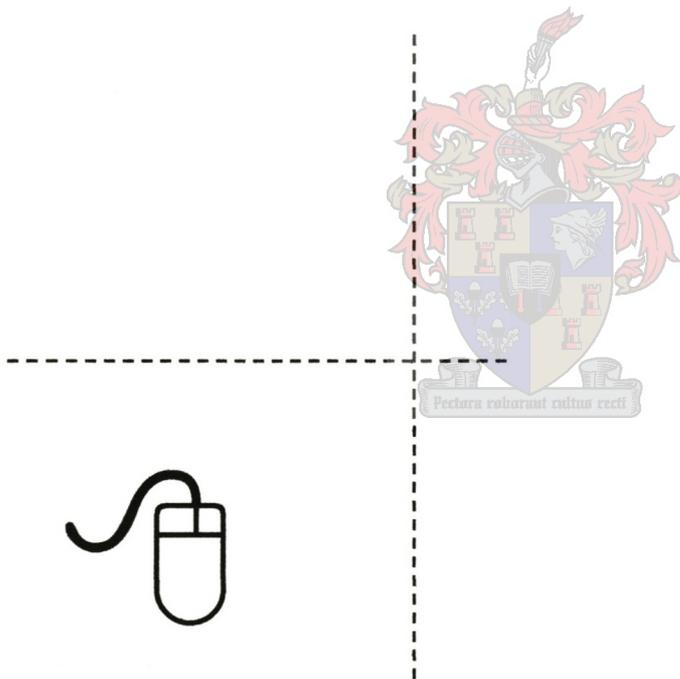


The implications of the personalisation of the media
www.ubuntu.co.za for democracy

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Thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Philosophy (Journalism) at the University of Stellenbosch.



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Declaration

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the work contained in this thesis is my own original work and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it to any university for a degree.

Signature:.

Date:.

ABSTRACT

This body of work is a post modern analysis of how the shift from mass to me media influences the role and structure of the media. Was McLuhan right, is the medium increasingly the message? Or is the post-modern media a totally different animal, a manifestation of popular culture and marketing rather than the socially responsible institution responsible for safeguarding democracy that it was envisioned to be by the American founding fathers?

The underlying theme is the convergence of media and marketing and the resulting conglomeration and technological dependency forced on the reader and the writer. Who are the new mediators and how do they manage the media? In the mediatrix, the readers become media managers and the writers become surfers.

The analysis begins with an examination of the contrast between real and virtual communities and how the media bridges this information gap. How does reporting in virtuality reflect reality?

The body of the study has three parts, the shift from mass to me media, the alternative media spheres it has engendered and the controlling forces behind this transition. Throughout the study, mass media and me media are contrasted.

The study ends with a look at the impact of technology and popular culture on the South African media and how the media will click through the future. Will the deeply entrenched communal values of ubuntu stave off the individualisation cocooning brings? That is, will the I before we focus of personalised media nurture the South African democracy or will it foster mediocracy?

ABSTRAK

Die volgende tesis is n omskrywing van hoe die beweging van die massa-media na die ek-media die rol en die struktuur van die media beïnvloed. Was McLuhan korrek, is die medium dikwels doe boodskap? Of is die post-moderne media n totale ander gedierte? n Manifestasie van die populere kultuur en bemarking, eerder as die sosiale verantwoordelike instituut verantwoordelik vir die behoud van demokrasie soos dit gevisualiseer is deur die Amerikaanse voorvaders?

Die onderliggende tema is die bymekaarvoeging van media en bemarking en die konglomerasie en tegnologiese verantwoordelikheid geplaas op die lesers en skrywers. Wie is die nuwe tussengangers en hoe bestuur hulle die media? In die "mediatrix" word die lesers die media bestuurder en die skrywers word die net-sweefer.

Die analise begin met die ondersoek na die kontras tussen egte en virtuele gemeenskappe en hoe die media hierdie informasie gaping oorbrug. Hoe word realiteit beïnvloed deur rapportering in virtualiteit?

Die liggame van die studie bestaan uit drie dele - die skuif van massa-media na ek-media, die alternatiewe media sferes wat dit vorm, en, die beheerende invloede agter die transformasie. Reg deur die studie word die massa-media en die ek-media gekontrasteer.

Die studie eindig met n opsomming van die impak van tegnologie en populere kultuur op die SA mark en hoe die media sal saamstem in die toekoms. Sal die diepere gelede gemeenskapswaardes van ubuntu die individualisme wat "cocooning" meebring afskiet. Sal die ek voor die ons van verpersoonlike media die SA demokrasie aanhelp of medioker maak.

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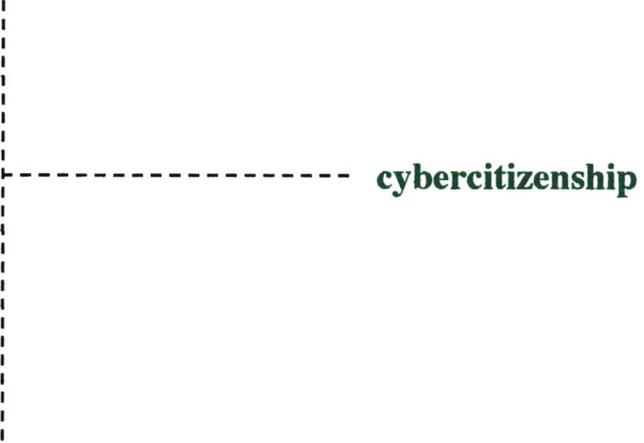
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What are the consequences of mediation ?

ITRW

In the real world

cybercitizenship



ITRW

cybercitizenship

In the real world

booting up.....

The spirit of ubuntu is a fundamental part of South African democracy and cocooning is the logical extension of the personalisation of the media. While these philosophies may seem mutually exclusive, one African, the other Western, one relevant to an emergent democracy, the other suited to post-industrial society, it is possible to draw on both approaches to analyse 21st century media in the emergent South African democracy. It is the contention of this work that the tenets of ubuntu and cocooning are not mutually exclusive. Indeed, ubuntu is firmly entrenched in South African society therefore the more individualised trend of cocooning will have to evolve within its parameters. By extension then, the personalisation of the media is not inherently detrimental to an emergent African democracy.

bring in the mediators

The well known communicologist, David Berlo observed that *“looking at the world today we cannot place our faith in communication - yet, increasingly, that’s all there is to place our faith in”*. (Steyn & Motshabi,1996:13)

In the technologically, over-mediated 21st century it is easy to lose sight of the subtle difference between reality and virtuality. As the media increasingly encroaches on modern life and begins to define it, the netizen could be forgiven for confusing the mediated picture with reality. The nature of community and citizenship are being redefined in this highly interfaced technoscape. Both definitions are no longer confined by geography or the clock. This begs the question - what impact will the existence of virtual communities and netizens have on nationality and democracy?

The last ten years has seen a series of major historical events that have transformed the world. The most important changes being: the diffusion of the information technology revolution, the collapse of the Soviet Union, with the consequent demise of the international Communist movement and the end of the Cold War that had defined

everything for the last half a century, the restructuring of capitalism, the spread of globalization; the emergence of the Pacific as the hotbed of the global economy; the paradoxical combination of a surge in nationalism and the crisis of the sovereign nation-state, the crisis of democratic politics, the rise of feminism and the crisis of patriarchalism; the widespread diffusion of ecological consciousness; the rise of communalism as sources of resistance to globalisation, the upsurge of religious fundamentalism; and last but not least, the development of a global criminal economy. All these vacillations are having a profound impact on the international economy, national politics and local, everyday life.

Computer mediated communication (CMC) has the potential to change peoples lives on three different, but strongly influential levels, asserts Harold Rheingold. (Rheingold, 1999:281) First, as individual human beings, people have perception, thought and personalities that are affected by the ways they use the medium and the way it uses them. Thus, young people around the world have different communications proclivities from their pre-McLuhanized elders.

The second level of possible CMC-triggered change is the realm of person-to-person interaction in which relationships, friendships and communities exist. CMC technology offers a new capability of 'many to many' communication but the way such a capability will or will not be used in the future depends on the way this generation, the first people who are seeing it succeed or fail, apply it to their lives. The three kinds of collective goods that Adam Smith proposes in his "Wealth of Nations" as the social glue that binds online groups into something resembling a community are social network capital, knowledge capital and communion.

The third level of possible change in modern life, the political, derives from the middle, social level, for politics is always a combination of communications and physical power and the role of communications media among the citizenry is particularly important in the politics of democratic societies. For Rheingold, the political significance of CMC lies in its capacity to challenge the existing monopolies on powerful communications media, and thus revitalise citizen-based democracy. (Rheingold,1999:282-3)

cracking cultural codes

Culture acts as a screen between a person and social reality, colouring it in such a way that his or her interpretation and understanding of reality may be totally different from that of a person of another culture. Beliefs are also based on outside sources of information such as books, other people and the media. Cultural influences like customs, traditions, rituals and other cultural sources play an important part in forming informational beliefs.

Steyn and Motshabi distinguish between task cultures and people cultures: *“Some cultures emphasise accomplishment with tasks, while other cultures emphasise relationships with people. There is reason to believe that a fundamental belief system is part of the task-people dichotomy. Task cultures may well have an underlying world view structure of what makes a person good. For instance, one underlying cognitive structure is the notion that self-worth comes only from accomplishment and success. Therefore, working hard and successful task completion are means by which to prove oneself.”* (Steyn & Motshabi,1996:15) Although there is clearly a danger of oversimplification, it may seem to an observer that in South Africa whites are primarily task-oriented and blacks people-oriented. One reason for this observation is the frequent use of the concept of *ubuntu* in black languages, which clearly is a manifestation of a people culture. (Steyn & Motshabi,1996:17)

In a situation where members of a cultural group prefer to communicate only with their own as has been the case in South Africa, the warning of Allport should be heeded: *“People who stay separate have few channels of communication. They easily exaggerate the degree of difference between groups and readily misunderstand the grounds for it. And perhaps most important of all, the separateness may lead to genuine conflicts of interest, as well as many imaginary conflicts”* (Steyn & Motshabi,1996:19). The remedy however is not as simple as to open all channels of communication.

we before I

Ubuntu means 'humaneness' in English and 'menslikheid' in Afrikaans . In a wider sense, it expresses the humanistic experience in which all people are treated with respect as human beings. In this sense, the concept is the foundation of sound relations in African societies. The expression in Zulu "umuntu mgumuntu nganye abuntu" meaning "people are people because of other people" summarises the concept in an effective way.

Khanyile refers to the universal values of the philosophy of ubuntu, despite the ethnic claims to the concept: "*Ubuntu means being human and being human implies values that are not subjective but universal - namely truth, honesty, justice, respect for person and property, compassion, tolerance of different religions, views and races, sensitivity to the aged, the handicapped, the less privileged and an enthusiasm for life.*" (Steyn & Motshabi, 1996:21)

The philosophy of ubuntu provides an opportunity to move away from the historic perspectives of human communication based on persuasion, confrontation, negotiation and development. This philosophy does not emphasise influencing and persuasion and the notion of power and domination. In ubuntu the total communication situation and all the factors that have a bearing on the situation are important. This holistic approach is in certain respects contradictory to the analytical and cognitive Western-oriented theories.

I before we

"Cocooning is the stay at home trend, reflecting our strong desire to build soft and cosy nests in order to protect ourselves from the harsh, unpredictable realities of the outside world."

(Popcorn & Marigold, 1997:51)

In American society there hasn't been a serious life-style trend since the couch potato was sighted in about '86, on one of its rare forays to the video store. So Barbara Ehrenreich maintains. As outlined by Faith Popcorn, cocooning remains a significant mass enterprise, encouraged by the availability of 500 new cable channels and microwave popcorn. But if one wants a more boisterous trend, one that demands

emulation and is inspired by zest rather than a fear of human interaction, then there is nothing at all. The only trend worth mentioning is trendlessness. (Ehrenreich,1993)

But there's something sad too about the decline of American trendiness. Trend-setting requires innovation, ebullience and a level of defiant frivolity such as has not been seen in these parts for years. Or perhaps, cocooning is by its nature the ultimate and final trend, after which no more are biologically possible: like the dodo snuggling into its nest, people have found their evolutionary niche, which has turned out to be the couch in the den. (Ehrenreich,1993)

Cocooning may be the emergent social pattern in technology saturated countries like the United States, but is it a sign of things to come for emergent democracies like South Africa?

telling it like it is

As an emergent democracy still on the cusp of the technological explosion, the philosophy of ubuntu is more applicable to South Africa than cocooning at the moment. This is the case as South Africa has a strong African, communal culture of which ubuntu forms a major part. Also South Africa has not been immersed in personalised media for nearly as long as Westernised nations, therefore cocooning has not taken root here yet. Arising from this combination of theories (ubuntu, participatory communication and a dialogue for critical consciousness) is a normative view of the role of the media. The media, operating freely, although with some intervention in order to ensure that a diversity of voices are heard and that the damage inflicted by reporting is not greater than the damage inflicted by not reporting, must contribute to the betterment of society, according to Ngairé Blankenburg. (Blankenburg,1999) This requires a form of media that is firstly public - in that it is free from vested interests such as business and government, as well as being, to a large degree, participatory.

In the practice of journalism, the media must provide context, by situating stories within a framework of power relations, and by acknowledging history and political economy and its effects on both macro and micro levels. It must use local, trained journalist/facilitators who are members of the community and must work with the community in order, not only to define problems or issues, but also to find possible solutions. The media must also look out for the interests of 'ordinary' people, rather than

simply those of the 'intelligentsia' elite, as every person is regarded as, with ubuntu, a fountain of knowledge who has valuable things to contribute to society as a whole. (Blankenburg, 1999)

The second way in which ubuntu can be used to formulate an idea of liberatory journalism, is through the content of the media. This takes its cue from indigenous practices of storytelling. The media becomes the storyteller, recalling traditional stories and national myths through symbol and narratives, ensuring the solidarity of the community. Blankenburg is optimistic that journalists can 'mediate' community participation and 'facilitate' community conscientisation. (Blankenburg, 1999) They also (re)tell the stories of the community in order to promote a strong and cohesive group identity. Thus, storytelling in form and in content become projects in which communities are able to participate in the recovery of an essential, empowering Africanness.

Ubuntu, used as a functionalist philosophy, is one which, through the spirit of humanism, enables a popular resistance against the profit driven, purposive-rational ideologies of the Western elite. It also challenges the journalistic practices of 'balance', 'neutrality' and 'objectivity' which arise out of such ideologies. Through the creation of meaning in common stories and rituals, or common readings even of Western created shows, a community asserts itself as active citizens rather than as passive consumers. For Blankenburg post-colonial Africa requires a birthing in the 'publics' of Africa, old and new, recognised and unrecognised, the organised and the unorganised sectors, the spaces provided by the informal economy, all the places where people think and dream and where there is the potential for creative cultural politics.

appreciating a third culture

Creative cultural politics go hand in hand with 'conscious' storytelling, to reaffirm identities and to solidify or create a strong sense of community and nationhood. Journalists form part of a community, ensuring widespread participation, facilitating a process of conscientisation', and telling and re-telling its collective stories. The media thus, play an important role in the process of genuine national and community liberation.

A major challenge in the immediate future will be to create a setting for constructive communication in South Africa. A Third Culture does not imply a mere eclectic merging

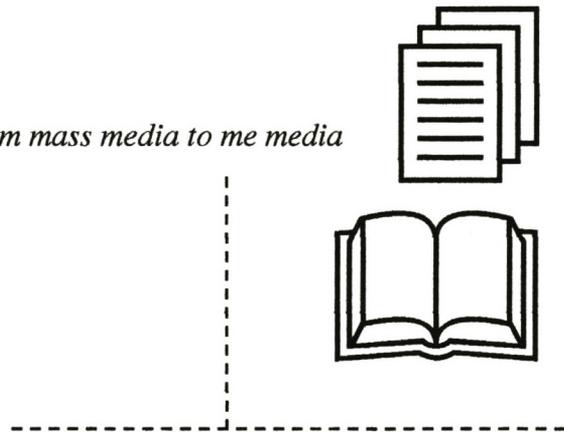
of the two cultures of the involved parties but the mutual development of a unique meeting ground. Potloane stressed the need for people to focus on similarities while retaining cultural differences, because only through communication can cultural bridges be built. He also emphasises openness and non-defensiveness about culture in order to achieve cultural synergy and to work and live together for a better tomorrow. (Steyn & Motshabi, 1996:22)

Due to the different perceptions of reality and the conflicting viewpoints among individuals and groups in South Africa, an environment needs to be created in which communicating parties can reach consensus on new sets of rules for meaningful communication. In the new culture, new concepts with new meanings need to replace old beacons. For this to take place, extensive communication on all levels is needed between individuals, groups and communities. The media's role as facilitator will be crucial.

If used responsibly, the communal characteristics of ubuntu will permeate the electronic media, superseding the tendency to cocoon and to form information elites.

SHIFT

The transition from mass media to me media



SHIFT

The transition from mass media to me media

“The Western world is imploding. . Today, after more than a century of electric technology, we have extended our central nervous system itself in a global embrace, abolishing both space and time as far as our planet is concerned.”

Marshall McLuhan

home is where the hardware is

In 1964, Marshall McLuhan predicted that by the end of the 20th century, the mass media will have turned the world into a ‘global village’. This would be a world in which people everywhere will all have become part of what is happening elsewhere - so much so, that they will not be able “*to go home anymore*”. (De Beer, 1998:6) In this village, information about events occurring all over the world would become common knowledge within a very short time, entering homes, as well as places of work and play.

In the electric age, the ultimate conflict between sight and sound, between written and oral kinds of perception and organisation of existence is upon humankind. (McLuhan, 1994:16) But with electric media Western men and women experience exactly the same inundation as the remote native. People are no more prepared to encounter radio and television in a literate milieu than the native of Ghana is able to cope with the literacy that takes him out of his collective tribal world and beaches him in individual isolation. People are numb in the new electric world as the native involved in this literate mechanical culture. Electric speed mingles the cultures of prehistory with the dregs of industrial marketers, the non-literate with the semiliterate and the post-literate.

world's apart

McLuhan conceived of development internationally as falling into four worlds; the first world created as a result of 19th century industrialisation, the second world as a political response to injustice resulting in Russian socialism, the third world, being those regions which have not experienced industrialisation and the fourth world where the new electronic environment eliminates time and space from human experience.

With regard to the media in this fourth world, McLuhan makes three basic propositions: each medium carries its own inherent message with long term psychological effects; information from any one medium results in the internal arousal of complementary senses; and the receiver participates subjectively in message formulation by becoming a co-source in the transformation of the message.

sign language

According to McLuhan, the medium determines both the content of the message and how it is interpreted. He divided signs into iconic and digital. Iconic signs usually resemble the referent and are spatial. Digital signs are linear and to understand them the receiver must know the code used (language). McLuhan compares Chinese characters (iconic) with the phetics (digital) of the English language to illustrate this difference. It was the non-linearity of iconic signs that prompted the cryptic statement - "The medium is the message" and contrasted print media (digital) with television (iconic).

For McLuhan, the physical relationship between the reader's eyes and the text comes to define a linear mode of thinking. Just as eyes move across the page, line after line, in a rigorous and necessary way, so too does one begin to think in similarly rigorously linear fashion, one idea logically connected to the next. (Whitney, 1998:43) Consequently, hypertext leads to the propagation of non-linear thinking as there is no rigid ordering of text, thus the reader's eye may wander where it will.

extensions of man

"We shape our tools and thereafter they shape us"

Marshall McLuhan

McLuhan sees art and technology as 'extensions of man'. The greater the number of senses involved the better the chance of transmitting a reliable copy of the sender's state of mind to the receiver. Electronic media are all embracing demanding total involvement and awareness from the receiver. He considers the ear (closed, exclusive, intolerant) to be hotter than the eye (open, neutral, associative). Speech activates all one's senses, the spoken word being more redundant than the written form.

MEDIUM	HOT	COOL
Oral	Radio	Telephone
Visual	Photograph	Cartoon
Audio-visual	Feature films	Television

(Marchant, 1988)

The term hot is equated with detached observer status (spectator) while cool is equated with involved participatory status (participant). Today's intensification of visual experience is tending to push oral experience into the background. Raymond Gozzi explains how McLuhan developed his definitions of "hot" and "cool" media as follows. A "hot" medium gave high definition to a single sense. It assaulted one's sense organs with a complete image, leaving little for the receiver to fill in on their own. A "cool" medium, on the other hand, projected its imagery in lower-definition. It left more to the receiver to fill in, demanding more participation. (Gozzi, 1992)

dismantling technology

"We drive into the future with our eyes firmly fixed on the rear view mirror"

Marshall McLuhan

Based on an analysis of Innis, McLuhan, Havelock, Postman, Gimpel, and Kuhn, Eugene Marlow derived various observations that have implications regarding the introduction and diffusion of a new technology into a culture:

1. Dominant media (technologies) create knowledge empires that ultimately go into disequilibrium.
2. Technologies have a bias toward either time or space.
3. Technologies create total environments that are not necessarily definable by the content of the technology.
4. Technologies create a demand for themselves.
5. A dominant technology creates organisational changes in a culture.
6. The diffusion of a technology into a culture takes time and the process is evolutionary.
7. The practitioners of a particular technology evolve their models (i.e. paradigms) of how a technology should be applied.

8. Refinements of the technology refine the models of use on the part of the practitioners. (Marlow,1993)

In sum, these eight principles can be applied to the historical development of various technologies and to their adoption and diffusion throughout a particular culture, and offer a means of judging the impact of these technologies on the culture they have saturated.

feeling wired

“The Web browser itself is about to croak. And good riddance, in its place...broader and deeper new interfaces for electronic media are being born. What they share are ways to move seamlessly between media you steer (interactive) and media that steer you (passive)...The new interfaces work with existing media, such as television, yet they also work on hyperlinked text. But most important, they work on the emerging universe of networked media that are spreading across the telesphere. As everything gets wired, media of all kinds are moving to the decentralised matrix known as the Net. While traditional forms - broadcast print - show few signs of vanishing, the Net is being invaded by new media species”. (WIRED, March 1997: “Kill your browser”)

Bolter and Grusin make the crucial point that to suggest that everything will “get wired” is to suppose that people will take pleasure in living in a highly mediated world. (Bolter & Grusin,2000:223) In this new world, information cascades from device to device, seeking one out. The unimpeded flow is what matters. Notice how an organic metaphor is mixed with references to technology to create an aura of naturalness and inevitability.

PUSH to enter

Push media arrive automatically - on the desktop, in the in-box, via the pager. People won't choose whether to turn them on, only whether to turn them off. And there will be many incentives not to... Push media are “always on”. And there are human agents behind the scenes, working overtime to keep the content always on target, always on top of things, always seeking one out.

Content is pushed to a person, in contrast to the invitational pull people make when they click on the Web. The push can be gentle, in a person's face, intermittent, in the background or always on. At first glance all this looks a lot like the revenge of television. The new networked media do borrow ideas from television, but the new media landscape will look nothing like television as one knows it. And indeed, it will transform television in the process.

The so-called liberating electronic media have changed the communication relationships between sender and receiver. Literacy does not provide some immunity against media fall out. Interpersonal contact remains the corner stone of communication. The mass media can best facilitate the process of intercultural communication by providing common and relevant frames of reference.

survival, according to De Beer. Oral tradition, literacy, communalism, urbanisation and social change are often in conflict with one another, interacting with print and electronic communication in a more complex way than ever before. Therefore the social role of the mass media in Africa may differ qualitatively from the expectations of the Western world. (De Beer,1998:61)

Rheingold points out the parallels between real and virtual life. People in virtual communities use words on screens to exchange pleasantries and argue, engage in intellectual discourse, conduct commerce, exchange knowledge, share emotional support, make plans, brainstorm, gossip, feud, fall in love, find friends and lose them, play games, flirt, create a little high art and a lot of idle talk. People in virtual communities do just about everything people do in real life, but leave their bodies behind. One can't kiss anybody and nobody can punch one in the ribs, but a lot can happen within those boundaries. (Rheingold,1999:275) To the millions who have been drawn into it, the richness and vitality of computer-linked cultures is attractive, even addictive. There is no such thing as a single, monolithic, online subculture; it's more like an ecosystem of subcultures, some frivolous, others serious.

nation-building on the net

The technology that makes virtual communities possible has the potential to bring enormous leverage to ordinary citizens at relatively little cost - intellectual leverage, social leverage, commercial leverage and most important, political leverage. But Rheingold reminds us *"the technology will not in itself fulfil that potential; this latent technical power must be used intelligently and deliberately by an informed population."* (Rheingold,1999:276)

As the fourth estate in modern democracies, the media must become a player, affirming a national culture in the collective imagination. This watchdog must create a sense of belonging and awareness that transcends (and also recognises) geographic boundaries and familial and community ties. A strong nation, built as a collection of 'conscious' and 'healthy' communities, is more likely to withstand many of the effacing effects of globalisation than one which is fractured and insecure.

If ubuntu is currently seen to be useful in the conceptualisation of a nation-state, it is by expanding its role from smaller community structures to national ones. The promotion of ubuntu as a nation-building concept is effective only in so far as it is able to depend on a strong, active and relatively united citizenship. Blankenburg asserts that if there is little evidence of a civil society, or a public, no matter how loosely formed, then the media is seen to be only speaking to the ruling elite, other journalists or to those who have justified its existence in the first place. (Blankenburg,1999)

3 **ipowerment**

soliloquy

chorus

The ihaves and the ihave nots of the information economy

cyberserfdom

Not everybody is equally excited about the wonders of the information superhighway. Critics question whether electronic media are in fact creating a global information village or whether it is a return to a medieval manorial system. A very obvious alternative view to the present hype about information technology is that it empowers the rich nations further and turns those without access to the Internet into cyber-peasants living in the shadow of tremendous power and information wealth.

Proponents of the cultural criticism school argue that all the wonders of information do not necessarily equal knowledge. They would argue that there might even be an inverse relationship between information and knowledge. Much of the cultural criticism now directed at the traditional mass media is likely to be redirected at the new electronic media. The fear behind this thinking is that the loss of authentic values may not arise from the overpowering information capacities and culture of the West (especially America), but from the powerlessness of people in those countries at the receiving end of the scale.

another access control area

“The Internet is a tool to propagate neo-colonialism...the Internet is a system which dilutes human interaction. People just talk over the computer and do not meet face to face to put human feelings into what they agree to do. Therefore, going back to our Africanness, our African values, the Net does not promote Africanness.”

Dalisa Mwale (Zambia) (RJR, No.18)

Like traditional media the Internet is only accessible to a minority. They live the lifestyle of the First World while being geographically located in the Third World. There is a steady growth of a second stratum of people gaining access to the Internet through either educational institutions at tertiary level or work environments. People in this stratum are the emerging African middle class and are predominantly black and male. The third group in Africa is the large majority often called the “masses”. Even the

words computer or Internet do not resonate in their universe. In short, access to the Internet in Africa has not differed much from the patterns of access to traditional media.

“The Information Revolution offers Africa a dramatic opportunity to leap ahead into the future, breaking out of decades of stagnation or decline. If African countries cannot surf this great wave of technological change, we may be crushed by it and become more economically stagnant than we are today.”

Frazer Mweemba (RJR, No.18)

instrument of empowerment or disenfranchisement ?

Modern communication is developing along two fronts each creating its own parallel and yet contradictory phenomenon. Mowlana goes on to explain, on the one hand there is the promise of the globalization of personal communications, with its potential to empower individuals. On the other hand there is the reality of globalisation: continuing centralisation of mass communication with fewer players controlling the choke points, leaving the overwhelming majority of the world's people increasingly marginalised on the periphery. (Mowlana,1997:16) The profile of users is skewed by race, gender, income and age. Studies show that more than 80 % of all users are computer literate, middle-class males under the age of 40. There is a close correlation between high incomes and use of the Internet. It is interesting that men are twice as likely to be Web users than women. Far from reducing traditional inequalities of power and knowledge, it seems that access to the Web may provide yet more advantages for those who are already privileged holders of 'cultural capital'.

The increasing concentration of the world's communication and information systems in the hands of a few leads to the domination of the world's networks by a handful of powerful conglomerates which become the lords of the global village and constitute vast communication empires that totally eliminate national boundaries. Mowlana puts his finger on the bottom line when he asks *“is a world split between an elite minority of information-empowered people interacting electronically and a majority mired in information poverty in anyone's best interests?”* (Mowlana,1997:105) In other words, do people really want to choose between a successful but soulless electronic existence and disenfranchisement?

4 **digerati**

civilisation

barbarism

What the media conglomerates are doing with the power they have

Ben Bagdikian's often-quoted prediction from 'The Media Monopoly' (1983) is that by the turn of the century "*five to ten corporate giants will control most of the world's important newspapers, magazines, books, broadcast stations, movies, recording and videocassettes.*" (O'Sullivan & MacKay, 1999)

marketing maketh the media

Depending who one listens to, the media is either (a) in an irretrievable death spin, characterised by megamergers, dissolving ethics and a dying print medium; or (b) entering a golden age of information democracy, with high-quality information available in unprecedented amounts over the Net. Anthony Wilson-Smith maintains that online magazines like Salon and Slate present themselves - amid bitter feuding - as home to the kind of elevated discussion one would have if, say, Aristotle, Einstein and Churchill all dropped by for a pint. (Wilson-Smith, 2000) Salon editor David Talbot has described his product as an "*interactive magazine of books, arts and ideas . . . to advance the cause of civic discourse.*" Slate editor Michael Kinsley describes his magazine as a mix "*of Time, The Economist and The New Yorker.*" If he'd toss in Playboy and People, he could lay claim to the dominant print trends of the last half century.

There's also the "Evil Media Baron Theory", according to which the Net was invented so that a half-dozen megamoguls could trick consumers into buying only products produced by their companies. Right now, those people are busy hating AOL/Time Warner. In a recent Online Journalism Review, writer Ken Layne maintained that a speech by Jonathan Sacks, general manager of America Online, amounted to this message: "*Thanks for empowering yourself by visiting this journalism site, which aims to bring you the best in convenience and tools to help you make informed purchasing decisions and to get important news about our corporate family of entertainers. Click here to buy some crap!*" (Wilson-Smith, 2000)

There's a widespread notion that media moguls tell reporters what to write. That's seldom true -- but it is true that some reporters with a keen eye for career advancement consider their bosses' views very carefully, and take pains to faithfully reflect them. The rivalry between Old and New Media is another reason to weigh the reliability of the purveyor of information as carefully as the news itself. It's like Ronald Reagan's line to Mikhail Gorbachev about the need for verification when they signed a nuclear disarmament treaty. "*Trust,*" said Reagan, "*but verify.*" (Wilson-Smith,2000)

selling the family silver

The South African media toward the end of the 1980s was dominated by the SABC, Argus Holdings Ltd, Times Media Ltd (TML) and the Afrikaner-owned Perskor and Nasionale Pers. The four white owned press groups together also controlled the Net. The media environment was thus tightly managed, with closely regulated advertising, printing and distribution arrangements. Complex relationships thus existed between the media conglomerates of the apartheid era and other South African capital formations.

The Argus restructuring emerged as a significant departure from the pattern of concentrated ownership that historically characterised the South Africa print media. For the first time ever, mining capital had relinquished newspapers previously regarded as strategically important in ensuring its dominant role in the economy and the security of capitalism in the face of rising Afrikaner national socialism. Naspers in 1996 -7 formed new firms and sold shares to companies owned by black business. Its managing director announced that the group was "*selling the family silver to black interest groups for moral and practical reasons.*" (Tomaselli,2000:286)

All this restructuring was simultaneously a continuation of historical patterns. A "rationalised" public sphere, organised by private, profit-driven organisation and subordinate to the principle of profit-maximisation, remained largely closed to wider public participation. The public sphere has thus largely remained under the control of "property-owning private people" whose new-found autonomy is rooted in the sphere of commodity exchange according to Habermas. (Tomaselli,2000:287)

the pen is mightier than the sword

Nelson Mandela, in a speech to the International Press Institute, declared: *“With the exception of the Sowetan, the senior editorial staffs of all South Africa’s daily newspapers are cast from the same racial mould...They are white, they are from a middle class background, they tend to share a very similar life experience...While no one can object in principle to editors with such a profile, what is disturbing is the threat of one-dimensionality this poses for the media. It is clearly inequitable that in a country whose population is overwhelmingly black, the principal players in the media have no knowledge of the life experience of that majority.”* (The Star, February 15, 1994)

Replacing whites with blacks in the corporate press is not really going to solve the problem of structural inequality. Neither will this racial substitution automatically provide increased popular access or diversity of opinion in the media. In fact, as previously “white” newspapers crossed racial readership boundaries, they experienced a commensurate loss in aggregate readership.

These new ventures, no matter the race of the persons who own them, are as likely to bolster capitalist interests as they have in the past, thus supporting the continuance of a class-based social formation. Journalist Thami Mazwai stated *“To be multiracial is in the logic of business”*. (Tomaselli, 2000:289) The new black owners may indeed have facilitated some sort of Africanization of values in the media, but financial survival is determined by readers and advertisers, not intellectuals and cultural commissars claiming “traditional” legitimacy or cultural vision. Mazwai dismisses pluralism in an instant: *“The media must reflect people’s aspirations. It must be a nation reflecting itself, If you read the Sowetan and The Citizen, it is like living in two countries. As editors, we must break these mindsets”*. (Tomaselli, 2000:289) Mazwai goes on to say there must be “diversity in ownership and management” thus offering the opportunity of dialogue, but from the perspective of the new class of media moguls.

5 **media alienation / nation** *history* *legend*

The nation-building role of the new media

the superhighway ahead

“The Internet is not a neutral tool - the Internet is political.” (Kole,1999:1)

Unlike the introduction of other high technologies, based on people of the North convincing Africans they need them, African NGOs embraced the Internet because of the potential of the technology. Access to information world-wide and the possibility of bottom-up and horizontal communication open new possibilities for NGOs. These experiences add to the very high expectations about the Internet’s potential for democracy and development.

Notwithstanding the ongoing commercialisation of Internet services, civil society succeeds in deploying the media for non-profit activities by:

- 1) Putting the needs of marginalised people into a central light, stressing the significance of local knowledge, in particular non-technical knowledge.
- 2) Paying explicit attention to social aspects, preparing for the constraints that the context imposes, but making use of its possibilities.
- 3) Creating conditions for development, democracy and women’s empowerment.
- 4) Focusing explicitly on non-average users. To prevent an outcome where the Internet is more accessible to one group than another, one can make the objectives of the project explicit for every single group. (Kole,1999:2)

Although Africa may still be at the level of information cowpaths, rather than superhighways, the Internet is inevitably changing how the media work and opening new possibilities for interaction. This can benefit democratic trends if used in a transparent, socially responsible way that allows for as broad an access base as possible and the dissemination of alternative, non-Western perspectives. Given the degree of economic inequality in Africa, ensuring that information is not monopolised by the monied minority is the underlying challenge.

of liberators & mediators

The media is integral to the modern day liberation project, to ensure widespread participation in the political system and in all aspects of the public sphere; as a 'mediator' in order to resolve conflict; to bring people together; to act as a 'catalyst' for critical consciousness'; and as a storyteller, creating and legitimating "*public cultural rituals for negotiating cultural conflicts and agreeing on common values*" (Blankenburg, 1999).

The philosophy of ubuntu can be used as a foundation and a legitimation of a kind of 'liberation' journalism that attempts to unite these roles. Liberation media draws on elements of development journalism, participatory communication and a variety of other theories of media in order to arrive at a concept of journalism which best addresses the needs of many African communities. Ubuntu can be used in an exploration of a form of journalism, whereby, as in traditional African village structures, the concerns, ideas and opinions of all the people are able to occupy real space in any public discussion. The philosophy of ubuntu can also be used in the determination of programming, or the content of the journalism project. This involves the notion of accommodating cultural diversity and the role of storytelling in traditional African communities in order to conceptualise a way of using the media to recall ancestral myths and legends, family and community identity as well as to establish a strong popular national culture. (Blankenburg, 1999).

The media is there to ensure first and foremost, the well-being of the collective, rather than the protection of individual rights. Participation occurs not on an individual basis, but on a community basis. Communities must within themselves arrive at a consensus in the identification of a particular story, issue or problem. That story is then put forth as one community's contribution to the collection of stories and issues on the national agenda. Within an African context, freedom of expression means a community is able to freely articulate its questions and concerns. "*In an African village it is assumed that problems do not have a final solution. Therefore, it is always important to discuss issues in order to come up with an acceptable interim solution*" (Blankenburg, 1999).

'Freedom of expression' in 'liberation' journalism extends beyond a participation that ensures that all voices are heard. It also means that communities are able to expect an effect from their participation, such as an improvement in their material conditions. As Mbigi (Blankenburg, 1999) states, "*(the) question is not freedom of choice but freedom from want*". In 'free market' economies, freedom more often than not means freedom to choose any consumer product, freedom to buy whatever source of information one desires, freedom to choose in the marketplace of ideas. It is a negative freedom whereby journalists are under a social obligation to provide information from a variety of sources, yet are under no obligation to ensure that this information is meaningful or relevant. On the other hand, the freedom from want calls for a much more active role to be played by the media, a role which ensures that society is fulfilling the fundamental needs of each community. The media forms part of a circle, in which communities, via the media, participate in the decision-making process of the nation. In turn, the nation, 'watched' by the media provides certain services to the communities.

Ubuntu practice advocates participation while at the same time recognises political leadership and authority. It incorporates both bottom-up and top-down strategies of communication. As Mbigi and Maree (Blankenburg, 1999) state, "*leadership in Africa has to be servant leadership, which is visible, symbolic and articulate in terms of face to face communication in mass rally style*". The media plays a role as the servant leader, its symbols are those defined and understood by the community, its role is to serve the needs of the community. Therefore, journalists must assess the potential impact of their stories on the community the most affected, before deciding if and how to tell them. The public's 'right to know', a Libertarian principle that is widely touted as a rationalisation of 'sensational' journalism, is not unqualified according to Mbigi and Maree (Blankenburg, 1999). It must be measured against a standard assessing the potential harm the information could do to a particular community. The media's role must be as an active participant in the conscientisation of the community rather than as a silent transmitter of the dominant ideology. What is called for, in the name of development, and also in the name of democracy, "*is active involvement in development problems, instead of detachment in the name of objectivity and neutrality which are not achievable when the issue is how to improve peoples' living conditions*" according to Okigbo. (Blankenburg, 1999).

surfing the sub-continent

The challenge is not merely benefiting from the latest socio-technological developments derivative of the Information Age, but also potentially enhancing democracy in South Africa by creatively using the latest media technology. For Louw, the ANC and the wider left-wing have simply not yet recognised the importance of the media within a development strategy for South Africa. (Louw,1993:4)

Louw maintains that a left-democratic public sphere requires, firstly an infrastructure that facilitates active grassroots participation - that is constitutionally guaranteed access to local and national communication processes. Secondly, the creation of a fully functioning 'public sphere' would be impossible without a 'media literate' population, intellectually equipped to use all the potential available in contemporary and still to be developed information technologies. (Louw,1993:5)

South Africa has the resources to integrate virtually all its citizens into an urban-based information society within a reasonable time-frame, if the will exists to do so. But this requires a significant rearrangement of existing resources via a development scheme to create the infrastructures and provide the necessary training. For Louw this is a short-sighted interpretation of 'development' and a condemnation of South Africa to the status of a Third World society disconnected from the global information economy. (Louw,1993:6)

Media can improve democracy through facilitating more social interaction, by making information, entertainment and a participative political culture more readily available for all. If Habermas is correct, once people know the possibilities they will demand access to this potential. Media instruction should help human beings regain control of the media (and the social communication process) and overcome the 'culture industry'. This would, in effect re-humanise the media, by potentially creating a social dialogue or public sphere.

Citizens need to be active participants in a multi-directional social dialogue. Post-Fordist technologies offers at least the possibilities of creating such an 'electronically-mediated dialogue'. Enzensberger drew attention to the way in which the electronic media offer the framework for such a discourse. People need to (i) understand the media, (ii) understand its possibilities and limitations, (iii) have access to the media, (iv) be able to critically 'read' media messages, (v) be in a position to make an on-going input into a plural media system if they so wish, (vi) recognise the importance of their participation as citizens if democracy is to work, and (vii) believe that their participation does make a difference (i.e., feel empowered). (Louw,1993:11) Within such a democratic system, media workers will facilitate social dialogue, rather than be the experts with sole access to the production of messages.

ALT

Alternative media structures and the roles they have taken on.



ALT

Alternative media structures and the roles they have taken on.

Computer technology and cybernetics have replaced the early 20th century factory production line of standardised goods, made by workers who were each devoted to a specialised part of the whole labour of production. Fordism is one name for this, after Henry Ford and his production line methods of car-making. Post-modernism deconstruct the linearity and rigidity of Fordism most strikingly in electronic media.

couch potato fall out

Branston and Stafford point out that cultural forms can no longer hold up the mirror to reality, since reality itself is full of advertising, film, video games and television images. (Branston & Stafford, 1999:234) Consumption is often emphasised as an active process, indeed as both the equivalent of citizenship and as the major way people construct their identities.

Zapping, the technique of rapidly surfing between television channels using a remote control device, can lay claim to being one of the most characteristically post-modern acts. The channels themselves are treated like some kind of continuous narrative which can be connected together in any order at all, according to the whims of the viewer. Thanks to television, people now live in a three minute culture (the length of most people's attention spans, it is said, shaped by advertising) or they are part of an over visual society, a society of the spectacle - again, owing to the preponderance of television.

going with the flow

The media saturated world is defined as post-modern and is characterised by such terms as 'decentered', 'fluid', 'non-linear' and 'opaque'. Post-modernism contrasts with modernism, the classical world-view that has dominated Western thinking since the Enlightenment. the modernist view of reality is characterised by such terms as 'linear', 'logical', 'hierarchical' and by having depths that can be plumbed and understood. (Turkle, 1999:294)

In 'The Electronic Word', the classicist Richard A. Lanham argues that open-ended screen text subverts traditional fantasies of a master narrative or definitive reading, by presenting the reader with possibilities for changing fonts, zooming in and out and rearranging and replacing text. Lanham puts technology and post-modernism together and concludes that the computer is a '*fulfilment of social thought*'. (Turkle,1999:295)

Post modernism idealises the singularity and heterogeneity required by post-industrial capitalism. It also encourages individualisation which sits comfortably with cocooning but jars with ubuntu since South Africa is not a fully post-modern mediascape. Post-modern capitalism involves processes of decentralisation that presuppose diverse modes of production and pluralized forms of consumption. "*The media play a central role in the creation and maintenance of the culture of heterogeneity*". (Saarinem & Taylor,1994:9) From hypertext and email to video and virtual reality, economic processes are regulated by creating multiple codes for local interests.

hyperreality check

Post-modernism consists of several elements. Probably the most prominent aspects are the fragmented nature of society and the role played by the individual in these events. Another outstanding element is that of the increased reduction between the real world and the world created by the media - i.e.: "hyperreality".

De Beer outlines the most prominent features of post-modernism as follows:

- 1) Post-modernism abolishes the clear cut distinction between 'high culture' and popular or mass culture. Post-modernists often incorporate everyday and often kitsch elements and techniques into art and music to increase its appeal to a wider range of audiences - Andy Warhol, Philip Glass etc. Their main aim is to indicate that they do not respect the strict boundaries between different cultural forms.
- 2) Post-modernism focuses on elements of double coding, playful quotation and irony. As a result post-modernists incorporate elements of past cultural products into present day productions creating intertextuality.

- 3) Post-modernism incorporates a mixture of fact and fantasy, the natural and the supernatural across the borders of different genres. There is an appreciation that audiences are active compilations of viewers from different backgrounds, ages, interests and gender - David Lynch uses different genres in "Twin Peaks".
- 4) Post-modernism mixes different time-frames and orders to create reality, as is evident in the editing of films like Pulp Fiction, Short Cuts, Jesus's Son and Timecode etc.
- 5) Post-modernism incorporates non-western elements with traditionally accepted Western ones. Within the South African context, this was witnessed in the 90s across a wide spectrum of cultural artefacts and media products. Elements of African music and culture were incorporated in advertising, paintings and especially traditional Western styles of music.
- 6) Post-modernism focuses on surface and style instead of depth.
- 7) Post-modernism merges reality with fictional reality, creating hyperreality. Since media is becoming an ever-increasing part of society, elements of the real world are being merged with "media reality". As a result, many viewers find it difficult to distinguish fact from fiction. (De Beer,1998:26)

method in the madness

A key part of post-modernism was often a self-reflexivity: a text makes open reference to its constructedness as a text and does not try to conceal it. Post-modern forms now routinely play with this. Cross over or hybrid forms which level hierarchies of taste are suggested as proof that all distinctions between 'high art' and popular culture have gone or become blurred. Intertextuality describes the variety of ways in which texts interact with other texts and in particular the interdependence between texts rather than their uniqueness according to Andermahr. (Branston & Stafford,1999:237)

Disjointed narrative structures are said to mimic the uncertainties and extreme relativism of post-modernity. In recent science fiction, critics have pointed to the frequency with which the key question will be: is it human or not and if it isn't, does it matter? This, along with the fascination with morphing, android or cyborg characters etc. is said to mirror post-modernisms blurring of the boundaries between the real and the simulated or hyperreal. (Branston & Stafford,1999:238)

It's easy to see how many boundaries between high and low cultural reference have been eroded and such emphases are attractive because of their democratic implications: there's no such thing as bad taste, one can enjoy what one likes; class hierarchies are said to have disappeared here, as everywhere else.

Lyotard: *"We find ourselves in an environment that promises us adventure, power, joy, growth, transformation of ourselves and the world - and, at the same time, that threatens to destroy everything we have, everything we know, everything we are...a unity of disunity: it pours us all into a maelstrom of perpetual disintegration and renewal, of struggle and contradiction, of ambiguity and anguish."* (De Beer, 1998:25)

6 **virtual insanity**

eye

ear

The meaning of virtuality

“Today mediated life equals real life.” (Louw,1993)

If people live in a world of media, it is still important to remember that they do not live in a media world. The media bring the world to them and help to shape that world, but there is still a reality outside of the media. Whitney discerns that it is becoming harder all the time to tell the real world from the media world. (Whitney,1998:4)

Who writes the rules and establishes the laws that govern cyberspace? So far, the regulations in this strange new world are surprisingly few. *“Entering cyberspace is the closest we can come to returning to the Wild West. Console cowboys roam ranges that seem to extend forever. But as feuds break out, fences are built, cut and rebuilt.”* (Saarinem & Taylor,1994: 10) Eventually, government will step in and mess up everything through censorship, legislation and other forms of access control and information monitoring. The wilderness never lasts long - netizens had better enjoy it before it disappears.

appealing to the senses

In an oral culture, all interaction takes place in face to face situations. Whitney does well to point out that a preliterate society has no shared form of fixing or writing messages. (Whitney,1998:38) A print culture is a literate society in which a shared system of inscription or writing exists so that communication can take place outside face to face situations, across time and space. In an electronic culture, communication can transcend time and space without physically moving the same object from one place to another. If oral cultures are largely aural, emphasising hearing and sound, and if print cultures are largely visual, emphasising sight and the ability to read, then the new electronic cultures are multi-sensorial, requiring a constant monitoring and co-ordinating of a wide range of sensory experience and information in order to accurately reflect reality. (Whitney,1998:47)

Electronic media are supplements to the human organism. Computers become the brains, engines the legs, video cameras the eyes, telephones the ears and wires the nerves, veins and arteries of the world organism. The lifeblood of this corporate body is electricity. When the blood flows, the globe becomes a cyborg. (Saarinem & Taylor,1994:5)

defying space and time

Electronic media have combined previously distinct social settings, moved the dividing line between private and public behaviour toward the private and weakened the relationship between social situations and physical places. Wherever one is now - at home, at work, or in a car - one may be in touch and tuned-in to the Western world.

Cyberspace opens a new communicative space in which messages can be exchanged at the speed of light. Within this space, the very processes of conceptualisation are transformed. (Saarinem & Taylor,1994:4) Writing can no longer be understood as the material translation of an immaterial concept but is always already figural. Telewriting is a writing in and with images whose materiality is immaterial.

Email calls into question the opposition and hierarchy between speech and writing. Accordingly, telewriting creates the conditions for a new form of dialogical philosophy. Without the net, it would be impossible for people to talk as they are now doing. Surely dialogues are no longer Platonic, nor are they merely written. What, then, are they?

There is no end to the net and the Western world view it propagates. Every destination is a point of departure and every point of departure is a destination. Apparent terminals are actually relays in a circuit that is forever in motion. In simcult, society's destiny is to live without destination. Saarinem and Taylor warn that people must prevent the absence of destination from creating a sense of purposelessness. (Saarinem & Taylor,1994:12).

removing all traces of itself

The transparent interface is one more manifestation of the need to deny the mediated character of digital technology altogether. To believe that with digital technology society

has passed beyond mediation is also to assert the uniqueness of the present technological moment according to Bolter and Grusin. (Bolter & Grusin,2000:24)

The World Wide Web remediates older forms without challenging them. Its point and click interface allows the developer to reorganise texts and images taken from books, magazines, film or television, but the reorganisation does not call into question the character of a text or the status of an image or its cultural bias.

“This tearing out of context makes us aware of the artificiality of both the digital version and the original clip”. (Bolter & Grusin, 2000:47) The work becomes a mosaic in which one is simultaneously aware of the individual pieces and their new, inappropriate setting.

something old.....something new.....something borrowed.....something blue

In the last few years the conventional wisdom has been that the advent of the new media will hasten the demise of print. That newspapers will die as readers get more information from the Internet; magazines will be overwhelmed by the proliferation of inexpensively-produced, niche-oriented sites and Webzines; bound books will be replaced by digitalized e-books. That the culture of print, in short, will soon be a thing of the past.

But Robert Boynton wonders whether this confuses the content with the attachment we have to a particular kind of container. (Boynton,2000) In fact, a number of recent developments suggest that new media may actually be the salvation of old media - that online newspapers, Webzines, and e-books could preserve and extend the best aspects of the print culture while augmenting it with their various technological advantages. If this is true, then the future of old media is in embracing the new - a development seen most clearly with newspapers.

Although it is too early to predict precisely what will emerge from the collision of new and old media, there are several indications that the encounter will be far more beneficial than was once thought. In the future, most magazines and newspapers will probably lead double lives: the paper product driving readers to the Internet site, and vice versa. And the lines between these media will blur, with each form functioning according to its strengths. A Web site might handle short, quick news, for example, with longer features left for the newspaper or magazine. In the future, lengthy non-fiction journalism might be distributed by Web sites in digitalized form, then printed using POD (print on demand) technology. Sceptics would do well to remember that after all “*hypertext is a thinkertoy*” and at present it is made in the U.S.A. (Saarinem & Taylor,1994:8)

the double edged sword

Cyberpunk fiction is characterised by its articulation of technology as a powerful narrative force that qualifies and even obliterates the role of individual and collective human agency as the focus of fictional events. Cyberpunk's critics generally agree that this technological force is given an ambivalent valence: technology is both the mechanism by which post-political multinational corporate power dominates the lives of humans and the means of those humans' empowerment and resistance. The critics then read ambivalence in one of two ways: either as an inability to imagine effective forms of political opposition and thus as a capitulation to extant forms of domination; or as a radical and liberatory envisioning of a cyborg human subjectivity.

In Kellner's assessment "*cyberpunk fiction offers an unflinching and realistic look at the powers that structure our experience and the status of the human being as the infrastructure of society shifts from industry and production to a media and information culture, in the new era of technocapitalism*". (Kellner, 1995: 319) The world of cyberpunk is a high tech world where information is the most desired commodity, where computers and cyberspace provide access to new realms of experience, where drugs , cloning and implants produce new implosions of human and technology.

reality bytes

The term cyberspace was first used by Gibson in his 1982 short story "Burning Chrome" to refer to a computer generated virtual reality. It is now a common term that designates various kinds of computer generated spaces - e.g.: various information services and communication systems, virtual reality systems. The concept was embodied in the 1982 movie *Tron*, in which the characters entered into computers for adventures in computerland. The television series *Max Headroom* drew on the concept as did Hollywood films like 'The Lawnmower Man' and 'The Ghost in the Machine'. Cyberspace is defined by Gibson in *Neuromancer* as: "*A consensual hallucination experienced daily by billions of legitimate operators in every nation...a graphic representation of data abstracted from the banks of every computer in the human*

system. Unthinkable complexity. Lines of light ranged in the nonspace of the mind, clusters and constellation of data. Like city lights receding..." (Kellner,1995:309)

"We are standing on the brink of the digitisation of everything" **William Gibson**

As it becomes clear that the Internet embodies Gibson's matrix and that the microprocessor is the key to humanity's interaction within it, vital questions emerge: Are humans to fall victim to the dark Neuromancer vision of cyberspace? Or can one tap into the technology's awesome power to build an open, enlightened, co-operative world-wide networked community? Gibson's dark vision of the matrix is haunting. Will the future of cyberspace be a dark and dehumanising experience, or a freeing and fantastical exploratory journey? The decision is ours.

"Strange Days" (indeed)

William Gibson in his novel "Neuromancer" grasped that Virtual Reality is about the definition of the self and the relationship of the body to the world. The theme is nowhere more successfully pursued than in 'Strange Days' and especially in a disturbing scene in which a victim is made to wear a wire while she is raped and murdered by an assailant who is also wired.

'Strange Days' arrived on the screen at a time when there was a certain panic circulating within the mass media and pop culture, associated in large part with the approaching end of the millennium and with the implicit fear that this will be the last millennium. Such apocalypticism is nothing new in human culture, and has characterised many fin de siecle movements as the centuries change.

vicarious pleasures

The plot flows as follows: a sleazy hustler named Lenny (Ralph Fiennes) sells state-of-the-art CD-ROMS that can be plugged directly into the brain of the buyer, enabling him or her to "wire trip" into a fantasy that makes contemporary versions of virtual reality

look crude. Lenny, a disaffected policeman, represents the individual who has thrown in the towel with all social institutions, a concept that has an increased sense of legitimacy in current narratives. His stumbling upon a murder plot via his CD sales and the assistance from his black girlfriend (Angela Bassett) are incidental to the picture's holocaustal atmosphere. A deluge of alternative techno-rock saturates the soundtrack, as viewers are reminded regularly of the imminent approach of the Big Event-the party to end all parties that will usher in the next century.

"It's the end of the world," says Lenny's pal Max. "Everything's been done, every kind of music, every government, every breakfast food. We've used it all up." (Kroll,1995)

For Kroll, Bigelow comes closer than any other filmmaker to turning movies into a virtual reality trip. In "Strange Days," virtual reality has become a digital drug, mainlined straight to the brain through a SQUID, a kind of electronic hairnet that records an individual's sensations onto discs. SQUID "playback" has become the ultimate vicarious experience: *"Feel it, see it. This is a piece of someone's life,"* pitches Lenny Nero (Ralph Fiennes), an ex-cop who's become a SQUID pusher.

The technology takes some explaining. But Lenny is a silver-tongued salesman. Advertising himself as *"your priest, your shrink, your Santa Claus of the unconscious,"* he says, *"This is not like television only better. This is somebody's life straight from the cerebral cortex. Uncut. It's about the stuff you can't have."* Making his pitch to a nervous client, he asks: *"Do you want a girl? Do you want two girls? Maybe you want to be a girl. Maybe you want a nun to tie you up."* (Johnson,1995)

double logic

Bolter and Grusin contend that if the ultimate purpose of media is indeed to transfer sense experiences from one person to another, the wire threatens to make all media obsolete. (Bolter & Grusin,2000:3) In this media-filled world, the wire itself is the ultimate mediating technology, despite - or indeed because of - the fact that the wire is designed to efface itself, to disappear from the user's consciousness. "Strange Days" captures the ambivalent and contradictory ways in which new digital media impact on culture today. The film projects the current cultural moment with great clarity. The wire

is just a fanciful extrapolation of contemporary virtual reality, with its goal of unmediated visual experience.

In addressing Western, post-industrial culture's contradictory imperatives for immediacy and hypermediacy, this film demonstrates what Bolter and Grusin call the double logic of remediation. Westernized culture wants both to multiply its media and to erase all traces of mediation: ideally it wants to erase its media in the very act of multiplying them. (Bolter & Grusin,2000:5)

there's no escape

"What is this need we have to experience life vicariously?" Bigelow asks. "Does it mean we find our own lives so mundane we have to escape them? Does this create a kind of passivity ... a 'distanciation,' a constantly mediated view of the world through television, the press, or cinematic experience as opposed to genuine experience?"

(Sterritt,1995). Perhaps the most controversial scene in "Strange Days" is a vicious murder vicariously witnessed by the hero - and by the viewer - as recorded on a sensory "clip" by the killer himself. Bigelow acknowledges it's a horrifying episode, but insists it serves a positive purpose. *"My challenge was to approach it in as cold and honest a light as I could,"* she says. Then why include such a segment at all? *"Because knowledge is power,"* the filmmaker replies. *"The answer is not to shield one's vision and cut oneself off from awareness. There's nothing more dangerous than lack of awareness."* (Sterritt,1995)

"Strange Days" is not really a prediction about the future, but a description of Western culture's current fascination with both transparent and hypermediated technologies of representation. For Bolter and Grusin, the true novelty would be a new medium that did not refer for its meaning to other media at all. (Bolter & Grusin,2000:271) Ideally, it would not contextualize itself in a post colonial guise either. In a purely Western setting, such mediation without remediation seems to be impossible. The prognosis is more positive in a non-Western, ubuntu-based culture, particularly an emerging democracy.

The reader as media manager

hunter-gathering again...

Many of the features of the ‘information age’ make netizens resemble the most primitive of social and political form: the hunting and gathering society. As nomadic peoples, hunters and gatherers have no loyal relationship to territory. They, too have little “sense of place”; specific activities and behaviours are not tightly fixed to specific physical settings. In hunting and gathering societies play and work often take place in the same sphere and involve similar activities. Similarly, work and play have begun to merge in the electronic age.

One way to characterise post-modern society, then, is as hunters and gatherers of an information age. The shared sphere of interaction is informational rather than physical, but it leads to a similar inability to distinguish clearly between gender, age and hierarchical statuses. People bypass many previous generations’ dependence on physical location as a prime determinant of access to people and information. This advanced technological stage allows people to hunt and gather information rather than food. Like hunters and gatherers, who take for granted the abundance of food “out there” and therefore only hunt and gather enough to consume immediately, people are increasingly becoming a “subsistence information society”. (Meyrowitz, 1999:107)

Why are people compelled to hunt and gather information in the first place? This need argued Gleick is instinctive, “*Everytime we curse the overflowing in-box and pass another chain-mail joke along, we expose a disparity between how we feel and how we act*”. (Gleick, 1999:92) People like email. People like the connectedness. The human need for information on demand is as primitive an instinct as any animal can have. It is the way of keeping contact with someone, anyone, who will reassure one that one is not alone.

through the looking glass

At one level, the computer is a tool. It helps people write, keep track of their accounts and communicate with others. Beyond this, the computer offers people both new models of minds and a new medium on which to project their ideas and fantasies. Most recently, the computer has become even more than tool and mirror. Turkle believes people are able to step through the looking glass. Netizens are learning to live in virtual worlds. (Turkle,1999:287) People may find themselves alone as they navigate personal oceans, unravel virtual mysteries and engineer virtual skyscrapers. But increasingly, when they step through the looking glass, other people are there as well.

As human beings becoming increasingly intertwined with the technology and with each other via the technology, old distinctions between what is specifically human and specifically technological become more complex. Turkle asks a rather question: "*Are we living life on the screen or life in the screen ?*" (Turkle,1999:298) These new technologically enmeshed relationships oblige one to ask to what extent people have become cyborgs, transgressive mixtures of biology, technology and code. The traditional distance between people and machines has become harder to maintain.

People's responses show that media are more than just tools. Media are treated politely, they can invade body space, they can have personalities that match one's own, they can be a team-mate and they can elicit gender, class and national stereotypes, amongst other things. What's more dangerous is the fact that this virtuality is a powerful means of spreading the neo-colonial virus far and wide. Media evoke emotional responses, demand attention, threaten us, influence memories and change ideas of what is natural. As such Reeves and Nass concluded that media are full participants in the social and natural worlds. (Reeves & Nass,1998:251)

Transferring hope from a psychedelic to a technological revolution, Timothy Leary preaches: "*Turn on. Boot up. Download.*" (Saarinem & Taylor,1994:6) One would do well to add "*and be critical*" to Leary's dictum.

disembodiment

According to Rheingold :*"The ability to radically and compelling change one's body-image is bound to have a deep psychological effect, calling into question just what you consider yourself to be."*

(Bolter & Grusin,2000:252)

People see themselves today in and through their available media, Bolter and Grusin assert. (Bolter & Grusin,2000:231) New media offer new opportunities for self-definition. In a virtual environment, people have the freedom to alter themselves by altering their point of view and to empathise with others by occupying their point of view.

The self is expressed in its email affiliations is not to say that the self is disembodied but that it is embodied in a particular mediated form. There is an increasingly complicated relationship between the body and technology in contemporary culture. *"Contemporary culture delights in confusing or breaking down the boundaries between the body and the world and the body and technology."*(Bolter & Grusin,2000:237)

For Lanier, the immediacy of Virtual Reality (VR) makes possible a new kind of empathy. (Bolter & Grusin,2000:246) Empathy is so highly regarded today as a means of knowing presumably because empathy is so fundamental to being human. VR enables the viewer to control the placement and duration of each shot and thus to manipulate her own perspective. If in hypertext the reader takes on some of the characteristics traditionally assigned to the author, in VR the viewer becomes something like a film director and this shift of control enables the viewer to explore the virtual space as she will. *"VR threatens to detach the user from her body"*. (Bolter & Grusin,2000:251)

Perhaps Rotzer is right in arguing that precisely because a sense of touch is hard to integrate into new digital media, it will be regarded as the privileged sensation. (Bolter & Grusin,2000:253) A sense of presence of oneself to others and of the self to itself comes not through immediate visual perception, as it does in virtual reality but through the feeling of being connected to others through the Internet. At a time like this, it helps to remember that, *"the construction of the self through a medium is nothing new."* (Bolter & Grusin,2000: 261)

reader / surfer / both ?

Research suggests that the public, especially younger audiences who have grown up with the Internet, is increasingly finding value in this diversity of news voices. One study has shown that as of 1998 some 36 million persons in the US (including 30 per cent of 18 to 29-year-olds, up from just seven per cent in 1995) look to online sources for news each week, and that 77 per cent of those aged 18-29 "*like having so many sources to chose from.*" (Samuelson,1998) In contrast, older age groups less accustomed to interactive media are not so likely to find this diversity appealing (70 per cent of those aged 30 to 49, 64 per cent of those aged 50 to 64 and 52 per cent of over 65s). It's still too early to tell just what impact this increasing use of online news is having on the public.

Suppose people progressively take more and more news from their computers; they call up headlines, commentary or movie reviews between e-mails at work or games at home. Will fewer people then want newspapers? Already readership has eroded. Between 1970 and 1997 the share of adults who read a daily paper slipped from 78 to 59 percent. Or suppose people can customise their papers electronically. One preselects what one wants - say, six top national and global stories, four top local stories, two favourite columnists, seven stock prices, the baseball standings and one's horoscope. It's zapped to one's home and printed on 8-by-11 paper. Is this still a newspaper?

good news for reporters

John Pavlik is optimistic that the Internet not only makes possible a more engaging form of journalism; it also puts greater control in the hands of the audience. (Pavlik,2000) The facts presented need be less filtered by journalists; the public can draw its own conclusions as to their meaning. In other words, journalists online can increasingly let the facts speak for themselves. Is this not one of the most long-cherished goals of journalism? On the flipside, there is a danger that the calibre of journalism will be less accurate and analytical and therefore less responsible to the public.

The Internet permits much greater customisation of news. Because of its ability to enable on-demand media, as well as audience segmentation, the Internet permits audiences and news organisations to provide increasingly personalised news. This news

however is chiefly told from a Western point of view. Pavlik underlines that this personalization is a double-edged sword. Although it can permit audiences to get just the news they want, such as financial news customised to their own investment portfolio, it can also increase the level of audience fragmentation already rampant in the media. (Pavlik,2000) In the process, it perpetuates neo-colonialism too. More significantly for non-Western media players, it increases their alienation from the world arena by being essentially a Western communication tool.

The writer as webmaster

Writing for the Internet is a whole other sport, so much so that Nielsen proposed guidelines for catering for Internet users, guidelines that came to describe more and more of the Internet reading experience. James Gleick outlines them; "*highlighted keywords, bulleted lists, frequent subheadings and paragraphs containing exactly one idea. Nothing sticky enough to slow the reader's headlong slide.*" (Gleick,1999)

a new writing implement

In "Power Journalism" Lisa Miller points out the many uses of the Internet for writers. (Miller,1998:13) For journalists, cyberspace has become one more place to contact sources, carry out interviews and gather information for stories. However, Miller is quick to point out that one can't always find what one needs online. (Miller,1998:20) All the information in the world is not there. And online research does not eliminate the need to do more traditional kinds of reporting. It's just one more way to get at the truth of the stories one is trying to report and write, says Miller. When news breaks or an interesting story surfaces these days, many journalists head to the World Wide Web.

pandering to personalisation

Journalism will become a smaller and smaller part of an ever-expanding global media and communications system in Katherine Fulton's view. (Fulton,2000) That system in turn will become the infosphere in which we live, play, and work. "Media" will be where one gets news, get entertained, get educated, and get money. What used to be separate and distinct - the elements of a package called a newspaper or a television network or a university education - will be unbundled and seamlessly interwoven into the texture of peoples' lives.

In this environment, what matters is what one's needs are and how well they are met - not necessarily who meets them, Fulton asserts. (Fulton,2000) People need banking, but they don't necessarily need banks. People need news and information of all kinds, but they don't necessarily need newspapers or television as it is known today.

multimediamen/women

Todd Oppenheimer has a vision of tomorrow's journalist: the reporters (the ones equipped with the multimedia kits) will come to their editors and say, "*Here are the still photos we need to shoot, here's the video we need, here's the audio to record, here are some new ways to illustrate this information, and here's my script.*"

(Oppenheimer,1993) Editors will have to be equally adept. "*It's definitely a new way of editing,*" Oppenheimer said one day, after spending several weeks shooting video interviews, editing the transcripts, creating related charts and databanks, and choosing a "stream" of still photos and voice-overs. "*You have to care about and have a sense of each medium.*" For instance: "*What picture works with the sound of that voice?*" (Oppenheimer,1993)

Once the biggest technology obstacles are overcome, multimedia might well bring society at least three enlightening changes the way Oppenheimer sees it. First, tomorrow's media-savvy children - those impatient with today's books and one-dimensional "passive television" - might not get dumbed down after all. It has been said that a society's morality is directly related to its attention span. That's a frightening concept. But as multimedia productions develop, their creators will steadily invent new ways to attract children's attention, perhaps luring them into some thoughtful material.

Second, Oppenheimer believes that the multimedia revolution may broaden the nature of journalistic judgement. Since space is not a significant constraint in the electronic world, multiple angles of a story can now be developed, each "chunked" into a variety of media forms. Suddenly, the best journalists may no longer be those who know how to limit a story's focus, but those who can expand it imaginatively.

Third, such limitless space could also reduce the prevalence of biased reporting. Since just about anyone can say anything in virtuality, the medium can just as easily foster bias and disseminate it even more widely. Every reporter who has unfairly slanted a story can

recall how carefully some facts had to be excluded and the remainder laid out with great craftiness. In multimedia treatments, that control is gone - viewers are now in command. So, for example, if Oppenheimer tried to inaccurately suggest there is little public support for a particular change in health care, a careful user of the interactive poll would catch him red-handed. *"The seams will show,"* says Oppenheimer, smugly. *"Bias may be harder to pull off."* (Oppenheimer,1993)

dancing to the cyberbeat

Oppenheimer hopes that in time the entire array of on-line participants will develop into a new kind of reporting team, producing stories that are seen less as edicts and more as conversations. (Oppenheimer,1996) For instance, today's version of "the story" might be considered the opening remark in an ongoing discussion; the next piece of the conversation would be the readers' responses, which could contribute not only additional viewpoints but also valuable facts and leads for everyone to follow. People read the results, then respond by publishing again. On and on it goes. After all, the on-line world, for all its rough spots, has created quite a hurricane, which is now slamming against Big Media's crusty, hierarchical authority. If one swims with the rising tide rather than fights it, one will probably notice the undercurrents more quickly, Oppenheimer claims. (Oppenheimer,1996) And, when people are restless or anxious to solve particular civic problems, perhaps these on-line networks will help us hear their concerns more precisely, and respond with more helpful kinds of information.

It's Oppenheimer's hope that the news gurus of tomorrow will be those who can redefine responsibility - theirs and that of their readers. (Oppenheimer,1996) If their material is framed in a way that can entertain this increasingly restless citizenry, and that encourages them to entertain, inform, and help each other, maybe then they can hold a crowd on the sidewalks of cyberspace.

real-time renaissance

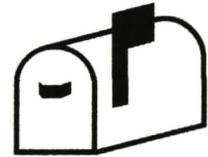
What is the role of the journalist in the new, direct-access media system? Is the journalist obsolete? Pavlik believes not. (Pavlik, 2000) He believes that in an online

world where there is an abundance, in many cases an over-abundance, of information the role of the journalist becomes more important than ever. But that role must change.

Journalists must amplify their role as sense-makers, helping direct the public to reliable information, and pointing out when certain online information should be questioned because of the partial nature of its source. Journalists in the digital age must be even more zealous in their pursuit of the truth, of balance and fairness. As regards ubuntu, journalism's main role is communal, making available more information and covering the issues at grass roots level thus empowering Africans to help each other and by extension their communities. These values are not necessarily part of the tradition of other "content" providers who now have a ready-to-use medium to reach a global audience.

In the age of online digital media, entrepreneurial journalists and journalism organisations must seek new ways to re-engage an increasingly global (non-Western) public without sacrificing any of the traditional newsroom values of accuracy, fact-checking, use of reliable sources and independence from commercial, governmental and other influences. If it can succeed in striking this balance, journalism will enjoy a renaissance in the 21st century, and society will be its beneficiary according to Pavlik. (Pavlik, 2000) A failure to find this balance can only lead to the collapse of impartial journalism and the loss of reliable information upon which all cultures, particularly the newly democratic, rely for self-governance.

CTRL



The market forces behind the information order.



CTRL

The market forces behind the information order.

what's all the hype about?

When too many dollars chase too few goods, one gets inflation. Too many reporters chase too few real stories, one gets news inflation, also known as hype. It's an old problem. Jonathan Alter points out that exactly a century ago, William Randolph Hearst helped start a war with Spain by hyping stories to promote his newspapers. Today people are better educated, more scrupulous and more willing to 'fess up than the journalists of 1898, but the pressures to compete and promote are even worse in our 24-hour news cycle. The consequences of that run deeper than the recent headlines of media malfeasance claims Alter. (Alter,2000)

In the US the biggest problem in journalism is not a handful of frauds and incompetents, though they should be drummed out. It's the channel-flipping factor, says Alter. And he may be on to something. The news media are all so terrified of losing audience that they're rapidly morphing into an entertainment medium. The signs are everywhere. State capitals are where the power is, but coverage of them is down. Too boring, apparently. General Motors workers go on strike, and the questions mount. But all the labour reporters have long since been put out to pasture--or transferred to sexier beats. Consistent foreign coverage? Please. India's intention to test nukes was a matter of public record last year, and even top US newspapers ignored it.

content or commerce?

New media create unique issues because of the possibilities in the technology. Sites not only put related advertising adjacent to articles, but they can embed advertising within an article. Either way, linking articles to commerce is far more immediate and powerful online. While a print advertisement requires one to visit a store to make a purchase,

online one can simply move one's wrist slightly to buy. *"Just because you can make such links, doesn't mean you should,"* says Swisher. (McNamara,2000)

Should *The New York Times* on the Web include a link to Barnes & Noble directly below a book review asks Tracy McNamara? (McNamara, 2000) Should *Newstream.com* sandwich a news report on Clinton's Memorial Day speech between a Ford press release and an advertisement for their own company? Should *Slate* magazine put a paid advertisement - labelled as such - in its list of the day's stories? Should Yahoo! FinanceVision pop up an advertising window when one researches financial news through the Yahoo! site? Should *Salon's* online shop feature music CDs for sale through an online store that features *Salon's* own album reviews? Should *Time.com* review a Panasonic digital camera--complete with picture and price--with a link to Panasonic's online store?

Still, it is more difficult for readers to recognise the line between commerce and content online than in print, McNamara contends. Visual clues have been developed over time in print; online, people are learning them rapidly. For this reason disclosure is essential, according to Rich Jaroslovsky, managing editor of *The Wall Street Journal's* Web site. *"The real issue is whether or not these sites are playing fair with their users,"* he says, *"by making clear when content is really an advertisement."* Les Blatt, managing editor of *Newstream.com* says, *"It's largely a matter of making clear where the information on your site comes from."* (McNamara,2000)

taking our wares to the media market

De Beer, foresees that *"if global trends take their course in South Africa, much of next century's media will be taken up with global entertainment or infotainment on the one hand and local news on the other"*. (De Beer,1998:500) Thanks to the IBA quotas, local content will have been given a boost, but will never be sufficient to supply the hungry appetites of 24 hour media operators. At the same time, information will become more specialised and available in more streamlined vehicles.

Advertising, the lifeblood of much media, will have expanded enormously De Beer predicts, primarily as the result of increased commerce in general, a large black middle class in particular and more differentiated audience segmentation. (De Beer,1998:500) This is significant because much of the media next century will be free, which is to say that advertising will foot the bill. This portent of media proliferation does not mean that the current “information poor” are in for a cornucopia. The media will continue to serve those of greatest interest to advertisers.

Blocking this market driven media economy will deprive South Africa of investment and information exposure and therefore of key ingredients for the country’s performance within the new international economy. In short and barring moves to delay the inevitable, South Africa’s media is destined to become part of the global media. The real challenge will be whether South Africa-originated media products in the next century prove as popular internationally as they will be locally.

10 **ecommunication = ecommerce** *mechanical* *organic*

Marketing the news, the reader as consumer, the media as Westerniser

“People don’t want nationalism or soil; they want satellites and Sony”

Ohmae (Jones,1999)

west is the way to go

Media critic Douglas Kellner maintains that people in the industrialised world are increasingly living in a media culture *“in which images, sounds and spectacles help produce the fabric of everyday life...providing the materials out of which people forge their very identities.”* (Stanbridge,1999:53) The increasing monopolisation and commodification of culture by an increasingly smaller number of primarily Western media providers raises concerns as to the nature of the images and meanings being globally circulated. Cultural commentators debate endlessly whether the emergence of a ‘global culture’- with the hallmarks of homogenisation and convergence - is obliterating local cultures, creating in its wake mirrors of American consumer society. A number of commentators point out that the current panic over American cultural imperialism tends to overlook the fact that the globalisation of communication is only the most recent of a series of cultural encounters.

“I am what I buy.”

(Saarinem & Taylor,1994:4)

The commonality of globalization is that every culture is a hybrid. Every culture remains different insofar as it is a variant of a common global culture. Globalization is a force of hybridisation, humanity’s commonality is that people are different. This theory is apparent to anyone who travels. Entering any big city around the world at first offers a common visual experience: skyscraper, Coca Cola signs, Benetton store, McDonald’s restaurants and CNN on cable. Many of the pieces that make up the kaleidoscope that is a city are universal.

going global

Globalisation affects three areas of society according to Jones. Firstly, in the economic sphere there has been a tremendous intensification of economic competition around the production, exchange, distribution and consumption of goods and services. Secondly, the globalisation process affects the political sphere. It is interesting to note that globalisation can have two consequences as far as nationalism is concerned. First, the promotion of global capitalism may weaken national boundaries. Second, nationalism may actually be strengthened as a result of globalisation. The third area to concentrate on is the relationship between globalisation and culture. (Jones,1995:220)

Waters outlines the major signs of global culture. For him these signs are inextricably linked to technological change:

- 1) **Miniaturisation:** this refers to a reduction in the size of media-related machines, partly in connection with Japanese design criteria.
- 2) **Personalisation:** historically there has been a general reduction in the size of the audience - from theatre audience, to families for television and individuals for personal computers.
- 3) **Integration:** here various technologies become integrated as they are centred on the development of the microchip.
- 4) **Diffusion:** access to mass media technologies is becoming widespread with regard to reception and transmission. As a consequence of cheaper receivers and technological advances in space and fibre-optics, increasing numbers of people have access to media products and are faced with an increasing range of choice.
- 5) **Autonomisation:** concern about passive audiences has arisen as more and more people gain access to cable and satellite television. (Jones,1995:222-3)

Levi's, Marlboro, Coca Cola & McDonald's for all

Almost all of this technology is the product of advanced capitalist societies, as is much of the content and this is having important effects on globalisation and culture. It exports the ideology of consumerism. National boundaries are dissolving as we increasingly learn to look at the world through global spectacles. The world is becoming media-saturated and people are able to experience world events simultaneously. Technology connects people separated by great distances into communities of interest or value-commitment, producing simulated communities.

develops during the initial reconstructive phase will have a profound impact on the nature of the emergent social order.

South Africa needs to concern itself with producing a population able to operate within an information economy i.e. media skills and media literacy are required. The teaching of media becomes a development issue in a post-Fordist era. In examining all aspects of cultural production and consumption, including media and the teaching of media, Louw asks two fundamental and interrelated questions: “*Who benefits? And who loses?*” (Louw,1993:9) At heart, these are questions of power and context; and questions of how power affects cultural meanings and practices. If the objective is to develop a post-Fordist South African information economy in which all citizens are empowered through public spheres, then ‘critical’ and ‘aware’ media producers and users are required.

12 **cybercapital**

composition

improvisation

Information as a valuable commodity

mail bonding

In the late 80s the Internet was doubling its number of users every year. By 1993 it was indicated that total connectivity was growing by 8% per month, while traffic was growing by 20% per month. In the same period, people in more than 130 countries world-wide could be reached by electronic mail. The total number of email users in 93 was estimated at 20 million, with some 1800 000 computer hosts. Today it is estimated that the Internet has over 20 million users. More optimistic commentators, on the other hand, point towards an estimate of closer to 60 million people, with more than 4000 news groups already available on the network. (De Beer,1998:476)

the need to know

Information has assumed its place beside petroleum, strategic metals and uranium as an international resource to be bartered, boycotted and blackmailed. Mowlana observes that *“megabyte streams of digitalized data have become the source of power in our information-based society”*. (Mowlana, 1997:7) Information means power and its manipulation can have far-reaching effects on economic, social and political development.

The global economy is now truly developing into an information-based economy. Such development and its effects include according to Mowlana: the increasing flow of information and information-based products and services among nations ; the growing economic importance of information and related products and services within and between nations; the increasing cultural and political significance of information and related products and services; the emergence of new information-based products and services that do not correspond to traditional categories; the underlying difficulty of enforcing intellectual property rights on the international level and the growing

convergence of international intellectual property issues with other international issues. (Mowlana,1997:15)

Although the economic implications of modern communication technologies are often discussed within the context of modern urban settings, their impact on rural areas should not be ignored. Economic development in rural areas will not only affect national economic performance, it will also help determine how well a nation fares in an increasingly competitive global economy.

supply & demand

McLuhan (1964) comments on technologies power to seemingly create a demand for itself: *"This power of technology to create its own world of demand is not independent of technology being first an extension of our bodies and senses. When we are deprived of our sense of sight, the other senses take up the role of sight in some degree. But the need to use the senses that are available is as insistent as breathing --a fact that makes sense of the urge to keep radio and television going more or less continuously."* (McLuhan,1964:pp. 67-68)

The "economic" aspects of technology are summarised by McLuhan as follows: *"Many people have begun to look on the whole of society as a single unified machine for creating wealth. . . . But the peculiar and abstract manipulation of information as a means of creating wealth is no longer a monopoly of the stockbroker. It is now shared by every engineer and by the entire communications industries. With electricity as energiser and synchroniser, all aspects of production, consumption and organisation became incidental to communications. The very idea of communication as interplay is inherent in the electrical, which combines both energy and information in its intensive manifold."* (McLuhan,1964:p. 354)

Marketing and consumption tend to become one with learning, enlightenment, and the intake of information. This is all part of the electronic implosion that now follows or succeeds the centuries of explosion and increasing specialisation. The electronic age is literally one of illumination. Just as light is at once energy and information, so electronic automation unites production, consumption, and learning in an inextricable process.

ESC

What are the consequences of mediation ?

net worth

ESC

net worth

What are the consequences of mediation ?

net effect

De Beer predicts that the Internet will be the primary communications medium for a computerised society, it will become more use-friendly, other languages will start to feature, consequently, the English monopoly will end, the Internet will gain popularity in developing countries, interactive television and computer services will take off, computers with the intelligence to identify handwriting and voice commands will be available, there will be quicker and cheaper access to increasing amounts of information and smaller, portable communication media with the ability to host a variety of products and services in one will be within reach. (De Beer, 1998:478)

To resist such electronic technology is as futile as trying to turn back the tides. It has already swept over the world in ways people have yet to realise. It is not a question of whether to accept or reject this new world but of who is going to use it and how.

home is where the click is

In "Clicking", Faith Popcorn, the marketing guru, comes up with some insightful ideas on the future impact of technology on people's lives. (Popcorn & Marigold, 1997:30) She sees a number of key trends with regard to the predominance electronic media. A major trend for her is cocooning. When the term was first coined, Popcorn's team talked a lot about hunkering down, ordering in and watching their favourite shows on television. Cocooning conjured up warm images of hanging out. Nestling. Cuddling. Enjoying oneself in one's own home. Clicking with those one loves. Whether one is laying low from being scared or being stressed, from being a turtle or being a couch potato, the future of cocooning is still driving people home. For home is where the heart is. And home is definitely where the click is. (Popcorn & Marigold, 1997:63)

gathering of the clans

Clanning refers to the inclination to join up, belong to, hang out with groups of like kinds, providing a secure feeling that one's own belief systems will somehow be validated by consensus. (Popcorn & Marigold, 1997:75) Virtual Clanning refers to seeking these conditions in cyberspace. These fine lines pulsing with information are revolutionising the way we network. Everybody from Madonna who reads "bedtime stories" to Keith Richards, to the Dalai Lama has scooted onto the online ramp of the information superhighway. In fact, the over abundance of users has created the biggest annoyance, netlag, better known as a traffic jam.

The main online attractions, by far, are the interactive chat channels and news groups and email. What's it like to communicate online? CyberClanners say its the ultimate click. Popcorn explains their reasoning : "*in an age rife with prejudice and hate, online communication is a nobler, purer expression. It's not about what you look like, how you dress or where you're from. It's all about what you say. And how you say it.*" (Popcorn & Marigold, 1997:76)

Support. Connection. Intimacy. Healing. Conscious choice. Compatibility. The language of Clanning indicates that as a culture people are yearning to click into something more. Something they haven't found in their cocoons. "*The need for community is like a gravitational pull.*" (Popcorn & Marigold, 1997:77) In the next decade, this pull is only going to become stronger and more pronounced.

deteching

99 Lives is a new look at the modern motto of "Too Fast a Pace, Too Little Time" which forces people to assume multiple roles in order to cope with busy, high tech lives. (Popcorn & Marigold, 1997: 207) What's new and 99 Live-ish about today is how people are coping with what sociologists are calling their time-compressed lifestyles. These days no one blinks twice at the beep-beep of pocket databank organisers or stares at people who walk down the street barking orders into pocket phones. In light of this, Popcorn deduces "*no wonder we feel a craving for downtime, private time - unbuzzed,*

unbothered, unbewildered time. But finding peace of mind isn't easy when you can be reached 24 hours, day and night, night and day." (Popcorn & Marigold,1997:215)

If people are going to keep their sanity, the key challenges in the next years will be how to manage information and how to manage communication tools. There are already consulting companies with names like Internet Navigators and Network Buddies that are starting to Click into helping steer people along the information superhighway. The best of the new Line Consultants will not only help one make connections but will also give guidelines to help one switch off and go back to normal "off-line" life. Popcorn is calling this necessary new assistance DeTeching, turning off the machines. (Popcorn & Marigold,1997:216)

time is of the essence

In "Faster" James Gleick examines another major trend - "*The acceleration of everything*". Society has reached the epoch of the nanosecond. This is the heyday of speed. "*Speed is the form of ecstasy the technical revolution has bestowed on man*" laments Milan Kundera. (Gleick,1999:6) "*Technology has been a rapid heartbeat, compressing housework, travel, entertainment, squeezing more and more into the allotted span*" notes the social historian Theodore Zeldin - "*Nobody expected that it would create the feeling that life moves too fast.*" (Gleick,1999:11)

Gleick is quick to see that "*multitasking is the concomitant major trend arising from the increasing need for speed.*" (Gleick,1999:169) It seems natural to recoil from this simultaneous fragmentation and overloading of human attention. Nothing could be more revealing of the transformation of human sensibility over the past century than this widespread unwillingness to settle for soaking up, in single-task fashion, the dynamic flow of sound and picture coming from a television screen. Is any one channel, in itself, monotonous? Marshall McLuhan failed to predict this: the medium of television seemed cool and all-absorbing to him, so different from the experience available to us a generation later. For McLuhan who announced that the medium was the message, television was a black and white, unitary system. McLuhan did not surf with remote control. When the pace of sights and sounds coming from the screen leaves one hungry,

people cope by adding layers. Of course, they multitask, watch television and eat and leaf through a magazine and do needlepoint. *"It turns out that multitasking has been our destiny all along - not killing time, not doing time but mastering time"*, Gleick concludes. (Gleick,1999:279)

connecting the continent

Increasingly South Africans are likely to join the world in surfing the Internet. At the moment, though, the primary need in large parts of the country is to provide people with straightforward telecommunication products and services. Many South Africans take these for granted, but there are millions of others who still do not have access to a reliable telephone service at a reasonable price and within easy reach. In an attempt to alleviate this situation, Telkom made a commitment to the World Trade Organisation to install an additional 1,8 million telephone lines by 2002. Despite these circumstances there are currently about 34 computers available per 1000 citizens in the country. While visiting South Africa in 97, Bill Gates, Chairman of Microsoft, indicated that this country is currently Microsoft's 27th biggest market.

In 1999, 53 out of 54 countries and territories in Africa had Internet access in the capital cities. In the space of 3 years, 6 countries connected to the Internet and 11 countries increased Internet connectivity from dial-up email hosts to more than 64Kbps. Clearly other African countries realise the importance of getting connected and are also doing something constructive about it.

Unlike many African countries, South Africa enjoys a well-developed communication infrastructure, but it is situated at the bottom of an economically struggling continent with a particularly poor communication infrastructure and poor prospects of improvement. De Beer warns that *"unless South Africa manages to align itself with at least one or more of the emerging economic power blocs, it could find itself excluded from a rapidly advancing world"* (De Beer,1998:497) The solution is simple and practical:

1) Government and the private sector need to collaborate to wire up Africa. A single point of connection in an institution then allows for innovative ways of distributing information taken off the Internet by traditional means.

- 2) Government - private sector initiatives should include tax deductions for companies which wire public institutions and donate computers.
- 3) Educational institutions which train information technology personnel should enjoy support from the information technology industry.
- 4) Non-governmental organisations local and international, including the UN, should include support for Internet connectivity and the purchasing of the necessary hardware as part of their development aid. (Kole,1999)

shut down.....

Working from the premise that there is a symbiotic relationship between ubuntu and democracy in the South African context and a direct correlation between personalisation and cocooning in a post industrial, Western context, it is possible to predict what the effect of personalisation will be on this newly emergent democracy. As this thesis reveals, cocooning and ubuntu grow organically on South African soil because of its unique position as part first and part third world and it's status as an emergent democracy and an emerging market. However, ubuntu is by far the more deeply determined societal pattern. Therefore cocooning will be more like the detail on this broader pattern. Personalisation of the media can actually foster greater participation and strengthen the spirit of ubuntu in the right hands, thus helping to build a sense of community, nationality and ultimately, democracy. One thing is for sure though, those who embrace the change will benefit:

“To resist the possibilities opened by the mediatrix is to leave this extraordinary technology in the hands of others”

(Saarinem & Taylor, 1994:1)

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