The Stories We Tell

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Abstract

Most of what we know, or think we know, we have never personally experienced. The fact that we learn most of what we know from the stories told by others indicates that telling stories is one of the fundamental human needs and activities. Within this framework, there is a vital question to be asked: who is telling those stories? The stories, which determine the cultural environment within which we are shaped, follow an evolutionary path that is parallel to the evolution of human communication in general. The current stage of such an evolution paints a dark picture: As the main story-tellers, the media, and particularly television, insert crime and violence stories into our minds in a pace that is never seen in history. It is possible to identify the concentration of media ownership and the fact that programs are produced according to a formula based on violence, as the main reasons behind this situation. Formula-based programs, in turn, guarantee cross-cultural understandability which is necessary since those programs are marketed all over the world. One can imagine three major political activities against this *de facto* censorship that blocks the telling of alternative stories: selective viewing; critical communication education based on media analysis; and citizen organizations such as The Cultural Environment Movement.

Anlattığımız Öyküler

Özet

Bildiğimiz ya da bildiğimizi sandığımız şeylerin büyük çoğunluğunu kişisel olarak deneyimlemiyoruz. Bildiklerimizin çoğunu başkalarının anlattığı öykülerden öğrenmemiz olgusu, öykü anlatmanın en temel insan ihtiyacı ve etkinliği olduğuna işaret ediyor. Bu çerçevede sorulması hayati önem taşıyan bir soru var: bu öyküleri kim anlatıyor? İçinde şekillendiğimiz kültürel ortamı belirleyen bu öykülerin evrimi, genelde insan iletişiminin evrimine paraleldir. Bu evrimin günümüzdeki aşaması karanlık bir tablo oluşturuyor: başat öykü anlatıcı olan medya, özellikle televizyon, suç ve şiddet öykülerini tarihin hiç bir döneminde olmadığı sıklıkta zihinlerimize sokuyor. Bu durumun temel nedeni olarak garantili kar peşinde koşan medya kuruluşlarının sahipliğinde görülen tekelleşme ve bu tekellerin programları dünyanın her yerinde pazarlayabilmek için farklı kültürlerce anlaşılabilecek -çoğunlukla şiddete dayalı- formüllere göre üretmeleri gösterilebilir. Alternatif öykülerin önünü tıkayan bu fiili sansür karşısında üç temel politik eylem tasavvur edilebilir: seçici izleme; medya analizine dayalı eleştirel iletişim eğitimi; ve Kültürel Çevre Hareketi gibi sivil toplum örgütlenmeleri.

The Stories We Tell

Most of what we know, or think we know, we have never personally experienced. We live in a world erected by the stories we hear and see and tell.

Unlocking incredible riches through imagery and words, conjuring up the unseen through art, creating towering works of imagination and fact through science, poetry, songs, tales, reports and laws -that is the true magic of human life.

Through that magic we live in a world much wider than the threats and gratifications of the immediate physical environment, which is the world of other species. Stories socialize us into roles of gender, age, class, vocation and lifestyle, and offer models of conformity or targets for rebellion. They weave the seamless web of the cultural environment that cultivates most of what we think, what we do, and how we conduct our affairs.

The story-telling process used to be hand-crafted, home-made, community-inspired. Now it is mostly mass-produced and policy-driven. It is the end result of a complex manufacturing and marketing process. The situation calls for a new diagnosis and a new prescription.

The stories that animate our cultural environment have three distinct but related functions. These functions are (1) to reveal how things work; (2) to describe what things are; and (3) to tell us what to do about them.

Stories of the first kind, revealing how things work, illuminate the all-important but invisible relationships and hidden dynamics of life. Fairy tales, novels, plays, comics, cartoons, and other forms of creative imagination and imagery are the basic building blocks of human understanding. They show complex causality by presenting imaginary action in total situations, coming to some conclusion that has a moral purpose and a social function. You don't have to believe the "facts" of *Little Red Riding Hood* to grasp the notion that big bad "wolves" victimize old women and trick little girls -a lesson in gender roles, fear, and power.

Stories of the first kind build, from infancy on, the fantasy we call reality. I do not suggest that the revelations are false, which they may or may not be, but that they are synthetic, selective, often mythical, and always socially constructed.

Stories of the second kind depict what things are. These are descriptions, depictions, expositions, reports abstracted from total situations and filling in with "facts" the fantasies conjured up by stories of the first kind. They are the presumably factual accounts, the chronicles of the past and the news of today.

Stories of what things are may confirm or deny some conception of how things work. Their high "facticity" (i.e. correspondence to actual events presumed to exist independently of the story) gives them special status in political theory and often in law. They give emphasis and credibility to

selected parts of each society's fantasies of reality. They convey information about finance, weddings, crime, lotteries, terrorists, etc. They alert us to certain interests, threats, opportunities and challenges.

Stories of the third kind tell us what to do. These are stories of value and choice. They present things, behaviors or styles of life as desirable (or undesirable), propose ways to obtain (or avoid) them, and the price to be paid for attainment (or failure). They are the instructions, laws, regulations, cautionary tales, commands, slogans, sermons, and exhortations. Today most of them are called commercials and other advertising messages and images we see and hear every day.

Stories of the third kind clinch the lessons of the first two and turn them into action. They typically present an objective to be sought or to be avoided, and offer a product, service, candidate, institution or action purported to help attain or avoid it. The lessons of fictitious Little Red Riding Hoods and their more realistic sequels prominent in everyday news and entertainment not only teach lessons of vulnerability, mistrust and dependence but also help sell burglar alarms, more jails and executions promised to enhance security (which they rarely do), and other ways to adjust to a structure of power.

Ideally, the three kinds of stories check and balance each other. But in a commercially driven culture, stories of the third kind pay for most of the first two. That creates a coherent cultural environment whose overall function is to provide a hospitable and effective context for stories that sell. With the coming of the electronic age, that cultural environment is increasingly monopolized, homogenized, and globalized. We must then look at the historic course of our journey to see what this new age means for us and our children

For the longest time in human history, stories were told only face to face. A community was defined by the rituals, mythologies and imageries held in common. All useful knowledge was encapsulated in aphorisms and legends, proverbs and tales, incantations and ceremonies. Writing was rare and holy, forbidden for slaves. Laboriously inscribed manuscripts conferred sacred power to their interpreters, the priests and ministers. As a sixteenth century scribe put it:

> Those who observe the codices,
> those who recite them.
> Those who noisily turn the pages of
> illustrated manuscripts.
> Those who have possession of the
> black and red ink and that which is pictured;
> they lead us, they guide us, they tell us the way.

State and church ruled in a symbiotic relationship of mutual dependence and tension. State, composed of feudal nobles, was the economic, military and political order; church its cultural arm.

The industrial revolution changed all that. One of the first machines stamping out standardized artifacts was the printing press. Its product, the book, was a prerequisite for all the other upheavals to come. Printing begins the industrialization of story-telling, arguably the most profound transformation in the humanization process.

The book could be given to all who could read, requiring education and creating a new literate class of people. Readers could now interpret the book (at first the *Bible*) for themselves, breaking the monopoly of priestly interpreters and ushering in the Reformation.

When the printing press was hooked up to the steam engine the industrialization of story-telling shifted into high gear. Rapid publication and mass transport created a new form of consciousness: modern mass publics. Publics are loose aggregations of people who share some common consciousness of how things work, what things are, and what ought to be done -but never meet face-to-face. That was never before possible.

Stories could now be sent -often smuggled- across hitherto impenetrable or closely guarded boundaries of time, space and status. The book lifts people from their traditional moorings as the industrial revolution uproots them from their local communities and cultures. They can now get off the land and go to work in far-away ports, factories and continents, and have with them a packet of common consciousness -the book or journal, and later the motion picture (silent at first)- wherever they go.

Publics, created by such publication, are necessary for the formation of individual and group identities in the new urban environment, as the different classes and regional, religious and ethnic groups try to maintain some sense of distinct integrity and also to live together with some degree of cooperation with other groups.

Publics are the basic units of self-government. They make it possible to elect or select representatives to an assembly trying to reconcile diverse interests. The maintenance and integrity of multiple publics makes self-government feasible for large, complex, and diverse national communities. People engage in long and costly struggles to be free to create and share stories that fit the reality of competing and often conflicting values and interests. Most of our assumptions about human development and political plurality and choice are rooted in the print era.

One of the most vital provisions of the print era was the creation of the only large-scale folk-institution of industrial society, public education. Public education is the community institution where face-to-face learning and interpreting could, ideally, liberate the individual from both tribal and medieval dependencies and all cultural monopolies.

The second great transformation, the electronic revolution, ushers in the telecommunications era. Its mainstream, television, is superimposed upon and reorganizes print-based culture. Unlike the industrial revolution, the new upheaval does not uproot people from their homes but transports them in their homes. It re-tribalizes modern society. It challenges and changes the role of both church and education in the new culture.

For the first time in human history, children are born into homes where mass-produced stories can reach them on the average more than seven hours a day. Most waking hours, and often dreams, are filled with these stories. The stories do not come from their families, schools, churches, neighborhoods, and often not even from their native countries, or, in fact, from anyone with anything relevant to tell. They come from small group of distant conglomerates with something to sell.

The cultural environment in which we live becomes the byproduct of marketing. The historic nexus of state and church is replaced by the new symbiotic relationship of state and television. The "state" itself is the twin institution of elected public government and selected private corporate government, ruling in the legal, military and economic domains. Media, its cultural arm, is dominated by the private establishment, despite its use of the public airwaves.

Giant industries discharge their messages into the mainstream of common consciousness. Channels proliferate and new technologies pervade home and office while mergers and bottom-line pressures shrink creative alternatives and reduce diversity of content.

These changes may appear to be broadening local, parochial horizons, but they also mean a homogenization of outlooks and limitation of alternatives. For media professionals, the changes mean fewer opportunities and greater compulsions to present life in saleable packages. Creative artists, scientists, humanists can still explore and enlighten and occasionally even challenge, but, increasingly, their stories must fit marketing strategies and priorities.

Viewing commercials is "work" performed by audiences in exchange for "free" news and entertainment. But, in fact, we pay dearly through a surcharge added to the price of every advertised product that goes to subsidize commercial media, and through allowing advertising expenditures to be a tax-deductible business expense. These give-aways of public moneys for private purposes further erode the diversity of the cultural mainstream.

Broadcasting is the most concentrated, homogenized, and globalized medium. The top U.S. 100 advertisers pay for two-thirds of all network television. Four networks, allied to giant transnational corporations -our private "Ministry of Culture"- control the bulk of production and distribution, and shape the cultural mainstream. Other interests, religious or educational, minority views, and the potential of any challenge to dominant perspectives, lose ground with every merger.

Formula-driven assembly-line produced programs increasingly dominate the airwaves. The formulas themselves reflect the structure of power that produces them and function to preserve and enhance that structure of power. Perhaps the leading example of such story functions is violence. It is a good example of how the system works; it is also an indication of the magnitude and nature of the challenge ·efore us.

Humankind may have had more bloodthirsty eras, but none as filled with images of crime and violence as the present. While violent crime rates remain essentially flat or decline, news of crime surges to new highs.

U.S. television networks doubled the time given to crime coverage between 1992 and 1993. *TV Guide*'s August 13, 1994 survey also showed a steep increase in stories of violence, especially in local television news.

Monitoring by the *Des Moines (Iowa) Register* (March 27, 1994) illustrated how crime and violence skew news priorities.

Of the six top stories on Des Moines evening newscasts during February, 1994, one out of four (118 stories) dealt with crime and violence. By comparison, 27 featured business, 17 dealt with government, 15 reported about racial relations, and 2 were stories about the schools.

A University of Miami study of local television news found that time devoted to crime ranged from 23 to 50 percent (averaging 32 percent) while violent crime in he city remained constant, involving less that one-tenth of one percent of the population (UMOMR, 1994).

A study by Robert Entman for the Chicago Council on Urban Affairs (Entman, 1994) found not only that local news shows are dominated by vivid images of violence, but that "a high percentage of African-Americans and Latinos are shown as victimizers of society, and few as social helpers," contributing to a sense of fear and distrust (that our own research diagnosed as the "mean world syndrome" (Gerbner, 1995), and to the notion that "the inner city is dominated by dangerous and irresponsible minorities."

Another study of homicide news reporting (Johnstone, Hawkins and Michener, 1994) found that only one of three actual homicides was reported, and that the most likely to be selected were those in which the victims were white rather than black or Latino, contrary to the actual crime statistics. University of Pennsylvania Sociologist Elijah Anderson also noted in the November 1994 issue of *Philadelphia Magazine* that media portrayals of crime and violence involving blacks and the resulting demonization of black males, becomes a major reason for "white flight." In fact, however, African American men, not whites, are the most likely to be the victims of violence.

Our Cultural Indicators[1] study of local news on Philadelphia television found that crime and/or violence items usually lead the newscast and preempt any balanced coverage of the city. Furthermore, 80 percent of crime and violence reported on Philadelphia local news was not even local to the

[1] Cultural Indicators is a database and a research project that monitors selected media content and relates recurrent features of to public conceptions of social reality. For more information, write to the author at University City Science Center, 3624 Market Street, One East, Philadelphia, PA 19104; e-mail FGG@ASC.UPENN.EDU

city. It is as if a quota were imposed on the editorial staff to fill from wherever they can. It is also the cheapest way to fill the time. We also found that whites are more likely to be reported when they are the victims and African-Americans are more likely to be reported when they are the perpetrators. Black-on-white crime is less frequent but more newsworthy than any other combination.

The percent of prime time television dramatic programs with overt physical violence was 58 in 1974, 73 in 1984, and 75 in 1994. The saturation of violent scenes was 5 per hour in 1974, 5 per hour in 1984, and 5 per hour in 1994 -unchanged. In Saturday morning children's programs, scenes of violence occur between 20 and 25 per hour. They are sugar-coated with humor, to be sure; that makes the pill of power easier to swallow.

Violence is a demonstration of power. Its principal lesson is to show quickly and dramatically who can get away with what against whom. That exercise defines majority might and minority risk. It shows one's place in the societal "pecking order."

The role of violence in the media mainstream of television emerges from our analysis of prime time network programs monitored since 1967. Women play one out of three characters in drama, one out of six in the news. Young people comprise one-third and old persons one-fifth of their actual proportions of the population. Most other minorities are even more underrepresented. Most of the groups that are under-represented are also those who suffer the worst fate.

The typical viewer of prime time television drama sees, every week, an average of 21 criminals arrayed against an army of 41 public and private law enforcers. Crime and violence engage more characters than all other occupations combined. About one out of three speaking parts, and more than half of all major characters, are involved in violence either as victims or as victimizers, or both.

We calculated the violence "pecking order" by counting the number of victims for every ten perpetrators of violence. That "risk ratio" expresses the "price" groups of characters pay for committing violence. We found that overall average risk ratio (the number of victims per 10 perpetrators) is 12. But the ratio for women is 17, for lower class characters is 19, for elderly characters is 20, and for women of color is 22. In other words, minority groups tend to pay a higher price for their show of force than do the majorities.

Our surveys show that heavy viewers express a greater sense of apprehension and vulnerability than do light viewers in the same groups. Heavy viewers are more likely than comparable groups of light viewers to overestimate their chances of involvement in violence; to believe that their neighborhoods are unsafe; to state that fear of crime is a very serious personal problem; and to assume that crime is rising, regardless of the facts of the case. Heavy viewers are also more likely to buy new locks, watchdogs, and guns "for protection" (thus becoming the major cause of handgun violence).

Moreover, viewers who see members of their own group underrepresented but overvictimized develop an even greater sense of apprehension and mistrust. Insecure, angry, mistrustful people may be prone to violence but are even more likely to be dependent on authority and susceptible to deceptively simple, strong, hard-line postures and appeals.

What drives media violence? The usual rationalization that media violence "gives the public what it wants" is disingenuous. The public rarely gets a fair choice in which all elements but violence, including placement, headline, promotion, airtime, celebrity-value, treatment, etc., are equal. There is no evidence that, cost and other factors being equal, violence per se gives audiences "what they want." As the trade paper Broadcasting & Cable editorialized on September 20, 1993 (66), "the most popular programming is hardly violent as anyone with a passing knowledge of Nielsen ratings will tell you."

We compared the ratings of over 100 violent and the same number of non-violent shows aired at the same time on network television. The average Nielsen rating of the violent sample was 11.1; the rating for the non-violent sample was 13.8. The share of viewing households in the violent and nonviolent samples, respectively, was 18.9 and 22.5. The non-violent sample was more highly rated than the violent sample for each of the five seasons studied. The amount and consistency of violence further increased the unpopularity gap.

Concentration of ownership denies access to new entries and to alternative perspectives. Having fewer buyers for their products forces the remaining "content providers" deeper into deficit financing. As a consequence, most television and movie producers cannot break even on the U.S. domestic market. They are forced into video and foreign sales to make a profit. Therefore, they need a dramatic ingredient that requires no translation, "speaks action" in any language, and fits any culture. That ingredient is violence.

Syndicators demand "action" (the code word for violence) because it "travels well around the world," said the producer of *Die Hard 2*. "Everyone understands an action movie. If I tell a joke, you may not get it but if a bullet goes through the window, we all know how to hit the floor, no matter the language."[2]

Our analysis shows that violence dominates U.S. exports. We compared 250 U.S. programs exported to 10 countries with 111 programs shown in the U.S. during the same year. Violence was the main theme of 40 percent of home-shown and 49 percent of exported programs. Crime/action series comprised 17 percent of home-shown and 46 percent of exported programs. NAFTA and GATT will dump even more mayhem on the world in the name of "free trade."

What can we do? People suffer the media violence inflicted on them with diminishing tolerance. A March 1985 Harris survey showed that 78 percent disapprove of violence they see on television. In a Times-Mirror national poll in 1993, 80 percent said entertainment violence was "harmful" to society, compared with 64 percent in 1983.

Local broadcasters, legally responsible for what goes on the air, also oppose the overkill and complain about loss of control. *Electronic Media* reported on August 2, 1993 that in its own survey of 100 general managers, three out of four said there is too much needless violence on television and 57 percent would like to have "more input on program content decisions." A *U.S. News & World Report* survey published on April 30, 1994 found that 59 percent of media workers saw entertainment violence as a serious problem.

Formula-driven media violence is not an expression of freedom, popularity, or crime statistics. It is a *de facto* censorship that chills originality and extends the dynamics of domination, intimidation, and repression domestically and globally. The media violence overkill is an ingredient in a global marketing formula imposed on media professionals and foisted on the children of the world.

So what is to be done? Three things.

The first is selective viewing in the home. Watch by the program and not by the clock.

The second is communication education, by which I mean media analysis. Education for the industry is best done on the job. Public and higher education should make a critical contribution that cannot be learned on the job. That is media analysis.

A course in media analysis is a journey of discovery. We learn how to formulate and define a problem; propose a project; conduct an investigation; and report and critique its findings. The three legs of the journey are (1) message system analysis (MSA); (2) institutional policy analysis (IPA); and (3) effects and cultivation analysis (ECA).

And the third is citizen organization, such as the Cultural Environment Movement in the United States and internationally. The Cultural Environment Movement (CEM) is a non-profit coalition of independent organizations and individual supporters in every state of the U.S. and 57 other countries on six continents, united in working for freedom, fairness, gender equity, general diversity, and democratic decision-making in media ownership, employment and representation. It is an independent citizen voice in cultural policy-making.

For more information, e-mail CEM@libertynet.org, or write P.O. Box 31847, Philadelphia PA 19104.

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Bir Kitle İletişim Aracı Olarak Kervan Ticareti

Eyüp Özveren
ODTÜ İktisadi ve
İdari Bilimler Fakültesi

Özet

Bu disiplinlerarası çalışmada yüzyıllar boyu Avrasya ticaret yollarında gözlemlenen, altın çağını özellikle Osmanlı döneminde Ortadoğu ve Kuzey Afrika'da yaşamış olan kervan ticareti yeniden ele alınmaktadır. Şimdiye kadarki çalışmalarda varsayılanın aksine kervan ticaretinin yalnızca iktisadi bir etkinlik olmadığı, aynı zamanda kültürlerarası ilişkiler ve iletişim açısından da önemli bir işlev üstlendiği savunulmaktadır. Bununla kalınmayıp, kervan ticaretinin kültürel ve iletişimsel boyutunun iktisadi boyutuyla koşut olduğu gibi aynı zamanda bir altyapı oluşturarak onun olmazsa olmaz koşulunu da sağladığı vurgulanmaktadır. Yazıda, dil ve para arasındaki işlevsel benzerliklerin altı çizilmekte, iletişim ve bilginin piyasa yapısı ve ticari etkinlikle ilişkileri ele alınmaktadır. Son olarak, kervan ticaretinin Akdeniz dünyası ölçeğinde hem karada hem de denizde geçerlilik taşıyan kendine özgü bir mantığı olduğu tezi savunulmaktadır.

Caravan Trading
as a Medium of Mass Communication

Abstract

This paper, by way of an interdisciplinary venture, re-investigates the phenomenon of caravan trade, a mode of commercial organization witnessed for centuries in Eurasian trade routes that had lived its golden age during the period of Ottoman rule in the Middle East and North Africa. In contradistinction to previous studies, it is argued that caravan trade is not an exclusively economic phenomenon, but instead it assumes an important intercultural and communicational role. Furthermore, this intercultural and communicative dimension is not only parallel to its economic function but also a *sine qua non* for it, since without this infrastructure trade could not function smoothly. The intricate interrelationships among money and language are underscored, as well as emphasizing the connections of communication and knowledge with market structure and commercial conduct. Finally, it is concluded that caravan trade displays a specific logic of its own that had been widely encountered on land as well as on sea within the confines of the Mediterranean world.