Editorial

I retrospectively have dubbed this issue “Life on Line.” Assembled from a pool of recent submissions, the contents of this issue converge in their shared commitment to the careful analysis of the complexity of Internet technologies and computer mediated communications. Lines, like those dividing a road, can act as a border delineating one side from the other. Lines also can link seemingly disparate locations, present and past moments, or research trajectories that are oft-times seen as radically at odds. These articles may diverge in location, perspective, and sometimes in their conclusions. No matter. A point emerges when lines meet. This collection of essays, reviews, and commentaries demonstrates the intellectual value in creating temporary intersections and productive collisions: between empirical research, statistical studies, discourse and policy analyses, theoretical reflection, ethnographic research, political-economic analyses, feminism, and cultural studies, to name only a few of the lines of inquiry represented herein.

The articles that comprise “Life on Line” explore different territories: the domestic environment (Middleton & Sorenson; Shade, Porter, & Sanchez); the entertainment industries (Chung & Grimes; Théberge); the workplace and collective agreements (Kiss & Mosco); political discourses and social movements (Bradley; Hurrell; Jansen & Koop); theoretical and methodological questions (Langlois). These articles implicitly suggest that disparate locales are networked through the Internet, that they become co-extensive technologically and socially. The online activities under discussion, from blogging to buying to debating politics, do not occur in distinct static spheres that exist in a binary relation, as is suggested by terms such as the public or the private, the home or the workplace, the political or the economic. In these online times, the movement of information sullies the pristine boundaries between different environments demanding precise, focused attention to the specificity of Internet practices.

The articles in this collection trace out these dynamics from different vantage points, yes, but the crossing of these lines creates points of intense intellectual convergence across key issues: surveillance, access, participation, the meaning of data, the right to privacy, the desire to communicate, and the connection of these matters to changes in the economy, in our polity, in the everyday. Convergence in this instance does not mean sameness. Asking how specific social groups communicate within this assemblage of Internet technologies, how power and access is distributed and re-distributed as a result, how we may study them, and what these trends may indicate is relevant and timely. But is it all new?

“Life on Line” invites a consideration of moments from the CJC’s past in the present conjuncture. For this editor, “Life on Line” recalls the feminist research that has appeared in the Journal, most notably Elspeth Probyn’s 1989 special issue on feminism and communication, which valorized the realm of everyday life in


©2005 Canadian Journal of Communication Corporation
the field and its intersection with macropolitical and economic forces. Another thread that weaves through the current batch of articles from start to finish affirms the critical and creative dimensions of communication scholarship discussed with cogency by Eileen Saunders (in 1985). To suggest that something is “on the line” reminds us that when our research engages with relevant subjects, then something is at stake, that our research matters. This critical communication perspective illuminates with clarity the relations of power and the potential for agency with these technologies: lines of flight.1 To highlight that our research can address topical subjects in a timely manner, this issue revives the commentary section of the Journal, initiated by Gertrude Robinson during her tenure as editor, with submissions by Laura Murray, Darin Barney, and Mike Gasher. The commentary section is intended a critical space for scholars to make pointed interventions on current or pressing issues.

The subject of Internet technologies and their reverberations continues in the vibrant research inquiries initiated by my immediate editorial predecessors, David Mitchell and Rowland Lorimer.2 Along with Richard Smith, they gave the CJC new life by putting it online whilst maintaining the Journal’s academic integrity. Open source software, hypermedia formats, and the World Wide Web may be used to create new academic genres. They are certainly another means of production and distribution. Whether they supplement or will eventually replace the standard print format is another question. As new editor on the block, I am eager to continue their my predecessors’ experiments with online publishing to better understand its potential and its limits. Exploring its capabilities may forge new connections between those who are part of the volatile field of communication studies and keen to creatively, yet rigorously, shift their modes of presentation to each other. Why? To better communicate.

The future history of the field will be created out of our collective labours in the present. As editor, my mandate is simple: to continue to publish the best work in communications in Canada and to encourage this scholarship to be a part of an international context, even as it remains attuned to local conditions. A journal, such as this one, can express the vitality of this flourishing field and its myriad traditions. It can shake up those traditions when necessary — not to jettison the past, but to revitalize it within current conditions. The Canadian Journal of Communication has been open to a plurality of perspectives and has given way to “parallel voices,” to quote Gail Guthrie Valaskakis’ 1993 guest editorial, “Crossing Borders: Issues in Native Communications.”3 This cannot be done alone or from a single position. The job is too big. In other words, suggestions for special issues, articles, commentaries, or changes are always welcome. Please contact me, and I will do my best to vet your suggestions fairly given the material constraints of time, space, and energy.

Putting together a journal is very much a collective enterprise. I would like to thank, first of all, David Mitchell and Terry Boyle at the University of Calgary, who have done an outstanding job in the past six years, giving generously of their time and expertise to make the Journal the second most popular online journal
whilst maintaining high standards in academic publishing. This is an incredible achievement. Both David and Terry have provided invaluable support over these past months, answering with intelligence and humour our every question. David’s editorial shoes are big ones to fill, metaphorically speaking, and we at Concordia are fortunate to inherit what has been built throughout the years of his stewardship. The Journal’s new editorial assistants, Nikki Porter and Lina Shoumarova, have worked tirelessly in putting this issue together. Their efforts are integral to the project of making a journal appear four times a year. We are fortunate to be working with the production team at Simon Fraser—Richard Smith, Michael Felzack, Rowland Lorimer, and Marilyn Bittman—who have guided us, with kindness, through the process. Gratitude is also extended to the Department of Communication Studies and the Faculty of Arts and Sciences at Concordia University, particularly the Vice-Dean of Research, Dr. John Capobianco, for supporting the Journal’s move to Montréal for the next three years.

Finally, I would like to extend appreciation to all of the authors and reviewers who contributed to this issue, patiently working with a novice editorial team. The professionalism and commitment to this process that I have encountered in working with authors and reviewers is inspiring. Authors have submitted and resubmitted their texts in record time. Reams of peer reviewers have worked above and beyond the call of duty. Our editorial team and the authors have benefited tremendously from the counsel of the reviewers’ invisible, but very present, work. I trust that even those who have not been published have learned from their comments. The critiques that are offered are intended to enrich research, and a letter of “decline” is not a sign that the door to publication in the CJC is forever closed.

The field of communication studies in Canada is alive and well, as is indicated by these papers and these efforts visible and invisible. As you read these articles, I invite you to forge your own connections and to establish new research trajectories.

Notes
1. The phrase is poached from Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari’s On the Line (New York: Semiotexte, 1983).
3. The relation of power between margins and centres in the field was analyzed recently by Amin Alhassan in his talk “The Invisible Canon,” presented at Trackings: A Symposium on the History of Communication Studies in Canada, organized by Charles Acland and held in the Department of Communication Studies, Concordia University, Montréal, November 4, 2005.

References

*Kim Sawchuk*

*Montréal, QC*