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ALTERNATE ROUTES
A Journal of Critical Social Research

PRESENTATION AND EDITORIAL POLICY

Alternate Routes is a refereed multi-disciplinary journal published annually by graduate students in the department of Sociology and Anthropology at Carleton University in Ottawa. Our mandate is to make *Alternate Routes* a forum for debate and exchange among graduate students throughout the country and we are therefore interested in receiving papers written by graduate students (or co-authored with faculty), regardless of their university affiliation.

The editorial emphasis is on the publication of critical and provocative analyses of theoretical and substantive issues which clearly have relevance for progressive political intervention. Although we welcome papers on a broad range of topics, members of the editorial board work within a feminist and marxist tradition. Therefore, we encourage submissions which advance or challenge questions and contemporary issues raised by these two broadly defined perspectives. We also welcome responses to and reviews of recent publications.

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CALL FOR PAPERS

Alternate Routes is seeking submissions for Volume 11, 1994. We are interested in receiving interdisciplinary analyses on a wide range of theoretical and substantive issues within the social sciences. Manuscripts will be anonymously reviewed by faculty members from academic institutions across the country. Please use the American Psychological Association (APA) referencing system and keep endnotes to a minimum. Papers should be submitted double-spaced and in triplicate. Floppy disks formatted in Wordperfect 5.1 or ASCII are required for papers accepted for publication.

We also welcome responses to and reviews of recent publications, book reviews, and discussions of work-in-progress.

Responses to this invitation to contribute should be postmarked no later than **29 October 1993**.

Alternate Routes est à la recherche d'articles pour sa publication de 1994, numéro 11. Nous sommes intéressés à recevoir des analyses interdisciplinaires portant sur un vaste éventail de questions théoriques et substantives propres aux sciences sociales. Les manuscrits seront critiqués de façon anonyme par des professeurs de diverses institutions académiques du pays. Nous vous invitons à suivre le système de référence de l'American Psychological Association (APA) et à limiter la quantité des notes de fin de document autant que possible. Les articles devraient être présentés en format double interligne et en trois copies. Une disquette devrait accompagner le document et contenir le texte sur logiciel Wordperfect 5.1 ou en codes ASCII.

Nous apprécierions par ailleurs recevoir des critiques des récentes publications, comptes rendus et travaux en cours.

Les réponses à cette invitation devraient être postées au plus tard le **29 octobre 1993** (le cachet de la poste en faisant foi).

Address to/Envoyez à: *Alternate Routes*
Department of Sociology and Anthropology
Carleton University
Colonel By Drive
Ottawa, Ontario
K1S 5B6

ALTERNATE ROUTES
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Volume 10, 1993

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INTRODUCTION: COMMUNICATIONS AND DEMOCRACY

Communication studies in Canada is an interdisciplinary field which encompasses diverse theoretical traditions and substantive problems. While it has drawn extensively upon traditions outside of the social sciences, historically many sociologists, such as Harold Innis, have made valuable contributions to communication research. Current research continues to range over a wide arena, including media studies, cultural studies, political economy, policy research, and feminist studies. This particular issue of *Alternate Routes* focuses on a major theme within contemporary discussions: the issue of communication and democracy.

Professor Vincent Mosco is a sociologist who plays a leading role in Canadian communication studies. In February 1993, he agreed to speak with the Editorial Board of *Alternate Routes* about his recent work. While Dr. Mosco's expertise is in the political economy of communications, the breadth and depth of his interests are apparent in this interview in which he explores contemporary debates over the nature of capitalist society, the relationships between cultural studies and political economy in communication studies, and the implications of globalization, deregulation, and privatization in the communication industries. Mosco's discussion highlights the profound theoretical and empirical challenges that scholars of communications face in the 1990s.

Vanda Rideout, a doctoral candidate at Carleton University and a former employee of Northern Telecom Canada Ltd., focuses more specifically on recent changes in telecommunications policy. Using the Poulantzian notion of 'power bloc', she shows that the recent shifts in Canadian telecommunications policy toward allowing more competition in key specialized services and long distance calling, works in favour of a hegemonic fraction consisting of the major financial institutions and large business users. The shift in policy means that increasing numbers of telecommunications services are no longer interpreted as requiring supervision and regulation in the public interest, but as requiring regulation to manage market forces. Consequently, she argues, the public service concept of universality is threatened and the democratic process in telecommunications eroded.

David Robinson, also a doctoral candidate at Carleton University, addresses the issue of democracy in terms of freedom of the press. His review suggests that news production studies have tended to either leave unelaborated a practical strategy for the development of a socialist and

democratic news media, or have proposed state administered solutions to offset market censorship. Recognizing the abuses of state control, however, Robinson proposes that socialists need to reconsider the democratic claims of writers like Tonnies, Dewey, and Habermas and begin to think about ways of extending public communications systems beyond the state and the market.

Behnam Behnia, a doctoral student from Carleton University, studies the impact of dictatorship on the conditions of communication. He considers the following question: why did Iranians, who during the 1979 Revolution demanded freedom and democracy, support the growth of another kind of dictatorship? He suggests that dictatorship, by abolishing democratic rights, undermines the conditions of communication. This, in turn, influences the institutions and social relationships through which members socially interact. In Iran 'distorted communication' led Iranians to form small, informal selective groups. In these groups the corporate rather than the universal perspective of democracy was likely to develop. Democracy came to consist of an ensemble of rules that protected the immediate interests of that particular group. Corporate democracy among Iranians, Behnia argues, is one of the factors that led to the establishment of the new dictatorship.

COMMUNICATION, CULTURE AND POWER: AN INTERVIEW WITH VINCENT MOSCO

Vincent Mosco is one of the foremost communication scholars specializing in the area of political economy. He is professor in the School of Journalism and Mass Communication at Carleton University and holds a research position with the Program on Information Resources Policy at Harvard where in 1975 he received the Ph.D. in sociology.

Professor Mosco is the author of three books and editor or co-editor of seven books on the political economy of the mass media, broadcasting and telecommunication policy, the social impacts of computers and information technology, and popular culture. His most recent are *The Political Economy of Information* (edited with Janet Wasko, University of Wisconsin Press, 1988), *The Pay-per Society* (Ablex and Garamond, 1989), *Democratic Communications in the Information Age* (edited with Janet Wasko, Ablex and Garamond, 1992), and *Illuminating the Blindspots: Essays Honoring Dallas Smythe* (edited with Janet Wasko and Manjunath Pendakur, Ablex, 1993). He has also published over sixty scholarly articles, reports and book chapters.

Professor Mosco is a founding member of the Union for Democratic Communication and is currently President of the Political Economy Section of the International Association for Mass Communication Research and a member of the editorial boards of academic journals in Canada, the U.S., England, and Spain.

His current research projects include *The Political Economy of Communication*, a book that addresses the theoretical foundations of the field and its relationship to economics, policy studies, and cultural studies; and an analysis of spatial and temporal transformations brought about by the application of computer communication in business and government.

Alternate Routes: One of the more interesting aspects of your recent work has been your attempt to 'demystify' terms like 'post-industrial society' and the 'information age'. Instead you propose that a much more apt description of contemporary social formations is the 'pay-per society'. What exactly do you intend to capture with this phrase? How does it differ from the 'information age' or 'post-industrial society'?

Vincent Mosco: As a bit of background, I'm a sociologist with a strong interest in communication. One of the things I've tried to do over the

years is to give communication studies a stronger theoretical grounding. The field has tended to draw more from psychology and some elements of pluralist political science, a far from rigorous treatment.

What I like about communication studies is that it raises questions that are central to the political economy of our culture as it is constituted and changing. My work tries to construct an analysis that is central to both the state of our theoretical understanding and to practical consciousness and common sense.

My last book, *The Pay-Per Society*, provided a touchstone notion for understanding the transformations that communication and information technology are bringing about in a colloquial expression that I seem to hear more and more in common discourse: references to 'pay-per-view' television, 'pay-per-call' in the telephone business, 'pay-per-keystroke' in the workplace. Advertisers refer to 'pay-per-body' when they deliver audiences to those who pay the bill. My goal was to develop a critique of what had become standard conceptions of post-industrialism and the information age by concentrating on this notion of 'pay-per'.

The idea itself refers more analytically to the ability of the new technologies to measure and to monitor information transactions and to package and repackage communication and information products on a scale heretofore considered at least difficult if not impossible. For example, the commercial television broadcasting industry was originally based on delivering audiences to advertisers. Today it is based on a pay-per-month charge with cable television, pay-per-channel with specialty channels and is now moving toward a full pay-per-view system.

In my thinking, this is a deepening and extension of the commodification of information, communication, and of the audiences that attend to programs. This lies at the heart of developments in the area that are not captured by notions like 'information age' and 'post-industrialism'. After all, what do we mean by 'the information age'? Does it mean that we have more information than ever before? Well, one might debate that, particularly when faced with the question, "who is 'we'" ? Yes, some have more, but some have less.

Similar problems arise with 'post-industrialism'. I was a student of Daniel Bell, so I'm intimately familiar with this notion. In fact, he sparked my interest in looking at the communication and information technologies. But when you examine critically the empirical work that

led to the notion of post-industrialism, you realize how wanting the term is.

For example, the major piece of research that led to the general use of the term 'post-industrialism' was a doctoral thesis completed at Stanford University by Mark Porat on the information economy. What he did was amass data on occupational shifts in American society. He looked at the growth of what he referred to as an 'information sector'. However, when you look in detail at the actual occupations that comprise that sector you find lumped together in the same category the Chief Executive Officers of transnational businesses and check-out counter clerks! Both are called 'knowledge-workers' or information workers. It seems to me that a term used to capture such fundamentally different power relations is of limited value. Consequently, it is more important to focus on the ways in which the new technologies influence the shape and the direction of capitalism. We need to look at how the technologies deepen and extend social relations organized largely around commodification and control. This process is what I see constituting a 'pay-per society'.

AR: Another descriptive phrase that has emerged in communications studies and other disciplines of late is 'post-Fordism', a term associated with a very diverse range of work. It loosely represents the view put forth by Lash and Urry (1987), Piore and Sabel (1984), the French 'Regulation School', and others that a new 'regime of accumulation' has emerged, one radically different from the standardized mass production characteristic of Fordism. The globalization of capital, a disaggregation of the mass consumer market into segmented niches, a decentralization and automation of the workplace, and a shift from industrial production toward service industries are, it is claimed, moving us into a decentralized, diversified, and differentiated social universe. Post-Fordist societies are more open, fluid, pluralistic and fragmented. In the case of the film industry, for example, Christopherson and Storper (1989) have argued that the major studios are no longer the giant vertically integrated oligopolies of Hollywood's Golden Age; today, they are characterized by product differentiation, vertical disintegration, and flexible specialization. Similar arguments have been made about the broadcasting and publishing industries. However, this seems to run counter to some of your observations about the increasing concentration of corporate power and the homogenization of cultural production. How do you assess post-

Fordism? Does it, in your mind, represent an adequate account of the forces shaping the contemporary cultural industries? Or is it just another version of the post-industrial society thesis?

VM: You are right to suggest that there is a vast literature in the area broadly defined as post-Fordism. There are also many differences within that literature. With that said, my reading of post-Fordism is that it has tended to focus on an element of capitalism that no one appreciated more than Marx: capitalism is remarkably dynamic, constantly transforming itself to advance accumulation, its fundamental *raison d'être*. My sense is that there is a tendency within this point of view to hold onto one element of the dynamic --- the tendency to deconstitution, deconcentration, and diversification. I don't want to suggest simplistic dichotomies or promote mechanistic thinking, but there is a tendency to save for the background tendencies to concentration, transnationalization, and a deepening of the accumulation process through the growth of a more controlled international division of labour, that leaves the post-Fordist view wanting.

When you look specifically at the media industry, the Christopherson and Storper example is a good one. They suggest, and quite rightfully, that the media business, specifically the film industry, is very much bound up with dynamic processes of capitalism that so interested Marx. But they tend to focus on one major element, finding in the growth of independent production companies evidence of a deconcentration of power. By doing this, they miss several fundamental points.

First, one can't understand the movie business within capitalism without seeing how that industry is bound up with and intimately linked to other elements of the cultural industries. Warner is part of Time-Warner, MCA is part of Matsushita, Columbia is part of the Sony empire. These reflect a deepening concentration across a range of media businesses.

A second thing they miss is that the film industry is based not simply on the production of movies, but on their distribution. Distribution is *absolutely critical* because it not only gets films into theatres but is responsible for finding financing and arranging marketing. Independent producers aren't capable of doing this. They depend on the majors to place their films into theatres. Marketing can now take upwards of thirty percent of the production costs of a film and even more

in the case of certain blockbusters. If anything, distribution has become more and more concentrated. That's especially the case here in Canada where Canadian-owned companies are kept out of theatres.

Finally, they ignore the ways that the growth of the independents contribute to the power of the majors. Essentially, the independents provide a way to externalize risk. Production is the most difficult dimension of the film industry --- it is the most labour-intensive and the most risky.

Of course it is important to recognize that there is a constant restructuring of industries like the film business. And the concentration model doesn't always work as well as it does in the media industries. Christopherson and Storper have chosen perhaps the most difficult case to establish the notion of deconcentration. They could go to other industries that post-Fordist theorists tend to be more fond of --- the automotive industry for example, where independent suppliers have some clout. The key point here is to recognize that a great deal of variability, of concentration and diversification, exist side-by-side which any model that would seek to understand the development of capitalism has to take into account.

When I look at developments in the media business, it is hard for me to avoid seeing the growth of concentration at a global level within an overall framework that allows for tendencies to diversification and independence as well. Now, does this constitute post-Fordism? Post-industrialism? Plain old capitalism? A new form of capitalism? These are important questions that media scholars need to address. One way to do so is within the tradition of political economy that approaches the social totality dialectically by taking into account a range of conflicting and competing forces.

AR: The issue of post-Fordism, of course, has also been highlighted by another tradition within communication studies: cultural studies. Post-Fordism is used by the so-called "New Times" Group associated with Stuart Hall (1989) and other authors once affiliated with *Marxism Today*. Angela McRobbie (1992) has employed some aspects of it in her discussion of cultural studies and "post-Marxism". Within this tradition, post-Fordism is employed to advance the idea that these alleged structural changes aren't just economic, that there is a certain cultural shift occurring as well. Post-Fordist societies, it is claimed, are much more discursive in nature. Social conflicts are organized less around the

struggles of capital and labour than around the struggle over signification and representation. Unlike some political economic approaches, cultural studies is more concerned with questions of subjectivity, audiences, and local resistance. In your book, *The Pay-Per Society*, you suggest that cultural studies and political economy would benefit by a closer collaboration. But I'm wondering, given this particular paradigm that contemporary cultural studies seems to be working with, what would that collaboration look like, and where would you start? Indeed, is it possible?

VM: It's interesting that you raise the question because it's something I'm working on right now in a book on the political economy of communications. One of the chapters will deal explicitly with challenges on the borders of the political economy of communication.

As I see it, there are two substantive intellectual challenges for this perspective. On the one hand, there's cultural studies, and I think you've outlined the challenge well. On the other side, there is a broadly defined domain of policy studies that comprises a great deal of communication research. But it has tended to be ignored in the dichotomization of the field into political economy and cultural studies. I think this misses a development of enormous importance --- a conservative wing of policy studies, so-called 'Public Choice Theory', or 'Positive Political Economy'. It has captured the imagination of the economics profession, of government policy makers around the world, and in fact has produced several Nobel Laureates in economics over the past few years.

We in sociology and communication studies cannot at all ignore this enormous challenge partly because thinkers from that perspective are going back to the tradition of Smithian classical economics to extend that conceptual apparatus to domains normally taken up by sociology. This includes the study of the family, of sexuality, and of social relations generally. Consequently we can't afford to overlook that domain. But you asked about cultural studies, so let me address that challenge.

I think it's important to recognize the contribution that cultural studies has made. Let me address how it's influencing my current thinking. First off, I think it has made an important contribution to epistemology. There has been a tendency within political economy to adopt epistemologies based on causal determination that are being considered excessively rigid by physicists, chemists and biologists and I

think ought to be considered so by the social sciences. Cultural studies has helped us to think about and develop non-essentialist epistemologies -- broadly inclusive notions that examine the social whole through the eyes of mutual constitution rather than causal determination. I think this is a significant turn of thinking that is quite useful.

Secondly, students of cultural studies have helped us to understand that culture is the product of the common sense, day-to-day practices of all people. The term 'popular culture' doesn't capture this well, but it has helped us to see that all social practices embody a cultural dimension. We ought not to privilege elite practices as constituting some special domain of culture separate from the practices of so-called ordinary people.

Thirdly, I think cultural studies has sensitized us to social relations and social divisions organized around gender and race, relations that at times are congruent with, and at other times clash with, class divisions. The latter have tended to occupy the central space in political economic analysis. In the case of gender, for example, I think cultural studies has taken a lead in, and presented us with the challenge of, addressing patriarchy within a class analysis.

With that said, I think one of the leading analysts in cultural studies, Michel Pêcheux, put it best when he argued that we need not replace the "narcissism of structure" with the "narcissism of the subject". It is ironic that in a discipline that would adopt non-essentialist epistemologies, there is a tendency to take an essentialist and deterministic vision of the subject --- the 'Subject' above everything else. My understanding is that cultural studies is a viewpoint that suggests that there are no longer meta-narratives, or privileged discourses. Well, if that's the case, how can one see the subject as the essential key to social understanding?

There is also a tendency within cultural studies to a simplistic reading of economics. Political economy is a field that ranges widely over disciplinary and social space. It is very complex and highly nuanced, with a wide range of clashing views. I think one way to build and reinforce the bridge between cultural studies and political economy is for people on both sides to pay more careful attention to each other's disciplines. Students of cultural studies need to develop a more nuanced reading of political economy rather than see it simply as economic and deterministic.

Finally, I think cultural studies could pay more attention to its

own accessibility. Again, I think it's ironic for a discipline, built upon the notion that we all produce culture and that culture ought to be accessible to all, to offer work that is so dense as to be largely inaccessible in most of its presentations to most of the producers of culture.

My sense is that it's essential for us to develop a dialogue between those who concentrate on the political economic approach and those who take a more culturalist understanding. We are both dealing with central elements of the social whole.

AR: Is there any particular empirical work you could point to that satisfactorily embodies both culturalist and political economic approaches?

VM: One touchstone for me is David Harvey's *Condition of Postmodernity*. He's among the few who have addressed *intelligently* the transformations taking place in the global political economy. He combines an understanding of technology, particularly computer communication technologies, with a grasp of wider social totalities *and* a knowledge of developments in culture. I look to his effort to bridge post-Fordist and postmodernist thinking as a model.

There are, I think, affinities between the structure of global banking --- what Marx initially referred to as the ability of capital to annihilate space with time --- and developments in architecture, popular music, and the like. One of our major challenges is to identify precisely what some of those affinities are while at the same time recognizing the differences and disjunctions. Harvey begins to move us in this direction.

A model of another sort is offered by Daniel Bell in *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism*. He sees a fundamental *disjunction* between the rationalizing tendencies in the global political economy and what he refers to as hedonistic and irrational tendencies in the global culture. One doesn't necessarily have to accept that analysis to look at it for models of how institutional structures and streams of intellectual discourse can relate to one another. So, although we may consider ourselves political economists, we can't avoid looking at systems of thought, values and cultural practices.

AR: It's interesting that Harvey's book hasn't been taken up very seriously within cultural studies. For example, in the recent collection,

Cultural Studies, one person who mentions it is Angela McRobbie (1992) who simply characterizes it in passing as yet one more example of 'bad totalization'.

VM: I'm aware of the criticism of totalizing discourses of all sorts, and it's warranted when it is directed at a form of rarefied systems thinking that some sociology has fallen prey to over the years, beginning with Parsonian functionalism. But, and this is a major 'but', as a student of computer communications and mass media I see forms of integration that are so enormously powerful that it makes a sustained, comprehensive, if not totalizing analysis absolutely essential. Let me point to exemplars of this for a moment.

I want to focus on the field of computer communications. At the level of the product of computer communications --- call it data, information, or 'communication' --- we see forms of integration that involve turning content into a commodity. Now, to avoid charges of totalization, I'm not suggesting that it is *only* a commodity, that it is not subjectively experienced as discourse in a wide range of forms. But what appears to me central to understanding both the institutional development of computer communications and its expression, is the development of whole new forms of turning use value in information and communications into exchange value. There is integration *around* the notion of commodification, of making the product of communication and culture a marketable commodity. We see this everywhere in the transformation of public discourse into marketable products.

At the same time, we see forms of institutional integration. When I began working as a student in the field of sociology and communication, it was much easier to understand who the key players were. They were broadcasting companies, film companies and perhaps telephone companies. Things have changed in fundamental ways so that major producers of communication and information include banks, insurance companies, retail outlets, etc. CitiCorp is one of the largest producers of video in the world. It also happens to be one of the largest banks. What we're experiencing is an enormous institutional integration around communication and information.

At a third level, there is an integration across industries. We used to comfortably make a distinction between broadcasting, film, telecommunication and the information industry. However, when we see AT&T, for example, reconstructing itself from a telephone company into

an information-provider, a video company, and a cable television firm, the distinction that neatly divided this arena into industry segments no longer holds. Globally, we see an increasingly integrated electronic services industry.

Finally, there's integration within technology. We're involved in a linguistic transformation from technologies organized around analog principles that essentially correspond to human voice, to technologies organized around digital principles, a common language that derives from computer technology and the development of systems of software.

There are, of course, exceptions, but we're seeing *incredible* integration around the commodity, the institution, the arena, and the technology. So, I tend to resist yielding to those who would simply avoid notions like totality and integration. Anyone serious about a dialectical analysis recognizes the importance of the 'local', whether this is understood in a social structural or a cultural sense, as a source of difference, of resistance. But the local appears to me, as a result of developments in communications, to be increasingly well-integrated within a wider social totality.

AR: Related to this global integration of communications systems, the CRTC recently decided to allow competition in long distance services. Subsequently, AT&T has made incursions into the Canadian market by way of UNITEL, and Bell Canada has applied to the CRTC to raise local rates by sixty percent. Deregulation, you have argued, can be directly related to the Canada-U.S. Free Trade Agreement. Perhaps you could explain this connection, especially in the context of the proposed North American Free Trade Agreement. How will NAFTA affect the communications and cultural industries in Canada, the U.S., and Mexico?

VM: One element is the integration of the global telecommunication industry. This is a result of both the generalized stagnation in capitalist economies and the turn to neo-conservative governments that have restructured social and institutional relations to get the growth engine going again. In essence, I see this as a transition in --- to use a increasingly popular expression --- a 'regime of accumulation'. The previous regime was organized around forms of monopolistic regulation based on notions of information as a public good. It also entailed the development of national instruments of accumulation like Bell Canada, and the commitment to support a full-time, skilled labour force. Today,

we see a transition from this regime to one organized around advancing information as a commodity. Regulation in the broadly defined public interest is redefined to meet the needs of business users of communication by managing competition in their interests. It involves supporting the transformation of labour within this new regime by promoting policies that would advance part-time, deskilled labour as an instrument to advance accumulation.

Decisions at the CRTC, in essence, have been trying to advance the latter and to introduce forms of competition that expand choice principally for large business users. There are a number of levers that the state has been using to advance this new regime. CRTC policy has been one of them. Federal legislation has been another. Trade agreements constitute a third.

The Canada-U.S. agreement touched on a number of important areas of telecommunication. For one, it legitimized the deregulation of what are called 'enhanced telecommunications services'. The distinction in the business is between 'basic' and 'enhanced' services. Basic service constitutes the ordinary use of the telephone --- voice communication. Enhanced services take up all the other uses: data transmission, electronic mail, etc. That sector is growing. It still comprises a relatively small amount of the entire telecom business, but it's the growth sector.

Broadly speaking, the goal is to deregulate the sector so that business users get to decide policy about enhanced services. What they need is the maximum amount of bandwidth in communication channels at the lowest price and with the greatest security controls. Taking enhanced services *out* of the hands of a national regulator and placing their jurisdiction in an international regulatory apparatus largely controlled by transnational business makes it more likely that nations will harmonize policies and regulations around the enhanced services in the interests of transnational business.

At the same time, the Canada-U.S. agreement *restricted* a practice that has been central to the development of Canadian communication and information industries: the establishment of crown corporations or national monopolies. It essentially makes it impossible for a nation to live within the agreement and at the same time produce a new national entity to advance a particular sector of communication development.

For example, if we wanted to create a 21st century version of the CBC --- a national, public computer communication institution that would provide end-to-end services for households irrespective of their ability to

pay --- the Canada-U.S. agreement would make it impossible to do so without abrogating the deal. Furthermore, much has been made of the so-called 'cultural exemption' in the Canada-U.S. agreement. Indeed, one clause in the agreement notes that culture is exempt. The very next clause, however, provides what many perceive to be an important loophole. It essentially says that either party can take measures of 'equivalent commercial effect' against the other if it feels that the other party is restricting trade in the cultural industries. That doesn't strike me as a terribly potent cultural exemption.

More generally, the FTA is an effort to harmonize global policies and generate a model for transnational business control of the growing electronic services sector. The next step, of course, is to incorporate Mexico. There are also moves at the GATT and in other bodies to do the same. The OECD has been advancing these policies for years. Though the movement is not entirely without resistance, there have certainly been strong tendencies toward building a transnational information and electronic services order.

Essentially, NAFTA extends the principles of the Canada-U.S. deal to incorporate Mexico. All of this is situated within the context of the liberalization and privatization of telecommunications systems. There are very significant consequences at stake. Given an integrated view of the political economy of information, we recognize that more is at stake than simply the local issue of who controls telecommunication. The issue here, more broadly, is building what Dan Schiller refers to as a 'global grid' or global information communication 'highway', and determining who has access to it. Who controls it, what are prices charged for the use of it, and who benefits from it?

One of the reasons why I have close affinities to a more geographically-oriented school of thought that people like Harvey and others are developing, is that when you look at communication information, you see a redrawing of the global map, reconstituting what they refer to as 'the space of flows' --- the flows of communication and information. By overcoming what would be considered 'traditional' boundaries drawn along national, ethnic and other lines, these information flows are being reconstituted around clear, unimpeded links of capital. And NAFTA is a step in that direction, one piece in the puzzle.

AR: We've seen in other countries --- Great Britain, the United States and New Zealand --- that deregulation means customers tend to pay more

for the same level of service or less. In such cases, universal access to telecommunications systems has been undermined. You've already mentioned that 'deregulation' is in fact a shift in the site of managed regulation from the nation-state to transnational corporations. In this sense, isn't 'deregulation' a bit of a misnomer?

VM: Deregulation is a myth. It's a euphemism. One would think that it would mean less regulation but it doesn't. Wherever policies advancing deregulation have been put into place, more regulation has resulted: Britain, Japan, the U.S. and now Canada. In fact, the CRTC expects to increase its staff to enhance its ability to deregulate!

When we step back from that euphemism we realize that regulation is a general societal process embodied in different forms, including regulating in the broadly defined 'public interest' and regulating in order to manage what's called 'competition'. There's another myth or euphemism: that policies are *advancing* competition. What governments are doing is instituting duopoly and cartel-like arrangements, permitting one or another firm to enter the market in order to prod a dominant provider (like AT&T, or Bell, or British Telecom) to transform itself along business lines. This is another euphemism for the ability to serve the demands of large business users: banks, insurance companies, and other heavy users of electronic services.

Yet another euphemism is that of 'cost-based pricing'. Costing in any industry is an arcane and very complex 'non-science'. It's particularly interesting in the telecommunication world, partly because this has been an industry very much open to political contestation. It's one in which unions have been strong in defending both their jobs and the maintenance of universal service, and one in which consumer organizations have registered strong social pressures over the years.

Costing has always been politicized. It's also particularly interesting in telecommunication because the notion of the telephone call is wrapped in mythology. That is, the distinction we make between 'local' and 'long-distance' is a subjective construct that grows out of social practice, political pressure, and class struggle. One can look at the history of telecommunication and the shifting definitions of the price of service along these lines. When I hear people talk about the need to move from public pricing to cost-based pricing, I recognize another myth in the making. It implies that long-distance charges have for years subsidized local rates and in order to achieve economic efficiency we

have to unbundle that subsidy and distinguish explicitly local from long distance, thereby ensuring economic efficiency.

That, of course, is all predicated on knowing precisely what makes up the cost of a local and a long distance call. That itself is a process of social construction and social contestation. Anthony Oettinger who has written on this and intervened in policy processes over the years, refers to cost regulation as a 'fairy tale' that is reinvented over time to reflect the balance of political forces in the industry. Essentially we're reinventing the myth today to advance the interests of large business users.

The argument is that the local end of the telecommunications systems doesn't bear its share of the costs, and we reinvent the definitions and methods of the costing process so that we can, in essence, redistribute income. By making the local customer bear more and more of the price of telecommunication, we engage in that conservative shibboleth of social engineering.

The U.S. has put this in place in a vast multi-billion dollar redistribution of income from the telecommunication 'have-nots' to the 'haves'. Everyone makes local calls, but lower income users tend to be much more dependent on the local use of the telephone. Eighty percent of long distance calls are made by twenty percent of customers. Those customers include you and me, but in the main they're concentrated among businesses that move vast amounts of voice, data, and video communication around the world. The notion of cost-based pricing, then, legitimizes a vast redistribution of income.

In essence, then, 'deregulation' is really both a redistribution of political power *and* a redistribution of income among customers. We've seen the consequences of this. In the United States, the price of local telephone calls has increased one hundred to two hundred percent over the last seven or eight years, depending on the jurisdiction. Similar results are observed in Britain, in Japan, and with Bell's proposal for rate hikes in major markets in Canada, we are seeing the consequences of the application of this principle here.

This threatens both traditional notions of universalism, where every household has a telephone, and new definitions of universalism that we may want to develop for a post-telephone era. The United States has been able to maintain a level of household penetration of the telephone over ninety percent, only by instituting a national welfare program. For the first time in American history, each of the fifty U.S. states has a form

of what industry people like to refer to as 'targeted subsidies', another euphemism for a 'telephone welfare system'. This program includes a means test, an administrative bureaucracy, and a policing system --- all of the constituents of a social welfare apparatus.

What was considered a right of citizenship, the telephone, now becomes something that the poor can only acquire after a visit to a welfare office or the social assistance division of a telecommunications company. It's a patchwork of fifty different systems in different states; so you may be eligible in South Carolina but not in Oregon. Ironically, under right-wing regimes, we see the re-institution of what neo-conservatives *themselves* considered to be failed welfare programs.

I think there are very important lessons here for Canada. There's a challenge for those of us who support the public interest and universality to think about alternatives to traditional ways of making policy in this area.

AR: In terms of making policy, opposition to these recent developments seem to have accepted a rigid and, as you suggest, perhaps dubious dichotomy between regulation (state solutions) and deregulation (market solutions). Do you think this way of thinking represents an adequate oppositional strategy? Or is there a need to develop conceptual frameworks that move beyond this dichotomy and begin to re-think how a democratic communications system could be organized?

VM: First, I think it's very important to acknowledge the gains that we have made from state policies. I realize it's not fashionable to praise state intervention. But nevertheless, we enjoy a public education system, a public health system, and a universal telecommunication and public service television system. Granted, there are enormous faults with all of them. However, they provide a measure of benefit to a wide population, a benefit that is there partly because social movements organized around state intervention pressured the state to protect the public interest. I think it's absolutely essential for us to acknowledge that and to continue to see state intervention, for all its complexity and range of positive and negative consequences, as one means of realizing widespread social gain.

However, it is not the *only* instrument. One of the challenges we face in democratizing systems of communication and information is to reflect on what citizenship means in this set of social practices we call communication. We criticize neo-classical economics for reducing needs

to wants and citizens to consumers. I think we're correct in doing so. But we have to direct our attention to what the needs are and what citizenship requires. We've barely begun that debate and discussion.

There are models for this. There is a social policy literature having to do with needs for housing, food, and other 'essentials'. We need to begin to take up the issue of 'need' in communication and information services. This is far from frivolous; it's not simply a question of how many sitcoms everyone has a right to watch at night, but rather what our access to vital communication and information services will be like in the future. Many people will be left essentially communication-illiterate if information is put on a pay-per basis.

One of our jobs as intellectuals is to think about and propose what constitutes packages of information services as instruments to build citizenship. Sociology over the years has been very slow to take up these issues. It's very important to place citizenship at the centre of sociological questions.

Let's look at what constitutes universality in the area of telecommunications. Traditionally we've defined it as a telephone in every household. That kind of technician definition needs to be discarded. Universality can be constituted through a range of technological means, but we have to ask some questions: what *are* those means and what are the range of services that different technologies can provide. We need to organize universality around needs, with an eye not to the consumer who participates in exchange value, but to the citizen. As your question suggests, we need to move beyond looking at the state as sole locus of decision-making and of social intervention on behalf of the public interest.

In this country there is a strong tradition of both statist and non-statist activity in this area. We've built a state broadcasting system that is the envy of many nations. At the same, as Marc Raboy has noted, investing in state broadcasting has shortchanged opportunities to develop a more broadly based social broadcasting system organized around communities and social movements. Consequently, community radio in the United States is much more advanced than it is in Canada because there isn't a tradition of state broadcasting against which community radio has to compete.

On the other hand, trade unions in the area of communication and telecommunication have been stronger in Canada than they have been elsewhere. I don't know if there's another example of a union quite like

the Telephone Workers Union in British Columbia. In her book *That Long Distance Feeling*, Elaine Bernard chronicles how this union took over the Vancouver telephone system to show that a strike could involve more than simply shutting down a service. She describes how workers took control and ran it themselves. I think there are alternative models here for achieving the public interest outside of simply marching down to the CRTC.

AR: But the increased corporate presence in public spaces doesn't auger very well for the issue of citizenship and democracy. As you've shown in your work, democracy is not just having access to technology, but also involves having spaces in which you can participate in a public form of communication. And corporations are increasingly taking over that public space, from the classrooms and lecture halls to museums and public gatherings.

VM: Absolutely.

AR: But where does that leave us as researchers? How do we address these issues? In essence, I'd like to know where you think communications research should go in the future?

VM: I think it's a good question to ask because we haven't spent much time talking about communication as a discipline. One of the things that I've tried to do over the years is to draw out the strong political economy tradition within communication scholarship, something that has, in my view, received remarkably little attention. There are exceptions of course. I think particularly of the contribution of a Canadian who died just a few months ago, Dallas Smythe. His book *Dependency Road* and his other writings in the field established an important political economy base in communication research.

One of the things that communication research needs to do is to situate itself more explicitly within major theoretical debates taking place in sociology, political science and economics. It is in a good position to do so because the substance of the discipline is something that is being talked about across a wide range of other disciplines. What communications as a discipline needs to do is insert itself more explicitly, as a community of scholars and as a discourse community, in this wider intellectual milieu.

There is increasing likelihood that it will do that. The North American critical scholars in the field have developed the Union for Democratic Communication, which, for the last ten years, has organized academics, students and media practitioners to present a critical voice. Media practitioners specifically have organized independent forms of political agitation. I think of Paper Tiger Television, an independent production and distribution company and South End Press, a community collective press in the U.S., that have involved more of a consciously constructed social intervention.

We have to recognize ourselves as critical scholars committed to praxis; to see ourselves as organic intellectuals, not as academic careerists. If we are true to our 'Gramsci-ite' views, then we recognize that in our practice, we are not involved in simply establishing a discipline, but in transforming the world. And doing that involves stepping outside of our disciplinary boundaries to take on the role of public intellectual and political activist.

Over the years, I have tried to reflect that range. At the moment I'm committed to research that will secure a more widely accepted place for the political economy of communication. At the same time, I'm committed to political activism. Communication offers a wide number of opportunities in that domain --- that's one of its real strengths. One can think about conceptualizing the political economy of communication and, at the same time work with trade unions and social movement organizations to create a democratic alternative to established communication systems.

AR: Thank you.

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