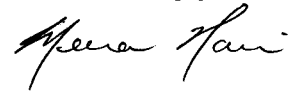


Definitions of Comprehensive Examinations – Final Draft – Approved

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1.0 Depth: Media History/Regulation

1.1 Objective

For my in-depth comprehensive examination, I wish to examine the history of the development and dissemination of new media technologies with some emphasis on Canadian cultural policy efforts to employ media to support cultural identity. The political factors leading to the formation of the Canadian nation and its geographical position relative to the United States suggest that past Canadian experiences are reflective of contemporary concerns by other nations to maintain a cohesive identity in the face of global migration coupled with the increasing penetration of global media. Canada's youthful and ongoing commitment to pluralism is evidence that 'cohesive identity' can be inclusive of cultural diversity¹. In *Imagined Communities* (1991), Benedict Anderson identifies that one's sense of belonging within a nation is, in part, constructed via media (p.46); thematically then, this comprehensive study will examine the influence of media upon the relationship of individuals to society. To this end, I wish to explore the following:

- i) the political factors affecting the development and disbursement of media technologies²
- ii) the social relations that delineate culture from cultural commodities

¹ Rosemary Coombe notes that the terminology of cultural diversity and multiculturalism assumes, "a social field of equivalent differences that can be subsumed under a single policy of tolerance, without regard for the very real psychic, social, economic, and cultural damage done by histories of Western imperialism (1998, p.376, n.37)." Professor Coombe's forthright appraisal notwithstanding, the commitment of cultural diversity remains an honourable aspiration.

² In using the term 'political,' I am drawing from Arjun Appadurai's definition of politics as, "...in the broad sense of relations, assumptions, and contests pertaining to power (Appadurai, 1986, p.57)." Appadurai argues convincingly that it is the function of exchange which creates value in commodities; a function driven by the political process (Appadurai, 1986, p.1).

iii) the pre-eminence of technology as indicative of progress and freedom

At issue is a central question, how have the environments of media shaped intimations of culture within communities? This phrase, *intimations of culture*, is an effort to avoid the instinctive tendency to invoke culture as a defined entity. The scope of the phenomenon we call *culture* necessarily lacks clearly defined boundaries. Yet cultural policy may privilege one form of culture over another, and, is prone to imposing a system of organization upon cultural landscapes. As noted by Theodor Adorno in *The Culture Industry* (1991), "Whoever speaks of culture speaks of administration as well, whether this is his intention or not." Adorno went on to identify administration as "... to assemble, distribute, evaluate and organize." (p.93). His collection of verbs implicitly suggests some manner of structure and ordering, which leads one to question, against what hierarchy are decisions made? When the hierarchy stems from nationalist concerns, the outcome may well be the construction of a cultural identity. In *Virtual Sovereignty* (2004), Robert Wright describes the institutional mediation of Canadians' cultural tastes in the twentieth century, "... patterns of representation and consumption were informed by officially sanctioned state nationalism (p.56)." Or, according to George Yúdice, "... cultural institutions and funders are increasingly turning to the measure of utility because there is no other accepted legitimation for social investment (2003, p.16)."³

1.2 Methodology

My intention is to avoid the confines of both political economy and cultural studies; seeking instead to occupy a middle ground. Robert Babe offers this view, "It is sufficient to begin with the premise that much cultural production is affected by the economy and by economic/financial considerations, and that the economy itself is constituted by an assemblage of

³ In this case, the outcome of cultural policy, theoretically a means of harmonizing and celebrating diversity, gives rise to division and dissent as marginalized groups and ideas are even further diminished for lack of profitability.

cultural practices and perspectives (2003, p.4).” Therefore, I wish to employ the communications work of Harold Innis. Innis’ central axiom, that communication media institute social order, lends itself well to this study. His methodological axes of time and space, centre and margins, monopolies and balance, provide a language with which I can examine and evaluate aspects of media development and regulation.

Briefly, Innis’ concepts of time or space provide a fluid means of assessing the civility of a civilization. “Time” represented a cultural disposition, the recognition of the importance of living tradition, whereas “space” focused on territorial (or in today’s language, market) expansion. All media support time-binding and space-binding to some degree (Babe, 2000, p.75)—a historical assessment of a medium depends to some extent on the degree to which a medium inhibited or supported monopolies of knowledge. In Innis’ terms, a stable civilization was one which achieved a balance between time and space, thus supporting cultural activity and cultural flexibility (Innis, 1951, p.64).

1.3 Literature

My emphasis on assessing social impact is due to its relevance as an indicator of cultural values, which Innis described as “the ways in which or the reasons why people of a culture think about themselves (1951, p.132).” The proposed literature encompasses historical material concerning media development and society (Briggs and Burke, 2002; Chapman, 2005; Crowley and Heyer, 2004; Czitrom, 1982) as well as the broader implications of Canada as a dominion of an empire (Grant, 1969; Grierson, 1946; Frye and Polk, 1982; Mount, 2005; Raboy, 1980; Williams, 1989). Using the past to measure the present allows one to dialectically frame the social effects of media change; when the new challenges the old, the resulting collision between communication and culture can alter social formations. Described as both the neglected child

and grandparent of media studies, (Brugger and Kolstrup, 2000, p.7) and (Curran, 2002, p.4) respectively, historical scholarship may alleviate a problem noted by Innis: “the difficulty of assessing the quality of a culture of which we are a part (1951, p.132).”

In addition to the historical study, the effects of media technology on, and by, individuals are scrutinized as well. The emancipatory potential of new technological media was celebrated in Walter Benjamin’s hallmark essay, *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility*, contrasting well with Innis’ view that the outcome of mechanized communication thwarted creative expression (1951, p.190). Likewise, Ithiel de Sola Pool likens technology to a liberating force, making particular reference to the U.S. First Amendment as conducive to creativity (1983, p.10)—which lies in direct opposition to Innis, who saw the First Amendment as an instrument of monopoly and repression (2004, p.11). Through an examination of Thomas Edison’s talking ‘foils,’ Lisa Gitelman illustrates the “power of the unfulfilled desire,” in the cultural construction of any new medium (2003, p.170). And, Catherine Frost (2003) applies an Innisian analysis to the Internet, noting its potential for balance between both time and space; a sentiment echoed by Yochai Benkler in his assessment, *The Economics of Social Production* (2006).

Readings: Media History/Regulation (Depth)

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