Critical Communication Challenges
For the New Century

By Jennings Bryant

This article, with minor modifications, was the author’s presidential address to the 53rd annual conference of the International Communication Association. It presents several critical communication challenges for the early 21st century. First, it outlines the root causes of 3 classic divides that provide context for these challenges: theory versus practice, persuasion versus entertainment, and East versus West. The author suggests pathways toward syntheses of these divides, then discusses 3 communication challenges of particular interest to the author: legitimization and advancement of entertainment theory, redefinition and expansion of research on the digital divide, and development of a science of diplomatic communication.

This evening I would like for us to spend a few minutes together, mulling over some of the critical communication challenges we are likely to face during the early years of the 21st century. However, in order to lay some groundwork for our rumination, I would like to take us back about 5 centuries, on an intellectual history tour to the ancestral roots of communication study. Although we are in Southern California, this should not resemble “Bill and Ted’s Excellent Adventure” (de Laurentiis & Herek, 1989), although we will briefly visit “So-crates” (or Socrates, to the uninitiated).

The Roots of Our Divides: Theory vs. Practice
We’ll begin our time travels with McCroskey and Richmond’s (1996) claim that “the study of communication is older than any area of current academic interest” (p. 235). These authors noted:

The oldest essay ever discovered, written about 3,000 B.C., consists of advice on how to speak effectively. This essay was inscribed on a fragment of parchment addressed to Kagemni, the eldest son of the Pharaoh Huni. . . . The oldest extant book is a treatise on effective communication. The Precepts was composed in Egypt about 2675 B.C. by Ptah-Hotep and written for the guidance of the Pharaoh’s son. (p. 234)
These early communication tomes were attempts to preserve and transmit knowledge about communication with practical, political value for a small number of people, aristocrats who formed the ruling elite in Egypt, the largest ancient state situated south of the Mediterranean.

It is at just about this time, 5 centuries ago, that we had our first schism in communication scholarship. This was a North-South split, but the axis of division was neither the Mason-Dixon line nor the 38th parallel; it was the Mediterranean Sea, for the ancient Greeks also began their study of rhetoric about the 5th century B.C., at Syracuse, in Sicily. However, whereas the Egyptians featured an absolutist, highly centralized power structure as a form of government, the Greek concern with communication initially came about with the overthrow of a tyrant and the development of a democratic regime, in which the citizens flooded the courts trying to recover property that had been confiscated during this regime. The “art of rhetoric” developed by Corax and his student Tisias, was intended to help ordinary people prove their claims in court. Their work is no longer extant, but these two Greek scholars are credited with the earliest concept of message organization and a theory of how arguments should be developed from probabilities (McCroskey & Richmond, 1996). In other words, they really began theorizing about communication. This is the tradition that spawned Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, and their heirs and laid much of the intellectual underpinnings for Western communication theory and research.

This is the first of three “divides” to consider as we reflect on “critical communication challenges for the international era.” This divide is commonly labeled theoretical versus practical, or basic versus applied.

The Roots of Our Divides: Persuasion vs. Entertainment
As everyone who has ever studied communication with any degree of seriousness knows, we owe a great debt of gratitude to Aristotle. However, Aristotle may well have been the origin of another of our divides. Building on the ideas of Heraclitus (6th century B.C.), Socrates, and Plato, Aristotle made what are arguably his greatest contributions to communication theory in the area of persuasion theory. In his system, persuasion required adaptation to both situation and what might be considered “audience psychology.” Aristotle (Rhetoric, trans. 1954) agreed with Plato that the role of rhetoric was “to discover the available means of persuasion” (p. 5).

But, Aristotle could not leave well enough alone. He also pioneered entertainment theory by systematically explicating theatrical drama in the Poetics (Aristotle, trans. 1961). This work is undoubtedly best known in communication because it introduced the concept of catharsis, by which exposure to tragedies in the theater purportedly arouses strong emotions and permits purgation of these emotions. Just as importantly for modern entertainment theorists, in the Poetics Aristotle (trans. 1961) posited a moral rationale for the expected reactions of displeasure and vexation versus pleasure and satisfaction, depending on whether the actions of the protagonists violate precepts of what is fair and just.

This introduces our second divide, that of politics and persuasion versus entertainment and leisure.
We can trace this divide forward throughout recorded history. For example, on the one hand, in the 1st century A.D., the sophists of Greece—imitated by many of the elite Roman philosophers—developed sophisticated rhetorical theory that emphasized style and emotion and attempted to subsume poetry under rhetoric. On the other hand, with the unprecedented wealth of the Roman Empire, beginning in the 1st century A.D., “leisure became an entitlement across all strata of Roman society” (Zillmann, 2000, p. 9). With leisure came the luxury of popular entertainment, including games, chariot races, and gladiatorial fights, some of which drew up to 150,000 spectators—as early as the 1st century. Clearly this foreshadows modern entertainment, minus only the multiplier effects of media technologies. And, hey, who knew that the formulae for *Fear Factor* and *Extreme Sports* would remain hidden for 20 centuries!

The Roots of Our Divides: East vs. West

The third and final divide is one that our 52nd annual ICA conference held last summer in Seoul made manifest to many of us: Eastern versus Western approaches to communication study. At roughly the same time that the explosion in theorizing about rhetoric was blossoming in ancient Greece, that is, the 6th century B.C., knowledge about communication was independently developing in the Far East. The bodies of communication knowledge emerging in ancient Asia were modeled on various philosophical systems, the most influential being Taoism and Confucianism, which emerged primarily in China, and Buddhism, which emerged in India and then spread to other Asian counties. For the most part, communication principles in Asia were deduced from philosophy rather than induced from specific practical, often situational, needs.

Because my treatment of this topic will be barebones at best, let me offer a recommended reading. Kincaid (1987) has edited a fascinating book entitled *Communication Theory: Eastern and Western Perspectives*. The overview chapter by Cushman and Kincaid (1987) is invaluable for those who want to understand the origins and locus of East-West differences in communication theory.

Essentially, “The three major philosophies that developed in Asia in the 6th–5th centuries B.C. established sets of beliefs that allowed for convergence toward a broad Asian model of communication oriented primarily inwardly rather than outwardly” (Bryant & Miron, in press). Despite convergence, several differences between philosophies remained. For example, “In China, Taoism promoted naturalism and simplicity, individualism and freedom, the search for harmony, and knowledge of the eternal through insight” (Bryant & Miron, in press). In India, Buddhism “proposed the inner solution of spiritual attainment” (Bryant & Miron, in press).

The primary goal of communication in Taoism and Buddhism was knowledge of the self and of the essence of the world, rather than informing and influencing others or manipulating the external world. As a consequence, communication took a “transcendental” form geared toward the eternal reality assumed to underlie all temporary events, including one’s own individual existence. Such a form of communication was radically different from the transactional European type of communication. (Bryant & Miron, in press)

Thus the third divide.
Some Syntheses Over Time
Over the centuries, numerous bridges were attempted and some actually built across these three major divides. Some reconciliation and synthesis occurred, as scholars learned of the countervailing ideas of others working on similar issues from different contexts and with divergent perspectives and attempted integrations of various sorts. Nevertheless, remnants of these three divides remain and will need to be addressed systematically as we consider “critical communication challenges for the new century.”

Three Communication Challenges
I approached my consideration of communication challenges the way the Bryant family goes about preparing for grocery shopping—I started an iterative list. During the past several months, every time I ran into a thorny communication challenge, I added it to this list. Unfortunately, when I finally got around to preparing this speech, my list had grown to 23 items! Doubting that you wanted to spend the entire evening in these seats, I realized that a bit of judicious editing was in order. So I have selected from my list just three topics—topics influenced by the three divides I discussed and about which I have personally experienced a critical need for more sophisticated understanding.

Legitimization and Advancement of Entertainment Theory
The first of these is the need for further legitimization and advancement of entertainment theory. Sigmund Freud, writing in 1905, may have said it best: “We do not know what it is that gives us pleasure and what we laugh about” (Zillmann & Bryant, 1980, p. 149). Certainly we have learned some things about entertainment during the past century, but quite frankly, we are still novices in this arena. What makes this an important issue is, in the words of Zillmann and Vorderer (2000), we live in an “entertainment age” (p. vii). As Wolf (2003) noted in The Entertainment Economy: How Mega-Media Forces Are Transforming Our Lives, “Entertainment—not autos, not steel, not financial services—is fast becoming the driving wheel of the new world economy” (p. 4). In fact, worldwide, entertainment is a $1.1 trillion industry and is expected to grow to $1.4 trillion in 2006 (PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2002). “Never before in human history has so much entertainment been so readily accessible, to so many, for so much of their leisure time as it is now, primarily because of the media of communication” (Zillmann & Vorderer, 2000, p. vii).

With a phenomenon so obtrusive internationally, it would appear to be obvious that social scientists have an obligation to devote considerable time and resources to developing entertainment theory. By and large, however, entertainment theory is still a second-class citizen. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, when Dolf Zillmann, Joanne Cantor, and a few others of us were submitting write-ups of the first experimental research studies in entertainment theory to scholarly journals, primarily in psychology, we got used to seeing befuddled comments from reviewers and editors. On more than one occasion, an editor would return a
manuscript without review, indicating that it did not fit what was done in psychology or communication. Years later, after our peers have published considerable theoretically grounded research on cognitive, emotional, and behavioral aspects of entertainment in journals in communication, psychology, and numerous other cognate disciplines, the divide still exists.

A portion of this bias can be traced directly to an elitist disdain for all things entertainment. The following quote from Robert Ludlum's (2002) *The Janson Directive*, a best-selling novel, is symptomatic of disdain for entertainment, Americans, and American imperialism in the entertainment industries:

> “All Americans like to think they are different,” the man said sourly. “One of the many, many ways in which they are all the same.”
> “That’s a very Hungarian observation,” Janson said.
> The man gave a half smile and nodded. “Touché. But . . . once upon a time, people would spend the winters staring into their fireplaces. Now we have television sets, and stare into those.”
> “The electronic hearth.”
> “Exactly. We can even get CNN and MTV. You Americans complain about drug traffickers in Asia, and meanwhile you flood the world with the electronic equivalent. Our children know the names of your rappers and movie stars, and nothing about the heroes of their own people. Maybe they know who Stephen King is, but they don’t know who our King Stephen was—the founder of our nation!” A petulant head shake: “It’s an invisible conquest, with satellites and broadcast transmitters instead of artillery.” (p. 356)

In order to avoid such diatribes, we may need to reconceptualize entertainment within a different motivational framework than the notion of escapism. Perhaps we need to connect to the notion of subjective well-being, now so positively received as a part of “hedonic psychology.” Should you question the goodness of fit, listen to these words from the preface to Kahneman, Diener, and Schwarz’s (1999) *Well-Being: The Foundations of Hedonic Psychology*:

> Hedonic psychology . . . is the study of what makes experiences and life pleasant or unpleasant. It is concerned with feelings of pleasure and pain, of interest and boredom, of joy and sorrow, and of satisfaction and dissatisfaction. It is also concerned with the whole range of circumstances, from the biological to the societal, that occasion suffering and enjoyment. (p. ix)

Sound familiar? To students of entertainment theory, it does. But it is a much more positive “spin” than considerations of escapism, ritualistic viewing, divertissement, and the like.

Moreover, we must acknowledge that entertainment theory is as much communication theory as is persuasion theory. I seriously doubt that Aristotle meant to set up a divide when he talked about rhetoric and politics, on the one hand, and tragedy and poetics on the other. Later intellectual ancestors just allowed that divide to happen. We need to work to explore the commonalities and potential for synthesis within these two sides of the same coin of human communication.

That may help address “legitimization,” but what about advancement. During the past semester, I taught a doctoral seminar in entertainment theory. Because
the class had a wonderfully international composition—two Korean students, one Chinese student, one Australian, one Canadian, one Gahanna, and three Americans—we often uncovered deficiencies in the application of extant entertainment theory to various cultural contexts. This made me extremely eager to become increasingly intercultural, international, and context sensitive with our investigations. We have done a great deal with message features, personality, and demographics in studying the enjoyment of drama, comedy, horror, and numerous other genres, but that has just given us a foundation from which to address meaningfully the subtleties of the incredibly complex phenomenon of entertainment.

As we address these subtleties, I hope we can use the study of entertainment as one way to bridge the divide between theory and application. Entertainment theory is among the most theoretically rigorous areas of inquiry in our discipline. Root theories like disposition theory, excitation-transfer theory, mood management theory, misattribution theory of mirth, and the like are textbook examples of how to articulate assumptions, to create conceptually sound classification-rule definitions, to do rigorous hypothesis testing, and the like.

They also play beautifully with practitioners who design, produce, and distribute media messages. Over the years I have had the great pleasure of translating these theories into practice for the likes of Nickelodeon, Sesame Workshop, AOL Time Warner, and many others, and I have become a hard-core devotee of the old adage that there is nothing as practical as a good theory. I have seen scholars like Dan Anderson use programmatic research as a toolkit to help build highly successful television programs like *Blue’s Clues* from the ground up, and I can tell you it is a beautiful thing when writers and producers begin to internalize and apply entertainment theory and research naturally in their everyday practice. Entertainment theory is a natural to bridge this artificial divide between theory and practice.


During the past 2 years, ICA has been involved productively with IAMCR in cohosting boutique conferences devoted to addressing various aspects of the digital divide, traditionally defined as “a gap between those who have access to technology and those who do not” (Besser, 2004, p. 1). From my perspective, this has been a very positive and progressive endeavor. Issues of equity, social justice, and the like are embedded in the digital divide and should burn holes in our conscience until they produce some of the best scholarship and action research we have to offer.

However, I must say that I am a bit concerned about the epistemological and methodological silos that have typified this realm of scholarship in the past, and I am even more concerned with the gap between theory and practice. To explain my concern, permit me to share a bit of my personal history, which helped me develop my subjective understanding of digital divide issues.

More than a decade ago, the University of Alabama Institute for Communication Research received from the U.S. Department of Education a contract to do primary evaluation of the “Star Schools” initiative (e.g., Bryant, Love, Rockwell, Maxwell, & Scott, 1990). This was one of the early attempts via distance education
to reduce disparities in the quality of curricular offerings in math, science, and foreign language between well-funded and impoverished schools. The bulk of the distance education programming during this period was one-way video, two-way audio—that is, programming delivered to the schools via satellite as live lectures presented on television, with students responding to the television teacher via telephone, and with the conversations between the television teacher and the students at the site doing the talking being monitored by students in other classrooms nationwide. We visited classroom after classroom in poor schools throughout the United States as part of our assessment. Let me share just two examples that illustrate the complexity of digital divide issues that are not typically accommodated in such scholarship.

**Texas phone phobia.** The first example was spawned by a site visit that took place in a very remote region on the Texas-Mexican border, about 150 miles from any major city (Bryant, Maxwell, Madsen, Rockwell, & Love, 1990). A Star Schools distance-education math teacher had identified this rural Texas site as particularly problematic, in that he could not get any of the eight 7th-grade students at that site to respond to the questions that he would direct to that classroom. That sounded like an interesting challenge.

We flew into San Antonio late one evening, slept a few hours, left our hotel room heading south by southwest at about 5:00 a.m. and arrived before class at the school site, located in one of the poorest communities I have ever visited—and I worked in antipoverty programs in Appalachia in my youth. When we introduced ourselves to the students and the facilitator in their distance-learning classroom, the students were open and friendly, quickly letting us know that language issues and motivation were not major barriers to communicating with the television teacher.

Then the lesson began, with the truly gifted math teacher calling on the students at this locale, as we had predetermined that he would. You talk about a sudden change in class atmosphere. We witnessed a total freeze up! Then the students begin to fidget and perspire like death-row inmates. We all independently had the feeling that if we had not been there, they would have darted out the door en masse. For certain, they would have much rather handled a diamondback rattlesnake than that phone. The classroom facilitator could not get a single one of the students to take the telephone handset and answer the teacher’s questions.

The facilitator and teacher pleaded, bribed, cajoled, and threatened, and the students still refused to budge from their seeming vows of silence, while the students in numerous other classrooms across the nation waited, and waited, and waited. At the end of this extremely awkward interlude, which seemed like an hour but was probably no more than 5 minutes, when at long last the television teacher had called on another site, the facilitator and most of the students were in tears. They were embarrassed to the point of mortification.

We switched off the set in the middle of the lesson and quietly asked the facilitator to leave. After reestablishing rapport and alleviating the tension at least somewhat, we turned the class into something that was a combination of focus group and therapy session—almost certainly not what the Department of Educa-
tion had in mind when they awarded us the evaluation contract! After about 30 minutes of probing, we found the problem. Not a single student in that class of eight had a telephone in their homes, but they did not want to admit it. Moreover, most of them had never used a telephone for a social call. The telephone, typically an extension of any teenager's ear, was an alien, frightening object to them. Certainly it was not something to be tried for the first time in front of a nationwide audience.

Please note that this incident took place only a decade and a half ago, and in one of the wealthiest nations on earth. Universal service had totally failed! Digital divide? Well, no; at least not as typically conceptualized. The school had the latest in technology and courseware. The key to this problem was an analog divide! This goes to show that no matter how good the quality of the telecommunications policy, how available the technology on site, how good the intentions of the teleeducational initiative, how good the abilities and dedication of the teacher, or whatever, unless the technology is familiar and approachable to users in their own sitz en laben, access will not happen.

Later we traveled to remote Native American Indian reservations in Arizona and New Mexico, locales where telephone penetration was less than 50% and where electricity was still not to be taken for granted, and we learned over and over that it is hazardous to make assumptions regarding the mere availability of what most would consider essential technologies and infrastructure, much less advanced communication networks, systems, and services.

Moreover, this is still a major issue today in Native American communities. Listen to this statement from November of last year by Teresa Hopkins (2002), a leader of the Navajo Nation:

It is 2002. The average consumer today contemplates whether they want broadband or not. Another consumer is comparing who to select for PCS services, AT&T, Sprint or Verizon.

At the same moment a Native American consumer contacts their [sic] local telephone company and requests a plain old telephone. But the community currently is not served and there are no immediate plans for expansion of service. (p. 1)

This is a matter of concern that is a layer deeper than most digital divide issues—it is an analog divide.

Tribal differences in learning style. We learned a second invaluable lesson about cultural aspects of the digital divide a couple of years after our initial Star Schools's evaluation, when we were assessing the impact and effectiveness of one of the TI-IN United Star Network's physical science programs for middle-school students. Again, this was a satellite-delivered program with telephone talkback (Bryant, Love, Rockwell, Maxwell, & Scott, 1992).

In the middle of the evaluation season, we received a call from the program director at the Department of Education, asking if we would take a few days out to do a specialized, supplemental troubleshooting assignment for him. It seemed that students at two middle schools serving different Native American tribes in New Mexico were performing very differently on the standardized testing that
followed the physical science course. This disparity was particularly troubling because traditional indicators suggested that these were relatively well-matched schools, with similar technology penetration rates, located in the same part of the country, whose students claimed membership in the same racial group.

So we spent a few days at the middle school that served the Jemez Pueblo tribe north of Albuquerque and a few more days with students of a Navajo tribe located at the Canoncita reservation west of Albuquerque—schools that were no more than 100 miles apart as the crow flies. As it turned out, after our initial site visits, which included observation and clinical analysis, we agreed with the pretest evaluation that the schools were well matched on standard social, demographic, and developmental factors.

Unfortunately, after 4 days of sitting in distance-education as well as traditional classrooms at both schools, we still had not been able to determine the source of the problem. So we decided to spend time out of class visiting with families, observing life in the communities, and generally getting to know the children better.

Fortunately, we soon caught a break. Over the weekend, we just happened to watch some of the students watching an adult mechanic at each locale perform a similar function—servicing and repairing a pickup truck. At the Jemez Pueblo location, the kids basically “hung around,” watching the mechanic, and chatting with him and with each other. At the Canoncita site, the same-age kids were all over the car, handing tools to the mechanic before he could ask for them, pointing out this or that, offering advice, and essentially taking an active, hands-on role in the maintenance and repair of the pick-up. Moreover, both mechanics seemed completely at home with their respective “audience’s” behaviors.

After these observations, our blinders were turned into binoculars, and we were able see that the Canoncita students were devotees of active, hands-on learning. The passive style of the distance-education lessons of that era just were not working for the Navajo students.

Fortunately, the TI-IN teacher was very dedicated and was truly invested in eradicating educational divides. He developed hands-on learning exercises for the students and their facilitator, designed to accompany every lesson. The Navajo children soon began to get into the physical science class. When we got the test results at the end of the term, no differences existed between the scores of the Jemez Pueblo students and the Navajo students (Bryant et al., 1992)! Hooray!

The lesson for us was that although the students were equivalent on every index typically employed in education, and they were similar technologically, they were light-years apart culturally. Those subtle cultural differences affected learning styles dramatically, which, in turn, had a concomitant dramatic effect on test scores. Again, add another layer of complexity to digital-divide issues.

The Alliance for Public Technology. Because I found what we had learned to be quite fascinating, I soon began to invest a considerable amount of personal and professional time in a national organization called the Alliance for Public Technology (APT). APT was, and is, dedicated to advancing public policy and implementing public education programs to eradicate all sorts of technological and communication divides. Later, I served as chair of the board of directors for APT.
This was a group whose membership included representatives from almost every different physical, economic, and social inequality possible, and its Board was a true rainbow coalition, none of whose members could ever be called passive. With leaders from the NAACP, the World Institute on Disabilities, the National Foundation for the Blind, the Urban League, AARP, the NEA, and 8–10 other advocacy groups or community-based organizations sitting around a table developing telecommunications policy, it took every ounce of my intellectual ability and physical stamina to even begin to maintain harmony and unity. Board meetings, which lasted for at least a day, tested every hypothesis I have ever read about organizational decision-making and leadership.

One thing I learned very quickly: Those front liners did not have a great deal of appreciation for what communication scholars were doing in terms of their digital divide scholarship. Occasionally something from the likes of François Bar (University of Southern California) or Eli Noam (Columbia University)—the latter of whom replaced me on the board at the end of my term—would strike a responsive chord with the group, but for the most part, our work struck them as inadequate because of a lack of intercultural sensitivity, recognition of the needs of stakeholders with physical challenges, and especially, lack of any sort of empirical validation by those working at the grassroots level.

More than once I heard the furtive cry, “Why can’t your public policy people get together with your social scientists and give us something that is holistic and anchored in reality?” I became sympathetic to their plea. In fact, I would even be so bold as to suggest that it may take team efforts involving policy experts, communication theorists, grassroots practitioners, and field researchers if we’re going to make real progress in digital-divide research. Moreover, we must begin focusing our attention on a wide range of disparity gaps. As Besser (2004) has noted, these include “effective use of information, the ability for an information user to be more than a passive consumer, and the availability of relevant, useful, appropriate, and affordable content” (p. 1).

Although our ICA/IAMCR-targeted conferences seem to be a good first step in that direction, to paraphrase Robert Frost, we’ve still got miles to go before we sleep. I surely hope we are willing to traverse those miles.

**Developing a Science of Diplomatic Communication**

In order to set the stage for the third and final communication challenge I want us to think about today, let me share a statement from Koichiro Matsuura, director-general of UNESCO, who wrote the following in a foreword for *The Global Public Relations Handbook: Theory, Research, and Practice* (Spiramesh & Vercic, 2005):

In an age when there is talk of an inevitable “clash of civilizations,” when ill-judged remarks can ignite the tinder-box of popular opinion, when the stereotyping and stigmatization of “the other” can suddenly destroy community relations built up over decades, there is a premium on intercultural dialog within and between societies. There is a corresponding need for sensitivity to these matters by organizations and individuals operating in multicultural, multi-faith, and multi-ethnic environments. (p. xxii)
Given the discord, strife, and war of the past year, this can be interpreted as a call for research in international, intercultural diplomatic communications.

A set of telephone calls I received during the brief diplomatic interlude prior to the overt conflict in Iraq made me even more aware of how much we need to develop a science of international diplomatic communication. One Friday morning I received a call from a very fine New York Times reporter for whom I had served as a source on several occasions. He was trying to write a feature piece evaluating the communication strategies and effectiveness of the then-current U.S. and U.N. diplomatic efforts. What he wanted was direction toward communication scholarship that he could employ to assist this critique. I told him that I was in no way an expert on this topic, but that I could give him the names and contact information for some of our leading experts in conflict resolution and negotiation, international public relations, rhetoric of war and peace, and the like. Midday the following Monday, he called back to say that he had been directed to some excellent theoretical literature, but that no one seemed to have “translated” this more abstract body of knowledge into a compendium of communication applications in the service of diplomacy. He said that his editor had suggested that he turn his attention to the political science literature, which he had found much more helpful.

As you might imagine, that did not sit well with me, and I added “diplomatic communication” to my list of communication challenges for discussion today.

Moreover, not completely trusting the research skills of even a good New York Times reporter, I began reading in the literature of diplomacy to see how these experts had relied on communication research. What I found is that, although some fine communication research on diplomacy exists (e.g., Gilboa, 1998, 2002), apparently it has only peripherally penetrated the lexicon, theory, or practice of diplomacy. For example, Henry Kissinger's classic volume simply titled Diplomacy (1994) does not even refer to communication. “Communication” does make it into Klare & Thomas's World Security: Challenges for a New Century (1994), but only in the context of indicating how the so-called “communication revolution” has affected diplomacy. In Thompson and Jensen's (1992) classic Approaches to Peace: An Intellectual Map, even though key communication topics such as “negotiation,” “intervention,” “mediation,” “conciliation,” and “arbitration” are treated and explicated, the references are to every other discipline but communication. Moreover, when delineating new approaches to diplomacy, the closest anyone gets to communication is to suggest that transnational or international NGOs will “radically change the arenas in which world political and economic decisions are made” (Pickus, 1992, p. 236). ICA is now one of these international NGOs. So perhaps we have taken a first step toward putting communication on the diplomacy map, but, again, much work needs to be done in this regard.

One of our most critical challenges will be bridging the divide between East-West communication, which is a source of many of our failed attempts at diplomacy. I think that ICA is the ideal organization to facilitate the reduction of this divide; in fact, I am confident that we have begun to make progress in this regard.
Working in the Public Interest

As I searched the diplomatic literature for communication footprints, I was reminded of challenges that past ICA presidents have issued regarding the need for ICA to better promote our scholarship to those making key decisions that affect “the public good.” I thought of recent conference themes, like “Communication Research Matters” and “Reconciliation Through Communication,” and then I thought about the “Borderland” theme of this conference and that of “Communication Research in the Public Interest” for next year’s conference.

We are obviously concerned with the relevancy and impact of our communication scholarship, but we do not seem to be making concrete progress in creating communication vehicles that would bring our research “front and center” in areas like diplomacy. My goal as I leave the office of president is to work as hard as possible behind the scenes to enable us to create vehicles for promoting and interpreting our scholarship in the public interest. That seems to me to be a concrete way of bridging the three divides I have discussed that have consistently reduced our efficiency and our impact. I would greatly appreciate your help in this regard!

References


