuaro Omu ●
● Bogdan Osolnik ● Gamal El Oteifi ● Johannes Pieter Pronk ●
● Juan Somavia ● Boobli George Verghese ●
● Betty Zimmerman ●

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“The paradigm of a totality”

Kaarle Nordenstreng in Cees Hamelink (ed.),
*Communication in the Eighties: A Reader on the
MacBride Report*. Rome: IDOC, 1980

Critical essays on the Report by IAMCR scholars
including Alfred Opubor, Tamás Szecskö and
Herbert Schiller, right after the MacBride Report
was published, put together during the IAMCR
conference in Caracas in July 1980

Reprinted in *Mass Communication Review
Yearbook* Vol 3, 1982 (Beverly Hills: Sage)

My points in 1980

“Many voices, one world. Communication and society, today and tomorrow” – what is provided on (1) world, (2) society and (3) communication?

- The “one world” shallow while the approach is

- ahistorical*

- eclectic and incoherent*

- media-centred*

- The “society” and “communication” follow

- bourgeois liberalism

- functionalist-positivist paradigm

History of communications

Unless we embrace what might be called “real world history”, we are left with the history of communications *in isolation* from fundamental social and global developments

Such a picture of communication history is not only incomplete: it amounts to a crucial choice of methodology carrying with it a particular concept of communication, a paradigm where communication is understood as a phenomenon *related to* a number of other social phenomena but not *organically linked with* them

“One world”

The Report does not contain any coherent picture of the world – neither the world of today not of tomorrow, or for that matter the world of yesterday

That is why a demand or a programme toward a “new order”, whatever attributes are attached to it, remains also a fairly empty slogan with more political connotations than theoretical insight

Society and communication

No adequate definition provided, no proper elements for description of these two central concepts

The paradigm is not far from the mainstream of bourgeois liberalism (ahistorical and abstract notion of society, value pluralism, etc.)

The model of communication is exchange with many connections to other social phenomena but without really organic links with them

Moreover the paradigm eliminates human consciousness in the communication process

Conclusion in 1980

The report is an excellent illustration of the dilemma of eclecticism: you try to be comprehensive but you lose the totality which you are supposed to discover

In this respect the Report could well be called “Mission impossible”.

My points in 33 years later

Exactly the same!

Even more serious given the field's expansion

Self-criticism of not following up that
uncompromised line