MEMORIAL RESOLUTION

WILBUR LANG SCHRAMM
(1907 – 1987)

When Wilbur Lang Schramm died in Honolulu on December 27, 1987, at the age of eighty, he was acknowledged around the world to be the foremost theorist, tactician, and indeed moralist of communication research, a discipline which, in the opinion of almost all who practice it, he "virtually invented."

He had founded and directed the three most influential institutes of communication research, at Illinois in 1947, at Stanford in 1955, and at the East-West Center in Honolulu in the 1970s. An astonishing number of the foremost scholars in the field were and are his trainees, and long after they became leaders themselves they continued to look to him as their mentor and source of wisdom. He had written twenty-five books and scores of articles and seen them translated into many languages. He had written, co-written, or edited the textbooks that defined and extended the scope of communication studies, and many of them, especially Mass Communications, The Science of Human Communication, The Process and Effects of Mass Communication, Mass Media and National Development, and The Handbook of Communication, remain as important as they were recognized to be on the day of their publication.

He had studied the effects of television-watching on children and adolescents and pondered the responsibilities of the media as an educational and socializing force. He had examined the role of communications in the social and political life of nations, particularly of developing nations and most particularly of Asia and the South Pacific, and he had been a valued consultant and advisor to many governments, including his own.

And he had friends everywhere, friends who were almost in awe of his imaginativeness and energy, but who worshipped him for his personal warmth, consideration, and generosity. After his death one of them remarked, with feeling, "He was always trying to do something for somebody."

Wilbur Schramm did not set out to be a medial specialist, or even a social scientist. When he was in college in the 1920s, television wasn't even heard of and radio was only a fascinating plaything that boys made out of a crystal, a bent wire, and a set of earphones. What Wilbur trained to become was what his place, time, family background, and temperament all suggested to him -a generalist, a literary humanist, something closer to the uomo universale of the Renaissance than to any kind of specialist.

Born lucky in most respects, he suffered from a stammer which at times severely hampered his speech, and which he never fully conquered. Some of the strenuousness of his career was undoubtedly born of the effort to overcome this handicap. Like Demosthenes, he went from stammerer to master of communication, and he did it on character. No temporary or intermediate goal ever satisfied him; he no sooner gained a peak than he was looking up and

ahead to the next. During his life he left at least two careers that many men would have thought sufficient and fulfilling.

The family into which he was born on August 5, 1907 was of Bavarian origin on both sides, solidly middle class, secure, modestly cultivated, civic-minded, musical, strong for education. Wilbur's father, Arch Schramm, played the violin, his mother Louise the piano. From them, from school, and from the family Victrola, Wilbur absorbed music. He became a flutist, a good one.

Marietta Ohio, the town in which he was born, was one of those nearly-classless Ohio River towns of the days before industrialization. It had its college, named for the town, which Wilbur attended, and for which he played both baseball and basketball. Like any town on any river, Marietta was exposed to both history and magic, and got its character from both. Explorers and adventurers had gone down the Ohio, rafts and flatboats and steamboats had carried settlers that way one of the more spectacular American dramas of ambition and treason had begun on Blennerhasset Island, where Harman Blennerhasset and Aaron Burr met to conspire and dream empire. That history, like the democracy and openness of Marietta, left its mark on the boy who grew up there, just as his college-years experience of reporting for the Associated Press kept him alert to the contemporary world.

The ideal of his humanist education was breadth, mens sana in corpore sano. Though he took his BA in Political Science, he studied not only English and American Literature but Latin and Greek in college, and he seems to have given about as much time to music, sports, and the writing of poetry as to his other studies. When he went to Harvard in 1928 he went to study literature, but he found time to play basketball for the graduate team and to play his flute in the Boston Civic Symphony.

When he left Harvard for Iowa in 1930 (mainly because of L. E. Travis's stammering clinic in Iowa City), he was still a student of literature. He completed his PhD in 1932, and after two years on a National Research Scholarship, began to teach in the Iowa English Department. In 1935, in collaboration with Norman Foerster, he founded the Iowa Writers' Workshop, which he directed until wartime service drew him to Washington in 1941.

That was one career, a literary one. By the time he abandoned it he had written a textbook history of American literature, a book on the Oregon Trail, updating Parkman, and fourteen tall tales published in the Atlantic Monthly and the Saturday Evening Post and later collected as Windwagon Smith and Other Yarns. He had edited a literary journal, American Prefaces, had directed for a half-dozen years the most prestigious writing program in any university or college of the time, and had become intimately acquainted with many of America's most distinguished writers, among them Robert Frost, Archibald MacLeish, Robert Penn Warren, and Eric Knight.

His second career had really got its start during his term as National Research Fellow, when he had begun to interest himself in psychology and in problems of communication. Two years with the Office of Facts and Figures and the office of War Information deepened that interest, and when he returned to Iowa City in 1943 he returned as Director of the School of Journalism, a post that he held until 1947, when George Stoddard, once Dean of Graduate

Studies at Iowa and recently appointed President of the University of Illinois, called him to Champaign-Urbana "to help get the university moving again."

At Illinois, as a member of the "inner cabinet," Wilbur was a general imaginative stimulator, persuader, trouble-shooter, and administrator. One of his first acts was to found the Institute of Communications Research, the first of its kind anywhere, and to persuade dispersed and sometimes dissident departments to collaborate in it. He developed a PhD program, brought together people from the social sciences, journalism, radio, and publishing, and made his energetic start as the father of a new discipline. As a part of that effort he compiled and edited Mass Communications (1949), collaborated with Fred Siebert and Theodore Peterson on Four Theories of the Press, and examined, in The Reds Take a City, the role of communications in a military operation, the capture of Seoul by the Communists.

The Illinois years were lively, perhaps over-lively, for there was stiff opposition to the Stoddard-Schramm innovations, and the administrative duties were endless. Wilbur's letters from that period are full of laments that he has too little time for research and writing. The wonder is that he did as much of it as he did, for he was Assistant to the President, Director of the university press, and, from 1950 on, Dean of the new School of Journalism and Communications. Eventually the opposition to Stoddard consolidated and forced him out, and Wilbur, smarting from defeat but grateful to be relieved of administration, accepted a position as Professor of Communication at Stanford in 1955. End of career two.

Or so it seemed for a moment. Wilbur Schramm was incapable of doing only one thing at a time, or of being simply a classroom teacher plodding through his classes. Within two years he had founded his second Institute of Communication Research and had become its director. That not only satisfied his strong desire to lead, but gave him a continuing opportunity to enlarge his mastery of his invented field, to initiate studies and train people to do them. With only an institute within a department to administer, he increased the flow of books and journal articles and monographs from his magic typewriter. His colleagues said that he wrote a book while they were outlining an article.

Also, he was in constant motion. At Illinois he had earned a pilot's license because without his own plane he found it hard to get around to all the places he had to be. Now he spent much of his time on airplanes, for his former students had created a communications network throughout the world, and many governments were demanding Wilbur's counsel and help. If he wasn't just getting home from Tanzania or El Salvador, he was just on his way to Hawaii, China, or Thailand. Increasingly, with his move to Stanford, Asia and the Pacific Basin enlisted his interest and focused his efforts. And if he wasn't overseas to advise someone, someone was probably in Palo Alto to see him. His wife Elizabeth -- Miss Betty -- whom he had married in 1934 and who presided over the Schramm household with grace and quiet efficiency for more than fifty years, seldom had only her family at the dinner table.

When Wilbur reached sixty-five, in 1973, the rules read that, like others, he must retire. He did not want to retire; he hated the idea; he had dozens of things still to do. Almost before the door of his Stanford office had closed, he was opening a new office at the East-West Center in Honolulu and taking over as director of the Institute of Communication Research that he had helped establish some years before. Two years of that, and his drive to do research and write books led him to ask to be relieved, whereupon he was appointed the first Distinguished Center

Researcher. With two years out for a stint at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, and with frequent absences for visits to the Asian continent and to the developing nations of the South Pacific, he kept his base at the East-West Center and the University of Hawaii until his death.

His vision for the Center, that it "must be a place where some new ideas originate and all new ideas circulate," expressed what he felt about every institution in which he had a part. He was a born teacher. He could never know anything without wanting to pass it on, as for example when he gathered his fellow graduate students into a late-afternoon seminar in Iowa City and tried to teach them Greek.

As a student of communications, he was the first to fuse several older disciplines into a new one essential to a changed world. He, more than any other, suggested the directions of research. The processes and effects of mass communication; instructional projects, including some cross-media experiments; investigations into movie and real life violence; studies of the use of mass communications in developing countries; the uses of the media for propaganda in peace and war; the responsibilities - and here the unquenched humanist surfaces -- of the mass media to the public they entertain and instruct and presumably serve: those are all avenues that Wilbur Schramm either mapped or walked down or both. Directly, he had influenced thousands; indirectly, millions.

He worked to his last hour. His last book, finished about the time of his eightieth birthday and published posthumously, is <u>The Story of Human Communication</u>, the summary of a productive lifetime. It will add a solid stone to his monument. And still in his computer system at the time of his death was the almost completed manuscript of a tribute to the pioneers of communication research -- Lasswell, Lazarsfeld, Howland, and Levine -- along with a concluding chapter on future directions for study.

End of career three. But the best part of Wilbur Schramm was not the scholar, not the writer of fluent and forceful prose, not the founder and director of institutes. His colleagues can carry on that work, having been shown how. What they will miss is the man, with his intimate, concerned, friendly warmth. The master of the mass media was also a master of personal communication, a broad, humane, gentle man. He could never blame anyone for being mediocre, or even incompetent; his impatience was reserved for those who did less than their best, and on those he could come down like the hammer of God. In the end, even those he came down on respected him for his standards and his integrity. All over the world there are former students and colleagues of Wilbur Schramm's who mourn his passing as they might mourn the death of a helpful, urgent, considerate, and affectionate elder brother.

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