

## ***Mass Communications in Canada***

**Rowland Lorimer and Jean McNulty**

**Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1987**

This textbook is a result of Lorimer and McNulty's teaching a course in introductory mass communication at Simon Fraser University. They realized a Canadian textbook in communication did not exist—at least not one that suited their needs. As they taught the course, they planned the book and after trying "various approaches to the material...they arrived approximately at the scheme" in this textbook.

The first three chapters serve as an introduction to mass communications. In Chapter One, the authors take a "broad cultural overview, one which, following many of the ideas of McLuhan and Innis, outlines the breadth of the role of communication in human affairs." Mass communication is defined in Chapter Two and placed in a special context; the chapter is organized in terms of activities, technology, institutions, regulations, actors, purposes and audiences. They take up issues from these elements in later chapters.

Chapter Three deals with mass media and government, emphasizing that "mass media systems are a fundamental apparatus for the development and survival of nations and cultures." The media have a political function as "purveyors of information in the political arena," the authors write. "Sometimes they are an extension of government, sometimes an unwitting ally, sometimes...a critic."

What Lorimer and McNulty claim to have done in Chapters Four and Five is to provide a simple circular model of how media images come from lived culture, which itself includes media-produced images and which form new media content. In Chapter Four, they describe each medium, pointing out the structure and syntax which "define the nature of expression" in each. Content, the authors claim, "reveals the dominant themes and set of ideas of ideology of a society. It also reveals subordinate or alternative interpretations or ideology."

Chapter Five combines a "structuralist understanding of media and audiences with a culturalist perspective." Rather than viewing the interaction between the audience and media as "effects", the authors suggest considering the relationship as "the interaction between meaning-generating systems in that both interact with and affect the other." It is not possible, the authors claim, to isolate the effects of the media nor can either system be fully defined or understood.

Chapters Six, Seven and Eight look at the institutional structures which influence the mass media. Chapter Six describes the constraints of ownership patterns in Canada. The authors consider the problems of excessive concentration of ownership, of a proper balance between public and private ownership, and of

how to limit foreign ownership and indirect foreign influence. In Chapter Seven, the authors examine the journalism process, considering how information is collected, processed and disseminated through the mass media. "In every medium a rather thick layer of organization affects the content we receive as consumers." Community cable channels fail to produce "acceptable" programming, they claim, because they lack this layer. A third institutional structure, considered in Chapter Eight, is communications policy which has "largely been an effort to balance political and cultural considerations of national sovereignty against the apparent dictates of the technology and the marketplace." The chapter considers explicit and implicit policies on telecommunications and broadcasting in Canada.

In the last four chapters, the authors try to show applications of the ideas presented in the first eight. Chapters Nine and Ten deal with global and domestic geopolitics of information. Chapter Nine describes global news agencies, including their biases in covering the Third World, and the reaction of Third World countries in a call for a new world order. Chapter Ten suggests that "the domestic geopolitics of information are not unlike the global geopolitics" where in Canada a centre-hinterland dynamic exists.

Chapter Eleven and Twelve are futuristic, focusing on new communication technologies and on the position of Canada as "the expansion of industrialization encroaches on information, entertainment, culture, and art." In Chapter Eleven the authors "review some of the fundamental changes to the global communications infrastructure, discuss their implications for Canada and Canadians, and suggest a strategy for proceeding in this new communications environment." In Chapter Twelve they respond to the question of what will become of Canada in an information age by addressing topics of public versus private control, foreign versus domestic control, industry versus culture, participation versus professionalization and education.

Because of the emphasis on the theoretical bases of communications, the book will probably appeal more to classes in social science than in journalism and broadcast where a greater in-depth discussion of the practice and production of journalism and film might be required. In spite of the apparent scarcity of information about the practical applications of communications, it still would serve well as a core textbook around which other material could be supplemented.

Lorimer and McNulty admit in their preface that they have not done their Canadian colleagues "the service they deserve in citing and discussing their work." For example, they seem to have missed completely reference to Benjamin Singer's (1983) introductory textbook, *Communications in Canadian Society*. They indicate that they hope to remedy this oversight by an invitation to other communication scholars to send them their work for inclusion in future editions.

The authors have tried to describe communications from a Canadian perspective "in a manner that puts the interest of Canadians to the forefront." Such being the case they avoided referring to research from other nations, which defined "their national realities...as-if-universal." They have thus achieved a textbook that is neither American nor British, but truly Canadian.

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***Human-Computer Interaction: A Design Guide***

M.K. Jones

Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Educational Technology Publications, 1989

***Interactive Video, Educational Technology Anthology Series, Vol.1***

Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Educational Technology Publications, 1989

Both of these books come from the same publisher and consequently complement each other. *Human-computer interaction: A design guide* is focused on the issues of designing computer systems that respond to the ways that individuals model processes, perceive relationships and conceptualize specific software. The *Interactive Video* anthology, while it contains a number of specific articles concerning the possible uses of interactive technologies, is restricted to a discussion of interactive video.

The first book is applicable to the design of electronic mail programs, hypertext, computer conferencing software, interactive CD-ROM disks, and just about any other computer-based program that requires an intelligent, easy to use and understand way interface.

The Jones book emphasizes human-computer interaction as it applies to the design of any human-computer interface. The author suggests that the intended audience is professional designers. This includes software developers as well as those who work with them. The book covers three topic areas: user models of a computer system, designing visual displays and designing dialogue displays. The discussion of the user models covers browsing, wayfinding, progressive disclosure and related topics as they apply to the user's perception of where one is within an interactive system, where one is coming from and where one is going. An example might be the user who goes into his or her communication program using their personal computer, then goes into a network like Datapac, then into another network or computer system. For the novice user it is not always clear which system or software is on the screen at the time. Thus a number of techniques can be used to clarify what is going on at any particular time and in any system.