

Critical Forum

Media and the American Mind: 25 Years Later

Jack Lule

When Sue Curry Jansen came to me with the idea for a Critical Forum on Daniel Czitrom's *Media and the American Mind*, I went to the bookcase and pulled out my copy. The book, which had been published relatively recently when I started doctoral work in 1984, had been required for the mass comm theory class. For an erstwhile reporter, the book had offered immediate confirmation of my decision to return to graduate school. Scholarly study of the media could be hugely interesting and important. I felt *the weight* of what Czitrom was attempting then—and now. If you have not looked at it in a while, I hope the Forum inspires you too to pull out your own copy.

The Forum has grown in size from Sue's original conception. Hanno Hardt learned of the project and contributed an essay. And while we were hoping that Daniel Czitrom himself would submit an essay, we could not count on it. But Daniel very graciously offered us his thoughts. A note thus on the referencing: Because the contributors cite so many of the same works, we have combined the references at the end of the Forum.

Finally, a note of thanks: As you know, the journal is changing editorial hands, and this will be the last issue for Linda Steiner and me. I want to thank Linda for the opportunity to create the Critical Forum and to thank you, my colleagues, for all the inspiring ideas, wise contributions, and kind words. It was truly a pleasure.

Jack Lule is Associate Editor of *Critical Studies in Media Communication* and the Joseph B. McFadden Distinguished Professor of Journalism at Lehigh University, Bethlehem, Penn. Correspondence to: Jack Lule, Department of Journalism & Communication, 33 Coppee Drive, Lehigh University, Bethlehem, PA 18015, USA; Email: jack.lule@lehigh.edu

Critical Forum

History Matters

Sue Curry Jansen

When Daniel J. Czitrom conceived *Media and the American Mind*, media scholarship was dominated, even defined, by a behavioral science orientation (“effects” research). As a result, the field was indifferent to historical inquiry. The terrain was essentially unmapped. This gave Czitrom exceptional freedom to conceptualize the field but also, as he noted in his “Preface,” an “eerie sense of intellectual isolation” (p. xiii).

Much has changed in the past quarter century. The Internet, mobile telephony, digital video, advances in computer and satellite technologies, and consolidation of media ownership and control have combined to transform how and what we know. “Effects” research no longer dominates media and communication scholarship. “Culture” has been discovered and mainstreamed as cultural studies. The poverty of history and theory in the field has been decisively documented (Hardt, 1992); and some serious efforts to remediate the deficit have been made (Schiller, 1996; Sproule, 1997; Peters, 1999; Starr, 2004 and others).

Even more significantly, however, the so-called “communication turn” in contemporary scholarship, which gained momentum in the mid-1980s, has displaced communication researchers as the primary stakeholders in media scholarship. Sociology pioneered scholarly study of mass media in both Europe and America, but this research has never been central to sociology’s dominant paradigmatic concerns. As electronic media have saturated and increasingly defined American culture and dire predictions about the relevance and future of print have gained currency, however, language and literature scholars have increasingly embraced the postmodern and their students’ flight from the book, focusing instead on popular culture, film, the Internet, technologies of writing, and other media. Political scientists, recognizing the centrality of mass media to democracy, international relations and diplomacy, the origins of the nation-state, the decline of the public sphere, and political campaigning and voting behavior, now study media as well as politics. Historians confront mass-mediated versions of the past as pervasive sources of error and resistance among students. At deeper levels, mediation is also

Sue Curry Jansen is Professor of Media and Communication at Muhlenberg College. Correspondence to: Sue Curry Jansen, Media and Communication Department, 2400 Chew Street, Allentown, Pennsylvania 18104, USA. Email: jansen@muhlenberg.edu

increasingly recognized as a persistent form of misdirection in historiography as inquiries into structures and processes of cultural production reveal that even “primary sources,” newspapers, documents, and other artifacts, bear the imprimatur of human agency: prior censorships, myth-making, and political and/or commercial imperatives. Philosophers, psychologists, economists, computer scientists, even religious scholars now find that media impinge deeply upon their subjects. In short, whether we like it or not, media and communication are now considered too important for any single discipline to claim.

Czitrom’s map still works because he anticipates many of these developments. His deeply sourced studies of the history and reception of the telegraph, motion pictures, and radio demonstrate that the distinction between communication and culture eroded steadily during the twentieth century, supporting his thesis that, “Modern media have become integral to both the conception and reality of culture, especially popular culture” (p. xii). That is, media have become significant constituents of the American mind. In some sectors of contemporary life such as electoral politics, consumerism, performances of gender identities, sport and leisure, they have become definitive constituents.

Czitrom’s prescience attests not only to his analytic and interpretive skills, but also to the crucial importance of historical inquiry in identifying cultural patterns and trends. By extension, it also underscores the cost of ignoring history. If communication scholars had fully appreciated and pursued Czitrom’s thesis in the early 1980s, the field might have been at the cutting edge of the communication turn in scholarship, instead of finding itself positioned, ironically, at the periphery.

Foresight also permeates Czitrom’s specific claims. For example, interdisciplinary renewal of interest in John Dewey and pragmatism was just beginning when the book was written; yet Czitrom’s assessment of Dewey’s contributions to communication scholarship remains the best short exegesis available, although subsequent scholarship has ascribed more influence to William James and George Herbert Mead in the geneses of the thought of Dewey and Robert Park (Cook, 1993; Westbrook, 1991). Czitrom also cuts deftly through the muddle that once conflated the work of Harold Innis and Marshall McLuhan, even though he crafted his assessment before the sun had fully set on the “McLuhancy” craze of the 1960s and 1970s.

Czitrom’s accounts of the dead ends, power struggles, and unanticipated innovations that led to the commercial development of the telegraph, motion picture, radio—and at least by implication, television—make him acutely aware of the folly of predicting future technological developments; and his highly qualified forays into that arena in the “Epilogue” are predictably the most dated aspect of the book, albeit no more dated than the predictions made by Bill Gates and Steve Jobs in the early 1980s when the PC revolution was still in its infancy.

A revolution in feminist scholarship in communication as well as history also took place during this period, which places gender at the center of studies of communication technology (Balsamo, 1996; Cockburn, 1985; Gray, 1992; Jansen, 1989; Rakow, 1992; Wajcman, 1991, and many others). Czitrom’s sensitivity to issues of race, gender and class was ahead of the field in the early 1980s; however, much humanistic

communication scholarship now takes as a founding premise Stuart Hall's (1988, p. 26) claim that, "*all* social practices and forms of domination—including the politics of the Left—are always inscribed in and to some extent secured by sexual identity and positioning."

Czitrom acknowledged "frustration at barely having scratched the surface," and expressed the hope that his work might encourage others to begin to fill the void", noting that the: "Metahistorical and epistemological questions concerning how new media reshape our perceptions of the past and the contours of knowledge itself remain almost totally unexplored" (p. xiii). A substantial amount of interdisciplinary scholarship is now dedicated to exploring these contours. Unlike Czitrom's work, however, much of it tends to focus on media texts while ignoring their material underpinnings—the political economy of culture production including the social structures of media organizations, labor processes, law and policy, as well as the social constituents of media reception. These are areas where communication scholarship has made some of its strongest contributions and, in my judgment, still possesses potential to exercise some interdisciplinary intellectual leadership.

The beauty of this book is that it raises big questions from the bottom up through compelling narratives about the social forces and historical figures that shaped the modern media environment and humanistic communication scholarship (Dewey, Cooley, Park, Innis, McLuhan). The book not only explains the origins and early reception of media, but even provides some rudimentary explanations of their engineering; moreover, in doing so, it serves as an exemplar of scholarly research.

Slowly rereading *Media and the American Mind*, to assess it through the lens of subsequent developments in communication and culture, has significantly amplified my respect for Czitrom's singular achievement. The fact that the book grew out of a dissertation is both inspiring and daunting. The dazzling display of humane learning, imaginative conceptual reach, depth of archival sourcing, and judicious critical judgments are what a reader might hope to find in a book that represents the culmination of a life's work—an opus magnum, not a debut performance.

Critical Forum

Living Up to *Media and the American Mind*

David W. Park

When *Media and the American Mind* was published in 1982, it quickly distinguished itself by treating both the history of the media (“Part One: Contemporary Reactions to Three New Media”) and the history of the study of the media (“Part Two: Theorists of Modern Communication”) with an exceptional feel for context. Consideration of media as historical artifacts was a significant accomplishment, but the more stunning element in the book was that this history of the media was linked to a tidy history of thought and research about the media. In this vein, Czitrom traced the ideas of Robert Park, Charles Horton Cooley, and John Dewey to the “revolution in late-nineteenth century journalism,” (p. 92), connected the rise of the Bureau of Applied Social Research to the rise of the marketing industry and of the medium of radio (pp. 125–131), and showed how Marshall McLuhan’s substitution of “mythology for history” (p. 280) could be seen at work in his consideration of the place of television in the 1960s. By casting a historical and critical eye on the history of the study of communication, Czitrom attempted to be a kind of anti-McLuhan, supplying history where once there had been myth.

Czitrom’s book is notable for many things, but I will focus on how Czitrom’s choice of theorists to profile—including Charles Horton Cooley, John Dewey, Robert Park, Paul Lazarsfeld, Harold Innis, and Marshall McLuhan—involved an unorthodox definition of the field of media studies. This is a factor that sets Czitrom apart from others who have addressed the history of the study of the media. Czitrom tells a story of thought about the media that involves almost no scholars in communication departments. This is very different from the kind of history of the study of communication that would come from an uncritical booster of the communication ‘discipline.’ At all turns, Czitrom seems much more interested in enlarging our sense of how media can be considered than in developing an all too usable history of the field’s past. Granted, Czitrom’s choices are open to criticism from many quarters. In

David W. Park is Assistant Professor in the Department of Communication at Lake Forest College. Correspondence to: David W. Park, Department of Communication, Lake Forest College, 555N. Sheridan Road, Lake Forest, IL, USA; Email: park@lakeforest.edu

his profiles of media theorists, there are few if any substantive reference to the ideas of women or to Marxist thought. Still, the choices he makes indicate a broad view of communication and of the media, laudably nonchalant about—and frequently critical of—the limits of mainstream communication research.

Ideas from the sociology of science can help us to understand the significance of Czitrom's broader view. The sociology of science has given us a good sense of how, over time, scientific fields tend to become more focused on particular ways of conceptualizing the phenomena they address. Richard Whitley refers to what he calls the "cognitive institutionalization" at work in scientific fields. This cognitive institutionalization involves two major related aspects. First, it refers to the degree of consensus and clarity of formulation, criteria of problem relevance, definition, and acceptability of solutions as well as the appropriate techniques used and instrumentation. Second, it defines the activity of a scientist in terms of the consensus (Whitley, 1974, p. 72).

As the field of communication becomes more highly institutionalized, we can expect the study of communication to become more predictable, standardized, and tightly coordinated. In 1982, as the field of communication was already well along in the process of institutionalization, *Media and the American Mind* gave us a productive heresy from an historian who felt little reason to play by the games inside the field of communication. If, as John Durham Peters has claimed, "in the crunch between institution and intellect, the latter historically has lost" (1986, p. 528) in the field of communication, Czitrom provides a victory for the side of intellect.

One lesson here concerns the place of reflexivity in scholarship. A basic assumption that informs *Media and the American Mind* is that it is important to understand the structures and meanings that play direct and indirect roles in the development of the ideas we use in our field. Pierre Bourdieu argued that reflexivity would give sociologists tools for understanding how "[e]ach field calls forth and gives life to a specific form of interest, a specific illusion, as tacit recognition of the value of the stakes of the game and as practical mastery of its rules" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 117). Let us enlist *Media and the American Mind* into this movement for reflexivity. By telling us the history of the study of the media in three chapters, Czitrom was one of the earliest to make explicit the interests at work in the field on which media research is played out. Providing us with the biographical, institutional, and cultural backgrounds of ideas about the media, Czitrom shows us the interests and powers at work behind intellectual regimes that, within communication departments, are often thought of in ahistorical terms.

I suggest that we pick up where Czitrom left off. Remaining true to Czitrom's goals should involve maintaining a broad sense of what media research can be, and a good dose of reflexivity, so as to gain perspective on the stakes in our own games. This becomes particularly relevant as the study of media begins more fully to respond to the development of the Internet.

When examining *Media and the American Mind* today, I find myself wondering what this book would look like if it had a chapter on the history of the Internet, and a corresponding chapter concerning ideas about the Internet, along with an account of

the structural and symbolic space those ideas occupy. In his epilogue to *Media and the American Mind*, Czitrom remarked that,

the semantic ambiguities once associated with the word *communication* now seem to have regrouped around that increasingly opaque term, *the media*. Much of the discourse about the media, in learned journals as well as informal conversation, suffers from fuzziness, lack of clarity, and a jumble of definitions (p. 183, ital. in orig.).

The same semantic ambiguity can be found in the discourse (scholarly or not) concerning the Internet (or ‘computer-mediated communication,’ or ‘new media’) today. We see this semantic ambiguity playing out in the field’s frequent attempts to move into a study of the Internet.

The connection between media studies and the Internet has quickly registered an effect on some of our journals’ and organizations’ names. The Internet was a dramatic development within the field of communication, moving many of us from ‘mass communication’ to ‘media communication.’ Surveying the growth of Internet studies, Steve Jones offers cautious reflections on how Internet studies might best proceed. Among other things, Jones suggests that “we must understand Internet studies’ history in the context of a larger multidisciplinary project to understand the consequences of media and communication” (2005, p. 234). He also claims that it is important “that Internet studies establish the grounds of its history on its own terms, a history encompassing the broader notion of technologically and electronically networked communication” (2005, p. 234). Overall, Jones advises reflexivity about this field of study, and a broad sense of what the academic project is in the first place.

This is very much consistent with Czitrom’s approach in *Media and the American Mind*. Taken together, Jones and Czitrom (one explicitly, the other implicitly) tell us that simply taking the ideas that were developed in the age of ‘mass communication’ research, and applying them en masse to the domain of the Internet and other new media is simply not good enough. We will best proceed by remaining reflexive, and keeping in mind the institutional and cultural constraints through which we operate. We can be certain that changes in how we study communication will *not* come as a direct result in changes in technology. As the study of communication begins to chart the new media territory unavailable to Daniel Czitrom in 1982—the last 25 years have brought plenty of it—the integration of these new media into the domain will require continued vigilance, lest we succumb merely to the institutional advancement of the study of the media.

By giving us a broad picture of the domain of media studies and a critical sense of the history of ideas relating to that domain, Czitrom has given us the tools we will need to continue this tremendous project of understanding the consequences of media and communication. Now, it is up to us to live up to Czitrom’s implicit challenge.

Critical Forum

Daniel Czitrom, James W. Carey, and the Chicago School

Jefferson Pooley

In this short essay, I want to make two claims. The first is that Part Two of *Media and the American Mind* is profoundly influenced by James W. Carey's approach to communication research and its history. The second claim follows from the first: *Media* is as much a brief for an interpretivist social science as it is, by self-description, an intellectual history. By saying this, I do not mean to dismiss the book, nor to downplay its status as one of the only serious and rigorous histories of the field. Were he writing the book today, Czitrom might still experience the "eerie sense of intellectual isolation" he felt 25 years ago (p. xiii). Unlike the thin and self-serving histories that the book displaced—written, most often, by key figures in the would-be discipline—*Media* furnished the context from which the field's governing ideas emerged. Here I apply that same contextualizing impulse to Czitrom's book itself.

James Carey, of course, has made an enormous impact on the field in America. Partly this is due to his graceful prose, but his influence derives as much from the field-specific voice he gave to a methodological dissent issued across the social sciences in the 1970s. With more or less force, every social science discipline registered a protest against the confident scientism of the postwar decades—a backlash against natural science envy and blind faith in quantitative methods. In each field, insurgents elevated history and particularity over explanation and the search for timeless laws. To their opponents they affixed pejoratives like "positivist" and "behaviorist." The new, more humanist and interpretive social science drew upon, and contributed to, a much broader recognition across many fields that knowledge and interest are entangled with one another.

The dissent, of course, was partly political, and often dovetailed with the New Left critique of Cold War liberalism and the putatively "objective" scholarship that it underwrote. But the 1970s interpretive turn in method was not in every case aligned with leftist politics. In mass communication research, Marxists like Dallas Smythe

Jefferson Pooley is Assistant Professor of Media & Communication at Muhlenberg College. Correspondence to: Jefferson Pooley, Muhlenberg College, 2400 Chew St., Allentown, PA 18102, USA; Email: pooley@muhlenberg.edu

and Herbert Schiller clung to a more-or-less traditional picture of social science, while political moderates like Carey advanced the interpretive cause.

Carey's famous "cultural approach to communication" is, then, just one among many such interpretive programs of the period. His version is an original mixture of pragmatism and various bits of the phenomenological tradition, but its outsized role within communication research owes a great deal to his role as translator for a field notably bereft—then and now—of broad intellectual literacy. Carey (1989) places himself on the far side of the "ragged ambulating ridge dividing the Enlightenment from the Counter-Enlightenment—Descartes from Vico, if we need names" (p. 70). He has in mind the Cartesian model of the individual knower, set against the view that the world we know is the world we make, together. In methodological terms, for Carey (leaning heavily on Clifford Geertz) the task of social science cannot be to grasp some mind-independent reality, but instead must be to reconstruct the meanings people make collectively, through symbol—"to try to find out what other people are up to" (p. 85). Human individuality, to Carey, is bound up in symbolic interaction, and the very persistence of societies depends on this ongoing, expressive back-and-forth. For Carey, then, the methodological is the political: the deeper purpose of communication is to maintain fragile cultures, in the ritual sense of the "sacred ceremony that draws persons together in fellowship and commonality" (p. 43).

It is not surprising that Carey turned to intellectual history to illustrate what he calls "the fundamental divide among communications scholars" (p. 73). He was, in the 1970s, an insurgent, fighting to break the monopoly held by the field's long-dominant behavioral science approach. What he did, of course, was to narrate an alternative history centered on Charles Horton Cooley, John Dewey and the Chicago School of sociology—identified by Carey as a rich tradition of thinking about communication that was, however, swept aside by the emerging "effects" tradition in the late 1930s and quickly obliterated from the field's memory. Carey had recast that "fundamental divide" in historical terms, with his particular version of the Chicago School asked to stand in for interpretive communication research. Dewey, Cooley and Park furnished Carey with an eminently usable past, displaced and recoverable—"buried treasure," to borrow Kurt Danziger's (1990) term (p. 178).

In Carey's (1989, 1996) retellings, Walter Lippmann is the chief villain, and normally set off against Dewey. See Jansen (forthcoming) for Carey's role in the field's misreading of Lippmann, especially in establishing the "Dewey-Lippmann debate" trope. Carey's Lippmann commits the "classic fallacy of the Cartesian tradition"—the view that our knowledge should correspond to some external reality—and his bleak and antidemocratic politics flow from this epistemological mistake (1989, p. 77). To Carey, Lippmann is the intellectual godfather to the quantitative and individualist "effects" tradition that displaced Dewey and the Chicago School.

In constructing his picture of the School, Carey points to certain institutional overlaps—like Cooley, Dewey, and Mead at the University of Michigan and, later, Dewey, Mead, and Park at Chicago. The account heavily accents Cooley, Dewey and Park in particular, and emphasizes the School's descriptive (and qualitative) richness and, above all, its argument for a kind of over-the-wire *Gemeinschaft*—mass

communication as a substitute for older, more traditional forms of social glue. Carey (1996) called the Chicago School's "the most useful view of communication and the mass media in the American tradition" (p. 24), and it is easy to see why: by his telling, Dewey and the Chicago School come off as his interpretivist forebears, sensitive to the binding role of communication as ritual.

I do not want to dismiss the value of Carey's recovery effort; buried treasure is a good thing, and the long-dominant behavioral science model *had* entombed prewar thought in caricatural slogans ("hypodermic needle," "the mass society theory") that Carey helped debunk. But his picture of the Chicago School is a heavily edited one. Carey had his present purposes, and they shaped the "Chicago School" he so eloquently taught us. In this he is not alone, as Lyn Lofland (1983) has remarked: "... the 'Chicago School' is a kind of projective device; descriptions of it seem to reveal as much about those doing the describing as about the phenomenon itself" (p. 491; quoted in Abbott 1999, p. 13).

As Andrew Abbott (1999) describes in his excellent history, the idea of the Chicago School was a retroactive creation of the early 1950s, when the department briefly embodied the traits it projected onto its past: "Meadean, dogmatically qualitative, and perhaps even dogmatically ethnographic" (p. 14). The prewar department was, by contrast, far more complex and eclectic—a "melange of contradictory viewpoints," in Howard S. Becker's (1999) phrase (p. 8). Carey probably overstates the links between Cooley, Dewey, and Park, partly by implying intellectual collaboration when the overlap was sometimes geographic. Carey leaves the impression that Chicago sociology was preoccupied with mass communication, even though the topic was relatively neglected. Park's views on social science, and Dewey's too, were hardly loyal to the *verstehen* ideal suggested by Carey. And so on.

Czitrom's treatment of the field's history, and the Chicago School in particular, is far more nuanced, but follows the contours of the narrative put forward by Carey in support of his "cultural approach" to communication. *Media* had been Czitrom's dissertation in history at the University of Wisconsin, and Carey clearly helped orient Czitrom, an outsider, to the field, as the book's Preface acknowledges.

Here is an excerpt from the opening page of *Media*'s Part Two:

In the 1890s, a trio of American thinkers began the first comprehensive reckoning with modern communication in toto as a force in the social process. Charles Horton Cooley, John Dewey, and Robert Park each ascribed enormous significance to the sum of recent advances in media technology, and each placed the implications he saw at the center of his larger social thought. Together, they construed modern communication essentially as an agent for restoring a broad moral and political consensus to America, a consensus they believed to have been threatened by the wrenching disruptions of the nineteenth century ... (p. 91).

Many of the same connections between Park, Dewey, and Cooley are stressed in the chapter, as is the impression of intellectual continuity and collaboration. Lippmann is portrayed as Dewey's antidemocratic opponent (p. 110), and as a key precursor to the effects tradition (pp. 123–4). Dewey's later stress on the affinities between "communication" and "ritual and communion," writes Czitrom, is the aspect of

his thought “most valuable today as a means of understanding the potential appeal of modern media” (pp. 120–1).

In his chapter on the “effects” tradition, Czitrom faults the “ruling behavioral model” for its deficiency in “exploring the spheres of meaning and the relationship between communication and the social order” (p. 146). Its “rather narrow model” explained communication “as essentially a process of persuasion” (p. 132), and is “surely inadequate for confronting the realms of value and meaning” (p. 145).

Czitrom’s history, 25 years later, remains fecund and nearly peerless in its combination of real learning and archival digging. In reviewing *Media* back in 1984, Michael Schudson observed, “If Czitrom has any axes to grind, he has kept them in his knapsack” (Schudson, 1984, p. 992). Schudson was surely right, but Czitrom’s narrative is, in part, Carey’s narrative, and *Media* helps make his case for an interpretivist field. This matters because, though everyone may have their “own private Chicago” (Becker, 1999, p. 8), Carey’s Chicago remains ours.

Critical Forum

Reflections on a Well-Worn Book

Peter Simonson

My copy of *Media and the American Mind* is falling apart. I have taped the binding, but loose pages still tumble out if I am not careful. I count markings by at least five different pens, indexes of reading and teaching it over the years. In this brief essay, I would like to reflect on why my copy of Czitrom's elegant history is so well worn. I will focus on Part Two, *Theorists of Modern Communication*, which is still, in my view, the best intellectual history of media study in America. Given the opportunity to reread Czitrom, I decided to go back and reread four other book-length histories that have come out since *Media and the American Mind* was published—Hardt's (1992) *Critical Communication Studies*, Rogers' (1994/1997) *A History of Communication Study*, Schiller's (1996) *Theorizing Communication*, and Sproule's (1997) *Propaganda and Democracy*. Though each of the four adds to our store of understanding, none in my view betters Czitrom as a carefully researched, reliable, well-written general history of the field. Of the five books, only one on my shelf is falling apart. Why?

In part, it is because *Media and the American Mind* is the best *history* of the five—not surprising, perhaps, since Czitrom is the only professional historian in the bunch. We amateurs and autodidacts trained in communication studies should take notice: Czitrom read the primary texts, lots of them, both charitably and critically; he drew upon the historical literature; he blended intellectual with social, cultural, and economic history; he kept his eyes on both details and big picture, both past realities and present concerns; he wrote beautifully, in readily accessible prose that gives one actual pleasure to read.

The same cannot be said for the post-*Media* histories. Of them, only Sproule's approaches Czitrom's in historical quality and evidentiary base, but he covers a shorter period (1910s to 1950s) than Czitrom (1890s to 1960s), and tells a more specific story. Rogers got empirically dirty with archival materials and oral history interviews, but his textual interpretations are limited, and his story facile—a triumphalist tale of communication science brought from the loins of Wilbur

Peter Simonson is Assistant Professor in the Department of Communication at the University of Colorado, Boulder. Correspondence to: Peter Simonson, Department of Communication, University of Colorado, 270 UCB, Boulder, CO 80309-0270, USA. Email: peter.simonson@colorado.edu

Schramm and the great men he knew. Hardt and Schiller both wrote broad and interesting critical philosophical histories, but neither sullied themselves with the archives, and neither wrote with the perspicuity of Czitrom. I find more historical inaccuracies in Schiller, Rogers, and Hardt than I do in Czitrom or Sproule. The latter two represent better historical work.

Czitrom's historical accomplishment is more impressive given the paucity of relevant published work at the time. Jean Quandt's (1970) unjustly neglected *From the Small Town to the Great Community* had mapped Progressive thinking about communication and culture, featuring Charles Horton Cooley, John Dewey, Jane Addams, and Mary Parker Follett, among others. Unfortunately, the women dropped off Czitrom's map of the era, which featured the philosophical triumvirate of Dewey, Cooley, and Robert Park. Dewey is the leader of the pack in Czitrom's story, teacher and influence for the other two, and architect of the greatest early theory of communication (pp. 91, 112). One senses James Carey's influence in the value placed on Dewey (who, with Harold Innis, another Carey favorite, is the closest thing to a hero in Czitrom's story). I have found that, actually, Cooley came to the idea of communication before Dewey, and am in the midst of arguing that he developed the greater theory.

If Czitrom drew bearings from Carey and Quandt for his account of the Progressives, the pickings were thinner for his chapter on the history of empirical media study. Todd Gitlin and Elihu Katz lurk in the background. The chapter covers a good deal of ground: propaganda analysis, Harold Lasswell, Walter Lippmann, *Public Opinion Quarterly*, film study, the Frankfurt School, and C. Wright Mills—but Paul Lazarsfeld and the Bureau of Applied Social Research (BASR) get the bulk of the attention, and come to represent the “dominant paradigm” of media research that Gitlin (1978) had posited, extending and inverting a narrative influentially unleashed by Katz in the introductory chapters of the 1955 *Personal Influence* (Pooley, 2006). Though “behavioral science” sometimes serves as a vague devil term, Czitrom's is a nuanced portrait critical of the paradigm's inadequacies in “the realms of value and meaning,” an opening toward the Geertzian cultural studies the book serves to underwrite. Innis and McLuhan round out the history—the former a brilliant countervoice, the latter a once-promising-critic-turned-charlatan, both figures Carey had written about—and the story ends in the 1960s.

We have filled out other parts of the intellectual history since 1982, even if no single book has done it as well as *Media and the American Mind*. Hardt (1979/2002) anchored the Progressive end of the story in the second edition of his fine study of nineteenth-century German roots for early American thinking (see also Lang, 1996). We know that Columbia rivaled Michigan and Chicago as a center for the study of communications in the 1910s and 1920s (Peters & Simonson, 2004, pp. 18, 95). Thanks to Sproule's (1997) and Gary's (1999) impressive histories, we have an excellent picture of propaganda analysis as it rose and fell from World War I into the 1950s. We have a fuller, if still incomplete, sense of the variety of thinkers who wrote about media and communication under the broad banner of science. For all its faults (ignore, e.g., Chapters 2–5), Rogers (1994/1997) is a useful opening for further

research on figures like Lasswell, Kurt Lewin, Carl Hovland, Norbert Wiener, Claude Shannon, and Schramm—the last of whom was more responsible than Lazarsfeld for institutionalizing the dominant paradigm of mass communication research in the US and overseas (see also Delia, 1987; Glander, 2000). Simpson's (1994) well-researched if heavy-handed interrogation of Cold War psychological warfare is the perfect antidote to Rogers' cheery ode to Schramm, while Wahl-Jorgensen (2004) reminds us of the persistence of the University of Chicago's Committee on Communication through the 1950s. I have helped chart internal fault lines at Columbia (Simonson, 2005, 2006). Signorelli (1996) provides resources for charting the history of women in the field. Peters (1996, 1999) has published a great deal of important work that throws the American story into its broadest historical and philosophical relief.

The next step, it seems to me, is to push harder in international directions, and fill in the story since the 1960s, where Czitrom, Sproule, and Rogers all trail off. Newer histories, including Hardt's and Schiller's, tend to emphasize the rise of cultural and critical studies in the 1960s and 1970s. The emphasis is also reflected in Katz et al.'s (2003) *Canonic Texts* project, which breaks down the history of media theory by school, organized semi-chronologically: Columbia, Frankfurt, Chicago, Toronto, and Birmingham (cf. Simonson & Peters, forthcoming). This is a move in the right direction, and we should follow it up by adding other cities and places that have contributed bodies of thought about communication and media—from Paris to Leipzig and the Ukraine, from Tokyo to New Delhi and Rio de Janeiro. Collectively, we need to map the field intellectually and institutionally—to chart ideas and research practices from at least the middle of the nineteenth century, when German political economists turned their attention to telegraphs and newspapers, and bring out useful texts, historical trends, and present-day implications. Though the next best intellectual history will look different from the 25-year reigning champ, *Media and the American Mind* still sets the standard for intellectual craftsmanship, in the sense that Mills (1959) and Veblen (1914) talked about it, and we would do well to take it as our own. Now is the moment for new international histories that depict competing and overlapping orientations and their development over time, through key figures and institutional centers from around the world. Quandt and Czitrom laid a lovely foundation for the American case. We can build out further through them.

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Critical Forum

Constructing Photography: Fiction as Cultural Evidence

Hanno Hardt

This essay explores the role of modern fiction in the construction of photography and its contribution to a cultural theory and history of communication. Stories are sites of observations about self and society; these fictional accounts¹ are the constitutive material signs of a shared conversation about photography, the nature of photographic evidence, and its relationship to memory and the construction of identity. As such, the essay relates to a tradition of cultural media history pioneered by Daniel J. Czitrom (1982), whose work focuses on media content, social context and reaction to the rise of modern media.

Literature is the arsenal of cultural memory, and fiction may offer insights into the nature and appeal of theoretical claims (e.g., Berger, 1980; Burgin, 1982; Kemp, 1979, Mitchell, 1994; Trachtenberg, 1980), while the intellectual proximity between literary and theoretical visions of photography has long been demonstrated in the writings of Baudelaire, Benjamin, Berger, Shaw, and Zola, among others. More recent theoretical writings ponder the consequences of a pictorial rather than textual world (Mitchell, 1994) or focus on the (practical or political) idea of representation (Hall, 1997). Regardless, however, photographs are an essential experience of a daily encounter with reality and aid in the construction of worldviews, including visions of photographs as historical evidence, to legitimate ideological claims and support political goals.

Photographs are portals to the imagination, and vessels of elusive truths, according to these fictional accounts, which recognize the documentary character of photographs only as a conventional idea, or a point of departure, for an argument that insists categorically on the ambiguity of photographic evidence and embraces the creative challenge of variable truths.

Hanno Hardt is Professor of Communication and Media Studies at the University of Ljubljana and Professor Emeritus of Journalism and Mass Communication and Communication Studies at the University of Iowa. Correspondence to Hanno Hardt, Faculty of Social Sciences, Kardeljeva p1.5. 1 Ljubljana, Slovenia. Email: hannohardt@uiowa.edu

The presence of photographs in the lives of the fictional characters fosters conversation and promotes excursions into the realm of the imaginary. In fact, photographs may become the means by which individuals escape their solitude to discover their social selves in relation to others or to society (Cooley, 1994; Frame, 1995; Highsmith, 1985; Oates, 1992). In this process of self-discovery, however, traditional claims regarding conventional notions of truth become suspect with the possibility of multiple realities (Highsmith, 1985).

The emerging paradox is a photographic image, whose content relies not on what is depicted but on the imagination of the observer. The idea that “every photograph tells a story” (Frame, 1995, p. 429) refers to the inherently fictional character of the photographic image and the possibility that every photograph contributes to the creation of a particular truth, based on culturally specific insights regarding intentions and purposes of the photographer, the photographed, or the reader of the photograph.

Moreover, Prichett (1989) confirms the significance of the eye in the process of social communication, when observational skills help construct their respective stories to fit specific interests or desires to capture an identity. In fact, photographers may have their own, subjective reasons for taking pictures (Highsmith, 1985; Prichett, 1989; Stegner, 1969). Thus, photography becomes an instrument of appropriation to aid the invention of a particular truth (Agosin, 1993; Amarin, 1997; Highsmith, 1985).

Under the best of circumstances, photographs constitute a conspiracy of purposes; without knowledge or understanding the social or cultural context in which they are always created, photographs may seem deceptively simple visual expressions, or else they become intricate and complicated observations of individuals with particular insights into biography and history. Berger (1996) translates a newspaper photograph, suggesting not only the richness of a verbal account, but also how photographs may stimulate memory and become powerful reminders of history and biography. Here the photograph reveals its potential as a source of insights about the relationship between image and existence, or between picture and reality and makes “seeing” a meaningful social practice. That is to say, photographs gain meaning when presented and understood in a specific cultural context of verbal explanations (Oates, 1988).

The notion of evidence, or fact in a scientific or journalistic sense of an objective claim, emerges from these fictional accounts as a complex issue. Typically, the photograph-as-object retains its character as material evidence, while the photograph-as-idea in its immaterial form relies on knowledge and experience to function as culturally constructed evidence. Consequently, photographs reflect the ambiguity of historical narratives (it was Fernand Braudel who once said that history has a hundred faces), which are always open to further interpretation. Nevertheless, the conventional idea of the photograph as evidence reappears in most of these short stories and suggests that here is public trust in the evidentiary nature of the photograph and dependence on its expected function in society (Amarin, 1997; Highsmith, 1985; Stegner, 1969).

Staging photographs further complicates the notion of evidence (Frame, 1995) and leads to questions of posing when those who are photographed play to the camera, willing to meet expectations formed by tradition or conventions regarding specific photographic genres, like the family portrait. Amorim (1997) stages a portrait of respectability and acceptance, while Carver (1996) turns the act of being photographed into the record of a performance. Here, posing for the photographer becomes a release of energy that combines personal expression and social intercourse. Indeed, photography turns into a specific alliance between the photographer and the photographed when the act of posing becomes a mutually understood practice (Amorin, 1997; Carver, 1996; Oates, 1988; Pritchett, 1989). Its predominance in these short stories reinforces the fictional ingredient in human relations and indicates a preference for play or indulgence in a make-believe world. At the same time, posing becomes a sign of individual empowerment and subjective expression. By relying on the socially constructed credibility of the photograph as document, fictions are turned into facts and become the truths on which worldviews rest, and ideologies are sustained.

Consequently, reading photographs requires a willingness to suspend judgment while interrogating photographic fiction (Frame, 1995; Oates, 1988, 1992). In fact, the authors of these short stories express their own suspicions regarding the deceptive simplicity of the photographic image to create entry points into their fictional narratives. Because photographs also mirror the complex interior life of individuals, reading them requires cultural contexts, historical or biographical knowledge, and an empathic understanding, as exemplified in Berger's (1996) reading of an ordinary newspaper photograph. Knowing the details of existence beyond the frame of the photograph, for instance, or extending the photographic image into the historical moment of its creation, are necessary conditions for providing a sophisticated and exhaustive interpretation of a photograph. But facing a photograph, beyond a confrontation with past experiences, turns into an encounter with the photographer as author and with the autobiographical nature of the photograph (Pritchett, 1989). Thus, every photographic portrait is also a self-portrait of its creator.

These insights are a reminder of what Walter Benjamin (1980) has called the "optical unconscious" which holds a different truth, since what speaks to the camera does not speak to the eye. In other words, photographs promise revelations of something new or unexpected, since camera technology is capable of recording instances beyond the photographer's intent or vision (Frame 1995; Highsmith, 1985), resulting in the (accidental) discovery of a different visual reality.

For instance, Kawabata's (1988) poet relates the experience of separating himself from his fiancé by cutting a photograph in half only to discover that the beauty and charm of the woman had turned into dullness. The loss of the other introduced a different reality. Likewise, Cooley's (1994) narrator realizes that the removal of her mother's face from a photograph album is a denial of her existence. It is as startling as the reconstruction of herself through photomontage. Here the author constructs absences and fills voids with (new) photographic images to overcome likeness and

explore the possibilities of a different, yet controllable image. In a more complex fashion, absence becomes a visible state of mind in these stories (Carver, 1996; Frame, 1995; Oates, 1992). Here, observation and the ability to remember create a bridge between that which is depicted—and therefore documented—and that which is not, but, nevertheless, belongs to an understanding of the photograph. Presence and absence complete each other, as memory provides the individual context.

Thus, making photographs or encountering them in everyday life constitutes cultural practices that are psychologically complex, biographically specific, and historically concrete; their reading demands an equally sophisticated approach to peeling back layers of facts and removing filters of truth to reveal the subjective nature of factual accounts and come to terms with the possibility of multiple realities.

In fact, the social self is always challenged by the seductive potential of the photographic record as document and the urge to rely on its surface qualities as evidence against a deeper, perhaps darker knowledge about its fragile nature. The writers seem to agree that the photograph remains an ambiguous and problematic form of expression, which escapes a certainty ordinarily assigned to the visual record. But it is also an indispensable tool in the arsenal of social practices. By combining the features of fact and fiction, the photograph responds to the demands for social control and the desire for individual freedom. While the former insists on the certainty, the latter embraces the ambiguity of the photographic image. The choice is ideologically determined, rooted in conventions, and maintained by social consent.

Photographs belong to the inventory of personal memory as memoirs of experience and prevail in the history of culture as documents of time (Berger, 1996; Cooley, 1994; Frame, 1995; Oates, 1992). But the use of the camera also promises a new vision and becomes a liberating experience, when new images succeed old ones and sustain life as vision (Agosin, 1993; Cooley, 1994). In the end, as Jacques Henri Lartigue (Borhan, 1980, p. 15) once noted, “it is not the camera which takes the photo, it is the eyes, the heart, the stomach, all that.”

Photography emerges as a cultural practice, which has been appropriated by people as a way of seeing themselves or the world, or being seen by others. They are not just mirrors that reflect an external world but manifestations of an unconscious revealed; they are the conspicuous representations of memory, distinctly visible as objects and accessible as ideas facilitating biographical or historical allusions.

In fact, the visible becomes the territory of these short stories, whose accounts of photography in modern times reflect Oscar Wilde’s claim that the mystery of the world is the visible, not the invisible. It is the mystery of the photograph that fuels the imagination of the writer-artist, who calls attention to the potential of the photographic image as well as to the authority of writing.

Literature acknowledges the discourse of photography as a social practice that is different from conversation or fiction and re-creates a subject that can only be understood within the photographic discourse through which it exists. Literature addresses the complex relationship between subject and image, between the individual and the photograph, and the consequences of living with photography

and participating in the life of an indispensable visual culture (Highsmith, 1985; Stegner, 1969).

Note

- [1] This essay is based on a reading of short stories, which address the presence of photographs in the lives of their characters.

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Critical Forum

Twenty-Five Years Later

Daniel J. Czitrom

April 1980: I am en route to Wall Street and my job as a management trainee at Morgan Stanley, wearing a three-piece suit, and already wilting in the spring heat of the nonair-conditioned IRT subway. I had finished my Ph.D. in History from University of Wisconsin-Madison in 1979, but had come up empty on the job market for several years. After stints driving a taxi, working in public television, and now learning the secrets in the heart of the capitalist beast, an academic career seems more and more like some half-forgotten dream. Opening my mail, I find a letter from the American Historical Association, congratulating me for winning its First Books Award for the manuscript that would eventually be published as *Media and the American Mind*. I dimly recall having submitted my manuscript into the competition. But today, I vividly remember the combination of elation and confusion felt at that moment, and I return to it here as a reminder of the enormous power of serendipity in my own and perhaps most academic careers. What we study, who we work with, and where we land owes so much to chance. Before I offer my own reflections on these thoughtful and deeply felt essays, I think it is important to acknowledge just how fortunate I have been.

Jefferson Pooley's claim that the book is "profoundly influenced by James W. Carey's approach to communication research and its history," is of course true. When I first heard Jim speak in 1974, while a graduate student at UW-Madison, it changed my life. I was trying to figure out how to write a dissertation in the history of American mass media, a field that no one in the History Department took seriously. I wound up doing a minor field at the UW School of Journalism and Mass Communication, the only game in town for those of us interested in studying the media. I was drowning in a sea of courses which did not really interest me: behavioral studies of media effects, quantitative analyses of audiences, histories of journalism centered on a few great men. Hearing Jim talk about what he called "A Cultural Approach to Communication" proved to be the intellectual life boat that saved me; our subsequent correspondence and friendship was critical to the writing of *Media*

Daniel J. Czitrom is Professor of History at Mount Holyoke College. Correspondence to: Daniel J. Czitrom, Department of History, Mount Holyoke College, South Hadley MA01075, USA. Email: dczitrom@mtholyoke.edu

and the American Mind. But it was not his take on the Chicago school, or his critique of Descartes, or even what Pooley calls his commitment to “interpretive social science” that attracted me. I knew little or nothing about any of these back then. Rather, it was his sheer intellectual openness and his insistence that there were other routes into understanding media, particularly ones rooted in historical inquiry that drew me to him. In 1990, I reviewed Jim’s seminal collection of essays, *Communication as Culture for American Quarterly* (Czitrom, 1990). There, I argued that Carey offered a radically alternative vision of how to study and think about communication, with a deeply humanist and historical sensibility. He was the missing American link to the British tradition of cultural studies—the American Raymond Williams, if you will. As a social theorist and historian, Jim Carey showed us how to deepen our understanding of American history and culture by rethinking our basic assumptions and metaphors about communication, media, and technology. As a teacher and citizen-scholar, he embodied a refreshingly democratic and open spirit that touched me and thousands more in the US and around the world.

Carey showed me there were other paths to travel than the (to me) dreary road of communication studies “normal science.” But my larger project was still a fundamentally historical one. The cutting edge action in the 1970s was all about the new social history, working class history, African American history, and women’s history. I imbibed all that, but I was more focused on how to include modern media and popular culture in the broader effort at expanding and redefining what counted as American history. No one in the Madison History Department knew or cared very much about mass media and their past. But the support of my mentor, Daniel T. Rodgers, was as crucial as Carey’s. My stab at synthesizing the intellectual history of modern communication with the social and cultural history of the media themselves owed an enormous debt to Rodgers. His pioneering work helped open up American cultural history beyond the traditional realms of literature and high art, and insisted on the connections between that history and the nation’s political life (Rodgers 1978, 1987, 1998). When I completed what many still thought of as an off-the-wall dissertation, Rodgers jokingly told me that I had written the book of a 50-year-old man. Now that I am that 50-year-old man—actually, somewhat north of 50—the book seems insanely ambitious and presumptuous in so many ways. But insane ambition and presumption were probably necessary for a young historian struggling to work in a field that did not exist. I always had a sense that *Media and the American Mind* was as much a prologue, an invitation to *do* history that I believed needed to be done, as it was a finished work. Thus, Sue Curry Jansen’s and Peter Simonson’s praise for *Media and the American Mind* as a work of history is particularly gratifying, for historian has always been my primary intellectual identity. Yet one of the continuing ironies about the book is that its influence has been felt primarily in the fields of communication and media studies, as opposed to history, as the list of contributors to this symposium confirms.

If I had landed at a research university instead of a small liberal arts college, my career might have had a very different arc: one more centered on graduate students, the reproduction of the profession, and the direction of dissertations in media

history. Serendipity again. But since the mid-1980s, I have moved away from the study of media and into other historical topics and historical practices: the cultural and political history of New York City; a comprehensive United States history textbook; a new study of the turn of the century reformer and pioneer photographer Jacob Riis; and contributions to a number of historical documentaries (Czitrom, 1991, 1992; Czitrom et al., 2005; Czitrom & Yochelson, 2007). My own “historical turn” probably reflected my discomfort with the growing dominance of cultural studies in the various iterations of media and communication studies. In a recent essay, “Does Cultural Studies Have a Past?” (Czitrom, 2002), I expressed my own uneasiness and disappointment over how the current practice of American cultural studies too often neglects American history. A historical critique of cultural studies cannot be separated from a broader questioning of the postmodernist and poststructuralist turns in recent American intellectual life. It would be impossible for me to summarize quickly this important line of criticism, which includes a growing number of historians. But the key sticking point remains: what is lost when analyzing discourse and language becomes a substitute for analyzing changes in material conditions, consciousness, and power relations over time? Bryan D. Palmer put it well in his thoughtful study *Descent into Discourse* (Palmer, 1990). “Historical materialism,” Palmer argues, “has no difficulty accommodating an appreciation of the materiality of texts and the importance of discourse. It can accept that discourse plays a role in constructing social being, just as it can appreciate the importance language plays in the politics of labor and the process of revolutionary transformation. The opposition between discourse and materialism hardens into a this-versus-that countering of interpretive choice at the very point where discourse demands recognition of the totalizing and discursive determinations of language, writing, and texts, elevating itself to an all-encompassing authority that is both everywhere and nowhere” (p. 215).

I want to be clear that cultural studies has also had extremely positive impact on the writing of cultural history. By insisting on a greater sophistication about language and a more careful interrogation of how historical sources and categories have been constructed, cultural studies has helped midwife some of the path-breaking cultural history of recent years. But I worry that too much American cultural studies suffers from a kind of intellectual ventriloquism. Too often, history appears simply as a foil for the real text—displaying a command of Continental theory. Too many scholars seem to be putting their quarters into the academic jukebox and playing the same tunes. American cultural studies, having challenged so many of the “master narratives,” is now in danger of substituting a “master methodology” that too frequently betrays a weak grounding in American history. American cultural studies needs to reclaim the idea of education for citizenship, in the broadest sense of the term, and one way to do that is to get the state and public policy back onto its agenda.

Of course, there has been a great deal of excellent work in American media history over the last 25 years, and it would be absurd to pretend to review developments in the field here. But the best of these works, in my view, consciously try to understand

media history within the larger framework of US history, thereby illuminating both. Paul Starr's *The Creation of the Media* (Starr, 2004) emphasizes what he calls "constitutive choices" in the history of communication, as well as the key role of politics. In analyzing why America's experience diverged from European patterns, he stresses how communications in America tended to exhibit a series of related characteristics from the seventeenth century to the mid-twentieth century: greater openness and transparency in the public sphere; higher levels of commercialization; greater decentralization; more rapid penetration of communication networks; greater receptivity to new products and technologies; and approaching technical and organizational challenges from a continental perspective—e.g., building postal, telegraph, and telephone networks on a far more extensive scale than any nation in the world. The sheer scale of these networks would later extend to telecommunications, motion pictures, and broadcasting. Starr also underlines the impact of America's republican tradition and Revolutionary heritage: its commitment to freedom of expression; subsidized growth of newspapers through cheap postal rates; guarantees of postal privacy; spread of popular education and belief in diffusion of knowledge; transparency in public legislative sessions; concise and clearly written constitutions. "The public sphere did not simply emerge from material changes," he argues, "it was created through politics—in the American case, through a revolution" (p. 16).

Over the years, I have heard many suggestions about chapters that *Media and the American Mind* might have included. Hanno Hardt's essay on "Constructing Photography" reminds me that several people thought I had missed the boat by not including a discussion of photography. My forthcoming book, *Rediscovering Jacob Riis* offers a new analysis of this pivotal figure that situates him within the gritty specifics of Gilded Age New York, tracing Riis's complex relations with the city's tenement neighborhoods, its new immigrants, its fiercely competitive journalism, its evangelical reformers, its labor movement, its police department, and its political machines. And David Park is not alone in wondering "what this book would look like if it had a chapter on the history of the Internet." But that and other new chapters are for others, like the contributors here, to write. I want to suggest that as scholars begin to write the history of the Internet and the World Wide Web, the dialectical approach I put forth in *Media and the American Mind*, emphasizing "the tension between the progressive or utopian possibilities offered by new communications technologies and their disposition as instruments of domination and exploitation" (p. 184), might still have analytical use value for scholars.

Any comprehensive history of the Internet will need to include both sides of this dialectic, the military and the counterculture, the need for command and control and the impulse against hierarchy and toward decentralization. ARPA (Advanced Research Projects Agency) was a Defense Department unit founded in 1957 in post-Sputnik panic, to support research and development in military-oriented systems such as ballistic missile defense. What became known as ARPANET, precursor of the Internet, grew from the work of engineers facing a strategic problem: How could US authorities successfully communicate after a nuclear war?

But a second, more utopian stream of development in the 1960s and 1970s was at work here as well. The world of “hackers” and their philosophy of sharing, openness, and decentralization, especially in the San Francisco Bay Area, owed something to the “open world” discourse associated with the antiwar movement and the counter-culture. These included the young engineers, scientists, and graduate students who turned ARPANET into a mail system rather than just a medium for sharing computer resources, formulating Usenet, the international computer newsgroup network more recently overshadowed by the World Wide Web. Many of the “open” qualities of the Internet were rooted in part in 1960s impulses: a powerful quest for new kinds of community; growing informality in communication and American culture generally in the 1960s and 1970s; interest in decentralized and alternative networks; challenge to hierarchy; and the sharing of information freely. (See Rosenzweig (1998) for the most thoughtful attempt at reviewing the first wave of Internet history).

Let me close by once again thanking the contributors for their essays and for giving me the chance to mull over where I came from and where I have been. Reading their very different takes on how they have used and learned from *Media and the American Mind*, as well as their acute sense of its limits, has been enormously gratifying. In 1982, I closed the book, perhaps channeling Harold Innis, with a plea for history: “The recovery of historical perspective, bringing the contradictions within American media into sharper relief, can perhaps help us to remember the future of modern communication” (p. 184). These days, although I may be a bit less utopian about that future, I am more convinced than ever that media history constitutes a critical component of our collective past.

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