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Honoring the Past: What Remains Relevant?

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Honoring the Past: What Remains Relevant?

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Abstract: At a time when communication technologies and patterns of interaction and dissemination change at an ever faster pace, this session explores obsolescence and continued relevance. Why study Aristotle in an age of social media? Is cursive handwriting still important? Are printed maps, newspapers and magazines now passe? Is film dead? Are normative theories obsolete? Each contributor to this article selected a particular technology, theory, founding figure and argued for or against their continued significance.

An anniversary is a time to celebrate, commemorate, venerate, contemplate, ruminate and evaluate. The 75th anniversary of the New York State Communication Association occurs at a time when communication technologies and patterns of interaction and dissemination change at an ever faster pace. The authors took the occasion of NYSCA's anniversary to consider the state of communication industries, theories and organizations. The velocity of obsolescence is "accelerating dramatically" as is the velocity of innovation (Gersh, 2013). Have communication theories, philosophies, industries, technologies and associations kept pace or been rendered obsolete? The voices in this article represent diverse areas of specialization within the field of communication who came together to consider the sometimes uncomfortable possibility that our own professional touchstones have become irrelevant. Each contributor was asked whether something they considered central to their communication environment retained its relevance. Ultimately, the challenge included a consideration of whether our State communication association itself retains significance. What follows is a somewhat personal exploration and argument. Each contributor comes from a unique professional background. Each has a distinct perspective and voice. Two contributors are journalists and came to academia in recent years. One is a scholar from the Public Relations industry. One is an early career media studies scholar while one is a long time academic and "NYSCAite." Several contributors considered permanence and change in media industries, practices and professions. Others focused on communicative practices, education and theories associated with those industries and professions. All used the welcoming scholarly environment provided by this state association to examine and reflect on issues and concerns held dear.

Much of the study of communication, media and technology revels in the new and exciting. For every new theory and every new media there are multiple old theories and old media. Adjectives abound for the new: fresh, clean, exciting,

dynamic, innovative and revolutionary whereas the old are worn, redundant, slow and useless. The consequences of such ideologies on "old media" are under–researched.

According to Gary Gumpert, communication innovations do not disappear, they morph into new forms or functions (Gumpert, 2017). Many communication theories and theorists seem obsolete as well but then arise like a phoenix in certain circumstances.

Any new invention impacts on human behavior and on other media. One of our favorite treatises on the evolution of media is Victor Hugo's Notre Dame de Paris. Book Five is entitled "This Will Kill that" or "One Will kill the other." Hugo was writing in 1831 about the impact of Gutenberg's fifteenth century invention upon the Catholic church. In Part II of Book V the character of the Archdeacon proclaims, "The book will kill the building" (Hugo, 1996, p. 204). As we see it, this thought has two facets. Firstly, it was the thought of a priest. It was the alarm felt by the priesthood before a new agent: the printing press. It was the terror and bewilderment felt by a man of the sanctuary before the luminous press of Gutenberg. It was the pulpit and the manuscript, the spoken and the written word, taking fright at the printed word...it meant the press will kill the church. "Hugo explores the migration of cultural content from architecture and place to books and pages with one displacing the power of the other.

While architecture lives on, there are any number of media, concepts and theories which do not. What follows represents the extended arguments and thoughts shared at a rich colloquium at our anniversary conference on the subject. The intent is to offer the essence of the dialogue in the hope we stimulate the reader to consider their own special object of obsolescence. We begin by looking backwards to examine the present day relevance or death of the legacy media of news: the newspaper and the White House press.

Mario Gonzalez: Are newspapers still important?

Are we on the brink of losing the printed newspaper, one of the most important journalistic delivery tools? Media critics and analysts have been predicting its demise for some time, but the hard truth is being faced by publishers almost everywhere (Rogers, 2017). The unpredictability of the industry's future has also reached newsrooms at the largest organizations. According to a 2018 article released on CNBC.com, the *New York Times* could be preparing to ditch the print edition all together. "The newspaper printing presses may have another decade of life in them, NYT CEO Mark Thompson told CNBC. "I believe at least 10 years is what we can see in the U.S. for our print products. "He said he'd like to have the print edition "survive and thrive as long as it can," but admitted it might face an expiration date. Thompson added that the company still makes more money from a print subscriber as opposed to a digital reader, but why is the print industry suffering when news and good storytelling is arguably more important than ever?

The importance of advertising dollars to the print industry's bottom line and other areas of decline cannot be ignored (Vranica, S. & Marshall, 2016) According to a report at the Pew Research Center, between 2000- 2015, print newspaper advertising revenue fell from nearly $60 billion to $20 million eliminating profits from the previous 50 years. U.S. newspaper circulation has also suffered across the board declining 8 percent with print and digital totals in 2016 at approximately 35 million and weekend subscriptions at 38 million for Sunday circulations, respectively (Barthel, 2017). As expected, when the financial picture looks bleak, jobs will eventually suffer and that has been the case with the print industry, losing 25 thousand jobs over the last decade. The rise of social media and the popularity of smartphones has also affected newspaper websites, with a 5% drop in the amount of "minutes per visit", meaning the amount of time a viewer will spend on the website. That has decreased below 2.5 minutes for the top 50 newspapers sites in the country, according to the Pew Research Center.

So how are newspapers owners trying to adapt to this struggling industry? Some have re-shifted their focus to their digital platforms, but many have cut their losses. Some media heads are trying to squeeze any type of profits available, even focusing on property and real estate. According to an article in the *Washington Post*, the *New York Daily News* sold to Chicago-based company Tronc Inc. (Tribune Online Content) for $1. Tronc received half ownership of the printing plant which was built on 25 acres of attractive real estate in Jersey City, New Jersey. In exchange, the company would assume annual losses and pension liabilities which climbed into the millions of dollars (Farhi, 2017). A less-than-ideal business deal for former publisher Mortimer B. Zuckerman, who paid $36 million for the *Daily News* in 1993. Fire sales spread to other newspapers as well. The *New York Times* sold the *Boston Globe* for $70 million in 2013. According to the *Washington Post*, the Globe's headquarters had an estimated value of nearly $64 million. In 2012, the Media General, Inc. sold the *Tampa Tribune* for $9.5 million, close to the total value of the newspaper's office building. The paper was later sold again and eventually shut down in 2016.

As newspaper owners lose large amounts of money, a lingering question remains in the industry – if people are not reading newspapers, where are they digesting their news content? According to a Pew Research Center study, the answers are quite interesting. Of the people polled who watch the news, an overwhelming 80% choose the television format. Of the people who listen to the news, 55% choose the radio experience as opposed to 25% who use a TV. Approximately, 59% of people who read the news, do so online as opposed to just 26% who read newspapers (Barthel, 2017).

Other results from the *Pew Research Center:*

- About 4 in 10 Americans often get news online.
- Only 5% of 18 to 29-year-olds get news from a print newspaper.
- 48% of 65 and older get their news from newspapers.
- Digital realm, mobile news consumption is rapidly rising.

- A portion of Americans getting news from a mobile device has gone from 54% in 2013 to 72% today (Mitchell, A., Gottfried, J. et al., 2016).

The negative outlook provided by these numbers would make any newspaper advocate nervous, but will everyone ultimately suffer from the type of news content that will disappear if newspapers go away? The Pew Research Center examined this question and decided to focus on one specific city – Baltimore, Maryland. Researchers looked at the type of news content being provided from different media formats over a specific time frame – Print, Local TV, Niche Media, Radio and News Media. The data results were nothing short of astonishing in terms of how important newspapers are to the creation of overall news content.

- Much of news people receive contains no original reporting.
- 8 of 10 stories were repeated or repackaged.
- Nearly all, 95%, came from traditional media- mostly newspapers.
- Another study during this period found newspapers were producing 1/3 as many stories than 8 years ago.
- Websites were often repacking news.
- Local TV newsrooms produced more content, followed by newspapers. TV focused the most on local news.
- Newspapers focused the most on government, crime, business and education coverage (Newspaper Fact Sheet, 2017).

It's hard to argue that important stories are being created every day from journalists, editors, photographers and videographers who work at newspapers. It's also important to realize that other types of media formats such as Television and Radio are more reliant on time constraints due to their delivery service. This makes it quite difficult to add manpower and to delegate the appropriate hours to work on in-depth and impactful stories.

As in life, all good things must come to an end, and this may hold true for the future of newspapers as *New York Times* CEO Mark Thompson is predicting, but is there a money-making future in the digital age? The *New York Times* has seen encouraging signs over the last few years with a 47% increase of digital subscribers in 2016 adding 500,000 new subscriptions. The NYT became the first newspaper in the country to surpass 2 million paid-digital-only subscribers (New York Times Sees Jump, 2017). Those figures helped the paper's digital subscription revenue to overtake it's print advertising revenue for the first time. *The Wall Street Journal*, who adopted a pay-wall format, has seen a jump of 150,000 subscribers (Trachtenberg, 2017).

The Chicago Tribune experienced a jump of 100,000 subscriptions. The *New York Daily News* has also changed to a pay-wall system, meaning most stories will only be available to people who pay a fee. For example, the *Daily News* is currently offering a charge of 99 cents for 13 weeks of unlimited access on their website. Many people may expect news organizations in New York and Chicago to do

relatively well, but what about newspapers and digital news sites dedicated to covering news in smaller markets? That's the bigger underlying issue facing the news industry. With the increase of news content provided on smartphones and social media, how can a newspaper in a city such as Fort Wayne, Indiana or Harrisonburg, Virginia survive? If the newspaper survives, what of the reporters who cover the tumultuous world of politics and in particular, the White House?

Joe Peyronnin: Is the White House press corp obsolete?

For decades the White House press has served the American public as the source for news from the nation's highest office. But the emergence of powerful social media tools, such as Twitter and Facebook, allow the White House to bypass the established channels and go directly to the people. Further, at the same time, unprecedented attacks of the press by President Donald Trump have eroded public trust in the press. While the White House press has had to adapt to technological changes in the past, and it has endured criticism from many presidents, never before has it been this seriously threatened. The convergence of these factors raises the question: "Is the White House press corp obsolete?"

From America's earliest days there has been a tension between the president and the press. President George Washington, who was often angered by the bad press he received, complained of being "buffeted in the public prints by a set of infamous scribblers" (Sterne, 1997, p. 491). In his second term, President Thomas Jefferson instructed state attorneys general in New England to prosecute newspaper editors for sedition in response to harsh criticism he had received. He later wrote a friend, "Nothing can now be believed which is seen in a newspaper. Truth itself becomes suspicious by being put into that polluted vehicle" (Appleby & Ball, 1999).

But newspapers were the only source of news and information about the presidents for much of America's history. They were usually highly partisan and biased in their news coverage and editorial opinions. In the 1800s, perhaps no president was more effective in managing his communications with Americans than Abraham Lincoln. He courted and charmed newspaper editors, and sometimes leaked information to newspapers. Rather than make a speech or proclamation, or court reporters that waited outside his White House office, he sent private letters to newspapers knowing they would be published. Lincoln understood the power of public opinion, especially during a brutal Civil War. In 1858, during his debate with Stephen Douglas, Lincoln declared, "Public sentiment is everything. With public sentiment, nothing can fail; without it, nothing can succeed." He continued, "Consequently, he who molds public sentiment, goes deeper than he who enacts statutes or pronounces decisions." (Holzer, 2015).

In the late 1800s, correspondents stood outside the White House seeking meetings with the president or interviews with his guests as they departed. Toward the end of the century reporters were allowed to sit at a table inside the building. Soon they would be allowed to wait in the front lobby where they would use public pay

phones to call in their stories. From this prime vantage point they could observe comings and goings, and button hole visitors.

When it comes to covering the president nothing is more important than access. President Theodore Roosevelt was the first to designate office space for the press, and he would often meet with the press, and he instituted daily briefings by his secretary (Jacobs, 2015). Such an arrangement was mostly beneficial to both parties. The president wanted to get information to the public, and the press wanted the latest information.

The development of radio offered President Franklin D. Roosevelt an opportunity to speak directly to a mass audience. Roosevelt conducted 28 fireside chats, the term used to describe the broadcasts, during which he addressed the American people about his New Deal initiatives and World War II.

President Harry Truman became a media pioneer of sorts when he delivered the first televised presidential address in October 1947. There were only 40,000 television sets in the country at the time, but 40 million Americans listened to the address on radio. In 1948, Truman became the first presidential candidate to air a paid political ad on television. Nonetheless, most of the White House coverage came from newspaper beat reporters housed just down the hall in the West Wing.

By 1960 more than 50 million American households had a television. This fact was not lost on Senator John Kennedy who would leverage the power of television, as well as his youth and good looks, to win the 1960 Presidential Election. Kennedy had become the first television president, and the medium disrupted the status quo in the White House press area. Television was a mass medium that provided a forum for presidents to address unfiltered millions of Americans.

President Richard Nixon authorized the construction of a new larger pressroom in 1969, which would include space for press briefings, conferences and press offices. The new press center was built over an indoor swimming pool located down the hall from the Oval Office. This was prime West Wing real estate and would ensure that the press had close access to the administration’s staff. This became essential during the Watergate crisis.

The new press center layout featured a podium on the far west end, nearest the communication staff offices that reporters could visit throughout the day. Dozens of seats we placed in front facing the podium. A platform for cameras was set up behind the seats. Each major news organization had a small office in the rear of the press center, or one floor below. These offices could each accommodate a couple of reporters, who filed their reports by phone or, for radio and television, by microphone.

President Gerald Ford, who had taken over the presidency when Nixon resigned, found himself on the defensive much of the time, especially after he pardoned Nixon. Ford considered reopening the pool and moving the press, but his plans

stalled when he received the cost estimate. President Jimmy Carter, who defeated Ford in 1976, seemed to be inconvenienced and annoyed by the press. His one term in office included a diplomatic success—Egypt and Israel, and many setbacks, oil shortages, inflation and the Iranian hostage crisis.

President Ronald Reagan won the 1980 election in a landslide. He was a former television star and California governor who surrounded himself with a sophisticated communications team. James Baker, White House Chief of Staff, and his deputy, Michael Deaver, were masters at managing the press and the message. Each day the White House communications team tried to get the press to cover its planned agenda, in order to drive the news coverage. They paid close attention to the president's television image, which they knew provided the most powerful connection with Americans.

In 1984, The CBS Evening News aired a segment critical of President Reagan's budget reported by correspondent Lesley Stahl. The video she used showed Reagan being presidential. Shortly after the story aired Stahl called a senior Reagan official. Expecting he would be angry, she was shocked when he responded favorably. She asked why. The official responded, "You guys in Televisionland haven't figured it out, have you? When the pictures are powerful and emotional, they override if not completely drown out the sound. I mean it, Lesley. Nobody heard you" (Stahl, 2000, p. 236).

President Bill Clinton's press secretary Mike McCurry began the custom of televising daily press briefings, which were broadcast live on CNN, the only cable news channel at the time, and by the networks when there was a major story. The idea was to get White House's spin directly to the people. McCurry would later regret his decision, declaring in 1998, "It's performance art and theater of the absurd." This was the height of the Monica Lewinsky scandal, which nearly cost Clinton his presidency.

In 2000, President Clinton named the White House press center the James S. Brady Press Briefing Room. Brady was Reagan's press secretary when he was severely injured during the attempted assassination of President Reagan in 1981. In 2006-2007 the press center was remodeled and modernized.

As the national press became more powerful, administrations worked harder to control the message and the president's image. The expansion of cable news channels, and the growing frustration of presidents wanting to get their story directly to the people, led to an increase in presidential interviews with local news outlets. This would allow administrations to bypass national news channels.

The advent of social media provided presidents with a new channel with which to directly reach Americans. President Barack Obama was tagged the "first social media president." While President Obama used Twitter, Facebook, Snapchat and Instagram, these services were still relatively new, especially in the early stages of his presidency.

President Donald Trump, who used Twitter effectively during his campaign, communicates often several times a day with his 47 million Twitter followers. Trump has generally used Twitter to attack his opponents, including the mainstream media, which he regularly calls “fake news.” Even his supporters have criticized his heavy use of Twitter. But Trump defends his use of Twitter, for instance, telling the Fox Business Channel in October 2017, “I doubt I would be here if it weren’t for social media, to be honest with you.”

Trump’s first press secretary, Sean Spicer, declared that the president’s tweets were official. “The President is the President of the United States, so they're considered official statements by the President of the United States,” he told reporters at his daily briefing in June 2017. He noted that the president has 110 million followers on social media, adding, “The president is the most effective messenger of his agenda.”

The president’s extensive use of social media has redefined how White House reporters cover the White House. The president’s habit of tweeting early in the morning frequently drives news coverage for the day. White House staff often scrambles to explain to reporters what the president may have meant by his latest tweet. But Trump knows Twitter gives him an unfiltered conduit to his followers.

Meanwhile, the daily White House briefing has become a show targeted at one person, the president. The president watches the daily briefing carefully and critiques his press secretary. Many times his spokesperson has attacked reporters, or offered misleading and false answers to the press. Press secretary Sarah Sanders once had to admit she was flying without a safety net. She explained, “I hadn’t had a chance to have a conversation with the president…I went off the information that I had.”

Media critic and New York University professor Jay Rosen responded to the deterioration of the daily briefings with the suggestion that news organizations should send their interns instead of star reporters. In a post on his site, *pressthink.org*, he explained, “When I say #sendintheinterns I mean it literally: take a bold decision to put your most junior people in the briefing room. Recognize that the real story is elsewhere, and most likely hidden.” He concluded, “That’s why the experienced news reporters need to be taken out of the White House, and put on other assignments.”

Many publications, including the *New York Times, The Washington Post* and *The Wall Street Journal,* have done some of their best reporting on the Trump White House from what Rosen calls “outside in.” They have assigned reporters to cover and investigate stories and issues surrounding the presidency with a great deal of success. Marty Baron, *The Washington Post’s* executive editor, speaking at Columbia University in October, 2017 said the attacks are having a “corrosive effect on democracy,” and then observed, “The whole purpose of these attacks is to destroy our credibility with the American people, but it’s also to intimidate us” (Landy, 2017).

But the sheer weight of attacks from the president and his supporters on the press and on Twitter is eroding American's confidence in the media according to numerous polls. Facts are being weaponized, news is being spun, and partisan agendas are being advanced at an alarming rate. Social media is flooding the political ecosystem with alternate realities, Russian bots and disinformation. President Trump has fueled this disturbing trend, and he has redefined White House press coverage in an unprecedented manner. The old way of covering the president has become obsolete.

Marty Baron observed, "Trust in the press and trust in the presidency is starting to intersect. So in a strange way, Trump has brought us together." Baron and many other journalists are doubling down on the basics of journalism and original reporting believing it will be validated over the long run. The American press has journeyed a torturous road throughout this nation's history. But this president and these times may be its most difficult challenge. Hopefully it will again endure. Thomas Jefferson said, "Our liberty depends on the freedom of the press, and that cannot be limited without being lost." If newspapers and the White House press are still relevant, how has the growth of public relations and the relationship between press and PR shaped those institutions. Are the precepts and principles at the heart of public relations obsolete or still relevant today?

Suzanne Berman: **Are the Pioneers of Public Relations still relevant?**

Public Relations in Transition

Although the forerunner to modern-day public relations practice can be found in the works of rhetoricians, press agents and other promoters, this paper focuses on the rise of modern public relations, which has its roots in the United States of the late 1880s when the growing industrial sector embraced public relations with fervor. With the growth of big business at that time, and the concentration of wealth amongst a handful of major industrialists came the need for increased regulation and by the 1930s labor unions that had developed earlier, began to have more power as well. As business, government and labor organizations grew, so too did the need for more effective communication. In addition, changes to the political process, including giving women the right to vote and the beginning of direct elections of U.S. senators, brought more people into the political process and increased the need for public discussion of policy issues. (Guth & Marsh, 2007). With industrialization, corporations began to realize that deception, and half-truths were ineffective when trying to deal with the challenges being raised by the media and government. As a result, public relations became a specialized function broadly accepted in major corporations in order to counter hostility by courting public support (Lattimore, Baskin, Heiman & Toth, 2007). It was in the beginning of the 20th century that the profession truly began to mature with the public relations work of industry visionaries such as Ivy Lee, Arthur Page and Edward Bernays.

The Fathers of Public Relations

Ivy Lee

The man most often dubbed the father of public relations was Ivy Ledbetter Lee. He along with George Parker formed the third publicity agency in the country in 1904. Upon opening their firm, Lee issued a declaration of principles that would lead the way in re-defining the public relations field for the next 50 years. At the core of Lee's ideas were that information should be truthful and accurate. Lee's principles also included, "In brief, our plan is to speak frankly and openly, on behalf of business concerns and public institutions, to supply the press and public of the United States prompt and accurate information concerning subjects which it is of value for the public to know about" (Cutlip, 1994).

Lee had a large list of clients and a long list of notable accomplishments. He played a critical role in promoting the public acceptance of the new field of aviation. He is also credited for his work with what eventually became General Mills, and in the creation of some of their best-known brands such as Betty Crocker and others. With his more controversial clients such as the Anthracite Coal Roads and Mines Company and the Pennsylvania Railroad Company, his first task was to convince management that the policy of operating in secret and refusing to talk with the press, typical of many large corporations at the time, was a poor strategy for fostering goodwill and public understanding. For example, after a series of railroad accidents befell his client the Pennsylvania Railroad, Lee encouraged them to provide press facilities, issue what is claimed to be the first new release of the modern age, and take reporters to the accident site. (Wilcox & Cameron, 2010).

Not only did Lee recognize that a company had to be open, but he also understood that in order to influence the public in a positive way, a corporation had to be engaged in good works. With this in mind, Lee counseled clients to align their policies and activities with the public interest. He is best known for his work advising the Rockefeller family after an incident occurred at one of their mines causing the death of several miners, including women and children. Lee advised Rockefeller to visit the mining camps to observe the conditions firsthand and to demonstrate a sincere concern for the plight of the workers. This visit was not only instrumental in restoring the reputation of the Rockefellers, but also led to policy changes and more benefits for the workers (Wilcox & Cameron, 2010).

Edward Bernays

Bernays viewed public relations as an art applied to a science—the art of communications applied to social science. (Bates, 2002,) Unlike Lee's public relations model based on the accurate dissemination of information, Bernays's model was built on advocacy and persuasion. The nephew of Sigmund Freud, he was an early believer in persuasion and understood that publics could be persuaded if the message supported their values and interests. In his first book, *Crystallizing Public Opinion*, he defined public relations as being similar to

propaganda and described it as, "the conscious and intelligent manipulation of the organized habits and opinions of the masses"(Bernays, 1968) Through his book, which outlines the scope, function, methods, techniques and social responsibilities of public relations, he became a major spokesperson for the new public relations. He was also the first person to articulate the two-way communication concept of public relations whose primary purpose is to help the communicator better understand the audience and how to persuade it.

Well known for staging events calculated to be newsworthy, one of Bernays' most famous campaigns was the Light's Golden Jubilee. To celebrate the 50th anniversary of Thomas Edison's invention of the electric light bulb, Bernays arranged that the world's utilities would shut off their power, all at one time, for one minute, in honor of Thomas Edison. Another one of his most quintessential campaigns was the 1929 Torches of Freedom March in which he had ten carefully chosen women walk down Fifth Avenue smoking cigarettes. The women were advancing feminism while at the same time setting the stage for a surge in smoking by women. What the public and the press didn't know was that Bernays was a consultant to the American Tobacco Company at the time, raising an ethical issue that still confronts the public relations industry today (Bates, 2002).

Some communication theorists accuse Bernays' approach as one of deliberately trying to manipulate public opinion in support of one's products, services, ideas, or issues without regard for truth or reality (Ewan, 1996). Nonetheless, he remains the preeminent figure in the field of public relations for his valuable contributions to educating public relations practitioners in the value of public relations as a management function that is grounded in human relations.

Arthur Page

Page became the first vice-president of public relations at the American Telephone and Telegraph Company (AT&T) and is credited with establishing that public relations should have an active voice in higher management. Page viewed public relations as a broad –based management function that transcended both the journalistic publicity and persuasive campaign traditions (Lattimore, Baskin, Heiman & Toth, 2007). It was under Page's leadership that the company realized the need for a proactive, planned public relations program. With a combination of different forms of information sharing, and even bypassing traditional media, the company sought to establish relationships with their public directly through a number of varied activities. By creating a film program to be shown to schools and civic groups they highlighted their community involvement and by paying fees for employees to join outside organizations, and by encouraging volunteerism, they ensured that through employee presence the company would be constantly represented in many forums.

What set Page apart was his insistence that the publicity department act as an interpreter of the public to the company. Under his direction, AT&T"s public relations department kept close check on company policies, assessing their impact on the public, therefore, encouraging the company to act all the time from the

public point of view, even when that seems in conflict with the operating point of view (Raucher, 1968).Public Relations historian, Karen Miller Russell, believes that Page may come closest among early practitioners of representing the sense of relationship building and two-way communication tradition. (Lattimore, Baskin, Heiman & Toth, 2007

Conclusions

With the work of early pioneers like Lee, Bernays, and Page, who set the foundation, organizations quickly learned the value of courting public favor through professional public relations. Companies began to see the merit in using publicity to attract customers and investors. In the 1900s, public relations evolved from individual press agents and publicists, to counseling firms that offered their services as experts in the field. By the 1930s, many corporations had their own in-house public relations departments and the integral role that public relations played for an organization began to be fully realized. Along with heeding the concerns of their external publics, organizations began to see the value of internal audiences as well. Astute public relations practitioners began to appreciate that well-informed employees could serve as ambassadors of the company. What began as mainly a U.S. enterprise in the early 1900s, with a few agencies and a few hundred practitioners, grew substantially by the middle of the last century. As we enter the new era of digital public relations, with its new modes of constant communications, once again we are seeing another major shift in the field, but essentially the foundation that was built in the beginning decades of the last century continue to be the pillars upon which public relations has been able to grow into the respected management function it has become today.

Jingsi Wu: How relevant are old communication patterns in a media age?

When Neil Postman (1985) famously pronounced the death of humanity in 1985, the dominant form of entertainment at the time was television. Thirty years after the doomsday prediction, humans continue to thrive and technology rolls forward at a dizzying speed. The world in which we are living could not be more different from the one that led to Postman's gloomy view of the society's obsession with media and the societies for other disheartened media observers that had come before Postman. Yet their visions about technology and the world are reverberating ever more intensely today and proving themselves more relevant than what appeared to be a much more "simple" time a few decades ago.

To be sure, Postman was not the first one to sound alarm about how overwhelming and mesmerizing modern media could be in comparison to the limited mundane activities any average individual could experience altogether in their one lifetime. Foundational works in communication and media studies have painstakingly scrutinized ways in which human agency could be crushed in the face of powerful and stimulating media. Marshall McLuhan (2006) for example coined the saying "the medium is the message" to describe the potent sense-altering impact each media form has had on their human users. Since media

function as extensions of the human senses, to primarily draw on the print media as mechanisms of gathering information about the world and engaging in communications, humans would have to predominantly employ their visual capabilities in their reception of media texts and logical competencies in their organization of linear information flow. By the same token, and here goes the essence of Postman's argument, when television overtakes the print media as a society's primary transmitter of information and brings with it an incessant stream of peripheral visual cues, words are overtaken by images, factual information is dwarfed by captivating spectacle, and linear attention is divided into fragments of mental energy that dip in and out as the media user pleases.

Fear of new media forms has thus persisted through each era regardless of the defining technology at the time. Although many media theories and empirical efforts have arisen to counter such a deterministic perspective of media effects, it is much more tempting to subscribe to the idea that our life quality and civic health are at stake if we as a society let ourselves get too taken away by the new and fanciful. Even though Postman's writing occurred way before the internet has become as embedded in our daily life and certainly before smartphones have become life necessity for many users, he already bemoaned the impression at the time that college professors had to compete with the shrinking attention span of their students and make their lectures more entertaining, rather than solely focusing on the educational value of their spoken words. Ask a college professor in 2018 whose students now possess an attention span that is shorter than a goldfish (Alter, 2017)!

Granted all people do not use the media in exactly the same way and technologies have produced numerous wonders for society as a whole, the classic saying "the medium is the message" gained new currency in the social media age. Coupled with the massive prevalence of smartphones, the exciting world of social media appears to be creating an all-new attention economy, through which users' experience of the world becomes ever more fragmented, manufactured, and trivialized. Instead of face-to-face, messy but organic interpersonal exchanges, humans now resort to platforms like Facebook to carry out virtual and meticulous presentations of their relationships. Rather than taking in vast information and engaging in difficult conversations with diverse opinions about a society's state of affairs based on those facts, we now are much quicker to immerse ourselves in YouTube viral videos or take in bite-sized updates one tweet at a time. As we experience the world more and more through our new media gadgets and platforms, we are less and less patient, attentive, or informed. Marshall McLuhan's incisive proverb continues to ring true in the new millennium. Humans are now able to reach far and wide thanks to such new media extensions of our bodily senses, but our worldview appears to be more restricted to the here and now. We are so happily indulging in the instant gratifications that we forget to think about the bigger picture and the world's future.

Such deep fears and anxieties have manifested themselves in abundant television shows, movies, and media coverage in general. Whereas television and movies

used to serve as easy scapegoats for causing health harms and social ills, they have never shied away from exploring the darkest scenarios when human's use and abuse of technology is pushed to the extreme. As two such recent examples, the British television anthology *Black Mirror* and American made movie *Her* both set their storytelling in the near future. Although technology has advanced a few steps ahead of where things are at currently, the settings in both worlds look almost eerily familiar to the viewers. Here, people have befriended their digital devices' operating systems and constantly talk to the "invisible bubble" around them or into their wearable technologies, rather than coming in touch with actual human beings next to them. Or, people obsess over the impressions they leave on other random strangers and acquaintances alike and the ratings that they receive correspondingly, which then impact their experiences of satisfying practical needs, i.e. what kinds of seats they can get on a flight or how good a mortgage they can qualify for. Although humans are not yet engaging in full-on romantic relationships with their operating systems like the storyline dreamed up in *Her*, or a massive social rating system like the one fictionalized in *Black Mirror* has not taken off despite China's recent best effort (Hvistendahl, 2017), those exact ideas appear perfectly within reach, which makes such dystopias immensely fascinating and terrifying. We appear to become more connected at the expense of the good old human connections. We feel more lonely and alone although we are more wired and entertained.

Ironically, college students are quick to criticize the state of technology's omnipresence and its damage on their psyche, at the same time as committing such crimes of attention deficit at an alarming rate. So much so that college professors now feel the pressing need to reflect on where they stand with the place of technology in their classrooms and devise policies accordingly. Intriguingly, some renowned professors teaching and researching about technology do not allow the use of technology in their classes. MIT professor and famous psychologist Sherry Turkle has written bestsellers that commentate on the twin developments of quantitative rise in technology use and qualitative decline of human communication, such as "Alone Together" (2011) and "Reclaiming Conversation" (2015). Dr. Turkle observes the accelerating drop over the course of her career in students who visit professors during their office hours and the increasing ease with which students resort to the indirect communication channel of emails. She laments frightening experiments in which students willingly choose to receive minor electric shocks instead of receiving a cash reward for forgoing their technology for a short while. When she spent a day with actor and comedian Aziz Ansari in Los Angeles, she observed that his fans were much happier to walk away with a picture with him thanks to their insatiable need to document their celebrity sightings than a more interesting conversation with Ansari or just his autograph.

Even more ironically, Alter (2017) cites examples of technology pioneers who are deeply aware of the damage that could be exerted on their offspring by their own inventions and fiercely protect them through such systems like the elite Waldorf School in Silicon Valley. Here, students are prohibited from using any

technology, but focus on honing the more important skill of unplugging or simply thinking. The Apple co-founder Steve Jobs famously did not take an iPad home for his children to play with despite his aggressive efforts to usher in the tablet evolution for the world.

To be sure, moral panics have existed alongside media for as long as media existed. Scholars have argued that our notion of technology is more socially constructed than naturally embedded in the technology (Marvin, 1988). Indeed, such discourses often cycle through the initial concern that the new medium will make obsolete previous ways of life, before causing more health damage and incitement of violence (Wartella & Reeves, 1985). This pattern applies to the reception of all modern media forms, including the latest additions of the Internet and smartphones. Therefore, Schudson's (1995) questioning of a supposed golden age of the modern public sphere becomes immensely relevant in our understanding of modern technology. Since the human society tends to project their ideals about how people should behave onto the actualities of media's use in our life, is it really the modern technology that is causing seismic changes in human behavior and psyche? Or are we simply inclined to blame our own imperfections on technology?

In theory, we should be sure to take a step back and acknowledge the many other factors that have led to an unsettling rise in teen depression and their apparent preoccupation with their digital devices and social media. In practice, it remains harsh to swallow the new reality of more zombified fixation to the "black mirror" constantly in front of ourselves.

Mary Kahl: On the Relevance of Rhetorical Studies

As a rhetorical critic and student of political communication, of course I intend to argue for the continued relevance, indeed the necessity, of rhetorical studies or the study of things rhetorical, in all the ways that those two phrases mean. This discussion began with a provocative question: "Why study Aristotle in an age of social media?" To which I must respond, when have Communication scholars ever NOT studied Aristotle? At no time since the Greeks have humanistic scholars ever eschewed study of the Aristotelian tradition. And I maintain that now is a decidedly poor time in our history to abandon it.

But more to the point this question suggests the need to consider the relevance or rhetorical studies on NYSCA's 75th anniversary and what it connotes for various parts of our discipline. For the field of rhetorical studies, by which I reference rhetorical theory, rhetorical criticism, public address and political communication, it means celebrating the fact that one of the most influential centers for the study of rhetoric originated in New York State, in the form of the Cornell School of Rhetoric. Those who study the contemporary origins of the field, those who seek to understand the twentieth-century revival of rhetorical studies and its continuation into the twenty-first century, often trace its renaissance to the group of scholars who gathered to study and teach in Ithaca, New York and whose influence resonated across the country into departments of Speech and

Communication, in small colleges and large universities, from east to west (Corbett, 1985).

Perhaps the most able chronicler of the Cornell School, himself a master's and doctoral Graduate of Cornell, is Distinguished Professor Emeritus of Communication at The Pennsylvania State University, Thomas W. Benson. Benson's essay in *Communication Quarterly* (2003) offers a highly definitive and carefully researched work on the history and impact of the Cornell School. He writes that James Winans, Alexander Drummond, Herbert Wichelns, Harry Caplan, Lane Cooper, Everett Lee Hunt, Hoyt Hopewell Hudson "and a few others initiated the intellectual and institutional grounding for the study of rhetoric in the newly-declared discipline variously called 'Speech' and 'Public Speaking'" (pp.1-2). For about a half century, starting in 1920, the Cornell School was not just an extremely influential academic department, but "an idea, a reputation, a group of men and women most but not all of whom had studied or taught at Cornell" (p.2) and whose influence endures across the discipline to this day. Karl Wallace, Carroll C. Arnold, Edwin Black, Michael C. McGee, and John F. Wilson were also inextricably bound to the Cornell tradition in speech, as all were either professors or students of rhetoric there.

Many of the founding fathers of the Cornell department enjoyed strong ties to Hamilton College. Brainard Smith, Duncan Campbell Lee, and James Winans were all Hamilton graduates, as was Alexander M. Drummond. Their training in the classics facilitated their grounding of the nascent Communication discipline in classical rhetorical studies and it enabled their repeated assertions that public speaking, discussion, and debate were worthy objects of study in their own right and indispensable to the conduct of civic affairs. As Benson observes, "the Cornell revival of rhetoric deeply influenced scholarship, teaching, and identity in the new discipline, with rhetoric taking its place in the larger structure of speech as a field of study" (Benson, 2003, pp. 7-8).

The last of the Cornellian professors included Carroll C. Arnold and John F. Wilson, both of whom contributed mightily to professional associations on the state, regional, and national levels. Arnold delivered the keynote address at NYSSA in 1960 and Wilson was President of the association in 1968-66. Arnold's and Wilson's scholarship (and that of their students) cemented the study of rhetoric and politics firmly in the Communication discipline.

Martin J. Medhurst, long-time editor of *Rhetoric and Public Affairs* and co-editor of *The Prospect of Presidential Rhetoric*, (and, parenthetically, a graduate student of both Arnold and Benson at Penn State) observes that Wilson's essay entitled, "Rhetorical Echoes of a Wilsonian Idea," published in 1957, represents one of the first essays in the infant field of political communication (Medhurst, 2008). Wilson's 1971 essay, "Six Rhetorics for Perennial Study," published in *Today's Speech*, remains a touchstone for classically-trained graduate students even today. Further, a happy collaboration between Arnold and Wilson also produced the brief but significant essay, "Public Speaking as a Liberal Art," which was published in a then-new journal called *Philosophy and Rhetoric* (Wilson and

Arnold, 1969). The pair also co-authored a popular public speaking textbook by the same name that influenced generations of students through multiple editions (Wilson and Arnold, 1978). It was this textbook, and Wilson's repeated presence at NYSSCA conventions, that prompted Susan Drucker to establish the John F. Wilson Scholars program during her time as NYSSCA President in 1990-91. Drucker observes, "I established the … program in his honor to carry on that legacy of providing access to our influential authors….I am pleased to see this program lives on" (NYSCA, 2017).

The story of the Cornell School of Rhetoric intersects with that of NYSCA in another manner, as well. One of significant formative meetings for the association occurred at Cornell University in 1941, with Drummond and Wichelns in attendance. The following year, 1942, the New York State Speech Association was established during a meeting of the Eastern Public Speaking Conference (a forerunner of the Eastern Communication Association.)

So, to conclude, the thread that connects the Communication discipline in New York State and the study of rhetoric runs to and through the Cornell School of Rhetoric. It is a thread that bound generations of professors and their students to the embrace of public speaking and rhetorical studies; a thread that wove the study of rhetoric deeply into the fabric of our state association, into the goals that it embraced in its early years, and into those that it continues to embrace today. Rhetoric was and continues to be the warp and weft of our collective enterprise.

Susan Drucker: Is the Marketplace of Ideas theory obsolete?

The "marketplace of ideas" theory uses the analogy of the free market in support of allowing a competition of ideas to enter public discourse. It assumes individuals have the capacity to decipher truth from falsehood in an open communicative environment supportive of deliberation and exchange of ideas. In the end, truth will out.

The theory dates to John Milton's *Areopagitica*, published in 1644 in which he argued against Parliament's efforts to license the press saying "Truth be in the field, we do injuriously by licensing and prohibiting to misdoubt her strength. Let her and Falsehood grapple; who ever knew Truth put to the worse in a free and open encounter?" This was expanded upon by John Stuart Mill expanded on the notion, arguing that free expression was valuable on individual and social grounds because it served to develop and sustain the rational capacity of man and, in an instrumental sense, facilitated the search for truth. This Enlightenment era metaphor took root in American jurisprudence in 1919 with Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr.'s dissent in *Abrams v. United States*, 250 U.S. 616 (1919). the case that formally established the marketplace of ideas as a legal concept. Holmes concluded his dissent in Abrams stating "the ultimate good desired is better reached by free trade in ideas—that the best test of truth is the power of the thought to get itself accepted in the competition of the market."

The communication marketplace and the media environment has certainly changed. Any communication theory is linked to one or more communication media. Marketplace of ideas is evidence of that. The circumstance of interpretation and the quest for the truth provides us with a link to the concept of the medium as an intermediary between one perception of reality and another. It is the "medium" that is at the heart of things. We cannot go a day, perhaps an hour, without hearing about fake news. The term has entered our marketplace of ideas. Certainly, not a new concept, but "fake news" and "medium" are inexorably connected.

The marketplace of ideas has been digitizalized. Digitalization increases sources, speed and opportunity for subjective content. The essential underlying characteristic of digitalization and the internet is speed and the multiplicity of sources (Cohen, 2017). Velocity and rapid dissemination, are the defining characteristic of digital media. Additionally, the line between reception and production can be overcome, and is at least blurred, thereby opening the possibility for anyone to create, modify and disseminate content. We are in the digital age. In the past, access and distribution of content were limited by storage space or the ability to transfer to a distant physical place. Those limitations have been virtually eliminated. "In the digital media environment, the individual blocks, filters, monitors, scans, deletes and restricts while constructing a controlled media environment" (Gumpert & Drucker, 2010). The digital bias focuses on the individual. The individual functions in a multi-media environment characterized by control, selectivity and detachment.

This takes us back to the matter of fake news and what it tells us about the state of marketplace of ideas theory. Digitalization brings a proliferation of channels and applications along with the multiplication of sources based on the technology of dissemination. This multiplicity effect, in turn, redefines agency. Digitalized content shifts responsibility to the receiver. With traditional gatekeeping diminished, the individual assumes greater responsibility in choosing trustworthy sources. Digitalization empowers the individual and simultaneously requires deciding which source to trust.

The proliferation of sources requires a different process of analysis in determining what is real and what is fake. The burden has been shifted to the receiver and at the same time the nature of what is transmitted has changed. The change in agency is a double-edged sword, with empowerment of the individual comes new responsibilities. The tools of media literacy become inherent in this discussion.

The expectation of bias in a digital age requires cross checking. Digitalization has shifted the obligation to cross check sources of news information from publishers to receivers. The need to cross check suggests the exercise of agency is different in a digital age. The current media environment creates spaces and sources with the appearance or illusion of accuracy, truthfulness, reliability, validity, authenticity and legitimacy.

Communication law scholar Jerome Barron, suggested the First Amendment marketplace concept is a “romantic conception of free expression,” which must be replaced with a more workable access approach. He asserted individuals must have access to the means of communicating ideas to enjoy their First Amendment rights. The digital era would seem to be embodiment of this access approach but the reality of how access is used undercuts efficacy.

Critics pronounce the “marketplace of ideas” obsolete in an age of media cocoons and echo chambers offered by the digital media environment. Yet, agency, the capacity of an actor to act in a given environment, is enhanced in a digital media environment. Agency implies active choice which is at the heart of the concept of the marketplace of ideas. The digital era implies the *need*, if not the duty, to verify. The marketplace of ideas could be alive and well if we take advantage of the unprecedented access to ideas and the means to authenticate and evaluate. In the best of all possible worlds, we now have the unprecedented means to transcend the limitations of our self-made “ME MEDIA” cocoons, and enter perhaps the richest of marketplaces of ideas. Rather than obsolete I would hope this could see the heyday of the marketplace of ideas.

Conclusions: Are state communication associations still relevant?

In honoring the past and contemplating the present it seemed only appropriate to look inward and confront the difficult question: Are state associations like NYSCA still relevant? Have state associations become obsolete? Organizations wax and wane. Communication has experienced significant siloization of the discipline and of the academy in general. Associations large and small compete with increasingly specialized conferences. More and more niche conferences compete for attendees who receive less and less funding for conference attendance. Niche conferences are hosted to meet demands of interests, or program assessment, or for profit.

The original statement of purpose for the New York State Speech Communication Association (which became the New York State Communication Association) was to encourage speech education in New York State.” The objectives of the organization have consistently emphasized promotion of speech education and to serve its members speaking for the profession. What are our current objectives and are we meeting them?

The New York State Speech Communication Association was founded on April 10, 1942 with 270 charter members. It first met as part of the Eastern Public Speaking Conference (now Eastern Communication Association). For the first 26 years the goals of the association were to encourage and plan statewide and sectional discussions and demonstrations. In the span of 75 years the world has changed and the descendants of speech communication, under the influences of social changes, global dynamics and technical innovations have impacted our scholarship and its association descendants. What has become of our role and value of our state communication association? In a special issue of NYSCA’s

Atlantic Journal devoted to this 75th anniversary Gary Gumpert and Susan Drucker asserted the following with regard to this state association:

1) That since its inception the New York State Communication Association's identity has been transformed.
2) That a state association serves a peculiarly idiosyncratic function in a contemporary world of increasingly mammoth communication associations.
3) And that a state association is defined by its personalities and relationships clustered around ideas.
4) That a state association can be instrumental in the development of scholarly identities (Gumpert & Drucker, 2017).

NYSCA has changed along with the discipline. From speech education we have moved into media literacy education. From being a liaison with the state department of education we have become a partner in publishing scholarship shared internationally. We can, of course, do more to be ever more relevant. Can we offer an academic home to current communication elements not among us, from adjuncts and teaching assistants to K-12 faculty. Can we offer workshops for transitioning faculty—moving from industry to academia? Can we do more to reflect present day departments which include PR, Journalism, and Film? All of these steps may make us ever more relevant but in looking backward we find we look forward as well to a relevant and vibrant contemporary NYSCA.

While this discussion was rich and, hopefully thought provoking, it led us to raise further wonderful questions about relevance and obsolesce. Why study Aristotle in an age of social media? Is cursive handwriting still important? Are printed maps, newspapers and magazines now passé? Is film dead? Are normative theories obsolete?

Ultimately, when "lies are news and truth is obsolete" newspapers, a White House press corp., ethical public relations, less mediated communication, a marketplace of ideas and state associations remain relevant and necessary!

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