

PERSPECTIVES ON Q METHODOLOGY: III.

A CREATIVE NEXUS

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I have long associated Q with creativity because of my leanings towards advertising as a creative art, more particularly with the devising of slogans, artwork, advertising themes and copy: Q was used to decide upon "Lark" as the name for the first mass-scale compact car of American make, and trade-mark names and "images" for soaps, detergents, cigarettes and much else went through Q's network. The most intriguing scope, however, concerned "image-making" for political purposes, now big business in the Western World. In *The Play Theory of Mass Communication* (1967) I gave a friendly hand to advertising as a new institution, based fundamentally on communication-pleasure terms--it could sell soaps, tooth-pastes, cars, beers, and the fleeting "images" of politicians, but not abortion or anti-abortion, religious beliefs, or other deep feelings of adult persons. It could reinforce the latter as already-fixed beliefs, but could rarely convert anyone from one deep faith to another.

The mass media, of which advertising is luminary, are thus regarded, in Q, as "ludenic"--more playful than "hard-nosed." They serve mainly as sources of

information, to be contained as *concourse*. Thus, in witnessing the much-advertised TV production, *The Day After*, viewed by perhaps 100 million Americans in November 1983 on ABC television, the effect would be essentially to "fill in" *concourse* vis-a-vis nuclear war--the direct effects on local farmers, their children, doctors in hospitals, looters, destruction everywhere, and radiation omnipresent--but whether it reached the core of the deep beliefs really at issue is more than doubtful.

One says more than doubtful because in debates after the showing on TV, the experts and their questioning public dealt with the nuclear threat, not with the underlying political causes. I doubt whether many of the panel of experts, including Henry Kissinger, could give offhand the names of any five of the constituent states of the USSR, or that many of the hundreds in the audiences of Ted Koppel's TV series could correctly say what the initials USSR subsume. Abysmal ignorance of another nation's life and culture is so preclosed. The same is undoubtedly true of the knowledge of Russians about the United States. From Q's perspective (as for that of its ideal journalist Walter Lippman), communism, capitalism, socialism, nationalism, federalism, libertarianism, democracy, anarchism and the rest are illusionary sources of action--myths are at issue, not necessarily truth-values (Stephenson, 1967). Yet different cultures learn to trust one another in "play" situations (for example in commerce, music, ballet, soccer, gymnastics, literature, ping-pong). The critical problems in myth-making are in part propagandist, chiefly militaristic and religious, but also in relation to a few great themes of mankind.

It is important to recognize that not all myths and "images" are sources of negative or perfidious pursuits. In my chapter in the *Communication Yearbook* 4, I concluded as follows:

What our theory of the play elements in subjectivity amounts to, is a profound matter, that truth-value--a story told of an event and its consequences--can be a transformation of reality and

not just "the old lies," or merely "there are two sides to every opinion." It is *our* responsibility, as communication theorists, to fathom these truths. (Stephenson, 1980: 34)

An example was given in my *The Play Theory of Mass Communication* (1967) in the chapter dealing with international tensions (chapter 5). It dealt with the Alliance for Progress, instituted in 1961 with the object of providing American dollars for South American masses. By 1963, as reported by Obaid and Maritano (1963), it was clear that millions of dollars had been funneled instead into the pockets of politicians, wealthy landowners, and businessmen, who shipped it back to their European and United States private bank accounts. The American press did "a very poor job of reporting on its southern neighbors, distorting the news," and these neighbors on their part had a "black image of the United States." At that time American foreign policy had failed "to identify itself with any genuine democratic movements in South America." "We are woefully ignorant of each other"--so wrote Obaid and Maritano in 1963.

The turmoil vis-a-vis Latin America has scarcely improved in the ensuing 20 years! The problems are of course enormous "in every direction of culture, history, politics, social institutions, geography, economics, racial prejudices, and psychological quixotism," so I wrote (Stephenson, 1967: 77), adding "What is accepted as simple social justice in England is viewed by the conservative Latin press everywhere as communism."

What, then, can be done to sort out the problems?

Obaid and Maritano suggested action--stop the flow of U.S. dollars and replace it by surplus goods to help build houses, hospitals, schools, roads. Colleges and universities in the U.S. could be linked with counterparts in Latin America, to develop extension work and to teach simple agricultural skills. Big Brother, in short, should help poor Little Brother.

My own suggestion was different: It proposed searching for what motivates both Latin Americans and

North Americans at a fundamental level, and then find ways to gratify anything common to both. In short, to look at the *situation* for "statements of problems" involved, and at the meanings at issue. I remarked,

I am foolish enough to believe that with a few-score depth-type interviews, followed by a Q-sample to represent them, a beginning could be made in the direction of determining what would flatter Latins, with good enough reason.... It would be something for a new Latin America...tied in with North American motivation. The solution would be a mood, and the climate for it, which fashions the conduct and lifts the hopes of all concerned. (Stephenson, 1967: 78).

It seems completely naive. But I had called attention to Rodo's *Ariel* (1922), a classic of Latin America, widely used in the education of elitist Latin Americans: It no doubt contributed to an image in South America of its northern neighbor as "plebian, vulgar, intelligent but uncreative," and offered for Latins a spirituality, generosity, loftiness and unselfishness symbolized by *Ariel*. My point was that one could look to such poetry and literature as the context for the few "interviews" one would undertake. In the imagery and creativeness of writers, of a José Martí, great prose writer of Hispanic America who earned a living by writing for the New York *Sun*--such are the sources of concourse upon which Q can play its part. I expand upon the possibilities in a work entitled *Canticles for Aldous Huxley's Literature and Science* with reference of course to Huxley's questions about the cultures of literature and science (Huxley, 1963).

But direct practical political action is also possible: President Frei of Chile, on a Christian Democratic platform, appealed particularly to women voters--poor peasants and rich ladies alike--who, to the extent of 67 per cent of women voters, won the election for him. I feel that something of this, as spirituality, could come from probes that we can make using Q.

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- Obaid, A.H. & N. Maritano (1963) *An alliance for progress*. Minneapolis: Denison.
- Rodo, J.E. (1922) *Ariel*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- Stephenson, W. (1967) *The play theory of mass communication*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
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In future issues...

FORTHCOMING BOOK REVIEWS

- Ernest G. Bormann's *The Force of Fantasy: Restoring the American Dream* (Southern Illinois University Press, 1985), by Dan Nimmo, University of Tennessee.
- James Deifenbeck's *A Celebration of Subjective Thought* (Southern Illinois University Press, 1984), by Charles Cottle, University of Wisconsin-Whitewater.
- Julian Henriques et al.'s *Changing the Subject: Psychology, Social Regulation and Subjectivity* (Methuen and Co. Ltd., 1984), by Celia Kitzinger, University of Reading, England.

For where science is lacking there is ignorance, since ignorance is the opposite of science (St. Thomas Aquinas),