

Discipline or Field?

*Soul-searching in Communication Research**

KAARLE NORDENSTRENG

Abstract

The terms of (mass) communication research and media studies are widely used to refer to an academic discipline, usually established in universities as a major or minor subject, a department or institute and sometimes even a school or college. It is implied that this young field is by now a discipline in its own right alongside such traditional disciplines as history, literature, sociology or political science. However, the nature of the discipline often remains unclear, while its identity is typically determined by administrative convenience and market demand rather than analysis of its historical development and scholarly position within the system of arts and sciences. This chapter discusses the nature and terminology of the discipline, with examples of Finland and other Nordic countries, and it advocates the need for a continuous self-assessment of the research community.

Key Words: communication research, media studies, academic disciplines, philosophy of science, Nordic research conferences

Introduction: The Field Expanded and Diversified

Throughout the past 50 years, the field of communication research has expanded perhaps more than any other academic field apart from computer science and biomedicine.¹ Its status next to the old established fields has been consolidated, but its expansion has also led to friction and conflict between the old “ivy league” sciences and this new and popular “Micky Mouse studies”, as it is called by opponents in the UK debate (a regular topic in the British *The Times Higher Education Supplement*). The conflicts are not based on mere prestige and jealousy, but literally on the vital prospects of each field – not least the old and established – in the middle of the so-called structural adjustment of universities.

In its expansion, the field has become more and more diversified. Different media (newspapers, magazines, radio, television, cinema, etc.) and different aspects of communication (journalism, visual communication, media culture, media economy, etc.) have emerged as more or less independent branches of the field. This multiplication process has not been halted by the convergence development brought about by the digitalisation of media production and distribution. On the contrary, new media, Internet, etc., have entered as further specialities in media studies, often gaining the status of another study programme, major subject or even a discipline of its own.

Placed in a broader perspective of the history of science, such multiplication is quite problematic. The field is both deserting its roots in such basic disciplines as psychol-

ogy, sociology and political science, and it is also becoming more and more dependent on the empirical and practical aspects of reality. This typically means applied research under the terms of the existing institutions, i.e. administrative instead of critical research. Moreover, there is a practical question of naming the various subdivisions of media studies, which does not follow any systematic patterns – neither internationally nor within one country.

In this situation it is high time to return to the crossroads question discussed by Bernard Berelson (1959), Wilbur Schramm (1959) and others in the late 1950s: Is mass communication research really a discipline or just a field? I made an early excursion into this topic already in the 1960s on the basis of my experiences from the USA – including personal interviews with Berelson, Schramm and Harold Lasswell (Nordenstreng 1968).

Today my answer to the discipline/field question is that it remains rather a field than a discipline, and my suggestion is that it is an unhealthy illusion to celebrate the popularity of media studies with the distinction of an independent discipline – not to speak of several disciplines. In any case, some serious soul-searching and critical examination of the identity of the field are called for.

Indispensable material for this soul-searching is provided by the “Ferment in the field” exercise which George Gerbner as editor of *Journal of Communication* mobilized in the early 1980s among colleagues to review the field from the point of view of research paradigms and their challenges – not least the challenge posed by leftist-critical thinking. The resulting special issue (Summer 1983, 33:3) did not reveal any final truth about the state of the art, but it did serve as a healthy reminder of the need to periodically take a meta-look at what we are doing. A new look at the ferment in the field was taken by the same journal ten years later (Summer and Autumn 1993, 43:3 and 4), but that turned out to be just another panorama of the field “between fragmentation and cohesion” (the title of the issue) without particularly intriguing or challenging perspectives.

More of that ferment is exposed by histories of the field, both across the international arena (e.g., Pietilä 2004) and through a national landscape (e.g., Pietilä et al. 1990) as well as anthologies of the classics (e.g., Katz et al. 2003; Peters & Simonson 2004). A useful overview of the present research landscape was provided by Wolfgang Donsbach in his Presidential address to the ICA conference in New York in 2005 (Donsbach 2006). His first thesis is that communication as a research field has seen the greatest growth of probably all academic fields over the last 30 years, and his counterthesis to this: “Communication still lacks, and even loses, identity” (based on a survey of ICA members, pp. 439-443). His second thesis is that we have accumulated a lot of good empirical evidence on the communication process, while the counterthesis admits: “The field increasingly suffers from epistemological erosion” (pp. 444-446). Donsbach’s third thesis finally says: “We have precise and sound knowledge in many areas – but (counterthesis) we tend to loose normative orientation in empirical research” (pp. 446-447).

An insightful addition to historical and disciplinary reflections about the field is provided by Brenda Dervin in a survey for the 2004 ICA conference in New Orleans on “navigating methodological divides in the communication field” (Dervin & Song 2004). My response to the question whether diversity means strength or weakness was as follows:

Both. But today I mostly warn about diversity turning into surfing. The rapidly expanded field has become more and more differentiated and the recent development of convergence has not stopped this tide. Rather the contrary, new media, Internet, etc have given further grounds for specialized approaches in

media studies, often gaining the status of another major subject and discipline in academic nomenclature. With such a trend the field is both losing its healthy roots in basic disciplines (sociology, political science, linguistics, literature, etc) and is also coming more and more dependent on empirical and practical aspects of reality. This means typically applied research serving existing institutions,

i.e. administrative instead of critical research. It is an unhealthy illusion to celebrate the popularity of media studies with the distinction of an independent discipline or several disciplines. I would call for serious soul-searching and critical examination of the identity of the field. It is time again to return to the crossroads of Schramm, Berelson & al.

Accordingly, there is good reason to search for the identity of the field. Moreover, in addition to these reasons for soul-searching, which stem from the field itself, Europe has an additional challenge for a reform of its whole higher education system, known as the Bologna process.² Along with this process also media and communication studies are rapidly moving to a two-tier BA-MA degree system throughout Europe, which brings further ferment to the field. Bologna invites – in practice compels – each major subject to rewrite its curriculum, and in this process one cannot help defining the disciplinary profile and core elements of each subject. This will naturally lead to soul-searching not only within each department but also at higher faculty or college level. Especially challenging prospects are provided by interdisciplinary programmes, which seem to become popular at the MA level opening the possibility to combine different BA backgrounds and to focus on cutting edge topics not least in the ICT and new media.

A Survey in Scandinavia

An illustrative case of the state of the art is provided by the Scandinavian countries of Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden (this time excluding the fifth Nordic country, Iceland). Some years ago I proposed in the context of the biannual Nordic conferences a systematic survey of the concepts and terms by which the field of (mass) communication is defined in our universities. The motivation was both theoretical-intellectual in terms of the philosophy of science and practical-bureaucratic in terms of the names given to disciplines, departments and positions. Both aspects have become more and more intriguing with the development of new media, convergence and globalisation. The field in this connection refers broadly to all approaches to media and communication within humanities, social sciences and arts, apart from purely technical approaches, and it covers both research and education.

Such an inventory based on lists of all relevant departments and disciplines to be found in the Nordic universities proved to be too ambitious to be fulfilled as first planned by 2003. I underestimated the difficulties of ascertaining the disciplinary profiles from published materials and websites. I therefore started from what Nordicom had already compiled: a country-by-country listing of university programmes in the field, indicating for each its institutional frame (university, faculty, department), name of subject or discipline, level and length of programme as well as a keyword-type characterisation of the programme content.³ My preliminary survey⁴ was based on this Nordicom mapping of the situation in 2002 and the following national characteristics are summarised with the latest update of 2006:

Sweden has 20 institutions which offer at least BA-level studies, 15 of them also MA programmes and six of them doctoral studies. Practically all of these use the same name

for the discipline: “media and communication science” (*medie- och kommunikationsvetenskap*, MKV). In addition to these are eight journalism programmes. Nordicom’s inventory of the Swedish programmes does not include the institutions of film studies, nor those of library studies. Of all the 20 institutions in Sweden, 11 are called universities in Swedish, while 9 are colleges with the Swedish name “högskolan” (literally “high school”). Most of these colleges translate their name for international windows as “university” – quite confusing as the status of these colleges is inferior to proper universities, for example without the right to grant doctoral degrees.

Finland has 10 universities which offer BA/MA + PhD programmes either in media or, beyond media, in speech communication, organizational communication or in library and information studies – generally designated as “communication sciences” (*viestintätieteet*). The number of different departments or institutes in these universities is 18 and the total number of programmes or disciplines is 25. Outside these are non-university-level polytechnics (most misleadingly calling themselves “university of applied science”), which offer altogether 18 programmes in media and communication, not least related to new media. Finnish university programmes have no common name for the discipline; several labels are used, each with a specific meaning determined by the history of the academic subject and its professorship.

Norway used to have in 2001 only four institutions, with “media studies” (*medievitenenskap*, literally translated “media science”) as the national discipline label, except for one with “film studies” (*filmvitenskap*). In addition, there were several institutions for professional journalism and library studies. But by 2006 nine regional institutions of higher education, called “högskolen” and translated in English as “university colleges”, have entered the field so that the latest Norwegian count is 13 institutions with a variety of discipline labels such as “media studies” (*mediefag*), “digital media technology”, “film and TV production”.

Denmark has five institutions but no common label for the discipline. “Media studies” (*medievidenskap*) is used in Aarhus and South Denmark, “film and media studies” (*film og medievidenskap*) in Copenhagen, “communication” (*kommunikation*) in Aalborg and Roskilde, while the labels “multi media” and “humanistic informatics” are also used. Other pre-university institutions/programmes offer education for professional journalism and librarianship.

In general, the Nordic landscape of the academic discipline gives rise to the following observations:

- The field in Sweden and Finland is institutionally quite abundant and diverse. In these countries the discipline represents both the faculties of humanities and social sciences, and those fairly evenly. Moreover, Finland also brings to the field the faculty of art and design (Helsinki, Rovaniemi), while Sweden’s list includes a technical university. Sweden has a nationally used umbrella term for the discipline in contrast to Finland’s anarchic terminology. However, the difference may be more cosmetic than real.
- Denmark and Norway have fewer institutions and programmes, although Norway has increased its supply. In these two countries the discipline is mostly administered by the faculty of humanities, but the actual study programmes and research activities display more or less balance between humanities and social sciences. Actually, the

difference between humanities and social sciences appears to be largely artificial and obsolete in this discipline.

- The true nature of the discipline can be discovered only through a careful examination of its historical evolution and institutional position in each case. There is no short-cut to map out the disciplinary landscape, and a proper survey requires thorough knowledge of the respective national territory. Such an in-depth survey still waits to be carried out.
- The current challenge posed by new information technologies, on the one hand, and the Bologna process, on the other, has led most institutions and programmes in the field to critically assess the foundations of their discipline. Regardless of such reflection, institutional changes occur, notably mergers between classic humanistic media studies and (post)modern information sciences, as experienced in Denmark and Norway.

The last-mentioned changes are symptomatic of a more general trend, well known in the USA, where multimedia and digital media are no longer designators for a pilot speciality but part and parcel of mainstream media studies. Take the Institute of Information and Media Studies at the University of Aarhus. This is how it describes its profile (see <http://www.imv.au.dk/eng/unit/presentation>):

The research and teaching at the Institute fall broadly within the scope of Information and Media Studies.

The institutional research in Information Studies includes historical, sociological, communicative, and design-oriented approaches to the study of the development and application of information technology on the level of individuals, organisations and society.

Institutional research in Media Studies includes projects concerning production aesthetics, textual analysis and reception within print media, radio, TV, film and the internet, as well as topics concerning the theory, policy, history, and institution of the media.

Between these two fields, where information and media studies increasingly meet, research is carried out in areas such as IT and Learning, the Internet, and Multimedia.

This profile of the combined Institute is naturally more technology-oriented than the earlier programme in Media Studies, which grew out of Nordic Literature. A reorientation was natural, given the fact that the Institute incorporated a branch of computer science.⁵ A similar merger was also carried out in Bergen, motivated by the new media society and prospects of convergence.⁶ On the other hand, no similar merger materialised at the University of Tampere in Finland, where a new Faculty of Information Sciences was established, with Computer Science and Information Studies brought under the same umbrella. Journalism and Mass Communication was invited to join the new Faculty, but it preferred to remain in the Faculty of Social Sciences, next to Sociology and Political Science, without moving into what it considered too much of a “bits and bytes faculty”.⁷

Footnotes to History

After a contemporary survey of the field in Scandinavia it is worth recalling how much the research landscape has changed since the first Nordic conference held in 1973. I made an informal review of history on the occasion of the 30th anniversary conference dinner in Kristiansand, Norway, in August 2003, which is reproduced here:

This is indeed a moment to recall history because of the 30th anniversary. It was summer 1973 when the Nordic mass communication researchers gathered for the first time in Norway, convened by the then Institutt for presseforskning at the University of Oslo. I think there were some 70 scholars participating from all the Nordic countries, including Iceland (from where Broddason came as always). I remember very well how the clan leaders of each Nordic country met after the event on the sunny and warm (like these days) lawn of the Voksenåsen conference centre and the secretary of that small ad hoc committee was a young research assistant from Gothenburg by name Lennart Weibull. It was instantly agreed that after this successful conference we should meet again in two years in Denmark.

So the tradition started 30 years ago. Bjerringbro was held in 1975, followed by Orivesi behind Tampere in the backwoods of Finland in 1977, Umeå somewhere in Sweden in 1979 and Reykjavik in 1981. A new round of five countries and ten years began in Volda in 1983. In that round Finland had its turn in 1987, and we did it on a cruise between Helsinki and Leningrad. It was the good old Soviet Union and we had a bus tour around Leningrad (perhaps the idea of the Leningrad cowboys was born at the same time). All other conferences have been held on a dry land following the same order of rotation. The third round started in Trondheim in 1993 and two years ago we ended it in Reykjavik. Here in Kristiansand it is the beginning of another round and another decade. So the wings of history are there.

All this has happened without bureaucratic structures, even without an association as many other disciplines have for their Nordic cooperation. It was a real a bottom-up venture sponsored by national research communities and coordinated by Nordicom, which came into being at the same time around 30 years ago, and by the same scholarly interest in search of its identity both at national and international level.

This articulation of the scholarly interest in the early 1970s was a natural consequence of a strong growth of the field. Sweden and Finland had their research centres and programmes established already in the late 1960s, largely thanks to the audience research operations of Sveriges Radio and Yleisradio. The consolidation of the academic field of mass communication research, as it was called at that time while nobody spoke about media, took place in the 1970s and it was supported by wider international platforms such as UNESCO and the IAMCR.

And it was not only quantitative growth but also a question of the paradigmatic orientation of the field under the intellectual conditions of the post-sixties and the political climate of the Cold War and the proceeding to détente. The Danish colleagues were quick to import Habermas, Negt and Kluge to Scandinavia, and they were confronted by conventional press historians and political scientists with a positivist orientation. Finland constituted an anomaly whereby anti-establishment progressives occupied a hegemonic position in the field.

It was at this time, in the middle of the seventies, that I developed a classification of Nordic communities of our field into two: class A, an innovative and interesting category, and class B, a not so interesting category of normal science. My humble Finnish one-man jury placed Denmark and Finland in class A, while Sweden, Norway and Iceland remained in class B – Sweden despite its large volume of research, Norway and Iceland because of their small volumes.

Today this thought experiment remains, of course, a footnote in history and no doubt each of our countries displays such a variety of scholarship that it is no longer possible to classify them as national entities, not even for a humble Finn. Rather we should note today that the Finnish slogan of connecting people has benefited our field, not primarily as technology but through scholarly networking which helps to turn quantity into quality, making two plus two to be five.

Further and more significant footnotes to history are provided by the keynote address which I was asked to deliver at the first Nordic conference in 1973 (Nordenstreng 1973). It was a state of the art review which was supposed to bring to the conference international perspectives, based on my involvement in Unesco's panel which produced "Proposals for and International Programme of Communication Research" in 1971. I summarized the tendencies of change in the field at that time by suggesting that there are two interrelated aspects involved:

1) a tendency towards a more *holistic framework* and 2) a tendency towards *policy orientation*. The holistic approach, for its part, may be seen to imply two sub-aspects, namely, a) stressing of the *processual approach* covering simultaneously various stages of the communication process, and, b) stressing of the *contextual approach* tying the particular communication phenomena into wider socio-politico-economic settings.

After lengthy quotes from Dallas W. Smythe I highlighted his point in a recent paper where he generalized that "behaviourism and logical positivism have provided a 20th century rationale for conservative, conformist and escapist activity". My reflections went on along with the radical outlook of the time, referring to a crisis in the Western social sciences and the need to overcome the traditional concept of science being separated from normative considerations, with a theoretical orientation away from positivism:

Anti-positivism, for its part, claims that a study of the objective laws of social processes, in their widest sense, can derive at social goals grounded on objective facts. This social goal – the 'how things should be' – can be inferred, at least to a great extent, from the laws followed by goal-directed social processes, once the latter have first been discovered. Consequently, research and politics cannot and should not be sharply separated. As Yrjö Ahmavaara, the Finnish philosopher and communication researcher, puts it, research into social laws and political decision-making process "are parts of a unified organism just violently separated from each other by the Humean guillotine".

My analysis of the state of the art ended pathetically:

In terms of the present analysis, then, the new approach, then, the new approach in communication research is no more of a happy chance than the boosting interest in communication policies is a social luxury. Both can be seen to reflect the same basic tendency: to have the mechanisms of prevailing social order 'modernized'.

Accordingly, I suggested that all of us reformers with more or less radical intentions were after all modernizers of the (capitalist-bourgeois) system – something that in today’s perspective really seems to have happened, not least with the marriage of communication research with the ICTs. I ended the presentation with four recommendations, in the form of warnings, “for us wandering in the middle of the ’movement ’”:

1. Anti-positivism should not descend to the level of value relativism... Being anti-positivists we might – like the UNESCO document, Halloran, etc. – take it as the task of media researchers to be a kind of partisan with the weapon on social science to change the world in this particular field of mass communication. So far we are sound anti-positivists. But it may well be that in our research, say on news values or the objectivity of news, we may come to the conclusion that there are different ways of reflecting the happenings out in the world and that different parties have different kinds of news organs, different countries have different kinds of news services, and we might end up by saying that all of them are principally equally good... We should not be reluctant to relate the findings of mass communication to a carefully documented objective reality – even if the latter might often be difficult to find out.
2. My second warning relates to the whole study of mass communication research. We should constantly bear in mind that the field itself is part of the social system and no matter whether we want or not, it follows the overall social laws governing all activities in the social body... It seems inevitable that the scientific tradition itself has got a good deal of built-in values in support of the social-economic system of each time, and I think it is impossible to get completely rid of this value-boundedness. But it is very important to be as widely as possible aware of it. Hence the importance for constant discussion around science policy.
3. We should not fall back on a mystification of media research, i.e. an illusion of an isolated discipline. After all, mass communication research has always been and will always remain a field rather than an independent discipline. Here I wholeheartedly support Wilbur Schramm, who spoke about a crossroads where many pass but few remain. In this new tradition of anti-positivism there is a risk of once more accepting the concept of mass media and mass communication research as being something extra-ordinary and to begin to study this as an exclusive phenomenon in society... Hence we should constantly in a way challenge the continuity of our whole field.
4. We should not fly up to abstract clouds where the militant groups carry out their orthodox meditation while the social-political-economic System is going strongly on. Here I want to stress the importance of concrete empirical evidence of reality, including media reality, which is continuously needed. I think there is a risk – especially in the hermeneutic tradition – of overlooking the need for very simple data. For instance, among university students we can notice signs that people are willing to abandon the ‘positivistic crap’ and the measuring methods and empirical evidence associated with it. This is foolish, of course, and leads to another equally bad situation where we used to be in the heyday of positivism, to a situation where our research is not firmly tied to objective reality.

These footnotes are naturally part of history. Nevertheless, they contain some food for thought, even for the contemporary scholarship.

One aspect which in this context should not be forgotten is Nordicom as a crucial infrastructure for the field in Scandinavia. Initially its role was largely invisible – except for institutions such as mine, which was one of its founders in the early 1970s – but during the three decades it has grown into an internationally recognized database and publisher. Nordicom is an exemplary case for the sociology of science, showing how effective networking will make a difference in the intellectual growth of a field – or discipline if you like.

Conclusion

As an actor in the field for the past 40 years, I should naturally first express gratification at its the expansion and consolidation. Instead of its withering away as suggested by Berelson in the late 1950s, we have seen an impressive growth of the field, which has brought communication and media studies to the centre of contemporary paradigms of socio-economic development – the Information Society. As George Gerbner put it in the editor's epilogue to the ferment issue, "if Marx were alive today, his principal work would be entitled *Communications* rather than *Capital*" (Gerbner 1983, 348).

But I have mixed feelings about this success story. My second thought – more and more even the first one – is that the field, with all the expansion and diversity, runs the risk of becoming professionally self-centred and scientifically shallow. Therefore one of the first points I nowadays make in the introductory course of the most popular subject at my home university is what I call "the paradox of media studies": our task is to deconstruct the naïve view that communication is the core of society and we specialise in undoing media hubris.

Lack of scientific depth follows all too easily from an eclectic and multidisciplinary approach. Both are important as such for a healthy evolution of a discipline, but in a rapid development they may become too dominant and offset the foundations of the body of knowledge. Such a "surfing syndrome" is particularly close to studies of fashionable topics such as information technology.

A particular problem in the field is its own scientific identity and its "genealogical nature", not least regarding the concept of communication. Within the field communication is typically understood as the constituting factor of related studies and disciplines, whereby various aspects of human communication – from speech and organisational communication to different media – have their specialities which are based on this core concept and its foundational theory.⁸ However, it is by no means self-evident that communication should be taken as the core of related disciplines. True, communication may be understood as the essence of social relations and society may be understood not only as something held together by the "glue" of communication but as something that itself is made up of communication in the Luhmannian sense. On the other hand, communication can be seen merely as camouflage distracting attention from more fundamental levels such as economics or socio-political power structures. This latter perspective does not support the idea of communication studies as an independent discipline or a group of disciplines united by the foundational concept of communication; it rather takes communication as a complementary aspect of more fundamental factors and thus communication studies as a loosely constructed field.

The question about the nature of communication and the related problem of discipline vs. field is far from settled and therefore it should be actively discussed instead of slipping it under the carpet, either by overlooking it or by addressing it with clichés.

Pursuing this and other issues raised above leads us ultimately to the philosophy of science – asking how scientific knowledge is constructed and organised; what are the principles which designate sciences and disciplines. This examination includes the well-known distinctions between basic and applied research: whereas basic sciences are supposed to describe, explain and help to understand, applied sciences are supposed first and foremost to predict; the basic sciences tell us what *is* and predictive applied sciences tell us what *will be*. In addition to these two main types, there is an often overlooked form of applied sciences which tells us what *ought to be* so that we can attain a given goal. These “design sciences” are not supposed to produce true or false knowledge, nor to predict correctly what will happen, but to enhance human skills and to generate instrumental knowledge for the manipulation of both natural and artificial systems – something that is highly relevant in communication studies.

The distinction between critical and administrative research cuts across both basic and applied sciences, including design sciences. These categories should not be vulgarised by identifying critical research only with basic theorising and administrative research only with applied data gathering and processing. Both theoretical and empirical research can be critical as well as administrative, and critical scholars should be particularly wary simplistic labelling of this or that orientation.

Consequently, I make a strong claim for the philosophy of science in order to deal with the concept of communication and its relation to the system of sciences. At the same time I call for a continuous study of the history of ideas in the field. However young the field, and however burning the challenges of the day, it is vital to realise how it has evolved and how it relates to other fields of research. Being aware of one’s own research tradition is a precondition for an organic growth of science – and a medicine against the “surfing syndrome”.

Accordingly, all Master’s-level communication study programmes should have a module on the history of the field and on the nature of the discipline. Likewise, all established institutions of communication studies should maintain some research on research, not only by mapping out the development of their research agenda, both in terms of topics and underlining paradigms, but also by examining the nature of the field.⁹

I am convinced that this will be good for both science in general and critical studies in particular.

Notes

1. I have no data to substantiate this generalisation and thus it should be taken as an informed guess rather than an empirical observation. Reliable data on the volume of different scholarly fields are hardly available at the national level, not to mention compatible data at the international level. Yet, other colleagues, notably Wolfgang Donsbach (2006), have independently arrived at exactly the same conclusion: the first of Donsbach’s three theses about the identity of communication research is that the field has seen “the greatest growth of probably all academic fields over the last 30 years”.
2. A summary of the Bologna process is given in Nordenstreng (2004).
3. “Utbildningar i medie- och kommunikationsämnen vid universitet och högskolor i Norden” (2001), published in a slightly abridged form in 2002 by *Nordicom Information* 24:4, 105-111. (For Nordicom

* This paper is largely based on Nordenstreng (2004), first presented in the colloquium “What is Left in Communication Research” in Piran, Slovenia, September 2003. It also relies on the author’s presentations in the first European conference on communication research in Amsterdam, November 2005, and conference on internationalizing media studies in London (University of Westminster), September 2006.

publications, see <http://www.nordicom.gu.se/eng.php?portal=publ>.) A second useful source was “Utvärdering av medie- och kommunikationsvetenskapliga utbildningar vid svenska universitet och högskolor”, the evaluation report of Sweden’s media and communication study programmes produced by the Swedish Högskoleverket (2001) with an appendix overview of media and communication education in other Nordic countries, based on the same Nordicom survey. The latest list of institutions and programmes of media and communication studies in the Nordic countries is published in 2006 by *Nordicom Information* 28:3, 141-157.

4. First presented as a paper “Disciplines of Media and Communication – A Survey of the Field” at the 16th Nordic Conference of Media and Communication Research (Kristiansand, Norway, August 2003) in Working Group 25: Media Theories – Media Studies – Media Research. That version was published in Nordenstreng (2004).
5. An interesting – even ironic – aspect of this case is the fact that the most senior academic of the Institute is Professor Frands Mortensen, who was Denmark’s leading leftist scholar of communication in the late 1960s and the early 1970s. He and other young scholars were instrumental in importing Habermas, Negt and Kluge to Scandinavia, and, for instance, Finns got to know continental radicalism largely via Denmark. Mortensen has since continued to pursue media studies with a critical approach – however no longer something that is dubbed “radical”. In any case, neither he nor anybody else would have imagined even in the wildest dreams in the 1960s that one day he would head an institute focusing on information technology in a fairly affirmative way.
6. The new Department of Information Science and Media Studies (*Institut for informasjons- og medievitenskap*) is located, like the earlier Department of Media Studies, both in the Faculty of Arts and the Faculty of Social Sciences. The first head of the merged Department is Professor Jostein Gripsrud, one of Scandinavia’s leading critical media scholars. The setting up of this Department in the beginning of 2004 should be taken into account when reading the above survey based on the situation in 2002.
7. A status quo solution regarding the faculty reform in 2001 did not mean that Journalism and Mass Communication wanted to avoid new media, digitalisation, convergence, etc. On the contrary, the Department (<http://www.uta.fi/jour/dept/profile.html>) was the first in Finland to introduce Master’s programmes in this area and its Journalism Research and Development Centre (<http://www.uta.fi/jourutkimus/english.html>) has focused largely on projects around new media. Moreover, the Department has among its staff a (part-time) Visiting Professor who happens to be the Executive Director of MIT Media Lab. Regarding Information Studies, earlier named “Library Science and Informatics”, it also used to belong to the Faculty of Social Sciences, but unlike Journalism and Mass Communication, it decided after a lengthy discussion to move to the new Faculty of Information Sciences.
8. This is manifest in Colleges or Schools of Communication, which typically include departments of speech, journalism, radio-TV, PR and advertising. In Finland the idea of communication as a unifying concept in higher education and research is quite concretely suggested by the fact that there are several and different kinds of university departments concerned with communication and media at the graduate and postgraduate level – nearly 20 units in 10 universities – and that these departments have established a network for cooperation, University Network for Communication Sciences (<http://viesverk.uta.fi/index.php?lang=en>).
9. An exemplary project in this respect has been launched at the University of Aarhus, Department of Information and Media Studies. “Theories of Media and Communication – Histories and Relevance” seeks to prioritise the field of media and communication theory and its histories and relevance as an independent field of research within media and communication studies (see <http://www.medieteori.dk/english/>).

References

- Berelson, Bernard (1959) ‘The State of Communication Research’, *Public Opinion Quarterly* 23:1, 1-6.
- Dervin, Brenda and M. Song (eds) (2004) ‘Communication as a field – historical origins, diversity as strength/weakness, orientation toward research in the public interest: 54 ruminations from field grandparents, parents, and a few feisty grandchildren’. Background paper for the “Strength of our methodological divides: Five navigators, their struggles and successes” plenary and post-plenary dialogue, International Communication Association annual meeting, May 27-31, New Orleans, LA. The paper can be downloaded at <http://communication.sbs.ohio-state.edu/sense-making/artdirect/artdervinsong04ica.html>
- Donsbach, Wolfgang (2006) ‘The Identity of Communication Research’, *Journal of Communication* 56:3, 437-448.

- Gerbner, George (1983) 'The Importance of Being Critical – In One's Own Fashion', *Journal of Communication* 33:3, 355-362.
- Katz, Elihu, John Durham Peters, Tamar Liebes and Avril Orloff (eds) (2003) *Canonic Texts in Media Research: Are There Any? Should There Be? How About These?* Cambridge, UK: Polity.
- Nordenstreng, Kaarle (1968) 'Communication Research in the United States: A Critical Perspective', *Gazette* 14:3, 207-216. (Copy of the article can be downloaded from the author's list of publications at <http://www.uta.fi/jour/laitos/nordenstrengpubl.html>)
- Nordenstreng, Kaarle (1973) 'Normative Directions for Mass Communication Research' in *Mediaforskning: Kommunikasjon og famfunnsansvar*. Rapport fra en nordisk konferanse I Oslo 18-21 juni 1973. Oslo: Universitetet i Oslo, Institutt for presseforskning, Stensil nr. 29, pp. 45-55. . (Copy of the paper can be downloaded from the author's list of publications at <http://www.uta.fi/jour/laitos/nordenstrengpubl.html>)
- Nordenstreng, Kaarle (2004) 'Ferment in the Field: Notes on the Evolution of Communication Studies and Their Disciplinary Nature', *Javnost – The Public* 10:3, 5-18. (Copy of the article can be downloaded from the author's list of publications at <http://www.uta.fi/jour/laitos/nordenstrengpubl.html>)
- Peters, John Durham and Peter Simonson (eds) (2004) *Mass Communication and Social Thought: Key Texts 1919-1968*. Lanham, MA: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Pietilä, Veikko, Tarmo Malmberg and Kaarle Nordenstreng (1990) 'Theoretical Convergencies and Contrasts: A View from Finland', *European Journal of Communication* 5:2-3, 165-185.
- Pietilä, Veikko (2004) *On the Highway of Mass Communication Studies*. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton.
- Schramm, Wilbur (1959) 'Comments on Berelson's Article', *Public Opinion Quarterly* 23:1, 6-9.