A Short History of Dialogue in Canada

Ted D. Naylor
University of Alberta
Dr. Ann Dale
Royal Roads University

1. Introduction

This paper provides a brief overview and discussion of the history of "dialogue" in Canada. In this paper, we understand dialogue as the ongoing civil project of building collective norms and values through the broad exchange, articulation and dissemination of knowledge through active sources of dialogue, information and discussion on the behalf of citizens. By examining the historical context of dialogue in Canada, we demonstrate how this concept has been successfully used in the past to coordinate, organize and stimulate crucial discussions around issues of public interest and importance. Secondly, we suggest dialogue has the ability to bridge asymmetries in democratic practices, by building collective norms, values and governance among diverse sectors (or "stakeholders" in the modern parlance of government) of Canadian society. In this way, dialogue differs from consensus building, agenda setting and consultation, since it provides a more permanent, engaged, open-ended and inclusive modality of shared decision making with the public.

The existence of asymmetries in democratic and governing practices in Canada is now well established. Renewed work on deepening civic engagement (McCoy et al., 2002), the recent identification of a "democratic deficit", along with the general recognition "something's wrong somewhere" (Lind, 1995), suggest these asymmetries are real. Further, complex developments over the last 20 years, such as government reform, the emergence of new management models in governance (known as New Public Administration), the managerialization of the public service and widespread dissatisfaction with electoral politics and policy development (Theme Report, 1991), have pointed to the need for the state to include and account for an increasingly diverse society that wants "in," that is, to play a greater role in decisions once thought to be the sole prerogative of the state (Dale, 2001). What is needed then is an analytical tool

that begins to address and explore why these asymmetries exist. The analytical tool that we suggest is crucial in addressing these general concerns is the concept of *dialogue*, since it suggests a way to explore a modality which could serve to enhance widespread discussion and dissemination of issues concerning Canadians.

Examining three popular sources that have, to varying degrees, permitted widespread dialogue in Canada–radio, television and the Internet–we seek to broadly explore the mechanisms of dialogue rather than the philosophical and historical underpinnings of the term and practice (for example, Anderson, 2002; Bohm, 1996; Maranhao, 1990). We will also confine our examination to the modern means that have enabled widespread, in most cases national, discussion and dialogue for the "Canadian way" (Shea, 1963) in broadcasting and communication. Thus we begin with a brief historical outline of dialogue in Canada by examining the creation of the Canadian Broadcasting Corp. (CBC).

2. Historical Outline of Public Broadcasting in Canada: Creating a "Public"

The history of national dialogue in Canada inevitably begins with the radio in Canada and the Marconi station XWA (later becoming CFCF), which began experimental radio broadcasts in 1919 and became the first station to be licensed in Canada the same year (Siegel, 1983). These developments were of course preceded by the first transatlantic signal in 1901 by Marconi with wireless telegraphy, and the first wireless telegraph station in 1902 in Glace Bay, N.S. Twenty years later, Station XWA was followed by the emergence of many commercial stations owned by small clubs, corporations, radio manufacturers, newspapers, community groups, universities and, notably, the Canadian National Railway (CN). The CN development is significant because of its national scope. The company managed to link stations from Ottawa, Moncton and Vancouver, along with a dozen other stations that were leased out across the country (CBC, history.html, Sept. 8, 2002).

These developments were the first of their kind in Canada and had a profound impact on how Canadians would communicate and engage one another for the remainder of the century.

However, it is worth noting the problems experienced by early radio stations and interestingly, to a degree, similar difficulties are now analogous to the problems of modern Internet access. Stations were predominately concentrated in larger population and economic centre's, leaving significant areas of the country without service; national East-West programming was costly and limited; and there was continual interference creating poor reception from powerful American and Mexican stations, along with a high degree of American content on almost all Canadian stations (CBC, history.htm, Sept. 8, 2002). Similarly, today new communication mechanisms in Canada, such as the Internet, are experiencing early problems associated with rapid development. For example, the recent identification of a "digital divide" (Sciadas, 2002007.pdf, Nov. 12, 2002) in Canada suggests measures must be taken to increase Internet access to all Canadians. This is particularly important given the rapid progression of new communication-technology developments, such as high-speed Internet and wireless access, and the critical role such technologies can play in increasing knowledge diffusion and innovation (Royal Roads University, dialogues.ca, Sept. 2, 2002). In addition to this divide based on "access" through means, is "public-based" access, where rural areas adjacent to large urban centres are often without access.

In 1928 the Canadian government appointed the Royal Commission on Radio Broadcasting to "examine the broadcasting situation in the Dominion of Canada and make recommendations to the Government as to the future administration, management, control and financing thereof" (CBC, history.html, Sept. 8, 2002). The result was the Aird Commission Report in 1929, which recommended a nationally owned broadcasting company be set up, and in 1932 led to the appointment of a publicly owned body known as the Canadian Radio Broadcasting Commission (CRBC). There was strong pressure for this early broadcast institution to remain fundamentally

"Canadian." For instance, the Canadian Radio League, founded by Graham Spry and Alan B. Plaunt, rallied support for the recommendations made by the Aird Report. In 1931, in an article defending the principles of public control for broadcasting and communication, Spry commented:

> Broadcasting … is no more a business than a public school system is a business … Broadcasting, primarily, is an instrument of education in its widest significance, ranging from play to learning, from recreation to the cultivation of public opinion, and it concerns and influences not any single element in the community, but the community as a whole (McChesney, pap.html, Dec. 8, 2002).

By 1933, the CRBC had five stations stretching across the country, in both English and French. The idea was that "Canadian radio listeners want[ed] Canadian broadcasting" (Raboy, 1990: 27). Thus, the early beginnings of a mechanism for a key forum of national and public dialogue across Canada was established.

For a variety of reasons, ranging from financial to organizational, the CRBC proved inadequate and in 1936 the CBC took over with a mandate to reach all Canadians in all parts of the country. Just one year later, the CBC established stations reaching 76% of all Canadians. The period is also notable since many of the "policy" decisions the CBC took coloured its influence and direction into the future. For example, one important refinement in policy the CBC undertook was to establish the idea "public" service should be primarily "national" in scope, while local and community service should be left to the private sector. Another policy move was that private individuals and corporations could not buy access to the air. As Raboy (1990: 64) notes, "this was a particularly strong position considering that the CBC provided free access to organized groups ranging from the Canadian Clubs to the Communist party."

These decisions, among many, cemented the CBC as the first modern communications system in Canada that

was independent, public and national in scope–defining a "public" and the interests of that public in national and widely accessible terms. These developments thus led to the development of a public space for national dialogue, or at least the potential means for national dialogue, since its aim was the creation of public programming and forums that could foster enhanced communication possibilities in public discussions and dialogues of Canadians. Moreover, the (mass) communication possibilities created through the CBC, and despite real or perceived faults (for example, Raboy, 1990; Seigle, 1982; McChesney, 1999), stands as an integral process in fostering democracy in Canada, particularly given the strong connection between public communications and democracy (for example, McCombs et al., 1997; Splichal, 1993; Habermas, 1989). As Splichal et al. (1993: 3) note, "communications are the basis for any democratic culture and political system."

3. The Emergence of a National Dialogue: Forums and Literacy in Communication

Impetus for one of the earliest and most influential developments in public dialogue in Canada took place during the Second World War. As Raboy (1990: 68) notes, "the war changed both the structures and the socio-cultural context of broadcasting." While the pressures of the war led to controversy surrounding the role of public broadcasting, for example propaganda was a contentious issue, the war did not discourage the government from establishing a parliamentary committee on broadcasting in 1942. This was due in part to the character of wartime broadcasting and programming, which was partly aimed at national unity. A renewed interest in the democratic possibilities of radio broadcasting emerged. Many public officials saw broadcasting as a modern replacement for dialogue and discussion, noting it could be used to "modernize the old corner-store discussions around the stove." Ultimately, the parliamentary committee tabled a significant report that retrenched the principles of a national broadcast for public interest as "a great instrument of education and national unity." Aside from a national character, the idea of public-service broadcasting

also emerged, at least in part, from wartime broadcasting. As Raboy (1990) notes, there was a new demand and thirst for national programs and an increasingly large "listening" public[1].

3.1 Farm Forums

The first major program directed to a public of "listening" groups was the emergence of what was known as the *Farm Forums* (1939-1965), or the *National Farm Radio Forum* (*NFRF*). The *Farm Forums* were developed through the work, direction and partnerships of the Canadian Association for Adult Education (CAAE) and the Canadian Federation of Agriculture. They intended to deal with the economic and social issues affecting rural farmers in Canada through the unique communication features of radio. In the forums, groups developed across the country to tune into the forums, which then acted as a starting point for weekly discussions producing dialogue around issues of major importance to farmers. The development of the *NFRF* is significant for a number of reasons.

The *Farm Forums* represent one of the first developments for encouraging a rough form of two-way[2] communication to transcend both time and space, meaning passive listeners became active participants in the discussions taking place over the radio across Canada simultaneously. Today, modern CBC Radio programs such as *Ideas*, *Cross Country Checkup* and *As It Happens* continue to engage citizens in dialogue around issues and debates– informed and premised on the idea of the *Farm Forums*. Historically, this was a new form of communication, where many people could come together in discussions to form a dialogue across both time and space. As the Canadian Congress of Labour noted at the time, the CBC forums thus marked an "important contribution to the democratic way of life," due to the "freedom of discussion" permitted (Raboy, 1990: 81), in addition to the national space and scope they created. Of course, the logic embedded in this observation presupposes the importance of technology in enhancing the ability to organize dialogue, or "free" discussions, contributing to a "democratic" way of (Canadian) life. Recently, Shelagh Rogers's CBC Radio program, *Sounds Like Canada*, continues this tradition, by

including a diverse range of citizens and groups access to radio in their attempt to:

> drench the airwaves with voices and sound from all over the country and bring the listener what is new, surprising and thought provoking, while presenting familiar voices in different and creative ways (CBC, soundslikecanada, Dec. 8, 2002).

The forums also provided a new method of building collective norms and governance by creating a means for civic engagement. CAAE's founder E.A. Corbett noted at the time:

> Within the communities involved [the *Farm Forums*] created a new sense of neighborhood and sense of social responsibility. It has provided a medium through which farm people by studying, talking and planning together have arrived at a sharper understanding of local and national problems. (Canada, 1980:)

Because of the numbers involved in this civic engagement–over 20,000 participated, which makes the Farm Forums the largest recorded Canadian forum in history–it was possible to include many people from across the country in forming a national and inclusive dialogue (Sim, story.html, Nov. 5, 2002). The forums thus represented a dialogue that was collective in character, requiring and depending upon the participation of ordinary citizens, building a collective consciousness and subsequent identity. This was an emergent property, and to this day remains a powerful way of framing discussions and debates important to Canadians across the country, although today notably in serious decline because of current re-framing of national radio and television infrastructure.

3.2 Citizens' Forum

A second and equally important contribution to the creation and development of a national "dialogue"

was CBC Radio's, *Citizens' Forum*, co-developed by the CAAE. Not surprisingly, the originators of the Citizens' Forum saw the program as an "education for citizenship" (Canada, 1980: 18). While the *Farm Forums* may have helped "farm people" form a dialogue of collective interests, the *Citizens' Forum* was intended to be even more inclusive, and appeal to a diverse civic audience. From the early 1940s to 1963, the *Citizen's Forum* managed to cover an incredible range of topics and subjects of political and social controversy.

Aside from building on the ground-breaking work of the *Farm Forums*, the *Citizens' Forum* further cemented the principles of dialogue as a key modality of civic engagement in Canada, while contributing to national discussions that were key to creating collective norms and values. The idea of audience participation, that is citizen participation, for example, was a key component of the forums. A major recommendation passed at the *Citizens' Forum* conference in Toronto, May 1947, "was that broadcasts in [the] future should originate in public meetings across the country with audience questions carried on the air" (Canada, 1980: 59). Embedded in this quote is the tacit recognition public participation underpins communication broadcasting, and should originate through the civic engagement of dialogue through public talk.

Undoubtedly, part of the educational component that gave the idea of forums, including the *Farm Forums*, much of its real impact for dialogue, was the notion of literacy. Here, we mean literacy as one's ability to understand and disseminate a topic or issue–this might be scientific literacy, cultural literacy or, broader still, civic literacy–but in any case implies the ability of an individual to understand a given topic or issue. The *Citizens' Forum* was "judged on its success in providing a basis for people to meet, examine the issues, share their opinions and reach conclusions on the best course for public action" (Canada, 1980: 18). In other words, the forums aimed to enhance the literacy of people around issues of importance, such that people would then reach a potential consensus for action. This was done by encouraging groups to form across the country, who would be supplied

information on the background of an issue with conflicting view points on the critical questions of the day. CBC Radio went to great lengths to listen to and accommodate the views of participating groups through annual forum conferences and the yearly *Citizens' Forum* questionnaire, which provided groups an organized way to make their opinions known (Ibid, 1980), and facilitated the development of a useful synthetic framework in support of the radio forums. Though the end results of this process varied widely, the point here is this was carried out through the modality of dialogue, by creating and fostering a national dialogue through the communication technology of radio. Though it was impossible to always represent the views and issues relevant to Canadians, the *Citizen's Forum* lived up to "the canons of excellent public education and invariably offer[ed] access and fair play to all responsible interests" (Ibid, 1980: 48).

Although the forums eventually faded for a number of reasons including, according to Wilson (1980: 87), inability to increase long-term group participation (i.e. public fatigue), a lack of field workers, or human resource time/effort, increasing competition from other sources of analysis and commentary, lack of financial support and the decline of social protest, it is clear the Citizen's Forum represented a new type of arena. This arena provided a space where issues of national scope were discussed by citizens and the public, and were aimed to enhance the ability of citizens to understand, disseminate and then act on a given topic or issue, forming collective norms and values. As we shall see, the idea of this kind of forum, enabled through developments in communicative technology, would have an important impact on the kinds of initiatives in dialogue that would follow, eventually laying the groundwork for the development and uses of mediums such as television, to a very limited degree, and eventually the Internet–now an emerging and promising arena of dialogue (Royal Roads University, dialogues.ca, Sept. 2, 2002).

4. Dialogue in New Media: The Development of a Television Medium

The next major development of public broadcasting took place in the medium of television. Though there were

experiments in television as early as the 1930s, it was not until after the Second World War that television became widely available. In March of 1949, the government of Canada's short-term policy was to develop a nationwide Canadian television service and the CBC was authorized to establish stations and production centres in Toronto and Montreal (Weir, 1983; Peters, 1979).

In 1951, the Massey Commission was formed to address the "compelling need to do something about television" (Weir, 1965: 250). The Massey Commission concluded the system founded on the recommendations of the Aird Commission had developed "into the greatest single agency for national unity, understanding and enlightenment" (Weir, 1965: 251). Therefore, they kept the recommendations of the Aird Report and entrenched television broadcasting as a national and public system. They also favourably approved of CBC programming such as the CBC Forums, which were deemed "of great value in making better citizens of us, in that they awaken our critical faculties" (Raboy, 1990: 104).

Television quickly followed the development of radio in terms of its national scope, within its second year CBC Television was available to 60% of the population, and nearly one-million Canadians owned television sets. By 1959, network service expanded to 91% of the Canadian population, with Canadian content hovering around 60% of air-time for English networks and 75% on French networks (CBC, history.html, Sept. 8, 2002). Again, the developments of a public-broadcast system, national in scope and orientated to public interest, can be seen as a key development in creating a potential mechanism suited to fostering a robust public dialogue for Canadians.

Certainly, there are forms of television programming that to this day contribute to public dialogue and civic literacy for Canadians. For example, the development of news journalism, despite many critiques (for example, Chomsky, 1988; McChesney, 1999; Hackett et al., 1998), could be taken as a relatively effective mechanism of providing Canadians with "objective" and "professional" sources of information people require to make informed decisions about issues of importance and relevance. Moreover, the creation of contemporary programs such as the

Massey Lectures, and most recently Peter Mansbridge's *Town Halls* are, indeed, mechanisms of dialogue, exposing people to key issues of policy and offering limited opportunities of participation. However, as we will see, the development of television did not create an environment conducive to widespread citizen engagement, nor an appropriate democratic mechanism for public dialogue needed to address increasing asymmetries in democratic practices. In this way, and for a variety of reasons (briefly touched upon below), we suggest television has largely failed in creating a viable arena of public dialogue, conducive to an openly engaged and literate citizenry.

4.1 The Failure of the Television Medium to Create Dialogue

Three years after the beginning of television broadcasting (1955), a third commission was appointed to examine issues related to public broadcasting and the CBC. This commission was the Fowler Commission, and tabled its report March 1957 (Wier, 1965). The recommendations of the Fowler report had serious and long-lasting affects on public broadcasting in Canada, and inevitably diminished the realm of television as a viable vehicle for public dialogue[3]. Most notably, its recommendations included the introduction of commercial features to public broadcasting. The embedded features of a public broadcasting in Canada–its national scope, its openness, the technical abilities to transcend time and space and its mandate to serve public interest–are to this day severely and irrevocably conflicted and compromised from the pressures of closed commercials and private interests recognized by the Fowler Commission.

A key development that emanated from the Fowler Commission was the creation of the Board of Broadcast Governors (BBG), in 1958. The BBG accepted the principle of separating the regulatory and operating functions of the CBC. This led to the creation of a second public agency, consequently the "primary area of public intervention in broadcasting would henceforth be regulation [as in the US], with programming and operations being secondary" (Raboy, 1990: 134). With this subtle departure from a legislative framework, that had been in place since

1936, the creation of a new public-regulatory environment reshaped and profoundly restructured the television-broadcast system away from programming to an orientation to policing-policy issues in broadcasting– this resulted in a climate where private broadcasting expanded and rapidly took off. As Babe (1988: 71) succinctly put it, "Public broadcasting began its decline in 1958…when the government created the Board of Broadcast Governors…this third phase [of development] has seen a steady increase in the relative importance of the private sector and a relative diminution of the public."

In lieu of a detailed history of television, along with the complexity of its development in Canada (Raboy, 1990), it will suffice here to note the controversy surrounding the development of television broadcasting was intense and varied between those who saw it as an extension of public dialogue, with the potential to be truly public and democratic in character, and those who championed its vast potential for commercial exploitation and private profit. In reality, Canadian television broadcasting, often arguably, lay somewhere in between these two diverse views, though increasingly policy decisions made on behalf of the emergent regulatory body of the BBG, eventually the Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC), began to shift towards private interests. The split between CBC programming and its regulatory mandate, then taken up by the CRTC, severely diminished its ability to be an effective participatory mechanism for fostering public dialogue in Canada. With the emergence of cable broadcasting in the 1970s, commercial enterprises found themselves in a position to argue that a multiplicity of channels offered the public greater freedom, and a supply of programming that the public demanded and wanted (Raboy, 1990). Not surprisingly, private interests did just that, and continue to do so today, successfully lobbying for the emergence of pay-per-view television, satellite television, now digital television and of course a wide variety of specialty channels and programming, many of which are American in origin, permitted through a "hybrid" policy allowing companies to import American signals into Canada (Raboy, 1990: 319). The problem of this policy, as the history of

the American broadcasting experience reveals, is:

> commercial broadcasters will do everything in their power to avoid public interest obligations if they, in any way, detract from the bottom line; that is, if they in any way might be effective [for the public interest]" (McChesney, 1999: 308).

In other words, civic engagement and literacy is, and has been, in serious decline for some time now because of the arrangements of our communications infrastructure.

The failure of television's communication potential to foster a healthy public dialogue and literacy is necessarily then linked to the increasing commercial features of television broadcasting, introduced through the complex and historical policy developments undertaken since its introduction. The continued success of modern *public* radio, as an interactive and engaging medium, also underscores the impact of the "commercialization" of television (and commercial radio). Paradoxically, the daily success of television to reach a mass audience, even relative to public radio, suggests a crucial lack of civic literacy taking place, as more and more people "tune in" to commercials and private programs, and "tune out" public dialogue that's crucially important to democratic decision making. Price (1995) notes, for example, increasingly "open" spaces for communication are being cut off. "Much of the traditional open terrain is tending to close and corridors of discourse are becoming private and more selective" (217). Price also points out emerging trends in television broadcasting, to subscriber channels and pay-per-view networking, are leading to the "self-ghettoization" and a trend toward diasporic communities, where spaces of communication are only available after payment of a fee. This conception of the public acts to transform a public, capable of dialogue, to a passive watching audience–from citizens to consumers–where "those who consume the spectacle cannot act" (Price, 1995: 29). In the future, Price prophesies eventually these channels will only be available to those with specific credentials, to "groups of common bond." Such a development,

taken to its logical conclusion, can only be seen to contribute to a society where, as Vico imaginatively puts it, "people get used to thinking only of their particular interest…and so live, like ferocious beasts, in the middle of a crowd but in an absolute solitude of spirit and desire" (Saul, 2001: 51).

Our pursuit here is of course to explore the "space" or modality that creates "common bonds" through diversity, openness and accessibility– through the admittedly ambiguous historical tool of dialogue. Moreover, and limited to a discussion of modern means permitting national and public dialogue, through a brief exploratory comparison between radio and television we posit television is defective in its ability to foster dialogue. Further still, and despite the relative success of public radio, the largely static development of radio and its communication features, and though it remains open and accessible primarily through the CBC, is limited in its future abilities to systematically carry out widespread and active dialogue on the behalf of Canadians. This is because of both its technological limitations, as primarily a one-way communicative broadcast modality, and its inability to extend and/or compress time and space[4]. In 1954, at the height of the "golden age" of radio, H.L. Keenleyside wrote:

> Canada is still trying to be a democracy, and the degree of success we attain in this effort will depend in great measure on our success in the development of an informed interest in public affairs (Canada, 1980: ii).

Almost fifty years later, we might add, Canada is still trying to be a democracy, but the degree of success we attain in this effort depends now on a critical effort to engage one another in a collective dialogue, since–*informed and engaged publics, along with trustworthy, supportive and inclusive institutions, facilitate democracy"* (Dale, 2001: 132).

5. A New Medium for Dialogue? The Development of the Internet and Cyberspace

The emergence of the Internet is now a third major development in a communication medium embedded with the potential to allow many people to

engage in dialogue and create new forms of literacy around issues of crucial importance to the welfare of Canadians. Though recent, the history of the Internet represents an emerging development in the history of dialogue, and offers the possibility of creating a modality capable of helping citizens reinvigorate public talk and dialogue in entirely new ways, and with entirely new results.

Notably, the history of the Internet is rooted in US military research and the Department of Defense's Advanced Research Projects Agency (ARPA), which developed a system to allow researchers to use each other's computers from a single terminal regardless of what system each target computer was running. Based on packet-switching communication technology, the system also made the network independent of control and command centres, so messages could find their own way along the network, permitting the network to simultaneously be used by any number of people at the same time. The end result of the ARPA project was the first major element of "cyberspace" in a network called ARPANET, which directly led to the creation of the Internet (Jordan, 1999)

Key to the communication features of the Internet is then the place termed cyberspace, since it is within this "space" people create networks allowing them to communicate–or create dialogue–as opposed to merely receiving messages in communication mediums such as television and radio. Notably, the concept of cyberspace has its historical roots in science fiction. In the 1980s, a genre of science fiction emerged known as cyberpunk. The genre concerned itself with society and technology by making each appear "fictional and strange" (Jordan, 1999). Notably, the term was actively coined by fiction writer William Gibson (1984), who used "cyberspace" to describe a non-space entered into through technology, created by futuristic electronic media (Barnes, 1996). While the term continued to evolve and multiply in meaning, the first person to apply it to a contemporary-communications phenomenon was John Perry Barlow, a Grateful Dead band member. He eventually became a cyberspace pioneer and co-founder of the Electronic Frontier Foundation, a non-profit organization that works to protect peoples digital rights (Strate et al., 1996). Sterling comments:

> Barlow was the first commentator to adopt novelist, William Gibson's, striking science-fictional term "cyberspace" as a synonym for the present day nexus of computer and telecommunications networks. Barlow was insistent that cyberspace should be regarded as a qualitatively new world, a "frontier". According to Barlow, the world of electronic communications, now made visible through the computer screen, could no longer be usefully regarded as just a tangle of high-tech wiring. Instead, it had become a place, a cyberspace, which demanded a new set of metaphors, a new set of rules and behaviours. (1992: 236)

A similar emphasis is also found in Rheingold's influential work *The Virtual Community: Homesteading on the Electronic Frontier* (1994: 5), which helped ground the historical development of the Internet in an emerging literature and canon of research:

> the conceptual space where words, human relationships, data, wealth and power are manifested by people using computer-mediated communication (CMC) technology.

Given these descriptions, and as Strate et al. (1996) point out; cyberspace is not the same as communication through CMC, but rather forms the historical context through which such communication occurs. They also point out it is not the same as a network, but instead is the "sense" of place created through the work of such networks. Primarily, individuals confront the sense of space created by cyberspace "in front of a computer screen, reading the glowing words, we confront our singularity before building a sense of others in the electronic world" (Jordan, 1999: 60). Historically then, the space created by cyberspace is a communication space, predicated on the

ability to communicate with others through the modality of an online dialogue–or "e-dialogue."

Further still, once an individual enters cyberspace the place is inherently a social one, and thus cyberspace is usefully thought of as a form of social space. Jordan (1999) contends cyberspace constitutes a social, cultural, economic and political space of virtual human interaction. This space exists and is made possible through interconnected networks, specifically a network of networks called the Internet. Once this space is entered into, the fundamental relations between others and ourselves are altered. Speculating on this place, Sterling comments:

> Cyberspace is the "place" where a telephone conversation appears to occur. Not inside your actual phone…. Not inside the other person's phone…The place between the phones. The indefinite place out there, where the two of you, two human beings, actually meet and communicate…. Although it is not exactly "real," "cyberspace" is a genuine place. Things happen there that have very genuine consequences. This "place" is not "real", but it is serious, it is earnest. (1992: xi-xii)

This suggests cyberspace be accurately considered a social space, where individuals, locally situated, meet and confront other individuals through the wires, codes and computers that make such a space possible. In this way, it is possible to conclude definitively cyberspace is a place, and colours any online experience that takes place there. As Jordan (1999: 85) comments, "The difference cyberspace makes to the individual is, necessarily, constantly felt and experienced." It consists of individuals in a social place, and necessarily shapes the possibilities, both real and imagined, of the experience of computer communication and exchange. As a social space, cyberspace is therefore predicated on individuals being in that space, based on social exchanges and communication through dialogue.

The emergence of the Internet as a communication medium thus offers the ability of enhanced communication, and is now affecting the historical trajectory of public dialogue in Canada. According to Dryburgh (2001), citing Statistics Canada, in 2000 an estimated 13 million, or 53% of Canadians over 15 years of age, said they used the Internet at home, work or somewhere else in the last 12 months. Moreover, the Internet is being used to enhance civic literacy through the emerging communication features it offers in cyberspace (Royal Roads University, dialogue.ca, Sept. 2, 2002). In this way, it provides a new space for public dialogue, with the added dimension of limitless reach and the ability of many people to communicate across time. The use of the Internet to expand dialogue, literacy and discourse are taken then as new features of a potentially democratic process, since largely they seek to involve different groups employing different techniques to achieve different (democratic) objectives. Though its appearance is largely ubiquitous when confronted, where people "meet" online and cumbersomely type to one another, the use of the Internet is different and does have real consequences for both those online and offline. Kapor notes the historical significance of cyberspace and civic e-dialogue:

> Instead of a small number of groups having privileged positions as speakers-broadcast networks and powerful newspapers–we are entering an era of communication of the many-to-the-many. . .the nature of the technology itself has opened up a space of much greater democratic possibility (McChesney, mcchesney.html, Oct. 12, 2002).

However, to be clear, communication vis-a-vis the Internet occurs in a cyberspace that is simultaneously embedded in the limitations and possibilities created by the features of that space (Naylor, 2002). Crucial then, is creating open public spaces on the Internet in order to secure public spaces for citizens, aimed at enhancing civic literacy since:

> an open information and communication system to ensure informed decisions in all public affairs can be seen as a fundamental condition for any contemporary model of general democracy (Splichal and Wasko, 1993: 15).

Thus open accessibility to the Internet is crucial if cyberspace is to fulfill its potential as a vehicle for public dialogue.

Also crucial is the recognition that the creation of the Internet and cyberspace is rooted in the material articulation of historical processes of dominant social practices embedded in society at large (Castells, 2001). In other words, the space of cyberspace is new, though it is built upon dominant socio-spaces, practices and structures, which are now reorganizing around an information-technology paradigm. Communication created through cyberspace vis-a-vis the Internet stands therefore as an example of a new form of space, reflecting the increasingly dominant social structure and practices of an information society made possible through emerging technologies such as the Internet. However, through the emergence of this paradigm there now exists an increasing opportunity to support dialogue and flows of information exchange characterized by a:

> diversification, multimodality and versatility…that is able to embrace and integrate all forms of expression, as well as a diversity of interests, values and imaginations, including the expression of social conflicts" (Castells, 2000: 404).

In addition, and unlike other communication mediums such as television and radio, the Internet remains technologically open, enabling widespread access and seriously limiting governmental or commercial restrictions (Ibid, 2000: 384). The Internet therefore stands as a promising communication medium for the creation of a truly public dialogue, where citizens can engage issues and topics, fostering a public of literate and active Canadian citizens.

5.1 Sustainable Development and E-Dialogues: A Brief Example

One domain where the Internet and cyberspace is making a direct impact, permitted through the historical development of the medium, is in the field of sustainable development. The fundamental ability of the Internet to create a social space conducive, indeed predicated, on the ability of creating dialogue among and across networks of individuals and groups is strongly connected to the very core of sustainable development issues – which tend to be fragmented, complex, broad, integrated and pluralized. The characteristics therefore make it conducive to the domain of dialogue, since dialogue is a tool seeking consensus, understanding, literacy and discussion around a diversity of interests and issues.

Formally, sustainable development is a process of reconciliation of three imperatives: (i) the ecological imperative to live within a global biophysical carrying capacity and maintain biodiversity; (ii) the social imperative to ensure the development of democratic systems of governance to effectively propagate and sustain the values that people wish to live by; and (iii) the economic imperative to ensure that basic needs are met worldwide. And equitable access to these three resources– ecological, social and economic–is fundamental to its realization (Dale, 2001).

Moreover, communities worldwide are now facing formidable challenges: significant demographic urban growth, with associated problems of urban sprawl and development; economic and population losses in many rural and resource dependent communities, with associated job loss and community decline; meeting the basic necessities for clean air, clean water, energy, transportation, land use, housing, jobs, health and waste disposal. Such problems are dynamically interconnected and cannot be dealt with in isolation, thus requiring new approaches, frameworks, partnerships and tools to address them in an integrative fashion (Dale, 2002, forthcoming). Key to facing these challenges is thus the ability of e-dialogues to co-ordinate and direct discussions around these issues, potentially contributing to a rapid development of social capital, and the

ability of people to discuss, disseminate and contribute to democratic decision-making through the communication features of the Internet.

Notably, 21st century sustainable development issues are similar to the complexities inherent in relationships; we need to become fully conscious of those relationships critical to our well being, and perhaps one of the relationships we least appreciate is the importance of our relationships with natural systems, and other species, which may be fundamental to our very humanity. We are now at a stage in human evolution where we can deliberately choose and design our potentiality, and indeed, our very survival may be linked to our capacity for deliberative social design, given our dominance as a species on the planet (Ibid, 2001).

The social spaces developed through the historical creation of the Internet may therefore contain the latent potential to contribute to a system of relationships designed around dialogue. This is based on the recognition "new information technologies are not simply tools to be applied, but processes to be developed" (Castells, 2000: 31). In the domain of sustainable development, the key is to develop processes, which are conciliatory and bring diversity–necessarily individuals, groups and interests–together under an umbrella of community based on open e-dialogue and access. Moreover, e-dialogues suggest an opportunity around the stovepipes and silos that currently characterize status quo decision-making processes, where vested interests dominate and co-ordination of multiple voices of interests is nearly impossible. As such, we would argue the Internet appears to be the newest hope in what amounts to a history of hopes for dialogue–for creating a truly meaningful public dialogue for Canada and its citizens.

Moreover, preliminary results from our e-dialogue research project (Royal Roads University, e-dialogue.ca, Sept. 2, 2002) are showing people with more linear thinking styles have greater difficulty with electronic dialogue than others with more lateral thinking styles. Thus, the strength of the medium may well be its ability to force people to think "outside" of their normal learning and thinking style, employing both lateral and linear structure. Since sustainable

development issues demands system perspectives and more integrated decision making (Dale, 2001), stimulating more lateral thinking may lead to greater horizontal integration.

In addition, our research is showing moderation is key to the success of these post-modern forums, in that, it provides for a modicum of structure, and yet, at the same time, allows for the spontaneity of emergent thought and creativity. And emergent thought is critical to electronic dialogue in which the absence of normal physical cueing, such as body language, does not allow for the emergent synergy that normally evolves in facilitated face-to-face meetings. This synergy online is captured by "facilitating" through "threads" the natural anarchy of the medium, by allowing seemingly random conversations to develop, that then must be "woven" together again through the skills of the moderator. And yet, this absence of normal cues gives the participants equal expression of voice without any physical cues of differential position and authority. As well, it appears the e-dialogues may also allow for more reflective capacity, as individuals can refer to references, either off-line or online, although again, it has ramifications for spontaneity and logical flow of conversation.

6. Conclusions

If indeed healthy communities are communities that engage in moral dialogue around the "meaning of community" (Etzionni, 2000), then deliberative dialogue may be critical in a world where "our traditional problem-solving resources scarcely apply. By the time alternatives are tested, the world has moved on. It is not the answer that we must seek but rather a continuous process of answering. Required are ceaseless conversations" (Gergen, 2000: xxiii). These conversations will only be considered legitimate, however, if they are "recognized, fair, inclusive and open procedures for deliberation and persuasion, where those who join in reflective discussion are neither intimidated nor manipulated" (Stein, 2001: 225). Equally, democratic communities must re-engage in moral dialogues about the meaning of "sustainable communities," given the evidence Canada's primary institutions are not assuming as effective a part in

citizen involvement as possible (Philip, 2002).

Canada has had a rich history of public dialogue beginning with the earlier *Farm Forums* and *Citizens' Forums*, leading to an unprecedented response to the sustainable development imperative called for by the Brundtland Commission in 1987 with the creation of round tables at all levels of government. Public dialogue is crucial to domain appreciation (Trist. 1983) and similarly, "domain transformation–the creation (or recreation) of an alternative way of working through public issues" (Dale, 2002). But the critical transitions will not be made if the Internet is not used creatively to its fullest capacity, re-enlarging public space for genuine dialogue based on the equality and the absence of coercive influences; listening with empathy (Yankelovich, 1999); and opening up the light to dominant paradigms, myths and metaphors of modern society (Dale, 2001).

The Internet, however, like all human inventions, has the capacity for both the forces of "light" and "dark." The "dark' is using cyberspace to perpetuate static forms of consultations in the guise of dialogue, to revert to a more passive rather than active medium by not allowing the emergent features of the medium to dominate. The "light" is optiminizing the power of the medium to stimulate more lateral and horizontal thinking, to convert information into knowledge and transform knowledge into wisdom. And those outcomes must be integrated into a dynamic public-policy development process reflective of 21st century demands for different expressions of diversity, voice, experiences and plurality of interests.

[1] We might note here, the idea of a "listening" public is an accomplishment of mass-communication developments. Radio was a new technology, and thus it took time and work for this development to become diffused widely among the public. New technologies such as the Internet are following roughly similar patterns, with people becoming more familiar over time with the technology and increasingly treating it as we do radio or television, that is as pre-reflexive.

[2] Radio is not a true or pure form of two-way communication, meaning listeners cannot directly respond to the broadcast using the same modality as the initiator of the broadcast communication. The telegraph and telephone are perhaps the best modern examples of initial developments in true widespread two-way communication.

[3] We recognize that some television programming does contribute to providing Canadians information and limited opportunities to participate through letter writing, on air presentations, and occasional forums, for example. However, we argue that outside of these opportunities, television remains largely a passive activity (Emery and Emery 1976), and defective in sustaining a prolonged and on-going opportunity for citizens to actively engage in dialogue around issues of national importance.

[4] Castells (2001) notes developments in communications, aside from compressing both time and space, also extends time and space by allowing messages to be stored or received at any given time, for example through tools such as e-mail, permitting communication to take place at undetermined times or sequences. This is possible through the packet-switching technology embedded in Internet communication.

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