2 Crossing borders in virtual space
   Jim McDonnell

7 En torno a las fronteras duras
   Daniel Prieto Castillo

11 Los mapas del alma no tienen fronteras
   Eduardo Galeano

12 On the borders of (in)humanity
   Philip Lee

17 Communication, technology and power
   Carlos A. Valle

21 Crossing borders to common ground
   Kathryn M. Lohre

25 From borders to intersections
   Robert Chase

29 Communicating across boundaries: From barriers to frontiers
   Ineke de Feijter

36 Music without borders
   Karl Paulnack

39 Cyanide for gold: Dealing with E-waste
   Pradip N. Thomas

43 Al-Jazeera English has conciliatory potential
   Mohammed el-Nawawy and Shawn Powers

46 The validity of communication policies in Latin America
   Andrés Cañizález

51 Television, public sphere, and minorities
   Paul de Silva

56 On the screen

IN THE NEXT ISSUE

The 1/2010 issue of Media Development will focus on gender-related dimensions of contemporary communication issues.
EDITORIAL

The idea behind an issue of Media Development dedicated to ‘reimagining borders’ is to explore in terms of communication the argument that:

‘Borders are no longer understood as self-evident, inevitable, invariable or ineradicable lines that have to be taken for granted. The discussion of spatial borders conceptualises them now rather as “un-earthed”, in the sense of not being earth-bounded any more... overcoming borders is mainly about overcoming the socially constructed imaginations of belonging to a certain place and of the need for a spatial fixity... overcoming borders then asks for the reimagining of borders and the reimagining of outsiders as insiders...’1

Every one of us lives within borders. We inhabit a world of geopolitical, social, and cultural demarcations that give order to our lives.

These borders are not confined to physical constructs such as land frontiers and they are not always regulated by controls such as passports or biometric identification.

Many borders are invisible, psychological or physical lines that nevertheless impinge on our daily lives.

Often these ‘limitations’ determine the groups to which we belong. There is the realm of language, across whose borders some pass hesitantly and others easily. There is the land of religion, whose borders unite or divide.

There are domains of ideology, gender, societal and group identity. There are frontiers between poor and rich, differently able and able, sickly and hale. And there is the ultimate transgression of death and its imagined communities.

From a communication perspective, borders are often delineated by the format in which content is presented. This is essentially what Marshall McLuhan meant by the medium is the message. And most people are familiar with the extraterritoriality of cinema and the hyperreality of virtual worlds, where conscious and subconscious often overlap.

The borders that limit today’s communications are far more interactive and porous than earlier ones and they extend beyond traditional (industrial) media to encompass ‘social media’ and its hybrid digital technologies. The past may well be a foreign country, but so is the present.

As with all foreign territory, there is a sense of discovering, getting to know, and coming to terms with this ‘other’. Crossing over, looking at the view from the other side, illustrates Edward Said’s observation that:

‘Transgression chiefly involves moving from one domain to another, the testing and challenging of limits, the mixing and intermingling of heterogeneities, cutting across expectations, providing unforeseen pleasures, discoveries, experiences’2

There are borderlands between ‘reality’ and ‘hyperreality’ in the world of social media. They include social networking (MySpace, YouTube, Avatars United); music sharing (imeem, The Hype Machine, Last.fm, ccMixter); virtual reality (Second Life, The Sims Online, Forterra); photo-sharing (Flickr, Zooomr, Photobucket, SmugMug); microblogging (Twitter, Jaiku, Plurk, Plownce); reference sites (Google Groups, Wikipedia); and business (LinkedIn, MySpace).

Immersed in such sites, where are the borders? Who controls them? How do they interact with traditional social and cultural boundaries? Are there taboos? Interrogations? Minefields?

Borders may no longer be – if they ever were – simple divides between here and there, ‘us’ and ‘them’. They have become difficult social and cultural terrains that we inhabit and that inhabit us.

In today’s complex world, borderlands remain places of negotiation, insecure and forbidding until we are able to reimagine them – which is where communication comes in.

Notes
Crossing borders in virtual space

Jim McDonnell

New technologies challenge established modes of thinking and bring forth new metaphors as people attempt to fit the new experience with existing categories of thought and practice. The spectacular rise and influence of the internet has led to a proliferation of metaphors and images as people have tried to make sense of this new phenomenon.

The consideration of the place of ‘borders’ in relation to the internet has particular resonance because spatial metaphors have gained widespread currency. The most obvious example of this is the word ‘Cyberspace’, a term that has slipped into popular usage and can be traced to William Gibson’s Neuromancer.

Others suggest the internet can be thought of as a city, a ‘marketplace’ (with ‘domains’ and ‘walled gardens’) or a ‘forum’ where individuals meet and interact in a variety of public and private situations, and yet others see it as a system of ‘highways’, or a ‘frontier’ or an ‘environment’ in which a variety of ‘communities’, ‘worlds’ and ‘networks’ are located. (Dodge, 2008: 119)

This mode of thinking is not purely of academic interest as it influences many of the ways in which people actually interact with and use the internet. In this article I want to explore the theme of ‘crossing borders’ in relation to three dimensions of the use of the internet which are closely linked to the use of metaphors of space and movement: virtual or online communities, social networking, and virtual worlds.

Benedict Anderson’s book, Imagined Communities, (1983) explored how the widespread distribution of standardized printed media helped to foster national consciousness by connecting readers though the printed word. A shared sense of connectedness eventually helped to bring about ‘imagined communities’. There is an argument that in a similar way the internet is creating a communications environment within which people are able to exchange information, build group identities, maintain links and form communities.

The metaphor of community is particularly strong in discourse about the internet. It is also a concept that arouses strong passions and has raised many hopes that the internet might provide a new form of community life. Karen Evans notes that:

‘Some have speculated that building community in cyberspace will result in novel forms of interaction which are totally “virtual” in that they will have no geographical referent and will be truly global in scope (Rheingold, 1994) and others have suggested that community building on the internet will be utilised to extend and enhance existing relationships which are based in physical spaces (Benedict 1991, Schuler 1996). Most writing on virtual communities, however, implies that what will be built in cyberspace will improve on traditional forms of community’ (Evans, 2004).

In his book The Virtual Community, Howard Rheingold defines virtual communities as: ‘Social aggregations that emerge from the Internet when enough people carry on public discussions long enough and with sufficient human feeling to form webs of personal relationships in cyberspace’ (Rheingold, 1994: 5). Rheingold has been criticized for using such a vague term as ‘community’. His answer recognizes the fluidity of the metaphor. He is quoted as saying that he ‘probably would not have been able to persuade my book editor to let me use a title like People Who Discuss Things Online and Form Relationships and Groups That Resemble Community in Some Important Ways But Differ in Others’. (Norgrove, 2005:3)

Rheingold has also been criticized for defining virtual communities that ‘emerge from the Internet’ when, even in his own case, there is a clear link
between a pre-existing offline community and the virtual community that later developed. (Goodwin, 2004: 106)

The enthusiasm for the notion of ‘virtual community’ expresses a sense that the internet is able to provide a mechanism which can overcome the physical limitations (borders, boundaries) of geographically based communities, so liberating the community members to create ‘imagined communities’ free from spatial constraints. It is, however, precisely, this promise of a borderless community that seems to cause some of the deepest unease among critics of online communities. Many critics have drawn a contrast not between online and offline communities but between virtual and real communities.

To the critics the virtual community lacks some kind of reality because it lacks face-to-face interaction and physical presence. In their minds, clearly demarcated borders or boundaries are precisely those elements which make community possible. The limitations of locality or physical presence give a shape to the community and the fluidity of the virtual community seems to be symbolize the extent to which existing community ties and commitment can be challenged or adjusted in the light of individual needs.

Churches are particularly exercised by this issue. The former Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr George Carey, pointed out ‘the Christian emphasis is on relationships, not just connections. … We must be sure that the virtual community is at the service of real communities, not a substitute for them’ (Carey, 2000). And the Pontifical Council for Social Communications has observed, ‘Might the “web” of the future turn out to be a vast, fragmented network of isolated individuals – human bees in their cells – interacting with data instead of with one another?’ (Pontifical Council, 2000, n.29).

Once the notion of community is conceptualized less in terms of locality, however, a more positive sense of the potential of the internet can emerge. The philosopher Bernard Lonergan’s broad definition, for example, opens up the possibility of communities transcending boundaries of time, space, and locality: ‘Community means people with a common field of experience, with a common or at least complementary way of understanding people and things, with common judgments and aims.’ To be a member of community in this sense is first of all to recognise and wish to be part of a ‘community that is the carrier of a common world mediated by meaning and motivated by values’. (Lonergan, 1985:5-6).

Castells argues that in the internet age it would be helpful to re-define community ‘de-emphasizing its cultural component, emphasizing its supportive role to individuals and families, and de-linking its social existence from a single kind of material support.’ He quotes with approval the definition offered by Barry Wellman, ‘Communities are networks of interpersonal ties that provide sociability, support, information, a sense of belonging and social identity’ (Castells, 2001: 127).

The positive dimensions of online communities were brought out in a survey conducted by the Pew Internet and American Life Project in 2001. The researchers argued that membership of online communities ‘has clearly stimulated new associational activity. And, because they have been both physical and virtual, these group interactions are richer than those found in “tertiary associations”. This type of activity might be likened to what sociologist Ray Oldenburg calls the “third place” – the corner bar, café, or bookstore where people hang out to talk about things that are going on in their lives and neighbourhood’ (Horrigan, et al., 2001: 10).

The survey saw this as an ongoing trend:

‘As the Internet disseminates more broadly throughout the population, there are signs that online groups may facilitate new connections across ethnic, economic, and generational categories. It is also worth underscoring that young people seem especially interested in taking advantage of the Internet’s bridge building potential in online groups’ (Horrigan, et al., 2001: 19).

The borders (spatial, temporal or physical) which virtual communities claim to overcome are, of course, not the only borders. Like offline communities, virtual ones have boundaries which are more or less open. Some communities are tightly restricted, others are open to all comers. Sine Anahita’s study of an online community of white skinheads illustrates the more general issues
that arise in any online community that wants to maintain a level of commitment from its members:

‘Within online communities, virtual identities demarcate the social borders of groups. Virtual identities are people’s online performances of who they want others to think they are based on aspects of identity that include sexuality, gender, race, ideology, nationality, ethnicity, and religion. … Since virtual identities mark the social borders of an online community, it is the virtual identities that must be patrolled, and the online behaviours of members that must be controlled’ (Anahita, 2006).

This uncertainty about virtual identities, and who is and who is not fully inside the community or group, is a common dilemma for a range of communities whether based on religion, common interests, politics, race, gender etc. However, one of the attractions for those who seek out such communities is that they can determine how much of themselves to reveal to the other members of the community.

The person who crosses the community border is a virtual identity that is under the control of the person entering. By the same token, the persons met within the limits of cyberspace are also constructions. In those cases where some members of online communities also meet in offline mode, the disjunction between digital constructions and real world personalities can be, at the least, intriguing and sometimes disconcerting or even frightening.

Virtual worlds
Crossing borders can be even more disjunctive in the case of virtual worlds. The metaphor of ‘world’ points us to the reality of more complex and all encompassing systems than communities. According to The Virtual Policy Network:

‘Virtual worlds can be defined as online environments having the following characteristics: shared and persistent environment, interactions occurring in real-time, an underlying automated rule set, the “physics” that determines how individuals effect changes and individuals are represented within the world typically as individual “avatars”. Examples of virtual worlds would be Game worlds: World of Warcraft, EvE Online, Lord of the Rings Online, EverQuest or Social worlds: Second Life, Habbo Hotel, Virtual MTV, Club Penguin’ (The Virtual Policy Network, 2008: 2).

Game worlds are generally more popular than social worlds. Some of them have become a thriving part of the culture of some East Asian countries like South Korea where games have millions of registered users. Though the majority of game players are male, the age range stretches from the children to retired people.

Social worlds like Second Life tend predominantly to attract people aged between 24-35 and have a more equal gender balance. Though adult social worlds attract hundreds of thousands or even millions of users they cannot compete with the 100 million registered users of Habbo Hotel, a virtual world for children:

‘Activity in social worlds tends to centre on events, fashion and interpersonal relationships. … Fashion extends to all aspects of the world, particularly rooms (in 2.5D spaces) or houses (in 3D ones) and avatar appearance and clothing. … Social-world users also spend a great deal of time nurturing friendships and negotiating personal politics, including cybersex’ (The Virtual Policy Network, 2008).

Like the game character in game worlds, the avatar in social worlds is the expression of virtual identity and the locus of interaction with other members of the world. The border between a virtual world and the rest of cyberspace marks the transition from mundane everyday reality into an alternative world of fantasy and imagination, as the very name, Second Life, expresses. By crossing this boundary the game players or social world users are able to reinvent themselves as characters and take on any physical or other characteristics that they find congenial. A major attraction is that players and users can play roles within the game or in the world that transcend those available in everyday life (The Virtual Policy Network, 2008: 2).
Social networking

Recently, discussion about virtual communities and virtual worlds has become overshadowed by an obsession with the emergence of social networks. The earliest social networking site, *Friends United* began in 2000, followed by *Friendster* (2002), closely followed by *MySpace* (2003) and *Facebook* (2005). Today these sites are used by millions of people around the world. It is estimated, for example, that over a fifth of adults and about 50% of children in the UK have set up profiles on social networking sites.

The popularity and prevalence of these sites is a striking example of the networks of sociability discussed by Castells. Importantly, a significant difference between these and previous forms of online community such as chat rooms and blogs: ‘is that social networking sites are predominantly based on social relationships and connections with people, rather than a shared interest. Online communication has changed from being merely task-based or for sharing information and is increasingly an end in itself’ (Ofcom, 2008: 11-12).

The names for social networking sites convey something of the range of possibilities that they encompass: *Friendster* and *Friends Reunited*, emphasize the connections of friendship; *MySpace*, very clearly conveys the sense that this is Internet territory which is under the control of the user, and might be one reason why, in the United Kingdom at least, it is still popular with children; *Facebook* has overtones of a photo album but is also a place where the user can choose a ‘face’ to present to the world.

The imagined communities of social networking sites have raised many of the same questions that were provoked by the emergence of the first online communities. If a person has hundreds of ‘friends’ (contacts) on *Facebook* does this constitute a weakening of relationships? Are there dangers to users, especially children and young people, in the publication of online ‘profiles’ that are accessible to anyone who wants to see or read them? The malleability and fluidity of such boundaries seems to provoke a profound sense of unease at both personal and societal levels not least because the flow of information and contacts across the internet often challenges established boundaries in the offline world.

The Chinese establish the great firewall to hinder blogging by political dissidents, states sign conventions on cyber crime and cyber terrorism, the entertainment industries struggle to prevent the illegal file sharing of content and users in poorer countries struggle to find ways to be connected. Where online users see the positive aspects of crossing borders online, parents, regulators, businesses, states and police forces often see a weakening of necessary controls and a subversion of law and regulation.

More broadly, however, the technologies (Web 2.0) that have made social networking sites possible embody a set of unintended consequences:

‘including the increased flow of personal information across networks, the diffusion of one’s identity across fractured spaces, the emergence of powerful tools for peer surveillance, the exploitation of free labour for commercial gain, and the fear of increased corporatization of online social and collaborative spaces and outputs’ (Zimmer, 2008).

Castells argues that ‘people are organized not just in social networks, but in computer-communicated social networks. So it is not the internet that creates a pattern of networked individualism, but the development of the internet provides an appropriate material support for the diffusion of networked individualism as the dominant form of sociability’ (Castells:131). He goes on to claim that ‘individuals are in fact reconstructing the pattern of social interaction, with the help of new technological affordances, to create a new form of society: the network society’ (Castells: 133).

However, even a brief consideration of some of the broader social context within which individuals are developing new forms of online sociability demonstrates that the online and offline worlds cannot be easily separated. The extent to which the internet will allow people freely to choose which borders to cross and which to maintain will be decided as much by the political, social, cultural, economic and ethical struggles in the offline world as by technological advances online.

References
En torno a las fronteras duras

Daniel Prieto Castillo

En 1981 reunimos información sobre formas de inserción de los jóvenes migrantes en el D.F., México, seres venidos de comunidades de unos pocos centenares de vecinos a una megalópolis que por entonces orillaba los 18 millones de habitantes. El cruce de fronteras, dentro de un determinado país, significaba un paso inmenso desde espacios casi cerrados a un reino del movimiento y del anonimato.

No llegaban esos migrantes a enfrentarse sin nexo alguno a tamaño monstruo urbano, siempre comenzaban a insertarse mediante algunos parientes o amigos que habían iniciado antes semejante aventura. Pero pronto había que arreglárselas solo y para ello eran necesarias formas de adaptación e integración al nuevo contexto.

Uno de los recursos privilegiados eran la radio y la televisión, en un intento de aprendizaje de manera de relacionarse y de comunicarse. La ciudad se expresaba a través de esos medios que ofrecían modos de hablar, temas de conversación, comportamientos, hasta cómo vestirse.

Así se podía comenzar a ser parte de esas inmensas barriadas, entrar en grupos, ganar amigos, conseguir trabajo. Sin duda había otros caminos, pero la oferta de comunicación y de percepción era muy valorada y significaba una alternativa para cruzar la frontera desde la vieja forma de vida en algún lugar del país a una rápida adaptación a esa urbe sin márgenes.1

Fuente de educación informal

La cultura mediática ampliaba imaginarios, representaba una poderosa fuente de educación informal, proponía modelos sociales para comenzar a ser alguien en medio del vértigo de tanta vida y tanto espacio desconocidos.
En 1984, cuando trabajaba en CIESPAL, Quito, tuve oportunidad de colaborar con un proyecto de reporteros populares desarrollado en la zona de la Sierra, en comunidades campesinas. Se trataba de un sistema consistente, desde el punto de vista material, en grabadoras de casete y de cinco cabinas donde se procedía a editar los programas para enviarlos a radio Latacunga, del obispado de la zona.

El sistema venía funcionando bien hasta que un día una camesina, Iza, llegó a una de las cabinas y anunció que quería ser reportera. La negativa fue cerrada: esto es trabajo de hombres, ¿acaso ha visto alguna mujer reportando? Por eso mismo, dijo ella, empezaremos por mí.

Nada la detuvo, ni quienes venían impulsando el proyecto, ni su familia, ni algunas críticas. Iza se convirtió en reportera popular y con el tiempo pasó a desempeñarse como locutora en la radio. En ese camino superó varias fronteras. Primero la del miedo a la tecnología. En un relato de sus experiencias contó que cuando se enfrentó por primera vez a un microfóno, sintió que el cuerpo se le desarmaba del temblor.

Segundo, la del rechazo de los hombres a la presencia de una mujer en esa actividad; no era cuestión de salirse del lugar asignado por la estructura social: la casa, la crianza de los hijos, el círculo de las posibles amistades y conversaciones.

Tercero, la de los límites al aprendizaje en una comunidad marcados por lo informal y, en todo caso, por alguna alternativa de ir a la escuela. El aprendizaje del oficio de reportera, de elaboración de noticias, de empleo de tecnologías, estaba fuera del sueño de cualquier mujer en esos ámbitos.

Esos humildes aparatos de grabación, esa precaria cabina, esos desplazamientos por la comunidad para buscar noticias, abrieron alternativas para una ruptura de viejos límites de la existencia, de la percepción y de la manera de ver el mundo.

Cruzando otras fronteras

A fines de los 80 me tocó ver una terrible coincidencia en El Salvador y Guatemala: jóvenes soldados transportados en camiones o patrullando a los lados de las carreteras, con un pañuelo atado en la cabeza tal como lo lucía Rambo. Tiempo más tarde leí un material periodístico: en los cuarteles se procedía a pasar las películas de ese personaje para enseñar a hacer la guerra, es decir, a matar.

David Grossman, un oficial del ejército norteamericano y experto internacional en ‘killology’ (‘ciencias de matar’) explica que la violencia televisiva se asemeja al condicionamiento mental al que son sometidas las tropas especiales para que, cuando llegue el momento, disparen contra el enemigo. Hay un aprendizaje de la violencia y del acto que lleva a la muerte. ‘Matar a un semejante, a menos que se trate de un sociópata, no resulta un gesto natural. Hay que aprender a hacerlo.’

Para eso están los aportes científicos, video juegos, películas..., todo un mundo de recursos para ayudar a cruzar la frontera de la vida. Tratamientos muy eficaces para ampliar el imaginario en esa dirección, para proponer modelos a imitar, para sacarse de adentro viejas maneras de concebir la existencia.

Hay una expresión que resulta casi un lugar común en la publicidad. Cuando se quiere resaltar el valor de una empresa aparecen elogios acerca de su alcance a escala planetaria, por ejemplo: ‘nuestros productos trascienden las fronteras’, ‘ofrecemos nuestros servicios sin fronteras’. Incluso cabe aquí añadir la denominación de una dignísima organización: ‘Médicos sin fronteras’.

En la práctica hay distribuciones y consumos a escala planetaria que se mueven por encima, o por debajo, de cualquier límite. Me refiero a la droga. En la Argentina sobreviven alrededor de 180.000 jóvenes víctimas del consumo del paco, tragedia frente a la cual hay unos míseros recursos expresados en algunas clínicas y en algunos programas. De aquella cifra son pocos los que encontrarán una salida.

La cultura mediática del país no ha asumido el problema de las drogas para intentar caminos de educación informal. Demasiado entretenido están los canales de aire con la vida de la farándula y las conductas farandulescas de no pocos políticos. Ya lo dijo un animador televisivo: mi trabajo es entretenir. El resto, es decir: prevenir, educar, le corresponde al estado. La droga se mueve sin fronteras y va marcando fronteras de hierro, en casos como el paco, a miles de jóvenes.

Una de las experiencias más duras que me ha tocado sentir a través de la lectura, fue la provocada por la novela 2666, de Roberto Bolaño. Buena parte de la obra gira en torno a los crímenes impunes en Ciudad Juárez, en el límite con Estados Unidos. El
autor muestra con un detalle muy doloroso, lo que sucede cuando se transgreden todas las fronteras en una zona de fronteras.

La cuestión no sólo es que se permita entre un país y otro circular las mercancías pero no los cuerpos (ya lo decía el viejo y querido Sartre:

‘(Ser mirado significa) que yo soy vulnerable, que tengo un cuerpo que puede ser herido, que ocupo un lugar y que no puedo, en ningún caso, evadirme del espacio en el cual estoy sin defensas.’ El ser y la nada.

La cuestión es también, y de manera terrible, lo que sucede dentro de la ciudad entre distintos sectores sociales. No hay mucho para idealizar en esos espacios. Y la cuestión es lo que ha ocurrido con los asesinatos de periodistas que se atrevieron a incursionar en esos mundos, a nombre de medios que también se atrevieron.

Apropiar y empoderar
Desde mediados de la década del 80 trabaja en la ciudad de Santa Fe, Argentina el Movimiento de los sin Techo, coordinado por el padre Atilio Rosso. Entre los numerosos frentes de acción que impulsa (salud, urbanización, alimentación, trabajo...) se cuenta como eje fundamental la educación. Estamos ante un proceso permanente de educación no formal, en el sentido de que se actúa por fuera del sistema, y a la vez porque son puestos en práctica instrumentos y métodos nacidos de la relación con sectores marginados de la población.

Una de las experiencias más ricas corresponde a la incorporación de las tecnologías digitales a los jardines infantiles. La idea impulsada por la organización es la siguiente: si queremos aportar a la educación de la marginalidad, corresponde tomar como base el último avance tecnológico. Para ello los representantes del Movimiento dieron un paso precioso: iniciaron un proceso de capacitación de las madres de los chicos en el uso de diferentes programas, para que ellas capacitaran a sus hijos.

Integran de esa manera a una de las figuras más importantes de la educación informal en un ámbito de educación no formal con el propósito, en esto insisten siempre, de preparar a los alumnos para tener un buen desempeño en la educación formal.

El salto a las tecnologías digitales, practicado desde el seno de la familia, significa una ruptura de los límites entre lo informal, formal y no formal, pero sobre todo una ruptura de las fronteras sociales a través del impulso a la apropiación del mundo virtual. Tiene todo sentido aquí el concepto de ‘empoderamiento’, que está relacionado en forma directa con el intento de superar, en este caso vía tecnologías, límites muy marcados en nuestros contextos.

Sin embargo, en la versión de los medios de la ciudad donde trabaja el Movimiento, se tiende a acentuar las fronteras:

‘La tele y la radio no cuentan lo que se hace en el barrio, lo que trabajamos todos los grupos de mujeres, lo bueno que hacemos todos los días. Con lluvia, con tormenta, igual estamos presentes. En cambio dan siempre las malas noticias, robos, asaltos, drogas.’

De un lado la búsqueda de alternativas para romper mediante las tecnologías digitales el cerco de la educación; de otro el estrechamiento del cerco a través de las versiones que disparan, casi a diario, los medios audiovisuales.

Los seis ejemplos que he dado me permiten hacer dos preguntas: ¿Cuáles son las fronteras superable? ¿Quiénes pueden cruzarlas?

Y esta otra: ¿Cruzar una frontera significa cruzarlas todas? Veamos caso por caso.

Con el de los migrantes intentábamos plantear que no todo lo ofrecido por los medios funciona como agente de alienación. La apropiación de la oferta constituía una forma de supervivencia en espacios de una inmensa complejidad, un modo de abrirse a una nueva frontera urbana. ¿Fin de toda frontera? De ninguna manera. La inserción significaba eso, supervivencia, en medio de límites muy marcados para amplias mayorías de la población.

Iza dio un paso enorme con respecto al modo de vida de las mujeres en su comunidad y en otras de la región. El motor fue ella, sin duda, y el medio radiofónico le permitió abrirse camino. Con respecto a su cotidiansidad, la incorporación a radio Latacunga significó un cambio grandísimo. ¿Fin de toda frontera? Ruptura de esa frontera, pero no de las otras que se extienden en comunidades campesinas y en barriadas en las grandes ciudades.

Ir más allá de la frontera de la vida mediante un
aprendizaje de cómo matar representa un destino que no le deseamos a ningún ser humano. Rotos esos límites, quedan abiertos caminos para la continuidad de la guerra en otros frentes. En Guatemala y El Salvador las fuerzas en pugna firmaron acuerdos de paz, pero eso no significó el retorno del territorio de la muerte al de la vida.

El Salvador es hoy el país más violento de Centroamérica, de aquellos aprendizajes se pasó a otros en el seno de las maras y de los sistemas de seguridad del estado. Derribada la frontera de la vida para asumir como natural el crimen, representa un camino sin regreso. Entre otros modos de inducir al horror, las semillas de Rambo siguen echando frutos.

La droga sin fronteras, sin frenos, sin programas educativos eficaces, sin el apoyo de la oferta mediática para intentar un freno, sin recursos para la atención de tanta víctima, sin capacidad de escándalo en la sociedad ante el ejemplo que di (180.000 consumidores de paco), muestra cómo una parte importante de la población vive cercada sin posibilidad de cruzar nada.

En juego están en todo esto los cuerpos que no viajan por las redes, que ocupan un lugar y pueden ser mirados y vulnerados, heridos, que no pueden evadirse del espacio... Los cuerpos narrados de manera implacable por Bolaño en su novela, en un ámbito de fronteras entre países y, sobre todo, de fronteras de la vida desgarradas sin tregua.

Y, en fin, la lucha cotidiana de Los Sin Techo por un territorio de dignidad, por una recuperación de la educación informal para tratar de fortalecer la crianza y la educación de los niños, lucha sostenida día a día, asediada por el discurso mediático que ve en los barrios sólo robos, asaltos, drogas...

Ampliación del cerco, estrechamiento del cerco, tal vez para siempre.

Fronteras en un mundo que desde lo tecnológico parece derribarlas todas.

Fronteras duras para unos y fronteras casi transparentes para otros, tal vez para siempre.

El autor agradece la lectura y las observaciones a este trabajo hechas por Ana Prieto y Carlos Cortés.

Notas

Dr Daniel Prieto Castillo. Licenciado y profesor de filosofía. Doctor honoris causa en comunicación social, título otorgado por la Universidad Bolivariana de Medellín, Colombia. Ex secretario académico de la Universidad Nacional de Cuyo, Mendoza. Consultor de organismo de trabajo en el contexto latinoamericano, como ILCE, CIESPAL y RNTC (Radio Nederland Training Centre). Con este último ha mantenido una relación de trabajo ininterrumpido desde 1987, en área referidas a comunicación rural, comunicación para la salud, y en producción de materiales centrados fundamentalmente en la educación no formal. Es autor de más de 45 libros y de 15 escritos en colaboración. Trabaja en comunicación y educación desde mediados de la década del 60. Actualmente dirige el la UNCuyo (Mendoza, Argentina) la Carrera de Posgrado de Docencia Universitaria y continúa con su actividad de educador en distintos países de la región.

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Los mapas del alma no tienen fronteras

Eduardo Galeano

A principios de julio del 2009, el escritor uruguayo Eduardo Galeano recibió la Orden de Mayo al Mérito en el grado de Comendador por parte del Gobierno argentino, la cual consideró un ‘homenaje a la vida compartida’ y a la ‘solidaridad’ entre las dos naciones del río de la Plata. Al recibir la distinción, una de las mayores que Argentina otorga a ciudadanos extranjeros, Galeano recordó su época de exiliado en Buenos Aires, donde fundó la revista Crisis, una ‘jubilosa celebración de la cultura vivida como comunión colectiva’. A continuación, palabras dichas por Eduardo Galeano en Montevideo al ser condecorado con la Orden de Mayo.

Permítanme agradecer esta ofrenda que estoy recibiendo, que para mí es un símbolo de la tercera orilla del río. En esa tercera orilla, nacida del encuentro de las otras dos, florecen y se multiplican, juntas, nuestras mejores energías, que nos salvan del rencor, la mezquindad, la envidia y otros venenos que abundan en el mercado.

Aquí estamos, pues, en la tercera orilla del río, argentinos y uruguayos, uruguayos y argentinos, rindiendo homenaje a nuestra vida compartida, y por lo tanto estamos celebrando el sentido comunitario de la vida, que es la expresión más entrañable del sentido común.

Al fin y al cabo, y perdón por irme tan lejos, cuando la historia todavía no se llamaba así, allá en el remoto tiempo de las cavernas, ¿cómo se las arreglaron para sobrevivir aquellos indefensos, inútiles, desamparados abuelos de la humanidad? Quizá sobrevivieron, contra toda evidencia, porque fueron capaces de compartir la comida y supieron defenderse juntos. Y pasaron los años, miles y miles de años, y a la vista está que el mundo raras veces recuerda esa lección de sentido común, la más elemental de todas y la que más falta nos hace.

Yo tuve la suerte de vivir en Buenos Aires, en los años setenta. Llegué corrido por la dictadura militar uruguaya, y me fui corrido por la dictadura militar argentina.

No me fui: me fueron. Pero en esos años comprobé, una vez más, que aquella prehistórica lección de sentido común no había sido olvidada del todo. La energía solidaria crecía y crece al vaivén de las olas que nos llevan y nos traen, argentinos que vienen y van, uruguayos que vamos y venimos. Y en el tiempo de las dictaduras, supimos compartir la comida y supimos defendernos juntos, y nadie se sentía héroe ni mártir por dar abrigo a los perseguidos que cruzaban el río, yendo para allá o desde allá viniendo.

La solidaridad era, y sigue siendo, un asunto de sentido común y por lo tanto era, y sigue siendo, la cosa más natural del mundo. Quizá por eso su energía, la siempreviva, fue más viva que nunca en los años del terror, alimentada por las prohibiciones que querían matarla. Como el buen toro de lidia, la solidaridad se crece en el castigo.

Testimonio personal

Y quiero dar un testimonio personal de mi exilio en la Argentina. Quiero rendir homenaje a una aventura llamada Crisis, una revista cultural que algunos escritores y artistas fundamos con el generoso apoyo de Federico Vogelius, donde yo pude aportar algo de lo mucho que me había enseñado Carlos Quijano en mis tiempos del semanario Marcha.

La revista Crisis tenía un nombre más bien deprimente, pero era una jubilosa celebración de la cultura vivida como comunión colectiva, una fiesta del vínculo humano encarnado en la palabra compartida. Queríamos compartir la palabra, como si fuera pan.

Los sobrevivientes de aquella experiencia creadora, que murió ahogada por la dictadura militar, seguimos creyendo lo que entonces creíamos. Creíamos, creemos, que para no ser mudo hay que empezar por no ser sordo, y que el punto de partida de una cultura solidaria está en las bocas de quienes
hacen cultura sin saber que la hacen, anónimos conquistadores de los soles que las noches esconden, y ellos, y ellas, son también quienes hacen historia sin saber que la hacen. Porque la cultura, cuando es verdadera, crece desde el pie, como alguna vez cantó Alfredo Zitarrosa, y desde el pie crece la historia. Lo único que se hace desde arriba son los pozos.

La dictadura militar acabó con la revista y exterminó muchas otras expresiones de fecundidad social. Los fabricantes de pozos castigaron el imperdurable pecado del vínculo, la solidaridad cometida en sus múltiples formas posibles, y la máquina del desvío continuó trabajando al servicio de una tradición colonial, impuesta por los imperios que nos han dividido para reinar y que nos obligan a aceptar la soledad como destino.

A primera vista, el mundo parece una multitud de soledades amuchadas, todos contra todos, sálvese quien pueda, pero el sentido común, el sentido comunitario, es un bichito duro de matar. La esperanza todavía tiene quien la espera, alentada por las voces que resuenan desde nuestro origen común y nuestros asombrosos espacios de encuentro.

Yo no conozco dicha más alta que la alegría de reconocerme en los demás. Quizás ésa es, para mí, la única inmortalidad digna de fe. Reconocerme en los demás, reconocerme en mi patria y en mi tiempo, y también reconocerme en mujeres y hombres que son compatriotas míos, nacidos en otras tierras, y reconocerme en mujeres y hombres que son contemporáneos míos, vividos en otros tiempos.

Los mapas del alma no tienen fronteras.

Eduardo Galeano nació en Montevideo el 3 de septiembre de 1940, ciudad en la que vive actualmente y que lo declaró Ciudadano Ilustre el 11 de junio de 2008 en reconocimiento a su trascendencia dentro del pensamiento crítico contemporáneo. Asimismo, el 3 de julio de 2008 recibió en la capital uruguaya la primera distinción como Ciudadano Ilustre del Mercosur, organización regional integrada por Brasil, Paraguay, Uruguay y Argentina, por su papel de gran pensador, ensayista e intelectual en Latinoamérica. Galeano obtuvo en dos ocasiones el premio Casa de las Américas por sus libros La canción de nosotros (1975) y Días y noches de amor (1978). En 1982 publicó Los nacimientos, primer volumen de la Trilogía Memoria del fuego, que tuvo su continuación con los libros Las caras y las máscaras y El siglo del viento, de 1991.

On the borders of (in)humanity

Philip Lee

What is the relationship between humanitarian action and humanitarian communication? How can the mass media exercise greater responsibility in covering humanitarian interventions? James Orbinski, former president of Médecins Sans Frontières, suggests that they tell true stories and challenge abuses of power.

‘Humanitarian action is by definition universal. Humanitarian responsibility has no frontiers.’
(Orbinski, 1999).

The world’s conflicts are not singularities with simple causes and effects. Rwanda was not just an ethnic conflict between Tutsi and Hutu; Afghanistan was not just a post-Cold War struggle between religious factions; Mexico today is not just a tussle between the government and local drug cartels.

The situations in which these countries are mired are the culmination of decades of political, economic, social, and cultural exploitation and embroilment. Vassals of the North’s global hegemonic aims, they are suffering the bitter legacies of power struggles that have enslaved, impoverished, and maimed their peoples physically and spiritually.

Many non-governmental organisations and many individuals are working ceaselessly to mitigate or repair the damage done and to draw the world’s attention to the misery inflicted by governments, global financial and trade organisations, the armaments industries, and traffickers of all kinds. Courageous journalists write for newspapers and make television documentaries. Photographers risk their lives to reveal – often in unbearably beautiful
pictures – the impact of actions carried out in the name of ordinary citizens.

Why, then, are so many people indifferent? Why does impunity exist at so many different levels? Why has it not been possible to stop the perpetual degradation of what makes us human, of our solidarity as human beings, of our very humanity?

One man who has survived on the borders of inhumanity and who has explored its moral conundrums is James Orbinski, former international president (1998-2001) of Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), the ‘independent, medical humanitarian organisation that delivers emergency aid to people affected by armed conflict, epidemics, healthcare exclusion, and natural or man-made disasters.’

Orbinski became widely known after the publication of his book *An Imperfect Offering* (2008), which won the Writer’s Trust of Canada’s Shaughnessy Cohen Prize for Political Writing. In it he reflects on the humanitarian tragedies of the late 20th century as a way of focusing on what is needed in the 21st. Orbinski is also the subject of an award-winning documentary (2007) – *Triage: Dr James Orbinski’s Humanitarian Dilemma* – directed by Patrick Reed and produced by White Pine Pictures and the National Film Board of Canada.

Orbinski is adept at communicating his passions. If communicative action is a rather dry, sociologically inspired ‘deliberative process’, Orbinski invigorates it by doing what he believes in. He acts. He speaks out. And he explains why in his book:

‘Stories. We all have stories. Nature does not tell stories, we do. We find ourselves in them, make ourselves in them, choose ourselves in them. If we are the stories we tell ourselves, we had better choose them well. This book is a series of stories. I ask again and again, “How am I to be, how are we to be in relation to the suffering of others?” It is a question that has preoccupied me for much of my life’ (Orbinski, 2007: 4).

**Brief biographical details**

Born in England in 1960, James Orbinski’s family moved to Canada in 1967. He studied at the McMaster University School of Medicine in the mid-1980s where he fell in love with immunology. In 1987 he went to Rwanda to do research on HIV and AIDS among children and in 1991 to Peru, where he worked in two northern towns affected by a cholera epidemic. That Peruvian mission was on behalf of Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), an organisation Orbinski was increasingly drawn to because of its ‘willingness to question its own actions and its own myths... It was not afraid to confront dilemmas and it was not afraid to re-examine its own decisions’ (Orbinski, 2008: 70-71).

In the winter of 1993-94 Orbinski went to Afghanistan as a coordinator of medical aid in that country’s ‘forgotten war’. Civil war had rendered it a dangerous place for humanitarian workers, even though MSF had solid credentials having been the only NGO to provide medical aid during the Soviet occupation.

Afghanistan was instructive, but it was the genocide in Rwanda that undid Orbinski and awoke him to the political connivances and duplicities that
obstruct genuine humanitarian intervention. It was there that he came to know the fullness of what people are capable of as human beings:

‘When I began working with MSF, I naively accepted the cloak of the apolitical doctor. I believed humanitarianism – with its principles of neutrality, impartiality and independence – to be outside of politics, in some ways even superior to it, and a way of avoiding its messy business. But I would come to see humanitarianism not as separate from politics but in relation to it, and as a challenge to political choices that too often kill or allow others to be killed’ (Orbinski 2008: 6).

It was Rwanda that taught Orbinski most graphically that the greatest challenge facing humanitarianism is the blurring of boundaries between humanitarian assistance and the political objectives of military intervention. He recognised that humanitarianism insists on confronting the causes and conditions of suffering and on asserting genuine respect for human dignity. ‘Humanitarianism is about the struggle to create the space to be fully human’ (Orbinski, 2008: 8).

Orbinski was elected international president of MSF in 1998 and launched its global Access to Essential Medicines Campaign in 1999. That same year he accepted the Nobel Peace Prize awarded to MSF and has since represented the organization in humanitarian emergencies and spoken on critical humanitarian issues in numerous countries. He has also represented MSF at the UN Security Council, at the WHO, and the UNHCR.

From 2001 to 2003 he was chair of MSF’s Neglected Diseases Working Group, which created the Drugs for Neglected Diseases Initiative (DNDi), a global not-for-profit enterprise that develops drugs and other health technologies for diseases largely ignored by profit driven research and development companies.

He also started Dignitas International, an NGO focused on community-based care, prevention and treatment for people living with HIV in the developing world. He is currently Associate Professor of Medicine and Political Science at the University of Toronto, and research scientist and clinician at its St Michael’s Hospital.

In 1999 Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize ‘in recognition of the organization’s pioneering humanitarian work on several continents’ and for helping ‘to form bodies of public opinion opposed to violations and abuses of power.’

Accepting the prize on behalf of MSF, Orbinski drew attention to some of the principles that had led to the organisation’s creation and its ‘split’ from the Red Cross, whose strict adherence to neutrality had prevented it from speaking publicly about such atrocities as Nazi extermination camps during the Second World War and the slaughter of unarmed men, women, and children in Biafra in 1968. ‘From its conception, MSF refused to recognize borders as sacrosanct or as an impediment to action’ (Orbinski, 2008: 69).

**Universal humanitarian action**

MSF adheres to principles of humanitarian action that include universality (all victims are worthy of assistance and protection wherever they may be); impartiality (assistance and protection must be given to all victims in a conflict, no matter which side they are on, and given strictly according to need); independence (humanitarian actors remain independent of political, economic, religious or other objectives). MSF remains neutral to the political causes of conflict, but refuses to remain silent about the plight of its victims. Nor would it remain silent in the face of war crimes, genocide, or massive violations of human rights.

Having characterised MSF as beyond ‘simple generosity, simple charity’, Orbinski said that what is crucial to humanitarian concerns is enabling individuals to regain their rights and dignity as human beings. ‘Our action and our voice are acts of indignation, a refusal to accept an active or passive assault on the other.’ He pointed to the framework of humanitarian law that fixes responsibility on states to ensure respect for human rights and to sanction their violation as war crimes.

At the same time, he lamented the absence of international monitoring or enforcement. ‘Today this framework is clearly dysfunctional. Access to victims of conflict is often refused. Humanitarian assistance is even used as a tool of war by belligerents. And, more seriously, we are seeing
the militarization of humanitarian action by the international community.'

MSF’s political notoriety stems from its unwillingness to accept the earlier, apolitical understanding of humanitarian relief and its firm belief that public advocacy is vital to effective and efficient emergency aid. These notions have not easily been accepted by governments and those who believe that neutrality and impartiality imply silent acceptance of what is going on. Despite frequent controversy, many other organizations have since come to adopt the principles that underpin MSF’s work and its affirmation that humanitarian work demands speaking out.

It is worth recalling that Orbinski’s speech was given at the height of the Second Chechen War (Russia’s invasion of Chechnya) – in fact he used the occasion to appeal to President Yeltsin to stop the bombing – and two years before 9/11 and its subsequent ‘war on terror’.

What is humanitarian communication?

Accepting the Nobel Prize on behalf of MSF, Orbinski stated that:

‘Humanitarianism occurs where the political has failed or is in crisis. We act not to assume political responsibility, but firstly to relieve the inhuman suffering of that failure. The act must be free of political influence, and the political must recognise its responsibility to ensure that the humanitarian can exist.’

The hijacking of humanitarian intervention by governments with covert political agendas – Rwanda, Kosovo, Iraq, and Afghanistan leap to mind – has long been a topic of study and comment (Ramsbotham & Woodhouse, 1996; Belgrad & Nachmas, 1997; Middleton & O’Keefe, 1998; Moeller, 1999; Boltanski, 1999; Chouliaraki, 2006). Scholars have also critiqued media complicity in presenting military action as humanitarian intervention (Mermin, 1999; Thussu, 2000; Kamalipour & Snow, 2004).

The legitimacy of humanitarian actions and their media representation was the topic of an important article by Luc Boltanski (2000). Critiquing the ‘politics of pity’, he identified two accusations that are often made. The first is that governments emphasise humanitarian action in order to mask their own political and military inaction, as was the case in the wars in Biafra (1967-70) and Bosnia (1992-95). The second is that governments carry out direct political action under the cover of humanitarian action, as was the case in Rwanda (1994) and Kosovo (1999).

The question is: to what extent those responsible for mass media content knowingly or unknowingly collude in a government’s position, policy, or actions? If a large part of the mass media (dominant newspapers, radio and television stations) insistently supports a particular argument to the exclusion of alternative points of view, it is obvious that dissenting voices will have a hard time being heard. This appears to have been the case in the U.S.A. with the war on Iraq, although elsewhere some major media outlets and independent media in particular presented a more balanced picture.

While mass media coverage did not prevent the war, what is important is that a large body of public opinion became alerted to people’s malleability and to media manipulation. Today, words, images, and public statements are the ‘weapons of choice’ of politicians and warmongers. Journalists – who help shape public understanding by providing information about a conflict – bear a heavy responsibility for what they write and broadcast. In this respect, proponents of peace journalism argue that the existing media environment and its practices need to change, since they stress sensationalism, immediacy, and in some cases promote propaganda and misinformation, which exacerbate conflict rather than contribute to its resolution.

Peace journalism illuminates structural and cultural violence as they affect the lives of ordinary people. It frames conflicts in terms of several parties pursuing many goals. It makes visible peace initiatives and potential solutions, whoever suggests them. And it equips people to distinguish between self-interested positions and real objectives. Peace journalism is: truth-oriented, exposing lies and deception on all sides; people-oriented, focusing on suffering on all sides and on people as peace-makers; solution-oriented, identifying creative initiatives that lead to resolution, reconstruction and reconciliation.

Peace journalism intends that the reader and viewer know enough to make critical decisions:
‘The approach of peace journalism is geared toward the stimulation and maximization of readers’ judgement ability and prudence. By challenging routine coverage methods and by providing the broadest possible range of accounts, peace journalism writers entrust the onus of interpretation to their readers. By doing so they do not treat the audience as a passive monolith, but rather supply an elementary and essential commodity for all readers... In summation, peace journalism is about supplying background for questions rather than furnishing answers’ (Peleg, 2007).

In situations of conflict or trauma, human or natural disaster, what matters is impartiality: the principle of justice that requires decisions and actions to be based on objective criteria, rather than on bias, prejudice, or preferential treatment for improper reasons. As such, peace journalism provides a model for those ‘acts of indignation’ implicit in humanitarian communication that empathise with and take the part of people who are suffering. James Orbinski is clear:

‘As a humanitarian, I can act from a feeling of shared vulnerability with the victims of preventable suffering. I have a responsibility to bear witness publicly to the plight of those I seek to assist and to insist on independent humanitarian action and respect for international humanitarian law. As a citizen, I can assume my responsibility for the public world – the world of politics – not as a spectator, but as a participant who engages and shapes it’ (Orbinski, 2008: 392).

All of which raises vital questions about the ethics and public service function of the mass media. Do not media practitioners have ‘a responsibility to bear witness publicly’ to the plight of the oppressed? To the victims of conflict? To abuses of power? And do not citizens have a moral duty to demand media practices that challenge oppression, conflict, and abuse?

James Orbinski thinks so. He is someone who has crossed the borders of inhumanity, who has witnessed human suffering, human depravity, and immense human courage. He offers hope when all seems hopeless:

‘And one source of hope is the existence of people who seem to have a capacity for empathy and an indifference to force that is miraculously pure. They are the true saints, who comprise a spiritual singularity in their own right’ (Holloway, 2008: 164).

References
Communication, technology and power

Carlos A. Valle

By placing profit as its goal, a society based on market logic affirms that commercial interests take primacy over truth and that having is more important than being. Media corporations set up on a commercial basis, by their very nature, are guided by the compass of financial results. In this context, what kind of democratic communication project can be independently developed? How far will the economic powers that be allow it to meet its objectives if they interfere with theirs?

In many Latin American countries the 1990s were a time of consolidating profound changes in the life of their institutions. The media took it upon themselves to send repeated messages that sought to devalue the image of the State in the way society was run, insisting that the less the State interfered, the better the economy and progress. The ground was already prepared for these messages by the negative experience of many who had lived through government corruption and inefficiency in managing public affairs.

Alongside condemnation of the State came condemnation of politicians and, consequently, of politics itself. The time of engineers and executives had arrived, because it had to be accepted that they knew how to manage businesses and how to obtain results and, of course, because they were efficient and honest. Everything was ready for the privatization of key national companies in the hands of powerful financial conglomerates.

The enormous benefits that were supposed to result from the brutal privatization of the national wealth of course dazzled the most powerful sectors of the population and those scaling the dizzy heights of the social ladder. Corrupt governments hand-in-glove with corrupt national and transnational companies were supported by media that went to a lot of trouble to talk about the marvels of a fictitious world that today we see crumbling away, but that refuses to recognize the fallacy of its assumptions. The phoenix knows how to rise from its own ashes.

Technology and power

Throughout the history of industrialization it can be observed that every new technical invention has been accompanied by promises of greater well-being, happiness, and better relations and understanding between peoples. Some theoreticians insist that responsibility for technological development rests with human beings and, therefore, it is unacceptable to represent technology as a monster that threatens human life.

From this point of view, technology is defined as neutral and passive. ‘Technology opens doors, but does not oblige us to enter’ or ‘it’s a poor workman who blames his tools’ are statements reflecting that position. They reflect the optimism that reigned in the 19th century when it was dreamt that technology would create Paradise on Earth, although without indicating where it would be set up.

Today, the situation facing communication is intimately linked to the incessant and growing world of technology that is immersed in a complex sea of economic, political and social forces which regulate many of the currents that propel its evolution and affect the way human life and dignity evolve. For this reason, it is impossible to isolate communication from technology. On the contrary, there is a certain feedback among the economic, political and social processes and the development of certain areas of technology that is determinant of communication itself.

In the 1950s, Jacques Ellul spoke of la technique. He referred to it as a modern mentality whose determining factor is an ongoing search for efficiency in all human activities, including technological processes. For Ellul it was a question of dehumanizing forces that control not only industry and business, but also politics, education, the church, the mass media, and international relations. The technological phenomenon had turned into the
most dangerous form of determinism.

In this sense, Ellul considered that technological progress had assumed such a degree of autonomy that, faced with it, there were only two possibilities: adapt or remain on the fringes and out of step. In Ellul’s opinion, technology had so overtaken society that it had become an essential part of its structure.

In 1932 in Brave New World, Aldous Huxley, deeply distrusting the trends both of politics and the prevailing technology, warned of the danger of building a society that, in search of lasting stability, accepted technology’s impositions to the detriment of the people’s freedom. We can find Huxley’s thinking in Ellul in all its profundity.

Is this a strict description of the modern world? Is technology such a violent and decisive threat to today’s world? In what way does this vision of technology determine the potential of communication? How does technological development affect human dignity? Will it become necessary to reject technology?

Manuel Castells has adopted a more neutral stance. For him one has to start by understanding the complexity of today’s world from the perspective of the revolution in information technology and its capacity to penetrate every sphere of human activity. By saying this, Castells does not infer that ‘new social forms and processes come about as a result of technological change.’ He categorically affirms that ‘technology does not determine society’, but ‘neither does society dictate the course of technological change.’

In other words, ‘Technology does not determine society: it gives it expression. But neither does society determine technological innovation: society uses it’ (Castells, I, 31). So that for him there is a dialectic between society and technology that enables us to understand the modern world. But the bedazzlement of all-encompassing technological development and its proven all-embracing reach in certain fields cannot be read in Castells in a political and economic context, obscuring the fact that it is there that the conditions for authentic communication emerge.

Piscitelli considers that, given the complexity of the technological world, it is necessary to begin by establishing a framework that allows us to demonstrate the paradoxical challenges hovering over the future of humanity and the preservation of people’s dignity. For that reason he says: ‘The history of the social impact of technology reveals the existing connections between a particular type of technology and a specific form of society. Not every technology serves any society, nor can every society absorb any kind of technology. Insofar as the technological factor is the instrumental variable, and given that machines are incapable, still, of dictating social ideals, it falls exclusively to the social body to determine the models of coexistence that it wants to establish’ (Piscitelli, 60).

All this becomes more obvious in the light of one feature of today’s technological revolution: that it has characteristics that are far superior to earlier revolutions. Previous changes took place in the context of a smaller number of societies and were spread over a more geographically limited area. But the process of globalization has situated economic-media conglomerates among its main agencies in order to ‘determine the models of coexistence that it wants to establish’.

The consolidation of power
What is behind the enormous deployment of resources and the incessant development of science and technology to serve the economic-political complex? The most obvious answer is the consolidation of power. Norman Mailer once commented that technology tells us, ‘From now on, we’re going to have much less pleasure, but much more power. That is technology’s credo.’ Who will have less pleasure but more power? Who will accumulate power for fear of losing pleasure? Who will turn power into the greatest pleasure?

In order to maintain power, you have to be stronger than a real or potential adversary. When power becomes the supreme good, every other value is either relegated or ignored. What place will human dignity have in a world in which everything is subject to the ‘supreme good’ of defending and protecting the status quo? This is what the jailer in George Orwell’s 1984 says: that power is not a means but an end, that the object of power is power itself.

Technology and politics
It has been debated if technical objects have political qualities. Because it would seem that what’s important is not so much the technology itself as the economic and social system in which the technology is immersed. Technological objects are not unimportant because technology becomes a way of creating order. It is by means of its technological structures that to a large extent societies determine how the people who make up each society have to work, communicate, travel, etc.

Lewis Mumford believed that there were two traditions in Western history with regard to technology: one authoritarian and the other democratic. Experience shows that the more society bases itself on a sophisticated technological system, the more it tends to function with a highly hierarchical system of control. Is this control necessarily inherent in the technology? The most frequent response is that ‘it has to be so’ because control of the technology cannot be left in the hands of non-experts.

That’s the argument, for example, in the world of the economy. One is subject to the ‘laws of the market’. These ‘laws’, which seem to have fallen from heaven, are those that determine actions without any consideration of their impact on people’s lives. But what’s certain is that the economy itself is not a natural science and great technological changes do not have their origin and development in a neutral sphere, because society’s foundations originate in political decisions.

That’s why Langdon Winner concludes that:

‘It is characteristic of societies based on huge and complex technological systems that moral reasons which are not necessarily practical are largely considered obsolete, “idealistic” and irrelevant. Any claim that one might make in the name of freedom, justice or equality can be immediately neutralized by confronting it with arguments like: “OK, but that’s not the way to run a railway” (or a steel mill, or an airline, or a communications system, and so on)... In many cases, to say that some technologies are intrinsically political is to say that certain accepted reasons of practical need – especially the need to maintain critical technological systems as entities working without problems – have tended to eclipse other forms of moral and political reasoning’ (Winner, 36).

Up to what point is the dignity of a person in play in this diabolical game, where the rules have been established beforehand and are immutable? Up to what point have our societies succumbed to technology’s dazzlement, have let themselves be carried away by scientific determinism and allowed their lives to be decided in the name of temperamental technology? At the same time, up to what point has technology been a valid excuse for consummating control and exercising power over the great majority?

Rubem Alves reminds us that, ‘In the long term, controlling the imagination is much more effective than using violence’ (Alves, 38). For that reason, in Orwell’s novel, we witness violence and repression, because the imagination has not remained under the control of the organization. In Huxley’s story, on the other hand, ‘the human being has become an entirely realistic being. His mind is now incapable of going beyond the limits of dominant reality. His reason is a replica of the operations programmed by the organization’ (Alves, 39)

How does this reality reveal itself in today’s world? The differences between the great powers and the countries of the South in the field of science and technology are ever greater. More than 90% of scientific research takes place in a handful of nations. The enormous technological gap has become a powerful source of dependency.

‘It was not in vain that control of technology led to two industrial revolutions: that of the great machines, which began in the 19th century, and the electronic revolution of our times. In different epochs, both designed their respective international economic orders’ (Borja, 919).

What happens with regard to communication? The highly controversial debates of the 1970s about the need for a New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO) promoted by UNESCO seem like memories of a distant and long forgotten past. Even so, what led to those debates, far from being finished, has been accentuated and magnified in ways that were unsuspected back
The expansion of the economic system has direct effects on the development of democracy and the nature of the communication that takes place within it. Consequently, respect for people's dignity is increasingly affected. An ever larger number of decisions is taken by a few in the name of everyone—with only the apparent participation of the people.

Elections, for example, are increasingly turning into a media spectacle. Candidates sell their images and there are 'specialists' who organize the promotion and sale of those images in every part of the world. The world watches the proliferation of scenes filled with unrealizable fantasies with which the candidates seek to win over their audiences.

The end of so-called Cold War was announced as the beginning of a new world era. A fictitious end of history had been reached, accompanied by overwhelming propaganda based on the need to modernize society, promoting the opening up of markets, the privatization of public resources, worker flexibility whose results translated into an enormous burden for those least protected. Economists spoke of an economy that would grow and be so prosperous that it would fill a magic cup that, when it overflowed, would spill on the least favoured. But it never happened: concentration of riches continued to increase and poverty to grow.

In this context a significant role was played by the transnationalization of the economy, concentration of media ownership in ever fewer hands, greater dependency on the field of information and knowledge, and unending consolidation of power. The right of enjoyment deriving from such a situation is in the hands of a handful of countries, while the hounding that poverty and external debt impose on many others snatches a life of dignity away from the immense majority of human beings.

Thus, in the field of informatics, which has every chance of becoming a common good, defending patents and intellectual property such as software is spilling over into other fields, especially those of medication, limiting the chance of being available to all.

Maintaining such a situation means that controls over society have increased. The last few years have seen more and more alerts about dangerous terrorists and the need to maximize security, which have resulted in a growing sense of insecurity and fear. All of this has led—in the name of freedom and democracy and in order to respond to the need for protection—to the creation of security barriers that infringe freedoms, exercising control over people, and setting limits on the mass media of communication.

**Human dignity, human community**

These and many other realities strike at the heart of our people. What needs to be done to place technological development at the service of people's development? How can the majority of silenced and suppressed people exercise their right to life and dignity, to their own development?

In this context it is vital that we return to setting human dignity at the centre of our thinking because it touches on the essence of a democratic community. Dignity is not an isolated attribute of a person, it is an expression of their being in relation to others. Human dignity is created and developed in relation to the other. In the same way that one achieves human dignity by encountering the other, one loses it by diminishing others. The unworthy person is the master and not the slave, because the latter has lost their human dimension.

It is on the basis of respect for the dignity of the other that genuine dialogue can be established between human beings, the search for a community in which the essential value is not power but human dignity. For that reason, the concept of human dignity is vital in order to speak about true life in community. A community in which technological development is at the service of life. It is the search for respect for human dignity that unites all human beings, independently of their religion or ideology.

We are living in times that require us to look at reality without illusion, but without letting ourselves be trapped by despair. On the one hand aware of the great marvels that technology has provided and is providing, but on the other alert to the dangers and harm it has brought and can still bring because of its ties to the political-economic context.

For this we shall have to work to open up spaces for the kind of communication that develops community in solidarity, that denounces discrimination and oppression, and that enables the silenced to be heard. The powerful structures of the media could play an integrating role in the whole community, but for that to happen society will...
In our modern age, border crossings define our way of life. They occur through immigration and migration, and the resulting multi-cultural societies. They also occur through travel, both with passports at checkpoints, and with passwords on the internet. As a result, we are challenged to redefine ourselves, our communities, and our world: to rethink how our borders hold people in, and keep people out.

In the years since the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act, which reformed a restrictive quota system, immigrants from all over the world have crossed American borders to build a new life in the United States. As professionals, students, or refugees, these immigrants have brought with them their hopes and dreams, customs and languages and, of course, religious traditions.

Carlos A. Valle was General Secretary of WACC 1986-2001. He is a former President of the Protestant film organization INTERFILM and author of Comunicación es evento (1988), Comunicación: modelo para armar (1990), and Communication and Mission: In the Labyrinth of Globalisation (2002). He is currently working with ISEDET, Buenos Aires, teaching courses on communication and writing articles for various publications.

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In 1990, Dr. Diana L. Eck, professor of Comparative Religion and Indian Studies at Harvard University, set out to teach a new course on ‘World Religions in New England’ With her students, she traversed the city of Boston and beyond to map the ways in which the great religions of the world were putting down roots on American soil.

What they discovered was not simply the new diversity – the inauguration of the landmark Sri Lakshmi Temple in Andover, or the establishment of the Thousand Buddha Temple in Quincy in the early 1990s, as two examples – but also the need for these new religious neighbors to engage with one another. Student work was compiled to form the first
edition of World Religions in Boston, understood as the first step in a more national undertaking. It was thus that the Pluralism Project was born.

Religious diversity and the Pluralism Project

Religious pluralism, as defined by Pluralism Project Director Dr. Diana L. Eck, goes beyond acceptance of religious diversity, or mere tolerance of it. It requires that individuals, communities, and countries engage with their religious difference – to educate, inform, and inspire new collaborations and conceptions of identity.

Briefly, Dr. Eck describes pluralism as follows. First, pluralism is not diversity alone, but the energetic engagement with diversity. Second, pluralism is not just tolerance, but the active seeking of understanding across lines of difference. Third, pluralism is not relativism, but the encounter of commitments. Fourth, pluralism is based on dialogue.

For nearly two decades now, the Pluralism Project at Harvard University has set out to map the changing religious landscape in the United States. How have recent waves of immigration from Asia, Africa, Latin America, the Middle East, and parts of Europe changed what can be defined as ‘American’ religious practice? Architecture? Public conversations?

As those immigrants established themselves into communities and centers, new questions emerged as well. What role does women’s leadership play? The interfaith movement? What is the new shape of our new civic life? And finally, how can we begin to better understand the complexities of our own multi-religious society through the study of and engagement with other multi-religious societies?

In her book, A New Religious America, Dr. Eck challenges popular notions of who counts as ‘We’ in ‘We the people of the United States of America,’ the opening words of the Preamble to the United States Constitution. In very real terms, the physical crossing of borders over the past forty-some years has precipitated the crossing of other, more amorphous boundaries – namely culture and identity. How is it that we seek common ground in this new multi-religious reality?

Cities as laboratories of pluralism

The Pluralism Project’s work in the city of Boston has remained consistent over the years. For us, Boston is a laboratory for our work: mapping religious centers and organizations; building a network of academics, students, and religious, lay and civic leaders; developing case studies; distributing resources for education and engagement; and thinking about the challenges of religious pluralism.

Our work, which focuses on the years since 1965, and on the communities who came with those subsequent waves of immigration, remains critical. The Mayor’s Office of New Bostonians’ 2004 statistics indicate that more than 26% of Boston’s population was foreign-born. We imagine that these numbers are only on the rise.

We recently launched the fifth edition of World Religions in Greater Boston at This online guidebook, building on each of the previous editions, seeks to not only inform Bostonians of the remarkable diversity right here in our city through extensive directories and interactive maps, but it also provides text-based and multi-media resources for becoming acquainted with our religious neighbors, and for learning about their traditions, customs, practices, beliefs, challenges, and triumphs in this multi-religious city.

Our hope is that this guidebook might be a prototype for similar work in other cities. The challenge is not simply to provide information, but to also provide people with the inspiration they need to engage their religious neighbors, colleagues, and friends.

Through our work in Boston we have learned much from the successes of the interfaith movement – which as in other parts of the country and world is increasingly being led by women and youth. Coalitions such as the Greater Boston Interfaith Organization and Cooperative Metropolitan Ministries are champions of social justice – bringing together diverse religious communities on common issues that affect our lives in the city and in the world.

Living wage campaigns, health care, genocide in Darfur, effectively combining arts and activism, and creating a vision for a future of peace and justice are some of the current agenda items of those organizations. In Sharon, Massachusetts, the Interfaith Action Youth Leadership Program is a model for how young people can be powerful leaders in interfaith dialogue and conflict mediation.
Religious diversity news
We have also witnessed the ways in which controversy can challenge the relatively firm foundations of minority religious communities in Boston, as elsewhere. The recent controversy surrounding the building of the Islamic Society of Boston Cultural Center in Roxbury, like so many other American mosque controversies in the aftermath of 9/11, is indicative of the ways in which Muslims and their organizations are regarded with suspicion, and how the media can be instrumental in shaping public opinion. This story, like others like it in Boston, and around the country, is one we followed with great interest in our news database, Religious Diversity News (RDN).  

Unlike other news services, we pride ourselves on the fact that RDN is a weekly collection of local news stories, gathered from local papers and publications, bringing depth to our national understanding of religious diversity in America that goes deeper than the coverage of national press agencies often provides. Searchable by tradition, country/state, and keyword, the archives going back to 1997 are invaluable tools for academics and local leaders who are seeking to better understand the context in which they live and work.

Case study initiative
Stories like the ISBCC controversy are so in-depth and complex that they merit significant reflection and study, and in fact lend themselves to intensive classroom learning. Over the past few years, our Research Director Elinor Pierce has been heading up a Case Study Initiative to identify, research, and write case studies that highlight the challenges of religious pluralism.

Other examples of full-length cases she has developed include: a case on another mosque controversy in Palos Heights, Illinois; a case on the Somali Muslim taxicab drivers in Minnesota who refused to transport passengers carrying alcohol; and a case on the exclusion of a Hindu woman from the National Day of Prayer events held at a city hall in Michigan.

These other cases are not limited to use in formal classrooms – but can also be used by religious councils, community organizations, civic leaders, staff groups, and human resources departments to generate discussion on the real dilemmas we face in an increasingly diverse society. The strength of the case study method lies in the fact that participants are required to cross borders by taking on the role of the protagonist to assess how s/he gathered information and made decisions, and to assess how that process could have been improved.

This kind of imaginative technique not only improves critical thinking and decision-making skills, but arguably transforms our individual and communal perceptions of who belongs in our societies and how they are accommodated. In other words, it expands our ‘common ground’ with people who are vastly different from ourselves.

Documentary film initiative
Documentary film is also a powerful tool for border crossing. The Pluralism Project has recently produced two films. Acting on Faith: Women’s New Religious Activism in America (2005) explores the lives and work of three American women – one Buddhist, one Hindu, and one Muslim – for whom faith, activism, and identity are deeply intertwined. Fremont, USA: A City’s Encounter with Religious Diversity (2008) offers a glimpse of interfaith action and civic engagement on the local level in Fremont, California, as well as the real challenges the city faces after 9/11.

With these films of ours, and countless other films that we come across in our research – most recently La Trappe and New Muslim Cool – we have begun to organize an interfaith film festival with partner organizations here in Boston.

Film is a medium unlike any other that has the power to draw large and unique, and oftentimes more public, audiences. Documentary film, in particular, has the potential to educate and inform utilizing the actual voices of its characters. Film can take us to places we’ve never been, never imagined, or never even heard of – geographically, intellectually, and emotionally. It can educate and entertain simultaneously, and it can help us to overcome our apathy toward our neighbors.

Engagement as communication
As digital technologies bring us all closer together, we must nevertheless remain wary of how they can drive us apart. Part of our task at the Pluralism Project has been to develop resources for enhancing
religious literacy, participating in difficult dialogues, inspiring critical thinking, and engaging with our religious neighbors, as has been described above. All of this work is effectively the work of communication. We are consciously trying to counter the voices and resources that seek to divide, incubate fear, and breed intolerance.

**Crossing the threshold in our own communities**

There are, of course, difficult border crossings we can and should make in our own communities. Last year, the Pluralism Project convened the ‘Boston Workshop: Christian Ministry in a Multi-Religious City’. This was a year-long opportunity for local religious and theological studies faculty, Christian ministers (of a range of denominations), ministers-in-training from local seminaries and divinity schools, and leaders of Christian coalitions and ecumenical organizations to learn about other religious traditions, and most importantly, to visit their centers of worship in order to meet their leaders and community members.

Each of the three day-long sessions included an introductory session on the religious tradition and the particular center’s history in Boston, a field trip to the center to observe and participate in worship or prayer, and a session for theological reflection among participants. Over the course of the academic year, we visited a Hindu Temple, an Islamic Center, and a Sikh Gurdwara. For nearly all of the participants, it was the first time they had ever visited these centers, and met their respective lay and clergy leaders.

Precisely this kind of face-to-face, faith-to-faith border crossing is the most risky, and the most critical. Crossing the threshold of religious differences is significantly more difficult when motivated by controversy. Knowing our religious neighbors, or at least having met them, provides us with the confidence to communicate our concerns, fears, and needs in a healthy way.

These kinds of border crossings, I would argue, are more aptly termed ‘threshold’ crossings. In our multi-religious communities, the borders recede to thresholds – of our houses of worship, our homes, and our personal religious and spiritual dwellings. The ground on which they are built is, ultimately, the same.

This recognition of our common ground does not minimize the real differences among us, or our feelings of how challenging it is to stand at the doorstep of a place that is deeply unfamiliar. But it does remind us that the map, with all of its neatly defined borders, has changed.

In Boston, as in the rest of the United States, the past forty-some years have seen unprecedented numbers of students, professionals, and refugees journey to our borders from Asia, Africa, Latin America, the Middle East, and Europe – bringing with them their hopes and dreams, customs and languages, and religious traditions.

These border crossings have forever changed the face of the United States of America. They have, in effect, changed the borders. They have, as a result, exposed our common ground.

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**Notes**

1. www.pluralism.org/pluralism/what_is_pluralism.php
2. www.cityofboston.gov/newbostonians
3. www.pluralism.org/wrgb
4. www.gbio.org
5. www.coopmet.org
6. www.ifaction.org
7. www.pluralism.org/news

Kathryn Mary Lohre is the assistant director of the Pluralism Project, a research organization at Harvard University that maps the changing religious landscape of the United States (www.pluralism.org). Kathryn received her BA in psychology, religion, and women’s studies from St. Olaf College in Northfield, Minnesota (1999) and her Master of Divinity degree from Harvard Divinity School (2003). She is currently serving on the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches as a delegate for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.
From borders to intersections

Robert Chase

There was a time, both in the media and in social and political settings when borders were clear. It was forbidden for those of a certain religion, race, nationality or class to cross certain lines. We needed official documents to move from one country to the next. In the rarefied world of media production, we needed capital and credentials to shift from being an observer to a producer. All that has changed.

With the rapid pace of change in communication technology, the ever-increasing consolidation and power of multi-national corporations, and new social movements that cross lines of faith, class, culture and national origin, borders are not as clear as they once were. This can be unsettling as we seek to navigate our way through these new waters; but such a reality also offers opportunities as barriers that once kept us separate have become intersections that bring us together.

I am privileged to serve as director of Intersections International¹, a new (since September 2007), permanent multi-faith initiative of the Collegiate Church of New York, the oldest corporation in North America dating back to 1628. Aptly named, Intersections’ mandate is to bring people together who differ, honour the differences and forge common ground in efforts that advance justice, reconciliation and peace. And so the notion of borders transformed into places where individuals and whole communities can converge is central to our work.

One of our collaborative colleagues, Arvind Vora is Chair for Interreligious Affairs of the Federation of Jain Associations of North America and a traffic engineer by profession. He reports that when two vehicles enter an intersection, there are sixteen possible safe interactions. How we engage the intersection is critical to the way we live our lives. Do we pause, yield, move straight through, allow someone to pass, proceed in unintended new directions?

At life’s intersection we discover each other and find our commonality. When there are only borders, the one across the wall remains ‘other’, and opportunities for reconciliation and peace are limited, but when we meet at the intersection, new paradigms are possible.

Relating the Muslim and non-Muslim worlds

Nowhere is the need to replace boundaries with intersections more important than in the relationship between the Muslim and the non-Muslim worlds. Recently, in our midtown Manhattan office, we were privileged to hear from two extraordinary Nigerians, Imam Muhammad Ashafa and Pastor James Wuye, who told the compelling story of how they made the transformation from mortal enemies, intent on killing one another in the name of religion, to two brothers focused on reconciliation and peace.

In 1992, violent interreligious conflict broke out in their homeland. Christians and Muslims fought each other in the marketplace, destroying each other’s crops and attacking one another’s families. Both the Imam and the Pastor were drawn into the fighting, and each paid a heavy price for their involvement – Imam Ashafa with the loss of two brothers and his teacher; Pastor James with the loss of his hand. For them, this was not an ethereal war between Muslim and Christian – it was this man killed my brother; this man’s forces cut off my hand.

So, there they sat at our conference table as Imam Ashafa told of when they were first in the same room together, and how his heart raced as the man he had sworn to kill was sitting across from him. You could sense the emotion still in him. Then, he recounted how someone called a halt in the meeting to take a tea break. ‘A mutual friend took both of us by the hand and said: “The two of you can pull this nation together, or you can destroy it. Do something.”’

At that moment, something in Mohammed — or beyond him — broke open and a spirit of reconciliation filled his heart; making him, as he would later say, ‘hearty’. He reached out to his former enemy to work for reconciliation. The spirit
took longer to fill James, and for three years, though he worked with Ashafa, he told us as we sat in awed stillness by his honesty that he secretly wished his new colleague death, even as they worked together.

But eventually, after three full years, he too, opened to the spirit of forgiveness and returned the love that Mohammed offered. They formed the Interfaith Mediation Center and today, their organization has over 10,000 members, reaching into the militias to train the country’s youth – as well as women, religious figures, and tribal leaders – to become civic peace activists. Under their leadership, Muslim and Christian youth jointly rebuild the mosques and churches they once destroyed through war and violence. Yes, it is possible to change borders into intersections, even in the midst of war.

Role of media

And so, this transformation process can occur in very traditional ways, one person at a time, taking the initiative to break open the borders that have historically divided us and creating points of convergence and cooperation. What is new to our day, however, is the central role that communications technology can play in this process.

First, I submit that any discussion about changes in social interactions must consider the role of the media. If we seek to build a world where honesty, integrity, full participation and human dignity form the basis of our social and political relationships, it is necessary to include the media in these equations.

As a prerequisite for such conversation, it is important to acknowledge the power of the media, perhaps best expressed in an old African proverb, ‘Until the lions can tell their own story, tales of the hunt will always glorify the hunter.’ Until the voiceless are granted voice, their hopes and expectations, triumphs and tragedies will never be articulated, leaving us and them to wonder if they really ever exist at all. My colleague Larry Hollon, General Secretary of the United Methodist Church has often stated that, ‘if you are not in the media, you don’t exist.’

A recent personal experience illustrates the point: For a decade, I had been working behind the scenes producing the image magnification component for the United Church of Christ’s large biennial General Synod meetings. This took untold hours of preparation and implementation but, since I was behind the scenes, only a few knew of my role. However, at the meeting this past June, I was considered an ‘honoured guest’ and – since I was still working behind the scenes and could not join my other colleagues onstage – a five second clip was shown in appreciation of my work.

As I walked the convention center at break time, I received countless comments from conference attendees about this five second clip – far more than I had ever received for my ten years of work backstage!

Personal experience aside, the tragedy about this principle is that there is such a select few gatekeepers controlling what we see and hear in traditional media (print, radio, television), that it is increasingly difficult to experience diverse viewpoints on the airwaves. In the US, for example, less than five percent of the television outlets are owned by women or people of colour. Media access is critical.

Towards the end of his life, Pope John Paul II stated in his Apostolic Letter to those Responsible for Communication, ‘I would like to recall our attention to the subject of media access, and of co-responsible participation in their administration. If the communications media are a good destined for all humanity, then ever-new means must be found – including recourse to opportune legislative measures – to make possible a true participation in their management by all. The culture of co-responsibility must be nurtured.’

Unless we are intentional about diversity of expression in the media, we risk bland homogeneity on the one hand or strident extremism on the other, so any ethic we might develop that nurtures movement from borders to intersections must find a way that makes room for diverse voices to be heard.

Dr. Robert Hackett, Professor of Communication at Canada’s Simon Fraser University, addressing the National Council of Churches Communication Commission in September 2007, noted that ‘media concentrate society’s symbolic power’, focusing attention by priming and framing. I recall seeing a study undertaken by mediarmatters.org that dramatically and tragically demonstrates the power of framing.

One of their studies showed that in the USA, of the 393 interviews on the nightly news of ABC,
CBS, NBC and PBS in the run up to the War in Iraq – three were by peace activists. A result of such framing was a high degree of support for the war – a position later lamented by most responsible US journalists.

**From mass media to participatory media**

But media are changing, and it is in this change that the transition from borders to intersections has accelerated. This revolution is unlike anything since 1448, when Gutenberg invented movable type. Communication technology has moved us from the era of mass media to the age of participatory media. The line between content consumer and content provider has blurred. Distribution has shifted from one-to-many to one-to-one. Another border is crumbling.

Examples of this abound, and the statistics, while startling, are changing so rapidly as to be outdated from one month to the next. Research shows: that 57% of American teenagers create content for the internet. Thirty-one billion e-mails are sent each day (although some studies indicate that twitter and text messaging is replacing e-mail as the medium of choice, especially for younger audiences. In 2009, Boston College stopped giving e-mail addresses to incoming freshmen.)

A new blog is created every second of every day, and the ‘blogosphere’ is doubling in size every five months. There have been 133 Million blogs since 2002.

YouTube has passed 150 million monthly visitors, with more than 100 million videos viewed every day. Close to two billion video streams have been initiated on YouTube. There are two billion Google searches each day. Wikipedia has 2,700,000 articles in English, and ten million altogether in 260 languages. There are 75,000 active contributors, and in 2008, Wikipedia had 684 million visitors.

With more than 250 million active users, if Facebook were a country, it would be the world’s fourth largest, between the US and Indonesia. Almost half visit the site every day and people spend an average of 20 minutes on the site. More than one billion photos are uploaded each month and more than one billion pieces of information are shared each week. And as of October 1, 2009, Twitter reported more than four billion tweets.

Last year, there were more computer transistors produced, and for less cost, than grains of rice.

These changes in technology have real-life implications – in the way we build community among our friends, but also in the ways conflicts are resolved within and among nations. Two recent examples illustrate how new technology has impacted how world events unfold and are perceived – across borders.

The first is the War in Gaza during the winter of 2009. Both sides used emerging technologies to advance their causes. On the web site Mediashift, Jaron Gilinsky offers examples of viral media used by both Israelis and Palestinians. Gilinsky states:

‘Both sides deployed dangerous new media weapons during this latest round of fighting in Gaza. Armed with Facebook profiles, Twitter accounts, and Lavazza espresso, warriors fearlessly and tirelessly scoured the cyber battlefield searching for enemy (blog) outposts. Outfitted with high-tech ammunition like HD videocameras, firewire 800s, and white phosphorescent keyboards, they attacked one-sided videos, slanted essays, and enemy propaganda with propaganda of their own. Instead of grad rockets, they launched grad school wits. Instead of anti-tank missiles, they battled with anti-spamming technology. In 22 days of combat in Gaza, these were the young fighters tasked with winning the merciless war of public opinion for their side.’

Freelance photojournalist Asteris Masouris reported on how new media were used by Al Jazeera to describe the situation on the ground in Gaza:

‘As actual footage from the ground is hard to come by and news organizations have mostly been forced to report from the sidelines, Al Jazeera, being the only network with reporters in Gaza, has emerged as the main source of direct information from the conflict zone. Its Twitter updates from a dedicated account (@AJGaza) routinely precede those of other media organisations by as much as several hours’

**Neda Agha-Soltan’s death**
But, perhaps the best illustration of how new media must be considered in our social interactions is symbolized by Neda’s story which struck the world in the aftermath of the Iranian elections in June of 2009.¹³

A young woman named Neda Agha-Soltan was watching the events unfold around her when she was killed by a sniper’s bullet. A camera recorded her final moments, and within minutes of her death, the video was posted on Facebook and then on YouTube and blogs and tweets from around the world made her a global symbol for the horrors of state sponsored violence and political repression in ways that words and statistics could not.

What makes Neda’s image even more compelling is her utter humanity in the brief 40 seconds of video footage. First, her eyes connect with the camera, follow it as it moves, lock onto each of us in that eternal instant before death: an instant we will all face. Eyes that now reach out for help when help cannot come, for justice now forever denied, for peace where there is no peace.

Then, there is her name – Neda means ‘voice’ in Farsi. She does not speak in the video, but the silence of her expression thunders across the global landscape. Her ‘voice’ demands that we listen. The technologies – YouTube, cell phone pictures, instant messages, social networking, twitter – relay the message in a new kind of struggle, where any moment can be captured. Reposting her image in various settings around the world sows seeds of anger, grief and righteous indignation – the seeds of a paradigm shift.

And Neda’s story can also be seen as a religious watershed. The ‘martyrdom’ of this young Islamic woman demonstrates to more than a billion Muslims (and the rest of us, too) that evil is manifested not only in a secular world run amuck, but also in authoritarian injustice perpetrated in the very name of religion. This intersection of ‘first hand’ knowledge in a heavily controlled society causes yet other barriers – cultural differences and geographical distances – to fall before the power of imagery evoked through emerging technologies, calling faithful people everywhere to struggle against dehumanizing injustice in all its forms.

Finding ‘tools of discernment’

If these borders of time and distance and language and national boundaries are being transformed into intersections before our very eyes, how can we create an ethic that responds to this reality, that maximizes the positive benefits of this transformation and that keeps barriers down and intersections alive in the future?

First, we must acknowledge that the borders are crumbling, that new ways of communicating with one another already exist and that this emerging technology is value neutral. It can be used for good or ill. We should not shrink from it, belittle it or condemn it, but try to understand it, especially through the eyes of young people for whom this reality is normative, and explore ways that this new technology can be used to enhance the human condition.

Second, we must find ways to use this technology to promote the public interest. Responsible dissemination of information by individuals, enlightened regulation by governments, social entrepreneurship by media producers, and corporate and foundation subsidies as stewards of this public trust are all essential components in a constructive societal communications framework.

At the same time, it is important to dispel the myth of the level playing field. In a globalized economy, with huge disparities in wealth, fields are inherently uneven. We need an ethic that tilts toward the small and the poor. A system weighted toward ‘the least of these’ is a foundational principle in religious and ethical thinking that cuts across lines of faith and culture. At its heart, this struggle is a question of justice and the arc of justice bends toward the poor and disenfranchised. We ignore this trajectory at our own peril.

Next, we need clear and robust protections for our children who do not understand the implications of exposing their lives on social networking pages. We must develop ‘tools of discernment’ and teach these in schools, civic arenas and religious institutions so that young people can ascertain for themselves those internet sites with legitimacy and those that cannot be trusted. And there must be a sense of urgency to our efforts. The forces of media consolidation, exponential changes in technology and the impact of globalization are already upon us.

Finally, it is important to understand the power of entertainment to touch hearts and minds and we must support informal initiatives that
reach out to producers to encourage a diversity of ideas, discourage stereotypes, and promote environmentally sound solutions, peacemaking imagery and stories that inspire.

Perhaps, imagination is the key: that human quality that moves us to dare to dream, that emboldens us, that enables us to create new products and practices – that dimension of heart, mind and soul that, when coupled with faith, moves us to ever deeper understandings of ourselves, our world and our God – shattering borders and bringing intersections to life.

Notes
1. For more information on Intersections International, see www.intersectionsinternational.org
3. For illustrations on how communication techniques have expanded the messages of Imam Muhammad Ashafa and Pastor James Wuye, see http://www.iofc.org/iofc-pastor
6. Unless otherwise noted, the following statistics are found at http://thefuturebuzz.com/2009/01/20/social-media-web-20-internet-numbers-stats/ These statistics were sited as of the writing of this article in September 2009; they are changing rapidly.

Robert Chase is an ordained minister in the United Church of Christ. He has served in local congregations in New York, New Jersey and Pennsylvania, earned a Master of Divinity Magna cum Laude from New Brunswick (N.J.) Theological Seminary, and a B.A. with honours in Political Science from the University of Pennsylvania. Chase served as Director of Communication for the 1.2 million member United Church of Christ (1999-2007). He also served as Executive Director of the UCC’s Office of Communication, Inc., the denomination’s historic media justice agency. In September 2007, Chase was called to be the Founding Director of Intersections, a new permanent global initiative of the Collegiate Church of New York. Intersections is an interfaith venture that brings people together in innovative ways in order to forge common ground and build outcomes-based strategies that address justice, reconciliation and peace in the world. Contact: rchase@intersectionsinternational.org

Communicating across boundaries: From barriers to frontiers

Ineke de Feijter

Een tante in Marokko (An aunt in Morocco) is the title of a Dutch television programme (and an old Dutch children’s song) in which two young reporters interview Dutch holidaymakers of Moroccan descent on their way to Morocco. The conversations take place in the parking lot of Valdepeñas in Spain, on the ferry from Algeciras to Tanger and in Morocco itself. The euphoria of the yearly vacation exodus (about 100,000 Moroccan Dutch) is obvious.1

Both the parking lot and the ferry mark the border crossing from journey to holiday, from Europe to Africa, from the Netherlands to Morocco. Stories of ordinary Moroccan-Dutch about holiday moods, daily life in the Netherlands, its political atmosphere, perceptions of the Dutch about Moroccans and Moroccan-Dutch, life in Morocco, family ties and life in and between two cultures. And, of course, about love, an important aspect of the summer holidays.

In the last episode, we get to know two teenage girls, parading on the boulevard of Tanger, looking for other Dutch speaking Moroccans, since they only speak Berber and Dutch, and not Arabic. They tell how Moroccan girls look up to them. Tonight they will take their cousins out, ‘who do not get outside much’, and ‘give them a new look’.

We also meet Bomghaite, a senior Moroccan father, who has already lived in Amsterdam for 49 years. Long ago, he had a relationship with a Dutch woman, who, after they broke up, did not allow him to see his daughter anymore. Now he has already been married for 25 years to a Moroccan...
wife. His daughter is an adult. He still misses her and hopes she will come and look for him.

Then there is Yasmin a young woman, whose father is a Palestinian and whose mother is Dutch. She met the love of her life in Morocco and is now trying to get her husband-to-be to the Netherlands. But Dutch immigration laws are strict nowadays, especially when it comes to so-called ‘import-brides’ (and grooms). They consist of Dutch language exams and obligatory naturalization courses in the country of origin, minimum income demands and age limits. The young couple therefore want to try the so-called ‘Belgian route’ (living in Belgium first), but that appears to be difficult too.

Finally, Mohammed, a 28-year old Dutch-Moroccan, who is going to get married, proudly invites the reporters to his wedding. Unfortunately, his guests do not favour a Dutch television camera in front of their women, so the conversation takes place outside, without his bride.

The program tries to give an insight into the lives of ordinary people in a relaxing holiday atmosphere. One could categorize it as infotainment. It shows their happiness and burdens, their habits and lifestyle, their dreams and expectations, their opinions and struggles with identity. It also shows how the cities of Morocco are changing. There is a lot of building going on; we see large supermarkets rising up, visited mainly by Moroccans living abroad, like the Dutch ones. One can perceive the impact of Western trends on the native culture. The families crossing borders do so in more ways than one. Inconspicuously, the program invites the viewer to cross too.

Plurality and communication transgressions
This program is an example of how public service broadcasters in the Netherlands are fulfilling their social responsibility towards a pluralist society, hoping to help people transgress cultural/religious borders. PSBs are strictly bound to functions, responsibilities and rules in the Netherlands. They are bound to offer information/education, news, fiction, entertainment, socialization and political awareness opportunities, and to give a well-balanced representation of all groups in society. Moreover, all religious groups in the country are guaranteed their own airtime both on PSB television as well as on radio.

Nevertheless, the dual system in the Netherlands, (since the 1990s the public broadcasters have been faced with competition from commercial stations), is under severe threat, as is the case in the whole of Europe. The present (and former) government of the Netherlands increasingly cut back the budget and recently emphasized the informational function of public broadcasters, suggesting leaving entertainment to the commercial stations. It is questionable however, whether the strict division between public and private still holds up in the contemporary state of affairs.

The main trends and changes in European media systems combine technological, economic and political interplay for the sake of the market. They include digitization and convergence (in terms of technology, economy and content), deregulation, liberalization and privatization (EU policies and directives to push the internal EU market), and concentration, globalization and commercialization. These trends affect public broadcasters, forcing them into severe competition with private broadcasters for audience ratings and, therefore, towards convergence in formats, genres, style and content.

What does this mean in terms of communication transgressions in Europe? It has always been stipulated that both people and society as a whole would benefit from more supply. However, expansion and competition have not increased program diversity. Viewers might have more choice, but it is more choice of the same. Viewing time has not increased dramatically; neither did audiences completely break up as a national audience, although public broadcasting did lose its hold. Media use now is multiform.

Audiences increasingly watch entertainment and fiction and prefer ‘own language-own culture’ content (McQuail, 2002). Digital television presumably will increase this trend, offering a multitude of niches, also in other (multi)media. People will choose their own programs, detached from stations or channels. Moreover, audience research in the last two decades has shown viewers actively participate in the negotiation of meaning.

The majority of the international media flow in Europe comes through nationally based media in a roundabout way. Only a small part is multilateral or bilateral, while international media channels strongly follow national boundaries. Cross border
transmission and reception is limited in Europe. According to McQuail (2000) language and culture, national media systems, selective perception and the adaptation of content act like ‘filters’ and interfere with possible cultural effects.3

So there still are many borders and crossings that need to be made when it comes to communication transgressions in Europe today. In fact, there is no such thing as a ‘European’ media scene, common culture, or language. National boundaries in this respect still strongly matter.4 What does exist however is a European market, and a European law to facilitate it.

With respect to communication, and the public sphere as its prerequisite, there is a power structure to take into account. Following merely the rules of market capitalism, it turns communication into a commodity and citizenship into consumption. Communication rights and participation, essential for democracy, become endangered. However, that is not the only obstacle in terms of (intercultural) communication.

**Media performance and diversity**

The Monitor Diversiteit (Diversity Monitor, 2002, 2005) analyzing nine Dutch television channels – three public, six commercial – shows there is a wide diversity of television programmes in the Netherlands. Research by Koeman, Peeters and D’Haenens (2007) however reveals how men dominate Dutch television. 67.1% of all talking persons are men (often in a role of presenter, expert, spokesperson or ‘hard’ functions like businesspersons or police). Children, adolescents, women, senior citizens and ethnic minorities are underrepresented. The largest group shown is adults between 30 and 50. Eight out of ten people on Dutch television are whites (entertainment programmes score as much as 90.8% whites! Only the information/education programming of PSB’s is ‘slightly more colourful’). Dutch television thus is not exactly a mirror of society.

However, there is more to it than unequal representation. Media are also biased. Television tends to stereotype women in mainly soft and caring roles, representing viewpoints of the ordinary citizen, mainly on family matters, relationships or upbringing. (Public channels are a welcome exception to this image, giving women a say on other topics as well). Stereotyping also holds true for older people, children and ethnic minorities. The latter are often related to menace and conflict (mainly issues of multicultural society, terrorism and war).

PSBs often highlight migrants when the multicultural society and integration is involved. It is also striking that whites on screen take the floor several or many times. Non-whites get only one chance and when presenting they speak less than whites. However, PSB channel Nederland 3 especially pays more attention to underrepresented groups.

At the level of programme genre, children’s programmes appear to score the best result when it comes to representing diversity. They show a balanced men/women ratio and reflect the age structure and ‘colours’ of the Dutch population. Almost 60% of primetime television (both PSB and commercial) is informative or educational. In sports programmes, women only make up 7.1% of the population.

Cross medial applications (used by public channels in 52.5% of their programmes and in innovative ways) also appear to be genre-specific. Public channels use websites frequently, whereas commercial stations often involve sms-facilities, to bring in a competition element to the viewers. According to the researchers this suggests PSB’s consider their viewers as citizens and commercial stations as consumers.

When relating diversity to media menus selected by different groups, it seems that people prefer programs with and about their own group. Diverse programming, therefore, does not automatically mean meeting a great diversity of people. Viewers’ choices also reduce diversity.

However, research of media content only cannot provide an overall view of whether and how Dutch television creates a balanced image of different groups in society. Context and media production should also be taken into account.5 Supplemented with audience research, this would account for a combination of qualitative and quantitative research. This compels all the more a retreat by linear media and an increase in separate programme use.

**Intercultural communication**

Media ethics and social responsibilities in the realm
of communications are vital to human coexistence and survival. To cope with the challenges of the so called ‘information society’, a communitarian, cross cultural and global media ethics is essential. According to Hamelink, merely increasing volumes of information and knowledge are not the solution: ‘(...) people need to acquire the capacity to talk to each other across boundaries of culture, religion and language’ (2002: 42). Dialogue in this respect is essential. But how to arrive at genuine intercultural dialogue, both at a personal and societal or even global level?

Vink (2004), in his volume *Grenzeloos communiceren, Een nieuwe benadering van interculturele communicatie* (Communicating without Borders, a New Approach to Intercultural Communication), has developed a new theory in this respect, disqualifying presuppositions and paradigms that, in his opinion, are outdated. Prevailing (Dutch) explanatory models about intercultural communication are methodologically based on comparing national cultures. The concept of national cultures, however, is problematic to Vink, because of its presumed homogeneity and its neglect of the dynamism of culture. Other objections include its cerebral character (excluding commonsense features of culture) and its blindness to differences of power.

The term *multiculture* or multicultural society, in this respect veils cultural contrasts, according to Vink. The tense relationship between individuals, groups, society, homogeneity and pluriformity can lead to different views and strategies (e.g. assimilation, integration, segregation etc.) These contradictions should be openly discussed and ground real choices.

The concept of national cultures is also inadequate to understanding processes of globalization and the global context of communication. Global cultural exchange needs a concept of culture that goes beyond national culture. In an anthropological sense, culture is a struggle for meaning within groups. Culture, in this respect, is not some sort of group belonging or unchangeable tradition, but a construction that is continuously changing due to the struggle for meaning. Nationality and ethnicity are not univocal concepts, but constructed differences to contrast identities.

Handling cultural differences is of increasing importance in the contemporary world. By definition, all cultural communication is intercultural communication, says Vink. He therefore offers an alternative approach to culture and communication and redefines the term ‘intercultural’. He terms his model *glocal scanning* after its main elements.

Vink’s point of departure is the unicity of conversation partners, the recognition of the other as different and equal, and the empowering abilities of communication (to be or become who we are). Because the micro- and macro- and the psychological and the social levels in communication cannot be separated, Vink compares communicating with *scanning*. This means to ‘feel out the right wavelength’ and ‘sound out the relationships’. Important in this scanning process are social position and distance, power relations and identity.

For a long time the ‘dominant’ model in communication studies has been the transfer of information (sender, encoding, message, decoding, receiver, feedback). Daily conversations, however, Vink states, do not inform, but confirm relationships. They have a ritual function. He argues that conversation partners position themselves towards each other and in social space. Both of them have two fundamental needs: the longing for autonomy and, at the same time, the longing for recognition and respect.

This implies tact, both towards the other and towards oneself. The former is the prevention of the other’s loss of face. The latter is self-presentation (which is impossible without recognizing the others’ right in this respect). Tact and self-presentation are vital mechanisms to build and maintain relationships. Nevertheless, this relational aspect of a message is often denied and leads to miscommunication.

Self-presentation, position finding, and recognition by the environment determine one’s identity, which is increasingly cross-border and plural. Identity has two dimensions: a social image (e.g. stigmatization, stereotyping) and a self-image. Identities are socially constructed as basic categories of identification. They facilitate understanding as well as misconceptions. Differences in social status and power are inherent in communication – both verbal and non-verbal.

Communicative abilities, says Vink, have less to do with technical issues than with one’s social, cultural, and symbolic resources. They also include
gender and physical aspects: women, for example, are said to emphasize connections, compliments and apologies in their communication, whereas men stress status, directness and interruptions. Physical aspects involve gestures, attitude, distance or closeness and look or touch.

The vital elements of the scanning process to understand personal communication as identified by Vink are determining position, tact, self-representation, language, power and non-verbal communication. In traditional societies, communication was determined by traditions. In modernity, people became *inner directed*, building on their conscience as an inner lead, also in communicational matters.

In postmodern times, people are *outer directed*. They are like radars that explore the environment, and react and continuously adjust themselves to it. Self-monitoring and contextual-scanning are of increasing importance in communication, according to Vink. Information and content are of relatively minor importance.

The significance of relationships in communication is even greater when cultural differences are involved. To understand this interaction, Vink argues that the social context (social differences and different positions) of this type of communication is crucial. He points to the role of distinctions that are made such as foreign or alien (and ethnocentrism on both sides); civilized or primitive; black or white (and the racism involved); (im)migrants or natives (inclusion and exclusion, we and they); Christians or Muslims (and the identification of religion, culture and lifestyle); and lays or experts, men or women.

Social differences affect communication. Vink argues that we need to be aware of the impact of (common) language in this respect: e.g., ‘economic refugee’, ‘asylum seeker’, ‘third world countries’, ‘the Dark Continent’, ‘the poor’, ‘the weaker sex’, ‘primitive society’, etc.

Globalization as a framework

The concept of the nation-state to Vink is inadequate as a framework for contemporary, global, intercultural communication. Vink argues that it is not the nation-state but the interaction between global and local that determines this framework. Examples of this are the production, circulation and consumption of cultural goods, such as music, religion, tourism and food.

Vink identifies two simultaneous and, at the same time, contradictory trends. *Globalization* or ‘reduction of the world’ and *localization*: greater attention to locality and local knowledge as a perspective to interpret changes. He summarizes the two in the term *glocalization*. Relating these processes to intercultural communication, two issues are important: the extent of a global culture and the future of face-to-face communication as a main feature of communication.

Vink does not agree with the, in his opinion, outdated theory of cultural imperialism. He endorses theories of mingled cultures and transculturalization.10 With respect to the debates on a global culture, he supports the view by De Swaan of ‘local heterogeneousness’ along with ‘global homogeneousness’.11 The global consumption society is not by definition the same as a global culture, says Vink:

‘Consuming is the contemporary form of presenting the self (…). The importance of lifestyles in marketing and media suggest that social classes and social distance disappear. This is wishful thinking and certainly no reality. (…) Worldwide a uniform pattern of consumption is growing, but this does not necessarily lead to uniformity’ (Vink:2004:99).

The active consumption of (cultural) goods is meant to express one’s identity(ies), status and meaning of life. This means people communicate through consumption and lifestyle. Vink, in this respect, concludes that consumption and the global information society are two sides of the same coin.

The survival of face-to-face communication amid new information and communication technologies does not lead Vink toward pessimism. Physical proximity, in his opinion, will remain the basis of all communication. This even applies to modern technology, since people are physical beings.12 Of greater importance, however, are the feeling and flexibility of people with respect to increasing cultural differences and the challenges to communication capabilities – especially within complex societies, which include *glocal* interactions, cultural differences and plural identities.
Communication transgressions in Europe, in this respect, still have a long way to go. Increasing media supply and monitoring diversity, as such, are not enough. Neither is a communitarian, crosscultural and global media ethics, no matter how important (about which there is no question). What is needed are competencies in (intercultural) dialogue, such as the art of thinking together. The ability to dialogue and to participate in communication are crucial.

Notes
1. It is important to pay attention to terms, especially when naming people(s). I will use the term ‘Moroccan-Dutch’ similar to e.g. ‘Afro-Americans’, meaning: Dutch inhabitants from Moroccan descent. I prefer this term over e.g. ‘Dutch Moroccans’ ‘new Dutch’ or ‘Moroccan migrants’, because it underlines their Dutch nationality and gives both their Moroccan as well as their Dutch identity its due (without fixating cultural differences). In this sense, ‘Moroccan-Dutch’ is a marker. Jansen (2008) discerns markers (to help mark our individual and common identity), barriers (to lock people out), and frontiers (challenging us to discover new horizons and broaden our circles of relationships with others). In the latter sense, borders are areas of transition in which passages –literal and figurative- are possible.
2. The impact of private broadcasters is even worse in Central and Eastern Europe, since in former USSR countries state media had a monopoly. For a recent overview of Central and Eastern European media changes see: Jakubowicz, Karol and Sükösd, Miklós (eds.) Finding the Right Place on the Map, Central and Eastern European Media Change in a Global Perspective. Bristol, Chicago: Intellect Books. (2008).
3. However, he does acknowledge the rise of a globalized media culture in itself (stamped by western values as commercialization and individualisation) leading to cultural synchronization. Central and Eastern European countries, as well as non-Western countries and cultures suffer more severely from this process of cultural ‘globalization’ as do Western European countries.
4. As external borders of the European Union do matter in terms of freedom of movement of (non-Western-European) people, or people without documents.
5. On the same day An aunt in Morocco was broadcast (September 8, 2009), Fayza Oum Hamed, brought out her book: De Uitverkorene, een importbruid acht jaar lang opgesloten in Nederland (The chosen one, an import-bride locked up for eight years in the Netherlands). She is a Dutch-Moroccan woman, who was married off as a 16 year old to a Moroccan man/family in Amsterdam East and smuggled into the country. She came to live in a 3-room apartment together with her husband and his family. They heavily battered her. She did not speak the language; she was not allowed to go out and did not know to whom to turn. She got two children, tried to give signals to medical staff and police, and finally, in despair, jumped off the balcony of the apartment building. It was then that helping instances took action. The Minister of integration, who was the first to receive a copy of her sad story, commented: ‘The very severe regimen of your ex family in law is barbarian. You show us now: it is enough. We do not accept tampering with the equality of man and woman, we do not accept that those, who still live in the Middle Ages, import others. For good reason we have fought for our humanitarian achievements. The clock will not be turned back’. The night before, both Fayza Oum ‘Hamed and the Minister were guests in one the most popular talk shows in the Netherlands Pauw and Witteman (September 7, 2009). It was the launch of the new television season. She spoke extensively about her miserable life in those eight years. The minister commented in a similar way as he did in his speech the next day, given on the reception of the book. One wonders how the media attention to the book and the story of Fayza Oum ‘Hamed on September 8 and 9 may have interfered with the viewers’ reception of An aunt in Morocco and intercultural dialogue in general. Context indeed is an important factor, as is the use of language, especially when qualifying people (or countries, or religions). Even more so against the background of the political atmosphere in the Netherlands being constantly stirred up by politician Geert Wilders – abroad best known for his anti-Islam movie Fitna. He and his extreme right wing party PVV, succeed time and again in getting a lot of media attention, even when there is nothing to report. Whether or not he will come up with his movie and after that its launch provided him with media attention for months in the Netherlands. Abroad, especially in the UK and the USA, he was given a good deal of media attention as well becoming the ‘most well-known Dutch politician’.
8. Consequently, this implies a view of reality as an independent variable, to be known objectively and detached from the viewer’s position and in contrast to a holistic understanding.
10. Since the concept of the nation is not adequate to the analysis of communication both on the micro (national borders do not determine the context of communication) and the macro level (the impact of global changes and developments), Vink
coins the notion of transcultural fields. This notion points to transnational cultural exchange. Transnational fields unite global and local dimensions and create a common language (local variations of a global idiom).


12. Vink does not allow for new developments with respect to human-machine interactions, developments of ‘human-robots’ or even for example the creation of a new species of ‘hominoids’. See in this respect: Roeien voor het leven, de kerk en een nieuwe hominide (Rowing for Life, the Church and a New Hominoid), Gorinchem, Narratio.

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Ineke de Feijter (PhD) is assistant professor and coordinator of the graduate program on Media Religion and Culture at the Department of Theology and Religious Studies of Amsterdam VU University. ineke.defeijter@home.nl
Music without borders

Karl Paulnack

One of my parents’ deepest fears, I suspect, is that society would not properly value me as a musician, that I wouldn’t be appreciated. I had very good grades in high school, I was good in science and math, and they imagined that as a doctor or a research chemist or an engineer, I might be more appreciated than I would be as a musician. I still remember my mother’s remark when I announced my decision to apply to music school—she said, ‘you’re wasting your SAT scores!’

On some level, I think, my parents were not sure themselves what the value of music was, what its purpose was. And they loved music: they listened to classical music all the time. They just weren’t really clear about its function. So let me talk about that a little bit, because we live in a society that puts music in the ‘arts and entertainment’ section of the newspaper, and serious music, the kind your kids are about to engage in, has absolutely nothing whatsoever to do with entertainment, in fact it’s the opposite of entertainment. Let me talk a little bit about music, and how it works.

One of the first cultures to articulate how music really works was the ancient Greeks. And this is going to fascinate you: the Greeks said that music and astronomy were two sides of the same coin. Astronomy was seen as the study of relationships between observable, permanent, external objects, and music was seen as the study of relationships between invisible, internal, hidden objects. Music has a way of finding the big, invisible moving pieces inside our hearts and souls and helping us figure out the position of things inside us. Let me give you some examples of how this works.

One of the most profound musical compositions of all time is the ‘Quartet for the End of Time’ written by French composer Olivier Messiaen in 1940. Messiaen was 31 years old when France entered the war against Nazi Germany. He was captured by the Germans in June of 1940 and imprisoned in a prisoner-of-war camp.

He was fortunate to find a sympathetic prison guard who gave him paper and a place to compose, and fortunate to have musician colleagues in the camp, a cellist, a violinist, and a clarinetist. Messiaen wrote his quartet with these specific players in mind. It was performed in January 1941 for the prisoners and guards of the prison camp. Today it is one of the most famous masterworks in the repertoire.

Given what we have since learned about life in the Nazi camps, why would anyone in his right mind waste time and energy writing or playing music? There was barely enough energy on a good day to find food and water, to avoid a beating, to stay warm, to escape torture—why would anyone bother with music? And yet—even from the concentration camps, we have poetry, we have music, we have visual art; it wasn’t just this one fanatic Messiaen; many, many people created art. Why?

Well, in a place where people are only focused on survival, on the bare necessities, the obvious conclusion is that art must be, somehow, essential for life. The camps were without money, without hope, without commerce, without recreation, without basic respect, but they were not without art. Art is part of survival; art is part of the human spirit, an unquenchable expression of who we are. Art is one of the ways in which we say, ‘I am alive, and my life has meaning.’

Surviving through music

In September of 2001 I was a resident of Manhattan. On the morning of September 12, 2001 I reached a new understanding of my art and its relationship to the world. I sat down at the piano that morning at 10 AM to practice as was my daily routine; I did it by force of habit, without thinking about it. I lifted the cover on the keyboard, and opened my music, and put my hands on the keys and took my hands off the keys. And I sat there and thought, does this even matter? Isn’t this completely irrelevant? Playing the piano right now, given what happened in this city yesterday, seems silly, absurd, irreverent, pointless. Why am I here? What place has a musician in this
moment in time? Who needs a piano player right now? I was completely lost.

And then I, along with the rest of New York, went through the journey of getting through that week. I did not play the piano that day, and in fact I contemplated briefly whether I would ever want to play the piano again. And then I observed how we got through the day.

At least in my neighbourhood, we didn’t shoot hoops or play Scrabble. We didn’t play cards to pass the time, we didn’t shop, we most certainly did not go to the mall. The first organized activity that I saw in New York, on the very evening of September 11, was singing. People sang. People sang around fire houses, people sang ‘We Shall Overcome’. Lots of people sang ‘America the Beautiful’.

The first organized public event that I remember was the Brahms Requiem, later that week, at Lincoln Center, with the New York Philharmonic. The first organized public expression of grief, our first communal response to that historic event, was a concert. That was the beginning of a sense that life might go on. The US Military secured the airspace, but recovery was led by the arts, and by music in particular, that very night.

From these two experiences, I have come to understand that music is not part of ‘arts and entertainment’ as the newspaper section would have us believe. It’s not a luxury, a lavish thing that we fund from leftovers of our budgets, not a plaything or an amusement or a pass time. Music is a basic need of human survival. Music is one of the ways we make sense of our lives, one of the ways in which we express feelings when we have no words, a way for us to understand things with our hearts when we can’t with our minds.

Some of you may know Samuel Barber’s heart wrenchingly beautiful piece ‘Adagio for Strings’. If you don’t know it by that name, then some of you may know it as the background music which accompanied the Oliver Stone movie Platoon, a film about the Vietnam War. If you know that piece of music either way, you know it has the ability to crack your heart open like a walnut; it can make you cry over sadness you didn’t know you had. Music can slip beneath our conscious reality to get at what’s really going on inside us the way a good therapist does.

Very few of you have ever been to a wedding where there was absolutely no music. There might have been only a little music, there might have been some really bad music, but with few exceptions there is some music. And something very predictable happens at weddings – people get all pent up with all kinds of emotions, and then there’s some musical moment where the action of the wedding stops and someone sings or plays the flute or something. And even if the music is lame, even if the quality isn’t good, predictably 30 or 40 percent of the people who are going to cry at a wedding cry a couple of moments after the music starts. Why?

The Greeks. Music allows us to move around those big invisible pieces of ourselves and rearrange our insides so that we can express what we feel even when we can’t talk about it. Music is the understanding of the relationship between invisible internal objects.

Transcending time and place
I’ll give you one more example, the story of the most important concert of my life. I must tell you I have played a little less than a thousand concerts in my life so far. I have played in places that I thought were important. I like playing in Carnegie Hall; I enjoyed playing in Paris; it made me very happy to please the critics in St. Petersburg. I have played for people I thought were important; music critics of major newspapers, foreign heads of state. The most important concert of my entire life took place in a nursing home in a small Midwestern town a few years ago.

I was playing with a very dear friend of mine who is a violinist. We began, as we often do, with Aaron Copland’s ‘Sonata’, which was written during World War II and dedicated to a young friend of Copland’s, a young pilot who was shot down during the war. Now we often talk to our audiences about the pieces we are going to play rather than providing them with written program notes. But in this case, because we began the concert with this piece, we decided to talk about the piece later in the program and to just come out and play the music without explanation.

Midway through the piece, an elderly man seated in a wheelchair near the front of the concert hall began to weep. This man, whom I later met, was clearly a soldier—even in his 70’s, it was clear
from his buzz-cut hair, square jaw and general demeanour that he had spent a good deal of his life in the military. I thought it a little bit odd that someone would be moved to tears by that particular movement of that particular piece, but it wasn’t the first time I’ve heard crying in a concert and we went on with the concert and finished the piece.

When we came out to play the next piece on the program, we decided to talk about both the first and second pieces, and we described the circumstances in which the Copland was written and mentioned its dedication to a downed pilot. The man in the front of the audience became so disturbed that he had to leave the auditorium. I honestly figured that we would not see him again, but he did come backstage afterwards, tears and all, to explain himself.

What he told us was this:

‘During World War II, I was a pilot, and I was in an aerial combat situation where one of my team’s planes was hit. I watched my friend bail out, and watched his parachute open, but the Japanese planes which had engaged us returned and machine gunned across the parachute cords so as to separate the parachute from the pilot, and I watched my friend drop away into the ocean, realizing that he was lost. I have not thought about this for many years, but during that first piece of music you played, this memory returned to me so vividly that it was as though I was reliving it. I didn’t understand why this was happening, why now, but then when you came out to explain that this piece of music was written to commemorate a lost pilot, it was a little more than I could handle. How does the music do that? How did it find those feelings and those memories in me?’

Remember the Greeks: music is the study of invisible relationships between internal objects. The concert in the nursing home was the most important work I have ever done. For me to play for this old soldier and help him connect, somehow, with Aaron Copland, and to connect their memories of their lost friends, to help him remember and mourn his friend, this is my work. This is why music matters.

What follows is part of the talk I will give to this year’s freshman class when I welcome them a few days from now. The responsibility I will charge your sons and daughters with is this:

‘If we were a medical school, and you were here as a med student practicing appendectomies, you’d take your work very seriously because you would imagine that some night at two AM someone is going to waltz into your emergency room and you’re going to have to save their life. Well, my friends, someday at 8 PM someone is going to walk into your concert hall and bring you a mind that is confused, a heart that is overwhelmed, a soul that is weary. Whether they go out whole again will depend partly on how well you do your craft.

‘You’re not here to become an entertainer, and you don’t have to sell yourself. The truth is you don’t have anything to sell; being a musician isn’t about dispensing a product, like selling used cars. I’m not an entertainer; I’m a lot closer to a paramedic, a firefighter, a rescue worker. You’re here to become a sort of therapist for the human soul, a spiritual version of a chiropractor, physical therapist, someone who works with our insides to see if they get things to line up, to see if we can come into harmony with ourselves and be healthy and happy and well.

‘Frankly, ladies and gentlemen, I expect you not only to master music; I expect you to save the planet. If there is a future wave of wellness on this planet, of harmony, of peace, of an end to war, of mutual understanding, of equality, of fairness, I don’t expect it will come from a government, a military force or a corporation. I no longer even expect it to come from the religions of the world, which together seem to have brought us as much war as they have peace.

‘If there is a future of peace for humankind, if there is to be an understanding of how these invisible, internal things should fit together, I expect it will come from the artists, because that’s what we do. As in the Nazi camps and the evening of 9/11, the artists are the ones who might be able to help us with our internal, invisible lives.’

From a welcome address given to parents of incoming students at The Boston Conservatory on September 1, 2004, by Dr. Karl Paulnack, Director of the Music Division.
Cyanide for gold: Dealing with E-waste

Pradip N. Thomas

_E-waste is a global issue and its disposal has become as significant as the disposal of solid waste. Despite the Basel Convention on the Control of Transborder Movements of Hazardous Wastes and their Disposal (1992) – that 170 countries have signed up to (with the notable exception of the USA) – its violation is unfortunately commonplace, even by countries that are signatories to the convention. This is not entirely surprising given the global mountain of hazardous e-waste that the developed world, in particular, is not keen to keep in its own back yard._

The global appetite for electronic goods, and the increasingly limited life of goods such as computers and mobile phones that become rapidly obsolete in a context characterised by frenetic innovation, decreasing costs and increasing correspondences between the technologies of leisure and of work, have led to the creation of many e-waste lands throughout the world.

Landfills, dumps, swamps are common dumping grounds for e-waste. And there are multiple environments and spaces for the processing of e-waste in the heart of cities in the developing world – in Abidjan, Lagos, Delhi, Chennai, Bangalore, among very many others. A typical computer’s parts contain a number of classified toxins including lead, mercury, arsenic, cadmium, chromium, beryllium, brominated flame retardants (BFRs).

These toxins are found in cathode ray tubes (CRTs), computer batteries, capacitors, liquid crystal displays (LCDs), circuit boards and other parts of electronic goods. The dismantling that is carried out in these mainly informal economies is directed towards the recovery of copper, gold, silver, platinum and other metals.

Toxic chemicals such as cyanide are used to recover these metals and the open smelting process results in the release of noxious fumes. Any waste arising out of these processes is dumped into surrounding areas causing serious environmental pollution and increasing health risks to the general population.¹

Given the increasingly central role played by the internet, mobile technologies and computing in our daily lives, it is inevitable that over the next few decades, connectivity will become truly global in scale as an array of technologies take over the organisation of our lives, adding, of course, to e-waste. The advent of ‘smart’ housing and smart cities will increase the volume of e-waste along with the increasing availability of a diverse range of leisure technologies.

It is interesting that as media academics theorise on social networking, interactivity, access and a time of information plenty, the political economy of e-waste hardly merits even a passing mention. Richard Heeks (2009: 29) in a working paper entitled ‘The ICT4D 2.0 Manifesto: Where Next for ICTs and International Development’ envisages the global expansion of inclusion policies and concludes with ‘three overarching questions for this next phase… How can the poor be producers of digital content and services? How can they create new incomes and jobs through ICTs? And how can we recognise and scale the ICT-based innovations they produce?’

The intention to globalise access and use if ICTs is of course entirely laudable and an organisation like WACC may well argue that the extension of ICTs access to all and its affordable use is indeed, an expression of communication rights. However the global consequences of abandoned, obsolete new technologies primarily by the rich, although in the future also by the poor, needs to become a priority issue simply because these technologies, at least for the moment, are non-biodegradable and because of the high personal costs of recycling e-waste in the developing world.

Additionally, ground water pollution is a
serious consequence of e-waste dumping in the developing world. A solution to e-waste is more ‘green’ technologies at the heart of the information revolution. A number of global IT and mobile technology manufacturers including Dell, Samsung, Hewlett Packard, Nokia, Sony-Ericsson among others have committed to phasing out the use of hazardous chemicals, flame retardants and PVC (see report on BBC Online: 2006) although there is little pressure on these companies to deliver on their promise of green IT products nor are there monitoring agencies to assess compliance.

Just as the spectre of global warming has led to increased efforts at finding alternatives to fossil fuels, there is a need for environmentally friendly technologies and greater awareness of both the politics and consequences of e-waste.

The Basel Convention and its contraventions
The EU’s Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment Directive (WEEE Directive) that became law in 2003 highlights the responsibilities of manufacturers in the collection, disposal and recycling of e-waste. This legislation was a response to the need to recycle 6.4 million tonnes of e-waste annually in the EU. The UK was one of the last of the EU countries to adopt the WEEE Directive in July 2007.

While the directive is sound enough, there are issues with its operationalisation, in particular, the additional costs related to the recycling of e-waste that inevitably are passed on to consumers. The establishment of large e-waste recycling plants in Europe is definitely a step in the right direction although the sheer volume of global e-waste is bound to result in contraventions of the Basel Convention.

Canada, a country that is a signatory to the Basel Convention and that has implemented ‘E-Waste Product Stewardship’ in most of its provinces/ territories with the exception of Newfoundland and Labrador, the Northwest Territories, Nunavut, Prince Edward Island and Yukon, has been involved in the dumping of e-waste. In 2006 federal agencies seized 50 containers of e-waste in the Port of Vancouver bound for China – merely the tip of the iceberg. Twenty-seven companies settled out of court and paid up to C$2,000 apiece (see Lachance: n.d.).

E-waste is simply not an issue of out of date IT products and their disposal, but is also linked to the state, the exercise of state power and the extension of neo-colonial relationships in a context characterised by a generally low priority given to e-waste recycling and its exports, irrespective of whether or not countries are party to electronic waste recycling laws. E-waste, in other words, is yet to become a global priority and is enveloped by grey areas of policy and practice.

In the US, the Environmental Protection Agency that is supposed to monitor exports of the only ‘officially’ recognised hazardous e-waste in that country – Cathode Ray Tubes (CRTs), has done very little to enforce this rule. In an interesting Government Accountability Office (GAO) testimony on electronic waste, John Stephenson reports on the findings from an undercover operation:

‘Posing as fictitious buyers from Hong Kong, India, Pakistan, Singapore and Vietnam, among other countries, we found 43 electronics recyclers in the United States who were willing to export to us broken, untested, or nonworking CRTs under conditions that would violate the CRT rule’ (Stephenson, 2008: 2).

The testimony goes on to add that some of these companies were actively involved in Earth Day 2008 recycling events! and that most ‘used electronics can be legally exported from the United States with no restrictions’ (Stephenson, 2008: 10).

States in the developed world, whether a party or not to such laws, continue to find ways to export their e-waste to the developed world. And most countries in the developing world are not in a position to obstruct e-waste overtures from the developed world. Praveen Dalal has observed that:

‘The two largest nations exporting their e-wastes are the United States and Britain. According to a British Environmental Protection Agency Report, Britain shipped out 25,000 tons of e-waste to South Asia…in 2005 the US recycled about $2 billion worth of electronic equipment, which may be just 20 per cent of the e-waste it generated, much of which found its way to India, China, Southeast Asia and Africa.’
It is clear that there is a global political economy of e-waste that involves states, manufacturers, exporters, importers, recycling and re-sale units, involved in a trade that is worth millions of dollars.

E-waste and income differentials
In spite of the global spread of electronic products, best exemplified by the ubiquity of mobile phones, the technology trail continues to follow a familiar route, as for instance in London, where studies have shown that ‘income and wealth differentials’ and ‘social location’ impact on access to ICTs (Murdock & Golding: 2005). The previous technological revolution that led to the circulation of white goods also followed a similar circulation trajectory. Those on the periphery tend to hang on to technologies even after their use by date – as is the case with mobile phone and computer use in the developing world. A study by Kurian Joseph (2007) in Chennai revealed that ‘...low-income households use the PC for 5.94 years, TV for 8.16 years and mobile phones for 2.34 years while the upper income class uses the PC for 3.21 years, TV for 5.13 years and mobile phones for 1.63 years.’

Higher income groups, irrespective of their location in the world, tend to disproportionately consume and discard ICTs thus contributing to e-waste. And public and private enterprises throughout the world are involved in a constant updating of their electronic technologies. The issue of course is more than just consumption patterns. It has to do with the policies that govern the production of technologies that have become indispensable to life in the 21st century along with the lack of political will to create binding policies on the recycling and disposal of e-waste.

E-waste in India
At the core of e-waste are products associated with the information and knowledge economy and digitally networked, convergent technologies. Economic growth and productivity remain the key goals of all nations and increased IT consumption is both a cause and effect of this growth. In India, for example, the IT and software revolutions have led to the creation of IT policies, to nation-wide networking, infrastructure development and to the inter-sectoral computerisation of public services, the automation of manufacturing and the networking of civil society.

The language of e-commerce, e-education and e-governance has begun to define the nature of the Indian economy as traditional manufacturing and agricultural production in particular have becoming declining contributors to India’s GDP. The IT industries are of course in pole position and are playing a significant role in both investing in the digitisation of the country and lobbying for preferential terms for their industry. Examples of such investments include corporate support for annual national e-governance summits, for e-education initiatives and anti-piracy efforts aimed at curbing any threats to the digital economy.

This change towards the knowledge economy is however taking place within the overall environment of complex modernity, uneven development and uneven globalisation in which vast numbers of Indians are being marginalised by the non-viability of traditional occupations such as agriculture due to the increasing costs of inputs and decreasing returns. The recycling of e-waste in Indian cities is carried out by precisely those who have been pushed out of agriculture and onto the urban fringes.

Most of these new migrants do not have the disposable incomes at hand to consume these new technologies. Moreover large numbers of people in India have been forced off their land to make way for free trade zones, electronic cities and IT company headquarters. The case of the Bangalore-based flagship Indian software export company, Infosys, is a case in point.

The state government of Karnataka made 800 hectares of pre-owned land available to Infosys. The lawyer Lawrence Liang (no date: 6) describes the ‘legal’ means used by the state to legalise illegality by referring to the Karnataka Industrial Areas Development Act’s expansion of the ‘doctrine of “eminent domain” (the absolute authority of the state to acquire land) to fit the demands of a land hungry information industry.’. The need for safe recycling environments in the informal sector and for alternative employment opportunities for e-waste workers need to be explored by the state, the private sector and civil society.

In response to growing international pressure from non-governmental agencies such as Greenpeace, the Indo-German-Swiss e-waste
initiative and local groups such as Toxiclink, the government of India, has announced the finalising ‘of the world’s strictest set of rules on disposing of electronic waste’ that also includes a ‘complete ban on import of any kind of electronic and electrical equipment for dismantling, recycling and disposal purposes’ (Economic Times Online: 2009). This new rule will also place responsibility on manufacturers to recycle e-waste and encourages the setting up of official e-waste recycling plants.

However, if the Greenpeace report (2008) ‘TakeBack Blues: An Assessment of E-Waste Takeback in India’ is anything to go by, it would seem that the implementation of these rules will be fraught. The study found that with the exception of one foreign company – Acer – and two Indian companies – WIPRO and HCL – the major foreign vendors including Apple, Microsoft, Panasonic, PCS Technology, Philips, Sharp, Sony, Sony Ericsson and Toshiba did not offer takeback services (10).

The report also reveals that of those that did offer these services, that of Dell, HP, Lenovo and Zenith did not function (2), and that none of the major vendors were involved in educating the public on this service (12).

E-waste and the media
So what are some of the communication and media issues with respect to e-waste? Firstly there is a need for a greater public awareness of the need to exercise personal responsibility for the care and disposal of consumer technologies. This is a question of ethics and of environmental responsibility.

Secondly, the media need to encourage the formation of public opinion related to the responsibility of IT manufacturers and retailers in the disposal and recycling of IT products and to hold these companies responsible for their e-waste.

Thirdly, there is a need for the media literacy movement to factor issues related to e-waste in to their curricula.

Fourthly, there is a need for research on the political economy of e-waste. Given the lack of political will by nations to deal with e-waste in their own back yards, it is important that the gaps between principles and practice are monitored and that investments are made into comprehensive mappings of global e-waste flows.

Fifthly, it is important that issues related to e-waste are factored into the pedagogy of ICTs for social change and that e-waste is taken seriously by agencies such as the World Bank and others that are involved in supporting ICTs project throughout the world.

Chris Long (2006), in an article in BBC online refers to an exhibition at the Science Museum, London that featured among other green technologies a circuit board made out of pasta, a ‘printer case made of corn-based BioPlastic that degrades gracefully, and a phone case made of Kenaf, a plant grown all over the world, which effectively melts when you bury it... One mobile phone case had been made from biodegradable plastic, with a sunflower seed inserted in it. By planting the case in the soil a flower grows.’

While there are doubts related to the scalability of some of these innovations, it is certainly important that such innovative solutions to the problem of e-waste are encouraged. The wise use of personal technologies will certainly contribute to smaller personal carbon footprints although there is also a need for such actions to be complimented with comprehensive policies on the manufacture and disposal of electronic goods and the recycling of e-waste.

Notes
1. See the e-waste clip on youtube produced by Greenpeace: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5sMOAWW6l0k

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Al-Jazeera English has conciliatory potential

Mohammed el-Nawawy and Shawn Powers

Can satellite news help mediate today’s international conflicts? The following study suggests that Al-Jazeera English offers a measure of trust in an increasingly fragmented world and helps people connect with others who share similar stories, a process that provides them with a sense of stability.

Today, the role that media technologies and actors play in the formation of opinion and social networks is changing and presents many new questions for media scholars. While media technologies have always played an important role in international conflict, today’s ‘network society’ has dramatically increased the ways in which media technologies are utilized in conflicts, the number of media organizations producing and disseminating information during conflict, as well as the means to better monitor and understand mediated communications from afar. Accordingly, media organizations are increasingly being treated as ‘actors’ within international conflicts, able to shape and refine opinions of people and even governments.

Since CNN’s coverage of the 1991 Gulf War, satellite news broadcasters have popped up around the world, each with a slightly different take on international events. Narratives guiding the public’s understanding of events are increasingly and more easily contested, and thus the ‘battle’ to control the flow of information has become intense, particularly...
during times of conflict. As competition over the airwaves has increased, it has become especially difficult to discern under what circumstances particular broadcasters have influence, and among what audiences.

With a plethora of news organizations broadcasting information around the world, it has become much easier for audiences to tune into the organization that is oftentimes aligned with their opinions and worldviews, a change in the newscape that calls into question whether news organizations are actually educating audiences or rather providing people with information that is simply used to further their pre-existing opinions and attitudes. This is an especially troubling trend when read in the context of the prevalence and hardening of negative stereotypes about cultural ‘others.’

Al-Jazeera English (AJE), launched in November 2006, presents an interesting test case to examine the role of satellite news in mediating today’s international conflicts. Hyped as ‘the voice of the South,’ AJE promises to contain the technological capacity and the ideological wherewithal to provide new and productive fora for cross-cultural communications. According to its proponents, AJE presents a tremendous opportunity for a new direction in the discourse of global newsflows. With its avowed promise of giving a ‘voice to the voiceless,’ AJE could represent a new style of news media that challenges existing research regarding transnational media organizations and media and conflict scholarship more broadly. Below are the primary findings of our multi-method, multi-country study of AJE and employees. The findings are based on 597 surveys from the United States, the United Kingdom, Qatar, Kuwait, Malaysia and Indonesia, several focus groups and 31 interviews of AJE employees.

**Primary findings**

*Al-Jazeera English viewers found it to function as a 'conciliatory media,' which is a media that is more likely to cover contentious issues in a way that contributes to creating an environment that is more conducive to cooperation, negotiation and reconciliation.*

Overall, viewers found that AJE was a conciliatory media, and the longer they had been watching AJE, the better they thought it was at fulfilling its conciliatory role. Conciliatory media, a term introduced in this research project, was determined based on how well AJE performed with regard to a number of journalistic criteria, including its ability to create space for the ‘mediatized recognition’ of stories from groups that have been historically and/or are currently disenfranchised, a process that has been found to be an important step in the process towards reconciling cultural tensions.

This process of mediatized recognition is at the heart of AJE’s mission, and is also reflected in how many of its journalists feel about the organization’s work. Moreover, by providing more depth and context to its stories, along with reasoned arguments on all sides of an issue, a conciliatory media is likely to induce more open thinking when it comes to considering other people’s perspectives.

The more months viewers had been watching AJE, the less dogmatic they were in their thinking. In this context, dogmatism refers to a ‘relatively closed cognitive organization of beliefs and disbeliefs about reality, organized around a central set of beliefs about absolute authority which, in turn, provides a framework for patterns of intolerance and qualified tolerance toward others.’ Previous research has demonstrated a positive correlation between levels of dogmatism and confrontational behavior in conflict situations. This finding was found to be significant amongst participants who relied heavily on AJE as their primary source for information and political behavior, as well as those who were less dependent on AJE.

The lower levels of dogmatism associated with AJE viewership may open up viewers to becoming increasingly capable of navigating issues that have otherwise been seen as irreconcilable. Moreover, lower levels of dogmatism have been found to strongly relate to one’s willingness to engage and listen to competing information claims, a consequence that could be exceptionally helpful in combating perceptions of a ‘Clash of Civilizations.’

This is particularly significant in light of our finding that viewers considered AJE to be a conciliatory media, and that the longer a viewer had tuned into AJE, the better they thought it was at fulfilling a conciliatory function. Not only did viewers think that AJE was effective at embodying the journalistic standards that we identified as essential for a news outlet to cover contentious
issues in socially productive ways, but the longer they watched, the less dogmatic they were, thus providing further evidence that the concept of a conciliatory media can have tangible consequences on how people approach difficult issues.

**Viewers tune into international news for affirmation rather than information.** On a number of levels, the findings provided evidence that participants were tuning into international news media that they thought would further substantiate their opinions about U.S. policies and culture, and provide them with information regarding the international issues of concern that they felt should be prioritized. For example, the study found a strong relationship between the participants’ attitudes toward the U.S. policies and culture and the particular broadcaster they depended on for news and information. Respondents who were dependent on BBC World and especially on CNNI were more supportive of U.S. foreign policy generally.

Moreover, those dependent on BBC World were more favorable to American cultural values, while those dependent on CNNI were more likely to support America’s war on terror. Participants dependent on CNNI were more likely to support U.S. policy in Iraq and U.S. policy toward the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, while those dependent on AJE were more critical of both. In other words, viewers use the media to get affirmed rather than to get informed.

For example, the viewers who oppose the U.S. policies in Iraq and Palestine may be more dependent on AJE as a source of information in that it will likely provide them with information to further substantiate their already established opinion. Similarly, viewers who support the U.S. foreign policy may consider themselves dependent on CNNI since they believe its reporting operates within an ideology that is similar to theirs.

Importantly, while viewers likely choose to watch international news broadcasters that will tell stories in ways that reinforce their opinions, we found that the more frequently a participant watched AJE, the less supportive they were of U.S. policy towards the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Similarly, the longer a participant had been tuning into AJE, the more critical they were of U.S. policy in Iraq. Thus, while the news media are unlikely to change one’s opinion on politically salient issues, it may often be the case that they do reinforce and deepen already held opinions.

**Challenge to existing paradigms**

This study cautiously approaches the conciliatory potential of AJE and its influence. In terms of news media today, AJE is an anomaly when it comes to its role, mission and identity. It stands out from its competitors in that it presents a challenge to the existing paradigms guiding international news broadcasters. It is neither dominated by geopolitical nor commercial interests, and is the first of its kind to have the resources, mission and journalistic capacity to reach out to ideologically and politically similar audiences throughout the world. It both represents a challenge to ‘the myth of the mediated centre,’ while also providing a test case for examining whether the ‘increased density in media flows... necessarily translates into increased media power.’

The findings confirm that people are drawn to news media that help them connect with others who share similar stories, a process that provides them with a sense of social stability. Yet, it is also clear that AJE is doing something right. Our finding that AJE was seen as a conciliatory media, and that the longer a viewer watched, the less dogmatic they were in their thinking provides hope in a world in desperate need of much cross-cultural reconciliation. Moving forward, questions of identity construction, promotion and identification are central to analyzing and understanding how media become trusted means for accessing information, and thus influential, in today’s media environment.

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**Notes**

Mohammed el-Nawawy is a Knight-Crane endowed chair in the School of Communication at Queens University of Charlotte. His research interests are focused on the new media in the Middle East, particularly satellite channels and the Internet, and their impact on the Arab public sphere. He is also interested in issues of public diplomacy and ways of initiating effective dialogue between the Middle East and the West. He is the author and co-author of three books: *Al-Jazeera: The story of the network that is rattling governments and redefining modern journalism*; *Al-Jazeera: How the free Arab news network scooped the world and changed the Middle East*; and *The Israeli-Egyptian peace process in the reporting of Western journalists*.

Shawn Powers is a Ph.D candidate at the Annenberg School for Communication at the University of Southern California and a Research Associate at USC’s Center on Public Diplomacy. His research interests are focused on the use of media in times of war and conflict and the potential roles that media technologies can play on resolving crosscultural disagreements and international tensions. He previously worked at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington, D.C., and has conducted field and media research in the Middle East, Eastern Europe and Southeast Asia.

The validity of communication policies in Latin America

Andrés Cañizález

During the 1970s and 1980s, the drive for National Communication Policies (NCPs) was remarkable in Latin America. International organisations, high ranking government officials and academics agreed that they needed to be implemented. After a period in which market theories prevailed, the arrival of the 21st century in the region came hand in hand with new governments with a markedly social and inclusive discourse. However, the last few years have seen a decline in NPCs which also offer a space to debate issues pertaining to communication in a democratic and pluralistic framework.

With the advent of the globalisation phenomenon and its growing daily presence in many spheres of social interaction, it could have been observed that we were facing the end of politics and, as a consequence, of the State”

‘Converted into an ideology, into unique thought, the historical process of globalisation has become *globalism*, or rather the imposing of market unity and the reduction of political discrepancies and cultural differences in the market. In subordinating these two scenarios of difference to just one vision of the economy, politics is diluted and the State appears almost unnecessary’ (García Canclini, 1999: 50).

The disappearance of the State was also decreed
by multilateral financial organisations in guidelines that arrived in the guise of economic aid. In the case of Latin America this followed the external debt crisis of the 1980s which demonstrated at its roots the exhaustion of the statist-rentist model. Facing this reality, the dismantling of the apparatus of State – rather than its necessary reform – was presented as the only option.

Meanwhile, throughout the last decade and the beginning of the current one, we have seen a global process that has produced great business fusions implicating the economies of different countries. An example of this is the growing transnational diffusion of symbolic production and the frequent use of ‘franchises’ in local production – in television for instance – all of which are linked to clear guidance over what countries must or mustn’t do, whether on the part of financial organisations or governments such as that of the United States.

Roughly summed up, this combination of factors demonstrates that globalisation ‘doesn’t specifically indicate the end of politics but rather a departure from the “political” within the framework of the nation state’ (Beck, 1998: 15). Rather, in the midst of this process, political action has not ceased but that at their base, financial transactions as much as media diffusion imply political constructions and are thus forms of intervention in the public sphere, in society.

It is worth remembering that communication is not simply an object for a policy, but rather a primordial scenario for politics to find a space for its symbolic development and so through the media a link between citizens can be represented (Martín Barbero, 2001).

‘The media has become a critical space in the configuration of the public sphere and of citizenship itself – we say critical to show that it not only deals with a new phenomenon but indeed an intense and substantive one – as much for the weight they now have in influencing the definition of public agendas as for establishing the legitimacy of any debate’ (León, 2002: 2).

With this determining influence that the media have in social life, it would be incomprehensible if, from the perspective of the State and citizen, policies were not fixed precisely in a framework that has transformed our way of understanding politics, as León (2002: 2) himself emphasises when he states that ‘the predominance of the media with respect to other examples of social mediation – political parties, unions, churches, educational establishments etc. – is such that for the latter to prevail recurrently, they need to support themselves within the media.’

Similarly, on the level of political configurations and representations, globalisation as an expression of a liberal concept has underscored the fact that ‘the dissemination of the democratic model as an ideal of city-State organisation on a global scale represents the triumph of the belief in (and experience of) the rights of people, individual liberty and the aspirations of equality among people as the best form of government compatible with capitalist economic development residing in a multi-partisan and competitive system’ (Brunner, 1999: 28).

If modern methods of communicational and economic interaction practically dispense with the traditional relationships with the nation State as a territorially demarcated and concrete geographical space, thanks to the development of new technologies, they haven’t ceased to be political. They are precisely more political in that the discourse that supports the figure of the State seeks to weaken it politically while at the same time elevating itself to the market. We agree with Beck in demonstrating that we helped to strengthen an ideology – globalism, ‘a conception according to which the world market vacates or substitutes the work of politics, that is to say the ideology of world market control or the ideology of liberalism’ (1998:27).

In reality, societies like Venezuela require not the supplanting of the State but rather State building insofar as great social rifts exist. These rifts express themselves through the access of new communication technologies at the same time as we can observe failures in the legal framework that provides tools for citizens to use in cultural and communicational interaction. The construction of the State that facilitates and brings about the participation of citizens emerges precisely from the democratic political task. It deals with implanting the plurality and diversity that coexist on a social and media level in the policies that emanate from the State.

Along with the need for State building, the concrete historical process in which we live challenges us to envisage options that transcend the merely national sphere. Effectively, in the middle
of a process such as globalisation, political decisions, economic resources and symbolic productions are mobilised with great ease, ‘globalisation reminds us of the fact that from now on, nothing that happens on our planet can be a locally enclosed event but rather every discovery, victory and catastrophe will affect the whole world and that all of us should adapt and reorganise our lives and tasks as well as our organisations and institutions along the local – global axis’ (Beck, 1998:30).

The new scenario requires broad options that on one hand involve recognized institutions and organisations, but at the same time contain new expressions and social actors that in many cases have spheres of effect that transcend the local:

‘We become accustomed to talking about public space and public sphere as identified fields in the territory of every nation and we believe that they are able to create political parties, unions and social movements of the country within them. But according to what we have just seen, the public sphere has been expressly undrawn and today we must re-conceive it with images and currents that transcend territories’ (Garcia Canclini, 1999:53).

Policies for building citizenship
In Latin America throughout the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s, important debates on what a constituted a National Communication Policy (NCP) were prevalent. At that time, these measures were strongly attacked by private companies within the communications sector and in many cases contradictions within even the official sector were evident due to a lack of political will and also because of levels of administrative disorganisation within the structure of our States. Today, in re-establishing the need for public policies in the communications sector, a critical look at the NCP is indispensable since, although we have stated the need for a new vision to examine the cultural processes emanating from cultural industries, equally new approaches are required in order not to repeat the errors of the past and to sustain new realities in the present.

Peter Schenkel, who dedicated himself to the study of this topic, indicated the difficulty in defining the NCP particularly because communication is present in all sectors, ‘equally in agriculture as in industry and on all levels, as much on an executive plane as a legislative, global and local one and it is manifest on a collective as well as an individual level.’ However, the same author resorts to the widely considered classical definition which was also supported by the Bolivian, Ramiro Beltrán. It defines the NCP as ‘an integrated, explicit and durable collection of communication policies harmonised in a coherent body of principles and rules aiming to guide the conduct of specialised institutions in the management of the general process of communication in the country.’

Regulations and legal resolutions should emanate from this description of the NCP which sets out its main functions. On the other hand, the NCP placed the need for planning first, hoping to ‘order the communication system in accordance with the priority needs of society’ (Schenkel, 1981:16). A sample of this orientation is collected in the book, ‘Planificación y Comunicación’ (Planning and Communication) by Bordenave and Carvalho (1978).

As such, in identifying the factors in play with relation to the NCP, an article published by Jesús Martín Barbero (2001) is particularly valuable since it guides us in this brief but necessary revision of the policies in light of current social dynamics. To a large extent, in the experiences of generating the NCP, governments and specialists converged (as much from within the official system as academics, and also from international networks as in the case of UNESCO), and although the proposals in their broadest sense pursued the guarantee of the rights of the majority in their relation with the media, in practice the governments equated this dynamic with a greater government presence in the communications sphere. These objectives, which moved on parallel levels, evidently weakened the purpose of the proposals because the government demonstrated no capacity for understanding that the stake should be for a public (and not necessarily official) space in the universe of the national mass media.

This relates to a second feature – that of a restricted character; NCPs were restricted to the State, to the government sphere, ignoring that in State-making (for which we have previously advocated), it must move away from an inclusive logic. Following the revision of those experiences, one can conclude that in the construction of public policies, factors such as the state, citizens, the market, in-
stitutions political parties and daily life intersect.

While examining the context in which we move in the present, we must highlight that:

‘It is not advisable to leave these matters only in the hands of politicians and businessmen, given that they are linked to basic human rights and with communication and comprehension between nations. They imply education as a way to train the way we look at those different from us and to the cultural policy where particular heritage is privileged while other heritage is discarded. Either discriminations are conveyed or they aid the appreciation of diversity’ (García Canclini, 1999: 55).

During the 1970s, the generation of these proposals and the debate which ensued in the 1980s, was instigated on many occasions from the highest leadership of the State and originated in good intentions (those of guaranteeing citizens’ rights) that in themselves could generate citizen appropriation. This latter aspect became crucial for the long-term viability of what was proposed (which basically remained on paper) especially if we remember that the NCPs were strongly attacked by private companies within the communications sector.

Finally, the NCPs suffered from precisely what they criticised. The concept of the ‘national’ in these proposals handled the nation as one, from a cultural point of view, leaving aside anything that was different, the other, that which in being different also formed part of the ‘national’. This vision repeated the cultural homogenisation that was criticised and with reason, due to the dominant presence of US audiovisual productions on our screens.

Today, the revision of the aims of the NCP is valid, but when we speak about public policies we envisage the possibility of inclusive practices in which the horizon of diverse representation in the construction of national culture is broadened. In practice, this can be guaranteed by different levels of citizen participation in the process of conceiving, designing and executing plans in the communications sector. In the current context, a public policy cannot be diminished to guarantee diffusion and broaden reception. Even when it is made up of messages conceived from another cultural viewpoint, they would still be equally unilateral.

Because of this we agree with Martín Barbero in highlighting the necessary activation of axes that from the different social scenarios provide for experimentation, appropriation and invention on the part of the citizens in a relationship of dialogue with the communications universe, before which – until now – they only had the possibility of receiving. This requires communication to be moved away from the media and towards mediation and social recognition and these public policies must begin to realise that within society they are part of the State, citizens and the market, as well as political parties and movements and social organisations; that it isn’t simply a question of involving institutions but of looking at daily life too (Martín Barbero, 2001).

Furthermore, we mustn’t overlook the fact that the power of the communications industry, which in the last decade saw fusions and acquisitions of unprecedented amounts, can be compared (regarding its impact on the current economy), to ‘the iron and steel industry of the second half of the 20th century, or the car industry in the 1920s’ (Ramonet, 2002: 22). In truth the reality, which can be overwhelming, creates a challenge and converges in the generation of new public policies from spaces shared by actors within the state, academics and citizens.

An author like Néstor García Canclini has visualised the motives that justify public policies in the communications sector in the era of globalisation, as well as the necessary citizen component in the generation of policies. One of his articles (2001) published in Venezuela serves as a reference to expand the horizon of the debate. The cultural industries (CI) in their widest sense include the media which – as we have previously mentioned – are determining factors in the formation of the public sphere and of citizenship. This new socio-political role, which has grown insofar as other political and institutional mediators have become weaker, requires policies to be brought up to date, that old laws be revised and that new legislation be created. This, evidently, must be within the framework of public participation and public debate.

As we have indicated, the CI have occupied a prominent position from an economic perspective. Their impact is important in today’s economy and this element makes them a matter of public interest. The energy industries are legislated, as is the car in-
dustry, so why can public policies on communication not be debated? One layer of this process should be the enactment of legal regulation. However, as it is a strategic matter, from a mainly cultural rather than an economic perspective, the State must familiarise itself with the subject matter in the best possible way so as to generate policies and laws. Consequently, investigation is essential before any political decision is taken so that adequate steps may be developed.

Additionally, States have a civic debt to the public media which, under official administration have been converted either into a mirror exclusively for the government’s voice or into unsuccessful manifestations attempting to repeat the commercial formula of private media companies. Policies towards these media must be brought about which seek to strengthen their role ‘as spaces to nurture broad, plural and open debate on different perspectives, ideas and cultural expressions of society’ (León, 2002: 2).

For Latin America it is essential to generate public policies which go beyond the national setting if we take into consideration that Spanish is a common language in the region (with the exception of Brazil). In reality these policies should aim at the agreement of political measures and legal regulation between the different countries within an inclusive framework from a social perspective, and from a political perspective within a comprehensive framework from the globalisation process. Articulation is necessary on a transnational level and with a concept of the State which goes beyond simply government.

Martín-Barbero and García Canclini also highlighted the promotion of ownership, the generation and appropriation of cultural expression that from a national perspective does not necessarily imply the closure of frontiers to the ‘foreign’ or ‘different’ but rather involve options that when sustained, enrich a range of offers of the ‘national’.

A public policy in cultural-communication material isn’t exclusively a legal matter but rather a concrete expression of a will to promote development which aside from representing itself in decisions of State or social appropriations can also do so in a legal context. The most important task of a law or official decree is to create the conditions for citizens to disentangle themselves from the text and convert it into a free path to new opportunities for development.

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Andrés Cañizález is a journalist with a Masters in Political Science. In the Communication Research Centre in the Universidad Católica Andrés Bello he coordinates the Political Communication and Freedom of Expression Programme. He directs the Topics of Communication magazine which the university edits. aca@ucab.edu.ve
Television, public sphere, and minorities

Paul de Silva

Television, in all its various genres, has emerged as the most influential of media in shaping public attitudes and conveying societal messages. It has replaced the print media as the primary source of information as well as being the primary source of entertainment and story telling. It also plays a vital role in shaping our attitudes and developing and fostering ideas relating to the creation of an ‘inclusive society’ as envisaged by Canada’s Charter of Rights and Freedoms specifically Section 15.

Canadian Television, both public and private falls woefully short in upholding its mandated responsibility to reflect the cultural diversity of Canadian society. In addition, the public institutions (the CBC, CRTC) charged with the responsibility of regulating and enforcing the legislation relating to these spaces, due to systemic reasons,1 as well as a lack of consistency and inadequate resources allocated to achieving these goals, have failed to keep pace with the changes in society in a meaningful way. This article examines the implications and consequences this has for Canadian society.

It explores the place and role of television in Canada in the public sphere, the arena for public discourse by its citizens, and its mandated role in reflecting Canada’s culturally diverse society. It also examines recent initiatives undertaken to reflect culturally diverse communities and racialised people both on and off camera, and in areas of decision-making.

Speaking in one’s own voice

The importance of being able to speak in ‘one’s own voice’ is vital to the full participation of all people regardless of cultural, and socio economic background in a democratic society. Yet, owing to the existence of systemic barriers created by a legacy of racism and exclusion and the particular economic realities of television in Canada, access to these ‘arenas’ in an officially constituted multicultural society such as Canada, by racialised people and communities, is severely limited.

Grace-Edward Galabuzi provides a rationale for why some groups are marginalized and excluded from participation in mainstream institutions:

‘Canada’s political and economic development was similar to that of other colonized societies in that it involved the subordination of indigenous peoples: the suppression of their civil, political, and cultural rights; and often the forced use of their labour to extract their natural resources. The historic development of the capitalist economy laid the foundation for the policies of slavery, marginalization, and socio economic exclusion of racialized immigrants.’3

Himani Bannerji, in her essay ‘The Dark side of the Nation’, questions the commitment to the values of multiculturalism by Canadian institutions and the issues that flow from this often ambivalent attitude to people who are not part of either the
English or French communities:

‘The state and the visible minorities (the non-white people living in Canada) have a complex relationship with each other. There is a fundamental unease with how our otherness in relation to Canada is projected and objectified.’

Bannerji also has concerns about the language used to describe non-English and French communities and suggests descriptors such as ‘visible minority’ and ‘minority communities’ are problematic as they have the effect of maintaining historically racist attitudes towards these communities. She also puts forward the argument that how we see these social and economic interactions depends on ‘which side of the Nation we stand on’ and often this is defined by the colour of our skin, which for non-white people, will always mark them as different from the established English, French and European immigrant communities, who eventually blend in.

These attitudes towards non-white people often result in forms of systemic racism that are hard to identify. Bannerji states:

‘The situation is one where racism in all its cultural and institutional variants has become so naturalized, so pervasive that it has become invisible or transparent to those who are not adversely affected by them. This is why terms such as ‘visible minority’ can generate so spontaneously within the bureaucracy, and are not considered disturbing by most people acculturated to Canada.’

Grace Edward Galbuzi outlines the underlying cause of this approach by mainstream institutions towards minorities:

‘While Canada embraces globalization and romanticizes the idea of multiculturalism and cultural diversity, persistent expressions of xenophobia and structures of racial marginalization suggest a continuing political and cultural attachment to the idea of a White-settler society. Canada has always imagined itself as a white immigrant nation, ignoring both the Aboriginal reality and the racialised immigrant population. This unresolved tension is reflected not only in racially segregated institutions such as the labour market and the subsequent unequal outcomes, but also in the quality of citizenship to which racialised group members can aspire.’

This marginalization has had a direct effect on how the mainstream media and television in particular deals with the presence and participation of minority people. Augie Fleras and Jean Leonard Elliot summarize this situation as follows:

‘The media’s treatment of aboriginal people, people of colour, and immigrants is mixed at best and deplorable at worst... Minority women and men are still being victimized by questionable coverage on television and in print. This miscasting of minorities in the media is not random or accidental. Nor is it something out of the ordinary—a departure from an otherwise inclusive norm. Rather it is deeply embedded in the media’s structures and processes...’

As Canada’s broadcasting regulator, the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) is charged with ensuring the implementation of the objectives included in the Broadcasting Act. The requirement for the CRTC to ensure that Canadian media reflect the country’s ethno-cultural diversity is based in Canada’s Broadcasting Act subparagraph 3(d) (iii) which states:

‘The Canadian broadcasting system should [...] through it’s programming and the employment opportunities arising out of its operations, serve the needs and interests, and reflect the circumstances and aspirations, of Canadian men women and children, including equal rights, the linguistic duality and multicultural nature of Canadian society and the special place of aboriginal peoples within that society.’

A recent ruling requiring broadcasters to measure current performance and set targets and goals for cultural diversity representation is an
attempt to encourage broadcasters to improve their performance in this area. However without specific requirements and the resources required to adequately monitor and ensure compliance, gains appear to be inconsistent and tokenistic.

The Canadian reality
As the most influential form of television in terms of shaping attitudes and conveying societal messages, as well as being the most popular, television drama, in all its various genres (dramatic series, movies made for television, situation and sketch comedy shows, etc.) plays a vital role in a nation’s culture.

John Doyle, television critic for Toronto’s Globe and Mail newspaper, and an advocate for Canadian-made drama having a central place in Canadian broadcasting, wrote in 2006:

“This is Canada. And this country, like any other, is simply inauthentic if its stories are not reflected back to its people. That’s why Canadian publishing is subsidized, and Canadian television is regulated. At the root of the original decades-old decision to support home-grown storytelling in print or on TV, there was a profound consensus about the need to keep storytelling alive. That consensus still exists. Sustaining the living thread of storytelling is a necessary endeavour, like ensuring health care and safe drinking water. It is another aspect of literacy.”

As a large part of the film and television programming in Canada, is produced with public funds and is therefore mandated by government policy, the issue of who gets to tell the story and profit from it is also an equity issue. The representation of members from culturally diverse communities and visible minority communities in particular, in executive management positions which are responsible for commissioning programs in broadcasting organizations, is an issue that will have to be addressed if any real change is to take place. These positions, known as the ‘gatekeepers’ in the industry – those who can ‘green light’ a project – are almost exclusively from mainstream communities.

Rita Deverall, an African Canadian writer, broadcaster and former television executive, stated in an editorial in Playback magazine:

‘If potential audiences are diverse, isn’t it natural to assume that diverse TV personalities and programs will sell? Other industries get it. Why is that such a difficult concept for media companies to grasp? It all goes back to who is in control. But instead of fundamental change in terms of who has the power, media companies stir up a lot of activity around ‘diversity’ – without changing anything.”

Deverell goes on to outline several ‘diversity smokescreens’ broadcasters use to avoid making any meaningful changes in the area of cultural diversity. These include the frequent use of the word ‘diversity’ in its communications; appointing minorities to symbolic positions; undertaking ‘consultations’ with minorities with no real outcomes; creating ‘training’ programs with no jobs at the end of the training; and ‘cosmetic’ on-screen hiring as opposed to hiring minorities in management positions.

At the moment there is no quantitative research data available on the numbers of racialised people working at senior management levels in the industry. A comprehensive analysis of the industry is urgently required. This has and will continue to have an effect on both the quantitative and qualitative, representation of cultural diversity on our television screens.

While there have been some increases in the numbers of on air personnel in the news area, representation, compared to overall population demographics, especially in urban areas is still very low.

In an editorial (Toronto Star April 2001) journalist Haroon Siddiqui called on the CRTC and media organizations to address the gap of the presence of diverse communities in Canada and their representation on network television. He stated that the cause of the lack of adequate representation of cultural diversity on network television was due in large part to the increased convergence and concentration of ownership:

‘Canada has become increasingly multi-racial and multicoloured yet our media haven’t…. These Canadians are not reflected on media payrolls. This is not to say that hiring should
duplicate the population mix, but rather that it should run in rough proportion to the available talent, as in our quest for gender parity.9

Another major challenge to attempting to achieve these goals is the nature of commercial television itself and the overriding pressure on television networks to increase ratings and profits. As Dr. J David Black, Professor of Communications at Wilfred Laurier University, stated in THE study: ‘Silent on the Set: Cultural Diversity and Race in English Canadian TV Drama’:

‘Privately owned media, outside the CBC, are largely concerned to create a comfortable environment in which advertisers can talk to potential customers. The “buying mood” they seek to establish is not compatible with messages that ask tough questions about white privilege, systemic racism, or more profoundly, about human difference and how we can co-exist on a crowded, complex planet.’10

Conclusions
The issue of the representation of cultural diversity in our media is a public policy issue that has many ramifications and cuts across many sectors. It is about how racialised people see themselves and how society sees them. Until now, there has not been the development of infrastructures of professional associations and lobby groups with the kind of sustainability and with the resources necessary to monitor and engage the regulatory / political process, and demand specific measures be imposed and enforced.

There needs to be strong support for issues of representation, inclusion and employment equity in television broadcasting by the Minister of Canadian Heritage, whose department is responsible for the development and enforcement of public policy in this area. The economic realities of the Canadian television industry, which relies primarily on imported US programming for its profits, a portion of which they are required to spend on indigenous Canadian programming by CRTC regulation, makes the television industry significantly less responsive to demographic changes than other industries.

Some broadcasters have made conscious efforts to increase the presence of racialised communities in front of and behind the camera in dramatic programs, most notably CBC’s Little Mosque on the Prairie, CanWestGlobal’s Da kink in my Hair, Vision TV’s Lord have Mercy! and Omni/Rogers Metropia. The concern remains as to the consistency of these program initiatives and the overall level of representation compared with the rapidly increasing diversity of the population.

While the Canadian Association of Broadcasters’s Task Force for Cultural Diversity (2002) helped focus some attention on the issues of cultural diversity in the Canadian broadcast media, the lack of adequate and consistently available resources for program production, training and development, and the absence of specific regulatory requirements and monitoring, coupled with systemic issues inherent in the industry mean that progress will continue to be extremely slow.

The possibility of further much needed changes is also threatened by the recent economic downturn, which has resulted in a hiring freeze at all the networks and which will likely result in the suspension of several initiatives that would have increased the involvement of racialised groups in this key sector of society.

The steep drop in advertising revenue along with the impact of the Internet on viewing patterns and revenue for conventional television networks has already caused the private broadcasting sector to appeal to the CRTC for a reduction in their commitments. Why is this important? What are the implications for Canadian society? Without equitable access to the resources and opportunities in this key sector of society, minorities cannot participate fully in public discourses on subjects vital to their existence or see themselves reflected in the important public arenas and institutions that makeup our increasingly diverse society.

Apart from it’s moral and employment equity implications, the risk of broadcasters and the regulator not fulfilling their mandates with regard to the accurate reflection of the diversity of Canadian society in all aspects of its operations, is that Canadian society will not have the benefit of the rich diversity of voices and perspectives that exist in the racialised communities which is essential to the process of nation building and the forming of a
national identity in a pluralistic society.

This marginalization and exclusion will result in loss of a sense of belonging and ultimately a disassociation from mainstream Canadian culture. This has important implications for the future of Canada as a nation given current trends in population growth and immigration. There is no doubt that due to demographic shifts, changes will come that reflect the changes in Canadian society, on our film and television screens and in other areas of discourse that are part of the public sphere.

The key questions are: How long will it take to implement these changes, and will the pace and the level of change be adequate for what is required for the development of a healthy, progressive and equitable society in Canada? ■

Notes
1. Systemic discrimination refers to unequal treatment based on system-wide policies and practices which have unintended consequences of discriminatory effects on disadvantaged groups and reproduce structures of discrimination and marginalization. Systemic racism in the Canadian context refers to social processes that tolerate, reproduce, and perpetuate judgments about racial categories that produce racial inequality in access to life opportunities and treatment (Galabuzi. Canada’s Economic Apartheid, 2006).
4. Ibid.
5. Grace-Edward Galabuzi.
10. Silent on the Set: Cultural Diversity and Race in English Canadian TV Drama. Dr. Catherine Murray, School of Communication, Simon Fraser University.

Paul de Silva joined the CBC in Winnipeg as a news reporter, later moving to Toronto as host/reporter for Canadians, a 26-part television magazine series profiling members of the city’s multicultural communities. In 1985 he was awarded the Prix Anik for the 13-part CBC series Neighbourhoods. He was also responsible for Inside Stories, Ballet Creole, Trade Secrets, and Disability Network. De Silva was Vice-President of Programming for Vision TV/One, The Body, Mind and Spirit Channel. He is currently President of A4One Media, a multiplatform media company focusing on social change.

VISION FOR CULTURAL DIVERSITY IN 2030

Fifty young professionals active in the field of cultural diversity from 34 countries met in Paris June 12-18, 2009 to explore their vision for realizing true cultural diversity between now and 2030.

The ‘U40 World Forum’ brought together cultural professionals, civil society activists, government officials, members of national commissions for UNESCO, university professors and doctoral candidates.

The Forum included two-days of workshops held on various themes related to the implementation of the UNESCO Convention. The outcome of those discussions was consolidated into a text called ‘Proposals For Cultural Diversity in 2030’, a two-page document distributed to the State delegations attending the Conference of the Parties.

In the text, the U40 participants set out their ‘Vision for 2030’, affirming that cultural diversity is an instrument to advance human progress and urging States that have ratified the Convention to adopt and implement cultural policies that address their specific needs. The significance of the active involvement of civil society in achieving this vision is underlined in this document.

At the conclusion of the U40 World Forum, participants identified several follow-up activities, including continuing information exchanges as part of an online discussion group, the compilation of best practices relating to cultural policies, the translation of the U40 proposals into the six official languages of UNESCO, work to identify possible private and public partners to bring resources of the Fund.

Cannes (France) 2009

For almost two weeks the Palais des Festivals on the Cannes Croisette (13-24 May 2009) impressed its own rhythms on life, as professional cinephiles avidly squeezed in as many films and press conferences as possible. The splendours of the seaside resort gave way to the mirage of cinematic events, while life developed a kaleidoscopic quality as the films began to unreel their imaginary worlds.

These imagined visions bore a startling resemblance to reality in all its aspects. Moments of sheer delight in the fleeting beauty of cinematic images were memorable in Pedro Almodovar’s Los Abrazos Rotos, Jane Campion’s Bright Star and Alain Resnais’s Les Herbes Folles. But equally powerful were images of tremendous brutality in Jacques Audiard’s Un Prophète, Brillante Mendosa’s Kinatay, Park Chan-Wook’s Bak-Jwi, Lars von Trier’s Anti-Christ and Quentin Tarantino’s Inglourious Basterds.

It has been remarked that violence was again the dominating feature at this year’s festival, ranging from the graphically brutal to more insidious forms, and from situations of war to everyday domestic life. A simple survey would, however, unmask this impression as an exaggeration. It is fair to say that there were almost as many pacific films in the official selection as those in which violence was prominent, even if the emotional intensity that the

Ken Loach (left) with Eric Cantona (right) during the filming of Looking for Eric, winner of the Ecumenical Jury Prize at Cannes 2009.
most shocking scenes provoked justified a different impression. However, to my mind, what appeared to have captured the imagination of many directors was violence embedded in various structures of power, be they sanctioned by society’s consent or self-consciously established. The question then raised was how the individual could fare under the pressure of those structures.

This issue was much more than simply a matter of violent images, since such images sprang from a global vision that placed the individuals in situations where they became victims of aggression from various sources of power.

The Ecumenical Prize for Ken Loach

For those familiar with ecumenical prizes awarded to a profound auteur film, the light comedy genre of Ken Loach’s *Looking for Eric* might appear something of a baffling choice. But among the films at the festival it was quite exceptional to encounter a work whose message was optimistic and affirming of human dignity, when so many were resigned to the idea that no alternative is left for the individual than to compromise or be crushed by systems of power.

It was refreshing to find a director who still trusts the capacity of humanity to uncover transformative inner resources capable of changing our world for the better without literally having to walk over dead bodies.

It would be misleading to believe that the presence of the Manchester United legend Eric Cantona turns the film into a facile celebration of either that iconic figure or the sport that made him famous. Instead, it is through Cantona, as an alter ego of the main character, Eric Bishop, that the latter reaches a level of self-reflection that enables him to change his life, fix his past mistakes, and save his family.

The recurring moral dilemma facing the individual in so many of this year’s selected films – whereby one must either compromise with evil or suffer the consequences – is rejected in favour of a third alternative.

*Looking for Eric* teaches with humour and grace that, where the individual fails, the solution to difficulties is often found in human solidarity and friendship. In Loach’s vision the ‘united’ disempowered render evil ineffectual, not by opposing force with force, but by disarming it through inventiveness and laughter.

Palme d’Or and Ecumenical commendation for Michael Haneke

It came as no surprise that the Palme d’Or was awarded to Michael Haneke’s *Das Weisse Band (Le ruban blanc)*. The Ecumenical jury considered it a very strong candidate for their prize and decided to honour the film with a commendation in recognition of its superlative valour.

Shot in black and white and score-free, the film exhibits a formal ascetic style which is only matched by the subtle observations of early 20th century individuals and society. The aesthetic excellence lends support to an ethical preoccupation with exposing the mechanics of social, and ultimately political, violence.

What we witness, on a small scale, through a German Protestant village during 1913-14, is symptomatic of a society in which the generalized use of force and its underlying ideology are doomed to engulf the whole nation with the outbreak of WWI. Moreover, in the village children we see in formation that very generation who would reach full maturity during the Third Reich.

The vision of human nature proposed by Haneke is irredeemably pessimistic, with a society corrupted by evil from children to adults. Under the mask of innocence and the pretence of retaliation the village youth inflict the cruellest punishments on adults and especially on defenceless young children.

If the patriarchal society functions as a first structure of repression, affecting the women and the children, the children replicate it in a gesture of rebellion, inflicting harm on both the more powerful and the powerless. There is also smouldering dissatisfaction and open retaliatory violence provoked by that state of oppression engendered by class difference.

The end of the film brings no resolution; the community is incapable of confronting its demons. Even the representative of the Church condones and augments such evil under the mask of self-righteousness. In such a world the only possibility of salvation comes through passive, but nevertheless complicit, withdrawal for those individuals who retain their free agency. The others are either moved to retaliate, by forming an underground resistance...
that perpetuates the same discretionary tendencies they oppose, or are the innocent victims of a corrupted society.

Grand Prix for Audiard’s *Un prophète*
Jacques Audiard’s *Un prophète* is both a character study and an exploration of the French penitentiary system. It offers a reflection on the corruption of the prison authorities, a corruption which makes it possible for criminal groups to remain active inside. The social observations here are interesting, with ethnic segregation playing an important role.

From the very beginning the protagonist, Malik El Djebena, a young Arab thug, is placed in a situation where he is forced by inmates to choose between his life and taking the life of another prisoner. Once the decision has been made the film can be read as a *Bildungsroman* – a novel dealing with one person’s early life and development – with Malik making a journey, first being used and then using the two dominant poles of power in the prison: the Corsican mob and the Muslim brotherhood.

In the end Malik emerges as a man of independent mind and as something of a victor. But his victory is also a defeat of the humanity of the individual: crushed by power structures and constrained to eliminate other human beings in order to save himself, he perpetuates the very aggression to which he himself fell victim.

Award for Best Director
Brillante Mendoza’s *Kinatay* is an exploration into the moment at which an innocent individual gradually slips, almost unconsciously, into a pact with the evil forces at work in society. The newly married police cadet Pepoy is dragged by way of an exchange of a small recompense into an episode of sheer brutality, during which a woman is kidnapped, raped and dismembered.

The camera captures what the audience perceive to be his impressions of the way to the place of torture, of the murder and of his way back into the city. It briefly records images evoking Jesus to add greater weight to the moral choice with which the protagonist is confronted. But, again, the survival of his own individuality is at stake, as corrupted police forces pressure the individual into giving up any semblance of moral integrity.

Jury Prize Ex-aequo
*Fish Tank* directed by Andrea Arnold won the Jury Prize ex-aequo together with Park Chan-Wook’s *Bakjwi* (*Thirst*). The latter is a surreal drama which struggles to obtain depth from a storyline in which the self-sacrifice of the protagonist, a Catholic monk, in the name of medical progress, leads to his transformation into a vampire.

At a rather different point on the cinematic spectrum, *Fish Tank* is an exercise in social realism in which a few images function as metaphors, encapsulating the meaning of the film.

The image of a sickly horse that Mia, the teenage protagonist, strives to unchain stands for the social constraints of her own situation and the efforts she makes to transcend them. The fish caught bare-handed and stabbed by her mother’s partner, Connor, anticipates Mia being manipulated into a brief love affair with him and the violence to which she is then subjected.
In the style of a coming-of-age drama Mia, now matured as a result of her newly gained experience into the misleading ways of the world, forsakes her past in search of a better future.

Report by Alina Birzache (Romania). Member of the Ecumenical Jury at Cannes 2009.

KARLOVY VARY (CZECH REPUBLIC) 2009

The Ecumenical Jury of INTERFILM and SIGNIS at the 44th International Film Festival Karlovy Vary (3-11 July 2009) awarded its Prize to the film *Bist* (Twenty), directed by Abdolreza Kahani (Iran).

The setting is a small cafeteria regularly used for mourning receptions. The film opens with Mr Saloumeini realising that he must sell and signing the contracts. He then tells the staff, a group of hardworking men and women whom we see cook, serve, clean up and become tired with their hard and routine jobs. One of the women has a little daughter who tends to get in the way. A young man arrives to play the accordion at functions but also has a message for Mr Saloumeini which he cannot bring himself to communicate.

As the characters reveal their human strength in coping with the challenge of being deprived of the work they cherish, they illuminate the capacity of

A failed medical experiment turns a man of faith into a vampire in *Bakjwi* (Thirst) directed by Chan-wook Park. What has been called a ‘New Age vampire movie’ had film critics disagreeing over its merits. The director has described the film as a fusion between Emile Zola’s novel *Thérèse Raquin* and the traditional vampire story.
the human spirit to navigate difficult circumstances with courage, love, and hope.

The women in this film – as mothers, as wives, and as children – are especially presented with kindness and with an abundance of human strength. More information: http://www.kviff.com/

YEREVAN (ARMENIA) 2009

At the 6th Golden Apricot International Film Festival (July 12-19, 2009), the Ecumenical Jury gave its award to the film *The Other Bank* directed by George Ovashvili (Georgia/Kazakhstan 2009). The film tells the story of a young refugee in Georgia, ready to do everything to cross the border to search for his father in Abkhasia. In this way he hopes to reunite his family.

The film shows the broken relationships between countries and people. It explains also that reconciliation is possible, but that there are always traumas, sorrows, and victims when borders are established with violence.

LOCARNO (SWITZERLAND) 2009

At the 62nd Locarno Film Festival held 5-15 August the Ecumenical Jury of SIGNIS and Interfilm awarded its Prize to the film *Akadimia Platonos* directed by Filippos Tsitos, (Greece/Germany, 2009). Through its well-considered *mise en scène* and deliberate camera work, this film is a detailed observation of simple people in their everyday life in a neighbourhood in Athens.

With a sometimes bitter-sweet, sometimes ironical tone, the film criticises naive patriotism and xenophobia, pleading instead for the dismissal of prejudices, a good understanding between cultures and the acceptance of others even if they are different.

In addition, the Jury awarded a Commendation to *Nothing Personal* directed by Urszula Antoniak (Netherlands/Ireland 2009). Subtly and by an appropriate timing the film tells a touching story of solitude and relationship. Beautiful images of pristine nature and music reveal the mood and emotions of the characters. The director conveys a strong message of hope for people violated in their lives and struggling for new relations, demonstrating respect for the freedom and independence of the other.

MONTREAL (CANADA) 2009

*Ceasefire* (Waffenstillstand) was honoured with the Ecumenical Jury prize as the best competition film in the Montreal World Festival 27 August to 7 September 2009. The prize was presented to director Lancelot von Naso (Germany) by jury chairwoman Julia Laggner, an Austrian documentary film maker. This is his first feature length film. It was the 31st year the Ecumenical Jury award has been awarded in Montreal.

At the Montreal festival, the international organizations are represented by Interfilm-Montreal, directed by the Rev. Andrew Johnston, of Ottawa, Canada, and Communications et Société, a member of SIGNIS, under the direction of Niquette Delage, of Montreal.

The jury’s citation read: ‘*Ceasefire* deserves the Ecumenical prize because of its focus on human suffering in war. Von Naso skilfully places the viewer directly into the situation of the protagonists. *Ceasefire* is a timely film where the physical journey parallels the inner transformation of the characters. The movie challenges the audience to examine their perspective on the consequences of war and our responsibility in the face of human suffering.’

In addition, the Ecumenical Jury awarded a Commendation to *Korkoro* (Freedom) directed by Tony Gatlif (France). It also received the Montreal Festivals major award, selected by an international jury chaired by Iranian director Jafar Panahi. The film is set in World War II Occupied France. It focuses on a large Gypsy family which travels through France to find work.

The family remains for a time in a village, working in the vineyards, as is their custom, only to discover that a new law has been passed that forbids them from continuing their nomadic existence. They are befriended by a wealthy land owner who gives him part of his farm on which to live. Director Gatlif, 61, has developed a reputation as a cinema specialist in Roma (Gypsy) life and culture.