

Editorial

The Rashomon Effect and Communication Studies

In his article “The Rashomon Effect and Communication Studies,” **Robert Anderson** observes that “the Rashomon effect” is a dual phenomenon. On the one hand, it stands for the disorienting effect upon viewers of watching a specific film, Akira Kurosawa’s 1950 feature film *Rashomon*, a classic of post-World War II Japanese cinema. In the film, the story of a crime set in the twelfth century near the Rashomon gate outside Kyoto is told from the points of view of seven participants, each one telling a different story of what might have happened, or not. The disorienting effect results from the fact that the viewer never knows exactly what did happen, as there is no narrative closure.

In the second and broader sense, Anderson notes, the Rashomon effect also stands for “the naming of an epistemological framework—or ways of thinking, knowing, and remembering—required for understanding complex and ambiguous situations.” This second meaning of the Rashomon effect names a communicative condition, our own, in which from film initially to the related sciences of understanding, we have come increasingly to find ourselves in what Anderson describes as “complex and unstable decision-making environments, in which incomplete information and irreconcilable perspectives converge ...”

In an attempt to provide a latter-day instance of the Rashomon effect, Anderson’s article draws a parallel to the 2007 death of Robert Dziekanski, a Polish immigrant who, after arriving at Vancouver International Airport, moments later got into a tussle with four RCMP officers and was dead in less than a minute. As in *Rashomon* the film, multiple accounts of the incident would be put forward, and it would take over nine years of legal wrangling to try to determine what had happened to Dziekanski.

Reaching more broadly than this tragic event, however, remain the larger dimensions of the Rashomon effect: namely, the difficulties of the various sciences, social and other, to provide adequate explanations in the light of inadequate information and irreconcilable perspectives that ultimately put into question communication itself. And these problems animate, in different ways, the other articles in this issue.

Catherine Frost in “The Revolution Might Be Tweeted but the Founding Will Not Be: Arendt and Innis on Time, Authority, and Appearance” centrally takes on some of the above dilemmas in deploying both Arendtian and Innisian perspectives to analyze the problem of the revolutionary founding as exemplified by the various Arab Springs. In Arendt’s reading, modern political revolutions or foundings necessitate three moments: how to restart time, how to reconstitute authority, and how to reconfigure community. Further problematizing these three moments, Innis’ work argued

that modern polities were marked by a bias against time, while authority and community had been alienated by the mediating biases of particular communication technologies. In an age benumbed by its own creativity and perpetually disrupted by media, the Arab Springs could at best topple dictators; as for founding anything, those problems remain unresolved, as Frost's rich analysis shows.

Ashley Rose Kelly and **Kate Maddalena's** article "Networks, Genres, and Complex Wholes: Citizen Science and How We Act Together through Typified Text" demonstrates with extraordinary subtlety the epistemological and ontological difficulties that contemporary scientific complexity entails. Kelly opens her account in April 2015, when the first traces of radioactive material were detected in BC coastal waters from the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear reactors in Japan damaged four years before by a tsunami. The radioactive material was detected by a citizen science network, InFORM, a Canadian research network that studies radiological risk in the Pacific. While computer models had predicted the eventual arrival of radioactive materials in BC coastal waters, these models were still highly uncertain. InFORM's seemingly simple water collection kit was itself part of a complex network constituted by not only human actors, but also a multitude of materialities, geographies, conceptual and theoretical constructions and norms, as well as shapes of coasts, patterns of habitation and points of access, ocean currents and wind patterns, roads and transportation systems, scientific methods, scientific training, reporting documentation and scientific tools. Using a blended theory approach, Kelly here brings together Actor Network Theory (ANT), and Rhetorical Genre Theory (RGT) to disentangle the resulting complexities and rhetorical objects and to explore the multiple intersecting forces through which and by which science communicates.

Sherry Yu's commentary, "Instrumentalization of Ethnic Media," takes up the argument that ethnic media (some 300 media outlets in Canada and 3,000 in the U.S.) are under-represented within the larger mediascape; that ethnic communities are themselves systematically misrepresented; and thirdly, that ethnic communities are under-served by ethnic media. Focusing on some of the reasons for this (the political economy of ethnic media, limited audiences, and the overwhelming "whiteness" of local and national news), Yu draws particular attention to a recent trend she terms "the instrumentalization" of ethnic media, in which the latter have come increasingly to serve the political and economic interests of stakeholders rather than the needs of North America's multicultural societies. As a telling example of the strategic abuse of ethnic media, Yu notes that in 2012 the Harper government spent over \$1 million to generate some 7,000 pages of "intelligence" about ethnic media in Canada.

In "Pornographie, nouveaux médias, et intimité normative dans les discours sur l'hypersexualisation des jeunes," **Elisabeth Mercier** brings a Foucauldian perspective to a recent discursive phenomenon, namely, the so-called hypersexualization of youth as reported upon as of 2005 in various media (in print and online, and in "expert" discourse). Mercier examines what she calls "the pornographization" of media public space as an effect on the shift to online streaming of porn and the ensuing transformation of notions of sexual intimacy to what she terms "sexual extimacy," or the overt display of a normative notion of intimacy.

Finally, **Fanny-Ève Tapp** and **Pierre Bélanger**, in “L’industrie canadienne de la télévision face au développement du multi-écrans,” analyze recent changes and challenges to Canadian broadcasters and major public relations firms as a result of the rise of multi-platform use, program streaming, and the increased recourse by broadcasters to apps such as Viggie, tvtag, ConnecTV, Tubetime, and others. Attempting to get a better grasp on “emerging practices,” the authors conducted semi-directed interviews with 15 broadcast and PR professionals in national agencies, and five English-language and French-language broadcasters. Although their study confirmed a major change in TV viewing from the former “lean back” model to more dynamic, interactive models, they found that broadcasters still tended to view TV as the primary site for reaching audiences, while PR professionals tended to be more experimental, favouring a leading position in innovation. In addition to raising concerns over (failing) business models, the difficulties of monetization, and the far horizons of profitability, one of the study’s major recommendations is for the creation of a working group of public and private stakeholders to develop better performance indicators for traditional broadcast TV as well as for the digital realm. But as we saw above, providing explanations on the basis of inadequate information is the starting point of the Rashomon effect.

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