

Publisher's Note

Adieu to Print: For a Sole Embrace of the Digital

For the *Canadian Journal of Communication* (CJC), the phrase “Goodbye, Gutenberg” has taken on a sadness that runs quite counter to the invigorating opportunities that schoolteacher Valerie Kirschenbaum revealed in her 2005 book of that title. True, since 1994 CJC has been first off the mark to explore many of those opportunities in the context of scholarly journal publishing. But we have always maintained our print edition, in part because in certain regions of the world, notably Africa and Asia and some areas in rural Canada, internet access has been so constrained.

However, when it comes to the efficacy of print as a method of dissemination, the writing has been on the wall for some time. No matter how many hundreds of readers may be served by a library's single print copy—given, of course, that it is not already out on loan or stolen—the tens of thousands that are likely to view an article online, consecutively or simultaneously, dwarf that usage potential. And with the financial and organizational impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic constraining library budgets quite dramatically, that writing has transformed into a flashing neon sign.

A potted print history of CJC

As outlined in Volume 1 Number 1 in Earle Beattie's article, “What Media Probe is all about,” CJC began humbly at York University in 1973–1974 as an organization called Media Probe started by a group of media professionals, academics, and others who were interested in the influence of media on society. According to the founding documents reviewed by Earle Beattie in Volume 1, Number 1 (1974) of *Media Probe*, Media Probe was an organization intent on addressing a comment by the “1970 Special Senate Committee on the Mass Media chaired by Keith Davey” (p. 11). The committee noted that there was “no organization worrying about how news is presented and how that presentation can be improved” (1974, p.11). The Media Probe group took up the charge and expanded its concern to deal with all content in all media. It adopted a mandate to promote research, take action, and present publicly on media issues and spoke of a “Bulletin, Review or Journal to publicize generally our findings, ideas and comments” (p. 11). Membership dues for group members were set low, two dollars for individuals and ten dollars for organizations, to cover “mailing and mimeographing” costs (p. 12). A monthly publication on media issues was projected (p. 12).

By 1977, the resulting quarterly publication, *Media Probe*, had changed its name to the *Canadian Journal of Communication* and included “Media Probe” as a commentary section. Reproduction appears to have progressed from using a mimeograph to a Gestetner, a more advanced duplicating machine, but one that still relied on generating the image of character by hitting a key against fabric spooled onto the barrel of a type-

writer. By the end of 1980, reproduction had much improved in readability, partly, it appears, as a result of the use of electronic typewriters such as the IBM Selectric. But the graphic design—including font choice, character spacing, line spacing, and reproduction—left a lot to be desired. In 1988, journal pages were fully separated in graphic form from typewriter output. To the great relief of readers, they were typeset.

While the journal's graphic presentation had much improved, costs had outstripped revenue. Thus, led by Professor David B. Mitchell, *CJC* undertook an ambitious circulation expansion program in the early and mid-1990s to attract U.S. and other international library subscribers and to enliven the sales and renewals of subscriptions in and outside Canada. It found a hunger for its content, in part because of an ever-increasing number of communication and media programs and departments in North American universities. By this program and other means, *CJC* created a financial foundation for expansion and innovation.

Opening to the digital

The mid-1990s—less than a decade after *CJC* embraced typesetting—saw the beginnings of a widening use of the internet, with its instantaneous, worldwide access. Faced with a dormant print archive earning no revenue, the scholars running *CJC* saw an opportunity to increase the availability of the knowledge contained in its archives with little added cost. Discounting a background survey in which individual subscribers saw themselves making little use of such an “online archive,” *CJC* used its retained earnings to innovate, working against the wisdom of the day. The subsequent usage patterns are, as they say, history.

A crumbling nostalgia

Time and circumstance have combined to create a bittersweet parting for those whose lives were tied to a seemingly impregnable knowledge materiality and its social conventions: words on pages, pages in books, reading stands, portable books, personal libraries, personal marked-up copies of books, trust in lending, lending libraries, mechanics institutes, public libraries. Surely, they were everlasting. Just so until mid-March 2020, whence came a fracture ushered in by the shutdown of some national postal organizations. True, it was only for a few months. But, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, postal services were not only interrupted but many destinations of print journals—universities, public libraries, and workplaces—had closed their doors.

A new world

The publication of *CJC*'s issue number four of the forty-fifth volume of *Media Probe/Canadian Journal of Communication* will end the official continuing print reproduction of *CJC*. We trust our readers will accept our reluctant decision.

We would have preferred a haven less subject to cyber vulnerability, but we welcome the opportunities the digital world have revealed. *CJC* has already begun an acquaintance with our readers to discover which countries they come from, which articles they access, and when they use the journal. We now include content other than text. We have added a Policy Portal and plan to experiment with the publication of Playlists of related articles to reveal value hidden in our archives. We plan to further address the needs and desires of our research community to assist it to grow and thrive.

We will transition to a publish-when-ready program rather than a strict quarterly release of articles. In general, *CJC* will aim for greater interactivity at all levels with authors and readers.

So yes, we are bidding Gutenberg goodbye in favour of a sole embrace, for better or for worse, of the world created by Alan Turing, Tim Berners-Lee and the hosts of nameless others who have created the cyberinfrastructure needed for instantaneous worldwide dissemination of original research. Watch this time-space!

References

- Kirschenbaum, Valerie. (2005). *Goodbye Gutenberg: Hello to a new generation of readers and writers*. New York: Global Renaissance Society, LLC.
- Beattie, Earle. (1974). What Media Probe is all about. *Canadian Journal of Communication (Media Probe)* 1(1), 11–12.

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