Internationalisation and Globalisation: rethinking a curriculum of communication

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ABSTRACT The article describes the changed conditions of communication due to the two factors of globalisation and internationalisation. It looks at four factors in particular: issues of genre; literariness and national cultures; new modes and forms of communication; and the impacts on curricula of communication. It places these issues into the contexts of economic and social futures, and makes suggestions about the necessary relations between these and forms of the curricula of communication.

Contexts

The last 15 years or so have seen increasingly insistent demands by governments in Anglo-phone countries for institutionalised education to become more responsive to the needs of local ('national') economies. At times and in certain places these calls have also included demands that the education system should 'deliver' certain cultural and social values: around national identity, morality or whatever. The two demands are connected; they represent attempts to solve problems of increasing uncertainty through one of the few remaining institutions over which national governments still seem to have effective powers. In no area of the curriculum have these calls been more insistent—or strident—than they have in that of communication, appearing variously in curricula (as 'German' or as 'English') or as a curriculum of 'literacy' in the Anglo-phone countries.

Here I will examine the challenges which they face and the possibilities which are actually open to curricula in this area, which I call, broadly, communication. My own field of interest is communication and representation and I will illustrate my argument occasionally by reference to the situation in Australia, England and Germany. Some elements of a comparative approach seem to me to be particularly relevant and even essential, given that so much of the current debate—whether practically focused or theoretical—remains too bound to specific localities, from where vast generalisations are launched.

While such generalisation may be in keeping with some aspects and characteristics of the current state of theorising, it is, nevertheless, not conducive to producing insight. Take as an example the notion of 'fragmentation'. Fragmentation is a fact when viewed from one specific locality. From there it does appear that social institutions are fragmenting, whether those of the family, the neighbourhood, the nation, the church, aspects of the state and of the economy. Seen from a global perspective, the very opposite may be thought to be occurring. So where, for instance, in one locality it may seem that the institutions of the mass media are
coming into crisis (issues of local versus transnational media ownership, for instance), from a global perspective the impression and perhaps the reality is one of increasing consolidation, integration, in any case the very opposite of fragmentation. What has fragmented in this situation is the identification of nation with culture—which was of course never an unproblematic reality in any case (Coulby & Jones, 1995; Lyotard, 1984).

In all of this debate the question about the shape and the purposes of curricula remain, in relation to their function and role in a specific locality, whether that is the nation-state—England has now had a National Curriculum for the last 6 years or so—or a part of a state, as for instance in the Länder in Germany or the ‘States’ of the Commonwealth of Australia or, indeed, a part of, perhaps, much smaller, regional or other entities.

I will consider some of the issues which affect the curricula of communication from four different perspectives: from the point of view of genre, of ‘literariness’ and national cultures, of modes and media of communication and from the point of view of a local curriculum in a globalising environment.

First a brief word on each of these, to provide some framing to my argument. Although the category does not really reach into the common sense of educators, knowledge of the generic form of texts (Cope & Kalantzis, 1993) is foundational to the possibilities of coherent communication. The category of genre therefore becomes central in times when the possibilities of communication undergo severe change. Similarly, the pre-eminence of language as the mode of communication is coming under increasing challenge, on the one hand, initially through theoretical attacks on ‘logocentrism’ by groups who had felt oppressed in relation to powerful groups in particular social configurations, but increasingly, on the other hand, over the last two decades or so, through actual changes in the semiotic landscape, the landscape of public communication, which is remaking not only that broad landscape, but, in doing so, is remaking the place and characteristics of written language in it (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996). In as far as curricula of communication are curricula of texts which have potency in the society in which the curricula operate, that issue has been settled in the past via the category of aesthetics—a political matter presented as a question of transcendental value. As political structures are challenged, so aesthetics may—for a time at any rate—become less useful as a device for providing shape and coherence for a curriculum of communication. Lastly, the main issue, the curriculum. In the era of the nation-state, the web of structures of control gave value, coherence and integrity to curricula. One element of the web supported every other element in a seamless structure. With globalisation all the purposes of the curriculum are coming into question, at every point (Kress, 1995).

In my discussion I make use of the currently overused term ‘globalisation’ and I want to set that against another term, ‘internationalisation’. Their effects often seem the same, though the structures through which they operate or which they produce, are distinctly different and are distinctly different in different places. The dynamics which they set in train are, similarly, quite distinct. By globalisation I mean the increasing tendency for the globe to constitute the effective domain of action and of thinking, in relation to a specific issue. Financial markets are global. The media are becoming globalised, as is communication generally and, consequently, many aspects of culture are becoming globalised also. Increasingly, production is becoming global as sites of production are shifted at short notice to low-wage environments. Consequently, the labour market is becoming globalised in every locality even though no one person actually might be moving. Where in the nineteenth century and in the early part of this century sites of production were fixed so that the labour force had to migrate to those sites, now it is sites of production which are flexible and moveable leaving the labour force in its original locality. Hence, patterns (and causes) of
population movements are now distinctly different from older ideas of immigration and are likely to remain so.

The consequences of these changed forms of population movement for educational thinking and policy have perhaps not been fully appreciated, particularly in relation to pluri-(or multi-) culturalism. In my view that is a fundamental issue and the conclusions at this stage are at best somewhat paradoxical. Take the three cases of Australia, the UK and Germany, in relation to this one factor. Australia has been a (so-called) country of immigration over the last five decades, with an active (if changing) policy of encouraging immigration. It did this for economic (and military) reasons, promising to produce employment in new sites of production where there might initially have been none available. The Snowy Mountains Scheme was one such undertaking, as were the expansion of mining and steel-making activities. The immigrants who went to Australia were invited there as future citizens, with a stake in the country’s future.

Germany, like several other north-western European nations, recruited labour from a variety of areas of southern and south-eastern Europe (leaving aside the question of Europeanness for the moment—as it arises with workers going to Germany from Turkey, for instance). These ‘guest workers’ went to existing sites of production in response to boom conditions in the economy. There was no question and therefore no sense of creating jobs on the part of the host country, no sense of immigration, with its implication of future citizenship. The fact that the people who went to a variety of countries demanded a stake in that place, once they had established themselves there, produced initial surprise and a consequent set of political and social problems. The UK by contrast has not at any time in recent history seen itself as a country of immigration, nor did it actively invite labour to come. The fact that this did happen, initially, was a consequence of the breakup of the empire and of consequent post-imperial, post-colonial dynamics. The people who came to Britain in the immediate post-war decades were already citizens or, more precisely, subjects of the British Crown. They, as much as their increasingly reluctant hosts, could assume—even if this turned out to be too superficial an assumption—that they were ‘the same’, all part of the one ‘family’.

However, if they were the same, as they were already politically the same at least in superficial form and status as subjects of the British Crown, then no special requirements needed to be met in order for them to be a part of this new place.

The older forms of population movement—emigration and immigration—demanded a particular response from the immigrant, namely adaptation to the social conditions of the (new) locality, the new site of production; hence there were, broadly, policies of assimilation, ‘integration’, and then ‘mainstreaming’ in the various countries of immigration as an initial response. This made particular kinds of demands on the education systems in these countries. Countries which recruited guest workers had no initial expectation in these areas and therefore no initial (psychological and) social structures to deal with this situation. Britain simply received other members of the same—if somewhat large and diverse—‘family’.

Thus, it is essential to recognise that current conditions—of multiculturalism, for instance—which may seem, on the surface, to be quite similar from one place to another, actually rest on fundamentally different histories, which in their turn have led to fundamentally different political and educational responses—‘naturally’. Thus, paradoxically, in Australia, a country of immigration, which expected ‘assimilation’ in its various forms, the fact of the initial invitation to the newcomers to be citizens (‘New Australians’) could and did lead after a period of some three decades to some reassessment of the rights of these new and different citizens and a valuation of that difference quite unlike that in either Germany or the UK. This has had important consequences for public policies on communication. Australia
developed, in the early to mid-1980s, a National Languages Policy (eventually changed to a National Language Policy) which acknowledged the existence of the multiplicity of languages spoken in Australia and gave to English—implicitly if not explicitly—the status of a lingua franca. Clearly this has had and will continue to have significant consequences for the curricula of communication.

If the expected response to immigration (movement of labour to sites of production) was assimilation, the response required off by that labour to the relocation of sites of production is fundamentally different. It is predictably the subject of intense ideological debate, which ranges from attempts to introduce the structures of low-wage environments in existing ‘developed’ countries, to restructuring of various kinds, including the restructuring of the ‘skills base’ of the labour force. Globalisation of production demands an ‘internal’ reconstruction of labour and of individual subjectivities (Senge, 1991), so that labour can respond to the demands of globalising production and to the requirements of a globalised employment market. The current common sense of neo-liberal, monetarist, share-holder capitalism is to demand a driving down of labour costs and the dismantling of structural costs, whether of health, unemployment support or pensions (Hutton, 1995). An alternative response sees a way forward by a restructuring of labour in the direction of innovation, flexibility and creativity, as the basis for new economic structures.

Clearly, institutionalised and non-institutional education has the most far-reaching involvement and role in this debate and in the future directions of economies in particular localities. While the pairing of immigration and assimilation left existing educational structures intact—that, after all, was what assimilation was to achieve—the new pairing of relocation of sites of production and reconstitution/restructuring of labour demands a fundamentally changed form of education, a quite different response. This is intensified by the fact that the forms of production which existed in the age of immigration were largely Fordist, with their specific requirements from the education system in terms of the preparation of the labour force. The new age of the movement of production sites and the consequent globalisation of labour is taking place in an environment characterised by non-Fordist forms of production—even if Fordist modes of production continue in very many places. The necessary ‘internal remaking’ of the labour force and the question of requisite, appropriate, necessary subjectivities pose entirely new questions for education systems and for their curricula. In these, the curricula of communication have central importance, particularly given the new conjunctions of information-based production and globalisation.

Contemporary population movements, which are as large-scale as any in human history and likely (or ‘threatening’) to be far larger, have to fit, at the moment at any rate, into these new structures. In ‘countries of immigration’ these structures are no longer simply those of assimilation: in countries which recruited (or received) guest workers, questions of the rights of citizenship have come to the fore; in a post-imperial, post colonial country such as Britain the uncertainties engendered by that condition cloud over the attitudes to pluriculturalism and its local histories.

All countries have to deal with the effects of globalisation in the contexts of their histories. They are also subject to the effects of internationalisation, a term by which I want to name the cultural, political and economic influences from somewhere outside a particular locality on the value structures, practices and forms of social organisation of that locality. These are making themselves felt increasingly and although internationalisation is by no means a new phenomenon in this century (or in fact before), the effects of the new technologies of transport and of electronic modes of communication are changing the levels of intensity with which these effects are experienced and the social and cultural transforma-
tions which are wrought by them. Food and dress are obvious if perhaps relatively superficial examples. For the former, internationalisation suspends the effects of seasonality, of climate and of ethnic custom for those who are affluent, while the latter suspends the effects of locality for very many—think of the ubiquity of jeans and T-shirts as a uniform for the young and not-so-young in diverse, cultural and geographic parts of the globe.

The cultural effects of internationalisation on culture and communication and its consequent effects on the curricula of representation and communication cannot be overestimated. The internationalisation of the mass media is producing dislocating, locally fragmenting and homogenising cultural effects at the same time as the globalising effects of the media of information and communication—the world wide web, for instance—are producing new, superficially coherent interest-based communities. In these contexts, the questions of genre have been newly topical over the last 30 years or so, with an intensification of that interest since the very late 1970s.

Genre

Jacques Derrida’s ‘La loi du genre’ (1978) may stand as an iconic marker of this recent intense period of interest (Derrida, 1978). The category of genre itself goes back to Aristotle’s Poetics and has had a continuous history of use, in the last two or three centuries particularly in relation to literary, aesthetically valued texts. In my own use of the term, the generic form of a text is an effect of the social conditions of its occasion of production. That is, the participants in a particular occasion of interaction have aims, goals and responsibilities and they stand in particular social relations to each other. They enact all these in that situation and they use language (among other modes) to do so. The resultant linguistic text encodes, realises and represents these aims and purposes, the relations of the participants and the unfolding enactment of that situation. The text which results from the interaction is a map of the social occasion in which it was produced.

Thus, for instance, an interview—say, a job interview—is a social occasion in which people come together for particular purposes, with specific aims, in particular ‘roles’, with their duties, responsibilities and rights (‘Are you comfortable?’, ‘Would you like to ask us some questions now?’). In ‘Western’ societies this kind of occasion occurs frequently (though it is essential to be clear about significant cultural differences even within that broad label ‘Western’), and although there are recognisable historical shifts in the structures of these occasions, from the point of view of any one interviewer or interviewee the regularity and repeatability of the form of the interview gives the text an appearance of fixedness, of stability. It is a form which can be known and understood; therefore it can be consciously acted within or against, that is mimicked, caricatured and parodied. The important aspect is that the (seeming) stability of the form of the text reflects a (seeming) stability of the social occasions; conversely, forms of texts are understood because the corresponding forms of social organisation are understood—whether through experience or through an analysis of the text-form based on a knowledge of the social semiotic system of that group. Systems of texts guarantee, as a parallel structure, systems of social practice and texts are understood and re-enacted in that way.

The multiplicity of textual forms, of genres, thus acts as a semiotic, social and cultural mesh which reveals the meanings of that society to its members and allows them to act conventionally or against convention.

The conditions of globalisation and internationalisation—as well as other factors—are producing deep challenges to these (seemingly) stable systems of (seemingly) stable textual forms. Internationalisation means that the generic forms—and with these, the social values
and forms of organisation—travel without let or hindrance from one cultural place to another totally different place. Media-commentators have wondered about the effects of beaming *Dallas* from a geostationary satellite down to dishes and viewers in the New Guinea Highlands or the islands of Melanesia. However, one does not need to travel that far from home to see fierce responses to this phenomenon. In Germany the showing of North American programmes such as *Power-Rangers* caused hostile comment, over worries about the effects of the habitual viewing of violence on young viewers. When a German television company decided to reschedule its *World Wrestling Federation* series from a later evening slot (at 21:30 hours) to a Saturday and Sunday afternoon slot, a veritable storm of hostile comment from media commentators, church groups and parents’ associations broke out over this move. The station had, in part, been responding to the fact—documented by its voluminous mailbag—that a very large number of young viewers, from 4 years of age upwards, watched this programme regularly and they and their parents had wanted it moved to an earlier spot.

The television company had prepared—at some considerable cost—a whole series of framing programmes which attempted to demystify the highly staged performances of these ‘shows’, the first instance, to my knowledge, of serious critical media education being undertaken by a television broadcasting company. That notwithstanding, the company was taken to court, where it was ordered to stop showing the programme during these hours and it lost the case on appeal to the highest court.

The case is instructive in a number of ways: what was at issue was the transposition of a genre from one society to another. The social relations coded in the genre were unacceptable in the society in which it was rebroadcast—but only to one group, educators by and large, both in formal and informal institutional settings. In the originating society, the social relations portrayed in the programmes—communication through (seemingly violent) bodily, physical, interaction—had a broad context and a historical embedding which enabled viewers to ‘see them for what they are’. And, it has to be said, that society has developed means to understand physicality and certain forms of masculinity in socially framed ways, which lead to readings of a kind in which those forms of physicality and masculinity can be made sense of in other than violent ways. In the receiving community, by complete contrast, the portrayal of social relations through physical, bodily interaction—with their surface appearance of extreme violence—was not readily acceptable to a generation which has spent 40 years coming to terms with violence of the most enormous magnitude and was witnessing at that time the resurgence of violence from groups of youths towards ethnic minorities.

The young viewers had entirely different readings of these programmes, judging from the letters and drawings which they wrote in their thousands every week to the programme. For them, the issues were about their own fears and anxieties, about families and how they do or do not manage to get on and about fairness and the observance of rules. They had what seemed to me on reading their letters and looking at their images a subtle understanding, which made them respond to the overt portrayal of violence quite differently from their elders’ responses.

The point is that internationalisation willy-nilly introduces the generic/social structures of one place to another, whether that place has the means to cope with them or not. The readings that are produced in the new place are relatively unpredictable: neither of the two German responses is, I imagine, like any among a range of typical American readings. In Britain, the same programmes have been shown in the middle of the day or late at night, without causing comment in either case. However, the appearance of entirely new, different generic forms in a social group will lead to an unravelling of the system of generic forms in one place and its reforming in quite different ways.
Internationalisation and Globalisation

The education system can ignore this issue and proceed as though national boundaries remain intact and with them the set of value systems and social relations which had characterised a particular society. The young people who are in that education system are constantly engaging with texts of the most diverse generic forms, which never make a fully legitimated appearance in the school, even in media studies. In Britain, rock videos, with their deeply anti-narrative, anti-rationalist formal structures, may be the object of study, but would not appear as a genre of text to be produced in the mainstream curriculum of communication. Some teachers, in some schools, might permit or encourage this; it is not a practice supported by the National Curriculum, by forms of assessment or by official common sense.

And so a deep uncertainty develops, not only or even particularly in relation to mass media texts, but in relation to all texts. Producing that uncertainty are, as well as internationalisation, also the facts of cultural diversity in classrooms, the texts of youth cultures read and used by students and, not least, the uncertainties which beset the adult social world of the teacher. Further, as another instance, the politics of gender have meant that certain generic forms have come under the severest critique, as underpinning structures of patriarchy and of oppression. In this context it is difficult to know what a productive curricular response should be. I return to this question briefly at the end of this paper.

Literariness and National Cultures: the politics of aesthetics

At the very moment when the system of genre is coming under attack from a variety of directions, one of the sheet anchors of that system has itself come adrift. In schools in Anglo-phone countries, the curriculum had been able to rely on a canon of literary texts which represented ‘the best’ in a culture’s history of literary production. This worked differently in different places, but it served as the gold standard to which the whole system could be tied. In its terms, forms of writing could be assessed, valued and disvalued and, consequently, in terms of it, human subjects could be formed in relation to ‘good taste’—a quality which could, while the system was in full working order, be seen as a natural quality, beyond challenge or critique.

There had been critiques of the ‘canon’ from time to time, but these were not of a fundamental kind. Marxists, for instance, were on the whole content to subject figures and texts in the canon to their re-readings but by and large left it intact and in many ways left it stronger than before, having described the reasons why we should actually be reading Donne, Marlowe or Milton. Feminists have added women writers to the list—slightly more contentiously from the point of view of school curricula. However, both left in place the idea of good writing, the core of the canon and a broad notion of the function of literature. The cultural aspirations and claims of a dominant group had not been challenged: the claims had been somewhat extended and so had the membership of that dominant group.

The challenge which has been most unsettling and is potentially the greatest threat and test both for the canon and for the school curriculum, is that of multi-culturalism. Two instances may serve to define the problem. The first is an incident in Australia, the second concerns the issue of set texts in the English (and Welsh) National Curriculum. The first arises from the fact that in Australia—as in other countries of immigration—writers from groups whose first language is not English have begun to write in English. In some cases there is a conscious attempt to use ‘broken English’, in the case I am describing, ‘Polish Australian’ as an aesthetic medium to express the feelings of immigrant women in their new country. The language is crude, and often vulgar and the literary effect is shocking. It is also highly effective as an expressive medium. In the second case a Vietnamese writer, who had arrived as one of the ‘boat people’, was awarded a literary prize for a short story written in
his own, quite rudimentary form of English. This provoked a comment from the editor of a book programme on the Australian Broadcasting Corporation on the aesthetic qualities of the piece, which he condemned as being in no sense ‘literary’. Predictably enough, a furor ensued, an argument conducted in bitter and often personal terms, which in the end, equally predictably, was inconclusive.

Not inconclusive, however, in one sense: the argument unsettled, in Australia at least for the near future, the previously settled notions of ‘good’ or ‘best writing’ and of literariness. The politics of aesthetics had appeared, as they usually do not do quite so overtly, on the surface, and in the fiercest form. The old owners of the canon asserted their claim, though not as successfully as they might have wished.

A struggle of a somewhat similar kind erupted in England in 1992–1993 over the conservative government’s attempt to prescribe what kinds of texts should be taught in the English curriculum. Here the issue did not focus on literariness in the form of aesthetics, rather it focused on the fact that a version of the literary canon was to be used for a different political purpose, to define a certain version of ‘Englishness’. That is, aesthetics as literariness was to be used in the service of a reactionary, nostalgic political project to re-establish a version of an English tradition and of a national identity. Apart from the inevitably ludicrous issues—was Joseph Conrad to be counted as an English writer or not—and the equally predictable attempt to re-install a particular version of the figure of Shakespeare at the centre of that curriculum, there were much more serious issues. They were those of class and, in particular, those of the many writers who use English as their medium, but who do not qualify in terms of birth, nationality or passport as English—writers from India, from the West Indies, from Africa, from Australia and so on.

The issue, of course, was a particular definition of ‘Englishness’, a mythic, nostalgic construct, which did not and does not exist in the writing of many authors who use English as their medium of communication—contemporary English authors included—and therefore makes their texts unusable for such a project. This case shows the complexity of the politics of aesthetics and reveals the many tasks which that category has to meet. However, both cases also show that the system of genres now has to operate without one anchor which had been essential for its smooth operation. The question is what to put in the place of that anchor: should it be the demands of business people for effective forms of communication? Or would that, in its turn, prove to be a quite unusable tool to do this job?

The new conditions of globalisation and internationalisation and the pressures which these are producing, have begun to reveal the identification of nation and aesthetics and of class and aesthetics within a particular national entity. The politics of external forces have begun to reveal the political character of the category of aesthetics and of its sociopolitical functions.

Modes and Media of Communication: the passing of logocentrism

My discussion so far has proceeded on the implicit assumption that written language is the medium of representation and communication. We know that this is not the case now. Children live in a communicational and representational environment which is visual as much as it is spoken and written. The question is does that affect writing? Or is writing (relatively) insulated from other modes of communication? Will writing continue in its present forms, even if perhaps used less than before? My own answer, speculative and necessarily tentative, is that writing is even now undergoing a transformation of a quite foundational kind and that these changes are likely to continue and probably accelerate in the near future.
Several factors contribute to that dynamic. First, young people are formed and form themselves in the totality of their semiotic environment. If that environment is one in which the modes of writing are less significant than other modes, then that is the environment which we, as curriculum planners, need to consider. Young people, who may be spending long periods with electronic games, developing high levels of visual analytic skills and muscular coordination quite unlike those of writing, are not going to leave these at the school gate and then turn back into the kinds of human subjects which we may want them to be: formed around the logics and rationalities of writing. Second, through a multiplicity of factors—in which technological ones are not, I think, causal—many texts are becoming multimodal in a pronounced way, using visual and verbal elements in quite new ways. A glance at any tabloid newspaper will illustrate what I mean, though we need to do some quite serious historical excavation to remember that even 25 years ago these very same newspapers were covered in print and used no or very few images.

Textbooks are increasingly now visual rather than verbal objects (leaving aside the quite other question of the changed uses of books in this new environment). However, is it the case that written language is merely being pushed aside, occupying less of the page of the tabloid and of the textbook than it used to? Or is it changing in its function? Or is writing actually changing in its formal, material characteristics, as an effect of these changes? Comparison is helpful here and so I wish briefly to compare two bits of language from two science textbooks, one from the 1930s and one from the 1980s.

1930s Text

The principle of the electric motor

The simple electric motor consists of a coil pivoted between the poles of a permanent magnet (see Fig. 63). When the current is passed through the coil in the direction indicated in the figure we can show, by applying Fleming’s left-hand rule, that the left-hand side of the coil will tend to move down and the right-hand side to move up. (Remember that the direction of the field due to the permanent magnet is from the N. to the S. pole.) Thus the coil will rotate in a counter-clockwise direction to a vertical position.

1980s Text

Circuits

In your first circuits you used torch bulbs joined with wires. Modern electrical equipment uses the same basic ideas. But if you look inside a computer there are not many wires or torch bulbs. The wires and bulbs have been replaced by electronic devices like transistors, chips and light-emitting bodies.

The difference in the form of language is obvious and so I will not comment on it in great detail here. One is what we might still regard as characteristic of scientific writing, the other is no longer so. Both textbooks were written for an age group of 14 year olds: one asks these readers to make the move to the written forms of science, while the other uses forms of writing which make the move from science-like writing to forms which are nearer everyday spoken language. One is impersonal (depersonalised), while the other is personalised and so on. There are deeper questions here about the kinds of syntactic complexity and form of cognition, but I will leave these. Generically speaking, we can see a clear difference in the forms of social relation which each text projects and we can see the pedagogic effects implicit in each form.

Several points which are not apparent from a look at the written language alone are crucial. Each of the pages from which these extracts come has images. In the earlier text they function as illustrations. That is, the verbal text has said what a magnetic field is and there
is then the illustration which provides a 'visual version'. In the recent text, images do not function as illustrations, they function informationally. The text proceeds differently: the written text gives some information, then the image gives some information, then the written text, then the image and so on. The image does not restate in visual form what the written text has previously done; it does not provide a visual version of the written text.

This is a fundamental change. Where before written language was the medium of information, in many texts there is now a new code at work which consists of both verbal and visual elements, which are used in specialised ways. In the page that I have in mind, the written elements of the text are used to recount actions—whether past or present—while the visual elements of the text are used to display information of a different kind; they indicate what are the relevant elements in the world and what are the relations between them. This specialisation of modes of communication has far-reaching effects and not in relation to writing alone. What it does is to leave the representation of narrative and of action with the written mode (which is there in the extract from the 1930s 'a current is passed through the coil' and 'We can show ...') but removes the need for writing to represent 'what is there' and the relations between elements ('the simple electric motor consists of ...' and 'a coil pivoted between the poles'). In the newer text that information is expressed visually. It is impossible to know what the effects of this change on writing will be.

Writing is changing and being changed by other, related factors: electronic technologies are unmaking some of the social conditions which gave writing certain of its features; an economy based on information may in any case have much greater need of the different representational and communicational potentials of visual modes. The spatial semiotic of visual images may be able to deal with large amounts of information much more effectively than writing can do. Images are highly effective at displaying complex relations between elements of visually represented information, quite likely more effective in aiding the handling of this information by a reader/viewer. In a globalising economic environment, post-Fordist economies will need to rely on information-based forms of production, in which the visual may come to be an essential mode of representation and information. At the same time, markets for any one developed economy are now global (or at any rate no longer solely national); visual communication may prove more effective in that context than language can ever be.

**A Local Curriculum in a Globalising Environment**

The economic, political, cultural and social conditions of the next few decades will continue to be transformed and shaped by the forces of globalisation and internationalisation. Their local effects will include, among others, greater degrees of multi- or pluriculturalism in very many places, that is the co-presence in one place of groups of diverse ethnic and cultural origin or constitution. It will include fundamental changes to forms and possibilities of production and therefore of work and to the shape of local economies. It will continue to attenuate, if not to abolish, the nation-state in its nineteenth-century form—even though this is likely to happen unevenly and with periods of (no doubt often violent) reaction. The state's response is difficult to predict and will vary from place to place, in line with local histories and cultural dispositions towards issues of social responsibilities.

It is not clear whether the state will continue to see it as one of its responsibilities—assuming it continues to exist—to offer the provision of education (or of other social services) for its 'citizens' or 'subjects' as in the case of Britain. Certainly in Britain at the moment, one can discern a deliberate attempt by the state to withdraw from responsibilities in these
areas—as shown in the question of ‘vouchers’ for nursery and other schools, for instance and in continuing moves to privatise functions of the state from health care to prisons.

While some voices maintain that the state will want to keep schools because of their function—at the crudest level—of maintaining social order (‘keeping kids off the street’ even if not of ‘socialisation’), there has to be, nevertheless, a question mark given the radical disengagement discernible in some forms of right-wing polemic. It is here that cultural traditions will play their role, in assisting or in resisting such tendencies.

The issue of what the relevant sites of education will be is in that regard a separate one. Workplace-based education has been an ancient tradition in many areas of work, in many cultures. And even though the traditions of apprenticeship, for instance, may be waning or disappearing, other forms emerge. In Australia workplace training is now seen as a duty of employers, who have to set aside a certain percentage of the cost of their payroll for that purpose. Other, less formal, sites are emerging. Most children under the age of 15 years have probably had their (only or most effective) training in new technologies outside of formal schooling.

However, on the assumption that the state continues to exist and accepts responsibility for the education of the younger population, the question of relevant, necessary, productive curricula emerges in stark form. How a locality (whether as nation-state or as regional authority) responds to the effects and pressures of globalisation and internationalisation is an open question. The possibilities range from reactionary retreat into cultural nostalgia, to progressive attempts to turn local cultural values into productive resources in an engagement with these challenges.

A curriculum of communication cannot escape the demands of a globalising environment, in at least two ways—unless the decision is made to put reaction, nostalgia and decline as the priorities of the curriculum. First, those responsible for its design have to ask, in searching ways, what the forms and modes of communication are which will be essential during the period of the next decades. Essential both for purposes of communication, locally and globally and essential for social, cultural and economic purposes locally. Second, the question arises ever-more insistently, whether current theories of communication—whether of language, of the visual or of multimodal communication—need fundamental rethinking.

Internationalisation and globalisation of communication will demand quite new kinds of dispositions, attitudes and skills, which go beyond the relatively simple issue of learning a number of languages, though that is an important aspect. If genres and forms of writing, as much as forms of speaking, reflect and encode, enact the social structures and values of one place, then a curriculum will have to make available to its students the resources for communication which reflect global requirements: Utopian forms, literally. Locally, the demands of multicultural environments will, similarly, require responses which go beyond mere insistence on the forms of one, the dominant, group. Harmonious, productive engagement with different cultures in one’s own locality will demand attention to communication in quite new ways. Economic demands are presently defined in exceedingly narrow and, in the end, not highly useful terms: spelling, sentence construction and so on.

The demands of the coming decades require, in my view, a move from the learning of specific forms—business communication, Japanese for tourism, etc.—though these will be needed. At the moment curricula of communication still rest on the twin pillars of ‘competent use’—‘proper command of English’, for instance—and of critical awareness either as ‘Milton was of the devil’s party without knowing it. Discuss’ or as ‘Show the relation between forms of text and kinds of audience in game-shows on television.’ Future curricula of communication will need to go beyond such goals and aim to give young people the productive skills of design to make texts which fully match and express their needs and conceptions. The
education system will need to focus on the quite different requirement of design. This will rest on a realisation that individuals need the fullest competence in the use of resources and the confidence to develop, with these, their own designs in relation to constantly changing demands. The task of the education system will be to make available the requisite resources and the skills, aptitudes and dispositions, an orientation towards design.

This move goes entirely beyond presently advocated notions of competent language use; it sees each individual as creative and innovative in their transformation of existing semiotic resources in relation to their perceived needs, expressed in their designs.

My second point goes to the theoretical centre of this necessary move. At the moment our theories of meaning making, of semiosis in whatever medium, are founded on the late nineteenth-century notion (as it afterwards appeared in the writings of Durkheim and de Saussure) of stable social systems and their abstract reified formal appearance. In Saussurean linguistics this became, through the agency of his interpreters, the idea of an abstracted, stable system, reflecting a social achievement (langue), knowable and usable by individuals, but not subject to their active change in their use (parole) of the system. Its effect is to treat the individual as a language user and not as a language maker. It produces dispositions inclined towards an allegiance to and adherence to abstract, autonomous, authoritative systems and their roles. This may have been useful and even essential in the age of Fordist production. It will not be useful in an age in which ‘Western’ post-industrial societies will need to construct new forms of information-based economies founded on the productive resources of cultural difference, change and innovation. For that, a new mode of thinking about meaning and semiosis will be essential, one in which individuals constantly remake their systems of representation and communication, in productive interaction with the challenges of multiple forms of difference. Writing will have its part in that, but in dynamic interrelation with a web of social factors and a complex system of other modes of representation. In that dynamic, writing will undergo transformations which are not at the moment fully knowable.

Perhaps a curriculum of communication founded on the principle of design will exhibit the constitutive principles of post-modernity?

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REFERENCES