

ANTENNA

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High Profile for Communications at SHOT Conference

The annual meeting of the Society for the History of Technology was held in Wilmington, Delaware on October 20-23, 1988, on the spacious grounds of the Hagley Museum and Library. Of the 21 panel sessions presented, four were of special interest to scholars of communication and technology history, who also gathered together at a special interest group luncheon. These panels examined both communication technologies and the broader relationship between the history of technology and various institutions, channels and processes of communication.

All of the communications-related panels and papers attracted an encouraging amount of interest. Approximately seventy-five people attended the panel on the telephone system and police surveillance during the Progressive era organized by graduate students of the University of Pennsylvania's Annenberg School of Communications. The communications technology special interest group's officially sponsored

panel on "Communication Technology and Community" was attended by roughly the same number of people. The panel on technological literacy, "Texts and Technics," attracted over 100 people, filling the room to its capacity.

The large number of communications-related papers at the 1988 SHOT conference and the interest with which they were received suggest that SHOT members are interested in pursuing a variety of links between the history of communication and the history of technology. The diversity of the papers demonstrate that neither of these disciplines is rigidly defined, which should encourage SIG members to use every available opportunity to present their research in future conferences.

Business meeting selects "Mercurians" as SIG name

SHOT's special interest group on the history and impact of communications technologies met during lunch on Friday, October 21, 1988, the first full day of the SHOT 1988 meeting at the Hagley Institute. Approximately thirty-five people attended.

Co-chairs Pam Lurito and Lori Breslow reviewed the SIG's achievements during the past year, including a membership that now approaches two hundred. Among this number are many who have been introduced to SHOT through the SIG's activities. Developing a prestigious advisory board was another achievement of the past year.

It was also announced that Milton Mueller and John O'Connor both received grants on behalf of the SIG during the past year. With funds granted by the Annenberg School of Communication, University of Pennsylvania, Milton has produced several issues of the group's newsletter, Antenna. John is now working on a directory for the SIG with funds from the Center for Technology Studies at the New Jersey Institute of Technology. During the meeting, appreciation for these efforts was expressed, and both John and Milton encouraged members to participate in these activities.

A lengthy discussion focused on whether the SIG should continue to sponsor panel sessions at SHOT in the future and if so, how should it go about it. Most people voiced the opinion that sponsored sessions should continue, but that a two-year procedure for developing panels might well be worth exploring. (Please see the proposal for session planning in the next article on this page.)

The next order of business was the selection of a name for the SIG. Several names had been submitted prior to the meeting, and several more

nominations came from the floor. Keith Nier of the Edison papers, Rutgers University came prepared with a sheet of suggestions and explanations for them. In the first vote, John O'Connor's nomination "Movable Types" won a plurality of the votes, but in the runoff election between the two top vote-getters, Keith Nier's "Mercurians" emerged as the victor. As Keith pointed out, the name "Mercurians" fits nicely with SHOT's tradition of naming SIG interest groups both for mythological figures and "identified flying objects."

The meeting ended with several people sharing news of conferences and other projects related to the Mercurians' interests. -- Pam Lurito

Session Planning Proposal

After a discussion among members attending the Mercurians' business meeting at the Hagley, it was suggested that a new procedure be developed for planning SIG sponsored sessions for the SHOT annual meetings. Therefore, the following is proposed:

This year, as an interim measure, SIG members are asked to submit papers or panel proposals directly to the SHOT program committee. In order to facilitate the acceptance of papers on the history and impact of communications technologies, Lori Breslow and Pam Lurito will be happy to consult with proposers and to act as a clearing-house and matchmaking service for members who want to form a panel. Anyone who does not receive the forthcoming SHOT call for papers can get the necessary information by writing Lori (College of Communication, Boston University, 640 Commonwealth Ave., Boston, MA 02215) or Pam (Box 6972, Denver, CO 80206).

In order, then, to plan for the 1990 SHOT meeting, all SIG members are encouraged to prepare a very brief description of a topic they would like to see presented in a sponsored session. This mini-proposal should include only a title, a one- or two- sentence description of the topic, and the proposer's name and address. More information about where to send these proposals will be included in the next issue of Antenna. These proposals will be listed in the October Antenna so they can be discussed at the 1989 SIG meeting. A SIG program committee will then be formed, and it will use that discussion in creating a session. We think such an innovative procedure might prove to be fruitful, broadening and nurturing participation in this important function of the special interest group.

---Pam Lurito



Paris Conference on Telecommunications History

On January 5-7, an international conference on the history of telecommunications took place at the Bibliotheque Nationale in Paris. It was organized by the Association pour la Recherche Historique des Telecommunications in affiliation with the Centre de Recherche en Histoire de l'Innovation and in cooperation with the Bibliotheque Nationale, whose director, the well-known historian and College de France professor Emmanuel Leroy-Ladurie, delivered the conference's opening address. Sessions were headed by Professor Robert Fox of Oxford University and Professor Francois Caron of the Sorbonne and director of the Centre de Recherche en Histoire de l'Innovation, as well as by several noteworthy professors from the Universities of Paris.

The first session dealt exclusively with pre-WWI underwater telegraph cables and focused on political aspects. Daniel Headrick, Roosevelt University, discussed cables and Franco-British imperialistic rivalries, while J.C. Allain, University of Paris III, gave a detailed account of the

state of French cables in the same period. Jorma Ahvenainen, University of Jyväskylä (Finland), pointed out the interrelatedness of the economic and political facets of underwater telegraphy. He noted, for instance, that Denmark's political neutrality enhanced that country's ability to play a meaningful part in cable telegraphy. Keith Neir, Rutgers University, surveyed the difficulties inherent in the operation and management of the first global telecommunications network.

The second session dealt with the various telecommunications technologies that superseded cable telegraphy after World War I. E. Davies, London Science Museum, discussed the expansion of transatlantic carrier capacity from underwater telegraph cables to Telstar. Pascal Griset, Institut d'Histoire Moderne Contemporaine, examined efforts to replace cable telegraphy with wireless, while A.J. Tudesq, University of Bordeaux III, looked specifically at radio and television in the French colonies of sub-Saharan Africa, raising several interesting points, including the role of radio in personalizing the power of local rulers.

After a break, the session resumed with the focus shifted to European telephony. Patrice Carre', Association pour la Recherche des Telecommunications, delineated the attempt to create a European long distance telephone network during the 1920s. Frank Thomas, Max Planck Institut fur Gesellschaftsforschung, used Thomas Hughes's sociotechnological theory of networks to examine the development of the German telephone system and the changing importance of various "network actors" such as the Reichspost and the Reichstag.

The third session dealt with telecommunications science and technology. Michel Atten, Centre National d'Etudes des Telecommunications, indicated the role of telegraph engineers in first introducing the electromagnetic theory of James Clerk Maxwell into France, decades

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before university professors even took notice. J. Cazenobe, Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Science Sociale, gave an equally daring paper on Hertz, pointing out that Maxwell had not foreseen the existence of Hertzian waves and that Hertz had not set out to verify Maxwell. In fact, Cazenobe argued, Hertz profoundly disagreed with Maxwell and sought to disprove him. Hertz's achievement was double: the discovery of Hertzian waves and the creation of an experimental apparatus for creating and receiving them. A. Butrica, Beckman Center for the History of Chemistry (Philadelphia), discussed how a scientific discovery takes on a new life as an engineering practice, while Paul Charbon, Amis d'Histoire des PTT d'Alsace (Strasbourg), asked the question, What really was the telegraph invented and patented by Morse in France in 1838?

The following session's papers examined the development of the telecommunications industry. Yuzo Takahashi, Tokyo University, sketched the beginnings of the telegraph industry in Japan, while J. Foreman-Pack, Hull University (UK), indicated the general evolution of the British telecommunications industry. Y. Lecouturier discussed a peculiar aspect of the telephone industry in Calvados (France) at the turn of the century: the beach resorts. C. Omnes, University of Paris-Nanterre, examined women and the telephone manufacturing industry in Paris during the 1920s and 1930s. U. Zeltstein, an amateur historian of technology, gave a distinctive talk on the commercialization of the autographic telegraph (a technological predecessor of today's FAX) in the last century.

The conference came to a conclusion with a roundtable discussion in which telecommunications engineers and industrialists debated the complex interrelationships between telecommunications and politics, connections between science and technology, and the impact of telecommunications on society. Among the impor-

tant ideas which emerged were the critical role of the military and the problem of innovation and technological unemployment. Francois Caron provided concluding remarks which placed the roundtable and the conference papers in the larger framework of the history of innovation.

The twenty conference papers - delivered by scholars from the United States, France, England, West Germany, Finland, and Japan - were well attended. Participants enjoyed the sumptuous lunches offered in the fin-de-siecle Cafe Colbert of the Bibliotheque Nationale. In addition, a public exhibit on the history of the phonograph organized by the Bibliotheque Nationale accompanied the conference and was free for participants. For further information on the conference, contact Patrice Carre', Association pour la Recherche des Telecommunications, 5, avenue du General Sarraill, 75016 Paris, France.

—Andrew Butrica

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BOOKS

Powermatics: A Discursive Critique of New Technology

by Marike Finlay

London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1987

In this very thorough examination of the public discourse of and about the "new communications technologies," Marike Finlay offers *Antenna* readers another theoretical perspective for the study of communications history. Utilizing Michel Foucault's "discursive technique," Finlay's book is an attempt at applied theory. It analyzes a vast number of texts from scientific, popular, industry, government, and academic sources. Although the corpus of texts is heavily skewed toward the Canadian situation, the sample includes international data.

The publisher has labelled this work "theoretical in nature," but "theory" in this case seems to be a code word for specialized language and complicated prose. Those unfamiliar with either the new technologies debates in Canada or the complex rhetoric of "critical" discourse analysis will find the reading difficult. Nonetheless, Finlay's perspective has much to offer those interested in issues of communications history.

She illustrates, in laborious detail, the ways in which the new communications technologies are constructed as "discursive objects." That is, these technologies embody social interests and forces which reach beyond their existence as empirical machines. They both contain and reproduce certain social processes. And whether one is in favor of new technologies or critical of their implementation, the discursive strategies used to construct these arguments is highly consistent. It is therefore as discursive objects, Finlay argues, that the new communication technologies are accorded social legitimacy.

When Finlay turns her attention from the discourse about new technologies and moves to a discussion of the discourse of new technologies, her analysis becomes clouded, however. In the second half of the book, Finlay attempts to articulate an alternative (policy) approach to communications and technology. Here she argues that new communications technologies represent a social discourse of power and social control. She relates questions of discourse, knowledge and power to Weberian notions of rationality and scientific management. Her goal is a "democratic emancipatory" discourse in which public inquiry and debate is central to the decision making process. The logic behind this move from the discursive to the empirical world is deeply embedded in complex epistemological arguments which were impenetrable to this reviewer. There is an interesting irony at work in this

book. As a scholar who is concerned with both systematically analyzing the social construction and displacement of power found in public discourses about new technologies, AND in articulating policy alternatives for more democratic and empowering forms of public decision making, it is striking that Finlay should choose to make her case using such highly specialized and inaccessible forms of discourse.—reviewed by Lane Browning

Authority in Language: Investigating Language Prescription and Standardisation.

by James and Leslie Milroy

London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985.

Authority in Language was intended primarily as a critique by linguists of testing methods designed to assess language ability. But it also presents a view of the sociocultural (including technological) dynamics that lead to the standardization of language in communities that make use of both oral and written communication. Social, political and commercial pressures promote the process of language standardization for writing by selecting and codifying a particular language variety available in a community and suppressing optional variability. The authors contrast oral and written communication strategies using clear examples from sociolinguistic research to show that, unlike a written standard, variability in spoken language is indispensable for normal social interaction. However, the awareness of a written standard leads to an "ideology of standardisation" involving prescriptivist attitudes and notions of linguistic correctness that are inappropriately applied by members of speech communities to spoken as well as written language. The authors argue that this ideology influences the inappropriate design of language ability tests and may result in limiting educational and other opportunities for certain groups of people.

This book was written for educators, speech therapists, and interested laypersons, and can be recommended as a good, easily readable introduction to sociolinguistics. For scholars of communications history and technology, the discussion of the roles of writing, and more briefly of printing and broadcasting, in the formation and promotion of the ideology of standardization is of particular interest. A section of the book is devoted to a historical perspective on the standardization of English in England from the early printing era. More generally, the book extends the discussion of the standardizing effects of communication technologies to the realm of written and spoken language. First published in 1985, the book has recently been brought out in paperback. —reviewed by Michael Willmorth

Call for Papers

The Institute of Culture and Communication, Temple University, invites paper and panel submissions for the Seventh International Conference on Culture and Communication. The conference will be held October 4-7, 1989 in Philadelphia. The CCC is an interdisciplinary forum hosting approximately 250 presentations on theory and research regarding the following topics:

Communication Theory
Methodology and Philosophy of the Social Sciences
Interpersonal Interaction
Government, Industry and Culture
Communication and Ideology
Mass Media and Acculturation
Art as Cultural Artifact

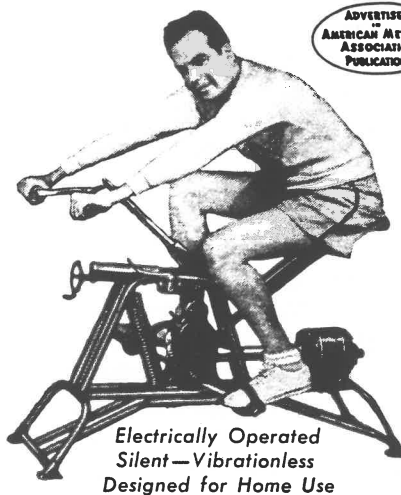
Individuals may suggest topics not specifically listed above, but related to theory and research on culture and communication. Proposals for individual papers and/or organized sessions as well as requests for information should be directed to:

1989 CCC Information
Sari Thomas, Director
Institute of Culture and Communication
Temple University
Philadelphia PA 19122 (215)787-8725

The deadline for all proposals is February 10, 1989.

Professor Donald Wilhelm,
16 Bowers Croft, Cambridge CB1 4RP
England:

I am currently preparing a book on the wider ideological and cultural implications of international satellite broadcasting (both radio and television) including direct broadcasting by satellite or DBS. Any pertinent information or concepts or contacts would be most welcome.



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