

Pages 384–389: Summary, Themes & Critical Questions

Summary

- Barker starts with **Benedict Anderson’s concept of “imagined communities”**, rooted in **print capitalism**, and poses a central question:

What kinds of communities emerge around **non-print, electric media**, like interkom?

- **Interkom** is a **grassroots Indonesian communication network**, locally invented and operated without state oversight.
- It is a network of **wired, analog intercom devices** linking homes, food stalls, and farms—initially hyper-local, then expanding rhizomatically into **“lokal” (local)** and **“lintas” (traversing)** lines.
- The growth of interkom mimics biological reproduction: lines **split (mitosis)** when overcrowded, when content diverges, or when users want privacy.
- New lines might be **content-specific (music, chat, polite speech)** or **exclusive/private** (e.g., **“Jalur Guha” or Cave Line**).
- The metaphor of **rhizomes** (Deleuze & Guattari) replaces family tree models of connection. Interkom is **non-linear, voluntary, and multi-nodal**.
- Interkom evolves not as a central network but through **overlapping, flexible linkages**, driven by noise, curiosity, and informal participation.



Course Themes Connection

Theme	Link
Fantasy vs. Reality	Interkom creates imagined proximity , allowing people to feel connected across distance—but in a way that preserves the fantasy of community without the obligations of face-to-face sociality.
Image/Interface Function	Interkom functions as a non-visual interface —a sound-based, modulated interface shaped by user rhythm and discourse. It's DIY media infrastructure that carries expressive, symbolic, and identity-building functions.
Space and Time	The interkom reconfigures local geographies . It extends kampung intimacy across distance while flattening space through cables, and reshaping temporal rhythms of social life (e.g., chatting during chores or into the night).

Q1. How does interkom challenge traditional models of media infrastructure and control?

Answer:

Unlike print or broadcast media—often state-regulated—interkom is **locally invented, user-run, and structurally rhizomatic**. It thrives without state oversight and develops according to local desires for connection, entertainment, and privacy. It's an **autonomous interface system** outside state discourse.

Q2. Why is the interkom network described as “rhizomatic,” and what does that mean in interface terms?

Answer:

Borrowing from Deleuze & Guattari, “rhizomatic” means **non-hierarchical, non-linear, and networked through voluntary linkages**. Like modern digital platforms, interkom lines **split, merge, and reproduce** based on user behavior, not institutional plans—creating a flexible interface of relations and signals.

Q3. How do interkom line divisions reflect both technical and social pressures?

Answer:

Lines split due to technical constraints (overcrowding, noise), but also **discursive and cultural preferences**—some users want different styles (polite vs. vulgar), others want **content-specific or private spaces**, mimicking how users curate social media feeds today.

Q4. How does interkom function as both a technological and symbolic network?

Answer:

It is not just about **transmitting sound**, but about **constructing identities, creating community, and shaping expressive styles**. Each line has its own culture, norms, and symbolic boundaries—interkom becomes a **social interface** built on sound, rhythm, and shared space.

Q5. In what way does interkom represent a counter-model to centralized communication systems?

Answer:

Unlike state media or corporate platforms, interkom's structure is **bottom-up, participatory, and fragmented**. Its evolution is not directed but **emergent**, driven by needs for play, intimacy, and hyper-local discourse, making it a model of **vernacular network culture**.

Pages 390–395: Summary, Themes & Critical Questions

Summary

- Barker explores the **performance of self on interkom lines**, especially through **vocal persona and naming rituals**.
- Users choose **on-air names**—aliases, often poetic or humorous—that differ from their real-life identities. This naming gives them **freedom to perform, flirt, joke, or insult** without consequences.

- The “**on-air**” self diverges from the “**on-land**” self, creating a **split interface identity**: one that is virtual, performative, and sonic.
- Interkom use mirrors **radio broadcasting**, but with hyper-local, decentralized rules. Norms evolve organically within each line.
- Much of the interaction consists of **gibberish, play, or performative speech**, which is often dismissed by outsiders as “noise.” But Barker argues it’s **symbolic labor**—a **performance of participation, not information**.
- He draws comparisons to **kinship structures**, noting that interkom allows people to **form new affiliative ties** outside blood or locality—“communities of voice.”
- The use of interkom is heavily **gendered**: female voices are fetishized, sexualized, and often harassed. Men dominate vocal space, though some women use anonymity to **push back or perform alternative identities**.

Course Themes Connection

Theme	Link
Fantasy vs. Reality	Interkom enables users to inhabit fantasy versions of themselves through vocal personas. These alter-egos are performative projections—fantasies of confidence, play, seduction—that exist only in the interface space .
Interface Function	The interkom becomes a sound-based social screen —an interface for identity, style, and affect. It’s a stage for symbolic performance, not just communication.
Space and Time	Users may live within walking distance but interact exclusively through voice. This creates asynchronous, symbolic space —a social field that overlays, but does not mirror, physical geography.

Critical Questions + Theorized Answers

Q1. What does the separation between “on-air” and “on-land” identities tell us about the function of media interfaces?

Answer:

It shows that interfaces offer **zones of experimentation**, where users can **detach from social norms and roles**. Like a username or avatar, the “on-air” name allows symbolic transformation—**media space becomes identity space**.

Q2. How does Barker challenge the idea that media must be informative to be meaningful?

Answer:

He argues that “**noise**” is **not meaningless**—it’s **symbolic performance**, a way of asserting presence and sociality. Interkom users talk to be heard, not necessarily to say something. This echoes how **interface engagement (likes, scrolling)** often replaces content with **gesture**.

Q3. In what way is interkom a vernacular interface for kinship and affiliation?

Answer:

It creates **non-biological, affective ties** based on style, shared humor, or sustained presence. Interkom lines function like **families of sound**—where your place is earned through performance, not blood.

Q4. How does gender operate on interkom lines, and what does this reveal about media and power?

Answer:

Voice-based interfaces often **amplify male dominance**, especially in anonymous spaces. But they also provide **cover for subversion**—some women perform multiple personas or use anonymity to resist objectification. The interface is a site of **both control and potential resistance**.

Q5. How does this section complicate the idea of “community” in digital or networked life?

Answer:

Community here is not based on shared space or goals but on **ritualized, playful presence**. Interkom networks show that community can be **improvised, symbolic, and constantly**

shifting, much like modern online platforms where **presence = participation**, not necessarily belonging.

Pages 396–401: Summary, Themes & Critical Questions

Summary

- The state begins to take notice of **interkom networks**—not as innovations, but as **threats**.
 - While interkom started as hyper-local, its expansion and popularity **challenged the boundaries of state control** over communication.
 - The Indonesian government frames interkom as **illegal, unauthorized broadcasting**, akin to pirate radio.
 - Authorities view the networks as **subversive** due to their anonymity, decentralization, and lack of surveillance.
 - Barker links this to **James Scott’s “Seeing Like a State”**: states require legibility—interkom, by contrast, is **illegible, rhizomatic, and untraceable**.
 - Some interkom users, aware of this, mock or avoid state attention, often **strategically playing with surveillance**—e.g., using coded language, switching lines.
 - The fear is less about content and more about **unregulated connection**—the **threat of networks that lie outside centralized knowledge systems**.
-

Course Themes Connection

Theme	Link
Fantasy vs. Reality	The state fears the fantasy of horizontal, anonymous communication —a space where people aren’t easily monitored or identified. Users, in turn, engage in playful fantasies of rebellion, secrecy, and mischief.

Interface Function	Interkom becomes an interface of political possibility —a communication space that escapes default modes of power. It is both a tool and a metaphor for alternative structures of connection .
Space and Time	Interkom disrupts traditional geography—not just physical, but bureaucratic space . It creates unmapped zones , nonlinear social clusters , and temporal flows that resist administrative scheduling (e.g., night activity, shifting aliases).

Critical Questions + Analytic Responses

Q1. Why does the state perceive interkom as a threat despite its informal and entertainment-driven use?

Answer:

Because it's a **system outside state control**. Even if not overtly political, interkom's structure—a decentralized, anonymous, mobile network—**undermines the logic of legibility and control** central to modern states. The issue is not content but **sovereignty over signal**.

Q2. How does interkom's invisibility make it both powerful and vulnerable?

Answer:

Its **illegibility** gives users freedom, but also makes the network **susceptible to shutdowns and crackdowns**, since it lacks formal protection. Its power lies in its **opacity**, but that also draws **state suspicion**—opacity is mistaken for opposition.

Q3. How does Barker apply Scott's concept of "legibility," and how does that help us understand media politics?

Answer:

Scott argues that states prefer systems that are **visible, countable, and mappable**. Interkom is none of those—it's **bottom-up, noisy, and unsupervised**. This forces us to see media not just as tools of communication, but as **sites of contestation between control and opacity**.

Q4. In what ways does interkom function as a counter-interface to state media?

Answer:

Where state media is **centralized, top-down, and scripted**, interkom is **polyphonic, fragmented, and user-driven**. It becomes a **vernacular interface of subaltern modernity**—where alternative logics of connection thrive.

Q5. What is the politics of interface design implied in this section?

Answer:

Interfaces aren't neutral—they either **invite surveillance or resist it**. Interkom's form—anonymous voices, fragmented nodes, shifting lines—**enacts a politics of concealment**, challenging the assumption that communication must be transparent or hierarchical.

Pages 402–End: Summary, Themes & Final Questions

Summary

- Barker revisits **Benedict Anderson's "imagined communities"**, which assumes that shared print culture (e.g. newspapers) creates a sense of nationhood by allowing people to imagine themselves as **part of a unified, synchronous body**.
- Interkom, by contrast, reveals **a different kind of imagined community**—not bound by nationalism, territory, or time.
- It is **fragmented, playful, shifting, anonymous**, and fundamentally **vernacular**.
- Barker resists calling interkom a **counterpublic** (a resistant space in opposition to dominant media), because its politics are not always oppositional—they are often **ambiguous, ironic, or non-ideological**.
- Interkom operates through **sound, rhythm, mood, and performative gestures**, not shared ideology or identity.

- In this way, it exemplifies **non-modern, non-statist communication networks** that are **intimate, affective, and situational** rather than bureaucratically legible or historically fixed.
-

Final Course Themes Connection

Theme	How It Concludes
Fantasy vs. Reality	The fantasy of interkom is not nationhood or modernity—it's connection without responsibility , presence without legibility. It challenges Western ideals of stable, knowable, communicative subjects.
Interface Function	The interkom interface is not visual or informational , but sonic, ambient, and ephemeral. It shows that interfaces can be rhythmic, collective, and improvisational , not just structured code or screens.
Space and Time	There's no shared clock time or mapped space in interkom. Users “gather” asynchronously across local networks, producing fluid collectives that only exist in use, in sound, in voice —a kind of nonlinear media ecology .

Final Critical Questions + Theoretical Reflections

Q1. How does Barker's analysis challenge Anderson's theory of the nation as an “imagined community”?

Answer:

Anderson assumes a unified, print-based model of imagination—**linear, synchronous, and bounded**. Barker's interkom shows that **community can be nonlinear, fragmented, affective, and anonymous**. It proposes an **alternative model of imagination**, not based in visibility or consensus.

Q2. Why is interkom not easily described as a “counterpublic”?

Answer:

Because it's not always oppositional or political in a direct sense. Interkom isn't about

resistance, but about **alternative world-building**: it's messy, funny, anonymous, and performative. Its politics are in its **form, not its message**.

Q3. What does interkom teach us about the potential of media interfaces to build community outside of formal structures?

Answer:

It shows that interfaces don't need to be sleek or state-sanctioned to **mediate real social relations**. Interkom builds **meaningful, affective micro-worlds** without algorithms, screens, or visibility—just through **shared rhythms, codes, and voices**.

Q4. How does Barker use “rhythm” as a sociological concept?

Answer:

Rhythm replaces structure. Interkom users **align through tempo, turn-taking, voice tone**, and shared jokes. This creates a **collective mood**, a kind of sonic choreography, which functions as an **interface of social coherence**, even without content or rules.

Q5. What might we take from interkom when thinking about contemporary networked life?

Answer:

That **connection doesn't have to mean transparency or legibility**. Interfaces can be ephemeral, localized, and socially powerful even if they're chaotic, invisible to outsiders, or not designed “professionally.” Interkom reminds us that **media is lived, not just consumed**.

COMMENT 1:

Similar to the TV Settings in the "misuse of a TV set" and we see that people have different settings or interests that correspond to different networks in this case. We see that interkom is only between certain proximity of people, let them be united by interest or community. This can also be seen as the political system.

Evaluation:

- You're making a valuable connection to McCarthy's “TV settings” as **vernacular media assemblages**.

- Good insight: **different interkom lines = different publics/settings/styles** (like bus ticket ads, devotional objects on TV).
- You're picking up on how **localized, curated setups function like informal political structures**—small publics governed by mood, tone, and voluntary participation.

Suggestions:

- Refine language: break long sentences and clarify what you mean by “political system.”

Like McCarthy's TV settings, interkom lines are “media environments” shaped by local interests. Each line functions like a small political microspace—governed not by formal rules, but by style, rhythm, and shared taste. These become community settings, not unlike curated social media channels.

COMMENT 2:

We see the similarity of the creative writer's way of avoiding shame of being in fantasy, similar to the creative writer, as he uses the protagonist to live his fantasy and this is saved by being embarrassed by woken by someone from his day-dream. People disguise themselves as someone else so their fantasy doesn't have a face. Similar to the creative writer, the writer itself is the "land-self" while the protagonist is the "air-self".

Evaluation:

- This is very creative and perceptive—you're drawing from **Freud's model of the daydreamer or creative writer**.
- The metaphor of “**on-land self**” and “**on-air self**” is *exactly* how Barker talks about performance and persona.
- Your analysis correctly points out how **interkom allows users to indulge in fantasy without shame**—by creating distance through anonymity.

Suggestions:

- Clarify structure and simplify for rhythm:

Like Freud's creative writer who uses a fictional character to explore forbidden fantasies, interkom users project "on-air" personas to explore humor, flirtation, or aggression without facing real-world consequences. The "land-self" stays grounded, while the "air-self" floats in sound. This split protects the fantasy from embarrassment.

COMMENT 3:

First, we see that states see the interkom as threats which signify their political presence. And that is obvious, as we see that anything that can create divergence between people is termed to be political. Here we see that interkom can be used by people to do politics and the interkom itself has a political presence.

Evaluation:

- Strong grasp of Barker's use of **James Scott ("legibility")**—the state sees **unmonitored, decentralized communication** as threatening.
- You rightly highlight that **even informal networks become political when they bypass centralized control**.
- The phrase "interkom itself has a political presence" is important—it emphasizes how **interface structure itself** can be ideological.

Suggestions:

- Clarify and add examples:




The interkom becomes political not because of its content, but because of its form—anonymous, mobile, and unregulated. As Barker shows, the state's discomfort with interkom reflects its deeper fear of illegibility. The mere existence of such a network is a political act, even if no one is discussing politics.

What You Might Revisit in the Text

Here are some rich points in the final third of Barker's piece that you might want to revisit or explore further:

1. **Why Barker avoids calling interkom a “counterpublic”**
→ He argues that it's not always oppositional. It's **ambiguous, playful, not always political in the Western sense**. Rereading that part could help sharpen your view on whether interkom is resistance or simply difference.
2. **The role of “rhythm” and sound over message**
→ He places a lot of emphasis on **the soundscape of interkom**—how participation itself is performative. You might explore how this ties to **interface-as-experience**, not just interface-as-information.
3. **Use of Deleuze & Guattari's rhizome vs. tree model**
→ You're touching on politics and structure—this section could strengthen how you describe **the interkom's form as a political and conceptual alternative** to broadcast or hierarchical networks.

Perfect! Let's start shaping your ideas from *Digital Gambling*, *Misuse of the TV Set*, and *Interkom* into a **mini comparative response essay**—framed through your course's key themes:

-  Interface as space + social technology
-  Fantasy vs. reality
-  Reconfiguration of space and time

Essay Title (Working)

“Interfaces of Fantasy: From Slot Machines to Interkom Lines”

(or)

“Living in the Interface: Community, Control, and the Disappearing Self”


Thesis (Intro Idea)

Across Natasha Schüll's *Digital Gambling*, Anna McCarthy's *Misuse of the TV Set*, and Joshua Barker's *Interkom in Indonesia*, media interfaces are shown not as passive technologies but as **active spaces of fantasy, control, and community formation**. Whether through visual spectacle, sonic presence, or behavioral design, these interfaces **reshape users' sense of time, identity, and social connection**, often **blurring the line between autonomy and orchestration**.

Body Paragraphs Breakdown

1. Interface as Fantasy-Making Machine

- **Slot Machines** (Schüll):
 - Create a **fantasy of control** while hiding algorithmic logic (illusion of choice).
 - AutoPlay: ultimate fantasy—playing without playing.
- **TV Settings** (McCarthy):
 - Visual assemblages create a **symbolic environment**—religious icons, ads, family photos—embedding the fantasy of identity, nostalgia, or power around the screen.
- **Interkom** (Barker):
 - Allows users to perform **vocal alter-egos** (on-air vs. on-land selves).
 - Similar to Freud's creative writer: uses a projected identity to **experience fantasy without shame**.

 Tie-in line:

In each case, the interface becomes a space where **users rehearse versions of the self**, often in **ritualized or symbolic form**, buffered from the constraints of embodied or regulated reality.

2. Interface as Control System

- **Digital Gambling Machines:**

- Schüll (via Deleuze): From **discipline to control**—interface adapts to desire, removing friction while subtly shaping behavior.
- The gambler doesn't see the control—they feel “in sync.”

- **TV Sets (McCarthy):**

- Misuse as recontextualization, but also a way to **reassert commercial messages** through local adaptation (e.g., bus ads).

- **Interkom:**

- Outside state control, **illegible networks** become political not by content but by **form**—rhizomatic, unmapped, unregistered.

✓ Tie-in line:

The interfaces do not only serve users—they also **shape users**. Whether through behavioral feedback, spatial arrangement, or surveillance anxiety, they enact a form of **soft governance**.

3. Interface and Space-Time Collapse

- **Gambling Machines:**

- Schüll: Time becomes resource—machines create a **flow state** where the user **loses bodily and temporal awareness**.

- **TV Settings:**

- McCarthy: TV links “**here**” and “**there**”—a Sicilian soccer game in a New York pizzeria; temporal and spatial distances are **compressed into symbolic presence**.

- **Interkom:**

- Interkoms **flatten geography**; people across neighborhoods form **sound-based communities**. Time becomes performative (e.g., late-night chatting), not clock-bound.

✓ Tie-in line:

In each case, the interface reorganizes the world—not just how it looks, but how it **feels, unfolds, and relates to the user** in time and space.

Conclusion (Pulling It Together)

While the screen, the machine, and the intercom line may seem vastly different, they are united by their function as **interfaces of cultural performance and social imagination**. They don't merely transmit content—they **stage realities**, allowing users to fantasize, perform, or disappear into a system that often reflects back not their agency, but **the logic of control, repetition, and rhythm**.