Understanding Media in Context: The Renewed Relevance of Multilevel, Multichannel Communication Research

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Abstract

In this paper, the author places into context the use of communicative media as observed within the boundaries of a residential college in New Zealand. The purpose of the paper is to argue for the relevance of conducting longer-term observation and analysis of a diversity of media as used by bona fide groups in their natural settings. It is argued that the contribution such research makes may not be limited to media studies but may also hold the promise of extending and solidifying communication-centric communication theory. The report presented here supports the claim that in order to understand any one medium, analysts must also take stock of the relationships and/or conflicts held with other media encountered within a research site. Moreover, it is argued that communication must be accounted for with reference to the historically contextualised social behaviours encountered or expected there. In sum, the paper suggests that the artificially drawn boundaries between Interpersonal and Mediated Communication be reconfigured according to the tenets of general theories of communication such as the Coordinated Management of Meaning, Social Communication Theory and the Ethnography of Communication.

‘...we are no closer to integrating mass and human communication than we were twelve years ago.’ (Stacks, 2009)

Introduction

The above quotation deftly summarises a largely unspoken concern lurking at the edges of the field of communication studies today. During the past thirty years, while communication theories have grown in diversity and popularity, the field has drifted further away from the creation and testing of general theoretical approaches applicable to the study of all contexts of human communication. One consequence of this positioning is the continued ambiguity regarding just what communicative media are and how they come into being.

While central to our contemporary way of life, communicative media are often analysed outside of their situated contexts of use. Media Studies, for example, tends to avoid conducting careful analyses of socially interactive contexts altogether. With the exception of a small group of scholars, the dominant mode of analysis in media studies takes the information value of both media and their content as self-evident. In other words, the dominant perspectives in Media Studies are biased towards ‘etic’ analyses of content and media (Note 1). The field, therefore, ignores the manifold ways in which the shape, form, and meaning of a medium comes into being as constrained between its intended and lived use(s). ‘Emic’ data regarding the way in which
communities themselves shape and inform patterns of communication – whether or not limited to studies of channel or content – are few and far between.

By leaving aside the issue of how channels are appropriated into, rejected from, or understood to impose obligations upon – or, conversely, held accountable to – the larger communicative stream instantiated in interaction between real people, a great deal of current research leaves the field bereft of consistent, coherent communication theory that accounts for both medium and meaning. Below, I present two alternative means of researching communication. Considered separately, each of the perspectives holds answers not typically provided by conventional means yet each is somewhat incomplete in resolving the problems outlined here. Conjoining the two, however, holds the promise of providing a new lens, through which larger groupings of communicative analyses might be researched. A brief pilot report of the utility of such a frame is advanced in the concluding section of this paper.

**Perspective 1: Media Ecology (ME)**

ME represents the work of a growing and varied group of scholars. Key historical figures include Innis (2003), McLuhan (1960; 1988; 1994), Meyrowitz (1985; 1994; 1998; 2010) Ong (1982), and Postman (1985). More recently, Lum (1996; 2006) and Strate (2006) have begun to coalesce a body of work drawing upon the varied streams coursing through this literature into a school, often referred to as the ‘Toronto’ or ‘New York’ school.

As a field or perspective, ME represents an alternative to mainstream analyses of human communication given its very different approach to media (Note 2). Most radically, ME does so with its attention toward not to the content assumed to be carried in media, but rather, on the features of the varied media of communication themselves. Accordingly, the term ecology is meant to underscore the idea that human beings live in meaningful environments of their own symbolic creation. As leading figures in the field reveal, however, these environments tend not to attract the attention of either mainstream communication scholars or everyday inhabitants of human cultures (Note 3).

Although the roots of what most closely resembles the canon of ME scholarship were firmly in place some sixty years ago, the perspective is rarely visible in popular college and university textbooks (Note 4). Precisely why this is the case is unknown but, as the approach posits a concern for the choice of one medium over another and does not take the starting point that exposure to information is key to understanding the impact of a medium, it does not resonate with conventional notions of what constitutes communication.

The conventional notion that information is something to which people are exposed and which has the capacity to do something to people, acts as a foil against the careful study of media in their own right. As this continues to be reproduced, communication studies is deprived of understanding not only how media – as meaningful components of our coordination and management of communication – are produced, oriented to and resisted by communicators but also in what ways they reflect and are influenced by longer standing interactive behaviours. The status quo regarding media also impedes the construction and refinement of general theories of human communication. In doing so, the field neglects consideration of media as vital, yet potentially unfinished or partial pieces of the puzzle of how and why communication matters (Note 5).
Lum (2006), however, represents one scholar within ME who embodies a Birdwhistellian (1970) concern for the multiplicity of channels that impact each other within our symbolic environments:

But on another, realistic level, we live in a multimedia society in the sense that we use a combination of a number of media or symbol systems at our disposal for communication purposes. To varying degrees, people use or otherwise are exposed to or engage in more than just one medium in their everyday life for news and information, entertainment, and communication. As can be imagined, the multimedia sensorial environment is a great deal more complex in nature and difficult to study than the single-medium sensorial symbolic environment that has been described previously...our task is to examine the dynamics among the co-existing media and how their interactions may result in or constitute to a sensorial-symbolic environment whose whole is qualitatively different from the sum of its sensorial-symbolic parts. These taken together are the ‘unique symbolic environments’ whose complex new languages, as Carpenter (1964) would have suggested, has yet to be discovered. (p. 196)

To date, Lum’s call for building a collection of holistic surveys of media in people’s lives remains unrealised. While difficult, the type of research called for is essential if the field is to unify the talk and study of media alongside general communicative practices. It is here, at the edges of media ecological scholarship envisioned by Lum, that I see a possible new connection to be forged between Media Ecology and the approaches articulated in the Coordinated Management of Meaning (CMM), Social Communication Theory (SCT), and the Ethnography of Communication (EOC).

**Perspective 2: CMM – SCT – EOC**

While generated by different scholars, the basic assumptions and areas of concern for the Coordinated Management of Meaning (CMM) (Pearce and Cronen, 1980; Pearce 1989 and 2007), Social Communication Theory (SCT) (Sigman, 1987), and Ethnography of Communication (EOC) (Hymes, 1974) are approximately the same. Key areas of theoretical orientation among them include:

- Communication is the primary social activity of people
- Meaning is socially constructed and held answerable to context
- Meaning(s) are hierarchically organised
- Communication is an ongoing, unfinished activity
- Communication is a process into which people participate – it is not individually controlled
- Multiple channels simultaneously support communication
- The communicative significance of a channel is determined by its placement into a social group – it is not strictly regulated according to its design or etic characteristics.

These shared characteristics render a common picture of human communication. Specifically, in reference to what is not rendered in ME, these three alternative perspectives share a concern about emic research of communication channels. Hymes (1974) is, perhaps, most direct in his concern regarding the limits of etic analyses of media:
There is a tendency to take the value of a channel as given across cultures, but here, as with every aspect and component of communication, the value is problematic and requires investigation (p 25).

Referencing the work of one of ME’s key figures, McLuhan (1964), Hymes cautions against the notion that the function or relevance that a channel seems to hold for one social group indeed holds it for all other adopters of that channel. Recall that one key opposition to ME Media is technological determinism. For the purposes outlined here, I suggest that this stems from the field’s pervasive etic approach to media studies in general and ME specifically.

Taken together, CMM, SCT, and EOC embody an ecological perspective to the study of human communication. By this I mean that each of the perspectives hints at the importance of communicative media in general as constituted by meaningful interactions across lived environments. As I have tried here to make the case, ME benefits from a strong orientation to channels or media on their own. Conjoining, therefore, socially oriented theories such as CMM, SCT, and EOC with ME holds the promise of cultivating a research agenda useful in discovering how media matter and how media themselves are created as a consequence of communicating (Note 6).

**Theory construction and analysis: Communication at Summit College (Note 7)**

The data analytic protocol developed and presented here forms the central mode of analysis in the author’s PhD thesis. The research is based on the ethnographic study of the use of varied channels of communication observable within one of New Zealand’s residential colleges. The goal of the thesis is to sketch out how persons living in this college instantiate media or channels of communication in and through their social interaction. The thrust of the thesis is primarily theoretical in scope as the data collection and testing process is designed to test the utility of merging the above key aspects of CMM-SCT-EOC with ME.

The motivation for this research stems from the ambiguity within ME scholarship regarding the specification of how technologies (in general) become media (in general). Consider, for example how McLuhan (1994; 1988) and Postman (1985) tend to speak about media as *found objects*. To test the utility of merging the above frameworks, I undertook a research program designed to establish the relevance of understanding emic procedures and communicative activities of a social group to account for how people transform a technology into a medium (Note 8).

While a variety of research techniques hold the potential to contribute new insights into how media are instantiated within the interactions of a social group, perhaps only ethnography insures that the data collected and theoretical frames employed are validated in and through emic testing. Bird (2003) is unequivocal in this regard:

> Only ethnography can begin to answer questions about what people really do with media, rather than what we imagine they might do, or what close readings of text assume they might do (p. 191).

Because much contemporary media studies research is informed by fairly rigid conceptualisations of not only content but also media themselves, it seems essential to use a research methodology such as ethnography to see – in the terms of communicators acting within situated events – how media actually take on their character and utility.
While nearly 40 years old, Hymes’ initial call for the analysis of channels in context still generalises to a variety of communicational situations and media today. Consider the following:

The general problem, then, is to identify the means of speech and ways of speaking of communities, to find, indeed, where are the real communities…to characterise communities in terms of their repertoire of these and through ethnography become able to explain something of the origin, development, maintenance, obsolescence, and loss of ways of speaking and types of speech communities – of the face speech wears for human beings (p. 203).

Indeed, his call for real communities and the goal to explain the origin, development, maintenance etc of forms of communication relates well to the research reported on here. Hymes’ initial mnemonic SPEAKING has been updated by scholars such as Carbaugh (2007) to reflect communication more generally. Briefly, the major prompts of this protocol are as follows:

S  What are the setting and scene of the communicative practice?
P  Who are the participants?
E  What are the ends of this practice?
A  What act sequence is involved in and for this practice?
K  How is the practice keyed? That is the tone, feeling, or pitch of the practice?
I  What is the instrument or channel being used? What channel is featured, minimised, required or prohibited?
N  What norms are active when communication is practiced in this way?
G  Is there a genre of communication of which this practice is an instance?

Prior to selecting a specific communication practice or event, researchers must spend a sufficient amount of time in the field. There is, however, no precise formula that might be proffered for just how long this amount of time is. In my case, I had lived within and among members of my site for more than a year prior to my noticing of an event that was not only readily open to a Hymesian analysis of communication but also which shed light on my major concern: the generation of a medium of communication from a base technology.

Summit College, while unique in many ways, is like all communication environments in that it consists of a variety of channels which variously contribute not only to the overall function and structure of the communication experienced within, but also to the very specific use and meaning of any single channel itself. Consider the following list of meaningful communicational partials of the physical and symbolic environment of the College:

- The Big Book: a 57-page booklet updated annually and distributed to all residents prior to their residence. The book outlines most of the formal rules of conduct for life at the college including dress codes, visitor policies, and communication networks.
- The Bulletin: a daily email sent to each resident outlining issues pertaining to the general life of the college such as special events, calls for meeting, attempts to solve issues of lost property, etc.
- The Warden’s Notice Board: posted prominently in a main corridor of the college, it represents an up-to-the-minute record of issues of concern to the community. These range from calls regarding lost keys to calls for community meetings to discuss violations of rules.
• The Summit Peak: a yearly, full colour publication of the college. It outlines parts of the year in the life of the college and includes many photographs of events, visits, etc. It also includes an article on Summit Alumni and is produced for external consumption.
• The College Annual: a yearly monochromatic publication created by residents. It acts as a yearly compendium of student life at the college and has been produced nearly each year of the college’s existence – over a century.
• Architecture: the style of the main building imposes certain structures on what types of communications are and are not possible within its walls. While all student bedrooms are private, a third of them are built to share a small living room. These are featured in certain parts of the structure and are related to social practices simply not possible in those private rooms that are directly tied to the main hallways. Sunday dinners (more on this below) and College Feasts require formal wear. Founder’s Hall is an interesting case study in the flexibility of a media due to the fact that, while the physical location remains the same, decorum varies widely across the different events conducted in the space. The Chapel and Library also act as media and are also being investigated for their impact on and response to interactive patterns.
• Public artefacts: trophies throughout the history of place as well as other symbolically meaningful objects such as artwork, photographs, sports memorabilia, placards, small gifts and the like are distributed throughout the college. These are displayed in special cabinets and also along the walls and central stairway at the entrance of the college.
• The Summit Circle: the college itself is more than a 15-minute walk from the University. One section, just outside of the university library, is used almost exclusively by Summit residents for socialisation outside of class-time. Students often make use of laptops and other electronic media while engaged in talk here.
• Orientation Week: an elaborate and highly structured week of activities within the college, designed to introduce students to its ‘culture’. Last year, 2011, more than twenty specific social, cultural, and sporting events were packed into the first week of residence for students.
• Balls: residents of the college participate in two or three dances a year. Often these involve hiring one of the town’s most prestigious event spaces.
• Ski Trip: nearly half of all residents take a three-day trip to Queenstown, where they ski for the weekend.
• Campaign Night: as the activities of the Summit College Student Club (SCSC) are key to the overall regulation of life at the college, students participate in a week-long political campaign for the top offices of the SCSC. At the end of the week, students assemble in a large common room and participate in voting. This event typically runs for three hours. Students make use of a variety of campaign communications from posters to impromptu speeches and YouTube videos in their efforts to win office.
• Annual Dinner: each year a former resident of the college is invited back to give a speech at the conclusion of the academic year. This takes place in Founder’s Hall and is one of the most formal events. The event is black tie.
• Facebook and electronic media: although students have computers in their rooms and also have mobile communication devices, they are not permitted to make use of these devices in the college's public spaces (and certainly not during the formal events such as Sunday dinners – more on that below). In fact, one key facet of college life is the general prohibition of using portable electronic media in public areas of the college. This past
February, a new population of first year students took up residence. They have agreed to not use mobile phones in any of the public areas listed above. As the time of writing, I have yet to see mobile phones used in public.

While the specific settings and practices of this community reflect the specific nature and history of the place, the above survey of media and practices captures the shared communicative problems and opportunities faced by communities and cultures in general. That is to say that in reading through the listing of places and actions observable at Summit College, one would be hard pressed to isolate one of them and to use it as the key source of understanding the how and why of communication observed at the college.

My remarks here are built upon understanding not only the uniqueness of each of the above events and sources of meaning, but also upon using Hymes (1974) as a template, coming to understand how one key practice is organised and regulated in association of its placement within the larger college environment itself. This, in turn, permits the analysis of the organising features of communication. Turning once again to Sigman (1992), the rationale for conjoining elements of ME with CMM, SCT, EOC is as follows:

- general communication theory must be built in such a way as to be applicable to the processes of meaning generation found in all...contexts. Communication theory in this view looks to account for formal, both structural and processual, similarities in the ways messages are handled (created, stored, invoked, negotiated, and the like) by media, persons, organisations, and so on. It strives to describe how meaning is made possible from and in interaction (p.353).

Summit College itself exists as a consequence of the ongoing patterns of communication visible within its walls. The site, therefore, makes for an ideal starting point for an analysis of the multiple interactive relations forged between communicational context(s) and communicational media.

**Communicating in context: The case of Sunday dinners and the instantiation of communicative media**

Sunday dinners, perhaps more than any other regularly occurring practice within the college, represent the key tension of the place. Though steeped in tradition, the college lives in step with the contemporary, high technology lifestyle embraced in New Zealand. Junior and senior residents alike come together in Founder’s Hall each Sunday for dinner that, on the surface, looks much as it must have for the past one hundred years (Note 9).

Each evening, when the warden takes his seat, he scans the students in attendance, who are to stand upon his arrival and remain standing until after he finishes grace. Though the students may not notice this, he will briefly confer with members of the residential staff at his table if he has noticed either students not standing for entrance and grace or violating Summit’s dress code. This is common practice for all dinners during the academic term. By the time Sunday dinners are instantiated towards the end of the first week of orientation, students know well how to read and act into the key parts of the rules in practice for this event (Note 10).

Initial fieldwork indicates that the communicative rules operating during Sunday dinners are established through a variety of media. The first level of these is symbolically contained in the physical setting of Founder’s Hall. Tablecloths, freshly cut flowers, glassware, and menus are
placed on each table and distinguish it visually from its mundane activity as a place to eat and run. Additionally, and in contrast to the typical cafeteria style dining practices, students dressed in wait staff uniforms are rostered to provide table service. Over the course of a few weeks, all students will have been served and helped in the serving of their fellows.

The next level of communicative regulation and meaning is established through the media and practices of the beadle. In fact, the beadle’s communicative role is crucial to the ceremonies of the college. The beadle, literally, punctuates the event of Sunday dinner into its constituent parts. This role creates a break from students’ communicative life outside Summit and they realise this the first time they hear the thump of the beadle’s large staff on the floor of Founder’s Hall. Typically, it occurs immediately after the main course is finished.

In this way, the thumping of the staff marks the end of dinner and the start of the first musical performance. It also acts as a means to alert the kitchen and wait staff that dessert is about to be served. Applause often greets the end of the musical performance and the beadle thumps the floor again just prior to the second act. By providing an audible marker between socialisation, dining, and music, the beadle adds an orderly pace to what might otherwise have been a chaotic event. The last punctuation of Sunday dinners, however, is enacted by the SCSC president and executive who tap a glass with cutlery when the warden arises from his seat. The entire hall then stands and remains silent until the warden and other guests at the high table exit the room. After their exit, the students (other than the president) sit and a short address is given.

The proceeding report suggests that the beadle provides an important communicative function in the context of Sunday dinner. The menu is also noteworthy for the purposes outlined here, that is, as a proposed answer to the call for multilevel, multichannel investigations of human communication. The ethnographic study of the repurposing of the menu as a medium informs our understanding about how a basic technology, such as paper, becomes a communicative medium for text messages.

Menus are only printed for Sunday dinners and other special occasions such as Founder’s Day, the Annual Meeting, etc. Their typical form is roughly half the width of an A4 sheet of paper. This allows for roughly two menus to be printed on each sheet. They contain the date of the dinner, food offering for the evening, as well as the scheduled entertainment. When residents arrive at their seats they find the menus along with a single folded linen napkin. The intended life of the menu is fulfilled within thirty seconds of the arrival of the diner, when its new life as a social medium begins. Since the menu is only printed on its face, the back is blank. Keeping in mind, too, that the well-dressed first and second year university students must now remain seated in the dining hall throughout the event, and must do so without mobile communication devices, they appropriate menus into a coordinated and highly regulated communicative practice.

Careful analysis of the note-taking system demonstrates that it is not only a reconfiguration of a basic technology of menu into an interpersonal medium, but it becomes one of skilful coding and message production. In some ways, while the message system might be compared to childhood note passing, its actual import in this research site is far more detailed. Consider, for example, that each resident is provided a blank sheet of paper, but then, after it is read once, becomes free for another use. Because of the rule prohibiting mobile communication media, students find themselves in a setting where they have much to say but are constrained in the way they communicate by the physical organisation of the hall. They have created a form of text-message-without-a-mobile-phone system as other communication channels are limited.
When I began collecting discarded messages late in 2011, I found that 4% of messages were in an origami-like form. In early March 2012, I came to realise that these origami-like artifacts were more than art in that they contained messages designed to remain private in transit, as it would be difficult to unfold and refold them without being noticed by other residents passing them in route to their destination. In fact, residents take the role of passing messages to their destination seriously. This is also facilitated by the rotational role of student wait staff, who carry messages designated for distant tables after being signalled non-verbally by seated residents. Wait staff, who enjoy having messages delivered for them when they are seated and not rostered, efficiently coordinate the delivery of messages.

Taken together, the success of the communication system built upon the notes is based upon multiple levels of social coordination and multiple communication channels. Analysis of either the form of the medium itself or the messages it contains simply would not reveal the richness and significance the medium holds for residents. Such analysis would also likely miss the fact that the medium itself only comes into being as it arises from the larger organisational communication patterns of the place.

Conclusion

The research methodology proposed here was spurred by the observation that there has been a profound change in the ‘mass’ of mass communication. In the past, the mass was measured by the size of the audience understood to consume the same content at the same time. Today, most residents in the developed world share the same medium, but not the same content. By extension, the very idea that either media or content are stable, found objects to be taken for granted is undermined by real communicators’ everyday experiences. By demonstrating the ways in which a medium does or does not become appropriated into larger standing interactional moments, communication theory holds the possibility of demonstrating how media are made. Future research will confirm whether or not it makes sense to take for granted media, just as the field seems to have learned to no longer take content for granted.

The report excerpted from the research presented here indicates that the need for a medium of communication stems from the placement of Sunday dinners into the stream of other social and cultural events enjoyed by residents of Summit College. As they are prohibited from using mobile telecommunication devices, the surplus of a technology such as the printed menus is appropriated into other previously standing patterns of communication. Out of this, a new contextually bounded medium arises. In order to understand the genesis of this medium the researcher needs to understand the general communication system at the college. Once again, the functions and meanings of the medium observed in the temporally and physically bounded event of Sunday dinner is made sensible only in concert with understanding its placement within the larger communicative ebb and flow of the college.

The uniqueness and contextual placement of the menus into the larger organisation of Summit College reveal important facets of how a medium of communication is instantiated and regulated within the interactive sequences and communicative rule structures of a culture. The analysis here also suggests that the utility of a medium is not fully understood without reference to its temporal, physical, and social setting. Certainly the case made here is that the larger social and communicative function of this medium is not to be found in analysis of it as a found object –
paper technology – nor according to the implied official use of it within the vision of the college itself – as menu.

In sum, my claim here is that the medium does not even exist outside of its exact placement against the tensions held between its design and its social use. This brief accounting of the multiple levels and media present in one setting suggest that we gain a fresh insight into the relevance of taking a multichannel, multi-context analysis into our talk about and study of human communication.

Stated slightly differently, the case study presented here indicates the importance of understanding the social utility of one medium or channel as viewed in concert with all others potentially free for use by people living within an interactive space. Attending to the varied levels of context and media in this case study, I propose further development of communication theory based upon the conjoining of the medium centric focus of ME with the processual and social focus of CMM-SCT-EOC. Further research is investigating if other channels extant at Summit College also fit into the analytic framework sketched here – early indications are that this is the case. If the varied media at Summit are consistent in the ways in which they are instantiated only within and against the larger stream of socially interactive communication present within its boundaries, research in other communities and cultures might also be warranted. In this way the field could stand to benefit from new efforts to integrate multichannel and multi-contextual analyses into future communication research. In so doing, we move closer toward resolving the long-standing divisions held between human and mass communication.

**Endnotes:**

1) Pike (1971) created the terms ‘etic’ and ‘emic’ as a means of ensuring that the understandings of the analyst accord with the larger life of a community. Emic analyses are drawn from and made sensible according to the rules, grammars, and practices of a cultural group itself. Etic analyses, in contrast, are external to these groups. Today, the terms continue to be used primarily in anthropological circles. The resurgence of the importance of culture, however, suggests that new communication studies take seriously the old mandate to ‘go native’ if what we wish to understand how, for real situated contexts, meanings and media are related to each other.

2) The more I listen to the way the word ‘media’ is used, the less secure I become in its coherence. Slippage around its use appears not only in popular culture but also in our scholarly press. From the point of view addressed in this paper the word media must only be used as a plural noun – never as a reference to a singular, unified thing. This seemly pedantic command is offered as a caution against departing from a more careful use of the term which leads not only to inattention to different media within the same utterance, but also to the idea that media are always important components of human communication – there can be no such thing as unmediated communication. They very fact that dozens of peer-reviewed articles continue to ignore the confusion that ensues from imprecise use of the word media indicates that the field has not integrated medium-theoretic thinking into communication analyses. By not attending to the inherently mediated nature of communication, the field continues to reify the artificially drawn distinctions between interpersonal, small group, mediated, forms with an understanding of communicating itself. With the exception of scholars such as Penman (2000) and Finnigan (2005), it is difficult to read within communication studies a holistic, and
uniform approach to media that includes, not only radio, television, film, newspaper, and the internet, but also media such as speech, clothing, architecture, and automobiles. In the end, the current state of affairs continues to privilege etic analyses of media over emic ones. Very few studies leave open or are oriented towards communicational theories that account for both the physical channel and its fitment into ongoing interactive patterns that support the coordinating and managing of meaning(s).

3) Throughout this paper I make a concerted effort to use the concepts and principles of the approach to communication known as The Coordinated Management of Meaning (CMM – Pearce 1989; 2007; and Cronen (1998; 2004). I do so in order to underscore the need for improved methods of research designed to more carefully account for the ways in which media ecology might benefit from being conjoined to such a perspective which places at its core the idea that meanings, and by extension media themselves, are conjointly produced, reproduced, and changed in accord with the ongoing practice that is communication.

4) Pavlik and McIntosh (2011) represent a unique contrast to most mass communication textbooks. They provide a six-paragraph description of ME with reference to McLuhan. Other small fragments of ME may be found in Littlejohn and Foss (2011) but here too, the discussion is only related to electronic and mass media – no mention to speech as a medium organises the presentation of communication theories. Laughey (2009) presents a mixed case study of how ME is integrated into communication studies texts. While a lengthy chapter, ‘The Medium is the Message’, presents most of the key issues of ME, another chapter regarding seven types of media is based on the content – not the channel features or forms of these media. And, just as in Littlejohn and Foss (2011), the discussions are limited only to conventional media – electronic or telemmediated. Craig and Muller (2009), Hartley (2011), and Merrigan and Huston (2009) stand amongst the large company of scholars who do not integrate medium ecological or medium theoretical thinking into their discussion of communication theory, terms, or research methods.

5) Birdwhistell (1970) is the source of the use of the term ‘partial’. While this work is typically distilled into the smallest fragment regarding body movements and nonverbal communications in undergraduate textbooks, Birdwhistell’s work speaks clearly and consistently about the notion that communication is supported through the simultaneous enactment of a variety of channels. His work seems a clear starting point for reconsidering the multichannel and multilevel nature of human communication regardless of medium of concern.

6) Penman (2000) makes use of the term communicating in an effort to refocus the field onto the ongoing, contextual process that is human communicative behaviour. Her efforts are noted in this manuscript and the call for research outlined in her volume remains fresh – and unrealised – to this day.

7) The real name of the institution and its associated people and place names have been replaced with pseudonyms.

8) Philipsen (2010) provides a concise narrative about how to approach a communicative culture with an eye towards observable practices with the mind towards discovering how they function according to their own rules and processes. Such an emic orientation ensures that the analyses of culture is according to rules and grammars followed by real people.
9) In 1984, the college became gender-integrated. Reportedly, this was initially met with controversy as the college had been a single sex residence for 75 years prior. Quickly, however, women and men found the place with each other and within the walls of the college.

10) The phrase act into is given its full treatment in Pearce (2007). It is used here to underscore the idea that communicators are expected to engage practices and resources previously structured for communication prior to their arrival in a given environment.

References


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