COMMUNITIES OF BROADCASTING AND COMMUNITIES OF INTERACTIVITY

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Abstract

This paper critiques Holmes' (1997, pp. 26—45) chapter in *Virtual politics: identity and community in cyberspace*, which addresses differences between 'communities of broadcast and communities of interactivity'. The perspective adopted is informed by my extensive (140-interview) ethnographic survey of remote Western Australia following the (1987) introduction of broadcast television.

Holmes' (1997, pp. 33—34) argument is that "what has been largely ignored is an appreciation of the property of broadcast's power of individuation (or metro-nucleation) of the population ... the ascendancy of the Internet can be explained precisely by a new kind of commodification – the sale of lost levels of community back to the consumer." This is a seductive argument – and Holmes makes many other exciting and insightful comments – but it is not borne out by the experience of those in remote Western Australia, one of the last populations in the globe to receive television broadcasts.

Introduction

This paper starts by addressing Holmes' arguments comparing and contrasting 'communities of broadcast and communities of interactivity'. This is a worthwhile endeavour, not least because there are so many parallels between academic work in relation to broadcasting and the same work with respect to the fledgling communication media which we currently term 'the Internet' – possibly a contraction of the 'interactive network'. The Internet is taken here as 'the community of interactivity' since the power of the individual to interact online is one of the cardinal features of the Internet.

Both series of investigations – into broadcasting and into the Internet – can be seen as starting with displacement studies (an investigation into the activities foregone as a result of the new engagement with broadcasting/the Internet), encompassing moral panics (Violence! Pornography! Gambling!) and progressing through to an investigation as to 'effects'. There is yet to be a detailed ethnographic study of the Internet to rival (say) Morley's (1986) *Family Television* – but it's doubtless on the cards. In the context of an academic predilection to approach the Internet as a me-too kind of broadcasting, a paper comparing communities of broadcasting with communities of interactivity has an immediate appeal.

In the case of Holmes' paper, furthermore, that immediate appeal is rewarded with some fabulous insights – for example, "Broadcast facilitates mass recognition … with little reciprocity while the Internet facilitates reciprocity with little or no recognition." (1997, p. 31) However, those insights are not followed through with an assessment of their implications for our understanding of interactivity (or indeed of broadcasting). Instead Holmes' project is to engage in a 'political economy' critical analysis of both broadcasting and interactivity, the underlying thesis of which is (in paraphrase): broadcasting has compartmentalised the audience into dislocated households of consumption, denying them a full experience of community, and the Internet then feeds upon the resulting isolation by offering the semblance of interactivity.

In Holmes' (1997, pp. 33—34) words:

> The extended reach of broadcast, its ability to cross the compositional borders of given communities and nations, while at the same time consolidating the nuclear, privatized household, has the effect of reindividuating citizenship and individuality ... The logic is dialectical: the greater the dependence of the individual on television, the less dependent s/he becomes on the public sphere which is being displaced in practice; and more such a public sphere, particularly in its architectural/compositional aspects, withers away … the ascendancy of the Internet can be explained precisely by a new kind of commodification: the sale of lost levels of community back to the consumer.

Holmes offers a table comparing and contrasting the two communities (1997, p. 32 figure 1.1):

Table 1

Communities of Broadcast	Communities of Interactivity
The many speak to the many by way of the agent of message producers ('media workers', the culture industry, etc).	The many speak to the many by way of the computer-mediated simulation of presence.
Centred	**Decentred**
Influences consciousness.	Influences individual experience of space and time.
High levels of recognition/identification between individuals.	Low levels of recognition/identification between individuals.
Very low level of reciprocity	**Very high level of reciprocity**
Individual experiences strong identity/identification with figures of authority, charisma or cult movements.	Individual experiences weak identification with others as figures of authority or charisma.
Concentration spans of audiences are sold to advertisers.	The need to communicate in highly urbanised settings is sold to advertisers.
Primary basis of the cellularization of social interaction in information societies.	An extension of the cellularization of social interaction via the workstation as well as household.

This paper contends three things;

1. that Holmes ignores peoples' opinions about the importance of broadcasting in their lives;
2. that the Internet may offer community, but it is not necessarily a community which has previously been lost; and nonetheless;
3. there are useful conclusions to be drawn from his paper.

The importance of broadcasting in people's lives

This section of the paper is drawn from an 'ethnographic' interview-based study of 140 people living in six

communities in remote and regional Western Australia (WA). Culturally, participants were predominantly Australians of a European heritage, although Indigenous Australians who volunteered to participate were included. Nonetheless, many Aboriginal Australians were beneficiaries of the Broadcasting to Remote Aboriginal Communities Scheme, and had a different experience of broadcast television from that researched in this project.

The study had a number of particular features. It was carried out in the late 1980's some two years after the introduction of satellite broadcasting first introduced television and 'popular' radio to remote and rural WA. It contained one community – Broome – which had had exposure (via Intelsat) to 'Australian public service broadcasting', but which had not previously received commercial television. It also included two regional centres as 'control' populations although each of these had had different exposure to television – especially commercial television, the central focus of the research at hand. Gnowangerup and Esperance are (essentially) regional communities, whereas Broome, Homesteaders and other populations in the research are isolated/remote.

Apart from Gnowangerup and Esperance, the populations researched were especially aware of their anomalous status as 'the last place on earth' to get broadcast TV. Every time residents of these communities visited major towns and cities they were exposed to television culture. Further, there was considerable enthusiasm for audio-visual entertainment and extensive ownership of video cassette players and television sets long before the first broadcasts were beamed from the satellite.

The size of the towns in regional and remote Western Australia (which constitutes one-third of the area of the continent) can be gauged by an analysis of the remote and regional population of WA offered by Skelton in 1989 (p. 52):

Table 2

Non-metropolitan population distribution WA

More than 25,000	Nil
20 -- 25,000	3
10 -- 20,000	3
5 -- 10,000	7
1 -- 5,000	40
500 -- 1,000	47
200 -- 500	47
<200	74

Skelton notes that 'A population of 200 is not counted as a "town" by the Bureau of Statistics, but there are still real live Australians out there in communities of such smaller size' (1989, p.52).

The Remote Commercial Television Service (RCTS) was introduced for the first time in 1987. The audience for this service describe experiences at odds to those put forward by Holmes in his 'Communities of Broadcast' column.

Certainly it is the case with broadcasting that the 'many speak to the many'. (Although this is a re-interpretation of the common complaint that media workers generally constitute and elite whose interests coincide with the info-industrial complexes represented by the media owners: thus (mass) media workers are the 'few speaking to the mass'.) However, for people in remote areas one of the real excitements was that, in addition to the many speaking to the many, the few also addressed the few. With a population of about half a million in all of remote, rural and regional WA, comparatively small, isolated communities saw themselves represented on television. Sometimes this was by way of 'news' or 'documentary'; on other occasions it was by advertising by local businesses. Either way the representation on television had a special importance. This adolescent's response was typical of the enthusiasm for seeing one's own community represented (even though the news item was potentially a negative one):

> **Male, <17, Gnowangerup:** But you don't really think about it being fair, you just think 'oh, my town's on the news!', and you get all excited. [interviewer: WHY IS IT EXCITING?] We're a small town -- we don't really get much publicity or all that. It's not like Albany, or Kalgoorlie or Bunbury or places like that. It's just sort of like a big thrill to see Gnowangerup and you all rush to the TV to watch it ... It's just exciting to see your town. You look in the film clip to see if you see anyone you know, so you can say 'Oh, I saw you on TV last night'. It's just good. (Green 1998, p. 139)

Far from necessarily destroying community, television can act as an affirmation of community – a form of visibility normally reserved for larger populations, 'places like that', against which the local can be compared and from which the local can be differentiated.

Similarly, although much of modern life dances to a core-periphery tune, commercial broadcasting has an imperative to deliver locally-relevant advertising to smaller communities and thus has to be centred, in part, within those communities and cognisant of them. Compared to most institutional influences, broadcasting in remote WA was much less 'centred' outside its audience-area than were health, finance, social services, administration and politics: (**Female, 25-39 Broome**), "There was this big thing of watching the ads because some local people were starting to get ads. I think Broome Toyota and the Roebuck were amongst the first that I can remember. And there was this big thing with the local ad and who the people in it were, and all this." The target market has to be central to the commercial broadcaster – even when that target market is peripheral to many other social institutions.

Innis and McLuhan between them have convincingly demonstrated that all communications media influence perceptions of time and/or space, and this is certainly true of television and radio. Holmes' assertion that broadcasting 'influences consciousness' whereas interactivity 'influences individual experience of space and time' says more (arguably) about Holmes' desire to identify differences between them than it does about the characteristics of the media channels discussed. Indeed,

Porush (1998 pp. 47—8) echoes McLuhan[1] in suggesting that language is a 'software' for the mind, and that exposure to language (let alone via broadcast or interactivity) changes the brain, and the thoughts:

> To put it bluntly, using different alphabets (or losing the capacity to read the alphabet), even within the lifetime of an individual, is a bit like growing a new brain … It lets you think things that you couldn't have thought before and make connections that simply didn't exist physiologically, and forces your brain into different information-processing patterns, which presumably involve different mental events or experiences (as physiological-cognitive research overwhelmingly shows).

Language influences space, time, consciousness and the structure of the brain. Broadcasting and interactivity use language, so they also influence these aspects of human experience, as does symbolic communication of any sort.

Leaving aside issues of recognition, identification and reciprocity (for these will be discussed in greater depth towards the end of the paper) it is arguable how much more strongly the consumer of broadcasting identifies with others 'as figures of authority or charisma'. Television, rather than broadcasting, can pack a highly emotive punch with the clever use of both audio and visual cues, as refined both by advertising and by television programme production. Nonetheless, our ability to resist the hot-gospel preachers on the box indicates that the domestication of the medium reduces the power of the message. The mundane, everyday domestic context acts as a balance to the heightened fervour of the message-deliverer. Cinema screenings (particularly the Newsreels of the 1930—40s) and public meetings would appear to have far better claim to amplification of authority and/or charisma, and to the winning of hearts and minds.

On the other hand, while it is a moot point as to how much 'charisma' can be gauged by 'celebrity', the thousands of websites dedicated to the Spice Girls, and to Leonardo di Caprio in the mid-1990s indicates that charisma may well colonise all communication channels: print, broadcast, screened and/or interactive. Indeed, case studies of fan culture (eg Watson 1997) indicate that discussion of a shared object of interest, fascination, desire operates as a valuable glue to bind individuals together in a community-of-sorts. This is, indeed, the argument put forward in support of the mass media by Cunningham and Turner (1993, p. 350) at the end of their first edition of *The Media in Australia*: "The mass media are the glue that holds together much of our sense of ourselves as a society. They are also the platform on which public debate and collective sense-making in today's society takes place. Their demise is less likely to lead to enhanced democratisation, empowerment and rehumanisation than to the erosion of these fine ideals." Arguably, Cunningham and Turner are suggesting a situation where the mass media offers critical

tools to evaluate and discuss figures who may lay claim to authority, charisma or cult status.

The sale of the concentration spans of readers, listeners, audiences and – even – interactive participants to advertisers is more a function of consumer society than it is of specific media vehicles. Nor should it be assumed that the people whose attention is 'sold' necessarily find the exchange offensive or demeaning. As one of the remote WA audience commented, about the first commercials broadcast on television (**Female 18-24 Broome)** "I remember when we first got it. The first TV ad we saw, we all rejoiced! … [We were] depraved [sic] of advertising! … The ABC, they don't have any at all ... I don't mind adverts – they can be funny." (Green 1998) In a consumer society, to be finally counted an audience worth advertising to (as remote WA audiences finally were, in 1987), involves a sense of 'recognition at last'. The advertisement is also, increasingly, an element of popular culture – indeed, of popular interactive culture:

> (**Female, <17 Esperance)** We were fascinated by ads, and that, because we've never seen that before either. You know, we all started learning them, reciting them at school, being really stupid ... We used to learn them, and then say, like, or take parts in the ad, all of us, and say the ad. Like, over and over again and that. [Interviewer: HOW BIG A GROUP WOULD DO THAT?] Oh, just average – being stupid – seven or eight. Yeah, about seven of us. (Green 1998, p. 263)

Attention spans may be sold to advertisers, but advertising is increasingly being recognised as 'content' – and as 'pleasurable content' to boot.

Holmes reserves the strongest condemnation in his paper for broadcasting's capacity to 'cellularize' households in the information society, and mentions that, in the US, "between 1960—1981, the number of people living alone doubled to one in four" (1997, p. 34) as if there were some kind of cause and effect (broadcasting/isolation). In fact, the rise of the nuclear family (if not the rise of the single-parent family) can be traced back to the nineteenth century and predates broadcasting. It is arguably more the result of the household being the primary unit of consumption in a consumer society than any effect of broadcasting *per se*. It is not as though broadcasting destroyed community, thus laying the foundation for interactivity to offer a verisimilitude of community in its place. Instead broadcasting may well (as was indicated by Cunningham and Turner, and the ethnographic research in WA) have offered a common ground through which people could explore issues of relevance and importance, and through which valuable community-construction activities could take place.

In general terms, it seems likely that audience studies research negates (or at least calls into question) six of Holmes' eight assertions, leaving aside issues of recognition and reciprocity. If it is assumed that levels of community have been lost over the past few generations the most that can be claimed is that this loss may coincide, in part, with the increasing pervasiveness of mass media broadcasting. There is no proven, or indicated, causal relationship between the two dynamics.

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[1] McLuhan saw the phonetic alphabet as a communication technology: "It can be argued, then, that the phonetic alphabet, alone, is the technology that has been the means of creating 'civilized man' – the separate individuals equal before a written code of law" (McLuhan, 1964, p. 84).

THE COMMUNITY OFFERED BY THE INTERNET IS NOT NECESSARILY A COMMUNITY THAT HAS PREVIOUSLY BEEN LOST.

Dayan's (1998) study of 'Particularistic media and diasporic communications', is one indication of how people (in this case those involved in a cultural diaspora) work hard to communicate across barriers of time, place and circumstance. Dayan comments (1998, p. 110) that "a diaspora is always an intellectual construction tied to a given narrative". In other words, it is the individual's understanding as to who they are, and where they belong, in which circumstances, that is more important in determining community-membership than any single index (such as geographical or physical location).

'Particularistic' – as opposed to mass – media are especially valuable in maintaining community and connection across barriers of time and space. Among the particularistic media identified by Dayan are: audio and video cassettes, newsletters, holy icons, letters, photographs, telephone calls, and exchange of travellers. To these elements can be added email, and correspondence via websites (for comparatively wealthy diasporic community members). People who passionately collect and exchange particularistic media are unlikely to agree with Holmes that Internet interactivity is "an extension of the cellularization of social interaction via the workstation as well as household". Instead of cellularization, their experience in the exchange of the particular is one of communing, and of community.

Many members of a diaspora have never belonged to a coherent community of the kind recognised as having been dispersed. The diasporic catalyst might have occurred generations, or centuries, earlier. The belonging-to is a mythological 'given narrative', a reconstruction of a community 'as it might have been' pieced together from fragments dispersed through time and space. The belonging-to is defined by psychology, history, culture and tradition, and has little to do with location (other than that location is not-in-the-heartland). Holmes' reductionist observation that interactivity involves 'an extension of the cellularization of social interaction via the workstation as well as household' is an observation relating purely to the physical plane, ignoring the sense of belonging and connectedness relating to the experience of community online. Holmes' perspective also ignores the fact that many people feel threatened and rejected by those with whom they live in physical proximity. Geographical co-presence is no guarantee of community.

Students who have spent years as members of online communities suggest that those who argue about whether virtual communities are 'real' or not are those who have yet to experience community in an online environment. Certainly Wilbur (1997, p. 6) talks movingly about "the strangely solitary work that many CMC [computer-mediated communications] researchers are engaged in, sitting alone at their computers, but surrounded by a global multitude". He adds: "for those who doubt the possibility of online intimacy, I can only speak of … hours sitting at my keyboard with tears streaming down my face, or convulsed with laughter" (Wilbur 1997, p. 18). One argument which deserves hearing and analysis is that 'community' is defined by the quality of interaction and association, rather than the media and/or channels and/or communication practices through which this community construction and maintenance is carried out.

Research into such qualitative issues demands qualitative research methodologies such as ethnographic investigations (the techniques which galvanised audience studies). There are some starting points in this academic endeavour, such as Clark (1998), but detailed studies which compare significantly different groups of Internet users (such as males/females, young adults/middle aged users etc) have yet to be widely published. Nonetheless, analyst/commentators should beware of determining the definition of 'community' in advance of such research.

The risks analysts run in denying online community is that applications of pre-digital definitions of 'community' become a comment upon academic analysis, rather than upon the quality of communication and community experienced by online community members. A categorical denial of the validity of Internet community is at odds with the experience of community members (Palandri & Green, 2000). Such a refusal to acknowledge online community is as invalid as the (old) assumption that women who read romance fiction are, in so doing, complicit in their subjugation and oppression by masculine society. Radway's ethnographic study of romance readers (1984) established other criteria by which romance reading could be judged as a subversive and/or resistant activity, time away from the demands of the family. Too great an emphasis upon traditional sociological definitions of community, which position such communities in space, time and in face-to-face relationships, simply create tautological arguments to the effect that 'definitions of community which rule out cyberspace result in there being no communities located in cyberspace'. Such definitions say nothing about people's experiences, pleasures and motivations.

On the other hand, once we start asking people about the ways in which they perceive their engagements online with their engagements in RL (real life) then we are working with legitimate raw material. We are assuming that the people who are participating in online community are capable of explaining the critical factors of experience that define (for them) whether their participation is in a community, or not. These interactive participants are best placed to decide whether they are engaging in a verisimilitude of community while actually being further atomised within the household, located away from the domestic centre and positioned in front of a screen. It is quite possible that some exchanges are more positive than others – that some are 'community-building', while others might simply be 'disappointing'.

Concepts of community are contested academic ground. Nonetheless, although the Internet does not offer an exact equivalent to accepted 'old' community, this does not mean that it fails to offer community to those who want it, or that those who believe they belong to online communities have necessarily been duped. Holmes says more about himself in concentrating on the physical person in front of the screen, rather than the psychology of that person (Wallace 1999) engaged in communication and, perhaps (according to *their* definition), in community.

THE USEFUL CONCLUSIONS TO BE DRAWN FROM HOLMES' PAPER

At first sight the two observations of difference that appear to offer greatest insight are:

"High levels of recognition/identification between individuals	Low levels of recognition/identification between individuals
Very low level of reciprocity	Very high level of reciprocity"

The dynamic of recognition/identification is that of 'celebrity culture'. Ethnographic research indicates that broadcasting facilitates celebrity culture, and (insofar that celebrities and their associated projects and media are popular) popular culture:

> **(Female, 25-39, Homestead)** If you pick up a magazine – like when we go to town we usually pick up the usual women's magazines – and it's from them that you find big gaps in things that have happened – on the political scene or just generally on the news. And people's faces – unless you watch television, you don't know who these people are ... There was another article earlier in the year about – must have been about Greg Chappell – and he must have had a lot of smut thrown at him or something and he was in an article in the women's magazine about he and his wife and we didn't ever know what was said. (Green 1998, p. 260)

Without broadcasting (and, especially, without commercial broadcasting) much popular culture unravels into fragmented, partial speculation and comment. The broadcasting operates as 'the glue'. And with only partial access to popular culture, audience members denied the wherewithal to participate are effectively disenfranchised from a major social project of consumer society. Holmes concentrates, in his analysis, upon physical recognition/identification – the very dimension of engagement denied to remote WA residents prior to the introduction of television. Celebrities are made highly visible by popular culture through broadcasting, and also through print media and the cinema. There is no doubt, however, that the Internet also encourages recognition of these categories of individuals since most celebrity/fan/pan websites offer graphic images.

The point made by Holmes, it seems, is that broadcasting teaches its audiences to recognise certain individuals as icons (of consumption?). The Internet also teaches recognition, but it uses a number of different cues, and facilitates recognition of individual expression and levels of competence and exposure to Internet culture, as well as offering another medium for the propagation of celebrity image. Thus the use of acronyms – LOL (laugh out loud), LMAO (laughed my ass off) etc – are one way of sorting out the Internet novice from the fluent user. A knowledge of conventions and 'netiquette' is another. At the same time regular community members have no long-term trouble in identifying others in their group who may engage in the (potentially anti-social) behaviour of anonymous postings. Palandri and Green offer two examples:

> Long-term chatter Iron Filings (IF) was asked if he communicated differently in VL [virtual life] from his communications in RL, given that cyber presented him with an opportunity to try out different personae: "VL

> communication is indeed another medium to practice another persona… but why?… I find that no matter what handle [name] I use… I am still recognized… why? Because I have the same 'personality' for all of them… the handles just hang out in different rooms is all… grinning…" (Palandri & Green, 2000, p. 637)

The other example is the story of an attempt to be anonymous when "passive-aggressive flaming" – verbally attacking – "those with whom I did not agree". The writer cited realised "that I was acting anonymously out of fear of risking their disapproval. Of course, one's writing style is one's signature, and soon I was found out. I chose to stay and work through my reasons for this behavior, in the face of some hostility from those I had anonymously antagonized." (Palandri & Green, 2000, p. 638).

The community perception in use here is a different degree of perception to the visual cues involved in recognition of – eg Madonna – on the television screen. It is a much more complex pattern of knowing, grounded in repeated experience of communication over a period of time. The fact that people engaged in an online community may (or may not) recognise each other in RL is simply one way of identifying that the way that they recognise each other – through their personality expressed in written text – is not the major communication pattern in RL. In situations where this *is* the major communication medium – in VL – then people are recognisable to those who know them. On the other hand, broadcasting does not facilitate recognition of fellow audience members until discussion of shared programs, genres or fandom comes up. Although Holmes comments that broadcasting is the 'many speaking to the many', in fact the many (program makers) speak of only a few – the politicians and celebrities. It is neither the fellow audience members, nor the programme makers who enjoy/endure 'high levels of recognition'. Recognition in broadcasting is a very specific subsection of a minority of those involved in a complex process.

As to reciprocity, it is possible to argue that there are high levels of response to broadcasts, but the reciprocal nature of this response is only tangential. Thus conversation about broadcasting, self-identification as an audience member, and the turning on of the receiver to be part of the next program in the sequence are all a form of response. Reciprocity, in terms of a return communication to the program-maker, may be much less pervasive – phone calls, letters, web-postings. The reciprocity structured into the relationship between broadcaster and audience articulates with genre, however. Talkback, for example, is critically dependent upon reciprocal communication with the audience. Nonetheless, there is little potential for the development of a one-to-one reciprocal relationship. The reciprocity is rarely interactive.

On the other hand, for the actors in broadcasting (the faces and voices broadcast) there is considerable response to their labour on the screen, and many hire public relations staff to help simulate the experience of reciprocal communication with fans. The 'celebrity status' achieved by news readers, weather forecasters and game-show hosts – those who achieve high recognition – is an indication both of audience response, and of public reciprocity to the actors' work. The fees which can be commanded by these people for opening fetes, shopping centres and the like are

a commodification of this valuable reciprocal response. These examples are not a response to the 'content-providers' of broadcasting, however, but a response to the content.

This is at odds with what happens in different 'areas' of the Internet. Much of the Internet offers little in the way of a reciprocal response. Apart from the collection of cookies so that websites can recognise and clock return visits, the only reciprocity involved in the typical quest for information is a plethora of advertising and the successful location of information desired and/or a prolonged and frustrating search. In comparison with information search, online community lies at the other end of the continuum of reciprocity relating to Internet content in that the material consumed by those who access the site is also created by them. (Although there may be patterns of 'lurkers', who read postings, but who do not contribute.) Here the reciprocity (for those involved, not lurking) is equivalent to the social obligation of being involved in a conversation – a response at some point is expected, and is necessary, for the structure of the exchange. There are parallels with talkback broadcasting, however, with the capacity to 'go private' in online matched by callers being put back to switch 'so that we can take your details'.

Email may be the only 'pure' form of reciprocal Internet activity and, in the way that it operates, it is a little like telecommunications-use. Listserve postings (and one-many messages to entire organisations) also enable email to offer a form of 'broadcasting'. Nonetheless, the greater the number posted-to, the lower the quality of reciprocity, and at this extreme email comes closest to becoming a one-way information service. Even within email it is possible to identify a continuum of communication styles in which reciprocity is more – or less – welcomed and expected. While high levels of reciprocity are sometimes a feature of a 'community of interactivity' they are neither necessary nor sufficient to define such a community. For lurkers, the only reciprocity involved is the physical act of logging into a site – an action equivalent to membership as part of a broadcast audience.

CONCLUSION

Arguably, the most useful aspect of Holmes' paper is a side effect. He clarifies the difficulty of talking in general terms about 'communities of broadcasting' and 'communities of interactivity'. One of the reasons why both communities resist generalisation is that their content is organised into highly specific genres. In the case of the Internet, moreover, there is reason to believe that the genres available encompass (or have equivalencies with) all of those from two-way telecommunications through to radio and television broadcasting and the gamut of print products including the letter, the newsletter/circular and the full mass-media printed magazine or newspaper. Studies of Internet users and speculation as to their characteristics and interests needs to move beyond discussions of a 'community of interactivity' to an analysis of different genres/communications patterns on the net, and of the participants who engage in these communications.

As to Holmes' other project, to convince readers of his article that broadcasting broke the 'public sphere' into domestic atoms, while the Internet fragmented these atoms further into individuals isolated behind workstations, neither audience studies, nor the experience of 'being interactive' indicate that his perceptions are entirely valid. They may reflect the physical positioning of the body in relation to technology, but the mind is elsewhere, it is active, and it is engaging in the processing of material for use in future work of community-building.

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