

**The Changing Media And Communication Education :
Obsolescence Of Content And Methodology?**

By

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AMIC ANNUAL CONFERENCE

JAKARTA, INDONESIA

JUNE 22 -24, 1995.

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Abstract

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The significant changes in communications and media in the last fifteen years have ushered in a new era of information and communication systems. The consequences have been felt in all areas of social life and on all levels of social organisation. It is inevitable that these changes would also affect the conceptual development of communication studies.

This paper examines the transformation of the research agenda for communications in response to the contemporary shifts in communication practices. It argues that this transformed agenda must inform a new communications pedagogy. Because these changes are co-existent with older, centralised media systems the analytical approaches to new media and communication technologies have split the research and education agenda.

While critical audience research has shown how these changes have impacted on centralised media, new forms of media generation (digital) coupled with dispersed forms of distribution have created new institutional contexts for media - audience interaction and intervention.

The extension and modification of disciplinary and knowledge regimes is a necessary concomitant of these changes to media. As the "content" of media is seen to be a less certain means of examining social control, the interest in meaning construction has accelerated and may be said to have overtaken the older paradigms of the media based on mass society models. In the words of John Dewey, knowledge in this new communications matrix may issue more from a "test of consequences" than from fixed rules of inquiry.

This paper will identify the general themes which characterise the paradigm shifts and research re-orientations in communications education. In particular it will track the debate as to the gains and losses in moving away from mass communication/mass culture models in communication research and education.

Introduction

"All professors of theory of communications, trained by the texts of twenty years ago (this includes me) should be pensioned off."

(Umberto Eco, *Travels in Hypereality*)

Eco's mischievous suggestion was written in 1983. More than twenty years on it is possible that the implication of his suggestion is even more relevant today. The educational contexts for the study of communications have been slow to shed the conceptual locks from older theoretical and institutional formations. Cyberspace, virtual reality and the digital reconfiguration of media machines have all made the university education sector confront, if not embrace a digital work culture.

The implications for the academic disciplines that have accompanied the growth of the older (late 19th century) communication technologies - photography, film may be unsettling. Can a film studies so heavily influenced by the aesthetics of realism (Bazin) survive the digital breakdown of the material basis for realism? What are the implications when objects no longer required for the genesis of images? New epistemological foundations for the study of images and sounds must emerge out of the collapsed boundaries between the real and the copy.

The theories of Baudrillard and Derrida should have prepared us for this eventuality. Their work, however, was largely quarantined from mainstream media studies and relegated to the realm of a radical hermeneutics. More recently, it has been influential for media analysis frameworks.

Both McLuhan and Baudrillard propose a theory of media that is at the same time a disavowal of the substance of media. Media content is a second-level interest when compared to the formal or relationship aspects of media. The language of this kind of theorising is itself both critique and barrier. It is a critique of content-control models of mass media analysis and a barrier in the intellectual passage from theory to practice.

McLuhan (whose work Baudrillard often appears to emulate) seemed most conscious of this dilemma and chose to execute his media criticism by inhabiting (and becoming) the object of his criticism.

Erupting in the midst of mass media and mass culture analysis, McLuhan's work while successfully anchored in popular readerships took longer to be assimilated into mainstream academia. The first serious attempt in recent literature is Joshua Meyerowitz's book, No Sense of Place (Meyerowitz: 85). Meyerowitz gives a prominent place to McLuhan's medium theory as a means of linking an "...analysis of media characteristics with an analysis of the structure and dynamics of everyday social interaction."

In defiance of the Baudrillard celebration and McLuhanesque parody of media hype, the "left" cultural critique was and is still intent on preserving some sense of the institutionalisation of media. The left cultural tradition in media critique has a history of sustaining an stable image of its critical object (e.g., media institutions, audiences) against the shifting ground for media analysis. The Frankfurt School position of "media as ideological closure" has been succeeded by a variety of critical positions. These range from protection of the public interest through public policy think tanks to the creation and maintenance of alternative media networks contesting dominant media. Currently we are witnessing the meltdown of both media substance and media formations. The re-rationalisation of the new media, however, has not yet fully emerged. We are on the cusp of the creation of both new

institutions for the new media and new discourses for their apprehension. As Phil Hayward notes, there is not yet a "cinema" for CD-ROM as there is for film. Video game parlours may vie for this role as the commercial basis for computer video games moves increasingly towards cultural, i.e., genre and narrative forms. A cultural discourse for the digital world is currently marked by competing vocabularies and still evolving theoretical imperatives.

There is a continuing symbiosis between media practices and social events which have grounded some of these concerns in important ways. They are reminders that no new discourse can ever be formed without referring to other perhaps older discursive frameworks. What Roland Barthes in earlier work called "intertextuality" (Barthes: 78) may now seem an innocent portrayal of what currently occurs in endless and frequent patterns of borrowings, plagiarisms, appropriations and parodies characteristic of new media. As a result, copyright and intellectual property laws are constantly in a state of revision in pursuit of new legal protocols to accommodate new forms of reproduction. The new media appear to challenge the notion of ownership and property. This is particularly the case when the domains of the private and public are crossed so frequently in the converging technologies of telephony, computing and audio-visual production.

There is also a possibility that **digitisation**, in its capacity to seamlessly manipulate image and sound, has engendered a general anxiety about the ability to communicate truthfully through the media. This connects to earlier suspicions in communication studies about the media's tendency to mobilize bias (c.f., Tuchman: 78).

Against the vision of dispersed and fragmented centralised media systems are the continuing claims to anchor our media analyses in the cultural commonalities which characterise the responses to centralised media. Television is the most salient example in this regard. The contemporary accounts of fanzines, fandom and general groupings around popular film,

television and music establish an important basis for "bottom-up" communicative interaction.

In the "reality television" stakes, the Rodney King affair suggested that a decentralised use of video (the camcorder) was *re-centralised* with traumatic effect. Video was not the arbiter of truth it was expected to be when placed in the context of legal argument. Though there are prior indications of the ambiguity of video evidence in the courts (see Cohen: 88), the Los Angeles riots which followed the King verdict confirmed a social consensus about the referents of this "event". It suggests that against the theory of the simulacra (Baudrillard: 88) a television image may have sufficient indexical strength, i.e., be believed as the accurate representation of an event, to spark an urban revolt. The initial inability to convict the LAPD police and the subsequent riots suggests a deep ambivalence about the status of television images. When called upon to buttress the social meanings these images are said to engender, it was left to a community to act upon those meanings outside the law.

Traditions of Innovation

Two theorists worthy of mention with regard to interventionist commentary on communications innovation are John Dewey and Walter Benjamin. Representing Pragmatism and Critical Marxism, Dewey and Benjamin wrote about similar moments in the history of communications though from entirely different social perspectives. Benjamin's provocative essay, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction", understood the historical moment of the 19th Century as one in which communications technology (related to reproduction of art) irrevocably turned against **tradition**. Benjamin was ambivalent about this transformation nostalgically

mourning the loss of originality while welcoming the possibilities of democratization represented by the new media.

Democracy was also a concern for John Dewey. His interest in communications sprung from a nostalgia for local democratic forms which he claimed were part of the American rural heritage lost in the trend to urbanization. Communications technologies were the expression of hope through which Dewey could express his ideological programme of **community**, an idea politically motivated by the common interests of public discourse.

Both Benjamin and Dewey's interests converge in the massive shifts of modernity - in which media and communications are seen as the constituting elements (see Murdock: 1994, Giddens: 93). They wrote about the media (and they were correct to presume it) as if the media could effect certainties. This implied a stable knowledge base and the centralizing forms of media characteristic of most of this century's communications bias. The metaphor of transmission (one to many), the control interest in "content" (persuasion) and the central regulatory and distribution organisations of media are the foundations of this bias.

Benjamin's and Dewey's interests diverge in the greater purpose of their respective discourses. Dewey's optimism saw the challenge of communications as one of evolving a strategy to **use the instrumentality of communications against itself**. Dewey wanted to find a social basis for reversing the *eclipse of the public* which he demonstrates as one of the consequences of centralizing communication systems (Dewey: 54).

Benjamin's pessimism leads him and the Frankfurt School to the opposite conclusion where communications media create new markets for popular cultural products. These, he claims, are able to deflect politics and distract the public with the results of fascism and permanent alienation .

Most of critical communications theory in this century has vacillated between the poles of Dewey's and Benjamin's thought. The variants of the Chicago School's many contributors to its idea of community grounded human agency and interaction in communications processes. The Frankfurt School's ideology critique of media, on the other hand, refused Dewey's nostalgic recovery of democratic ideals in what they saw as the long expired institutions of a local democracy (Horkheimer:47). Instead the critical theorists of the Frankfurt School invested in the idea of media's capacity for control and ideological closure from which their social pessimism would derive its force of argument.

From the late 1940's to the present, the massive changes in media and popular culture have created a sense of panic among urban intellectuals who feared a general moral decline in the general population. A variant on the transmission metaphor and content analysis of media, critical theory and its legacy depended heavily on a stable core of centralizing media for its negative effects.

As this central core of media begin to erode, however, the question arises as to whether the critique of media based on its centralised character must of necessity also erode.

Morality Tales and Media Literacy

The period between 1970 and 1990 saw a growth in the model of media literacy in communication education. This was seen as a means by which the earlier panic about centralised media could be abated through discerned and informed media education. The media literacy model found unlikely bedfellows in religious groups suspicious of television, professional educators and artists seeking to share the production medium of television through instructional video workshops.

At the peak of the interest in media literacy came the influence of cultural theorists (e.g. Roland Barthes) whose earlier work on mass culture was all but ignored because of high culture /low culture barriers in cultural theory. This move led to a substantial interest in meaning structures of the media and the rise of semiotics in the analysis of ideological codifications of everyday life in the modern world. Media literacy in communications education had effectively passed from a practice for informing consumers about the differences between good and bad tv to critical interventions in the ideological production of meaning.

As one example of a contemporary approach which has continued to emulate the pessimism of the Frankfurt School, media literacy focussed heavily on the media to the exclusion of the cultural, political and economic force of capitalism. More recently, media educators insist on moving beyond the literacy metaphor (Gruneau:91). In this work the interrelations between political and organizational contexts is seen as a key feature for understanding media and the construction of social identities. The goals of media educators of this critical persuasion are directed towards giving students the idea that the media and media analysis is a contested terrain. (There are powerful media think tanks of both the left and the right.) They argue that the embedding of media in social institutions make media education only a small part of the larger project of social enlightenment .

This position suggests a lack of responsiveness to the changes that have occurred in the media but particularly in the way publics and audiences have detached themselves from expert knowledge about the media. Public interest has shifted with the move to become more involved with the opportunities offered by new communication and information technologies. There is a growing awareness that non-expert, i.e., lay knowledge of the media in its centralised forms may make a key contribution to the project of critical cultural theory (Vitone: 91, Collins: 89).

The "Post"

The above encapsulated history of theory may appear to lead naturally to the hyphenated lexicon for the description of current trends. It is, however, a map of where media theory has been: post-Marxian, post-Freudian, post-positivist, post-mass media and of course post-modern. As theorists note (Crowley & Mitchell: 93), the use of the "post " and the hyphen is a manner of retaining the older frames of knowledge regimes and methodologies. It signifies a reluctance to fully abandon these frames of knowledge.

Another possibility, however, is that older approaches still have a role to play. Unlike master narratives, these are not meant to be universalized but may emerge out of a kind of dormancy to recover and recuperate methodological themes. Re-introduced in this manner, no approach to methodology in communication studies (old or new) should be automatically ruled out. It remains to establish, however, what difference the emergent new communication technologies have made to the research agenda, the curricula and to the activities of communication researchers. This must include the confluences of political, social and organizational change.

The centralising communications revolution had, as its parallel political world, the passing of earlier patterns of colonialist domination. The current preference is to see the collapse of communism as concomitant with the rise of the pervasiveness of a global media particularly in its most de-centralising forms - the fax machine, the vcr and parabolic devices (satellite tv) and the computer-telephony convergence.

Curiously the older global themes spawned in the wake of centralising media (e.g. the United Nations (UNESCO) sponsored plans for a new "world information order") return with a equally strident insistence on normative corrections. This occurs with a necessary detachment from and resistance to

older received paradigms (e.g., development communication). These positions tend to split around concerns (both pessimistic and optimistic) for the public interest in the new communications environment (Melody:1993) and the furthering of alternative networks (which by-pass both mainstream media and policy debates - Abrash and Egan:1992).

I would like to attempt to identify the approaches in this new agenda - either where it recuperates and re-constructs older theoretical concerns in the service of contemporary problems or where knowledge itself begins to reflect new designs of information storage and distribution.

The social construction of meaning in media

Recent theoretical overviews have suggested an agenda of sorts for a renewed theoretical base with which to approach the consequences of a new media ecology. The most general level of this shift, it is argued, occurs as a consequence of content control approaches being replaced by meaning constructing ones (Crowley and Mitchell: 1993). This may be another manner of specifying the nature of paradigm competition in communications study in which the transmission view of communication is contrasted with a ritual view. This distinction was made popular by James Carey and is now a familiar means of situating some communication practices within one of these two perspectives. The debt Carey owes (and acknowledges) to Harold Innis here is apparent in his alignment of the transmission view of communications (as social maintenance) with a spatial bias and the ritual view with a temporal bias (Carey:89, Innis: 51). Reading Carey closely we find his agenda to be indicative of the general shift referred to at the outset. Carey believes that the intellectual viability of the transmission view of communications (so dominant in American communications theory in this century) has been exhausted. It was his purpose to reinvigorate the field with

Dewey's ritual view of communication as a means of opening up most emphatically the communal and symbolic dimensions to communicative action and interaction. This was expressed in the strongest terms in the claim that "reality was constituted by communications" - by the symbolic and social worlds in which communication processes were embedded. In Carey's terms, this is the "long revolution" (c.f. Williams) of communications in which the changes in communications and western society at the end of the 19th century (alluded to earlier) have a precise morphology in the informational and post-industrial world of the late 20th century.

Cultural Studies or Communications

The intention to replace content control approaches with meaning constructing ones has had already a fertile ground in literary and cultural studies against which communication studies identified with transmission-type metaphors were often opposed. This recent proposal from within communications, then, could be seen as a late entry into the fields of the popular, the mundane, everyday life and the social and historical contexts for inquiry. It has been pushed no doubt by the massive shift in the role which media plays as part of the productive apparatus of society. The claim that the cultural studies of Raymond Williams and Stuart Hall are a variant of communications studies is a deliberate rebuff to cultural studies. It opens the argument that communications theory can re-work its own agenda by locating an interest in rejecting formulations of dualistic models (sender-receiver, encoding-decoding) for the communication of meaning. The most significant field of study at which these tensions cross is media audience research in which certain knowledge about audiences derived from

industrial models (which is really knowledge of markets) competes with audience analysis based on the broader scope of social and political contexts. Functionalist Marxist and descriptive semiotic models reconstruct audiences as active ("oppositional/negotiated meanings" - Fiske: 87) or "narratively positioned" (as in news discourses - Morley: 82). In a methodological shift away from marketing, audience study moved to use ethnographic - like methodologies to produce studies of "situated" moments of media consumption (Morley: 86, Radway: 84).

The radical edge of these approaches have begun to question the containment of meaning (however variable these meanings have been shown to be for different groups and situations) within the boundaries circumscribed by social power and hierarchy. As audiences can be shown to have cut loose from the imposed hierarchies of access and privilege evidenced by a diversity of behaviours and meanings currently in play, these examples, if only transitionally, are, it is claimed (Ang: 93) the expression of social power. The question of meaning or what sense audiences make of various media would therefore be largely *indeterminable* along the older lines suggested by the cultural Marxists and audience ethnographies.

The point here is to consider the paradigmatic competition for the audience research agenda as an indication of the fluid methodologies and purposes which currently characterise this field of study. From institutional (government /industrial/ market studies) through ethnographic and critical /theoretical accounts, it is apparent that no agreement between policy, social scientific and cultural theory scholars is either possible or necessarily desirable.

It suggests that knowledge construction in this crucial area of media studies, in its continuous contestation of approaches, has become emblematic for the study of communications as a whole.

Our educational approaches, then, should endeavor to open the process of theorising the audience and other equally important conceptual problems in communications to their appropriate purpose in which the "test of consequences" (to return to Dewey's phrase) provides a measure of the use and interest of this process. This may include the possibility and usefulness of a new empirics (Liebs and Katz: 1990), a recognition of contingency and localism in the interpretation of media (Allor: 88, Ang: 91, Hartly: 92.) and a fuller respect for creative responses of fandom and other groupings.

Breaking the hold of mass culture theory would seem to be the key issue in the kind of paradigmatic conflict evidenced in media audience analysis. Significant events and unintended consequences relating to the use of new communications media provides ample evidence for a world of contingent and local frameworks for media use. We have many examples of resistance to Western models of journalism from non-western communities (development and environmental journalism were highlighted at last year's Asian Mass Communications Research and Information Centre (AMIC) conference in Bangkok, c.f., Dixit: 94, Dalhan 94). The popularity of soap and romance novels (c.f. Radway: 84), the use of the cassette in Iran and India (c.f. Manuel: 1993), the fax machine in Tienanmen square, and the role of the internet in the organisational structure of those advocating violence in the Oklahoma bombing. These examples all strongly suggest a profound social transformation related to changing modes of information and communication.

Technological convergence and social diversity

Last year's Asian Mass Communication Research and Information Centre (AMIC) conference in Bangkok (June:1994) thematised *convergence* while the International Communications Association (ICA) held one month later in Sydney thematised *diversity*. While these themes appear to contradict one another, Arjun Appadurai (Appadurai: 93) argues differently. he suggests that the opposition between cultural fragmentation and post-modernist homogeneity is a problem of information scrambled within social relations destabilised by transnational and transcultural movements (c.f., Carey: 93). Appadurai's distinctions, in their paradoxical demands on communities, sees convergence and diversity as a complementary opposition. In his view, this may permit a new ecology to emerge that radically places technological convergence in a direct and determinate relationship to social diversity. His argument proceeds as follows:

Post-modernist homogeneity is a time-structured problem in which the links between the horizon of the future and the chaotic present is given a linear narratively constructed projection. The future is imagined to exist as an antidote to the chaos of the present. Hence the possibility of a simultaneous demand for diversity in the context of an increasing perception of homogeneity. The inverse of this construction may also be projected if we accept that capitalism has always been a global system co-existent with colonialism (Flew: 94). Relationships within what is now termed "postcolonialism" allows for a wider range of judgements and definitions about the so-called first and third worlds. The discrediting of older paradigms of development and progress conceived for the colonial context hoped to change the approach to economic independence and cultural autonomy. In this regard, the idea of global homogeneity has *failed to* account sufficiently for diverse local networks and knowledges.

(The transformation of the development communication paradigm is discussed later in this paper.)

Electronic communication and the postmodern

The central role of the computer and computer networks in the new media ecology has opened the agenda to what Mark Poster has described as the mode of information (Poster: 1990). Poster's is a postmodernist account of electronic communication. He argues that the mode of information (the new communications technologies) radically reshapes the subject in a new language of technology. The subject is split across numerous discourses experiencing multiple, dispersed and above all unstable identities. If these stabilize around alternative movements, politics or lifestyles Poster argues that a strong challenge may arise against traditional authorities. The general rule governing *effect* in this post-mass mediated world is transition. According to Poster, stable social or political identities are short-lived phenomena and most attempts to restrict the definition of social or political reality for anyone by any authority is doomed to fail.

If computer networks can de-stabilize, however, they can also serve to maintain social and cultural institutions. This double-sided character is a familiar theme of computer and technological innovation as a whole. While computer networks have been cast as having an open and playful potential there is also the possibility for abuse of privacy and the security issues this implies.

Risk Communication

The theme of the double-edge of communications technology emerges strongly in William Leiss's work on risk communication (Leiss: 93.) I include Leiss's work here because it demonstrates a return to older theory applied within a new knowledge framework to a new set of problems. The problem area is called *risk communication* and the problem is one related to the "persuasive" form which risk communications must take. The media's representation of risk may invariably affect the public's perceptions of risk in both negative and positive ways. Leiss's task was to develop a model of risk communication cognizant of its ambivalence.

Leiss develops his argument by referring first to older strands of approaches and problems generally grouped under the terms "persuasion and propaganda". Citing Lasswell's famous dictum "Who says what in which channel to Whom and with what Effect", Leiss quotes Lasswell's breakdown of the communication act: (i) control analysis - study the 'who' looking into factors that guide the act of communication.

(ii) content analysis which includes

(a) media analysis - radio, press, film.

(b) audience analysis - persons reached by the media and

(c) effect analysis - assessing the impact upon audiences

The representation of message transmission is attributed by Leiss to Shannon and Weaver and is known as the Mathematical Theory of Communication.

Leiss gives an account of how Weaver "humanized" Shannon's mathematical theory by adding elements (signal, noise, transmitting and receiving devices) and then further demonstrates how this theory may be adapted for an account of an institutionalised communications process exemplified by the advertising practices.

Leiss's current interest is risk communication which he defines as "...any purposeful exchange of information about health or environmental risk

between interested parties" (Leiss:93). The definition implicates both public policy and the public interest.

Leiss is keen to demonstrate how the mathematical theory of communication can be adapted to clarify problems in the communication processes regarding messages about risk. His framing question is, "How could scientists get the public to understand expert conception of risk?"

Leiss asks how Shannon and Weaver's communication theory model breaks down this large problem into a number of smaller more manageable problems. These are described at the levels of source, channel, message, and receiver.

A further refinement of this model is offered by Leiss and Krewski emphasising language type (expert versus lay) and the communication flows that result.

The point here is an instructive one for innovators in communication education. Leiss is able to demonstrate that an older theory, often criticised and now considered largely obsolete, can still make a substantial contribution to the resolution of certain communication problems. The successful implementation of this older model depended on its readaptation and extension according to the character and complexity of contemporary institutional practices and problems.

The Public Interest

The problem of risk communication engaged the issue of cross-over between two spheres of communication - expert and public. The question of the public

interest has a long history within communications (Ferguson: 1990; Blumler: 1992; Keane: 1991). Media staked out a wide range of practical engagements serving industrial goals, policy goals, social and political goals and the more general purpose of empowerment.

In the earlier part of this century, communications was seen as a science to assess, in an objective fashion, the relationship between media and society. While the attempts to lock communications into this epistemic model were fraught with difficulty, continuous interest in the critique of media have attempted to link social and theoretical ideas with institutional and empirical analyses of media. The older vocabularies of media analysis invoke the questions of control of the media. Frequently this debate revolves around state versus private control of the media. In either case some argument has always been sustained around a special protection that should be afforded to the media as the preserve of the public interest.

The new communications situation calls this commitment into question particularly in light of questionable institutional and work practices of media organisations which have brought suspicion about the capacity of media to serve the public interest. The older vocabularies around media and public interest assumed a homogeneity of culture and nationality within which a strong consensual notion of the public could operate. With the disintegration of this condition and the emergent differential nature of social life, a new vocabulary is needed to describe and analyze the media-society relationship. In his recent work, well-known media theorist Denis Mcquail (Mcquail: 1993) poses the key questions of how the new normative expectations and processes for accountability will be handled. The answers are elusive but within the older frameworks of ownership, regulation, news quality and state security, Mcquail proposes that issues related to freedom, diversity, information quality, and the maintenance of social and cultural order be

considered. Mcquail maps these in relation to the conditions which currently force a reappraisal of the older agenda in mass media theory. These include:

- (1) the proliferation of media in their technical and institutional forms as well as content;
- (2) the absence of any unitary framework of norms to apply to any particular national 'media system';
- (3) the fact of convergence and the fading boundaries between print broadcast and telecommunications affecting regulation and media policy;
- (4) increasing transnational character of media ownership, financing, organization, production, distribution, content, reception and regulation;
- (5) less sovereignty over media operations and issues of diversity, access, cultural autonomy, integrity and identity are highlighted;
- (6) growing conglomeration of media, concentration of ownership through production stages and across various media and other businesses;
- (7) loss of clear national consensus about the media's public role and less public regulation with more policy by market forces;
- (8) Increased commercialisation and attacks on public service media has meant more thought about the reasons for public intervention and support;
- (9) Media industry growth has resulted in greater professionalisation with expanded media education and new forms of accountability (Macquail: 93).

Mcquail's proposals for the application of normative theory to the media is heavily qualified by contingent definitions of the public interest. He holds to the notion that the media must be generally accountable to the public interest but that both the basis for accountability and the purpose of media will vary considerably from from social context to another.

For the researcher and educator, the construction of a social theory of media will benefit by considering the modifications suggested by Mcquail though it would appear that a number of these issues have been longstanding ones, e.g., freedom, media ownership, social maintenance. The difference that the new

media make is that they do not suggest a change in the content of the norms but in the priorities and force ascribed to them.

The outcome of these debates is by no means certain. For example, despite the continued existence of a national media in many places, the increase in alternative channels may have lessened the need for dominant media. Also, increased concentration in media ownership and the greater potential for competition may lessen the prospect of media monopoly. More tv and radio channels may result in more diversity though the quality of this diversity remains suspect. The general rule appears to be that few recommendations divorced from local institutions about media's social responsibility can be made.

Electronic Networks and the Transformation of Communication Education

The new communication and information technologies have suggested new means of accessing knowledge. The question is how these will affect the definition of knowledge. This question has been addressed in an earlier era of reflection on media change by Marshall McLuhan. At that time, McLuhan argued persuasively for a profound need to reevaluate thinking and knowledge production as a consequence of the move from print-centred to electronic-centred communication. While McLuhan's work was driven by a special interest in television, current media have placed television as one of several media serving knowledge creation and distribution.

Bill Melody provides an account of the relations and problems suggested by the wholesale adoption of new communication technologies in wealthy countries and the recommendation of their adoption in less developed countries (Melody: 93). With the idea of information as the *stock* of contemporary social life and communication as the means by which it *flows*, Melody argues for the centrality of information systems to all aspects of

sustainable social life. He argues further that recent and massive changes in the technological capacity for information gathering, storage, retrieval, processing and transmission will make these societies dependent upon complex electronic information and communication networks. These information societies will allocate a major portion of their resources on information and communication activities (Melody: 93).

The implications for societies engaged in these processes are profound but Melody argues they may be greatest in the realm of knowledge production. Tracking his argument through the work of three Canadian theorists, Innis, McLuhan and Dallas Smythe, Melody supports their claim that changes in society are associated with changes in the dominant communication technologies. For Innis, the knowledge of any particular society was defined and structured as a feature of its technological forms and institutional contexts. These forms and contexts linked communications media to the emergence, maintenance and decline of civilizations. McLuhan's level of analysis was aimed at the individual -media relationship. If knowledge and information was a feature of changing communications technologies, the consequences would be discerned at the micro-communicational moment between individual and medium. Unlike both McLuhan and Innis, Melody suggests that Smythe located his analysis of media at the level of institution (and this is where Melody's own work is situated). Smythe was interested in the specific conditions under which new communication technologies were introduced and consolidated within institutional arrangements. He questioned the appropriateness of these arrangements and in particular the problem of "forced consumption" where consumer choice related to new information and communication commodities is restricted or absent. Melody's work is, in this respect, a legacy of one of Smythe's analytical commitments. As director of the Centre for International Research on Communication and Information Technologies (CIRCIT), Melody was head

of one of the most influential communications policy think tanks in Australia. In this role, Melody consistently warned of potential problems as new facilities for the flow and distribution of information increased. For example:

- (1) More information did not mean better decision-making on the part of corporations.
- (2) More information makes planning more difficult resulting in a reduction of planning horizons.
- (3) More information has introduced complexity, instability and uncertainty into economic and social systems and made their understanding and control more difficult.
- 4) Vast information processing systems incur large administrative costs. This leads to greater concentration in industry and imbalances in the competitive capacities of industries. More mergers, monopolies and concentrations of ownership result.

Melody's argument is a cautionary tale about the downside to the information revolution. Its application to knowledge producing institutions e.g., educational institutions may be instructive. Innis's concept of "monopoly of knowledge" is most directly adaptable to Melody's characterization of the spheres of information production and control.

Information Overload

Melody defines information overload as the point when the sheer volume of information supply vastly exceeds that which can be individually assessed. He is keen to assert that this is in fact the current state of affairs in the major institutions in government and industry which rely on information. It has led to a wholesale creation of a new class of specialists in the information processing industry - the professional advisers, consultants, etc. who sort

through and select appropriate data for the use and context intended. Older professions e.g., librarianship require new roles in relation to this need demanded by information overload.

For the educator in communications the implications may be onerous. It suggests that methodologies of scholarship are affected by the very transformations of the practices under investigation, e.g., communication networks, institutional changes, educational work practices. For example, the access to large data bases may benefit senior professors on large research grants. Students still needing to access physical books from library shelves are disadvantaged particularly where those collections are frequently cut back. Significantly the increase in information may not mean an automatic increase in knowledge. Understanding the difference between knowledge and information is best thought through the Innisian distinction between time-bound and space-bound communication corresponding roughly to oral and written communication. Religious systems and their oral traditions are the best examples of knowledge systems in which the communication forms insure that information and knowledge coincide. Knowledge systems characteristic of this orality have the most chance of creating a context for the communication of knowledge. In the context of contemporary education it may imply that the older forms of face-to-face interaction between professor and student with the opportunities for student participation in discussion and debate are the best assurances for the creation of a knowledge quotient. Notwithstanding the advances made within the modalities of distance education, the tendency has been to overvalue information technology to the detriment of communication values involved in these practices. The current wisdom in distance education models tends to recommend a balance between information seeking practices and interaction between tutor and student (Bates: 1990).

Communication and Development

Because of the special interest AMIC has had in communication and development (Jayaweera and Amunugama eds.: 1987), I will conclude the paper with this topic. This is one further area of communications education which has been transformed by the both contemporary media and changing theoretical and research priorities. I will draw on the work of Majid Tehranian (Tehranian: 1993) to punctuate the argument of this paper within this field of communications study: that the erosion of centralising systems of communication have made for major shifts in the way communications and media are practiced and analysed.

Tehranian recounts the history of development communication - its methods and theories and the manner in which it has changed. It may no longer be useful to maintain the same nomenclature except as a shorthand to identify that earlier work from the post-World War II period through the sixties and seventies. Tehranian is keen to emphasise the changed boundaries initially circumscribed by the West in relation to less developed countries. These boundaries have effectively resulted in a major shift in the differentiation between the less developed and more developed nations. Not incidental to this shift is a substantial re-theorisation of the nation - state - its definition and operation (Anderson: 83, Bhabha: 90).

Tehranian does well to develop endogenous as opposed to exogenous standards against which the development of a nation might be considered. This is important to the earlier arguments I have developed in this paper underlining the general shift away from centralising discourses of media and media analysis. Tehranian understands development as a human-centred activity even as new communication technologies are seen to co-exist with

traditional services. No account of communication development is seen as separate from the development of democratic institutions in all realms of social and economic life.

These are about the only general principles which Terhanian can or will enunciate. The lesson that is offered suggests a very uneven and complex picture when attempting to understand the range of current development indicators among less developed nations. This also applies to the manner by which more developed nations have responded to this situation. There seems no question that in the last three decades the rich have got richer and the poor have got poorer. This applies as much between countries as within countries (UNDP: 1990-92). Globalisation has appeared to work in favour of this trend towards increasing the gap between rich and poor (a result suggested by Melody's work).

In a manner of speaking, Terhanian suspends his subject between modernity and post-modernity as if the conditions under which norms of development theory must succeed are served by neither. Modernity has been the context in which the competing theories of modernization and dependency have been produced. Terhanian sees this opposition supplanted in the post-cold war era by an opposition between totalitarian and communitarian orientations. If totalitarian models emphasise "social order" as a precondition for development, the communitarians see the restoration of 'community' as both the pre-condition and the goal of development.

Similarly Tehranian maps a trajectory for the evolution of research paradigms affecting theory formation in development communication. Modifying Giddens's model of human agency(Giddens:1990), it is Tehranian's claim that the linguistic-hermeneutic framework provides the best opportunity to model human action and conduct. The move is a significant one in the context of social science models which have previously dominated

development communications with models of determinate social structures, systems of communicative control and passive human behaviours.

In moving to the domain of policy, Tehranian outlines the policy options adopted by various *colours* of the political spectrum. The strategy deployed in the argument articulates internal development policies with external communication policies over time. Perhaps the salient feature of this model is the historical nature of this articulation despite a political map which links fixed ideological orientations with development approaches. The varied economic growth of less developed nations is reflected by the three development communication theories alluded to earlier.

- (1) The modernization approach supports the growth in those countries whose high accumulation strategies have resulted in industrial leaps.
- (2) The dependency approach emphasises the stress on economic, political and cultural systems as a result of the high accumulation strategy.
- (3) The communitarian approach looks to alternative paths to the ones already set by earlier development paradigms to stress participatory communication and appropriate technologies.

Tehranian sees a trend though not a blueprint for successful stages of development. The process, he argues, begins with high accumulation (of capital) and eventually is modified by a stage of "high mobilization" involving a redistribution of wealth and reinvestment in social services. Both these stages require a third or "corrective" stage of "integration" - a phase of cultural maintenance in which communications and media play a central role. These stages appear not be linear in their appearance - cultural maintenance, for example may be either a cause or effect of development communication.

Conclusion

In the conclusion to this modeling of development communication, Tehranian echoes theoretical principles consistent with those articulated earlier in relation to media and audience analysis, the public interest, and the knowledge implications of the new communication and information technologies. These are mainly involved with indeterminate accounts of human agency and the move from a centralising mass media to the priorities of interpersonal and alternative communication networks. Development theory above all has moved from an emphasis on physical development to human development and in a way this stands for the most salient feature of change in each of the research domains considered.

The debate between those media theorists whose work is anchored in centralised forms of media and those who re-theorise their critical practices in the context of new media is set to continue for some time. Media analysts have, for some time, understood the importance of "knowing" the constituency to which their theories pertained. They noted the creative and innovative approaches taken by individual members of a mass audience to the media products they enjoyed. In some ways the new communications technologies enhance the diversity of responses to centralised media. But in the same moment, they may serve to undermine centralised media and in so doing undermine the fabric of mass media communities and the communalising discourses which accompany them.

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