

What future for media in Hawaii?

Jim Dator

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I first came to Hawaii to live and to teach at the University of Hawaii in 1969 after spending six years teaching at Rikkyo University, in Tokyo. Every five years or so since then, I have found myself on a panel like this one talking about the future of communication, or of media, or newspapers, or literacy, or just of paper itself, in Hawaii or in general.

In preparation for this talk today, I looked back over the outlines of some of my previous statements. I believe, with a few corrections here and there for technologies or social persistencies I did not anticipate, I could read any one of them as my statement today and you would find them acceptable, if not necessarily convincing, just as most people seemed to have found them acceptable, but not convincing, when I originally presented them.

But, in my opinion, we in Hawaii and everywhere are now very much farther along in the process of social transformation that I have been trying to get people to be attentive to for past thirty years. So I would be doing you a disservice today were I not to update my earlier statements so as to reflect the then-anticipated changes which have now already happened, and to highlight some aspects which will be even more telling in the future.

Hawaii is in the midst of a huge, and largely undiscussed--certainly undiscussed in the local press--social transformation. Whatever Hawaii will look like 25 years from now, it won't look much like it did 25 years ago when I first arrived to stay.

Since my allotted time is brief, I will just make a few points about three major areas of discontinuity I see in the present and looming larger in the future--in the areas of economics, politics, and technology.

Economics:

Although I believe the current budget crisis to be largely politically contrived, it is nonetheless part of a larger set of processes which are real, lingering, and devastating. The daily lives of most people in Hawaii are going to get a lot worse before they get better, and they will not, in the foreseeable future, ever get to be as good as they seemed to be from the 1950s to the early 1970s. Until and unless we invent and implement a new economic system, and new methods for understanding and assessing economic conditions, things will only get swiftly much worse for most real people than they are now. Of course, the perception and description of our current "budget crisis," and actions being taken in response to it, will make things much worse, now and in the future, for most of us in Hawaii, I believe.

But let's pretend the present actions resolve our budget crisis. What then?

For example, what might be the future of mass tourism upon which Hawaii now is so dependent and within which basket all our eggs are currently lying? Not good, in my opinion. Given increasing rates of skin cancer and concern about skin cancer (Consider the recent tragic death of Astronaut Veatch), will people spend their scarce resources to come here and increase the chances of their own death?); global warming (Been enjoying the recent hot, humid, muggy weather? Could it be more typical in the future?); sea-level rise (When completed, the Convention Center might turn out to be useful after all as a replacement for the Natatorium as a huge salt water swimming pool); and the drying up of an economically comfortable middle class everywhere, including Asia where they might be a short-run flash in the pan (It is the middle class which provides the "mass" in "mass tourism").

But who will own Hawaii tomorrow? And who will own the media? Hawaii is not now locally-owned, and the media certainly are not. Will that continue so that Hawaii will be an increasingly small and insignificant remote outpost of civilization, getting, even more than it does now, its ideas about the world from everywhere in the world but Hawaii? Indeed, I very much agree with a column written by Bud Smyser and published in the Star-Bulletin on October 17 in which he defended and applauded the modestly-local focus of our two major daily newspapers. No, I think that a very likely scenario for Hawaii is for it become the forgotten, tiny backwater, wholly under the influence and control of outside forces that our

political and economic decision makers seem to want us to be--if you heed their actions and not their rhetoric.

But Hawaii's economic future still depends in part on what happens locally politically, so let me comment on the present and future of politics in Hawaii.

Politics:

What about the future of sovereignty? Will Hawaii secede entirely and peacefully from the US? If so, will it be for and by ethnic Hawaiians only, or as a result of a coalition of Hawaiian, Green, Libertarian, New Age, and High Tech (let me call them "Wired") activists finally refusing to take outside control any more?

While it may be difficult for many people now to believe that the US might give up Hawaii peacefully, that also seems a plausible scenario to me, given the ideas of Newt's "Contract on America," and the utter fiscal and moral bankruptcy of America. Newt and his folks want either to sell or to give away massive chunks of America now. Why not give away Hawaii, which has too many Democrats and too many colored people anyway for the taste of most Americans? Or, at least, why not give it back?

Now, I must confess that I supported Ben Cayetano for Governor long before he was a candidate. I thought that he would be a forceful, compassionate, progressive, communitarian leader; that (given his own past) he would bring us together in this period of increasing disparities and suffering with an inspiring vision of a common future. So far, he has shown none of that. To the contrary, Gov. Cayetano has revealed that he is more an advocate of Newt's philosophy than I could ever pretend to be (and I do think Newt's philosophy needs to be better understood). For example, while I know better than to believe anything I read in the newspapers--even letters to the editors--Linda Colbert, Executive Assistant to the Governor, apparently wrote the following, according to words appearing in the Star-Bulletin of October 17:

"It is essential to put the brakes on government spending, which has grown far faster than the private sector that supports it."
 "Some government services truly are essential. But many things government has taken care of here are better left to others. Only by re-engineering, re-structuring, and downsizing, and perhaps even

privatizing some government services can we afford to do those things only government can do."

I at first thought Bud Smyser had written that. Or Bud Shasteen, Or maybe even Orson Swindle. What Republican or Big Business Democrat could disagree with that statement? Well, maybe those who want no government at all so that the transnational corporations can rule unimpeded by local concerns or a social conscience.

If Colbert's statement reflects the wave of the political future of this state--and I think it might--then all is lost for a humane, communal, caring society here. Say "aloha" to "aloha" because the last thing this kind of libertarianism cares about is love--whether it be love of the land, love of your community, or love for your neighbor. Love, compassion, caring and sharing is weak and silly. All you are supposed to care about is yourself and how much more you can have compared to everybody else in the world.

That is not a Hawaii I care to live in--but I guess I will have to, because that is the same political philosophy which is sweeping the world--including, it seems, even these once-blessed isles. I had counted on Ben Cayetano issuing a passionate and compelling call for care, love, sufficiency, and stewardship in the interest of future generations. I had expected him to rise to leadership and to be the first political visionary, locally and nationally, to strive to turn the tide against mindless continued economic growth and self-centered greed, and to champion a necessary, positive role for government as the vehicle through which all people in Hawaii, present and future, express their common hopes and dreams, and resolve or manage their conflicts and differences. But what we seem to have instead is a Newt Wannabe wholly in the pocket of transnational economic interests who, without apparent remorse or misgivings, seems eager to destroy one of Hawaii's most precious resources--progressive governance which should be made even better; a compassionate welfare net and public health system which of course needs further refinement and improvement; and a system of higher education which gives--or gave--Hawaii intellectual resources of a quality higher than those of any other community of comparable size and remoteness anywhere in the world.

Nothing has played a greater role in elevating the sights and possibilities of our island people than has the University of Hawaii system since 1954. But apparently it is to be, like everything else

here, a temporary flash in the pan, something we can't afford any more, something expendable so that we can keep our credit rating on Wall Street

From cow college to cow college--from plantation to plantation--in one generation. Say it isn't so, Governor. Say it isn't to be so.

Technology

I suppose when most people think about the future of media they think about changes in communication technologies.

There are big changes well underway certainly. Consider, for example, the merger of news, entertainment, and communications companies. And the merger of telephone, television, computers, hardware and software into the hands a few controllers worldwide.

While the Internet is cited as, and so far is still experienced as, a decentralizing, individual and community empowering mode of communication against these centralizing tendencies, I believe that regulation and commercialization of the Internet is already well underway and that it will soon become part of the global system of mind control.

Yet, I remain fascinated by continual developments in virtual reality and other emerging forms of presentation. And I can imagine the amalgamation of newspapers, television, cellular phones and Game Boys along the lines suggested in the most recent issue of Wired which depicted a variety of future hand-held communication/entertainment devices through which all of the mediated world might one day flow. And so I do expect, and indeed celebrate, the final, immanent transformation of industrial society into an information society, complete with

Tele-commuting--and the death of automobile-commuting downtown just about the time the First Hawaiian Bank mausoleum is completed;

Of tele-educating--coinciding with the Death of UH, and the end of Hamilton and the State libraries;

Of tele-financing, including transnational e(lectronic)-money, and the end of governmentally-defined legal tender;

And indeed of global tele-justice--and the end of national law. On this point, I urge you all to read two recent books by Ethan Katsh-

-The Electronic Media and the Transformation of Law, and Law in a Digital World.

I participated last year as the only non-law professor or non-law librarian in a month-long, electronic conference, moderated by Prof. Katsh and sponsored by Westlaw, on the future of law and law libraries given developments in electronic media. About one hundred people participated in this conference via computers in their homes, offices, hotel rooms, automobiles, picnic tables, or beach chairs spread from all over the US to me in Hawaii. We never saw or met each other face to face, but rather exchanged our ideas by way of cyberspace. We all agreed that law and law libraries (and just about everything else), as presently known, are not long for this world.

Prof. Katsh approached some folks at the Wall Street Journal to see if they wanted to publish extracts from the electronic conference. Naturally, the WSJ had no interest in the substance of the conference. All it wanted to know was if any famous judges were involved in the activities. So Ethan Katsh said, "Certainly: What do you think Judge Ito was doing with his laptop during the Simpson trial?"

And now you know the truth as to why OJ is free.