## Chapter VII

## In Place of a Conclusion

Thought, Aijaz Ahmad opined in 1992, "tends always to exceed the facts, in more ways than one."[1] However, as the information age begins to stand tall as an older adult in 2003 (past its early youth in the 1990s), I am tempted to doubt Ahmad's conviction—based upon the "prehistory of [my] own thought," to use his words yet again.[2] Thought may or may not exceed facts (*exceed* needs some clarification here anyway); what is certain, though, is that it is being increasingly challenged, perhaps more menacingly than ever, by the ever swelling floods of facts—to stay afloat. (The other options for it would include drowning under the seas of information, or taking unscheduled flights of literary or statistical fancy.)

The connection between *thought* and *fact* has an interesting significance for both ecology and communication, and most certainly for EC. *Fact* is a close cousin of *information*: One of its meanings would suggest that it is an individuated, verified or verifiable, form of information. Both *fact* and *information*, in any case, are closely related to *communication*, as well; and, having gone through the relevant aspects of systems theory in this thesis, we are alert already to the eerie alliance that the information revolution tried to seek and establish, even while in its embryonic stage, between *information*, *informationalization*, *communication*, and *digitalization*, on one hand, and *ecology*/*environment*, on the other.

While the age of information may only always aspire to reach its ever-deferred prime, the information revolution has already reached the point where one could conceive of futures in which *ecology* would be increasingly approached and understood as a system of information up for highly purposeful manipulation on many different levels. Referring to real and speculative effects of precisely such scenarios, Timothy Luke argues that the

> fragmentation caused by "powerful knowing" creates a highly dispersed, if not contradictory, competitiveness among many new class occupations and disciplines, making commonly shared sets of interests difficult to arrange.[3]

While Luke's concerns are macro-political, they are curiously helpful in making us ask: What may be the status of EC as an academic discourse—as Ahmad's "thought"—in the midst of powerful knowledges generated by predominantly praxis-centered, and thematically, institutionally, and professionally diverse, groups that are nonetheless its contributors?

It won't be wrong to claim that such a question has not been raised within the academic discourse of EC: at least not on a philosophical level, or as an articulate thought. For, had it been raised, we would have more likely found ourselves being greeted with more substantive, reflective profiles of EC on academic sites devoted to it; contrarily, we would not have had to scour through unreasonably long bibliographies (which appear to include random publications on environmentalism as de facto instances of ecological communication). In this sense, the image of EC—the thought—has not yet transcended its own facts—factions. For all that, aspire as it might, EC is far less of a discourse than it is an organizational or disciplinary platform shared by those loosely interested in non-specific combinatorial formations of *ecology* and *communication*.

*Qua* platform, EC serves as an ironical example of Luke's idea of fragmentation (through the informationalization of ecologies): Under the thrust of disconnecting ecologies reconnected through the global networking of humans, it has brought together an ultimately nondescript set of common interests; however, its internal inertia also underscores the difficulties encountered in arranging those "shared sets of interests." As such, journalism and media studies do provide some of the more appealing traditions for this platform to graduate to the status of a discourse; however, as I have argued in my thesis, those traditions are equally liable to restrict its theoretical outreach by virtue of their positivistic, action-centered proclivities and insubstantial accounting of extra-media institutions, phenomena, and factors.

Raising questions about the status and image of EC *as a discourse* should not be done trivially or cursorily (because that is what we already have anyway), even though the more serious the answers the lesser the possibility of their being definitive or homogenizing. The issue, for me at least, is not whether individual participants or participant platforms are able to iron out their differences and are able to speak with one voice, as it were, for the sake of effectiveness or utility. The issue is whether the

platform of EC is willing to articulate to itself, and to its academic others as well as brothers, its own raison d'être on a philosophical level, and is thus able to view itself with some measure of objectivity.

In a close connection with the above, my thrust upon the need to seek new avenues for EC lies in my belief that the platform of EC has not adequately doubted itself as such, and hence it lacks, what academically-savvy would call, *self-reflexivity*. While one can find enough intramural criticisms of bad journalism and ecologically insensitive or evasive advertising, it is difficult to find a book or article critical of the constitution of this broad intellectual platform, questioning of the hope attached to the media as an institution, or throwing critical light on the conditions of possibility for the platform itself. It is possible that this recently organized forum is too young to be diverted by criticisms of self; it is also possible that the participants in the discourse are by default not too variegated after all.

Wherefore, it is important to recognize and characterize the moment at which EC has come to seize our attention, and also to ask ourselves: Who *are* "we"? The answer to the above queries is perhaps a form of braggadocio, but it is intended as a note of caution and self-reflection: *We* the literate, educated, possibly scholarly, humans have our attention seized by EC; *we* are also unfailingly computer-savvy; *we* are located in the (post)industrialized West (well, usually); *we* are both literati and digiterati; and, were someone to go even further—either with the statistics or with the usual points of our theoretical departures or both—*we* may well be overwhelmingly White male academics or journalists-cum-authors. Given all the above, *we* are beginning to attend to, and cannot help anymore but attend to, EC: while being pretty secure ourselves as prime subjects and citizens of an information society that is increasingly globalizing other societies.

On that count, the platform of EC can be understood as a global metropolitan academic intervention in the traffic of ecological meanings; and, as such, its inarticulateness about itself, exemplified in issue-based prolixity and journalistic positivism, can be interpreted as a form of political and intellectual evasion. For all that, if EC must adopt an identity at the level of academic discourse, then it should be of educated discourse orchestrated by a global class of the techno-savvy: distinguishable

from *de facto* ecological communications of the illiterate, the uneducated, the deprived, and the technologically primitive, on one hand, and the scattered tribes of ecologically sheltered primitive peoples on the other.  In both the distinctions, there is only one respectable position for the profession, as far as I am concerned:  In trying to be a good student of its Others, it should not slack in its responsibility to be a critical teacher to Itself.

**Notes**

[1]Aijaz Ahmad, *In Theory:  Classes, Nations, Literatures*, Verso:  London & New York, 1992, p.  287.

[2] *Ibid*.

[3] Timothy W.  Luke, *Capitalism, Democracy, and Ecology:  Departing from Marx.* University of Illinois Press:  Urbana and Chicago, 1999, p.  17.