

MESSAGE ENERGITS:

REDISCOVERING AND REBUTTING MERRILL'S MICRO-THEORY<sup>1</sup>

by T. W. COOPER

In the July, 1979 issue of Journalism Educator, John C. Merrill published the original and provoking "Message Energits: Propellents and Stimulants of Communication?"<sup>2</sup> Despite the possibility of peer ostracism or full scale controversy, Merrill bravely proffered the daring hypothesis that the central unit of communication energy is the energit (pronounced in-ER-jit). On the one hand, Merrill risked losing his stature in the journalism community, and, on the other, gaining the Nobel Prize in Physics, a costly disloyalty to his field and thus his career.

Significantly, Merrill introduced the field of micro-communication, a unique domain in which invisible communication energy units, economic theory, and natural science methodology collide. "Energits," Merrill concluded, "constitute the atomic framework of a message, the fissionable protoplasm of the corpus communicatus, the bridge of message energy which spans the chasm of misunderstanding and disinterest."<sup>3</sup> In other words, Merrill's energits are an invisible elan vital or life force behind all acts of communication.

Merrill concludes that without energits the print journalist is merely a deadbeat, who loses his readers to television. Without energits the journalism professor is a monotonous tape-loop, who forfeits his students to expanded internships.

Thus Merrill deduces that energits are seminal to journalism, education and the larger communication process.

So crucial to communication theory is Merrill's probe that it is inexplicable why the term "energit" disappeared immediately following the publication of Merrill's article. Scholars neither praised nor buried Merrill's hypothesis; they totally ignored it. To this day there are no competitive schools of theory comparing V-energits, H-energits, and T.B.-energits, Merrill's major distinctions among the energy units. Nor do current Ph.D. theses analyze the pedagogical, methodological, and pseudo-scientific implications of Merrill's five hours of research within the embryonic "energit" laboratories of his imagination and home study. In fact the term "energit" itself still seems totally foreign to all save those seven Libyan scholars who heard Merrill deliver the original paper at the 1979 UCUSCAAPI conference in Belewandi, Mongolia.

However, after seven years of stress-induced follow-up to Merrill's five hours of investigation, this paper will establish the proposed reasons for disappearing "energits," and their concomitant micro-theory. The conclusions below also list an alternative analysis of sub-atomic communication. All evidence currently suggests the following scenario:-

- 1) What Merrill had really discovered was the energit, not the energit.
- 2) Because the energit has not yet fully materialized (cf. emerged) from the dimension of abstract theory, it is easily confused with ~~the~~ non-existent energit. From beyond sub-atomic distance, sub-atomic "m's" and "n's" are easily inverted.

- 3) In scholarship, no phenomenon is considered real until it fully emerges into the literature of that field. Tautologically, emergits show greater potential for emerging into the literature than do energits.
- 4) Merrill, well noted for his erudition in international communication, communication ethics, and journalism, had not previously published in "energitology." The novelty and danger of his invading the invisible micro-realm raised dangerous ethical questions of invasion of privacy, the separation of church and state, and AAUP contract violation proceedings.
- 5) As a scholar, Merrill may be underqualified in writing about energits. That is, he fails to sufficiently qualify his language and thus sounds dogmatic or possibly knowledgeable. Merrill assertively concludes that energits exist. In true academic tradition he might better have stated:

what, for lack of more specific tools and nomenclature, we term 'energits,' may, in certain tested climates, cultures, and civilizations exhibit qualities of force, magnitude, or possibly existence, if researchers are replicable and grants are enormous.

- 6) Merrill's diagrams suggest two-dimensional representation of the three types of energit. Without permission from the particles themselves, nor of the microscope nor of related microbes, these "sketches" may be considered impressionistic if not post-avant-garde or phony.

However, lest any reader misinterpret the spirit of these findings, one must make clear that, relative to the energits' domain, Merrill is a "giant." However, his stature does not grant him total control of the language and paradigms of his chosen field. His proposed "right" to originate vocabulary and facts within the field, as its founder, remains hollow on two counts:

- 1) as founder he cannot quote or footnote previous authority in

the field, and 2) as foundational, his thought is suspect by virtue of its originality and deviance. If Merrill's speculation is confused with true insight, it is possible that other points of view, even non-American, or non-SBJ/SDX, may be presented.

Like the Loch Ness monster, "emergits" are infrequently observed in meaningful empirical studies and often thought to be imaginary. It is important, consequently, that Diagram 1, albeit an artist's conception of an emergit, be accepted as evidence of an UFE (unidentified floating emergit) spotted under "E" in an index at Great Expectations bookstore near Chicago.

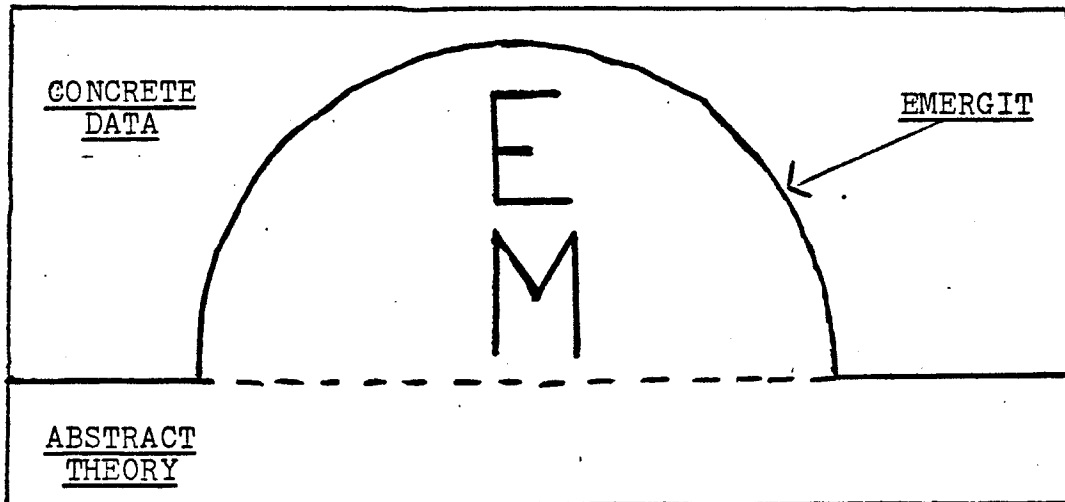


DIAGRAM 1 (By permission, Emergit Documentation Center, UCUSCAAPI, 1986). Emergit emerging from abstract theory into the literature through concrete data.

As they emerge more fully into more acceptable literature, it is fully anticipated that emergits will also be more fully exposed in larger diagrams. It is, however, safe to say that this drawing should not be confused with the suspect sketches of "emergits" circulating in high school textbooks, and that the E M pictured on the side does mean "emergit," rather than the physicist's

conjecture suggesting "E=MC<sup>2</sup>" or the competing theory that the "emergit" is seeking to communicate "Educate Merrill."

Ultimately, Merrill, like Columbus or his competitors, should be credited for his vast discovery, not blamed for false identification. However, one must be careful in reading Merrill's studies and remember that he, unlike the great thinkers Aristotle, Descartes, Kant, and DaVinci, has unfortunately earned a Ph.D. He has also successfully written and edited far too many books to see clearly at the sub-atomic level.

Nevertheless, Merrill has given us, if not a truthful theory, a great topic. It is such breakthroughs which provide scholarship with tempting titles for conferences, and enticing ideas for theme issues of academic journals. Such ballast should guarantee him not only promotion to tenure in the academic hall of Degrees of Honor, but may also lead to his discovery in a larger universe as a significant emergit.

#### ENDNOTES

1. Presented at the International Conference of Americans Interested in Travel to Midwestern and Southern Cities As Tourists and Occasional Paper Presenters held in Paris, Tennessee in December, 1986. The author's name is listed on the program for tenure purposes although the paper was actually presented by a senior graduate student who needed to appear on a panel, on behalf of the author, who needed to write another article during the conference. The elongated abstract above represents the essence of the author's Ph.D. thesis; which has been previously rewritten for The Journal of Communicators, Mass Comm Abstracts, A Bibliography of Thesis Proposals, Bulgarian Micro-Physicist, and TV Guide.
2. Perhaps most readers better remember the standing ovation given Merrill by seven Libyan scholars midway through his original presentations of the paper in 1979 at the Universal Consortium of Unrecognized Specialists in Communications Activities and Assorted Pseudoscientific Investigators, (UCUSCAAPI),

meeting in Belewandi, Mongolia. So interested were the Libyan scholars in Merrill's hypothesis that they detained him with questions for years, while corresponding with members of the U.S. media.

3. Journalism Educator, July, 1979, p. 55. The quotation appears to be an amalgamation of ideas Merrill culled from Augustine, Einstein, Simon, Garfunkle, Sartre, and Merrill's dentist.
4. "Deciphering Micro-graffitti" was the term paper topic of Merrill's most prolific sophomore, Hugh Long of Louisiana Social University. The empirical study noted that, while over ten trillion possible combinations of EM decoding exist, the letters must stand for either "emergit," or are a type of "branding" which occurs as part of more obscure particle "micro-rodeos."