It is said that all the cells in the human body are replaced once every seven years. The person we easily recognize today is, in fact, quite different from the person we knew seven years ago. The Canadian Communication Association is seven years old this year. This is a good time to pause and assess the status of Communication as a discipline and the direction of its research program. The task is made considerably easier by the fact that a collection of papers from the founding conference of the Association was published seven years ago, including an introduction to the problematic of the field (Salter, 1981; Lacroix/Levesque, 1981; Robinson, 1984; Rogers, 1982; Theall, 1981). This collection provides a benchmark for evaluating the changes that have occurred, and the nature of the discipline in Canada today. I will begin, then, by summarizing the central argument advanced in 1980 about the discipline of Communication.

Communication in 1980:

In 1980, it seemed important to distinguish Communication from other disciplines and fields of study. Communication is not like History or Sociology, I argued at the time. The variety of its research topics was striking. Mass media studies were included in the research program in Communication but, in 1980, there were Communication departments in Canadian universities where media studies were the exception rather than the rule. For example, at Simon Fraser, one of my colleagues was studying the social communication in advertising. Another had examined the content of public school readers to see what was conveyed in those texts along with the basic information on how to read. Yet another examined policy issues related to broadcasting and telecommunications. These topics are not connected to mass media, but they all fit directly into the conventional picture of Communication.

Other research being conducted at the time fit this picture less easily. I had just completed a study of the role of scientists in making public policy. A colleague had examined rice production in the third world, and the activities of such institutions as the World Bank in promoting development. Researchers in Communication had also studied the social impact of technology, office automation, regulatory agencies, and the use of language in communication. Some had conducted studies of the social changes introduced by colonialism, while others focussed on the new communication technologies and examined the
dissemination of information as a result of the economic structure of broadcasting and telecommunications. In other words, Communication could be distinguished because it did not have one primary focus of study. It encompassed a wide variety of seemingly unrelated topics, only occasionally dealing directly with the mass media.

In spite of these differences, I argued in 1980 that Communication did have a unified orientation, a problematic. First, as is evident from all of these examples of Communication research, the study of Communication dealt with information. In the emerging discipline of Communication, information was more than a text on a written page, or the content of an entertainment program or the daily news. It was something other than bytes of data on a computer. The activities of scientists in regulatory activities, or the World Bank in developing countries constituted "information."

An illustration will be useful to show how Communication approached the study of information. In this illustration, a person enters a room; her eyes focus upon the occupants, the furnishings, and the activities taking place there. She also takes account of the level of "commotion," the movement of individuals and even the shadows on the walls. She notices the quality of the furnishings, the design and colours of the clothing being worn by occupants and takes this "information" into account as reflecting status and class dimensions of the situation. Indeed, all the factors in the room, including many not noted here, are information, and all of the features of the environment--including what is absent from it--are as important as the content of the conversations occurring there or the documents produced as a result of them. In Communication, information was regarded in its broadest sense as the features--including imaginary ones--of the environment.

It was not enough to say that Communication was concerned with information, even in the broadest sense of the term. There are limitations to the amount of information that can and will be absorbed from any environment. A second component in the study of Communication was the selection and organization of information that made an overabundance of information intelligible. The term used in the study of Communication for the selection and organization that renders information intelligible was "signification." Communication was the study of signification, of how individuals, groups and institutions fastened onto some aspects of their environment as significant in coming to an understanding of what the environment meant. Because of its focus on signification, Communication was very different from Information Science.
Obviously any selection of information involves the human capacity to perceive information from an environment. Communication scholars occasionally relied upon the work of psychologists. But their approach was very different from the predominant paradigm in Psychology. The third aspect of Communication was based on the contention that a highly interactive relationship existed between those who perceive information and the environment (or context) from which the information is drawn. To use a formulation from media studies, it was argued that the audience affected the message as much as the message affected the audience. In other words, communication involved an active process of construction and reconstruction in the creation of information and its interpretation. Because of this feature of its research, the approach taken in Communication distinguished it from Psychology.

Fourth, a political economy perspective was often taken in Canadian communication research in 1980, and Communication scholars studied regulatory agencies, public policy, industry structures and technology. If one was to conceive of information in interactive terms, it was argued, attention had to be directed to the way in which information was produced and disseminated, including studying the political and economic factors influencing the production of information and the technologies of its dissemination. Particular emphasis was given to the technological aspects of communication, as these were seen to mediate or filter information and influence. An example of how technology might "bias" information will help. The point is fairly obvious if I draw a picture of two lovers seeking to engage in an intimate but difficult discussion about their personal lives over the telephone. Now imagine that the two are connected through a computer network and, while the privacy of their conversation is protected, they must type their statements of love and concern on a keyboard and view each other's protestations on a videoscreen.

The point being made by Communication was more complex than this illustration suggests. In general terms, it was claimed that both specific meanings and more general social relations were changed by the way information was produced and disseminated, and the medium and technology of its dissemination. Following Innis, the concept of "bias" was often used to describe the phenomenon, but it was probably the wrong term. If the substance of information was always affected by the technology and conditions of its production, no information could be "unbiased."

The new communication technologies were of interest because they altered the substance of what was communicated. They represented more than a collection of machines, satellites and computers, however; they were integrated into modes of production. The theoretical foundation for this aspect of Communication studies was laid by Harold Innis, the political economist who
turned to the study of communication at the end of his productive scholarly life. Like Innis, Communication scholars in Canada in 1980 were concerned with the historical development of technology, and how different technologies "biased" not only information but also economic and social relations within any society. Like Innis, also, Communication often included policy recommendations within its scholarly articles, so that the field had both a theoretical and a pragmatic orientation.

A fifth related focus in Communication was illustrated by the study of what happened when information was used in different narrative contexts. For example, one colleague compared the scientific content of the same information when that information was presented in an academic article, in a press report on television, or discussed as part of a debate on regulatory options. In doing so, he drew from the other theoretical antecedent of Communication in 1980, literary and semiotic theory. What he did was "read" the various presentations of the same information to determine their many messages for their audiences. In effect, he argued, each medium (including technological medium) was associated with a different narrative and a different means of telling a story. But for him, the media of interest did not only include written texts or mass media. Indeed, they could even include the institutional culture of particular organizations such as the World Bank, and the environment of colonized third world countries. Any environment could be seen as a medium of communication, in terms of its predominant technologies and the structure of its social, political and economic relations.

Finally, I argued in 1980 that Communication in Canada could be distinguished by its preoccupation with questions of culture. This was partly a result of its Innisian heritage, and following Innis, the definition of culture was primarily an historical one. Culture was defined in the following manner:

...experience as shaped by the messages and message systems of its participants. Culture is conceived of as history and its social context, art and commercially produced artifacts, political debates and the activities they generate, experience and its interpretation by individuals as members of groups, regions, nations or classes (Salter, 1981:XVIII).

Culture, I suggested, had become a central preoccupation of Communication studies because of its ambiguous status in both Canada and in Quebec. It was my contention at the time that when the content of a culture could not be taken for granted by its members, attention was often directed to the process by which culture was articulated, produced and disseminated. Questions of cultural identity, about policies promoting it and about sovereignty were on the agenda of Communication scholars. Obviously, Communication did not have a
monopoly on the study of culture. But since Communication was concerned with issues relating to the signification of information, cultural information and cultural identity were legitimate foci of its research. Indeed, by examining how information was produced and interpreted in different cultural contexts, Communication as a field of study could identify some of the factors that had, and might yet influence policy in Quebec and Canada.

In summary, in 1980 there were several aspects to the study of communication in Canada. Communication involved the study of information, as it was produced and interpreted in different social and cultural contexts. Communication had a particular perspective on the study of information. The process of communication could not be understood by reference to models of "sender-message-receiver," even if these models were made more sophisticated by the notion of encoding and decoding. In every case, communication involved an active process of constructing meaning, which was contextually-bounded. This was as true of the communication within institutions and particular societies as it was for the production of texts and television programs. The technology used in production, and the political and economic conditions of the environments in which information was produced and interpreted both had an effect on the content of information. This was partly because communication technologies were so central in the development process, but equally because the technologies of communication "biased" the type of development that would occur. Finally, for historical, political and theoretical reasons, Communication studies had addressed questions related to culture, and more particularly, to cultural issues in the context of Quebec and Canadian identity.

Communication Studies Today:

There are two ways to conduct an assessment of Communication seven years after its founding conference. The first concentrates on the status of Communication as a field of study in various Canadian universities. The second examines the problematic and research program of individuals in the field to identify the changes that have taken place. The two influence each other. Some of the preoccupations of researchers reflect the status of the field as a discipline, while the status of Communication is influenced by the quality and content of its research.

(a) The status of Communication as a field of study:

When the Canadian Communication Association (CCA) was formed in 1980, little attention had been paid to whether Communication was a discipline or an interdisciplinary field of study, or how it should be located within the academic community. In fact, Communication departments had existed for many years at several universities, and the association in 1980 was simply a collection of these
somewhat diverse units, and a rallying call for researchers in the field. At a
conference in Windsor, held a year before the CCA came into being, discussion
centred on the "common bond" of the field, but few argued that the common
bond had been or could easily be identified. The question which remained
unanswered in 1980 became increasingly important in the years that followed.
Communication departments grew, more were added, and the status of
Communication and the placement of these departments within the university
became contentious. Moreover, several departments instituted graduate
programs, and in doing so, were required to articulate a coherent picture of
their field.

Between 1980 and 1987, it became necessary to address the question of
whether Communication was a discipline. Unfortunately, there were no criteria
for establishing when a field of study should be called a discipline. Moreover,
Communication departments were often established as interdisciplinary areas of
study, but there is as little literature of an analytical nature on the concept of
interdisciplinarity. As a consequence, it will be necessary to engage in a
diversion from the main purpose of this paper. It is necessary to examine the
concepts of "disciplinarity" and "interdisciplinarity," before applying them in a
critical review of the status of Communication.

In a university context, interdisciplinarity is used to refer to new fields of
study that seem to require the efforts of scholars from several different
disciplines (Bertrand, 1980:19-24; Cambrosio/Keating, 1983; Gelwick, 1983;
Kroker, 1980; Morin, 1980). The various interdisciplinary areas of study in
Canada are quite different from each other. Some, such as Women's Studies
and Canadian Studies, seem to have grown out of a critique of the orientation
of more established fields. Individual courses in Women's Studies are seldom
very interdisciplinary, however. For example, at Simon Fraser, Women's
Studies courses are offered in history, philosophy, sociology, psychology. In
contrast, Canadian Studies has adopted a problem-oriented approach, offering
such courses as "Hockey in Canada," "The Political Culture of Canada," and
the "Religious Tradition in Canada."

Some interdisciplinary fields of study are more focussed than either
Canadian or Women's Studies. For example, a new field has developed called
"risk assessment," which is designed to explore methodological and other
questions relating to the use of scientific information about such risks as
chemical hazards for the purposes of making public policy. Gerontology, and
Tourism Studies are all highly focussed areas of study involving academics from
different disciplines.
Based on these illustrations, I would suggest that a number of common characteristics exist in these quite different interdisciplinary areas of study. First, all of these areas can be considered to be emerging. They were established as new programs at some, but not all universities, and they reflect the pioneering efforts of their founders in identifying the resources for studies not undertaken elsewhere. This point is important because it suggests that an interdisciplinary area of study cannot remain in its initial form for an extended period of time. Part of the rationale for the establishment of interdisciplinary areas of study is to generate new work that otherwise would not be undertaken unless new opportunities are created. Establishing Women's Studies or Gerontology as an interdisciplinary area of study does not commit the university to the creation of a new departmental unit. Rather, it can be seen as a testing ground for the viability of a new academic program. In the 1970s, it was generally assumed that many of the new interdisciplinary areas of study would grow into full-scale departments when (and if) they established their academic credentials.

Because interdisciplinary areas of study are considered to be experimental, scholars working in them are given tacit permission to postpone the search for intellectual coherence among themselves. Interdisciplinary studies are often distinguished by the fact that each faculty is oriented to his or her own research program. The interdisciplinary units and journals serve as "collecting basins" for a variety of interesting—and often important—work that falls outside the conventional disciplines for one reason or another.

There are several reasons why an interdisciplinary area of study might fall outside conventional disciplines, even while drawing upon their resources. One has already been mentioned with respect to Canadian Studies. Several of the interdisciplinary areas of study are "problem-oriented." That is, they approach the subjects of their research as problems that require the application of skills from many disciplines. Problem-oriented studies often exhibit a pragmatic or policy orientation. In other words, at least some of their research is directed towards the needs of governments, industry or advocate groups; much is done on the basis of contracts; the goal is often to produce recommendations for public policy. This feature of some interdisciplinary areas of study contributes to its often tenuous status—as interdisciplinary work—in universities oriented towards conventional academic publication.

Second, interdisciplinary areas of study such as Communication often present themselves to the world as "metadisciplines." Metadisciplines draw from several different disciplines but they approach their subject matter from an overarching perspective. One advantage of the "meta" approach is that it permits researchers to deal with problems that have been neglected by other
disciplines because of their inherently complex nature. Another advantage of a "meta" approach is that it facilitates a commentary on problems of epistemology.

A third, related reason why interdisciplinary fields of study fall outside conventional disciplines is that they often develop as a critique of them. This critique can take many forms. In some instances, it means simply arguing for a broad perspective, or multi-faceted approach to research. In others, it links the academic side of the university to the pragmatic demands of governments and interest groups. In doing so, questions are raised about the "ivory tower" status of the conventional disciplines. The critical approach taken by the interdisciplinary areas of study represent a statement about the power relations in the conventional disciplines, and about the resulting neglect of particular research problems or segments of the population. In discussions about its significance, the radical or "cutting edge" nature of interdisciplinary work is often stressed, and the existence of interdisciplinary work implies a finding of fault.

For example, the establishment of Environmental Studies raises the question of why geographers have not dealt adequately with environmental issues within their discipline. People sympathetic to their objectives wonder why departments of Women's or Canadian Studies are necessary, and in doing so, offer a critique of the established disciplines of English, History, Political Science and Sociology. Why have Linguists focussed on language, and not on its uses or on the social relations that language sustains? Why do most Sociology departments pay so little attention to technology, when technology has such a profound influence upon social relations? The list is long and the arguments are familiar to anyone who has ever participated in the establishment of an interdisciplinary area of study.

Finally, I have observed that the status of interdisciplinary work within the university is always marginal, in spite of the establishment of programs, departments and faculties of interdisciplinary studies. The value of the new fields of study can never be taken for granted; their members' academic credibility is often under attack; the fields themselves are seen to be unnecessary, particularly in times of budget cutbacks and a conservative ethos. The status of interdisciplinary work as marginal may be the result of the power of the established disciplines which see them as competitors for the scarce resources for research and within the university.

The term "marginal" implies something more than a critique of the established disciplines. In the classic Simmelian formulation, a marginal person is one who is simultaneously with, but not part of, a group (Simmel, 1950:402-8). Simmel believed that such individuals were likely to be its keenest
observers, but that the status of "marginal person" imposed significant constraints and pressures upon those who held it. The use of the term "marginal" to describe the new interdisciplinary areas of study is appropriate because it captures the intellectual vibrancy that often accompanies their research and the difficulties faced by researchers in maintaining institutional support and legitimacy within the university.

Although Communication had been taught in several university departments for many years, Communication was usually described in 1980 as an interdisciplinary area of study. The description was accurate. First, like other interdisciplinary areas of study, Communication was taught in newly emerging programs; its faculty placement was different at the various Canadian universities, and its research program was diverse. Second, the field in 1980 was also characterized by its broad perspective, and its problem-centred orientation, and much of its theoretical work was metatheoretical. In Communication, metadisciplinary work took the form of an epistemological commentary on the established disciplines and also about the concept of disciplinarity. Following Innis, many of its researchers commented upon the monopolies of knowledge in more conventional academic fields. Finally, the field itself was described in terms of its distinguishing characteristics, and it was stressed that Communication was not like Information Science or Psychology. Implied in these distinctions was a critique of established disciplines for their neglect of important questions. To the extent that there was a common bond to the field of Communication, it was fashioned in opposition to much existing disciplinary work. Thus, Communication in 1980 fit easily within the picture of interdisciplinary work that I have drawn.

In the universities generally, interdisciplinary areas of study suffered between the years 1980 and 1987. At Simon Fraser, the crisis came in 1984-5. The Faculty of Interdisciplinary Studies was disbanded and a Faculty of Applied Science replaced it. Communication came under attack. It is important to note that the situation of Communication was not unique at Simon Fraser for a number of interdisciplinary areas were also under attack and some were closed. Nor did anyone argue that the Communication department lacked intellectual strength or that student interest was declining. The situation of Communication at Simon Fraser is particularly revealing with respect to the status of interdisciplinary studies. At Simon Fraser, the attack on Communication followed immediately upon the unanimous approval of a Ph.D. program in Communication, and it came when new Communication departments were being established at some other universities. Yet, at least one other Canadian university also questioned the future of its successful Communication program during this same period. In both instances, those who wished to dismantle Communication as a department or program drew attention to the range of topics
covered by its graduate theses, and they considered merging Communication with more conventional disciplines such as Sociology and English.

The crisis of interdisciplinary studies had an important effect upon Communication. What had been an unstated problem in 1980, the status of the field as a discipline, became more important to a number of academics in various departments across Canada. Combined with the need to justify the two new Ph.D. programs that were established during the same period of time, scholars in Communication began to shift their view of the field, perhaps in imperceptible ways, towards a more conventional one. The inherent marginal status of any interdisciplinary study, the maturing of its research program, the establishment of the symbols of disciplinarity such as journals and degree granting programs, and the crises in several universities all combined to alter scholars' perceptions of Communication as a field of study and, I shall argue later, of its research priorities.

Given these changes, and the growth of the field, is Communication now a discipline? That will depend upon how one defines disciplinarity. Unfortunately, there is as little foundation in the literature for a definition of disciplinarity as there was for interdisciplinarity, although there are a few important studies of the history of specific disciplines (Morgan, 1982; Morgan 1970; Collins 1981; Knorr-Cetina 1981; Laudan 1982; Miller 1983). Two things are evident even from a very cursory review of the literature. Each discipline has its own trajectory of growth, and each conventional discipline is also a relative newcomer to the intellectual scene. Indeed, there is some evidence that all conventional disciplines began as interdisciplinary areas of study, although the term "interdisciplinary" was not used very often before 1970.

There is one area of literature that is useful for the evaluation of the disciplinary status of Communication. A small, but increasingly influential group of sociologists of science have argued that disciplines within a university community are socially constructed. In other words, they argue that the seeming intellectual coherence of established disciplines is a product of the negotiation engaged in by their founders. From this perspective, journals and conferences are as important as university administrators' decisions for establishing the legitimacy of a discipline, for journals provide opportunities for the articulation of the distinctions between one "discipline" and another and for the legitimation of the interests upon which disciplinarity rests. The term "disciplinarity" confers authority upon the somewhat arbitrary boundaries between fields of study, and the creation of a discipline represents the end result of a positioning of work within a field of study to achieve its institutional recognition and position of dominance.
Whitley's work on the creation of a new discipline among the natural sciences is particularly useful because it provides the benchmarks against which the success of this negotiation can be measured (Whitley 1984:775-818). He constructs a matrix illustrating the different factors involved in the creation—or failure to create—a particular discipline. For Whitley, three factors are most important in creating disciplinarity. The first is related to the efforts of the individuals involved. Whitley is impressed with the need for an almost entrepreneurial spirit among a discipline's pioneers. Particular individuals take upon themselves to negotiate a place within the university for a new field of study, and succeed in attaching a label to it. This point is not a new one, for it has often been observed in studies of disciplines that particular individuals have played a pivotal role. One thinks immediately of Harold Innis, who devoted considerable energy to establishing the field of political economy at the University of Toronto.

Second, Whitley calls attention to the role that scientific uncertainty plays in the creation of a new discipline. In conventional disciplines, some areas are characterized by a much greater degree of scientific uncertainty than others. New disciplines are seeded in the areas of uncertainty within the established disciplines, and develop to the extent that a resolution of uncertainty is possible with a new approach. Here, Whitley echoes and extends an observation made earlier in this paper. Interdisciplinary areas of study develop as critiques of the established disciplines. Whitley suggests that these critiques find fertile soil where the research within an established discipline is characterized by uncertainty, and that interdisciplinarity is replaced by disciplinarity to the degree that a claim of relative certainty can be established within a new field of study.

Finally, Whitley draws attention to the role of methodology in the creation of a new discipline. He suggests that methodological uncertainty is as important as substantive uncertainty in the development of disciplines. The newly defined fields of study, he suggests, being with a positive attitude towards methodological uncertainty and a high degree of tolerance for a broad range of paradigms. Disciplinarity is sustained when the methodological pluralism and uncertainty is replaced with some degree of agreement about appropriate methodologies.

In the past seven years, Communication has developed many of the attributes of disciplinarity that Whitley and his colleagues describe. In the establishment of new programs and departments, the graduate degrees and in the resolution of the crises, those within the field have demonstrated institutional expertise. These efforts have been supported by the existence and legitimacy of the Canadian Communication Association, by more than one
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francophone journal, and by the improving prospects for one or more English language journals of Communication in Canada, and by the recognition of Communication undergraduate and graduate degrees. One would have to conclude that the efforts of the "pioneers" to establish a discipline and to maintain disciplinary interests within the universities have been successful.

This entrepreneurialism has important intellectual dimensions, ones which Whitley's analysis seems to neglect. The role of particular individuals as scholars in boundary-creation of a discipline should not be underestimated. Just as institutional recognition is contested, so too, the definition of the common bond is a subject of negotiation. As an interdisciplinary area of study becomes a discipline, efforts are directed to delineating its content, rather than just its distinctions from other fields of study. In Communication, in this regard, one thinks of the work of Marike Finlay at McGill, Bill Melody at Simon Fraser, Peter Bruck at Carleton, the technology group at UQAM, and the popular culture groups of UQAM and Simon Fraser. These individuals are seeking to stake out the definition of Communication in Canada by defining its common intellectual bond. In doing so, they are even challenging the "pioneers" within the discipline itself.

Finally, Communication was characterized in 1980 by its methodological pluralism. Indeed, there was little observable consistency in the research programs of its scholars. Some drew heavily from literary theory and the humanities. For others, Communication was more akin to philosophy than social science, and others thought that Communication should be an empirically-based social science. At Simon Fraser, the emphasis was on historical and institutional studies. As I will argue in the next section of this paper, much of this methodological pluralism—and uncertainty—is disappearing.

Thus, I would argue that Communication in 1987 is more like a discipline than an interdisciplinary area of study. Is this transition a good thing? One might expect that some of the critical edge of the earlier studies has been dulled, since the effort to distinguish Communication from other fields of study has become less important. As well, one might lament the decline of methodological pluralism and the development of specialized language in Communication, seeing both as evidence of the growth of a new "monopoly of knowledge," this time in Communication, the very field that once focussed on monopolies of knowledge as an area for study.

Comments about the negative effects of disciplinarity are beside the point. The pressures for disciplinarity do not come primarily from the desire of disciplinary members to create monopolies of knowledge. The main pressures for disciplinarity have come from the lack of resources for interdisciplinary
work, the natural maturing process of departments and programs of Communication, the continuing interaction of scholars in the field through their conferences and journals, and perhaps most strongly from the crises that several departments and programs have faced in the last few years. The choice may well have been to dissolve Communication as an interdisciplinary area of study or to move towards disciplinarity, in which case the current health of the field is the best evidence that a wise choice was made.

(b) The research program of Communication:

The research program in Communication is considerably less diverse in 1987 than it was in 1980. My analysis of this change is an exploratory and suggestive one. It is based on the recent publications by Communication researchers that I have been able to find in such journals as the Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology and Canadian Political and Social Theory as well as publications in the Canadian Journal of Communication. It includes information taken from conversations with individuals and participation in colloquia at several universities, and on the recent conference programs of the Canadian Communication Association. It is based on an assessment of English language scholarship only.

There are now several identifiable preoccupations within the field: media studies, textual analysis, cultural studies and technology studies. The newly emerging importance of media studies is not surprising. In the past several years, broadcasting regulation in Canada has been under close scrutiny. Recently, a number of researchers have done background studies for the Broadcasting Task Force, or have conducted research on such related issues as "balance," "quality of programming," "violence in television" and "stereotyping" (Caplan/Sauvageau, 1986). These studies are required in order to support changes in broadcasting legislation and the new modes of broadcasting regulation. Communication research has reflected the need, and in doing so, now contains a more comprehensive literature on broadcasting and media than existed even a few years ago. The influence of government funding on the research programs of a discipline should never be underestimated. In the case of Communication, the links between policy needs, funding for research and the research program in the field are easy to demonstrate.

Media studies has a particular orientation in Canada in 1987, partly as a result of the funding and policy priorities. The main issues that have commanded attention concern matters related to regulation. For example, studies were conducted for the Task Force on Broadcasting to determine the role of the public broadcasting system, the effect of "spill-over" from American television, the status of broadcasting for official language minorities and a
number of legal and regulatory matters (Tremblay, 1986; Donner, 1986; McLeod Arnopoulos, 1986; Salter, 1986). With the exception of news, the program content of television, the diffusion of ideas through the mass media, the meanings conveyed by particular programs all have attracted relatively little attention, although these topics form the core of media studies in most other countries.

The emergence of an increased emphasis on technology in communication has several origins. It reflects, among other things, a decision taken at Simon Fraser to locate the Department of Communication in a Faculty of Applied Sciences, when the Faculty of Interdisciplinary Studies was disbanded three years ago. In arguing in favour of its placement in Applied Sciences, members of the Department stressed the relationship between technology and culture as being central to the problematic of Communication. They also agreed to emphasize the study of the new technologies, or at least the regulatory aspects of the new technologies in a revised curriculum. As the Communication department at Simon Fraser is one of the largest in Canada, its perspective reverberated throughout the field, even if other departments have different orientations.

A second source of the new emphasis on technology stems from the influence of Jurgen Habermas, whose preoccupation with issues in Communication and interest in technological rationality as a mode of thought made him a source of theoretical insight for a number of scholars in Communication. What is interesting in both these instances is that the focus on technology is not usually concerned with the technology itself. To be sure, some research in English Canada is directed to understanding the effect of home videos and computers, and other academics have written about satellites. But the focus of their attention is not the technology per se, but the political and regulatory implications of pursuing particular policies with respect to it.

Most often, however, technology studies in Communication examine technology as it affects modes of thinking and social relations. For example, Finlay writes in the Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory about how technology creates a discursive order conducive to social control (Finlay, 1987). Charland writes about "the rhetoric of technological nationalism" that "ascribe(s) to technology the capacity to create a nation" (Charland, 1986). Angus and Cook look at nuclear technology as a form of ideology (Angus/Cook, 1987). Wernick re-evaluates Innis and Havelock (Wernick, 1986). In none of these examples is the focus of attention the new communication technologies. By and large, the study of technology in Communication has been concerned with the relationship of technological organization (including everything from the new communication technologies to modes of thinking) and how society is
organized and understood. The study of technology provides a mode of theorizing about power relations in society, and indeed about society itself.

The third focus in Communication is textual analysis, and it might best be described as a search for a methodology for Communication research. A large proportion of the papers at the Canadian Communication Association 1987 meetings dealt with problems and applications of different techniques of content and discourse analysis. The people who presented the papers concentrated on the results of their studies—coverage of peace and disarmament issues in the news, for example—but the greatest interest was displayed in how they "read" their texts.

The new interest in textual analysis has a somewhat different basis from either content analysis or literary theory, although methods have been borrowed from each approach. There are several reasons for the difference. The first is the recent influence of Michel Foucault. Although many disciplines and interdisciplinary areas of study claim Foucault as a theorist in their fields, his link to Communication is quite easy to demonstrate. The influence of Foucault has been to re-introduce the concept of discourse into the field of Communication and to define discourse in a manner comparable to Habermas' technological rationality, as a mode of thinking or speaking. Textual analysis is often called discourse analysis, even when methods more closely akin to content analysis are used.

As well, Canadians have been influenced by the work of English theorists who have focussed their attention on ideology, culture and related concepts. As is the case with Foucault, a number of different disciplines claim this body of theoretical work as their own. Communication researchers in Canada in 1987 seem less interested than their colleagues from other disciplines in "reading ideology" or in analysing the specific ideological content of particular events or media programs. They are influenced by, but do not conduct cultural studies. Instead, they draw upon a quite diverse literature on ideology and culture for insights about the relationship between media content and social context. In seeking to understand the "active process of construction and reconstruction of meaning" that occurs between the audience and the producers of messages, Communication researchers rely upon concepts such as hegemony, "naturalized" and "privileged," to show how particular interpretations of events come to be taken for granted—as "natural"—in the minds of those whose experience they contradict.

Finally, in Communication in 1987, a good deal of attention is still being directed to the study of culture, but the approach has changed significantly. In 1980, culture was an element in the problematic Communication because, both
in Quebec and in Canada, questions about national and cultural sovereignty commanded significant attention. The study of culture within Communication was tied to specific federal or provincial cultural policies. In 1987, culture has a different meaning. Drawing from the English theorists, cultural studies in Communication now refer to "popular culture," sub-cultural communities or oppositional cultures, which establish themselves in opposition to the hegemonic discourse. Of interest are musicians, music videos, videoartists, punk and youth cultures, and oppositional cultures in industrial societies or in third world countries. Their music, language, points of reference and style, it is argued, undermine the dominant interpretation of reality, creating a dialectic of meanings, and a "struggle" for a politics of meaning.

(c) Research in 1987 and the Problematic of Communication:

How do these four foci in Communication in Canada in 1987 relate to the original paradigm in Communication? The answer is a complex one. Recall that there were several elements to the problematic of Communication in its original formulation. First, Communication involved the study of information, as it was produced and interpreted in different social and cultural contexts. The recent work is still focussed on the interpretation of information in different contexts. More attention is now being paid to the actual relationship between information and its interpretation, for example, in the cultural studies approach. Second, it would be less appropriate in 1987 to characterize Communication as having a political economy perspective than it was in 1980, and Harold Innis appears to be less influential in providing the theoretical concepts for the discipline. With the exception of material expressly commissioned for the Task Force on Broadcasting (much of which was not prepared by Communication researchers resident at the universities), research is less focussed on issues concerning industry structure.

Third, Communication in 1980 was seen to have had a particular orientation to the study of information. Communication had to be understood as a process engaging the producers of information and the audience in the construction and reconstruction of meaning. This aspect of Communication research has been strengthened since 1980 by increasing reliance on theoretical work drawn from the cultural studies perspective. At the same time, the emergence of a preoccupation with questions of discourse, and the development of a significant interest in methods of textual analysis has directed researchers away from the study of the relationship between the message and its audience, except to the extent that this relationship is evident within a text. Ironically, the new field of "interpretation studies" falls outside the discipline of Communication.
Fourth, it was argued that the technology used in the production and distribution of information, and the political and economic conditions under which information was produced had a direct effect on the content of that information. This aspect of the problematic of Communication has been eclipsed by other foci of concern. The interest in technology has remained strong, but often technology is used as a synonym for the industrial or post-industrial era, or for the social and material configuration within any particular society.

Finally, it was suggested that Communication in 1980 was preoccupied with questions of culture, and that even the most theoretical articles often ended up with a pragmatic list of recommendations for public policy. This aspect of the problematic of Communication has changed more than any other. The perspective on culture has been "internationalized," and specifically Canadian questions no longer command as much attention as they did in 1980. Indeed, much of the policy work in media studies is, as I have noted, concerned with legal and regulatory problems that might be addressed equally well in any national context.

Communication in 1987: A Critical Review:

I have focussed on two quite different aspects of the changes in Communication from 1980 to 1987. On the one hand, I have traced some of the factors responsible for the shift in Communication from an interdisciplinary area of study to something resembling a conventional discipline within this time period. On the other hand, I have attempted to locate the foci of Communication research in 1987, and to use a description of the problematic of Communication prepared in 1980 as a point of comparison between 1980 and 1987. In providing a critical review of Communication in 1987, I would like to follow the same procedure, dealing in turn with the implications of disciplinarity for Communication and with the research program in Communication as it can be discerned in 1987.

(a) Communication as a discipline:

The transition from interdisciplinarity to disciplinarity carries with it some consequences. First, it is to be expected that some loss of diversity will occur. Disciplines usually have less tolerance for substantive pluralism, given the attention their members pay to defining the boundaries of the field. This loss of diversity is apparent in Communication, although the field encompasses more topics than most conventional disciplines. I would argue that the loss of diversity in Communication research is not altogether a bad thing, because there are not enough researchers in Communication to sustain multiple research programs of any substance.
The metadisciplinary perspective was no easier to sustain than was the status of Communication as an interdisciplinary area of study. The metadisciplinary approach of Communication provoked strong criticism from the conventional disciplines, which gradually altered their own paradigms to incorporate some aspects of the metadisciplinary critique. As well, at a time when Communication was under attack, the best course of action was to underplay the metadisciplinary aspects of the field.

The metadisciplinary approach also resulted in high levels of theoretical and research uncertainty within Communication. These uncertainties, as Whitley suggested, bred their own new interdisciplinary areas of study. For example, in Communication within the past seven years, two new interdisciplinary groups related to but different from Communication have emerged. One, at York University, focusses on arts, culture and social and political thought, and it has published a new journal, Borderlines. At Carleton, a centre for the study of cultural policy has been created, drawing its members partly from outside the Communication department. Its projects include a bibliography on cultural policy and the creation of alternative news indices for reporting on political matters. Metadisciplinarity, it seems, has spawned new fields of endeavor, sometimes at the expense of Communication as a distinct field of its own.

Some of the critical orientation of Communication has also been lost in the transition to disciplinarity. This, too, is not a serious problem. Many of the topics which were formerly neglected are now being addressed by conventional disciplines, partly as a result of Communication and its publications. As well, an epistemological commentary, such as was common to Communication studies in the 1980s, cannot sustain a field on a long term basis. Sooner or later, any interdisciplinary area of study that is based on an epistemological commentary must provide answers about how a more adequate study should be conducted. The result may be that the epistemological critics move elsewhere into yet newer interdisciplinary areas of study where epistemological commentaries are again important.

Finally, the loss of marginality attached to the field of Communication has meant much less attention must now be directed to justifying the existence of a separate program or discipline. That is to the good, as more effort can be expended on research. I think it is also true, unfortunately, that the intellectual debate within Communication has lost some of its vitality.

The point was made earlier that the transition from interdisciplinarity to disciplinarity was neither positive nor negative, but simply inevitable, given the external pressures placed upon academics in the field and the natural maturing process of the various programs and departments. The loss of marginality,
diversity and critical perspective should be viewed in the same light. They, too, are a somewhat inevitable consequence of the development of Communication in the past seven years. That said, it is important to point out that the type of critique typical of interdisciplinary areas of study owes no necessary allegiance to the philosophical or political right or left. Some "critical" interdisciplinary areas of study are best characterized as "radical," others as "liberal" and others seem to be profoundly "conservative" in orientation. The political consequences of the analyses offered within a field of study are not related to its status as a discipline. Some of the most politically radical work has been done in such conventional disciplines as History; some of the most philosophically conservative, in interdisciplinary areas of study such as risk assessment. The transition from interdisciplinarity to disciplinarity in Communication should not be understood as a shift in the philosophical or political orientation of its researchers.

(b) Communication Research:

The increasing emphasis on media studies in Communication was, I argued earlier, partly a result of the requirements of government and of the availability of funding to meet these needs. Although this surge in funding has created a literature on media and broadcasting where little existed before, there are some dangers in relying upon the needs of government to create the research foci within a discipline. The needs of policy makers are as changeable as their motivations and the political climate. The development of an adequate research program on media and broadcasting in Communication depends upon the sustained effort of many researchers. This will require research funding with no policy mandate, and a willingness on the part of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council to fund research that has policy implications.

The loss of the focus on national problems of identity, while not complete, is troubling, particularly if it is replaced by a seemingly internationally applicable concept of culture. Communication researchers have a great deal to contribute to the study of cultural and national sovereignty in a Canadian and Quebec context. The problems that this research is intended to resolve are more important than ever in light of the free trade and Meech Lake agreements. Similarly, it would be disturbing if reliance upon theoretical concepts from cultural studies in England distracted Communication researchers from doing the ethnographic studies in Canada to determine the nature of so called popular culture in a Canadian context. Although it may be true that the music, fashion and language of popular culture is international, the experiences of their participants are not. The strength of Communication as a field of study is in its attention to the relationship between information and its social and cultural context. This requires specifically local and national studies.
Finally, there is the question of whether the foci on technology and on textual analysis are beneficial or not. In both cases, there is a tendency for the theoretical material, which is very abstract, to become disconnected from the research programs, and for the resulting research to be considerably less interesting than its theoretical prospectus would suggest. In the case of technology, the result has been to use research or technology as a mode of theorizing about social relations in general. The specificity of the technological dimension of communication, so important in the work of Harold Innis, has become secondary to the more general discussion of power and dominance. In some instances, I suggest, technology has become simply a metaphor for modern societies.

In the case of textual analysis, there is the very real danger that the analysis of texts will become an end in itself, to the exclusion of historical or social research. There are two reasons why this might happen. One is that within some theories of discourse, texts are understood as themselves constituting social relations. If one accepts this view of texts, there is no reason to look outside the text for an understanding of their social and cultural context. Were this view to become dominant within Communication, a fundamental change would have occurred within its problematic. Moreover, the differences between industrialized and non-industrialized cultures with respect to the role of texts would have been underplayed.

In dealing with both technology and texts, the emphasis on Foucault, on the new British theorists of ideology and on the Habermas-inspired perspective is quite similar in its effect upon Communication as a field of study. On one hand, it creates a pressing need for a methodology that can encompass and draw upon the theoretical concepts. On the other hand, the theoretical work itself is sufficiently broad and general so as to make methodological clarity difficult. The result has been two-fold. There appears to be an increasing gap between the theory—which is often about social relations in their most general sense—and the method—which despite the theoretical innovations draws heavily from content analysis and methods of semiotic or literary analysis. Technology and textual analysis in Communication in 1987 has attracted a great deal of attention, but there is yet to be a substantial body of textual research that lives up to the promise of its theoretical foundations. The debate is about theory and about methodology, but the connection between the two eludes Communication researchers, as indeed it does researchers in other fields.

The reason for being preoccupied with textual analysis is often simply a pragmatic one. Texts are accessible and much easier to study than the development of public policies, the institutional structure of an industry or the ethnography of a community. They do not raise questions for the researchers
about access to data or very many ethical issues. A method can be developed, after some debate, that will produce relatively reliable results. This simplifies the research process, and supports disciplinarity by eliminating the need for methodological pluralism.

The price for Communication of concentrating on textual analysis is a high one. Unless one accepts the view that texts invariably embody and constitute all social and political relations (a view that has considerably less to recommend it in the case of non-industrialized cultures), concentrating on texts changes the perspective of Communication as a field of study. The emphasis given to the active relationship between the message and its audience is diminished if only one side of this relationship is the subject of extensive study.

Conclusion:

At the seven year mark, several papers have been written that attempt to take stock of Communication either as a discipline or as a body of research. These papers are important because they, too, play a role in establishing disciplinarity and in developing a research program. Each of these papers takes a highly individualist approach, as is inevitable even if a systematic review of the literature has been conducted. There are many who will disagree, even with the argument that Communication is no longer best described as an interdisciplinary area of study, and certainly with the critical comments offered here on technology and textual analysis and on cultural studies. Each paper, including this one, is meant to provoke rather than settle the debates within the field.

References


