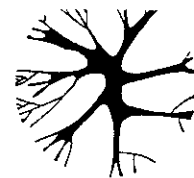


# COMMUNICATION RESEARCH TRENDS



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## Concentration of Media Ownership

Multi-channel cable, direct broadcast satellite and immediate access to computer data banks promise an immense variety of information at our finger tips. But many are questioning whether this will mean real diversity of public access or simply many more channels in the hands of fewer and fewer industrial giants. The rapid introduction of new communication technologies is bringing to the fore all of the old policy dilemmas regarding concentration of economic power in the mass media. In the background are the perennial concerns to guarantee the right to communicate and to encourage diversity of opinion in the debate of public decisions.

Some argue that the new multi-channel technologies will automatically solve the problems of spectrum scarcity in broadcasting. What is needed is the profit incentive and free competition to attract large investments for rapid expansion of new services. In this view, the world economic crisis demands that we race to create new information industries to solve unemployment and other problems. Developing countries, too, must open the doors to transnational investment in order to catch up with the technology of the industrial world.

Others contend that this rush to modernise at any cost is destroying the principle of the media as a public trust and is making information a commodity that only those with buying power can have.

This issue reviews some of the rapid changes that are currently taking place in research on economic concentration in the media.

REVIEW ARTICLE

## I: Who Controls Television Content?

*Prime-Time Television: Content and Control.* Muriel G. Cantor. (Beverly Hills: London: Sage Publications, 1980).

The production of a daily newspaper or a television programme is often the work of a large organisation with hundreds of people involved. A key research question is how concentration of ownership and centralisation of 'gatekeepers of information' influence this complex process of content formulation. What are the critical points at which gatekeepers can determine the world view and values expressed in cultural production?

Muriel Cantor narrows her focus to one type of television programming, prime time popular drama. She describes the specific role of all the parties who influence content from the conception of an idea for a new television programme to the time it actually becomes a successful series in the prime viewing hours. She singles out four major groups of actors who typically play some part in shaping the content of television drama in the US: the three major competing networks along with their local affiliated stations and the advertising sponsors; 2) the handful of independent Hollywood producing companies that supply the networks with programmes on contract and employ producers, writers, actors and craft personnel; 3) the various government regulators and the organised pressure groups or social critics that attempt to influence through these government agencies; and 4) the mass audiences. In the background there is the cultural history and the political-economic 'system' of the US: the financial and marketing structure, traditions of popular entertainment, the century-old tradition of 'trust-busting' reform movements that have brought into existence anti-monopoly legislation and regulatory agencies, and the value system of free speech and diversity of opinion. Cantor emphasises that all of these groups are interdependent, and the final content outcome is the result of fiercely competitive, negotiated compromises.

### The National Networks

By far the most influential parties in the process are the national networks. Although the Hollywood producing companies may initiate the kernel of an idea for a series, they are dependent on the networks for approval and financing at every stage of production: informal presentation and modification of the idea; preparation of the preliminary scripts (which immediately become the property of the networks); the selection of a production team and actors for the pilot programme; deciding whether a pilot will be run as a series; censorship of scripts; agreements on cutting and editing; the critical decision on when it will appear in prime time; and deciding how long the series will run. In most of these decisions of the network, a determining factor is whether the advertisers find the programme compatible with their interests and this, in turn, depends on whether the programme is likely to attract high audience ratings among the demographic sectors which have the strongest buying power.

### The Hollywood Production Companies

Creative people in Hollywood are occasionally able to get the networks to accept an innovative programme idea that sets a new trend in prime time drama. Norman Lear bargained with the CBS network for his 'All in the Family' after another network refused it. But the power of the network is indicated by the fact that the persons most influential in production content are not the writers or directors of actors but the on-the-line producers who act essentially as the negotiating liaison between the studio and the networks. The on-the-line producers hire the actors, the writers and craft workers. This producer also has control over the develop-

ment of story line as well as the cutting and editing. Most producers have been writers themselves and use writers only to fill out dialogue and incident. Actors become important only if the pilot becomes a successful series that depends on the actor's personality. With thousands of competing writers in Hollywood and only 2,000 acting jobs for 18,000 members of the Screen Actors Guild living in Hollywood, these people have little bargaining power.

### The Government Regulators

Three major regulatory issues in the history of US broadcasting illustrate not only the role of the Federal Communication Commission and the courts but the negotiated competition among advertisers, networks, citizens pressure groups and the Hollywood creative people.

Until the late 1950s (first in radio and then in television), it was customary for sponsors to have a 'franchise' on time periods, and many programmes not only were created by advertising agencies but designed to fulfil specific sponsor objectives. However, the FCC was increasingly concerned with sponsor control, and the public outcry over revelations of fraudulent quiz programmes brought Congressional investigations. The networks used this opportunity to stop the practice of direct sponsorship and, instead, to sell time slots in a given programme to various sponsors. The networks also instituted strict censorship of all programmes and began to sit in on all meetings to plan story lines and other phases of programme production.

In the early 1970s citizens groups, social scientists and educators put pressure on the FCC and the networks to eliminate the violence and explicit sex content of prime time drama. The FCC then developed a plan with the networks to keep the early evening hours ('The Family Hour') free from themes objectionable for child viewers. This was the first attempt to allow public control of content in television drama in the US. In this case, the creative people — the Writer's Guild of America, the Screen Actors Guild and the Directors Guild — filed suit, arguing that this was not simply an application of self-regulatory broadcasting codes but a violation of the Free Speech Amendment of the US Constitution. The courts judged in favour of the creative people, but in practice the networks maintain the family viewing period.

Until the early 1970s the networks produced most of their own drama. In 1972 the US Justice Department brought antitrust action against the networks alleging monopoly practices in their control of the lucrative prime time programming. On the basis of an out-of-court settlement, one of the networks (NBC) agreed to leave production of TV entertainment programmes and feature films to independent producers, and other networks are producing less of their own programmes.

### Can Audiences Influence Content?

Cantor feels that audiences should be included in the model of content influence, but admits that there is little agreement among

communication theorists on how a disparate group of 20,000,000 to 50,000,000 individuals actually provide feedback. The 'demand model' of marketers and programme planners holds that, through the rating system, audiences determine the content. At the other extreme, some Marxists and theorists of mass society maintain that audiences are helpless before the manipulation of elites. Cantor has found in her research that Hollywood producers have an 'ultimate audience' in mind, but that their primary audiences are the network officials and other gatekeepers. And since network officials conceptualise their 'target audience' in terms of age, sex and income demographics of interest to advertisers, audiences in fact have power in so far as they have buying power and are likely to respond to advertising persuasion.

### Avoiding Concentration at the Transmission Stage

*Economics and Freedom of Expression.* Bruce M. Owen. (Cambridge, MA: Ballinger Publishing Company, 1975).

Owen suggests that the differentiation of the organisational stages of production and transmission of media messages, such as Cantor has done, is important for understanding how economic concentration inhibits freedom of expression. He sees three basic stages: 1) *creation of messages* (writers, reporters, producers, etc.) which is the critical moment of access and freedom; 2) the *editorial process*, the gatekeepers deciding which messages will be transmitted; and 3) the transmission stage (printing and delivery, broadcasting, etc).

Owen argues that there is relatively easy entry at the stage of message creation and editing. There is relatively little concentration, per se, at these stages. Historically, in the newspaper and broadcasting industries there has been great concentration of economic power at the transmission stage which is characterised by heavy capital investment costs, economies of scale, licensing and other barriers to entry. The problem is that the transmission stage in these industries has often become vertically integrated with the editing and message creation stage. Thus, as Cantor points out, the broadcasting networks can control the production of TV drama. The book and magazine industries are much less concentrated at the transmission stage, in great part because they can use the partially subsidised common carrier postal system. Thus, these media have much greater freedom of access and less control at the critical message creation and editorial stage.

Owen therefore recommends that for purposes of broader access public policy encourage multiple channels at the transmission stage and, as far as it is economically efficient, a separation of transmission functions from the message creation and editorial stage. Since politically it is now difficult to force a separation of newspaper printing from editing and reporting or limit a broadcasting network to common carrier functions, it is of great importance that new forms of transmission such as cable be made common carriers separated from programme production.

## II: Questioning the Ideals of Media Diversity

*Who Owns the Media: Concentration of Ownership in the Mass Communications Industry.* Second Edition. Benjamin M. Compaine, Christopher H. Sterling, Thomas Guback, J. Kendrick Noble, Jr. (White Plains, NY: London: Knowledge Industry Publications, Inc, 1982).

In different chapters giving comprehensive summaries of data on concentration in newspapers, book publishing, magazines, theatrical film, television and radio broadcasting, and cable television, each of the authors takes a somewhat different position. However, in this latest edition, the senior author contends that, with the new computer and multi-channel video technologies and the immense investment demands to develop these technologies, we may have to reassess old assumptions about how to achieve media diversity.

Compaine notes that three long-standing principles have guided policies of media ownership in the US:

1. Diversity of opinions in the public forum is necessary for

democratic government, and to guarantee this diversity we must not allow the channels of information to be controlled by a small number of gatekeepers.

2. Bigness is bad. In all industries — but especially in the information industries — concentration beyond a certain optimal level of efficiency implies price-fixing and other power manipulation.

3. Localism is desirable. That is, the control of media should be located *within* different geographical units and *within* social groups that the media serve. Also, there should be ample information about the immediate political and social environment.

Where media are a private enterprise, achieving diversity and other goals depends on a mixture of profit incentives to attract large investments to new communication technologies and sufficient regulation to prevent too much concentration. In Compaine's view, the perennial problem for policy-makers is to determine the proper balance between freedom to expand enterprises and having too few gatekeepers.

### How to Define Concentration and Diversity

Generally, policy-makers have attempted to guarantee diversity of gate-keepers by keeping different media — newspapers, broadcasting, cinema — under separate ownership, especially at a local level. Each medium was presumed to have naturally discrete boundaries with different patterns of management and technological development and different norms for regulation. For example, broadcasting was assumed to have limited channels because of limitations in the frequency spectrum. Government regulatory agencies have therefore set down detailed norms for fairness and have limited the number of broadcasting stations under a single owner. The print medium, however, is almost completely unregulated. Ironically, in many cities there is only one daily newspaper but access to many radio or video channels.

Compaine emphasises that with the new media, the boundary lines between media are blurring. The same film can be seen at a cinema or on one's TV screen with transmission by broadcasting, cablecast, direct broadcast satellite or video cassette. With teletext, newspaper-like content is projected on the TV screen. To avoid a series of regulatory contradictions, it is necessary to build a new set of boundaries in terms of *content*; the *process* by which information is gathered, stored and transmitted; and the *format* in which information is displayed for the user (ink on paper, image on a video tube, sound from a speaker). The important question for diversity may not be the present norm, diversity in the display format, but the multiplication of content providers within the whole mass communications industry and increase in the channels of conduit (the process stage).

This blurring of media boundaries also raises questions regarding the prohibiting of cross-media ownership. When a new medium such as cable is introduced, consumers and advertisers do not increase the percentage of their budgets for various media, but switch their spending to the new medium. Newspapers and broad-

casters naturally want to gain access to the new markets. Regulation which encourages separation of ownership along lines of media formats may discourage investment necessary for the development of new media or may inhibit the variety of content providers for the expansion of channels. The important issue is whether to maintain the new 50 channel cable systems as a common carrier open to maintain the new 50 channel cable systems as a common carrier open to many content providers (similar in ways to the postal or telephone system) or to allow cable owners to engage in the more lucrative content production themselves.

### The Effect of Concentration on Content

Sterling, in his comprehensive review of studies on the relation of broadcasting ownership patterns and media content, observes that so far there is no strong research underpinning for breaking up various kinds of combined ownership situations. There are numerous case studies of abuses, and at least one significant study found that common ownership of a newspaper and a television station in the same city tended to restrict the variety of news available to the public. Considering that the issue of concentration of ownership revolves around its supposed influence on content, it is surprising that Sterling must conclude that much of the needed research on content influence has yet to be done.

### Problems with Smallness

Compaine argues that there is no clear definition of what level of bigness is harmful and that in the long run larger corporations may be better able to provide the quality and real diversity that is expected. Policymakers must avoid accepting at face value some assumed myths, such as that greater diversity yields higher quality. He maintains that we must not burden the technology that is fuelling the changes in the media business with overly ambitious dreams of social change. Furthermore, US information-providers are facing stiff competition in world markets. As a result, artificially scaled-down institutions will not be able to win their share of the world market.

Compaine concludes that there does not appear to be an alarming trend toward concentration of ownership in the American media, but admits that this more quantitative economic measurement may not indicate the qualitative aspect, the kind of information that gatekeepers typically include or exclude.

## III: Preventing a Corporate Takeover

*The Emerging Network Marketplace.* Herbert S. Dordick, Helen G. Bradley, Burt Nanus. (Norwood, NJ: Ablex Publishing Corporation, 1981).

Within the next ten or twenty years the marriage of computers and telecommunication with its promise of remote shopping, interactive remote education, and many other services could transform not only the information infrastructure of society but the nature of society itself. However, Dordick et al. argue that if appropriate policy decisions are not taken now, 'it would be reasonable to expect a repetition of the familiar pattern of some other large technological innovations such as television and nuclear power with haphazard development responsive only to commercial demand, which favors private over public interest, short-time over long-term considerations and economic over social criteria.'

It is likely that only larger corporations will be able to pay the initial set-up costs and have enough volume to sustain monthly service charges. Many small businesses will not be able to pay the costs. There could be a growing incidence of failure among small businesses and a growing concentration of intellectual power and access in larger corporations. Also, as medical and other services become geared toward electronic delivery, less affluent private consumers and poorer minorities will be left out. The authors suggest that by the 1990s not only consumers but members of the business and industrial sectors could make information inequities a major political issue in the US.

### The 'Privatisation' of Public Information

*Who Knows: Information in the Age of the Fortune 500.* Herbert I. Schiller. (Norwood, NJ: Abex Publishing Corporation, 1981).

Schiller provides evidence that present trends in the telecommunications industry will increase enormously the political and economic power of America's largest corporations. He analyses in detail how large corporations use public funds and government regulatory agencies for their own benefit. For example, government subsidies for developing new technology go to the super-corporations, but once the technology is brought to the marketing stage, these corporations reject public interest criteria in the marketing and distribution.

Of particular interest is Schiller's study of the tendency toward the privatisation and commercialisation of data banks and other information generated by government subsidised research. This trend is gradually eroding the principle of information as a public good expressed in institutions such as public libraries. He also points out the efforts of large corporations to use new multi-channel media to present their message directly to the public. Getty Oil, for example, has purchased 85% of a new 24-hour sports channel and uses this channel for programmes warning of government regulation and defending oil company policies.

## Corporate Strategies for Shaping Public Policy

*Pushbutton Fantasies: Critical Perspectives on Videotex and Information Technology.* Vincent Mosco. (Norwood, NJ: Ablex Publishing Corporation, 1982).

Mosco proposes that the failure to adopt policies for equitable distribution of new information resources stems in part from a naive and fallacious 'pluralist' model of how public policy is made. This pluralist model suggests that in the US citizens groups representing demands for public access and the information poor can have an equal voice in policy-making by negotiating along with the communication industries, the US Congress, the courts, and the White House. In fact citizen's groups have had very little success.

A much more realistic model is the analysis of power structure. This perspective begins with the recognition that large corporations and other elite groups form a coalition through interlocking directorates and common interests so powerful that they are able to use regulatory agencies and other government bodies for their own purposes. This coalition is able to control public opinion and policy-making so completely that, in the end, a communications policy of 'deregulation' appears to be the logical fulfillment of traditional American values.

A first step is the ability of this coalition to mobilise financial resources to fund research that shapes decision-making. Mosco

points out that research foundations such as Rand, Aspen and Ford, and university research programmes, particularly those at the Annenberg Schools, Harvard and MIT, have taken a particularly active role in designing the communication deregulation policy that gathered momentum in the Carter administration and found its implementation in the Reagan White House.

Secondly, policy-planning groups — mainly private associations of corporate and government officials — take the research findings and shape these into proposals for action. Thirdly, in the public opinion phase, the news media, which have a natural vested interest, focus debate on *how* deregulation should occur, not *whether* it is the right direction at all. This opinion-making process makes the next step, legislation, seem natural and inevitable.

Mosco adds that the structuralist model of policy-making has implications for media reform. It suggests that the battle is lost by the time it is discussed in government regulatory agencies. The attempts to work through government regulatory agencies only legitimises a mythical pluralism that masks the actual power structure. Instead the public interest media movement must debate the issue at the early stages in research foundations, universities, policy-planning groups and the news media.

## IV: Media Concentration and Media Bias

*Images of Welfare: Press and Public Attitudes to Poverty.* Peter Golding and Sue Middleton. (Oxford: Martin Robertson & Company, Ltd., 1982).

British communication researchers are concerned that increasingly the media are reflecting only the point of view of the managerial and proprietary classes. Since the demise of two influential pro-labour newspapers in the 1960s and the dominance of newspapers by the economics of advertising, the perspectives of labour and the poor have much less representation in the media. Consequently, when national debate focusses on labour demands or assistance to the poor, public opinion does not see this as a problem of unjust distribution of wealth but rather blames the poor themselves for their laziness, lack of thrift or rebelliousness.

Quantitative comparisons of independent or group-owned media are of little help in understanding this kind of systematic bias because virtually all the media share the same perspective. Rather, research must start with a particular problem of bias, trace this directly to gatekeeping or lack of alternative media and then demonstrate empirical evidence of public opinion. Golding and Middleton apply this general model to explain the effect of media concentration in Britain in defining public attitudes toward problems of poverty, unemployment and income reductions during the British economic crisis of the 1970s and early 1980s.

### The Cultural Origins of Media Imagery

The first stage of this research model assumes that the images and explanations of poverty in the press are not manufactured there but come out of centuries of English cultural history. The dominant imagery, which took shape between the 16th and 19th centuries, explains poverty as a mixture of unavoidable misfortune and a morally culpable attitude with associated vices such as drinking, violence, etc. Since the poor are themselves ignorant and helpless (in this view) the powerful and the state should step in with a balance of punitive deterrence to mobilise the indolent into a work force and occasional relief to prevent open rebellion. However, an alternative tradition, which developed in the 19th century cooperative and labour movements, rejects paternalistic philanthropy and sees the solution in the collective self-reliance and self-determination of the poor.

A second stage of the model examines the political and economic forces which caused the disappearance of an alternative, labour-oriented press. In the last year of its publication (1964) the *Daily Herald* had more than double the combined readership of the three quality, middle-class papers of Britain and was one of the twenty largest circulation dailies in the world. The *Daily Herald* had deve-

loped a loyal readership with a strong emphasis on domestic and international news for working-class men in the industrial areas of northern Britain. But the advertisers were interested in the target audiences of the affluent middle classes reading the quality press and the youth/women reading the sensational popular press. The *Daily Herald* died when advertisers switched to the trivial popular press.<sup>1</sup>

### The Press Offers Explanations

A third element in the model locates the analysis of media content and public opinion within a political-economic crisis that is deeply and widely felt and which demands public interpretation and search for solutions. The background of this book was the economic crisis of Britain after 1973. The working class experienced this with special acuteness: real income dropping to fight inflation, threat of unemployment, an extension of the tax net into ever lower income levels — and the sight of soaring welfare costs for the unemployed and elderly!

A fourth stage analyses how the news gathering organisation of the press systematically picks up the dominant cultural explanation of poverty (not the perspective of the poor) in its regular news beats with welfare bureaucracies, the courts, the police and ultra-conservative MPs outraged at the sight of the welfare scroungers and looking for the willing ear of a reporter. Golding and Middleton describe in detail how the press began to run a series of 'investigative reports' of picturesque scroungers who were living high with every angle of social security benefits. The popular press, most read by the working class, played up the most sensational aspects with little or no background explanation. In the absence of an alternative labour-oriented press both the popular and quality press highlighted the abuses of social security, but gave little attention to the dropping wages, higher taxes on the poor, or tax evasion by higher status groups.

A final part of the study was a survey of attitudes of media users to discover to what degree the popular interpretation of courses and remedies of poverty reflected those of the press. Although the press may not have been the only source of attitudes, by far the most common interpretations virtually parroted the image of welfare presented in the press.

<sup>1</sup> This draws heavily on Chapter 11 *The British Press: a Manifesto* by James Curran, ed. (London: The Macmillan Press, Ltd., 1978). This book along with *Power Without Responsibility: The Press and Broadcasting in Britain* by James Curran and Jean Seaton (Glasgow: Fontana Paperbacks of William Collins Sons & Co. Ltd., 1981) offer excellent analysis of trends of media concentration in Britain.

# V: Economic Factors in Media Technology

*Les industries de l'imaginaire: pour une analyse économique des media.* Patrice Flichy. (Paris: Presses Universitaires de Grenoble — Institut National de l'Audiovisuel, 1980).

The classical liberal model of communication sees the harmful effects of media concentration largely in terms of inhibiting the range of opinion and the circulation of new ideas. This view focusses on media content. However, Flichy shows that economic monopoly and the quest for highest returns on capital define not only content but the way new communication technology becomes institutionalised on society.

Edison, when he invented the phonograph and the camera for moving pictures, envisaged their use for education. However, investors saw much quicker profits in the new mass leisure market which attracted an untapped market of women and youth in every home. Requirements of capital directed this new technology toward the kind of light, popular entertainment which had the broadest appeal.

The radio and the phonograph were initially conceived of as a medium of interactive communication, but they were quickly re-defined as an extension of the music hall and vaudeville. Significantly, at the critical point of determining how a new technology was going to fit into society, the promoting companies were involved in producing both the hardware (the radio receivers, record players) and the software (the radio programmes, records). Indeed, the early manufacturers of radios brought in the entertainers in order to have some programming to induce people to buy radio receivers.

## **Technology Alone Does not Explain Culture**

Flichy questions the thesis popularised by McLuhan that technology is the major determining factor in the development of culture and social relations. Rather the imperative of reproductions of capital and the organisation of large national and transnational corporations play the key role in developing patterns of communication and the evolution of culture. The search for maximum return on capital has played a major role in defining audio-visual technology as a mass medium. This same search led to the strategy of transnational, global advertising strategies and a single global mass audience. The concentration of ownership or at least of managerial control of the cultural industries has led inexorably to the redundant and homogenised cultures at a national and international level.

Thus, the belief in the early 1970s that the new audiovisual media such as cable were going to be the basis for a new pattern of communal human relations and a means for strengthening the local community were a delusion. Likewise the desire for creative artists to have a significant personal contribution to the content of media is also wishful thinking.

Flichy concludes his book on a more optimistic note pointing out that parallel with the tendency towards concentration and centralisation there is a contrary centrifugal tendency toward the democratisation of communication in many parts of the world. But, surprisingly, he provides very little analysis of the economic basis for such democratic communication.

# VI: Alternative Communication in Latin America

*Comunicación y Democracia en América Latina.* Elizabeth Fox, Hector Schmucler, et al. (Lima, Peru: DESCO, 1982).

Latin American researchers in this book and elsewhere have documented the overwhelming concentration of control of the media in most countries of the continent. This book charts the evolution of a response by researchers and policy-makers which is significantly different from that taken in Europe and North America.

In the period around World War II a press generally dominated by political parties gradually became private enterprises heavily influenced by the US rhetoric of free press but without the tradition of reform and regulation of that country. In the 1950s and 1960s, to supplement a press and broadcasting system serving primarily an urban middle-class, governments encouraged a new form of educational and extension communication aimed at rural development. Much of the communication research of the period focussed on the effectiveness of mass communication campaigns in rural development. The results of much of this research showed that not only was rural communication without structural change ineffective but that it represented a subtle form of manipulation by traditional elites.

This led to a new phase of research in the late 1960s and early 1970s which analysed the content of media as an expression of the ideology of the transnational cultural invasion. However, much of this research used the thesis of centre-periphery dependency too rigidly and neglected to analyse carefully the role of power structure and mechanisms of control in the interior of Latin American countries. The research also neglected to analyse the role of opposition popular movements and emerging forms of alternative communication.

The research on external cultural dominance and the early UNESCO discussions of national sovereignty within global communication did stimulate interest in developing national communication policies which centred on a greater cultural independence. This was the focus of the Intergovernmental Conference on Communication Policies in Latin America held under the auspices of UNESCO at San José, Costa Rica in 1976. Oswaldo

Capriles describes in one of the essays of the book the unfortunate history of a proposal for national communication policy in Venezuela. Although the communication researchers who designed the plan had relatively strong support from the president, the plan was stopped cold by the powerful press and broadcasting interests.

## **Popular Communication as a Response to Concentration**

Given this resistance to any reform, Latin American communication scholars have turned their attention to new forms of 'popular communication' which are developing at the margins of Latin American society. These are relatively spontaneous communication efforts of organisations in the poor neighbourhoods of the Latin American mega-cities or in communities of rural peasants. They use small media that the people themselves can mount and manage or which can be sustained with the help of non-governmental organisations such as the church, labour unions or new popularly-based political movements.

The authors present descriptions of the most typical of these expressions of popular communication: inexpensive, locally produced newspapers, popular theatre, group communication using 'folk media' or inexpensive audio-visuals, local radio, etc.

Generally the contributors to this book see this popular communication as something which will possibly grow until it becomes a significant new form of communication in the country. At the same time they ask how the element of creativity and participation be maintained as this communication takes on a widespread organisation and begins to incorporate more complex new technologies that derive their formats from traditional vertical mass communication. Once the social forces underlying popular communication become the government at a national level, how do new models of participative, dialogical communication avoid degenerating into a new form of social control and become, instead, a real alternative to the transnational model?

# Current Research on Concentration of Media Ownership

## AUSTRALIA

**Allan Brown** (Dept. of Economics, University of Queensland, St. Lucia, Queensland 4067) has various publications on concentration of ownership in Australian media including 'Takeovers, Mergers and Australian Newspapers' in *Media Information Australia*, No. 16, May 1980. He is currently studying the economic effects of the introduction of subscription and cable television on existing media operators.

**Kirsten Schou** (Australian Film and Television School, 13-15 Lyonpark Road, North Ryde NSW 2113) is continuing research on the economic structure of the film industry in Australia and on government policies for the development of Australian film.

**Kor Stig** (University of Amsterdam, Grimborgwal 10 — Gebouw 5 — 1012 GA Amsterdam) has just published, *Concentration of Media Ownership in Australia: A Matter for Concern?* Copies can be ordered by sending address and 12 Dutch Guilders (15 if for Australia) to Postaccount 13.500 of Gemeentegiro Amsterdam, account no. 5032350 of Publicaties FSW-A/Cahier, Grimborgwal 10, Amsterdam.

## CANADA

**William H. Melody** (Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, British Columbia, V5A 1S6) continues research on the economic structure and effects of government regulation and policy planning for the media.

## FRANCE

**Patrice Flichy** (Institut National de l'Audiovisuel, voie des Pilotes, 94360 Bry-sur-Marne) is currently doing a detailed analysis of the economic structure in the production of television.

**Nadine Toussaint-Desmoulins** (Institut Français de Presse et des Sciences de l'Information, 83 bis rue Notre-Dame des Champs, 75006 Paris), following her research on concentration of ownership of the press in France, is currently studying concentration in the area of book publishing.

## GREAT BRITAIN

**Graham Murdock** and **Peter Golding** (Centre for Mass Communication Research, U. of Leicester, 104 Regent Road, Leicester LE1 7LT) are continuing research on trends in new communication technologies, especially cable.

**Frank Webster** (Dept. of Social Studies, Oxford Polytechnic, Heddington, Oxford) is preparing a book on current policies of European governments for promotion of new telecommunication technologies, especially the aspects of research and development financing, and the influence of this on occupational structure (especially the entry of women in the work force), education, and leisure time use.

## SWEDEN

**Sven Linderöth** (Radio Kalmar, Box 805, 39128 Kalmar) has recently completed a study, 'From Competition to Monopoly: Local Political and Economic Journalism' published in *The Nordicom Review of Nordic Mass Communication Research*, No. 2, 1981.

## SWITZERLAND

**Florian Fleck** (Institute for Journalism and Mass Communication Research, University of Fribourg, CH-1700 Fribourg) has published analyses of press concentration in Switzerland and, in 1982, hosted an international conference on 'The Fundamental Problems of the Economics of Mass Media'.

## USA

**Ben Bagdikian** (Graduate School of Journalism, U. of California, Berkeley, CA 94720) is compiling dominant firms in each major medium in the USA with an assessment of the impact of concentration on public information.

**Stephen Barnett** (School of Law, U. of California, Berkeley, CA 94720) is doing further work on the procedures used by the US Dept of Justice for deciding whether to approve newspaper combinations under the Newspaper Preservation Act.

**Robert L. Bishop** (Dept. of Communication, The U. of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI 48109) is preparing a book on the economic factors leading to concentration of ownership, including analysis of causes of decline of quality newspapers in Britain.

**Benjamin M. Compaine** (Center for Information Policy Research, 200 Aiken, Harvard University, Cambridge MA 02138) in addition to the new edition of his *Who Owns the Media* reviewed in this CRT continues research on the economic implications of the new information technologies.

**James N. Dertouzos** (The Rand Corporation, 1700 Main Street, Santa Monica CA 90406) and colleagues at The Rand Corporation are continuing research on the impact of cross-ownership of television stations, newspapers and cable systems.

**Peter Drier** (Dept. of Sociology, Tufts University, Medford, MA 02155) is studying the institutional links between the American power elite and the media, showing how these links influence the content of media. Current research focuses on the institutional affiliations of the members of boards of directors of the 25

largest newspaper chains. Other research analyses the attempts of power elites to co-opt and neutralise advocacy reporting in major media.

**Donald Miles Gillmor** (School of Journalism, U. of Minnesota, 206 Church St. S.E., Minneapolis, MN 55455) is currently studying U.S. antitrust law as it applies to concentration of media ownership.

**Douglas Gomery** (Dept. of Communication Arts, U. of Maryland, College Park, Maryland 20742) is continuing research on the economics of the film industry with a current focus on the interaction between the US movie industry and the new cable/subscription/DBS industries.

**William T. Gormley, Jr.** (Dept. of Political Science, U. of Wisconsin, Madison, WI 53706) has done research regarding bias in news stemming from economic concentration and is presently studying public participation in public utility regulation decisions.

**Herbert H. Howard** (College of Communications, The U. of Tennessee, Knoxville, Tenn. 37916) is studying group ownership including cross-media ownership.

**Barry Litman** (Dept. of Communication, Michigan State U., East Lansing, MI 48824) is studying the influence of newspaper concentration on the quality of news, measuring quality in terms of the intermediate step of resources invested to improve quality. He thus hopes to avoid subjective evaluation of content-based final output measures. A second line of research examines how the entry of major US broadcasting networks into the area of cable is influencing the shape of cable programming.

**Robert Pepper** (Division of Broadcasting and Film, U. of Iowa, Iowa City, Iowa 52242) is examining whether the deregulation of cable permitting cable owners to both produce programmes and act as carrier will result in an increased control of an increasing number of channels by fewer information-providers.

**Walter W. Powell** (School of Organisation and Management, Box 1A, New Haven, CT 06520) who, with **Lewis Coser**, has done extensive research on publishers as gatekeepers of ideas (especially scholarly book publishers), is currently examining the political and the economic factors influencing public television stations.

**Chris Sterling**, now director of the Center for Telecommunication Studies (George Washington University, 2000 L St., NW, No. 301, Washington D.C. 20052) after a period as consultant to the FCC, publishes *Mass Communication Book Notes* which is one of the best single sources of information on current U.S. government books and reports regarding regulatory action, hearings and policy as well as books assessing the political-economic impact of new technology.

**John Soloski** (School of Journalism, the U. of Iowa, Iowa City, Iowa 52242) is planning research on the factors that lead to monopoly newspapers in the USA, the structure and impact of syndicating services and the influence of newspaper management techniques on news processing.

**Michael Wirth** (Dept. of Mass Communication, U. of Denver, University Park, Denver, Colorado 80208) is studying the effect of market structure on television performance in the area of public interest programmes and on national concentration in the radio industry.

## WEST GERMANY

**Helmut H. Diedrichs** (Ginnheimer Landstr. 1, 6000 Frankfurt 90) has been doing research and publishing on various aspects of concentration of ownership in the Federal Republic of Germany over the last ten years.

**Gerd G. Kopper** (Dept. of Journalism Education, Universität Dortmund, Postfach 50 05 00, 5400 Dortmund 50) reports that there is currently less interest in the question of media concentration in Germany. Most research is focussing on the political economy of the new communication technologies and the national planning that this involves. He himself is doing comparative studies of the political-economic aspect in the development of electronic media in the USA, Japan and Western Europe. He is also doing research on the economic aspect of local media, news agencies and television production.

**Horst Holzer** (Nadistrasse 45, 8000 München 40), who has done extensive critical-analytic work on media control in Germany, is currently focussing on the pattern of economic control of the new technologies (cable and DBS), which is now developing in Germany, and the communication needs of those who will be using these media. Recent publications include a book on *Cable TV and Economic Interests (Verkabelt und verkauft)*.

**Walter Shütz** (Press und Informationsamt der Bundesregierung, Welckerstrass 11, 53 Bonn 1) has published statistical and bibliographical reports of press concentration over the last ten years.

**CORRECTION:** In the 'Current Research' section of Vol. 3, No. 3 of CRT on 'Critical Views of Advertising' the reference to **Stuart Ewen** should have noted that the authors of *Channels of Desire: Mass Images and the Shaping of American Consciousness* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1982) are **Stuart Ewen** and **Elizabeth Ewen**.

## What Kind of Media Diversity?

It is clear that research on concentration of media ownership is in a period of confused transition. The introduction of new technologies and the fluid integration of the media industries have made many of the old neat formulas for encouraging diversity in the press, broadcasting and film obsolete or contradictory. The media industries face a combination of great new opportunities for investment and great economic risks, and they are rebelling against the old forms of regulatory compromise that were often more of a form of protecting media interests than an incentive to diversity. Most significant, the old consensus among researchers and policy groups in liberal democracies, which was concerned with fine tuning the existing mechanisms for avoiding the worst abuses of media concentration, has broken down. There is a variety of positions, but in the place of the fragile consensus there are emerging two very different, conflicting approaches to concentration of economic power in media. Both groups may be committed to diversity in the media, but they differ in what is meant by diversity and how this is to be achieved.

### Let the Free Market and Technology Decide

A first group is deeply sceptical of any regulatory attempts because, in their view, regulation does not always procure the desired outcome. The media industries are quick to use regulatory measures to protect their own interests, and regulation often ends in contradictions impossible to apply. The uncertainties in the period of transition to new social organisation of communication technology are so great that it is just as well to let the forces of the marketplace sort out the problems. For this group, the new technologies promise an abundance of diverse channels of access. The real problem is how to provide profit incentives for entrepreneurial risk and to attract the large amounts of capital that are necessary to develop technology in ways that will ensure quality service.

Underlying this approach is the premise of a fluid, competitive marketplace and a fairly broad distribution of economic power that will permit all sectors to enter the marketplace and provide needed information-communication services. It also presupposes an equitable, pluralist political decision-making process. What this group abhors, above all, is any form of societal planning or government intervention which will favour one kind of media content or access to media by particular social sectors. The marketplace may not always be the perfect arbitrator, but technology and economic competition — with some minimum of coordinating regulation — are, in the long run, the most neutral and the most respectful of individual freedom.

At the research level, this group is very hesitant to measure diversity in terms of *qualitative* content of the media. They would rather pose the question at a more general level in terms of the *quantity* of channels (to avoid any subjective value judgements regarding content). They presuppose that if there is a sufficient quantity of channels and there is freedom to open new channels upon demand, an acceptable level of diversity of content will follow automatically.

### The Need for More Democratic Social Structure

A second group argues that in this era of giant national and

transnational corporate dominance it is absurd to presuppose that there is sufficient equitable distribution of economic power to allow market forces alone to ensure equitable distribution of services. The political decision-making process is so manipulated by powerful corporations that it is virtually impossible for citizens' groups, consumers, minorities and the poorer sectors of society to participate significantly in the policy-making process. Access to information is such a basic human right and communication so central in the development of national cultures that these should be considered a common good and a public trust. Information should not be considered simply a marketable commodity distributed only to those with the capacity to pay.

This group insists that communication technology is never 'value free' by the time it reaches the marketing stage. If information and access to communication channels are considered market commodities only, then the new computer-multichannel technologies will be designed for use more by the more affluent and to gain the maximum profits — not the greatest social benefits.

Precisely because new technologies are in a more fluid stage and we are in a period of transition to new institutional organisation of media, we need not less but more critical questioning of economic forces and more careful analysis of the human and social consequences. Because of the tendencies toward greater concentration of economic power in the hands of transnational corporations, we need not less but more social planning which will encourage the redistribution of social power and a decentralisation of access to communications. If past regulatory efforts have not worked well, it is in great part because the media industries have manipulated government without any public interest criteria.

### Problem-Oriented and Critical Research

For this group the starting point of research on economic concentration should be the problem areas of content bias: images of women and minorities, the presence of poverty and other injustices. This research admits that it takes a value and moral point of view — discrimination against a particular social group is unjust and should be treated as a problem for action. The best of this research shows how the systematic bias of the media is the result of a chain of organically interrelated factors operating within the culture industries: the economic and political conditions, the advertising and marketing strategies, and the organisational structure of information-gathering.

A major new emphasis among this group is research on how the economically and socially less powerful can be given access to communication channels. This is expressed in the research on alternative and more democratic communication. Clearly for this group diversity does not mean simply *quantitatively* more channels but a diversity of media which reflects the diversity of society and acts as a source of greater social equity in society.

At present the first group described here enjoys an intimate working relationship with the dominant political and economic sectors in Western liberal societies. However, in so far as the second group becomes more closely related to popular social movements, they could become much more significant.

ROBERT A. WHITE Issue Editor

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