The four essays contained in this volume were all presented within days of each other either at the 1987 Learneds or at the Montreal meetings of the Canadian Communication Association (CCA), the Association de recherches en communication du Quebec (ARCQ), or at the conference of the US based International Communications Association (ICA). The collective forum lent itself to a reconsideration of two questions occupying scholars for at least a decade: the development of communication studies in Canada and their relationship to the much older research traditions of the United States. Two of the papers, Roger de la Garde's Southam lecture and Liora Salter's response, address the first issue, while the presentations of Richard D. French, and John Meisel are attentive to the second. In spite of these differences in emphasis, the collected papers offer a great deal of overlap and cross-reference indicating that academic thinkers and government officials share a set of common concerns.

Since Thomas Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962/70) the history of science has been radically rethought. Natural science's claims to "objectivity" and universal neutral description were widely questioned (Reiss:1982). Kuhn and others who investigated scientific theorizing, demonstrated that different institutional and social settings give rise to competing scientific theories about the same set of facts. The social foundation of scientific rationality undermined science's claim to superiority over other means of intellection. To trace any discipline's evolution, Kuhn demonstrated, requires an account of the institutional and social settings in which theories are developed and issues explained. For Canadian communication studies such a record would have to include a description of the country's cultural preoccupations and a survey of the institutions where communication issues were being debated in the past. John Meisel sums up the task as one of describing the "unique configuration of conditions, problems and potential solutions....research strategies and scientific infrastructures; predilections of governments and other funding agencies; (including) the inarticulate major premises of scholars and their consciously designed conceptual frameworks and research perspectives all (of which) reflect the characteristics of the site on which they emerge" (Meisel, 1987:55).

Much remains to be done to provide such a "thick description" (Geertz 1973) of Canadian communication studies. Yet, the papers presented here begin
to explore and bring together some of the fragments out of which a
historiography of the field can ultimately be constructed. Roger de la Garde's
"Mr. Innis: Is there Life after the 'American Empire'" documents and critiques
the interplay between governmental priorities and private sector research in
determining the scope of communication research in Quebec. The very close
link between economic and political interests, he argues has had an adverse
effect on the academy. It has unnecessarily restricted the choice of research
perspectives and methodologies in Quebec's university programs. A good
example of such narrowing is the preoccupation with mass media studies and
their role in the creation of francophone culture. This overlooks, de la Garde
claims, the ways in which other cultural practices affect viewers' and readers'
understandings of their personal existence, and assigns the French language a
disproportionate importance in the increasingly multicultural province.

Liora Salter's "Taking Stock: Communication Studies in 1987" documents
another process of institutionalization within the academy itself. Her paper
argues that new groups of scholars raising new sets of questions, as
communication scholars did in the late sixties, face an uphill battle for
resources and legitimation within the university structure. One strategy in
such a situation is to represent the new "field" as an interdisciplinary endeavor
involving colleagues in a number of existing departments (Littlejohn 1982:243-5).
Many of Canada's communication programs began and gathered
legitimacy this way. Interdisciplinary status for a new field, Salter argues, is
however merely a stage in the natural evolution of a new discipline. If enough
insurgent groups manage to gain footholds in the academy, institutional
rearrangements occur and new institutes and departments are born. At that
point a "field" encompassing scholars working on the same themes, becomes a
"discipline". According to Salter this transformation is now accomplished and
took not more than a decade in the Canadian university system.

Salter's analysis gains credence from comparisons with other disciplines
where it was shown that the individuals establishing new fields usually
constitute a "scientific community" with a common outlook. Thomas Kuhn and
others have called these groups "schools" (Tiryakian, 1979:216). Five such
"schools" in the late sixties began communication studies in Quebec and
elsewhere according to de la Garde. Among them were the Universite de
Montreal, McGill, UQAM and Laval, the University of Ottawa in Ontario and
Simon Fraser in British Columbia. The similarities and differences between these
schools, their relationship to existing Canadian journalism programs and their
theoretical outlooks and research agendas have however not yet been
systematically studied. Whether all these institutions indeed opted for the
government/industry interpretation of the discipline, as de la Garde suggests,
or offer a more varied theoretical palette, as Meisel claims, remains an open
question. The relationship of Canadian "schools" to scholarship practiced south of the border is also currently unexplored. In another context Donald Theall and I have argued that the Quebec schools in the early seventies provided a fertile epistemological bridge between French semiotics and British cultural studies (Robinson/Theall 1975:7; Robinson/Straw, 1982:140). Such a reading of the early stages of the discipline would challenge the more pessimistic assessment offered by de la Garde, though it would not fault his warning.

Richard D. French's piece on the "Francophone Summit" offers a spirited defense by a current Quebec Minister of Communications of the importance of language in fostering a distinct regional and national consciousness. In making this claim French continues a long standing Quebec tradition of using the communications terrain as a symbolic jousting ground in federal provincial relations. Predecessors staked out this ground in the sixties when cable jurisdiction was hotly debated. Quebec's interest in communication matters thus has substantial precedents, as de la Garde implies, though the foci of interest have shifted over time. The redefinition of culture producing institutions as "cultural industries" seems to have transformed the nationalistic focus of Mr. Levesque's communication policies into a search for the "bottom line" for Quebec produced communication products. In the process government has redefined the "citizenry" as "consumers" whose buying patterns of pop culture artifacts are more important than their political formation. Such a shift of focus is not unique to Quebec, as French notes, but part of the increasing commercialization of everyday life in North America. Yet, precisely the difference in market sizes provides both the Quebec and the federal government with the rationale for protectionist communications policies in the name of cultural identity. The contradictions inherent in such a stance are difficult to explain to outsiders, especially the United States, as the recent "free trade" talks have indicated.

John Meisel's "Some Canadian Perspectives on Communication Research" explores in greater detail the extent to which policies and research are concerned with maintaining a sense of Canadian identity. As an ex-head of the Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) and as a political scientist, Meisel is eminently qualified to assess this Canadian communication preoccupation. His presentation complements the primarily institutional foci of the other papers and sketches the conceptual and research differences which arise from Canada's location and political needs. Canada's vast land space and small population as well as colonial origins he argues, required it to forge a new political identity as British power waned. This endeavor tended to encourage an identification of communication issues with cultural processes. As a consequence Meisel believes Canadian scholarship has developed a larger range of theoretical perspectives than south of the border. Yet, it is not presently clear whether this richness is due to the discipline's
infancy (Jones, 1983:450) or to the variety of theoretical formulations offered by Canada's eleven existing graduate programmes in communications. There is equally little detailed evidence on the question whether positivistic approaches are waxing or waning in the eighties. Anthony Giddens claims they are on the wane because the Anglo-Saxon consensus on the nature of social research has become eroded (Giddens, 1983:245). Methodological richness from this point of view would result from the theoretical shortcomings of earlier social theory which are now being overcome with neo-Marxist, hermeneutic, phenomenological and philosophy of language theories on both sides of the Atlantic (Robinson, 1987:26-7).

Much remains to be done in providing a detailed account of communication studies in Canada. Such a historiography will have to illuminate the complex interplay between ideas and social structure by exploring the interrelationship between schools of thought, contemporary research and teaching curricula (Jones, 1983:458). It will also have to pinpoint the epistemological roots and methodological assumptions in the various domains of communication studies. Only then will it be possible to trace the conceptual changes which sub-fields, like mass media studies have undergone and why theoretical approaches have varied over time. This journal issue hopes to contribute to keeping the debate alive by offering a platform for the continued exchange of ideas and substantive accounts about the development of communication studies in Canada. Letters to the editor and paper contributions will be published in another Special Issue to appear in the fall of 1988.

REFERENCES


