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Symposium on New Media and Learning  
Technologies in Asia : 16-18 November, 1998,  
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lau, Robert.

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**Paper No. 5**

Opening Address: AMIC 16 Nov 98

Symposium on New Media and Learning Technologies.

Ladies and Gentlemen, may I wish you a very good morning. To those participant who have traveled to Singapore for this symposium, may I bid you a very warm welcome and may your stay in this country be both enjoyable and richly rewarding for Singapore's hard pressed but eager retailers.

This symposium addresses an important and far-reaching issue, the full impact of which has still to be clearly defined. It has been scarcely five decades ago when the information revolution made its first innocuous appearance at research institutions and universities. Its first applications were related largely related to statistical analysis in census and other similar large scaled data collection undertakings, requiring not only the capture of raw data but its subsequent cross tabulations according to a re-determined set of attributes. Data was stored variously on punched cards and paper tapes. Magnetic tapes and random access devices such as magnetic disks did not appear until later.

It was impossible during those early days to even guess at the enormous diversity of applications that IT could be used. In hindsight, it is perhaps to be expected that IT, being the product of the ingenuity of the human mind, must inevitably insinuate itself into all areas of human endeavors and creativity and be applied to all aspects of human activity. The evidence of this is here for all to see today. It has been a startling experience, to move from vacuum tubes to transistors to integrated circuits to very large scale integration to micro-electromechanical devices. In regard to

applications, IT has progressed from data collection and processing to expert and heuristic systems to interactive multimedia and virtual reality systems and in the process integrated communication technology as an indispensable component of its being. All these have taken place within the amazingly short time of less than 50 years.

There is little doubt that the thrust behind this phenomenon will continue unabated for the foreseeable future. It is quite impossible to predict specifically which way the technology would go in the next 10 or 20 years. The most likely answer is that it will continue to encroach into every aspect of our lives. To some this may represent a fearsome threat to the comfortable security of the predictable but to others this could represent a challenge to exploit hitherto unavailable opportunities to move ahead.

“Informatization” is a somewhat convoluted word created, I believe, by our Japanese friends to describe the process of enriching the broad based population with the right to be informed and form their own opinions. Semantics aside, this is perhaps the most important role that IT could contribute towards the fundamental mission of media and learning. IT represents a new and powerful enabling tool in the acquisition of knowledge and information. Regardless of the specifics of its direction, there can be no argument over its potential impact and this is where the endeavors in media and learning technologies must inevitably be focussed.

I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the contribution of the Commonwealth of Learning, in particular, the presence of its President and Chief

Executive Officer, Dato Professor Gajjaral Dhanarajan. In a similar vein, the ongoing support provided by the School of Communication Studies of the Nanyang Technological University, and by no means least, the United States Information Service, to this symposium.

May I wish you a most challenging and productive symposium. May you come away reeling and staggering from the enormity of the information overload that this event will surely engender.

Thank you.

To: JOE CARLOS

From: ROBERT IAU

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Opening of the Symposium on  
16 Nov. 98  
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