In Memoriam:
Eugene D. Tate, 1935-2011

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Eugene D. Tate, the second editor of Canadian Journal of Communication (CJC) from 1982-1989, died on July 25 in Saskatoon. He was 75. Though I never met him in person, certain of his articles on the beginnings of Communication studies in Canada had a lasting impact on my thinking, a debt I am happy to repay here in tribute to his memory and work.

Born August 20, 1935 in Mankato, Minnesota, he spent his youthful years in Ottawa and elsewhere. He did a BA at Hamline University in 1958, a BD at Garrett Theological Seminary in 1962, and a Master’s in Systematic Theology at Northwestern in 1964. He was ordained a Methodist minister in 1962, serving various congregations in Minnesota, Michigan, and Washington before earning a PhD in Interpersonal Communication from Michigan State University in 1970.

The family—his wife Connie Battreall and eventually four children—moved to Saskatoon where he taught in Sociology and Social Psychology at Saint Thomas More College of the University of Saskatchewan, retiring in 1992. After his retirement he worked for the University of Maryland, teaching on US military bases in Germany, Italy, Turkey, Portugal, and England.

In 1982, when CJC founding editor Earle Beattie (1916-1992) retired from York, Tate bought the 8-year-old Journal for a nominal sum. Prior to his editorship, Tate had been chair of the Journal’s advisory board. Founded in 1972 as Media Probe, it became the Canadian Journal of Communication in 1977. The Journal was for a couple of years the official organ of the Canadian Communication Association, founded June 1, 1979, but then reverted to independent status. Tate’s editorship was thus marked by numerous milestones in debates on the beginnings of the study of Communication in Canada, through to the 25th anniversary of the Journal in 2000.

In his first comments as new editor (CJC 8(3), 1982), Tate remarked that “The weaknesses of the Journal are … attributable to the weaknesses of the discipline of Communication in Canada” (p. 7). Those weakness are still with us today: uncertainty over the story of origins, divers entry points into Communication from a variety of other disciplines, and “Communication” serving as an eclectic umbrella for different approaches to media research.

To comment very briefly on these topics, Tate’s major contribution to the history of Communication studies in Canada was the emphasis he placed on the formative influence of the 18th century Scottish rhetorician George Campbell as an integral part of the school curriculum in Upper and Lower Canada, including the Maritimes. Campbell's

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work was extended in the 19th century by Richard Whatley's Elements of Rhetoric (1828) that attempted to restrict the field of rhetoric to that of argumentation. Finally, Tate stressed the importance of the Edinburgh born Alexander Melville Bell who moved to St. John's in 1838 and from 1877 to 1880, taught elocution at Queen's. Tate thus made of Rhetoric the major component of the formation of Communication (the other two components—at times there were more—he termed the Empirical and the Phenomenological and how these played out in particular ways in U.S. Communication theory).

Fundamentally, however, Tate was a Phenomenologist, understanding Rhetoric as Speech Communication—and in Canada, strongest in the Maritimes and in the Western universities' emphasis on Adult education, whereas in Central Canada, Communication derived from Sociology. This was Speech Communication as a form of mutual inter-constitution of being by two (or more) speakers: response more than thought. Like McLuhan, Tate was an anti-Cartesian, and highly influenced by the thought of Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy (1886-1973), an émigré German philosopher. Rosenstock-Huessy was in turn greatly influenced by the ideas of the Jewish philosopher Franz Rosenzweig (1866-1992). In effect, Tate's view of Communication situates itself in the ancient argument between Jerusalem and Athens, or the Jewish-Christian philosophical encounter.

Most importantly, in my view, Eugene Tate as Editor of the CJC forged new perspectives on the field, perspectives that still invite further work. It was his hope that the CJC would become “the prestige journal in our discipline in this country.” With his passing, that legacy remains an open one. What more can one ask of a journal editor?

References