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GETTING TO PHILCOM, CHANGING YOUR CLOTHES

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I arrived in the United States in the mid-1990s to a job at New York University. I went looking for cultural studies and links to the left, and found them via *Social Text*. Then I was asked to become director of graduate studies in my department (of cinema studies). Despite its name, the department had been home to some notable dissertations about radio and TV, and so in my new role I felt obliged to go looking again at domains of knowledge across the academy and the country that might relate to the interests of our dozens of graduate students—and myself. By chance, Tomás Lopez-Pumarejo invited me onto an International Communication Association (ICA) panel, which turned out to be within the Philosophy of Communication Division (PHILCOM). I asked around New York about these bodies. The few people in cultural and media studies who had heard of the ICA (or the study of communications as such) said they thought PHILCOM was where the leftists hung out.

I attended the business meeting (in Chicago in 1996) and witnessed a vigorous debate over the name of the division. It seemed to be about cultural studies versus hermeneutics, Foucault versus Habermas, and social movements versus the New Left. But the “versus” sign appeared to be under erasure, which appealed to me; and Larry Gross and Larry Grossberg were both involved in PHILCOM. Their work was valuable, and Grossberg had been an (initially) anonymous marker of my doctorate (from a country far away, one with an incest taboo on granting research degrees nepotistically; a land where dissertations are not evaluated by Haliburton-style giveaways). So I joined the division. A little while later, Greg Wise asked me to stand for election to run the body. A competition was needed, and only one person had been nominated. I agreed, on the understanding that I wouldn’t win. But I did, and so I became responsible

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for helping to organize the annual conferences, like everyone else in that role. I was fortunate to do so under Wise's expert tutelage. We were the group that made the transition from paper submissions to electronic ones. Both experiences were awful, but so is brushing your teeth when tired. You live with it. And I had the chance to work with people I really admire, such as Wise, Briankle Chang, and John Nguyet Erni. Mariana Johnson and Leshu Torchin were my graduate assistants and the managing editors of *Television & New Media* at the time. They emptied and filled the mail bags (and then the attachments) and dealt with my (and my correspondents') hysteria, not to mention the (b)analogy of the association.

OK, what did I think PHILCOM was doing? The president of the Social Science Research Council, noting the links between nationalism and disciplines, has called for approaches that embrace the social in post-national ways that transcend academic as well as geopolitical boundaries (Calhoun, 2002). I saw PHILCOM as a placeholder of that kind, a space within the ICA that was actually internationalist and cosmopolitan in its makeup, and committed to interdisciplinarity—hence its historic links to the study of gender, sexuality, and governmentality for example. As I traveled in Asia and Europe and met scholars who were puzzled at their rejection by various divisions of the ICA with names that purported to represent work done on the media, I advised them to try PHILCOM's cosmopolitanism. We provide a counterbalance to a rampant and parochial methodological individualism.

For the narrow world of U.S. communications dominates the ICA, even as people throw their hands in the air about expanding international representation, contemplating (heavens!) attending the International Association for Media and Communication Research (IAMCR). (Hint—the answer is to give up your power base in the United States and merge with IAMCR.) Intellectually, it means coming to terms with a sorry history of Americanization (training white, ethnically marked migrants to be disciplined subjects able to transcend class boundaries through speech and rhetoric), propaganda (anyone for the cold war?), Big-Ten sports (B for sale), effects work that repeats and repeats and repeats, and teaching journalists to show they are not liberals or intellectuals. It is a sad commentary on this body that while the American Anthropological Association, the American Studies Association, and the American Sociological Association were able to take stands against twenty-first-century U.S. imperialism and the media system that permits it, the ICA (like its equally nationalist neighbor, the National Communication Association (NCA)) had nothing to say and nothing to offer. Federal Communications Commission deregulation? The role of the United States in stifling media alternatives to Hollywood abroad? Nothing to say, nothing to offer.

By contrast, the future is bright for PHILCOM-style interdisciplinarity. In the U.S. context study after study—from the Association of American Universities; the American Council on Education; the Committee on Science, Engineering, and Public Policy; the National Research Council; the Sloan Foundation; the Association of American Colleges and Universities; and the Council of Graduate Schools—underscores the need for interdisciplinarity. For its part, the National Science Foundation (NSF) Integrative Graduate Education and Research Traineeship scheme is designed to obviate the limits of nineteenth- and twentieth-century disciplines by permitting scientists and engineers to undertake interdisciplinary doctorates, “stimulating collaborative research that transcends disciplinary boundaries” to create a “diverse, globally-engaged, science and engineering workforce” (Nyquist & Wulff, 2000).

When people emerge from graduate study, most of them suddenly have to write for, and speak with, audiences and colleagues who are quite different from those they encounter within single disciplines or subdisciplines, audiences who are “curious about everything” (Hacking, 2004). Elderly disciplinary narrowness is quickly brought into question. As the director of the NSF recently put it, “the easy work is finished and ambitious scholars are confronted with problems that not only defy the specialization of disciplinary skills, theories, and methods but actually demand their collaboration” (Colwell, 2003).

We have seen the importance of interdisciplinarity for diversifying both the personnel and the agendas of universities. And the disciplines themselves realize that they are in need of reform. The American Historical Association (AHA) has published a major report along these lines (Bender, Katz, Palmer, & Committee on Graduate Education, 2004), and convened a workshop on the need for interdisciplinarity; the sciences have constituted the publishing venture *Interdisciplinary Science Reviews*; and the American Political Science Association (APSA) has established “interdisciplinary membership” with the AHA and the American Sociological Association, *inter alia*. It seeks to be more interdisciplinary in order to secure greater NSF funding (“AHA,” 2004; “APSA,” 2004).

What does this mean for the name of the division? Some sages seem alienated by the politicized, cultural-studies turn that PHILCOM has taken over the past decade, claiming that both philosophy and quality (or at least their brands of those slippery concepts) have gone missing or been subordinated. But most folks appear to favor a broad alliance of those working from the left within communications, one that blends theory, activism, and politics. I’d propose continuing to do just that—but under a name that adheres to truth in advertising; by changing clothes, as it were.

Why do we need to change clothes, and what will happen if we do so? Our name needs to capture the raft of work we do. We need a superstructure

that reflects our base—the people and topics that actually animate our division. That base is a shifting formation, of course, but it would be fair to say that it comprises residual, dominant, and emergent discourses, touching upon the earliest concerns of the division as well as more recent ones. This means a complex—sometimes at least paradoxical—admixture of theoretical speculation and grounded analysis spanning political economy, discourse analysis, ethnography, cultural policy, textual analysis, and language philosophy—much of it inflected by feminist, queer, and postcolonial theories and methods, and applied to the media, ordinary life, the state, and capital.

The new clothing may alienate those who want an idealist sphere separated from the grubby realities of the everyday and frustrate those who neatly separate their wardrobe between literature review, theory, hypothesis, evidence, discussion, and conclusion. But it may also help generate an efflorescence in the field, show how capacious communications can be, and attract people who have nowhere to go within the existing paradigms. It could be nothing less than a site for examining the political technology and political economy of subjectivity.

Perhaps “Studies in Culture and Philosophy” suffices as a title. It would be close to the reality of our panels, it would sit well with the interdisciplinary remit of the times, and it would attract people from outside U.S. gossip circuits looking for shelter in these cold times.

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