

Editorial

Media Probe

In 2011, as the *Canadian Journal of Communication* (CJC) entered a moment of editorial transition, Michael Dorland introduced himself with a curse and a wager. As Dorland ends six-plus years at the helm of the CJC, and as the *Journal* transitions again, it is a good time to reflect on change, curses, and wagers.

Conceived during meetings held at York University and Ryerson Polytechnical Institute in 1973, the CJC launched as *Media Probe*, a title with hints of Marshall McLuhan's media theory. Despite this association, *Media Probe* sought all the different modes of thought and analysis needed for a critical knowledge of media, technology, and nation. It brought scholars, professionals, practitioners, teachers, and students together and proliferated the intersections between scholarly research and media practice. In transitioning from magazine to academic journal, *Media Probe* became the *Canadian Journal of Communication*, and it published the intellectual content of a field undergoing institutionalization and professionalization. Yet, the *Journal* did more than distribute and archive articles; it encouraged new forms of connection and collaboration among "exiles," as the first editor described scholars of communication and media, and experimented with formats and technology, all while resisting absorption into the models of publishing that distort scholarship (although the *Journal* was owned for a time by its editors—imagine!).

Media Probe is not revisited to revere the past but rather to invite probing of the transitions shaping our present. The professionalism of the field, a significant accomplishment, seems ill-equipped to deal with the political monstrosity of the moment. Probing might be useful. Probes feel out unfamiliar situations to produce provisional knowledge; probes are multiple and always register their surroundings in relation to and recalibration of one another. Probes are most necessary when distinctions between involved practice and critical evaluation are difficult to stabilize. Probing begins and ends but is never complete. Probes reveal the transitional nature of knowledge and are one way to approach questions of history, technology, and environment in times of upheaval.

An example: in December 1901, messages leapt the Atlantic Ocean, found a kite attached to a telephone on Signal Hill, Newfoundland, and entered expectant ears as three audible clicks. The clicks indicated three dots,

“...”

and their arrival was celebrated as an epochal event. It heralded the electromagnetic reorganization of continental space and inspired media imaginaries built on ubiquitous and instantaneous interconnection, such as McLuhan's. Today, the “typing awareness indicator” of your texting application remediates this message, a message about mes-

sages in composition and the ambient assurance of connectivity (lest desires for disconnection gain a momentary foothold).

While we curse technology when it fails, its operative state is often a curse for theory. In conforming to user expectation, the Signal Hill demonstration allowed wireless operators to overlook how badly they misunderstood the planet. Guglielmo Marconi, who received that first transmission, was no flat-earther, but he believed his signals bent with the Earth's curvature in crossing the ocean, envisioning the planet as a massive "waveguide" for digital communication. Demonstrations trumped debate; more tap, less yack, we can imagine him saying. The "end of theory" promoted by big data ideologues is not without precursors! Yet, as the situation is probed, one finds that Marconi's signals did not track the curving earth; the message bounced off the part of the upper atmosphere that is ionized by the sun. Today, questions of how sunlight and technology interact in the atmosphere have moved to the centre of our concerns, and misconceptions of our planetary condition appear more ominous.

The curse of operating technology is well known in our field; despite five decades of *CJC* scholarship, our most famous exports are typically described as technological determinists and critiques of the technological nationalism shaping Canada as a colonial formation, spatial imaginary, and pollution-emitting threat to planetary inhabitability have not yet gained political effectiveness. The incoming editorial collective intends to sustain these and other lines of critical questioning and anticipates no sudden changes to the *Journal*, which Dorland, as Kim Sawchuk before him, navigated beyond the narrow preoccupations and disputes often seizing our professional attention. Indeed, this issue, and several to follow, are comprised of articles handled during Dorland's editorship, and so the transition will unfold gradually. The new group includes Melissa Aronczyk (associate editor), Bethany Berard (assistant editor), Mél Hogan (associate editor), Tokunbo Ojo (associate editor), and Leslie Regan Shade (editor of our online Policy Portal), and I hope you will welcome them to the *Journal*.

In anticipating change, one often looks to moments of similar transition, and I find myself returning to Dorland's wager. He asked scholars to try different things, to recognize the transitional nature of knowledge, and to resist urges to claim novelty or consolidate disciplinary authority with this understanding in mind. He gambled that the field would accept this role for its journal. The wager remains open.

More to come ...

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