Communication as a Discipline

Views from Europe

Historical and Normative Foundations of Communication Research

Communication in Common

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> *"What is common to the greatest number has the least care bestowed upon it.*
> *Everyone thinks chiefly of his own and hardly at all of the common interest."*
> (Aristotle, 1966, *Politics,* Book 11, Chapter 3, p. 33)

From its earliest formation in Ancient Athens, the ideal of democratic politics has been haunted by the suspicion that citizens would renege on their obligation to contribute to the quality of communal life and, instead, pour their energies into the pursuit of individual interests and personal advancement. Over the last three decades, across the capitalist world and increasingly across the globe, this temptation toward self-enclosure has been insistently reinforced by the celebration of market dynamics and values. The social responsibilities of citizenship have been comprehensively trumped by the promise of expanded opportunities to consume. The result, as one of Aristotle's most eloquent contemporary advocates, Michael Sandel, has forcefully pointed out, has been to "crowd out nonmarket values worth caring about" (Sandel, 2012, p. 9), particularly the values of "altruism, generosity, solidarity, and civic spirit" essential to the renewal of public life (ibid., p. 130).

Ironically, Adam Smith, remembered now as the primary architect of "free market" thinking, was one of the first to acknowledge this displacement. In the book that secured his reputation, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments,* published in 1759, he argued that market societies "may be upheld by a mercenary exchange of good offices," but "not in the most comfortable state." If they forgot that "all members of human society stand in need of assistance," freely given "from love" and "from friendship," and did little "to restrain our selfish, and indulge our benevolent affections," they would, he argued, never truly flourish (Smith, 1969/1759, p. 125). In his second major work, *The Wealth of Nations,* published in the year of the American Revolution, he attempted to square this circle by asserting that, although participants in market economies may set out to maximize their own advantage, taken together, the sum of these self-interested actions will advance the common good, since while an individual may intend "only his [sic] own gain," she or he will be "led by an invisible hand to promote . . . the public interest" (Smith 1937/1776, p. 423). This assertion, that markets, left to their own devices, are self-correcting, was never entirely convincing, but the recent financial crisis, where the chronic irresponsibility of bankers has confined the poorest sectors of the population across the United States and Europe to stark austerity, has exposed it as a cruel fiction.

In relatively limited social milieu, like Aristotle's Athens or a rural village, generous habits of the heart may be cultivated and sustained by webs of personal and kin relations, and then further reinforced by social disapproval and ostracism. But in complex, dispersed societies, where the obligations of citizenship extend beyond territorial boundaries to issues of global justice and environmental degradation, they depend crucially on how we organize our encounters with strangers, both materially, in the fabric and topography of cities, and virtually, through the informational, analytical, deliberative, and imaginative connections provided by communications systems.

The rapid rise of digital media over the last two decades has persuaded a number of commentators that we are living through a revolution in communications. As everyday access to core communicative resources migrates from desktop computers to laptops, and from laptops to smartphones and tablets, digital media are becoming an increasingly ubiquitous and immersive presence in everyday life. They are, for those who can afford to be connected, always there, at any time in any place, insistent and seductive by turns. The result, as Mark Deuze has noted, is that increasing numbers of people now live *in* media, rather that *with* them, and organize "the key categories of human aliveness and activity" around them (2012, p. x). The arrival of integrated and wearable computing, widely trumpeted as "the next big thing," will take this process a stage further. One of the best publicized prototypes is the Google Glasses project (the so-called "Project Glass"). The company's promotional video shows a man using the links provided by his computer-enabled spectacles to organize every aspect of his daily life, from contacting his partner and ordering concert tickets to finding an alternate route when the subway is shut and navigating his way through a bookstore to find the volume he wants to buy. Some observers will take this as further confirmation that the new digital media, and particularly the second generation of the Internet, Web 2.0, organized around social media, require us to discard the paradigms constructed on the basis of "old" media, and build a new and improved media studies 2.0. The problem with this argument is that it ignores the resilience of structural power.

In 1863, the French poet Charles Baudelaire published his essay, "A Painter of Modern Life," a celebration of the illustrator Constantin Guys, a regular contributor to the *Illustrated London News* and a leading figure in the new popular pictorial journalism. He presents Guy as a new social type, the flaneur, "a lover of universal life," walking the city, moving into the crowd "as though into an enormous reservoir of electricity," immersed in the constantly changing "ebb and flow," relishing and recording the diversity and unexpectedness of street life (Baudelaire, 1972, pp. 399–400). In contrast, the experience of the young man wearing the Google Glasses is entirely organized around the possibilities built into the technology. There is no peripheral vision, no straying offline. It is the city as orchestrated by Google.

It is too often forgotten in discussions of digital media that the Internet's emergence as an increasingly universal utility coincides with the concerted push to marketization which has significantly expanded the operational scope of private corporations while shrinking the public domain (Murdock & Wasko, 2007). The Internet is not outside this process. It is central to it, with the result that it has become the site of an increasingly intense struggle as attempts to facilitate open and equal participatory exchange find themselves in constant tension with corporate attempts to re-impose a top-down system.

As Nick Couldry has argued, we urgently "need more informed conversations" not only about how "we live with media," but also about "how that life might be different" (2012, p. 210). Advancing these conversations requires us to place present developments firmly in the context of long-term historical processes, and to reconnect them to ethical debates about the communicative foundations of a "good society." I want to argue here that we can usefully approach these issues and the dilemmas they present by reviving the idea of moral economies, and by revisiting the history of the commons and the drive toward commercial enclosure.

Moral Economies

In a concerted rebuff to commentators influenced by crowd psychology, the social historian E. P. Thompson argued in a landmark essay that, far from being mindless eruptions of mass destruction, food riots in 18th-century England were disciplined and underpinned by a consistent view of "what *ought* to be men's reciprocal duties" (1991, p. 203; emphasis in the original). He sees this framework of expectations as "a moral economy" (ibid., p. 188) rooted firmly in the patrician model of controlled distribution and regulation of prices that was being comprehensively dismantled by the promotion of a "free" market in corn. As he later noted, deploying "economy" in this context was intended to return it to its origins in the Greek term *oeconomy*, describing the "organisation of the household, in which . . . each member acknowledges her/his several duties and obligations" (ibid., p. 271). We can generalize this idea and follow Andrew Sayer in defining moral economies as clusters of "norms and sentiments" that regulate economic relations on the basis of ideas about "the responsibilities and rights of individuals and institutions with respect to others" (2000, p. 79). As Sayer points out, these frameworks "go beyond matters of justice and equality to conceptions of the good" (ibid.) as both a personal ideal, the "good life," and a collective project—the "good society."

It was precisely this social and moral context that was stripped away as market economics sought to bolster its claim to be a "scientific" inquiry into processes that could be measured and predicted with mathematical precision. But even as it abolished morality from its theoretical models, it elevated it to pride of place in its legitimating rhetoric. "In abstract, normative terms, the point of economic activity" of all kinds "is to enable us to live well" (Sayer, 2007, p. 261). And for market fundamentalists, the good life is best guaranteed by maximizing individual freedom of choice and action, both for the entrepreneurs who design and produce commodities for sale, and for the consumers who use them to craft lifestyles that express their senses of self. It presents the sign language of commodities as the epitome of democratic speech, offering everyone the chance to talk eloquently and persuasively about who they are through the connotations of character, taste, and sensibility carried by the branded objects with which they surround themselves.

This elevation of market "liberty" as the cardinal value necessarily entails a demotion of the two other motifs of the ethical manifesto for modernity announced by the French Revolution: equality and mutuality. But in modern societies, "moral economies are plural, not singular" (Arnold, 2001, p. 94), and we find these two relegated principles underpinning the two major forms of nonmarket economic organization in democratic polities; public goods and gift relations.

The moral economy of public goods is represented by that cluster of public cultural and communications institutions—public libraries, public parks, public museums and galleries, public service broadcasting—founded to address the perceived limits of market-based activity. In contrast to the valorization of consumption and personal possession in the moral economy of markets, public goods institutions seek to provide shared resources that are paid for collectively out of the public purse and available to all on an equal basis. These initiatives are grounded in an ideal of democratic citizenship as simultaneously an entitlement to the essential supports for self-realization and a social contract requiring a commitment to the quality of communal life.

This commitment is discharged in two ways: through the payment of taxes that finance shared resources and address social inequalities, and through participation in one or more of the myriad amateur cultural and communicative associations, from neighborhood and hobbyist news sheets to community choirs, reading groups, and campaigning initiatives. These initiatives, which are organized and run by voluntary workers who contribute their time, enthusiasm, expertise, and often their money, are based on a moral economy of gifting animated by an ethos of mutuality, a commitment to pooling responsibility for building and maintaining a shared enterprise (Murdock, 2011a).

The essential contrasts between these three coexisting moral economies of communicative activity are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Three Moral Economies.

Spheres	Capital	Government	Civil society
Goods	Commodities	Public goods	Gifts
Arenas	Markets	Polities	Networks
Payments	Prices	Taxes	Reciprocities
Relations	Personal possession	Shared access	Co-creation
Identities	Consumers	Citizens	Communards
Ethos	Individual liberty	Equality	Mutuality

Taken together, the moral economies of public goods and gifting offer the organizational and ethical basis on which a communicative commons might be built, but this potential is continually compromised by the concerted push toward commercial enclosure. To properly understand this tension as it is currently unfolding, however, we need to place it within the wider history of the struggle for the commons.

Misunderstanding the Commons

For some commentators, the commons, far from being an essential support for collective life, is a radically inefficient and self-destructive form of economic organization that needs to be replaced by private enterprise.

This view originates with the lectures given at Oxford University in 1832 by the newly appointed Drummond Professor of Political Economy, William Foster Lloyd. He had no doubt that human behavior was driven by a ruthless impulse to selfishness. If, he argued, a man takes a guinea out of his own purse, he knows very well that he has a guinea less, but if he "takes it from a fund, to which he and another have equal right of access," because most of the loss is born by others, there is no reason not to take it and spend it. He was speaking against the background of the debate sparked by Thomas Malthus' dire predictions that population growth would outstrip food supply, outlined in his book *An Essay on the Principle of Population*. First published in 1798 under a pseudonym, it had gone through successive editions and was still in print when Lloyd rose to deliver his first lecture, "Checks to Population." In common with others, he saw two main solutions to the problem: restricting the number of children people, particularly poor people, could have (an argument that later fueled the enthusiasm for eugenics), and ensuring that agricultural land was used more productively.

The son of a vicar, Lloyd belonged to the rapidly rising professional class, but facing an audience peopled with the sons of the landed gentry and aristocracy, he posed a rhetorical question carefully crafted to appeal to their self-interest. Why, he asked "are the cattle on a common so puny and stunted. Why is the common itself so bare-worn?" (Lloyd, 1833, p. 36). The most obvious answer was that, by 1832, almost all of the best pasture had been sold to private owners, leaving only the roughest waste still held in common. But for Lloyd, the explanation lay elsewhere. A private land owner, he argued, like the imagined man with the purse of guineas, has no reason to turn more cattle onto a pasture, since it will damage the long term value of his or her holdings. But where land is held in common, because the cost of overgrazing "is shared by all" and is largely passed on to others, there is no reason for anyone not to steal a personal advantage (ibid., p. 31). This argument systematically misrepresents the organization of the medieval commons and assumes that the "laissez-faire liberalism" of Lloyd's own time could be simply transposed to a system governed by a very different moral economy (Hyde, 2010, p. 34).

The commons of pre-industrial England provided a range of essential supports for peasant subsistence: pastures for grazing, forests for collecting firewood and building timber, woodlands and hedgerows for gathering medicinal plants and foodstuffs. To be a commoner, however, was not simply to access these resources; it was to engage in "communing," to participate in a moral economy grounded in a web of social relations which emphasized collective solidarity, mutual aid and care, and responsible custodianship of scarce resources (Patel, 2010, p. 97). The space of the commons was a "theatre within which the life of the community [was] enacted and made evident" (Hyde, 2010, p. 31). It supported not only the production and reproduction of the basic necessities of life, but also social arenas for ritual, leisure, and festivity.

The process of enclosure encircled the commons from the outset and exerted a relentless pressure to translate collective resources and activities into privately exploitable assets that could be sold for a price in the marketplace. The physical fences and "no trespass" notices erected by the new landlords were replicated in the cultural sphere by the patenting of vernacular medicines and technologies, and by the conversion of folk tunes and narratives in the oral tradition into copyrighted commodities.

The world's first copyright law, the Statute of Anne, passed in England in 1710, attempted to strike a balance between deeply rooted conceptions of knowledge and culture as common-pool resources and the claims to individual rights lodged by the rising strata of professional authors. The traditional view was powerfully expressed in William Langland's widely circulated medieval poem, *Piers Plowman,* when the figure of Truth declares that "Human intelligence is like water, air and fire—it cannot be bought and sold," since it a divine gift, "made to be shared on earth in common." The persistence of this argument produced a series of compromises. First, authors (and publishers) were granted the sole right to print or reprint their work for a limited term of 14 years, renewable only once if the author was still living. Second, this right was not automatic. It had to be applied for and a fee paid. Unregistered works immediately entered the public domain. Third, only literal copies were covered by the act; "no one needed permission to make derivative works—translations, sequels, abridgements" (Hyde, 2010, p. 56).

Lloyd's ill-informed view of the commons was given a new lease on life almost 150 years later by the retiring president of the Pacific division of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, Garret Hardin, who returned to Lloyd's lecture in a valedictory address he entitled "The Tragedy of the Commons" (Hardin, 1968). Reprinted in the prestigious scholarly journal *Science*, it became one of the most-cited scholarly papers of the late 20th century. The "tragedy" for Hardin lay in the fact that calculations of short-term personal gain pushed individuals to exploit common pool resources to the maximum, and since there was no effective curb on their actions, scarce resources, vital to collective food supply, would be progressively depleted. For Hardin, as for Lloyd, the least worst alternative is legally enforceable private ownership, which he freely admits is unjust, but sees as preferable to the "total ruin" imposed by the commons (ibid., p. 1247). This conclusion fitted snugly with the case being made by neoliberal economists championing the wholesale privatization of public assets, including natural resources, such as water and forests. The problem is that "unmanaged" commons are entirely unrepresentative.

Almost all actually existing commons, both historical and contemporary, have been regulated by collectively agreed-upon rules of access and use. Some of the arrangements that governed the medieval commons were backed by statute and could be defended in the courts, but most were rooted in the customary understandings that had grown up around longstanding practices. As Elinor Ostrom demonstrated in the body of work on contemporary commons that began with her landmark 1990 book, *Governing the Commons*, and eventually won her the Nobel Prize for economics, the question was always not whether the commons are regulated, but how. Drawing on case studies of contemporary commons, from forests in Nepal to fisheries in Maine, she explored the ways that "caring for the commons [was] organised from the ground up and shaped to cultural norms" (*The Economist*, 2012a, p. 98). The tension between the defense of custom and custodianship and the incursion of property and profit is played out every day across multiple sites around the globe, as logging companies fell ancient forests, aggressive commercial fishing depletes marine stocks, and historic areas of cities are bulldozed to clear the way for "redevelopment." But Ostrom's celebration of the local and the small-scale left little room for the state to play a positive role in guaranteeing equal access and non-exploitable use of essential resources. This is a blind spot. In their double role as regulators of market excesses and funders of public goods, modern democratic states have played a central role in ensuring the sustainability and vitality of both the physical

and cultural commons. To understand why, however, we need to see the struggle for the communicative commons as central to both the constitution of citizenship and the expansion of the city.

The Communicative Commons

The physical enclosure movement in the countryside that accelerated in England with dissolution of the monasteries and was more or less complete by the mid-19th century, dismantled the economy of self-sufficiency and forced villagers to seek paid work, either on the new landed estates or in the rapidly expanding industrial towns and cities. This migration did not end struggles over commons in rural areas.

The battle to maintain open spaces for collective use continued with campaigns for national parks, direct action to keep open the historic public footpaths across land that had passed into private ownership, and lobbies for the establishment of "green belts" placing limits on urban sprawl. But the primary locus of activity shifted to the new urban landscape, as demands for land for commercial purposes and speculative development increasingly clashed with the assertion of communal rights to shared space (see Harvey, 2012). Often, "urban protests over common rights were more formidable and more visible than rural" protests (Thompson, 1991, p. 121). London, which by 1850 had become the world's leading financial and cultural capital, saw extended battles to secure the urban commons (Keller, 2010, p. 36). These were fought with particular intensity around two iconic locations, Hyde Park and Trafalgar Square, both of which saw confrontations over rights of public assembly and political speech, as well as continuing skirmishes over appropriate forms of recreation and festivity.

The centrality of public space to the constitution of communicative life in democratic societies is almost entirely missing from Jurgen Habermas' hugely influential account of the development of the political public sphere. As he concedes in the subtitle to his foundational text, his inquiry into "the structural transformation of the public sphere" deals with "a category of bourgeois society" and focuses on spaces of association, coffee houses and salons, peopled almost exclusively by old and new wealth (Habermas, 1989/1962). Pressed by critics and struck by the emergence of new social movements, he later revised his map of associative activity to include the myriad groupings within civil society that operate "outside the realm of the state and the economy," and that range from "churches, cultural associations, debating societies, grass roots petitions, to labour unions" (Habermas, 1992, p. 452). The mutuality that informs social relations in this extended conception of "civil society" is enacted across multiple spaces. Some are open only to members, but many welcome visitors and passers-by or stage performances in full public view, organizing fetes and carnivals, playing music in parks or on street corners, or giving public opinion corporeal form by assembling to march through or occupy key public spaces in the city. The history of public space, and of its communicative uses, is integral to the history of the public sphere (Murdock, 2012).

The democratic imagination however, needs to go beyond the mutual recognition generated by face-to-face encounters to embrace the lives and entitlements of distant strangers. Cultivating this extended sense of mutuality requires access to shared communicative resources. Habermas nominates two as central, the newspaper and the novel. Newspapers were charged with providing the resources for rational political deliberation and participation; comprehensive and disinterested information on key

events and issues; rigorous analysis of relevant contexts, possible causes, and likely consequences; and wide-ranging and inclusive debate on possible courses of action. But principled deliberation, based on openness to argument, also requires participants to cultivate habits of recognition and respect in confronting difference. Art, narrative, and entertainment are central to this process. Art challenges our settled perceptions by making the familiar strange. Fictions allow us to enter the lives of others and see the world through their eyes. Entertainment speaks to our shared humanity.

Commercial publishing and, later, the audio-visual industries that grew up to cater to the informational and entertainment demands of the new urban populations, have provided some of the necessary informational and imaginative resources for democratic life, but as a basis for a communicative commons, they have three major limitations. First, wherever access to media and cultural provision is regulated by price, effective choice is inevitably tied to disposable income, creating exclusions. Second, the escalating volume of advertising material and its increasing prominence gives commercial speech a unique centrality in public life, squeezing the space available to other voices. Third, and arguably most important, audiences for commercial media products are addressed, and encouraged to see themselves, primarily as consumers exercising their rights to choice in the marketplace, rather than as members of a moral community with a responsibility to look beyond their immediate wants and desires and contribute to the overall quality of collective life. As Jay Blumler and Stephen Coleman note in their contribution to this symposium, the more vigorously "ideological commitment to the privatization of public space" is pursued, the stronger the impetus to transform citizens into consumers and the greater the hollowing out of "the sociability and solidarity upon which democratic culture flourishes."

The intensification of commodity culture and the elevation of the consumer as the central identity of modernity can be seen as a second enclosure movement. It has commandeered physical space within the city, occupying whole blocks with department stores and, later, with supermarkets and shopping malls, and displacing the conviviality of public squares and traditional market trading with carefully directed "footfall" as shoppers navigate enclosed enclaves under the watchful eye of private security guards. True public spaces are hospitable to diversity. They provide arenas in which social differences, including those that are discomforting and unsettling, can be encountered and negotiated. They facilitate the "mutual recognition of strangers . . . not merely [as] individual[s] who have not yet become acquainted but [as] people who are disturbing to one another" (Kohn, 2004, p. 203). The social spaces offered by commercial provision attenuate and often cancel opportunities to recognize the claims of others. By homogenizing sociability, they ensure that we only encounter those similar to ourselves. The physical enclosure of gated communities and privately policed shopping malls is mirrored and reproduced in the restricted social reach of specialist cable channels and computer "applications."

This symbolic annexation has been continually reinforced by the pervasiveness and clutter of advertising, and in the life of the self, through consumerism's presentation of other people as either models to be emulated or competitors to be outplayed, rather than as potential collaborators to be enlisted in common enterprises on a basis of equality.

From the outset, however, the intensification of promotional culture coexisted in modern democratic polities with the long struggle for universal citizenship and continuing debates over the scope of personal rights and the nature of collective responsibilities in conditions of increasing social diversity and heterogeneity. The recognition that sustaining the practice of citizenship required supporting material and cultural resources animated both the drive for welfare provision and the construction of a network of publicly funded cultural institutions offering open access to informational and imaginative resources designed to foster self-development and cultivate a shared sense of civic membership. These initiatives, which ranged from local public libraries to national public broadcasting systems, set out to counter the impetus to material, symbolic, and self-enclosure that informed commercial provision by using tax subsidies to finance open access. There were, however, two points of tension. First, the impulse to inclusivity was hedged around by an ever-present push toward governmentality that was aimed at displacing social antagonisms and constructing an imagined community around officially sanctioned conceptions of the "nation" and national culture, conceptions based on clear hierarchies of social and symbolic value. The desire to open the way to new experiences and ways of looking and thinking was combined in an uneasy mix "with an interest in developing benign forms of social control" (ibid., p. 200). Second, the origination and orchestration of the cultural materials on offer was monopolized by cadres of cultural professionals who deployed their claims to authorship and curatorship to patrol the boundaries. The vernacular and amateur productions generated by civil society groups were routinely refused entry or admitted only on strictly specified terms.

Because the technology of radio transmission made instantaneous and universal access possible, public broadcasting occupied a pivotal place in the network of public cultural goods. By abolishing geographical constraints, it promised to provide everyone with a library, theatre, concert hall, seminar room, and debating club—all without walls. But it was precisely because of this prospect of universality that public broadcasting became the site of permanent tensions around issues of governance and representation. Its assigned responsibility, to act as the voice of the nation, opened the way for governments to press their particular definition of the national interest, and for cultural and intellectual elites to defend their exclusive right to decide who got to speak and about what.

The Digital Commons

We can think of the emerging digital environment as the latest, and most comprehensive, arena in which the relations between the three moral economies of communication I have sketched here are being both reinforced and reassembled.

When he devised the original basis for what would later become the World Wide Web, Tim Berners Lee imagined a horizontal network of connections in which each participant could originate, as well as receive, material without the mediation of a central point of control. Originally deployed to facilitate scholarly exchange, it rapidly became the basis for an explosion of vernacular commentary and creativity. Much of this effort is narcissistic and self-promoting or used as a vehicle for recycling stock stereotypes or abusive speech that reaffirms social boundaries and discriminations, a potential reinforced by the widespread resort to anonymity online. But there are also multiple initiatives using collaborative production to develop new common-pool cultural resources rooted in a moral economy of gifting and

reciprocity. Some are linked to mobilizations around specific political and social campaigns. Others, like Wikipedia, provide general resources for understanding, analysis, and agency. Others, again, are exploring the possibilities of shared participation in the origination of visual and narrated expressive forms. Taken together, these ventures generalize an ethos of mutuality beyond the constraints of geographical location that previously limited the reach of civil society groups. But we need to guard against facile optimism.

The arrival of the Internet as an increasingly mass utility coincides with three major shifts that have the potential to shape its future in decisive ways: the rise of fundamentalisms, the consolidation of security states, and as noted earlier, the global embrace of marketization.

Fundamentalisms are the direct antithesis of an ethos of mutuality based on hospitality to heterogeneity. They erect un-crossable boundaries between "us" and "them," purity and contamination, and define "insiders" by denigrating and often demonizing "outsiders." The last two decades have seen these essentialist systems gaining increasing purchase, not only across the major world religions of the book, but within national communities. The combination of escalating inward immigration and a perceived decline in purchase within the world system is an especially potent mix. Calls for protectionism, whether economic, social, or symbolic, erode the ethical basis for any conception of cosmopolitan citizenship, but find a ready home online.

States have always assumed responsibility for guaranteeing the security of their territorial boundaries and protecting citizens from external attack and internal subversion. The 9/11 assaults on New York and Washington, along with the subsequent bombings in major metropolitan centers, have intensified these concerns and focused governmental attention on the increased scope of civilian surveillance made possible by digital communications technologies. Consequently, the expanded opportunities for collaborative participation offered by the Internet are permanently shadowed by technologies of geostationary tracking, face recognition, and data mining that allow citizens' movements, associations, and activities to be logged, aggregated, and stored more comprehensively than ever before.

But arguably the most concerted threat to the possibility of using digital technologies to construct a new cultural commons, and one that transcends geographical boundaries, comes from the worldwide embrace of marketization and the global generalization of consumer culture. The Internet is at the cutting edge of this shift. In the major Western economies, most people's routine online activity is increasingly orchestrated by a small number of major corporations, led by Google, Apple, and Amazon. Their reach has been consolidated by the migration of Internet access from personal computers to tablets and smart phones, and the move from surfing the Web by following links to downloading dedicated applications. Rather than providing a public park, open to a variety of uses and serendipitous encounters, the Web is becoming a series of walled gardens tailored to already-established interests and preferences.

This drive to enclose has been reinforced by recent attempts to extend intellectual property rights. Registration requirements have been removed. The term of copyright, set at a maximum of 28 years in 1710, now stands, in the United States, at 95 years for work produced by the major communications corporations, a more than four-fold increase. The conditions imposed on the legitimate uses of new digital formats, such as e-books, are often more restrictive than the old physical versions. As

Lewis Hyde has noted, these moves have turned the basis of the previous settlement upside down. Previously, "everything belonged to the commons," except for material removed "for a short term, and for good reasons. Now the point of departure is the assumption of exclusive ownership" (Hyde, 2010, p. 58).

Added to that, because the economic base of most commercially organized Web activity is the collection and sale of information about users, the Internet has become the vehicle for increasing intensified and personalized forms of promotional address. Some mobilize online networks in the service of sales. Others incorporate the unpaid labor of consumers into the design and development of new commodities. Taken together, these initiatives constitute a new enclosure movement. Audience activity is no longer valued simply for the attention and engagement it delivers to advertisers, but increasingly, for the productivity of the unpaid labor it contributes to the development of commodities for sale.

At the same time, despite substantial cuts to tax subsidies, public institutions are using digital technologies to make their holdings and expertise generally available while retaining the core principle that access should be free at the point of use. Public libraries, museums, galleries, and public broadcasting organizations are digitizing their collections and archives. Researchers who accept grants from public bodies are increasingly required to post their results online. Scholarly communities are migrating away from prohibitively expensive, commercially published journals and developing open access peer reviewed outlets online.

To be maximally useful, however, these dispersed initiatives need to be networked together. Investigating the factors that facilitate or impede the digitization of public cultural resources and the possibilities that exist for collaboration and networking across institutions and sectors, offers a fertile area for research on the changing nature of public goods (Murdock, 2010). It also raises major questions about the future role of public service broadcasting (see, e.g., Debrett, 2010; Moe, 2011). In the context of arguments around the cultural commons, one possibility is for public broadcasters to become the base for a comprehensive public search engine, offering a first port of call for anyone wishing to access the full range of public cultural resources and navigate their way around the diversity of opportunities on offer (Murdock, 2005).

The flexibility, storage capacity, and searchability offered by digital technologies also opens up possibilities for new forms of collaboration between professional cultural workers and amateur contributors, and between expert practice and lay knowledge. As Jay Blumler and Stephen Coleman note in their piece, the field of representation is shifting from "speaking for" to "speaking with," but as the continuing debates around "citizen journalism" make clear, forging a new social contract across these historical demarcation lines will require sustained negotiation. But it is a project that must be pursued, since, in combination with the digitization of public cultural holdings, it offers the best chance to build a communicative commons with the informational and analytical depth, expressive range, geographic mobility, and social inclusiveness that can begin to meet the formidable collective challenges of the coming decades.

Research Challenges

The arguments I have sketched here suggest a number of lines of research and inquiry for communication scholarship.

(1)   Reconnecting communication inquiry to debates in moral philosophy

Recent events have forcibly reminded us of the limits of the market-oriented thinking that has increasingly informed public policy, including communications policy, over the last three decades. Faced with the devastating social consequences of the financial crisis and the extent of corruption and manipulation revealed by the inquiry into the operation of one key division within Rupert Murdoch's media empire, it is no longer possible to argue that the unrestricted pursuit of commercial gain will somehow produce positive social outcomes. One option is, once again, to place the defense of the public interest at the heart of regulatory systems. Another is to argue for enhanced funding for countervailing institutions based on a moral economy of public goods and public service. These are not "local" decisions, confined to rebalancing the media system. If, as communication scholars, we want to stake a claim for the value and distinctiveness of our area of expertise by arguing that communication plays a pivotal role in the constitution of social and political life, we must accept that we have a responsibility to go beyond empirical inquiry and enter into debates about what we mean by a "good society" in contemporary conditions, and how the practical organization of the communication through which we encounter and interact with each other may promote or impede its realization.

(2)   Taking the long view

I have argued here for the indispensability of a historical perspective that locates present developments within processes that have evolved over long loops of time. We now have an impressive body of scholarship on the history of modern communication systems, charting the institutional forms they have taken, the expressive forms they have generated, and the ways they have entered into and reshaped everyday lives and senses of self. This is an indispensable resource for understanding the part played by legacies and continuities in present conditions and a necessary corrective to the over-easy resort to notions of "revolution." But we need to go beyond histories *of* media to develop fuller accounts of media *in* history, placing developments in communication firmly in the context of the other long-term shifts they are inextricably tied up with. An examination of the shifting relations between the constitutions of the commons and processes of enclosure would offer one fertile departure point for analysis, since the drive to enclose has been central to the process of commodification at the center of capitalist economies.

Nor is commodity culture and its promotion any longer simply an issue for the mature capitalist societies of the West. The collapse of Soviet communism and the turn to the market in both India and China has opened up a global arena for consumerism. The majority of the world's largest shopping malls are now in Asia, posing urgent comparative questions about the shifting relations between the identities of consumer and citizen and the cross-cutting claims of the identities of worker and believer.

(3)   *Questions of comparison*

As Paolo Mancini reminds us in his contribution to this symposium, many of the interpretive schemas that have underpinned communication research to date are anchored in the experiences of a tiny handful of advanced capitalist countries over a specific historical period that saw both the emergence of a complex communications environment and the cementation of mature industrial and democratic systems. For many scholars living elsewhere, the assumption that models developed to analyze these intersections could be generalized and applied universally is a variant of cultural imperialism, and it has been met with increasingly vocal demands to "de-Westernize" media scholarship.

Developing more inclusive comparative typologies of national systems is one necessary response to this challenge. The framework I have offered here has its origins in Johan Galtung's suggestion that we can most usefully see media systems as being located within a triangular field of forces exerted by pressures coming from capital, the state, and civil society (1999). At one level, I have used this model to tell a story that is endemically parochial and based solidly in English, European, and North American experience. It assumes a capitalist economy, a developed civil society, and a polity that allows public cultural institutions to operate at arm's length from government, rather than as extensions of state power. Thirty years ago, this model would have had limited applicability, but recent changes have rendered it more generally serviceable. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the turn to the market in both China and India have invested capitalist dynamics and commodity culture with global reach. The emergence of new social movements is generating new patterns of civil society and popular mobilization. The relations between states and public goods are, everywhere, increasingly sites of conflict. In this context, investigating how communicative systems are being reshaped by the changing dynamics and interactions of capital, states, and civil societies offers a starting point for comparative analysis that avoids media-centrism and reconnects the study of changing media to wider patterns of economic, social, and political transformation.

How the shifting relations between capital, the state, and civil society will be resolved in nations approaching them from different histories remains very much an open question (Murdock, 2011b). China may succeed in forging a new settlement between the free market and the strong state. As Martin Jacques has persuasively argued, the state in China is more often seen as a positive force than an impediment to be reduced to a minimal role, and it continues to be "regarded as the embodiment of what China is, and the guarantor of the country's stability and unity" (2009, p. 425). Elsewhere, the resurgence of civil society and the struggle for democratic rule continues to be marked by the revival of religious frameworks, often in their more fundamentalist forms.

As Frank Esser reminds us in his piece, however, comparative communication scholarship also needs to take account of the increasing centrality of regional and global flows and spaces. Charting the ways cultural commodities are modified and changed as they move across and between cultures, and mapping the imagined global communities built around shared beliefs, common conditions, and experiences of diaspora and displacement, are vital areas for anyone concerned with the communicative processes that promote or impede the formation of the cosmopolitan consciousness needed to build a genuinely transnational communicative commons.

(4)   Communicative space and the space of the city

Not surprisingly, given its centrality to claims of specialized expertise, media research has tended to focus on how people use media forms and technologies and how these engagements shape the distribution of knowledge, the cultivation of views of the world, and patterns of personal identity and social connection and separation. These remain vital areas of study, but not to look beyond them limits our analysis. Spaces of personal communication are embedded in a wider network of encounters and segregations within the city. We have just reached the point in human history when, for the first time, more people live in towns and cities than in the countryside. By mid-century, this figure is estimated to rise to seven out of 10. The emerging megacities are simultaneously bastions of capital accumulation, financial dealing, and consumption, and magnets for inward and overseas migration. This produces a dual structure in which the official metropolis is shadowed by the unofficial city, and business districts and malls coexist alongside shanty towns. Against this background, we urgently need to reconnect the study of communication to work on both the changing ecology of the city and the role of developments in both spheres in reorganizing association and privatization.

(5)   Ghost hunting: Gifting, sharing, and caring

Most work on the structural organization of communication systems has concentrated on the shifting relations between capital and private enterprise on the one hand, and state and government on the other. There are good reasons for this.

First, the erosion of the welfare consensus in the heartlands of Anglo-American capitalism, where the highest densities of research have traditionally been located, has thrown into question issues around state management, regulation, and subsidy. Defenders of free admission to museums have had to struggle harder to justify not transferring costs from taxpayers to users. Advocates of public service broadcasting have had to counter repeated claims that digital abundance renders the project obsolete, or that monopoly entitlements to public monies are an unacceptable restraint on competition.

Second, the rise of enlarged security states, the escalation of civilian surveillance, and the increasing centrality of communications systems as both military targets and pivots in the deployment of weaponry, open up a range of areas for urgent research.

Up until now, however, the focus on state-capital relations has led to communicative activity within civil society receiving less attention than it deserves. There is an established body of work on community media, alternative media, and amateur creativity, but compared to the volume of work on the commercial communications industries and public cultural institutions, it is still relatively modest. Nonprofessional production has been a ghost in the conceptual machine, an absent presence—something mentioned in passing, but never fully incorporated into our working models. Now that the Internet has opened up multiple new opportunities for vernacular production and extended their potential reach well beyond their original location or membership base, we urgently need to understand the organization and potential of these new phenomena. As I have argued, this is not just a question of investigating their

operation, but of exploring the moral economies that underpin them. Activity that contributes to the commons is grounded in practices of gifting, sharing, and caring, and it is directed toward collaborative projects that produce material freely accessible to all. We need to investigate the conditions that encourage and sustain this commitment, as well as the forces that deflect, dissipate, or subvert it. We also need to explore the relations between direct participation in communal cultural production and conceptions of the wider obligation of citizens to contribute to the collective good at arm's length, through taxation.

(6)   Cultural work and digital labor

As noted earlier, the expansion of vernacular production also raises vital questions about the future role of professional practice in the cultural and media industries. What amateur photographs and film should be included in digitized national and local archives, and what issues for curatorship does this expansion of the available historical record present? Does the increased ubiquity of smartphones and the expanded capacity of participants in events to capture vivid photographs and video footage and send messages detailing and commenting on action as it unfolds, render the journalist's historic role as a privileged witness redundant? Working through these questions is central to any attempt to assess the possibility of building a communicative commons that combines the moral economies of public goods and gifting.

At the same time, the voluntary labor of audiences and users online also offers corporations a new source of value. Increasingly, consumers are encouraged to also become producers, "prosumers" contributing ideas, energy, and expertise that can be used to develop new cultural commodities for sale or market them more effectively. This push to commandeer the activity of audiences without payment raises urgent questions of exploitation (Comor, 2011; Scholz, 2012).

(7)   *Inequalities*

The idea of the communicative commons outlined here assumes equal access to common-pool resources. In the current context, however, this assumption is increasingly questionable. There is a tendency in writing on media, and particularly on "new" media, to assume that everyone is now connected, or very soon will be. The migration of Internet access from computers to mobile phones has certainly extended access, but it has also coincided with a sharp reversal of the historic trend toward a more equitable distribution of income and wealth. Since 1980, for example:

> [T]he share of national income going to the richest 1% of Americans has doubled, from
> 10% to 20%, roughly where it was a century ago. Even more striking, the share going
> to the top 0.01% has quadrupled, from just over 1% to almost 5%. That is a bigger slice
> of the national pie than the top 0.01% received 100 years ago. This is an extraordinary
> development, and it is not confined to America. (*The Economist*, 2012b, p. 3)

Across the capitalist world, from archetypal welfare states like Sweden to the emerging economic powerhouse of China, overall income inequalities (as measured by the Gina coefficient) have widened

appreciably over the last two decades. This sustained redistribution of income, from the poor to the rich, raises continuing research questions about the dynamics of exclusion from market-generated cultural resources. It also suggests that constructing a comprehensive cultural commons which combines the moral economies of public goods and gifting is now a necessity, rather than an option.

The point of addressing this question, and the others signaled here, however, is not simply to deepen our understanding of how communications systems operate in contemporary conditions. It is also to strengthen our ability to demonstrate the indispensability of communication research in illuminating the conditions and resources that can facilitate lives lived in common on a basis of equity, justice, and mutuality.

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