

3-1-2007

Editor's Introduction

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Recommended Citation

(2007) "Editor's Introduction," *Democratic Communiqué*: Vol. 21: Iss. 1, Article 9.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7275/democratic-communication.1702>

Available at: <https://scholarworks.umass.edu/democratic-communication/vol21/iss1/9>

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Editor's Introduction

Union for Democratic Communications has been defined organizationally through its conferences. UDC members meet about every eighteen months to share their recent research or artistic projects in a less impersonal atmosphere than traditional academic gatherings. All of those who have been involved over the years are well aware of how uplifting these conferences can be, of how we share in an uncommon intellectual tradition and a belief that our professional activities truly inform broader discussions concerning media and telecommunications outside of the academy. It therefore seems appropriate that this meaningful of a group should have its own regularly published organ.

With this volume *Democratic Communiqué (DC)* will be published twice each year, in the spring and fall. While *DC* has been a peer-reviewed publication for several years, UDC's steering committee has concluded that an expansion of the journal will provide for a broader cross section of the work presented at UDC conferences, work that may be overlooked or undervalued by other academic organizations and publications. Such a venue will be important both as a place to share recent work, while also providing an account, however imperfect, of where we have collectively been and where we are going as an organization. Indeed, while UDC has been important to many of us over the years, the record of our activity is dispersed over a broad array of books and articles, none of which we can collectively call "our own."

Now the proverbial questions arise, "Do we really need another journal devoted to media studies?" and, "How can such a journal realistically compete with Journal of such-and-such published and distributed by a major house." These are important concerns. After all, there are indeed many journals addressing communication and media studies, and most are produced by substantial academic publishers with impressive resources. Yet in North America especially there are almost no organizations and very few periodicals dedicated to the political economy-oriented research UDC has sought to advance for almost thirty years. This condition has profound implications for what approaches are deemed legitimate for studying the media and thus for how academic inquiry concerning media is shaped. UDC has been a sanctuary for political economy and critical-historical research, and a cross section of our organization's intellectual legacy is apparent – although by no means fully represented – in the makeup of the journal's editorial advisory board. With these things in mind an expanded *DC* has almost every ingredient of more established venues and, like UDC, a sense of genuine purpose to boot. Its new editor hopes to continue with efficient coordination of the publication over the next few years, and, admittedly, continues to learn an immense amount "on the job." It is indeed a delight and a privilege to take on this task.

In keeping with the theme of the 2006 conference at Florida Atlantic University, each article in this issue examines specific facets of media and communication in the neoliberal era – the possibilities for self determination afforded through popular media, capital's exertion of social power through copyright, the effacing of space and place in Indian cinema in the neoliberal period, and the news media's

stage-management of the hot war abroad and the class war within. Diana Agosta's essay, "Constructing Civil Society," is rooted in the author's extensive field research with inhabitants of rural El Salvador's who in the late 1990s used low-power radio stations to recover a way of life and sense of purpose that had been shattered from the twelve-year civil war that ravaged the country. The piece challenges more familiar theorizations of civil society as it reinforces the concept of indigenous, alternative, or "proletarian" public spheres which carry out the mission of unhindered public discourse typically forsaken, if not wholly opposed, by commercial outlets. "By providing public space for communicative interactions of civil society," Agosta notes, the community radio outlets fostered "a community of listeners, a new culture of what can be said, how it can be said, and who can say it." Drawing on extensive interviews with community broadcasters, Agosta documents their intervention in the burgeoning mediascape of El Salvador established along neoliberal lines; paralleling the media situation in the United States, Salvadoran commercial concerns pushed through sweeping telecommunications legislation in 1997 which all but banned community radio. The article explains in detail how rural broadcasters used their media to defy such measures and reclaim their sense of self-determination.

In "Copyright Ownership in the Digital Age," Chris Jordan closely considers the American film industry's legal maneuvers to bolster its monopoly privilege over a key technological and cultural commodity – the digital videodisc. Jordan explains how two vital legal decisions "illustrate the ever-escalating efforts of corporations to control their every representation in culture, even after being legally acquired, as if copyright ownership is the natural right of the creator and not granted by the United States Constitution." Examination of the first case, *Huntsman v. Soderbergh* reveals how Hollywood studios use copyright law to further their imperatives and reinforce control over content while restricting consumers' right to use products and services. With the second case, *Universal City Studios, Inc. v. Reimerdes*, Jordan outlines the implications of the Digital Millennium Copyright Act, specifically, how the law is used to classify software intended to expand a DVD's operative choices as a piracy device. While at first glance these observations suggest the desperation of the American entertainment industry in the face of seemingly uncontrollable technological change, they also point to the continued strengthening of cartel control, a control which now extends past the neighborhood theatre into the domestic sphere.

Jyotsna Kapur and Manjunath Pendakur's contribution, "Global Fantasies: The Strange Disappearance of Bombay from its Own Cinema," examines how neoliberal-guided economic policies have become aesthetically manifest in Hindi cinema. Drawing on the work of Henri Lefebvre, the authors argue how an admixture of selective nationalism and historical revisionism, vis-à-vis notions such as "globalization," are symptoms of a wider program where the future is staked out solely through the imperatives of global capital. In India, a belief evident in an array of official and popular discourses is that Indians are now empowered subjects – rather than objects – of the global capitalist order. "In this paradigm, which casts itself as nationalist" the authors note,

the enemy within the nation, i.e., the ruling class, can disclaim its collaboration with international capital and represent itself as the heroes, not the traitors, of the nation. This ideological sleight of hand, this simultaneous disavowal of imperialism in the present while reclaiming the nationalism from the past, is achieved by erasing class as a component both of the anti-imperialist struggle of the past and of the violent integration of India into global capital in the present.

As Kapur and Pendakur demonstrate, this curious transmutation couldn't be more apparent than in the country's cinematic productions in the neoliberal era, where "a new global space in the imaginary" is constructed; "one in which class and politics are erased by a new uncritical emphasis on consumer culture."

"The Military-Media-Industrial Complex" is a revised transcript of Norman Solomon's address to UDC in 2006. Solomon presents an overview of the central argument of his widely read book, *War Made Easy*, which examines the corporate media's long-running, almost methodical, support of the U.S. government's military ventures abroad. Drawing on his own experiences and insights as an independent journalist and media critic, Solomon points to how the corporate media's duplicity in support of U.S. foreign policy is in accord with its performance since at least the 1960s. As with all of his work, the author implicit message is to recognize geopolitics within a historical continuum, and to be attentive teachers and citizens by scrutinizing print and electronic news media against independently produced news and information.

Layout of *Democratic Communiqué* would not have been possible without the assistance of Maris L. Hayashi, who aided the editor in his numerous encounters with and eventual escape from the long shadow cast by Bill Gates. Elsewhere Hayashi performs virtuous works of librarianship at Florida Atlantic University and acts as UDC webmaster. The cover of *Democratic Communiqué* was graciously completed by Brandon Tarpley and the photo provided by Hanno Hardt. Thanks are also due to the many colleagues who provided invaluable support through wellinformed reviews of manuscripts. These individuals will be recognized in the second and final issue of Volume 21.

James F. Tracy
Editor