

The Yin and Yang of Media Ecology

Janet Sternberg

Abstract

In this paper, I use the yin/yang metaphor from Chinese philosophy to contrast two intellectual traditions in the field of media ecology: the yang tradition of studying media as environments, focusing on mass communication and on *intrapersonal* communication; and the yin tradition of studying environments as media, emphasizing *interpersonal* communication. I argue that in recent years, an imbalance in the field of media ecology has arisen, resulting from a lack of integration between these two intellectual traditions. The yang study of media as environments has eclipsed from view the yin study of environments as media, to the detriment of the field as a whole. After illustrating this imbalance and its undesirable consequences, I conclude that media ecologists should strive to integrate yin and yang traditions and promote a better balance in the discipline by acknowledging, paying tribute to, and exploring the neglected yin branches of the intellectual roots of media ecology.

In the President's address delivered at the third annual convention of the Media Ecology Association, Lance Strate (2002) considered the subject of media ecology as a scholarly activity. In papers presented on a panel at that same convention, Susan Barnes (2002), Donna Flayhan (2002), and I focused on one of the scholarly activities in which media ecologists sometimes engage; that is, each of our papers explored intellectual and theoretical foundations of the field. Explorations of this sort gave rise several years ago to a special issue of the *New Jersey Journal of Communication*, entitled "The Intellectual Roots of Media Ecology" (Lum, 2000a). This metaphor of intellectual roots caught my attention and got me thinking. And in due course, as I undertook my own explorations into the intellectual roots of media ecology, I found another metaphor to be helpful for understanding the scholarly traditions in our field. This additional metaphor comes from Chinese philosophy, and involves the equilibrium between the forces of yin and yang. In this paper, I explain how the yin/yang metaphor applies to the field of media

ecology, and argue that the field has too much yang and not enough yin (for an extended discussion of this argument, see Sternberg, 2001, pp. 34-109). I conclude by suggesting a way to remedy what I perceive to be an imbalance between the yin and yang of media ecology.

The Yin/Yang Metaphor

The yin/yang metaphor is often expressed graphically in the familiar yin/yang symbol: a circle divided into two matched shapes, one a dark shape corresponding to yin, and the other a light shape corresponding to yang, each shape containing a small spot of the other one's color. This design symbolizes the relationship between the forces of yin and yang, a relationship effectively described in the following summary:

The original meaning of “yin and yang” is representative of the mountains — both the dark side and the bright side, or the contrasting shaded and [sunlit] slopes of the mountain. The “Yin” represents the female or the shaded aspect, the earth, darkness, the moon, and passivity. The “Yang” represents the male, light, sun, heaven, the active principle in nature.... This symbol shows the perfect balance between opposites, or the great forces of [the] universe. [It] portrays that there is no “real” masculine or feminine nature, but that each contains a part of the other. The two are contained in one circle thus showing that both powers are in one cycle. Instead of these two being held in antagonism, they are held together to show [that] they are mutually interdependent partners. One cannot exist without the other. (Ehmen, 1996)

So the symbolism of the yin/yang image and metaphor involves an ecological outlook that strives for balance, proportion, and harmony between two distinct but complementary elements that fit

closely together, each element intertwined with and bearing traces of the other, forming an integrated, unified whole.

But how does the yin/yang metaphor apply to the field of media ecology? Well, although media ecology is still an evolving discipline, two basic intellectual traditions can be distinguished in the field. On the one hand, there is a tradition of studying media as environments, focusing on mass communication and on *intrapersonal* communication. On the other hand, there is also a second tradition of studying environments as media, emphasizing *interpersonal* communication. The first intellectual tradition, which currently dominates in the discipline, is the yang of media ecology: the more prominent and better-illuminated study of media as environments. This yang tradition in media ecology involves the cultural and psychological consequences of technologies and techniques of mass communication and of *intrapersonal* communication. The second intellectual tradition is the yin of media ecology, the more obscure and less familiar study of environments as media. The yin tradition involves the social impact of the mysterious silent languages and hidden dimensions of *interpersonal* communication. What the yin/yang metaphor demonstrates is that these two intellectual traditions in media ecology complement one another, and that elements of both traditions are integrally necessary for a balanced approach to the study of communication.

Though I may be the first to apply the yin/yang metaphor in contrasting this pair of intellectual traditions in media ecology, similar distinctions between the study of media as environments as opposed to the study of environments as media have been suggested by others in our field (e.g., Lum, 2000b, p. 3). Perhaps the clearest articulation of the differences between these two approaches comes from Joshua Meyrowitz. In *No Sense of Place* (1985), his landmark

book about the impact of electronic media on social behavior, Meyrowitz compares two traditions that he prefers to call “medium theory” and “situationism,” analogous to the traditions I refer to, respectively, as yang and yin:

(1) “medium theory” — the historical and cross-cultural study of the different cultural environments created by different media of communication, and (2) “situationism” — the exploration of the ways in which social behavior is shaped by and in “social situations.” These two fields have developed independently of each other and the main questions explored in them have traditionally been far removed from the main concerns of most mass communication researchers. Yet each of these areas of inquiry offers partial clues to a detailed theory of the effects of electronic media on social behavior. (1985, pp. 15-16)

Meyrowitz describes medium theorists — the yang — as concentrating on characteristics of individual media as information-systems (pp. 16-23), and he notes that “the best known and most controversial of these scholars are Harold Adam Innis and Herbert Marshall McLuhan” (p. 16). In contrast, situationists — the yin — concentrate on characteristics of social situations as information-systems (pp. 23-33), and according to Meyrowitz, “the situationist whose approach may indirectly provide the most clues to the impact of new media on social roles is Erving Goffman” (p. 28).

The Yang Tradition: Media as Environments

Regardless of the labels we bestow on these approaches, it seems clear that the intellectual tradition in media ecology which studies media as environments — the yang — emphasizes technological aspects of particular media, especially their cultural and psychological impact. In

this sense, media ecology involves, as Strate (1996a) puts it, “the study of media and technology *as* human environments.” Scholars following yang approaches concentrate on investigations of mass communication and of intrapersonal communication, drawing on disciplines such as history, philosophy, psychology, literary studies, economics, and political science. This yang tradition of approaching media as environments is sometimes characterized as representative of the Toronto and New York schools of media ecology (e.g., Lum, 2000b, pp. 1-4; Strate, 1996a; Strate & Lum, 2000, pp. 56-57). According to Strate (1996a), the Toronto school includes not only Innis (1951) and McLuhan (1964), but also scholars such as Edmund Carpenter (1960), Eric Havelock (1982; see also Gronbeck, 2000), and Walter Ong (1982). In the New York school, Strate includes, among others, Lewis Mumford (1934; see also Strate & Lum, 2000), Henry Perkinson (1991, 1996), and Neil Postman (1982, 1985, 1992; see also Gencarelli, 2000). In addition to scholars like these identified with Toronto and New York who follow yang approaches, inquiries into media as environments have also been pursued by other major figures in media ecology, such as Jacques Ellul (1954/1964; see also Gozzi, 2000), Susanne Langer (1942/1979; see also Nystrom, 2000), and Elizabeth Eisenstein (1979, 1983, 2002).

The Yin Tradition: Environments as Media

In contrast to the yang tradition of studying media as environments described above, the intellectual tradition in media ecology of studying environments as media — the yin — focuses on characteristics of social situations as information environments and the ways people make meaning from various aspects of social situations. Scholars following yin approaches concentrate on investigations of interpersonal communication in contexts of group behavior and social interaction, drawing on disciplines such as sociology and anthropology. Given that the yang

tradition has attained greater prominence in media ecology, occupying the foreground of the field, as it were, with the yin tradition lurking in the background, media ecologists may be less familiar with the yin tradition, which therefore bears further discussion.

The yin tradition in media ecology of studying environments as media is effectively explained and demonstrated in Christine Nystrom's little-known manuscript entitled *Media Ecology: Inquiries into the Structure of Communication Environments* (1979). In this unpublished work, distributed occasionally in communication courses at New York University, Nystrom provides an overview of the tradition of studying environments as media:

In the sense that studies of communication environments take as their focus questions about the structure and effects of social setting, symbolic systems, and cultural contexts on meaning-making and its human consequences, they may with some felicity be labeled *media ecology*. For ecology is the study of the structure of environments. And "media," as I am using the term here, are the social, symbolic, and cultural environments of which communication — the structuring of human meaning — is a product. (1979, Chapter 1, p. 20)

Nystrom elaborates on the notion of environments as media, and stresses the significance of studying social settings as communication environments:

A medium of communication is an ordered social and symbolic environment — a particular organization of people and objects, using certain symbols and communication technologies, having a certain organization in time and space, and operating within a given culture — that structures the meaning-responses and consequently the thoughts, feelings, expectations, and transactions of its

participants in particular ways. In this view, a school is a medium of communication. And a library. And a movie theatre, a coffee shop, a livingroom in which a family gathers to watch TV, an airplane, a teachers' conference, a study where a solitary man simply sits and reads. What distinguishes these as environments, as media, is not that they are different *places*. For the same place may become a different medium of communication — that is, structure things differently — by changing its organization of space and time, its use of symbols, its use of communication technologies, or any one of a number of other variables. What those variables may be, and how they structure the meanings, not only of individuals in different social settings but, at the broader level, the patterns of thought and response, the habits of mind, of a culture, is the subject matter of media ecology. (Chapter 1, pp. 22-23)

The yin tradition of studying environments as media draws heavily on what is often referred to as the symbolic interactionist approach to human affairs, originating in the field of sociology. Symbolic interactionists view social relations as transactional phenomena involving active meaning-making by participants, and social psychologist George Herbert Mead is the leading figure identified with the symbolic interactionist approach (see, e.g., Barnes, 2002; Lofland, 1998, p. xvi; Surratt, 1996, pp. 4-5; West & Turner, 2000, pp. 74-76). Describing himself as a social behaviorist, Mead focuses on the psychology of the self in the context of group behavior, and his most important work, *Mind, Self, and Society* (1934), has influenced generations of scholars in various disciplines.

The symbolic interactionist approach to social relations provides the foundations for the yin perspective Meyrowitz refers to as situationism (1985, pp. 23-33; see also Cutler, 1996). Meyrowitz indicates social anthropologist Erving Goffman as the major situationist of relevance to the study of media (1985, p. 28), summarizing his perspective as follows: “Goffman describes social life as a kind of multi-staged drama in which we each perform different roles in different social arenas, depending on the nature of the situation, our particular role in it, and the makeup of the audience” (p. 2). Addressing social relations from a transactional point of view, Goffman deals with “the ways in which people — both alone and in ‘teams’ — constantly structure their appearance and behavior to convey socially meaningful messages and impressions” (Meyrowitz, 1979/1986, p. 254).

Among Goffman’s many ethnographic investigations of the structure and dynamics of social situations, two books stand out as especially significant for the yin tradition of studying environments as media. In *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959), probably his most often cited publication, Goffman uses metaphors of theatrical performance to analyze social relations, focusing on how individuals present themselves to others. And in a later book, *Behavior in Public Places* (1963), less frequently mentioned but a classic equally worthy of attention, Goffman examines the social organization of gatherings, with particular emphasis on rules of interaction in face-to-face encounters. With these works and others (e.g., 1967, 1969, 1971, 1974), Goffman stands out as one of the most influential situationists for scholars following the yin tradition. Subsequent generations of media ecologists such as Nystrom (1973, 1979) and Meyrowitz (1979/1986, 1985) explicitly acknowledge their intellectual debt to Goffman. For example, in her doctoral dissertation, *Towards a Science of Media Ecology* (1973),

Nystrom singles out his research as furnishing one of the fundamental paradigms for media ecology:

Goffman's model is also compatible with the assumptions, needs, and perspectives of media ecologists. Goffman is always concerned to describe the setting (or environment) in which the play takes place; the media ecologist places similar stress on the communication environment, whether it is a room in a university or a television set. Goffman is also concerned with the "masks" people wear, and, of course, the kinds of performances their situation compels them to give. Translated into media ecology terms, the Goffman model focuses attention on the states of mind media environments compel people to assume. (1973, p. 214)

And in Goffman's own field, urban sociologist Lyn Lofland commends the scope and insight of his contributions:

Goffman almost inadvertently focused his enormous talent for microanalysis on numerous instances of public realm interaction.... Goffman demonstrated eloquently and persuasively that what occurs between two strangers passing on the street is as thoroughly social as what occurs in a conversation between two lovers, that the same concerns for the fragility of selves that is operating among participants in a family gathering is also operating among strangers on an urban beach. (1998, p. 4).

The ethnographic approach used by Goffman to analyze everyday situations brings to mind a related discipline that also informs the yin tradition of studying environments as media:

anthropology. From this field, the yin tradition in media ecology draws most notably on the work of Edward T. Hall, an anthropologist investigating cultural environments as media of communication. In *The Silent Language* (1959), Hall proposes a theory of culture as consisting of shared sets of “primary message systems.” He identifies ten such message systems which form what he calls the “vocabulary of culture” (pp. 38-59), including elements such as time and space in relation to different patterns of human activity and interaction. Hall underscores the importance of examining “unspoken, but very real patterns of behavior — what he calls *silent languages* — which serve to organize action and thought in any given culture” (Meyrowitz, 1979/1986, p. 255). Expanding on his notion that “space speaks” (1959, pp. 162-185), in *The Hidden Dimension* (1966), Hall introduces a theory of “proxemics,” the study of spatial aspects of behavior, devoting special emphasis to distinguishing different types of space (e.g., visual, auditory, olfactory) in discussing “the ways in which people use space and adjust interaction distances to suit different types of relationships” (Meyrowitz, 1979/1986, p. 254).

What Hall’s anthropological research has in common with Goffman’s sociological investigations, as Meyrowitz points out, is that both scholars suggest “an observable structure to interpersonal behavior — a structure that encompasses ‘elements’ or ‘variables’ which are commonly manipulated by people to create specific meanings and effects” (1979/1986, p. 254; see also Flayhan, 2002). By focusing on behavioral structures and elements from which people make meaning as well as the social impact of the meanings people make, Hall and Goffman shed light on areas of interpersonal communication that are critical for the yin tradition of studying environments as media. Meyrowitz explains the significance of their contribution as follows:

Hall and Goffman present the kind of ethnographic data normally found in the work of anthropologists studying strange or primitive societies. Their observations, however, illuminate our own culture and behavior. Hall and Goffman try to make us aware of perceptions and actions which are normally intuitive and unconscious. Their work, therefore, does not tell us about behavior patterns which are foreign to us, but about patterns we know but do not usually know we know. (1979/1986, p. 254; see also Meyrowitz, 1985, p. 2)

But Hall and Goffman are not the only scholars to provide insight into aspects of communication environments that lie, for the most part, out of the realm of conscious awareness. The more subtle, hidden aspects of communication which are key factors in social interaction, and therefore of utmost importance to the yin tradition of studying environments as media, have stimulated various other researchers as well. Related areas of yin-oriented inquiry are illustrated by Nystrom in the following passage:

Such students of culture and communication as Edward Sapir, Benjamin Lee Whorf, Dorothy Lee, Claude Levi-Strauss, Mary Douglas, Clifford Geertz, Edward Hall, Edmund Carpenter, Gregory Bateson, Paul Watzlawick, Erving Goffman, Eric Havelock, Walter Ong, Harold Innis, and Marshall McLuhan — to name only a few — have argued persuasively, each in his own way, that it is those aspects of language, of situations, of communications technologies which we least consciously recognize that most firmly regulate our meaning-making. Hall calls these the “covert” aspects of communication, the “hidden dimensions” of culture. Douglas refers to the hidden “rules” that regulate cultural meanings. McLuhan

and others talk of the “invisible environments” created by communication technologies, and of the hidden ways in which these environments structure our meanings. Whatever the labels they use to describe the non-conscious, the unintended, the largely unrecognized aspects of human communication, such writers seem firmly agreed on one point: in shaping the meaning-making, not only of individuals but of entire cultures, that which is outside of our awareness plays a far more important role than the overt content of “messages.” (1979, Chapter 1, p. 11)

Moreover, as Nystrom’s summary reveals, connections exist between scholarship in the yin tradition, which addresses environments as media, and research in the yang tradition, which deals with media as environments, the two traditions being complementary in nature rather than mutually exclusive. McLuhan provides a prime example of someone who transcends distinctions between the two traditions: despite his identification as the epitome of yang medium theory (Meyrowitz, 1985, pp. 3-4), McLuhan nevertheless ventures occasionally into subject matter more typical of yin situationists. In *Understanding Media* (1964), for instance, McLuhan highlights several structural elements of situations such as time in discussing clocks (pp. 135-144); and space in discussing roads and paper routes (pp. 90-104), housing (pp. 117-123), and transportation (pp. 162-169). In addition, the seminal anthology edited by Carpenter and McLuhan, *Explorations in Communication* (1960b), contains several articles that take structural elements of situations into account, including the editors’ collaboration on acoustic space (Carpenter & McLuhan, 1960a), Frank’s essay on the role of skin and touch in tactile communication (1960), and Birdwhistell’s piece on body motion or kinesics, “the study of non-

verbal interpersonal communications” (1960, p. 54; see also Birdwhistell, 1970). Similarly, Postman transcends the distinction between the yin and yang traditions in media ecology as well: his yang contributions to the study of media as environments mentioned previously (e.g., 1982, 1985, 1992) are complemented by certain areas of his work which advance the yin tradition of studying environments as media. For example, Postman’s books on education, such as *Teaching as a Subversive Activity* (Postman & Weingartner, 1969), *Teaching as a Conserving Activity* (1979), and *The End of Education* (1996), demonstrate the yin tradition by considering schools as communication environments. Likewise, Postman’s *Crazy Talk, Stupid Talk* (1976) provides yin-oriented insight into various social aspects of interpersonal communication.

Furthermore, it must be noted that the yin tradition of studying environments as media is also informed by other lines of inquiry beyond those mentioned above. Strate suggests additional scholarship associated with the yin tradition in media ecology:

The other theoretical underpinning for environments as media, which begins with Shannon and Weaver’s information theory, and Wiener’s cybernetics, connects to systems theory as pioneered by Laszlo and Bertalanffy, and to the Palo Alto School started by Gregory Bateson, and including Paul Watzlawick with his relational approach to communication, Edward T. Hall’s work on culture and nonverbal communication, Ray Birdwhistell’s emphasis on context in the study of kinesics, and yes Goffman who obviously bridges both situationism and systems. This other stream is important because it then becomes a focus of Nystrom’s dissertation comparing media ecology to systems theory, and is implicit in Meyrowitz, in that information systems is the common ground he establishes

between the situations of symbolic interactionism and media ecology's media.

(Strate, personal communication, August 9, 2001; see also Nystrom, 1973;

Meyrowitz, 1985)

No doubt, the study of environments as media includes additional lines of inquiry such as these (and perhaps others yet to be recognized), and their contributions to the yin tradition in media ecology deserve to be explored more fully in future research.

An Imbalance in Media Ecology Between Yin and Yang

Now, having described the yin tradition of studying environments as media, as well as the yang tradition of studying media as environments, I can proceed with my argument, which is this. I believe that the current state of affairs in media ecology involves a serious imbalance resulting from a lack of integration between the two intellectual traditions, with the yang tradition of studying media as environments eclipsing from view the yin tradition of studying environments as media, to the detriment of the field as a whole. Yet the philosophy of yin and yang calls for equilibrium between the two, stemming from mutual interdependence and requiring partnership and cooperation. What the discipline of media ecology needs with respect to its underlying intellectual traditions is just this sort of integration and balance between yin and yang.

Similar observations about an unfortunate lack of integration in the field have been expressed by other media ecologists. For example, Meyrowitz complains vehemently and lucidly about a lack of integration between medium theory and situationism (1985, pp. 16-34). In surveying the differences between these two approaches, Meyrowitz argues that medium theorists tend to concentrate on mediated environments, with scant consideration of social interaction in face-to-face communication environments; whereas situationists tend to

concentrate on face-to-face environments, with little attention to social interaction in mediated communication environments (p. 33). Based on such deficiencies, Meyrowitz criticizes the two leading scholars identified with these approaches:

Goffman and McLuhan have complementary strengths and weaknesses: Goffman focuses only on the study of face-to-face interaction and ignores the influence and effects of media on the variables he describes; McLuhan focuses on the effects of media and ignores the structural aspects of face-to-face interaction. These oversights may stem from the traditional view that face-to-face behavior and mediated communications are completely different types of interaction — real life vs. media. (p. 4)

Besides the lack of integration between medium theory and situationism about which Meyrowitz complains, there is also a lack of integration between the study of mediated communication and the study of interpersonal communication, according to Gary Gumpert and Robert Cathcart. Gumpert and Cathcart identify a schism separating these two areas of inquiry and criticize underlying divisions in mainstream communication research. In their typology of mediated interpersonal communication, for instance, Gumpert and Cathcart claim that “it is difficult to find an interpersonal communication text or resource book which treats the subject of media as a significant factor. The role of media in personal communication has, by and large, been overlooked” (Cathcart & Gumpert, 1983/1986, p. 26). And in the preface to one edition of their *Inter/Media* anthology series, Gumpert and Cathcart (1986a) protest against splitting communication studies into separate categories like mediated versus interpersonal communication because such compartmentalized thinking ignores both the pervasiveness of

media technologies in human affairs and the symbiotic relationship between mediated and interpersonal communication. Gumpert and Cathcart underscore “the inextricable relationship between media and interpersonal communication” (1986b, p. 9) which calls for the sort of integrated research included in their anthologies:

It is our intention, through this collection of readings and original essays, to begin to bridge the gap that has existed in the study of mediated communication and interpersonal communication. We have tended in the past to treat the mass media as isolated phenomena having little to do directly with interpersonal communication, and we have dealt with interpersonal communication as though mass media did not exist.... To a large extent, the study of interpersonal communication has concentrated on the relationship between two persons without regard for the media environment which contains that relation.... the nexus of media and interpersonal communication has been overlooked.... What has been underemphasized is the whole of the communication process: a process in which each part affects the other part and no one part can be fully understood apart from the whole. It is our intent in this book to emphasize the connections; to restore a perspective that has been overlooked in the acceleration of technology and the collision with face-to-face communication. (pp. 10-11)

Whether we focus on Meyrowitz’s complaint about the lack of integration between medium theory and situationism, or Gumpert and Cathcart’s protest against the lack of integration between the study of mediated communication and the study of interpersonal communication, or my objection to the lack of integration between the yin and yang in media

ecology, it appears that such intellectual oppositions have prejudicial consequences for the field. Lack of integration tends to encourage lack of balance: lopsided circumstances develop whereby one intellectual tradition — call it medium theory or mediated communication or the yang of media ecology — attains greater prominence over the other — situationism, interpersonal communication, or the yin. In this way, the yang tradition in media ecology has come to overshadow the yin, which continues to be comparatively underrepresented, leading to a disadvantageous state of imbalance in the discipline.

Succumbing to this imbalance, we run the risk of limiting our scholarly horizons and neglecting important areas of inquiry. Skewed by this imbalance, we rarely feel inclined to pursue investigations which not only benefit from but in fact demand the integration of the study of environments as media with the study of media as environments. For example, the reluctance of media ecologists to integrate both yin and yang traditions in their intellectual repertoire may account for the relative paucity of research on mediated interpersonal communication in the field. An area requiring almost by definition a blend of yin and yang perspectives, research into mediated interpersonal communication is especially critical for understanding the impact of the various new technologies so prevalent nowadays, from desktop and laptop computers to handheld electronic devices, from video camcorders to audio karaoke, from mobile telephony to Internet, and the myriad combinations thereof. I document elsewhere in greater depth the propensity of media ecologists to adhere to yang rather than yin perspectives in relation to electronically-mediated communication in general and computer-mediated communication in particular (Sternberg, 2001, pp. 76-109). Suffice it here to offer some illustrations of how media ecologists favor the yang over the yin in current approaches. For this purpose, it is instructive to

compare the degree to which major scholars from the two intellectual traditions have been represented lately in the field.

Revealing clues about the imbalance between the yin and yang traditions can be uncovered by scrutinizing recent media ecology literature. For example, in the anthology on communication and cyberspace edited by Lance Strate, Ronald Jacobson, and Stephanie Gibson (1996a), the index fails to provide a single entry for Goffman, Hall, or Mead, although bibliographies of several individual articles in the collection do mention these yin authors. Yet the index does list an abundance of scholars working primarily in the yang tradition such as Innis, Langer, McLuhan, Mumford, and Postman. A production error may be responsible for omissions in the anthology's index, but even individual articles show surprising bibliographic deficiencies. Both the editors' introduction (Strate et al., 1996b) and Strate's piece on cybertime (1996b) cite Hall and Meyrowitz as well as McLuhan, but neither mentions Goffman. Likewise, in tackling the ecology of the self (1996), Susan Barnes refers to Mead and Meyrowitz but not to Goffman. Overall, considering the subject matter of many of the selections, this volume displays a remarkable lack of acknowledgement of the yin tradition in media ecology.

More telling than the Strate et al. anthology is the special issue of the *New Jersey Journal of Communication* celebrating the intellectual roots of media ecology (Lum, 2000a). In the entire issue, no mention whatsoever is made of Goffman, Hall, or Mead. Even Christine Nystrom, among the most enthusiastic proponents of the yin tradition in media ecology, whose work as a whole has a strong yin component (e.g., 1973, 1978, 1979), makes no mention of Goffman, Hall, or Mead in her contribution to this journal issue (2000), referring instead to yang scholars such as McLuhan, Ong, and Postman. That the bulk of this issue's important set of reflections is

devoted to scholarship from the yang tradition of studying media as environments lends credence to my claim that current generations of media ecologists are not attending sufficiently to the yin tradition of studying environments as media.

Other hints about the dearth of yin vis-à-vis the wealth of yang in media ecology affairs come from conference and lecture activities in the discipline. In recent years, the spotlight at media ecology events has shone almost exclusively on scholars from the yang tradition. For instance, there was the 1998 McLuhan symposium at Fordham University, as well as the ongoing McLuhan lecture series sponsored by the Canadian government. And the inaugural convention of the Media Ecology Association featured Paul Levinson's (2000) paper on McLuhan and media ecology. Similarly, at the September 2000 conference of the New York State Communication Association, to which many media ecologists belong, a panel was devoted to the intellectual legacy of McLuhan. At the annual convention of the National Communication Association in November 2000, there were showcased sessions praising the contributions to media ecology of Mumford and Ong. Even Joshua Meyrowitz, champion of the yin, invoked yang scholarship (namely McLuhan) in his keynote address at the second annual convention of the Media Ecology Association (2001), as a point of departure for encouraging us to broaden our theoretical perspectives by morphing McLuhan with yin scholars such as Birdwhistell and Goffman. And at the convention represented by these *Proceedings*, we celebrated the yang tradition yet again, previewing Kevin McMahon's outstanding documentary film, *McLuhan's Wake*. In contrast, leading yin figures such as Goffman, Hall, and Mead have been conspicuously absent from these sorts of professional commemorations of scholarship in the field. Not a single such occasion in recent years comes to mind where representatives of the yin tradition in media ecology take

center stage. Certainly, the yang tradition deserves recognition and praise, and the tributes I have mentioned are all worthy indeed. But they are also symptoms of a pattern among media ecologists: a disproportionate amount of attention paid to the yang side of the intellectual equation, with a resulting lack of attention to the yin.

Conclusion

Thus, rather ironically, the field of media ecology seems to suffer from an internal ecological imbalance between the yin and yang intellectual traditions I have outlined here. So what are we to do about this unhealthy state of affairs? My solution is simple, and I try to practice what I preach. Let us take heed of Meyrowitz's recommendations to integrate medium theory and situationism (1985), and to morph McLuhan with as many theoretical perspectives as we can (2001). Let us also follow Gumpert and Cathcart's advice to integrate the study of mediated communication with the study of interpersonal communication (1986a, 1986b; Cathcart & Gumpert, 1983/1986). And finally, as Susan Barnes (2002), Donna Flayhan (2002), and I have done with our convention panel and papers, let us strive to promote a better balance between the yin and yang in our discipline by acknowledging, paying tribute to, and exploring the neglected yin branches of the intellectual roots of media ecology.

References

- Barnes, S. B. (1996). Cyberspace: Creating paradoxes for the ecology of self. In L. Strate, R. Jacobson, & S. B. Gibson (Eds.), *Communication and cyberspace: Social interaction in an electronic environment* (pp. 193-216). Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press.
- Barnes, S. B. (2002, June). *Media ecology and symbolic interactionism*. Paper presented at the annual convention of the Media Ecology Association, Marymount Manhattan College, New York, NY.
- Birdwhistell, R. L. (1960). Kinesics and communication. In E. Carpenter & M. McLuhan (Eds.), *Explorations in communication* (pp. 54-64). Boston: Beacon Press.

- Birdwhistell, R. L. (1970). *Kinesics and context: Essays on body motion communication*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Carpenter, E. (1960). The new languages. In E. Carpenter & M. McLuhan (Eds.), *Explorations in communication* (pp. 162-179). Boston: Beacon Press.
- Carpenter, E., & McLuhan, M. (1960a). Acoustic space. In E. Carpenter & M. McLuhan (Eds.), *Explorations in communication* (pp. 65-70). Boston: Beacon Press.
- Carpenter, E., & McLuhan, M. (Eds.). (1960b). *Explorations in communication*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Cathcart, R., & Gumpert, G. (1986). Mediated interpersonal communication: Toward a new typology. In G. Gumpert & R. Cathcart (Eds.), *Inter/media: Interpersonal communication in a media world* (3rd ed.) (pp. 25-40). New York: Oxford University Press. (Original work published 1983)
- Cutler, R. H. (1996). Technologies, relations, and selves. In L. Strate, R. Jacobson, & S. B. Gibson (Eds.), *Communication and cyberspace: Social interaction in an electronic environment* (pp. 317-333). Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press.
- Ehmen, B. (1996). *T'ai chi chu (or the yin-yang symbol)*. Retrieved November 6, 2000, from <http://www2.cybernex.net/~jefkirsh/symbol.html>
- Eisenstein, E. L. (1979). *The printing press as an agent of change*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Eisenstein, E. L. (1983). *The printing revolution in early modern Europe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Eisenstein, E. L. (2002, June). *Old media in the new millennium*. Keynote address delivered at the annual convention of the Media Ecology Association, Marymount Manhattan College, New York, NY.
- Ellul, J. (1964). *The technological society* (J. Wilkinson, Trans.). New York: Vintage Books. (Original work published 1954)
- Flayhan, D. (2002, June). *The hidden dimensions of Hall in media ecology*. Paper presented at the annual convention of the Media Ecology Association, Marymount Manhattan College, New York, NY.
- Frank, L. K. (1960). Tactile communication. In E. Carpenter & M. McLuhan (Eds.), *Explorations in communication* (pp. 4-11). Boston: Beacon Press.
- Gencarelli, T. F. (2000). The intellectual roots of media ecology in the work and thought of Neil Postman. *The New Jersey Journal of Communication*, 8(1), 91-103.
- Goffman, E. (1959). *The presentation of self in everyday life*. New York: Anchor Books.
- Goffman, E. (1963). *Behavior in public places: Notes on the social organization of gatherings*. New York: The Free Press.

- Goffman, E. (1967). *Interaction ritual: Essays on face-to-face behavior*. Garden City, NY: Anchor Books.
- Goffman, E. (1969). *Strategic interaction*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Goffman, E. (1971). *Relations in public: Microstudies of the public order*. New York : Harper & Row.
- Goffman, E. (1974). *Frame analysis: An essay on the organization of experience*. New York : Harper & Row.
- Gozzi, Jr., R. (2000). Jacques Ellul on technique, media, and the spirit. *The New Jersey Journal of Communication*, 8(1), 79-90.
- Gronbeck, B. R. (2000). Communication media, memory, and social-political change in Eric Havelock. *The New Jersey Journal of Communication*, 8(1), 34-45.
- Gumpert, G., & Cathcart, R. (Eds.). (1986a). *Inter/media: Interpersonal communication in a media world* (3rd ed.). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Gumpert, G., & Cathcart, R. (1986b). Introduction. In G. Gumpert & R. Cathcart (Eds.), *Inter/media: Interpersonal communication in a media world* (3rd ed.) (pp. 9-16). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Hall, E. T. (1959). *The silent language*. New York: Anchor Books.
- Hall, E. T. (1966). *The hidden dimension*. New York: Anchor Books.
- Havelock, E. A. (1982). *The literate revolution in Greece and its cultural consequences*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Innis, H. A. (1951). *The bias of communication*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Langer, S. K. (1979). *Philosophy in a new key: A study in the symbolism of reason, rite, and art* (3rd ed.). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. (Original work published 1942)
- Levinson, P. (2000, June). *McLuhan and media ecology*. Paper presented at the annual convention of the Media Ecology Association, Fordham University, New York, NY.
- Lofland, L. H. (1998). *The public realm: Exploring the city's quintessential social territory*. Hawthorne, NY: A. de Gruyter.
- Lum, C. M. K. (Ed.). (2000a). The intellectual roots of media ecology [Special issue]. *The New Jersey Journal of Communication*, 8(1).
- Lum, C. M. K. (2000b). Introduction: The intellectual roots of media ecology. *The New Jersey Journal of Communication*, 8(1), 1-7.
- McLuhan, M. (1964). *Understanding media: The extensions of man* (2nd ed.). New York: Mentor.

- Mead, G. H. (1934). *Mind, self, and society: From the standpoint of a social behaviorist* (C. W. Morris, Ed.). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Meyrowitz, J. (1985). *No sense of place: The impact of electronic media on social behavior*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Meyrowitz, J. (1986). Television and interpersonal behavior: Codes of perception and response. In G. Gumpert & R. Cathcart (Eds.), *Inter/media: Interpersonal communication in a media world* (3rd ed.) (pp. 253-272). New York: Oxford University Press. (Original work published 1979)
- Meyrowitz, J. (2001, June). *Morphing McLuhan: Medium theory for new millennium*. Keynote address delivered at the annual convention of the Media Ecology Association, New York University, New York, NY.
- Mumford, L. (1934). *Technics and civilization*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.
- Nystrom, C. L. (1973). Toward a science of media ecology: The formulation of integrated conceptual paradigms for the study of human communication systems (Doctoral dissertation, New York University, 2001). *Dissertation Abstracts International*, 34(12), 7800 (UMI No. AAT 7412855).
- Nystrom, C. L. (1978). Waiting: The semantics of transitional space. *Etc.: A Review of General Semantics*, 35, 245-253.
- Nystrom, C. L. (1979). *Media ecology: Inquiries into the structure of communication environments*. Unpublished manuscript, New York University.
- Nystrom, C. L. (2000). Symbol, thought, and reality: The contributions of Benjamin Lee Whorf and Susanne K. Langer to media ecology. *The New Jersey Journal of Communication*, 8(1), 8-34.
- Ong, W. J. (1982). *Orality and literacy: The technologizing of the word*. New York: Methuen.
- Perkinson, H. J. (1991). *Getting better: Television and moral progress*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction.
- Perkinson, H. J. (1996). *No safety in numbers: How the computer quantified everything and made people risk-averse*. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press.
- Postman, N. (1976). *Crazy talk, stupid talk: How we defeat ourselves by the way we talk — and what to do about it*. New York: Delta.
- Postman, N. (1979). *Teaching as a conserving activity*. New York: Dell.
- Postman, N. (1982). *The disappearance of childhood*. New York: Delacorte.
- Postman, N. (1985). *Amusing ourselves to death: Public discourse in the age of show business*. New York: Penguin.
- Postman, N. (1992). *Technopoly: The surrender of culture to technology*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.
- Postman, N. (1996). *The end of education: Redefining the value of school*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.

- Postman, N., & Weingartner, C. (1969). *Teaching as a subversive activity*. New York: Dell.
- Sternberg, J. (2001). Misbehavior in cyber places: The regulation of online conduct in virtual communities on the Internet (Doctoral dissertation, New York University, 2001). *Dissertation Abstracts International*, 62(07), 2277 (UMI No. AAT 3022160).
- Strate, L. (1996a). Containers, computers and the media ecology of the city. *Media Ecology: A Journal of Intersections*. Retrieved December 6, 1999, from http://raven.ubalt.edu/features/media_ecology/articles/96/strate1/strate_1.html
- Strate, L. (1996b). Cybertime. In L. Strate, R. Jacobson, & S. B. Gibson (Eds.), *Communication and cyberspace: Social interaction in an electronic environment* (pp. 351-377). Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press.
- Strate, L. (2002, June). *Media ecology as a scholarly activity*. President's address delivered at the annual convention of the Media Ecology Association, Marymount Manhattan College, New York, NY.
- Strate, L., & Lum, C. M. K. (2000). Lewis Mumford and the ecology of technics. *The New Jersey Journal of Communication*, 8(1), 56-78.
- Strate, L., Jacobson, R., & Gibson, S. B. (Eds.). (1996a). *Communication and cyberspace: Social interaction in an electronic environment*. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press.
- Strate, L., Jacobson, R., & Gibson, S. B. (1996b). Surveying the electronic landscape: An introduction to communication and cyberspace. In L. Strate, R. Jacobson, & S. B. Gibson (Eds.), *Communication and cyberspace: Social interaction in an electronic environment* (pp. 1-22). Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press.
- Surratt, C. G. (1996). The sociology of everyday life in computer-mediated communities (Doctoral dissertation, Arizona State University, 1996). *Dissertation Abstracts International*, 57(03-A), 1346 (UMI No. AAT 9620896).
- West, R. & Turner, L. (2000). *Introducing communication theory: Analysis and application*. Mountainview, CA: Mayfield Publishing Company.