

Mass Media and Democracy: A Reappraisal

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Introduction

New times call for new thinking. Countries in eastern Europe are redesigning their media systems, with one eye cocked to the west in search of new ideas and models (as well as investment). The domination of public service broadcasting in western Europe is weakening in response to a combined commercial and political onslaught. And the rapid expansion of TV channels is transforming the media landscape in a way that calls for an intellectual adjustment.¹

This chapter attempts therefore to do more than merely provide a textbook-style summary of traditional liberal arguments about the democratic role of the media.² It also assesses their relevance for today. Much liberal commentary derives from a period when the 'media' consisted principally of small circulation, political publications and the state was still dominated by a small, landed elite. The result is a legacy of old saws which bear little relationship to contemporary reality but which continue to be repeated uncritically as if nothing has changed. It is time that they were given a decent funeral.

Discussion of the democratic role of the media is bound up with a debate about how the media should be organized. Traditionalist conceptions were framed partly in order to legitimate the 'deregulation' of the press, and its full establishment on free market lines (Curran 1978). Calling into question traditionalist thought thus casts doubt on the free market programme that it was intended to legitimate. But the process of going back to first principles and reappraising the democratic role of the media also raises questions about the adequacy of conventional public service alternatives to the market.

This reappraisal concludes with a revised conception of the democratic role of the media, and a proposal for a new way of organizing the media. This may well be rejected in favour of better considered alternatives. But whatever view is taken, the general subject of the media and democracy clearly requires a removal van to carry away lumber accumulated through the centuries. What should be removed, what should take its place, and how the intellectual furniture should be rearranged is something that needs to be critically assessed.

Habermas and the Public Sphere

A good starting point for rethinking the democratic role of the media is provided by a recently translated study by Jürgen Habermas (1989), which has acquired almost a cult following in the United States and northern Europe.³ In brief, Habermas argues that the development of early modern capitalism brought into being an autonomous arena of public debate. The economic independence provided by private property, the critical reflection fostered by letters and novels, the flowering of discussion in coffee houses and salons and, above all, the emergence of an independent, market-based press, created a new public engaged in critical political discussion. From this was forged a reason-based consensus which shaped the direction of the state.

Habermas traces the evolution of the 'bourgeois public sphere' – a public space between the economy and the state in which public opinion was formed and 'popular' supervision of government was established – from the seventeenth century to the first half of the nineteenth century. Thereafter, he argues, the public sphere came to be dominated by an expanded state and organized economic interests. A new corporatist pattern of power relations was established in which organized interests bargained with each other and with the state, while increasingly excluding the public. The media ceased to be an agency of empowerment and rationality, and became a further means by which the public was sidelined. Instead of providing a conduit for rational-critical debate, the media manipulated mass opinion. It defined politics as a spectacle, offered pre-digested, convenience thinking and conditioned the public into the role of passive consumers.

Although Habermas was careful to argue that participation in the public sphere, in its classical phase, was restricted to the propertied class, he has come under attack for idealizing this period of history. (Mortensen 1977; Hohendahl 1979; Curran 1991). He has also been criticized for his characterization of the media and the public sphere in the subsequent period (Fraser 1987; Dahlgren 1991).⁴ There are, perhaps, good grounds for questioning the value of Habermas's study as historical scholarship. But it offers nevertheless a powerful and arresting vision of the role of the media in a democratic society, and in this sense its historical status is irrelevant. From his work can be extrapolated a model of a public sphere as a neutral zone where access to relevant information affecting the public good is widely available, where discussion is free of domination by the state and where all those participating in public debate do so on an equal basis. Within this public sphere, people collectively determine through the processes of rational argument the way in which they want to see society develop, and this shapes in turn the conduct of government policy. The media facilitates this process by providing an arena of public debate, and by reconstituting private citizens as a public body in the form of public opinion.

The lingering question left by Habermas is how can this model – supposedly realized by a restricted class in the early nineteenth century – be universalized during the era of mass politics in a highly differentiated, organized capitalist society? The answer, we suggest, is that the public sphere cannot be re-established through a simple process of enlargement – by enabling those who were formerly excluded to participate in it. Rather, the public sphere and

the role of the media in relation to it has to be reconceptualized and re-incarnated in a new form. But, first, we will consider more conventional accounts of the democratic role of the media.

Public Watchdog

Traditionalist liberal thought argues that the primary democratic role of the media is to act as a public watchdog overseeing the state. This is usually defined as revealing abuses in the exercise of state authority, although it is sometimes extended to include facilitating a general debate about the functioning of government. This watchdog role is said to override in importance all other functions of the media, and to dictate the form in which the media should be organized. Only by anchoring the media to the free market is it possible to ensure the media's complete independence from government. Once the media becomes subject to public regulation, it will lose its bite as a watchdog and may even be transformed into a snarling rottweiler in the service of the state.

This particular view seems to have become the cornerstone of a new consensus in the United States. For instance Kelley and Donway, two American political scientists of conservative sympathies, have recently argued that any reform of the media, however desirable, is unacceptable if it is 'at the cost of the watchdog function. And this is the inevitable cost. A press that is licensed, franchised or regulated is subject to political pressures when it deals with issues affecting the interests of those in power' (Kelley and Donway 1990: 97). This argument is restated in a different form by a political scientist of the centrist views, Stephen Holmes: 'Doesn't every regulation converting the media into a "neutral forum" lessen its capacity to act as a partisan gadfly, investigating and criticizing government in an aggressive way?' (Holmes 1990: 51). Even commentators with strongly reformist views appear to entertain the same fears. 'I cannot envision any kind of content regulation, however indirect', writes Carl Stepp, an astute critic of the American media, 'that wouldn't project government into the position of favouring or disfavouring some views and information over others. Even so-called structural steps aimed at opening channels for freer expression would put government in the intolerable role of super-gatekeeper' (Stepp 1990: 194).

These arguments have paved the way for the increasing deregulation of American broadcasting. During the last decade, American TV channels have been 'freed' from the obligation to provide a mixed schedule of programmes and from the fairness doctrine requiring public affairs to be reported from contrasting viewpoints. Rules restricting chain ownership of TV stations have been relaxed, and the requirement on cable TV companies to carry over-the-air channels has been dropped. Even the principle of license renewal of broadcasting stations, the coping stone of what residual regulation remains, is now being questioned.

What happened in the United States has begun to happen in Britain, though in the latter case in the teeth of considerable opposition. As in the United States, it was argued with great force that public regulation of broadcasting inhibited critical surveillance of government (Adair Smith Institute 1984; Veijanovski 1989). As Rupert Murdoch (1989: 9) succinctly put it, 'public

service broadcasters in this country [Britain] have paid a price for their state-sponsored privileges. That price has been their freedom'. This rhetoric paved the way for a move towards deregulation. The 1990 Broadcasting Act authorized the auctioning of TV and radio franchises (with some quality safeguards), the expansion of the private broadcasting sector and the relaxation of content controls on commercial TV and radio. However, the basic infrastructure of public service broadcasting – the BBC and regulatory agencies enforcing public duties on private broadcasters – survived intact (Curran and Seaton 1991).

Part of the reason why the free market-public watchdog argument has had such resonance in both Britain and the United States is that it is based on premises that are widely accepted in relation to the press. In the United States, the Supreme Court, citing the First Amendment, even struck down in 1974 a press right of reply law in Florida partly on the grounds that its effect was to inhibit criticism of public officials and chill robust political debate (Barran 1975). A similar line of reasoning has been regularly invoked in Britain to keep the press free of public intervention. For instance, the last Royal Commission on the Press opposed any form of selective newspaper subsidy because 'it would involve in an obvious way the dangers of government interference in the press'. 'No public body', it added, 'should ever be put in a position of discriminating like a censor between one applicant and another' (Royal Commission on the Press 1977: 126).

These arguments highlight a fundamental inconsistency at the heart of the media system of both countries: the primacy of the watchdog role has been upheld in the press but not in broadcasting. Thus, the right of reply to partisan attack has been authorized in American broadcasting, ironically with the support of the Supreme Court, even though this was outlawed in the American press (Lichtenburg 1991). Similarly, British commercial broadcasting is still run on the basis of regulatory agencies 'discriminating like a censor between one applicant and another' in awarding franchises, even though this is judged to be unacceptable in print journalism.

For a long time, this inconsistency was tolerated by free market advocates on the grounds that broadcasting was a technically disabled medium. (Royal Commission on the Press 1977: 9; cf Horwitz 1991). It was limited by the scarcity of frequencies on the electromagnetic spectrum, and had to be run consequently in the public interest or, as it was argued in the United States, managed in a way that accommodated the interests of those not awarded a franchise. In contrast, there are no physical constraints on the number of press titles that can be published. But this pragmatic justification for public service broadcasting crumbled in the 1980s with the widespread adoption of new TV technology (Pool 1983). The diffusion of fibre-optic cable TV in the United States meant that most areas had many more TV channels than newspapers to choose from. Although Britain was not cabled so extensively, the introduction of high-powered satellite TV resulted in British viewers having access to approximately the same number of TV channels as national newspapers. The door thus swung open to the deregulation of public service broadcasting in both countries. A similar pattern occurred elsewhere with cable and satellite TV generating an unprecedented choice of TV channels.

The traditional public watchdog definition of the media, in the context of an expanding broadcasting system, thus has a seemingly compelling logic. It legitimates the case for free market reform of broadcasting, while justifying the continued, unfettered capitalist organization of the press. There seems to be, at first glance, much to commend this approach. Critical surveillance of government is clearly an important aspect of the democratic functioning of the media. Exposure of the Watergate burglary cover-up during the Nixon presidency or lesser known exploits (outside their country) such as disclosure of state involvement in the illegal sale of Bofors guns in Sweden or Nikitov's exposure of local state corruption in the USSR, leading to his murder in 1989, are all heroic examples of the way in which the media performed a public service by investigating and stopping malpractice by public officials.⁵

However while the watchdog role of the media is important, it is perhaps quixotic to argue that it should be paramount. This conventional view derives from a period when the 'media' were highly politicized and adversarial. Most modern media are now given over mainly to entertainment. Coverage of public affairs accounts for only a small part of even news media content, and only a proportion of this takes the form of critical scrutiny of government.⁶ In effect, the received wisdom means defining the role of the media in terms of what it (save for a few exceptions) does not do most of the time.

The traditional approach appears time-worn in another way. It defines the watchdog role of the media as applying only to the state. This antiquated formulation derives from a period when the state was unrepresentative, corrupt and potentially despotic, and free speech and a free press were viewed as a defence against absolutism (e.g. 'Cato' 1720). This analysis came to be framed by a simplistic conception of society in which conflict was thought to exist primarily between the individual and the state, and between ignorance and enlightenment (Curran 1978). This ignored the exercise of power through structures other than the state, and so paid no attention to the role of the press home and the economy. Clearly, a broader definition of the watchdog role of the media is needed. The media should be seen as a source of redress against the abuse of power over others. But as soon as this broader definition is adopted, it weakens the case for the free market.

As a consequence of the take-over boom of the last three decades, a large number of media enterprises are now tied to core sectors of finance and industrial capital. For example, during the period 1969-1986, nine multi-national conglomerates bought over 200 newspapers and magazines in Britain with a total circulation of 46 million at the time of purchase (excluding publications resold to each other) (Curran and Seaton 1988). Similarly, much of the press in the United States, Australia, New Zealand, Germany, France and Sweden - to mention only those countries for which evidence is readily to hand - have been bought by or have major shareholdings in non-publishing corporations (Bagdikian 1990; Chadwick 1989; Farnsworth 1989; Tunstall and Iimer 1991; Hadenius and Weibull 1986). The trend towards privatization has so resulted in television becoming increasingly embedded in the corporate nature of big business. Diversified conglomerates increasingly dominate the

new TV industries based in Europe, and control commercial television in Australia (Tunstall and Palmer 1991; Chadwick 1989). A similar trend is developing in the US (Kellner 1990). For example, Japan's Matsushita Electric Industrial Company acquired in 1990 MCA, a major Hollywood producer of TV programmes, following the pattern set by General Electric's acquisition of the US network, NBC, in 1986.

One of the consequences of this changing pattern of ownership is that media enterprises have sometimes refrained from criticizing or investigating the activities of the giant conglomerates to which they belong (Hollingsworth 1986; Curran and Seaton 1991; Bagdikian 1990). In exceptional cases, parent companies have even stepped in to suppress indirect criticism of their interests. Thus Toshiba, one of Japan's leading nuclear contractors, withdrew in 1988 a record attacking Japan's nuclear programme which had been commissioned by its Toshiba-EMI music subsidiary (Murdock 1990). The free market thus compromises rather than guarantees the editorial integrity of commercial media and impairs in particular its oversight of private corporate power.

More importantly, changes in the ownership of the media have affected its relationship to government. One 'school' of researchers argues that media conglomerates are, in effect, independent power centres which use their political leverage to pursue corporate gain. Thus Chadwick (1989) argues in an important study that a number of entrepreneurs formed a tactical alliance with the Labour government in Australia in the late 1980s as a way of securing an official permission to consolidate their control over Australia's commercial TV and press. This resulted in an unprecedented number of editorial endorsements for the Labour party in the 1987 election, as well as opportunistic fence-sitting by some traditionally anti-Labour papers. Similarly, Bagdikian also claims that media conglomerates turned a blind eye to official corruption and failed programmes during the Reagan era in order 'to protect a political ally' (Bagdikian 1990: X). In a more detailed analysis, Tunstall and Palmer (1991) argue that the policy of major media combines in Europe can be explained partly in terms of their pursuit of 'regulatory favours' (by which they mean principally the abolition or 'waiving of official media regulation). By implication, media conglomerates are not independent watchdogs serving the public interest but self-seeking, corporate mercenaries using their muscle to promote private interests.

Another political economy tradition argues that the transformation of media ownership is part of the emergence of an information-cultural complex which close ties to government (Schiller 1989; Herman and Chomsky 1988). The stress here is less on the individual interactions between media corporations and government, and more on the way in which the integration of the media into capitalism has encouraged it to endorse, sometimes critically, discourses supportive of capital. As a recent study puts it, 'it is because of the control of media institutions by multinational capital (big business) that the media have been biased towards conservatism, thus furthering what they perceive as their own economic interests' (Kellner 1990: 172). This approach contains a number of internal variations - some more persuasive than others⁷ - and rarely confronts directly the liberal conception of the media as a public watchdog. But the thrust of this research, whether explicit or implicit, is that conglomerate media are not a source of popular control over government but merely one

means by which dominant economic forces exercise their formal influence over the state.

Critical scrutiny of government can also be blunted by political partisanship. In free-market theory, partisanship on the right is balanced by partisanship on the left so that there is always a substantial press ready to expose government failure, whichever party is in office. But this theory begins to break down when parties of the right are in government and the press, as in most of Europe, is overwhelmingly right-wing. Although conflicts can occur between right-wing papers and right-wing governments, the tendency is for criticism to be reined in out of partisan and patriotic loyalty. In extreme cases, this can result almost in the suspension of critical judgement. The intertidal watchdog tradition did not find in Lord Mathews, for instance, a notable exponent. 'I would find myself in a dilemma', he declared, 'about whether to report a British Watergate affair because of the national harm. I believe in biting for Britain' (cit. Hollingsworth 1986: 31). At that time, Lord Mathews controlled the third largest press group in Britain.

The assumption at the heart of traditional theory that the free market nurtures fearless newshounds is thus open to question. This said, radical accounts that stress the 'incorporation' of commercial media by big business also need to be viewed critically. Their emphasis on the material transformation of the media is not always balanced by an analysis of countervailing influences within media organizations that make for *relative* journalistic independence. In reality, the need for audience credibility and political legitimacy, the self-image and professional commitment of journalists, and normative public support for journalistic independence are all important influences militating against the subordination of commercial media to the business and political interests of parent companies. This is well illustrated by the extraordinary battle that took place in the *Observer*, a British Sunday newspaper, owned by the multinational conglomerate, Lomho.

In April 1984 Lomho's chief executive, Tiny Rowland, told the *Observer* editor, Donald Treford, not to run a story about atrocities committed by the Zimbabwe army in the dissident Matabele province. Rowland was already worried about his deteriorating relationship with the government in Zimbabwe where Lomho's investments contributed some £15 million to group profits. The radicalism of the post-colonial government headed by Robert Mugabe represented an obvious threat to Lomho interests, and Lomho had also made the strategic mistake of backing Mugabe's unsuccessful rival, Joshua Nkomo, in a recent election. Although Rowland denigrated his editor of 'trying to destroy my business in Zimbabwe', there seems little doubt that he was seeking to safeguard his company's corporate interests when pressing for the Zimbabwe report to be withdrawn.

Donald Treford defied his proprietor and published the story on 15 April 1984. He was backed unanimously by his staff, and by the paper's independent directors appointed at the time of Lomho's take-over of the *Observer*. In the protracted row that followed (in which Lomho allegedly cancelled advertising in its own paper), Treford offered to stand down. This put the proprietor in a difficult position. To have accepted would have undermined the credibility of the paper, added to its unprofitability, and generated appalling publicity for Lomho. To refuse meant entrenching the editor's position and losing pro-

prietorial authority. For a time, Rowland toyed with the idea of selling the paper. But in the end, he settled for a face-saving exchange of letters and confirmed Treford's appointment. The sanction of publicity in effect prevented a powerful conglomerate from manipulating a subsidiary company. But it did not prevent Lomho from exerting pressure on the *Observer* on subsequent occasions, when senior editorial resistance was not always so determined (Curran and Seaton 1991).

Public Media as Watchdogs: A Reassessment

Public service broadcasting organizations have also resisted editorial interference for much the same reasons. Their audience credibility and strategic long-term interests, the self-conception and self-respect of their journalists, have all encouraged a defence of their autonomy from government. There is also in many liberal democracies general support within the political elite for the principle of broadcasting independence, partly for reasons of self-interest. Ministers know that one day they will need access to broadcasting when they are voted out of office. Some broadcasting organizations are also difficult to capture because power within them is decentralized and dispersed or protected by an internal system of checks and balances. But the ultimate defence of public service broadcasting autonomy is public support. On a number of occasions, in countries ranging from Germany and Britain to Israel and Australia, public disapproval has stopped politicians from asserting increased political control over broadcasting in a way that directly parallels the saga at the *Observer*.⁸

Indeed, recent British experience points to a perplexing conclusion that, both partly supports and challenges the arguments advanced by free market traditionalists. On the one hand, British broadcasting lost some degree of autonomy during the 1980s in response to a sustained onslaught from a radical right-wing government (Cockerell 1989; Leapman 1987; Schlesinger et al. 1983). Yet, despite this, it continued to expose government to more sustained, critical scrutiny than the predominantly right-wing national press. This produced escalating conflict between government ministers and broadcasters, in contrast to their generally harmonious relationship with the press.

The contrast between press and broadcasting is illustrated by the furore over an ITV documentary, *Death on the Rock*, which suggested that a British army SAS unit had unlawfully killed members of the IRA in Gibraltar, and that this was being concealed in the official version of events. The Foreign Secretary, Sir Geoffrey Howe, asked the ITV regulatory authority, the IBA, to prevent official inquest that was due to take place. The IBA refused, and the programme was transmitted on 28 April 1988. The then prime minister, Mrs Thatcher, described her feelings about the programme 'as much deeper than being furious', and her displeasure was echoed in much of the press. 'TV Slur on the SAS' was the *Daily Star's* headline (29 April 1988). 'Fury Over SAS Trial by TV', reported the *Daily Mail* (29 April) which also published a TV review calling the programme 'a woefully one-sided look at the killings'. The *Sunday Times* ran several articles seeking to rebut the accusations levelled in

the programme, in which it questioned the veracity of the programme's main witness and the professionalism of the programme makers.

This public flak failed to intimidate. Thames Television, the makers of the programme, convened an enquiry headed by Lord Windlesham (a former Conservative Northern Ireland Minister) which concluded that, 'taken as a whole "Death on the Rock" did not offend against the due impartiality requirement of the IBA and the Broadcasting Act 1981'. Although making some criticisms, this internal report halted the programme as 'trenchant and its makers as "painstaking and persistent" (Windlesham and Rampton 1989: 143). The programme duly won several prizes including the BAFTA award, the TV industry's top prize symbolizing the broadcasting community's rejection of government and Conservative newspaper criticisms. As a final snub, the programme was screened again in 1991 as a part of a celebratory season to mark the 35th anniversary of the investigative TV programme series, *This Week*, in which 'Death On the Rock' had first appeared.

This illustrates the way in which a complex reality can deviate from the script written by traditionalist ideologues. State-linked watchdogs can bark, while private watchdogs sleep. Yet, often, both can remain somnolent.

This points to a dual problem. Public-service broadcasting offers a number of levers that can be manipulated by politicians, although the position varies slightly in different countries (Browne 1989; Etzioni-Halevy 1987; Kuhn 1985 (a); Golding and Elliott 1979). Broadcasting authorities can be 'packed' with government supporters; financial pressure can be exerted by a government in refusing to increase public funding; public flak can be generated by government in an attempt to drive a wedge between broadcasters and the public; informal and formal representations can be made to promote self-censorship; broadcasting organizations can also be threatened with being legislated out of existence or being reformed root and branch. Both financial and legislative sanctions have become more pressing at a time of rising broadcasting costs, increased TV competition and the legitimization of political opposition to public service broadcasting.

But private media organizations owned by conglomerates are also vulnerable. Indeed it is sometimes easier for the public watchdog role of the media to be subverted in the deregulated than in the regulated sector of the media. Owners of private media have greater legitimacy within their organizations than do government ministers seeking to influence public sector broadcasting organizations. Although this legitimacy does not extend to the promotion of narrowly defined corporate interests, it certainly underwrites influence on broader editorial concerns that affect critical surveillance of government. The owners of private media also have more direct control over the hiring and firing of senior personnel. They are not obstructed in the same way as government ministers by mediating agencies designed to prevent their interference: independent directors – the equivalent of public trustee members of broadcasting authorities – are the exception in private media. Public concern about manipulation of private media is also less well developed than it is in relation to public media, and so provides a less adequate form of protection.

In short, the complex issues raised by the public watchdog functioning of the media cannot be resolved by a simple, unthinking, catchistic subscription to the free market. What is needed are practical measures which will strengthen

the role of the media as a watchdog rather than a complacent endorsement of one system.

Consumer Representation

However, the public watchdog perspective is essentially negative and defensive. It usually defines the role of the media in terms of monitoring government, protecting the public, preventing those with power from overstepping the mark. It thus stops short of the more positive, Habermasian conception of the media as an instrument of the popular will. But there is one strand within traditional liberal thought with affinities to Habermas's approach. This defines the role of the media as that of the 'fourth estate'. Some Victorian commentators argued that newspapers were subject to the equivalent of an election every time they went on sale, in contrast to politicians who were elected only infrequently (Boyce 1978). Consequently, they claimed, the press was a fully representative institution, and should be accepted as a partner in the process of government. As Thomas Carlyle argued, the press should be deemed 'a power, a branch of government, with an inalienable weight in law-making' derived from the will of the people (Carlyle 1907: 164).

This argument was reformulated in the twentieth century in less assertive terms around the concept of the sovereign consumer. The core premise is that 'the broad shape and nature of the press is ultimately determined by no one but its readers' due to the hidden hand of the free market (Whale 1977: 85). Media owners in a market-based system must give people what they want if they are to stay in business, and this ensures that the media as a whole reflect the views and values of the buying public and act as a public mouthpiece. This particular argument has been given my biological force in traditional histories of the press (e.g. Siebert, Peterson and Schramm 1956). In the case of Britain, the received account is that the press progressed through three main stages (e.g. Aspinall 1973; Koss 1981 and 1984). In the first phase, it was subject to state censorship and functioned almost as an extension of the state. In the second stage, it was dominated by the political parties and served as an extension of the party system. In the third and final stage (dating from the 1940s), the press came to be managed by market-led pragmatists who sought to maximize sales rather than further a political viewpoint. This established allegedly the consumer as the ultimate controller of the press, and transformed newspapers into representatives of the public rather than of organized political interests.

A sophisticated variation of the consumer representation thesis is to be found also in critical, revisionist American sociology. As exemplified by Alvin Gouldner (1976), it acknowledges weaknesses in the traditional free market argument but nonetheless endorses its central conclusion. Gouldner draws attention to the existence of 'huge, immensely capitalized and increasingly centralized media' and argues that, in general, 'ownership generates a set of limits patterning the media in directions supportive of the property system'. Yet, he goes on to make a stark distinction between the market-based media system which he views as 'ultimately liberating, and public ownership of the media which he equates with the Soviet model and a catastrophic regression of rationality'. The grounds for making this manichean distinction is two-fold:

public ownership leads, in his view, to the fusion of official and media definitions of reality, whereas the market liberates the media even from those who run it. The mainspring of this liberation is supposedly the drive to make a profit. It propels 'leading publishers to tolerate (and promote) a counter-culture hostile to their own long-term property interests... They will and have sold an adversary culture that openly alienates masses of youth from their parents and government because, and so long as, it is profitable.' There is thus, according to Gouldner, 'the essential bourgeois contradiction between producing anything that sells, on the one side, and allowing only what is supportive of existing institutions, on the other'. This is resolved in favour of short-term gain so that 'in the end, the system subverts itself because there exists no protection of its own *future* that might rule out quick turnover profits at the cost of the system as a whole' (Gouldner 1976: 157).

There is thus a solid corpus of literature, written by people from different disciplines and from different theoretical perspectives, which all advance essentially the same argument: the free market produces a media system which responds to and expresses the views of the people. Like all persuasive mythologies, it contains an element of truth. But its overall conclusion is nonetheless profoundly misleading – for at least six different reasons.

First, market dominance by oligopolies has reduced media diversity, audience choice and public control. In most western countries, there has been a long term reduction in the number of competing newspapers, and an increase in local monopoly and chain ownership (Hoyer, Hakelius and Weibull 1975; Rosse 1980; Curran and Seaton 1981). This has been paralleled by a long term consolidation of centralized control of magazine, record, book, and film production (Locksley and Garman 1988; Garman 1990; Murdoch 1990; Bagdikian 1990). The picture in the case of TV is more mixed because oligopolistic control of commercial TV has been prevented or mitigated in some countries by regulatory controls.

The scale of this oligopolistic domination of the media can be illustrated by the experience of Australia, Britain and the United States. In Australia, two men (Packer and Murdoch) controlled in 1989 84 per cent of the sales of the thirty best selling magazines; Murdoch controlled in 1988 a remarkable 63 per cent of metropolitan daily circulation, 59 per cent of Sunday circulation and 55 per cent of suburban local circulation; and three men (Lowy, Bond and Skase) almost totally dominated in 1989 the commercial TV market (Chadwick 1989). In Britain, the top five companies in each media sector controlled in the mid-1980s 93 per cent of national newspaper sales, 66 per cent of video rentals, 59 per cent of record, cassette and CD sales, 53 per cent of local evening sales, 45 per cent of ITV transmissions, and 40 per cent of book sales (Curran and Seaton 1988). In the USA, three companies control about two-thirds of the TV market; three publishers dominate the national news magazine market; and most of the local press is controlled by chains (Blumler 1983; Bagdikian 1990).

Free market apologists emphasize two things in relation to these trends. They point out correctly that the movement towards market domination by a few corporations in certain markets has not been continuous and uninterrupted (Royal Commission on the Press 1977; Burnett and Weber 1988). Some also point to the expansion of part of the media system and argue that this is reviving competition. The growth of specialized magazines, computerized newsletters,

desktop publishing, local radio stations and, above all, TV channels are all cited as evidence of endogenous market regeneration (Pool 1983; Compaine 1985; Dahlgren 1991). These are important qualifications. But what they overlook are three powerful countervailing and interrelated trends that are resulting in increasing domination of the media as a whole in a national context, and increasing market power in an international context. Since 1960, there has been a rapid acceleration of mergers and acquisitions of corporations in different media sectors, producing major multi-media combines. The general trend towards privatization of broadcasting, and the growth of the new TV industries, has also enabled media conglomerates to expand into a sector where their growth had been curtailed previously. And there has been a further shift towards the integration of the global market in TV programmes, books and business information (following trends already well established in the film and record sectors) which has enabled some companies to extend their market reach.

These trends have coalesced to produce private concentrations of media power that are unprecedented. The most far-flung is Murdoch's News Corporation which controls a newspaper empire stretching east-west from Boston to Budapest and north-south from London to Queensland, an extended magazine and book empire incorporating Triangle and Harper Collins, and a TV and film empire including Fox TV and Twentieth Century Fox in the US and five satellite TV channels transmitted by British Sky Broadcasting in Europe. Major European-based conglomerates include the Bertelsmann group which has a massive book-TV-film-radio-magazine empire in Germany, including both the RTL Plus television channel and Germany's largest cable TV company, in addition to the American book and record majors, Bantam and RCA, amongst other foreign media interests; Berlusconi's Fininvest group which controls 27 Italian TV stations, extensive press and film interests in Italy in addition to television holdings in France (Channel 5), Germany (Telefun), Spain (Telecinco) and Canada; and the British-based Maxwell Communications Corporation which controls a major group of newspapers extending from the United States to eastern Europe, book companies including the New York publisher, Macmillan, as well as TV interests in Britain, France and Spain. These are matched by major conglomerates like Time-Warner, International Thompson and Sony based respectively in the US, Canada and Japan. The enormous resources commanded by these conglomerates, their large economies of scale, and extensive domination of linked markets, has undermined the functioning of the market as a free and open context, a level playing field in which all participants have an equal chance of success.

The second, related flaw in the consumer representation thesis is that the rising capitalization of the media industries has restricted entry into the market.⁹ In Britain, for example, it currently requires in start-up and run-in costs over £20 million to establish a new national daily newspaper, over £30 million to establish a new cable TV station, up to £50 million to acquire a major ITV franchise and over £500 to establish a new satellite TV business. It is still possible to enter more cheaply the marginal media sectors – such as local free sheets, local radio stations and specialist magazines – but these have much less influence by comparison with the commanding heights of the communications industry. It is also possible to attempt to launch into the main de-

regulated media sectors with a relatively small capital outlay, and even to maintain a nominal presence by operating on a very small budget with manageable losses. But low investment often leads to low quality and high price, a combination that usually marginalizes these ventures from the outset. The heavy capitalization of the media industry has created, in effect, a zone of influence in which dominant economic forces have a privileged position, and to which other significant social forces are denied direct, unmediated access. As Nicholas Garnham comments: 'we would find it strange now if we made voting rights dependent upon purchasing power or property rights and yet access to the mass media, as both channels of information and fora of debate, is largely controlled by just such power and property rights' (Garnham 1986: 47). It is in this context that free market celebration of the recent expansion of some media sectors needs to be assessed critically. The belief is that more media outlets have produced more diversity and choice. But what this increasingly fashionable argument ignores is that prevailing market structures do not necessarily mean more of the same, as some left-wing critics maintain. More what it does mean is that choice is always pre-structured by the conditions of competition. In a contemporary context, this means a class filter imposed through the high costs of market entry; an unequal relationship between large and small competitors; often oligopolistic market domination; and the constraints imposed by catering for the mass market. The consequences of this pre-structuring can be briefly illustrated by recent changes in American television and the British press.

In the United States, a large increase in the number of TV channels has expanded cultural and genre diversity. The basic diet of the networks has been cable TV stations making available a choice between stations and, above all, by coms, chat shows, game shows, soaps, classic comedy TV shows, stand-up comedians, Hollywood film classics, art house movies from Europe, newsworthy American films, children's cartoons, foreign language programmes for ethnic minorities, and much more besides. But what it has failed to achieve is a corresponding increase in the ideological diversity of public affairs programming. The burgeoning number of local independent stations provides, according to Entman's pioneering research, 'little political information, let alone accountability news' (Entman 1989: 110). CNN has introduced two new news channels, which provide instantaneous coverage within much the same ideological framework as the three news networks (CBS, NBC and ABC). What none of the new commercial enterprises has done is to offer a leftist 'take' on the news. Indeed, the greatest political diversity is to be found in 'take' on profit organizations outside the economic market, which are undercapitalized and marginalized.

Similarly, the recent expansion of the British national press has led to more consumer choice without substantially expanding its ideological range. The introduction of cost-cutting new technology led to the launch of seven new national papers between 1986 and 1990. But market leaders forced up costs by increasing pricing and promotion in a deliberate attempt to squeeze out competition. In the event, only four new national papers survived: a pornographic,

depoliticized Sunday paper (*Sunday Sport*), a Conservative tabloid bought by Rupert Murdoch (*Today*), and two centrist papers catering for an advertising-rich, elite audience (*Independent* and *Independent on Sunday*). As a consequence, the chasm between editorial and public opinion¹⁶ in Britain persisted. In short, distortions in the market require the media representation thesis to be heavily qualified. When this thesis was first advanced, it had considerably more validity than it has now. It really was the case in the pre-industrial phase of the press that almost anyone could set up, so to speak, their trestle table in the free market place of ideas. This produced a choice between ideologically diverse papers – conditions in which the 'public' could exercise significant influence over the press and be represented by it (Curran 1977). This has long ceased to be the case even if traditional free market arguments continue to be advanced as if nothing has changed.

The third flaw in the consumer representation thesis is that it ignores the way in which the relationship between media and audiences has been transformed since the nineteenth century. The audiences for 'popular' media have become much larger and also more heterogeneous in terms of their political and social composition: they no longer necessarily have a shared set of beliefs or common interest that can be 'represented'. The rise of entertainment content in news media has also reduced the desire for political reinforcement content in news for media consumption. A view of the media, fashioned during a period when politicized newspapers served highly differentiated audiences, no longer corresponds to the reality of the contemporary media. The *Sun*, the biggest selling daily in Britain, illustrates the change that has taken place. It devotes less than 15 per cent of its editorial content to public affairs news and comment, and sells to a politically divided audience of over 10 million readers. While it can be argued plausibly that the *Sun* connects to structures of feeling among its readers (Holland 1983), it certainly does not represent them in a political sense. Thus only 41 per cent of its readers voted Conservative in the 1987 general election – the choice insistently recommended by the paper. (Harrop 1988)

Fourth, the revisionist claim that media controllers subordinate their ideological commitments to the imperatives of the market is only partly true. It is based on selective arguments that simplify and misrepresent a complex situation. Thus, it is claimed that the dispersal of share ownership is producing a divorce between ownership and control of the media; that the new breed of media controllers are market-led pragmatists; and that the media, in a competitive environment, must submit to the rule of the consumer. In fact, a large number of communication conglomerates – including very large and extended ones – are still controlled by a single shareholder or family (Herman and Chomsky 1988; Murdoch 1982). A significant number of media controllers – such as Springer, Hersant, Maxwell and Black – are ideologically committed rather than politically neutral businessmen. Above all, the rise of entertainment and the growth of oligopoly has increased the relative political autonomy of media owners in relation to the market.

All three points are illustrated by Rupert Murdoch's career. (Munster 1985; Leapman 1983). He has generally controlled the media enterprises he has invested in; his views have become increasingly right-wing, particularly since the early 1970s, and, in advancing his beliefs, he has skilfully negotiated the currents of the market rather than being swept passively along by them. Thus,

on occasion, he has bowed to strong market signals: he refrained, for example, from changing the character of the radical New York magazine, *Village Voice*. At other times, he has trimmed when it has seemed advantageous to do so: the *Victoria Sun* and the New South Wales *Herald* both backed the right-wing Labour leader, Bob Hawke, in the 1987 election when it was in Murdoch's wind when new technology facilitated the emergence of a new competitor, the *London Independent*; his appointment of an independently minded Conservative journalist, Simon Jenkins, as editor of the *Times* in 1990 was a belated recognition that the *Times's* Thatcherite politics was causing it to lose readers to the new paper. Yet, whenever possible, he has pushed his papers to the right by hand-picking editors with right-wing views and by bombarding inherited, politically centrist editors with aggressively worded right-wing advice (Evans 1983; Giles 1986). Indeed what has been most striking about these displays of ideological commitment has been his willingness to move some of his papers – such as the *London Sun*, *Sunday Times* and *Times* – to the radical right in opposition to the views of the majority of its readers (Curran and Seaton 1991). To see Murdoch as a passive absorbent of market dictates is to adopt too mechanistic and simplistic a view of the market: it also underestimates Murdoch's innovative ability and the strength of his convictions.

Fifth, the concept of sovereign consumer control ignores the variety of influences which shape media content. The familiar image of the trader in the marketplace of ideas, which regularly recurs in free market rhetoric, ignores the reality of highly bureaucratized media organizations, with fixed routines and structures, whose journalists rely heavily on a restricted range of sources. It simply overlooks, in other words, the voluminous sociological literature which shows the varied ways in which audience pressures are selectively interpreted, 'refracted' and even resisted within media organizations.¹¹

Sixth, the idealized notion of market democracy ignores the central financial role of advertising in commercial broadcasting and the press. Critics of advertising tend to focus on the direct editorial influence exerted by advertisers through the withholding of advertising support for ideological reasons, and the pressure that this generates on media clients to accommodate to or anticipate the advertisers' ideological concerns (Hoch 1974; Barnouw 1978; Bagdikian 1990). The extent of this influence is relatively small and tends to be exaggerated, certainly in Britain (Blumler 1986; Curran 1980). The more important way in which advertisers shape the media is by weighting the economic value of audiences. The structure of the press is oriented more towards upscale than downscale audiences because the former generates a larger advertising subsidy per reader (Curran 1986). This is true to a lesser extent of commercial television because programmes select and deliver audiences with less precision than press publications. However, advertisers still distort television because they tend to reward high ratings rather than intensity of audience demand. This generates strong pressure on general interest channels to aim for the middle market and to conform to middle market values and perspectives (Gitlin 1983; Brittan 1989).

There is also a more general sense in which the traditional conception of the media as a public representative does not seem to fit the contemporary media. A view formed when most media were partisan and 'spoke for' clearly defined

constituencies seems less appropriate to market-based news systems, as in the US, which are predominantly bi-partisan and define themselves in terms of disseminating 'information'.

The view of the media as a public tribune thus seems almost obsolete. Yet, it is still worth clinging on to the notion of the media as a representative agency. The market also has a role to play in making media organizations responsive to the public. What is needed is a new formulation that fits changed circumstances and a revised conception of the media's democratic role.

Information Role

In addition to the concept of the media as a watchdog and representative, commentators have also stressed its 'informational' role. This is usually portrayed in terms of facilitating self-expression, promoting public rationality and enabling collective self-determination. These different functions of the media can only be fulfilled adequately, it is argued, through the processes of a free market.

Thus, the free market is supposed to promote a culture of free thinking democracy. No one should be subjugated, the argument goes, to another's will but should be able to express freely what they think to whomsoever they want. This freedom, essential to self-realization, is safeguarded allegedly by the right to publish in a free market.

The free market is also equated with efficiency in the pursuit of the public interest. The freedom to publish ensures that all significant points of view are in available from diverse and antagonistic sources. This makes for good judgement and wise government. Originally, this claim was advanced in an assertive form based on the assumption that truth would confound error in an unrestricted debate. But in response to the decline of naive empiricism, this argument came to be reformulated in a more circumspect way. Typical of this more cautious approach is the American jurist, Oliver Holmes's much quoted contention 'that the ultimate good desired is better reached by free trade in ideas – that the best test of truth is the power of the thought to get itself accepted in the competition of the market...' (cit. Barran 1975: 320). This argument has been presented in a variety of guises. The free market mobilizes the collective intellectual resources of the nation. It fosters public rationality by enabling collective judgements to be made in the knowledge of alternative courses of action. Or, more simply, 'a free marketplace of ideas has a self-righting tendency to correct errors and biases' (Kelley and Downey 1990: 90).

The market system is also celebrated as the best possible way of facilitating self-government. Free market media inform citizens from a variety of viewpoints; they keep open the channels of communication between government and governed, and between different groups in society; they provide a neutral zone for the formation of public opinion. In short, the processes of the market are central to the exercise of popular sovereignty.

These hosannas have come increasingly under attack even within the camp committed to the market system. One line of criticism has been that *market failure* has limited individual freedom of expression, and consequently pre-

ented public debate from being adequately informed by diverse sources. As the influential Hutchins Commission argued as long ago as 1947, after surveying the development of the American media: 'the right of free public discussion has therefore lost its earlier reality' (Commission Report reprinted 1974). This then prompted the argument that public rationality has been impaired, and collective direction has been weakened, because people with something useful to say have not always been given a chance to say it. As the American political theorist, Alexander Meiklejohn, put it: 'self-government is nonsense unless the "self" which governs is able and determined to make its will effective' (Meiklejohn 1983: 276).

Critics also opened up another line of attack, arguing that the *inherent* characteristics of the market deplete the informational role of the media. The British equivalent of the Hutchins Commission – the 1947–9 Royal Commission on the Press – claimed that the press was failing to inform adequately the people because it was a product of the market. 'The failure of the Press to keep pace with the requirements of society', it concluded, 'is attributable largely to the plain fact that an industry that lives by the sale of its products must give the public what the public will buy' (RCP 1949: 177). By implication, the inadequacy of the press was merely a reflection of the inadequacy of the public, a form that alleged that the pressure to maximize sales and ratings led to a common denominator provision that underestimated the abilities of the public (Hoggart 1957; Thompson 1974). This very British debate was superseded by a less overtly moralistic analysis, on both sides of the Atlantic, which highlighted information that is simplified, condensed, personalized, decontextualized, with a stress on action rather than process, visualization rather than abstraction, stereotype rather than human complexity, (Gitlin 1983; Newcomb 1987; Inglis 1990).¹² Since many of these criticisms were predicated on the assumption that these deficiencies were a by-product of processing news as a commodity for the mass market, they were an attack, by implication, on the notion that market processes safeguard the informational role of the media.

Professional Responsibility Model

At this point, it is worth following a short detour. Across the horizon loomed at a convenient moment the figure of the media professional. With the perfect timing of the American cavalry riding to the rescue. It is no coincidence that both the Hutchins Commission and the Royal Commission of the Press concluded at about the same time that media professionalism was the solution to the shortcomings that they diagnosed. Journalists were urged to adopt the mantle of the professions. In this way, the media would be able to fulfill its informational role and serve the public interest (Commission 1974; RCP 1949). Their reports were followed by a series of ringing public endorsements of professional responsibility. The cult of professionalism became a way of reconciling market flaws with the traditional conception of the democratic role of the media. It asserted journalists' commitment to higher goals – neutrality, detachment, a commitment to truth. It involved the adoption of

certain procedures for verifying facts, drawing on different sources, presenting rival interpretations. In this way, the pluralism of opinion and information, once secured through the clash of adversaries in the free market, could be recreated through the 'internal pluralism' of monopolistic media. Market pressures to sensationalize and trivialize the presentation of news could be offset by a commitment to inform. The democratic role of the media could thus be rehabilitated without structural reform.

The ideology of professional responsibility has found numerous celebrants for a variety of reasons, not all noble.¹³ But at its core is a seductive idea: professionalism means that the journalist's first duty is to serve the public. It proposes – certainly, as presented by its more radical advocates – that journalists should act as a counterweight to forces, both internal and external, that threaten the integrity of the media, including media controllers, advertisers, publicists and government.¹⁴ By emphasizing accuracy and facticity, media professionalism seems to be defining the role of the media in a way that will assist people to make up their own minds for themselves. Professionalism is thus seemingly a philosophy of empowerment rather than of control; professional self-interest appears in this case, to coincide with the public interest. But professional commitments cannot exist in a vacuum. Journalists operate within certain structures which influence – and can distort – their definition of professionalism. (Tuchman 1978; Schlesinger 1987; Bevis 1990). The exercise of professional judgement also presupposes a high degree of autonomy.

Although most American journalists stress their operational freedom, the evidence suggests that journalistic autonomy has declined in the US since the early 1970s, particularly in large news organizations (Weaver and Wilhoit 1986). Journalistic autonomy has also been revoked or cut back by interventionist media managements elsewhere. (Ericson, Baranec and Chan 1987; Curran and Seaton 1991). Put simply, professionalism is not assured within media organizations which do not have as their central goal the realization of professional norms. This is, indeed, one of the arguments for public service broadcasting.

Professionalism is also vulnerable because it is not clear on what basis it is justified. Journalism does not have the entry requirements, credentials and self-regulatory controls normally associated with a profession. Journalists have consequently an ambiguous status, and this can be a vocational weakness. A repeated criticism levelled against journalists is that their lack of critical engagement leads to tacit acceptance of the social order, and to over-ready adoption of the definitions provided by the powerful (Hall et al. 1978; Entman 1989; Abramson 1990). But this is inscribed within a particular set of professional beliefs which define implicitly the role of a journalist as a subaltern professionalism stresses truth-seeking but this too is often interpreted in a restricted and defensive way. One truth-seeking strategy is the attempted 'scientization' of news reporting: the focusing on technical, strategic and insider perspectives of politics in a way that enables journalists to avoid being exposed as necessarily subjective participants in the political process (Hallin 1985). Reporting elections, for example, in terms of campaign strategies and the journalist to take refuge in a 'neutral' form of interpretation. Another

defensive strategy involves an almost mechanistic reliance on market-defined news values. This can lead to the manipulation of the media by publicists skilled at generating news bites and photo-opportunities, and exploiting the news codes operated by journalists (Gitlin 1991).

A further problem is that professionalism is itself ambiguous. It means different things to different people, and indeed different cultures. In the United States, TV news items on the major networks tend to take the form of 'closed'. In Italy by contrast – and, indeed, in much of Europe – TV news tends to be more 'open', with more 'talking heads', in which greater prominence is given to contrasting interpretations of events (Hallin and Mancini 1984).¹⁵ This divergence reflects the more dominant political and interpretive role of political parties in many European countries compared with the United States, and the more ratings-conscious commercialism of American TV. But it also reflects a different definition of professionalism, predicated on a different understanding of the place of broadcasters in society. In the US, the accent is on entertainment and disclosure – reporting news as a structured 'story' whose meaning is clearly signified by the reporter. In many European countries, greater emphasis is given to the role of broadcaster as a factual witness and passive mediator, who enables the viewer to have access to competing interpretations of the world.¹⁶

In sum, the ideology of professionalism does not provide an adequate way of realizing the democratic role of the media, although it is sometimes presented in these terms by critical writers in the free market tradition. This approach is misconceived partly because professional commitments need structures to support them, and partly because the code of professionalism is itself ambiguous. This ambiguity masks an unresolved debate about the democratic role of the media.

Defects of Traditional Perspective

This debate is unresolved partly because the traditional conception of the media's informational role fails to command allegiance even in purely theoretical terms. One shortcoming is that it ignores modern political structures, and focuses on the individual as the basic unit of analysis. The media protect the individual from the state; inform the individual as an elector; express the opinion, which is tacitly conceptualized as aggregated private opinion.

This perspective harks back to an almost pre-industrial conception of polity, in which the positive role of modern political parties, pressure groups and associations is overlooked. These provide a means of advancing individual interests within collectively organized society, afford a source of protection against the exercise of private economic power, organize political choice in a way that enables people to choose (in theory) between programmes as well as individuals, and provide a variety of means of influencing public opinion and exerting democratic pressure on the state. Traditional thought ignores the building blocks of modern liberal democracy and so has nothing constructive to say about how the media should relate to them and enhance their performance. The second defect of the traditional approach is that it maintains an artificial

and untenable distinction between information and representation. It does this by detaching information from its social context. Thus, the criterion for judging the successful functioning of the informational role of the media is normally held to be one of two things: the richness of media discourse defined in subjective terms of 'quality' or the number of media outlets which, as Horwitz (1991) shows in an admirable essay, is increasingly the yardstick being adopted in American jurisprudence.

Missing from this analysis is a recognition that ideas and systems of representation are part of the ideological arsenal which competing groups use to advance their interests. This point can be understood in a very simple and rudimentary way in terms of political agendas. Political parties on the right tend, in general, to emphasize law and order, defence and international relations because they are often seen by voters as being particularly strong on these issues. Parties on the left tend to emphasize welfare and employment because these are areas where they are often rated more highly. Rival political parties consequently vie with each other at election time to get broadcasters to make their 'issues' the dominant themes of election coverage. How broadcasters respond to – and, in effect, arbitrate between – these rival agendas can have a significant influence on the outcome of tight elections.¹⁷

A comparable but more complex process of contestation takes place between social groups. Different ways of signifying and making sense of society, different linguistic codes and conceptual categories, different chains of association and versions of 'common sense' privilege the interests of some social groups while disadvantaging others. Put another way, the media's informational role is never purely informational; it is also a way of arbitrating between the rhetorical claims of rival interests – in a form that has an indirect outcome in terms of the allocation of resources and life opportunities between different social groups.

The case for media diversity is thus not simply that it promotes a rational debate based on awareness of alternatives. It is also a way of promoting social equity in which divergent social groups have the opportunity to define their interests in their own terms and promote them in the public domain. It is in this context that the role of the media in forming a consensus should be understood. Traditionalists argue that the media should facilitate social agreement through the dissemination of accurate information and contrary opinion. This is an entirely reasonable proposition on the face of things. But it can mask, in reality, a process of manipulation in which one class or social coalition is able to naturalize and universalize its interests because it dominates the channels of accurate information and facilitating a debate based on conflicting argument. Indeed, it may actually be doing both these things. But by continuing this debate to 'legitimate' areas of controversy, and by grounding it on assumptions that do not challenge the structure of social power, it may also be engineering a contrived form of social consent.

The third limitation of the classical liberal model – and, one that is often alluded to – is that it overstates the rationality of public discourse. As Chafee (1983: 299) puts it, 'I can no longer think of open discussion as operating like an electric mixer . . . Run it a little while and truth will rise to the top with the dregs of error going down to the bottom'. His reservations were based on

distortions in the distribution of information, the outpouring of information on a scale that is impossible for any one individual to assimilate and, above all, the subjective element in making judgements (cf. Peterson 1956). This last point has been highlighted by research emphasizing non-rational elements in opinion formation, and by studies emphasizing the highly selective way in which people assimilate communications (Tan 1985; Graber 1988). In reality, public discourse does not follow the rational pathways of the classic liberal model.

This has wider implications that tend to be ignored. Entertainment is usually omitted from conventional analysis of the media's democratic functioning because it does not conform to a classic liberal conception of the rational exchange between the rulers and ruled. But in fact media entertainment is one means by which people engage at an intuitive and expressive level in a public dialogue about the direction of society (Curran 1991). Media entertainment is in this sense an integral part of the media's 'informational' role.

There is another reason why entertainment is wrongly excluded from traditional accounts. This stems from the conventional assumption that the sole purpose of the public debate staged by the media is to effect changes of government policy and exercise democratic control over the state. But this implies too narrow a definition of public dialogue, and too restricted a definition of its purpose, rooted in a conventional distinction between private and public spheres which the slogan 'politics is personal' rightly challenges. Public dialogue should encompass the common processes of social life; its outcome should be to revalidate or revise social attitudes patterning social relationships. Media fiction is one important dimension in which this dialogue takes place.

The fourth weakness of the traditional model is, of course, that it fails to distinguish between the legal right to publish, and the economic reality limiting market entry restrict individual freedom of expression. But it also restricts on and this is a category that does not feature in traditional analysis - freedom of group expression. Whole groups in society, not merely individuals, have restricted access to the public sphere through the media. This has undermined, in turn, self-government in the interests of all. It has limited the ability of sections of the community to voice effectively their interests, their opinions, their view of relative priorities. And this has prevented other groups from responding to, indeed even sometimes being aware of, these different definitions. The democratic process for making collective judgements about the development of society has thus been weakened because it has not been, in an adequate and attainable sense, collective.

Media and the Public Sphere

Implicit or explicit in these criticisms are suggestions for rethinking the informational role of the media. At the cost of some repetition, it may be helpful to draw together briefly the main arguments into an ordered whole.

The public dialogue staged by the media system should be informed by a diversity of values and perspectives in entertainment as well as public affairs coverage. By generating a plurality of understandings, the media should enable

individuals to reinterpret their social experience, and question the assumptions and ideas of the dominant culture. It should also enable everyone, on the basis of diverse perspectives and sources, to decide for themselves how best to safeguard and advance the welfare in collective as well as individual terms, and to set in the balance rival definitions of the public interest and claims based on equity.

This will be emancipatory in a number of ways. It will give subordinate classes increased access to ideas and arguments opposing ideological representations that legitimate their subordination, and enable them to explore more fully ways of changing the structure of society to their advantage. Media fiction that enables people to explore imaginatively what it is like to be other people, in different circumstances and with different formative experiences, is also likely to promote empathy and understanding rather than the opposite. However, the key rationale for pluralism is not progressive social engineering: it is empowerment, giving people the right to define their normative vision of the world and their place in it through access to alternative perspectives of society.

Another (and complementary) democratic function of the media system is to act as an agency of representation. It should be organized in a way that enables diverse social groups and organizations to express alternative viewpoints. This goes beyond, however, simply disseminating diverse opinion in the public domain. Part of the media's system should function in a way that invigorates civil society. It should assist collective organizations to mobilize support; help them to operate as representative vehicles for the views of their supporters; and aid them to register effective priorities and develop and promulgate alternatives. In other words, the representational role of the media includes helping to create the conditions in which alternative viewpoints and perspectives are brought fully into play.

This implies a break from a 'postmodernist' approach in which the act of media consumption is equated with political activity; the private holding of a political opinion is equated with political activism; and the guiding democratic force in society is deemed to be enlightened public opinion in 'the public sphere' shaped by the interplay of argument and evidence in the mass media. This is a recipe for control from above, given the extent to which mass media are currently influenced by dominant elites, even if media audiences display a healthy degree of independence.

One way to step out of this seductive framework is to visualize the public sphere as a core surrounded by satellite networks and organized groupings. The core public sphere is the public space where all interests interact with one another in seeking to establish agreement or compromise about the direction of society. Feeding this core are a number of umbilical cords that connect it to the life force of civil society - different interpretive communities with a shared normative conception of society (such as greens, feminists and marxists), different organized groupings (such as political parties and pressure groups), different sub-cultures (such as those of ethnic minorities), and different social strata with distinctive interests and social experiences (which are only partly organized and articulated). The representative role of the media can be conceptualized in relation to this. One part of the media system should provide a public arena of debate roughly coterminous with society in which different

interests are represented; another should provide channels of communication linking organized groups and social networks to this public arena; another part should facilitate the functioning of these groups within their respective constituencies; and a further part should be composed of unaligned channels of communication between the common public sphere and different social strata and congregations of individuals.

The third democratic function of the media is to assist the realization of the common objectives of society through agreement or compromise between conflicting interests. The media should contribute to this process by facilitating democratic procedures for resolving conflict and defining collectively agreed aims. For example, the media should brief the electorate about the political choices involved in elections, and so help to constitute elections as the political moments for collective decision about the public direction of society. The media system should also facilitate organized representation by giving due publicity to the activities, programmes and thinking of organized groups in addition to the formal processes of government and party opposition. But the media system is itself also an important mechanism for collective self-reflection. By staging a public dialogue in which diverse interests participate, the media should also play a direct role in assisting the search for areas of common agreement or compromise. It should also provide an adequate way in which people can engage in a wider public discourse that can result in the modification of social attitudes affecting social relationships between individuals and groups.

One problem arising from this conception of a democratic media system is that it will probably make the attainment of national agreement more difficult. Indeed, it will almost certainly reinforce existing centrifugal and fissiparous tendencies within society. A genuinely pluralistic media system implies enabling dissident groups within the working class to command effective communications resources, fostering sectional loyalties (whether in the form of class, ethnic, gender or other group solidarities), and staging an open public debate that weakens adherence to dominant political and social norms. This is in marked contrast to the experience of most countries where the media are usually integrated into the hierarchy of power and where the media are agencies of social integration and control.

However, there are various ways in which the centrifugal impact of a pluralistic media system can be mitigated without subtracting from the pluralist commitment that underpins it. One conventional and legitimate way is, of course, to establish a legal framework that lays down acceptable (but minimal) limits to freedom of expression, such as restrictions on incitements to racial hatred. Another is to impose fairness rules on some media so that the range of representations it mediates reflects the broad balance of contending forces in society. This is a way of anchoring part of the media system to the central social component — a common space that links together divergent groups — this approach also builds in a stabilizing element. Underlying this is a desire to replace societal agreement based on domination with a more equitable system of public dialogue in which conflicts of interest are brought into the open and resolved in a democratic, non-violent way.

What might this media system look like in terms of structure and organization?

What kinds of journalism would it foster? These questions beg further questions in the sense that the design of any media system needs to take into account the generation of pleasure and cultural provision, which are issues that lie outside the terms of reference of this essay. Any prescription based only on what serves the democratic needs of society can only be a partial input to a larger debate. But with this qualification in mind, what does a re-evaluation of the democratic functioning of the media imply in terms of concrete practice?

Towards a Working Model

The outline set out below may seem to American eyes detached from political reality. But although it does not exist in any country as a functioning model, it draws upon and composites features derived from the practice of different European countries. Indeed, it is proposed in this form precisely because it works with the grain of what is attainable.

The model can be viewed at a glance in Figure 5.1. It has a core sector, surrounded by media organizations which are organized on different principles. The core sector of general interest TV channels reaches a mass audience and provides a common forum of societal debate. It offers an opportunity for different classes and groups to take part in the same public dialogue about the direction of society. It provides scope, therefore, for them to interact with one another and engage in a reciprocal discussion. It also provides a single emporium in which individuals can explore where their self-interest lies, and relate this to rival definitions of the common interest. Lastly, it offsets the particularistic features of the rest of the media system by providing a common symbolic environment which reinforces ties of mutuality.

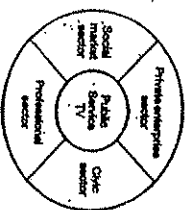


Fig. 5.1 Model of a democratic media system

The peripheral sectors are composed of media reaching more differentiated audiences, and are organized in a way that is designed to produce a vigorous plurality of competing voices. One sector consists of private enterprise organizations; another sector promotes the maximum journalistic and creative freedom; a third sector is dominated by media linked to organized interests; and the fourth fosters innovation within a modified market system. The diversity of these media is designed to feed into and invigorate the core system; it entrenches a system of balance and checks that promotes pluralism; and it strengthens the democratic institutions of civil society.

In principle, the best way to organize the core sector is to set up competing public service organizations (whether in the form of publicly owned or publicly regulated commercial organizations). Potentially, this offers the best prospect of opening up broad social access to the airwaves, and enabling viewers to plug into different views and perspectives. It also creates the framework in which general interest channels maintain a high priority to news and current affairs programmes, and fulfil wider social objectives in its cultural provision. The system of payment for public service organizations also ensures that there are no second class citizens excluded by price from the general forum of public debate. A deregulated commercial system will, by contrast, tend to restrict the range of views and social interests represented on general interest channels, give lower priority to public affairs coverage and subordinate social objectives to maximizing audiences.

But the theory of public service broadcasting does not necessarily correspond to reality. One problem is that government can undermine the independence of public broadcasting institutions, and restrict the public debate conducted through their channels. The travails of the French broadcasting system provide a particularly stark cautionary tale in this respect, although Kuhn (1985). Two models (with various national differences) have been developed to tackle this problem. One is a corporatist model in which diverse representative groups are incorporated into the command structure of broadcasting. The other is a neutral civil service model in which broadcasting is established as a depoliticized system staffed by impartial 'public servants'. Both approaches are viable.

A successful corporatist strategy for preventing official control is exemplified by the German broadcasting system. Its core public service institutions are decentralized confederations in which opposed political tendencies are locked into a system of mutual checks and balances. This has produced organizations which it is impossible for government to capture without the equivalent of a prolonged, house-to-house battle against broadcasters with powerful political allies. Right-wing politicians in Germany have sought to get round this problem by seeking to establish a private enterprise sector, modelled on the American system, on the grounds, partly at least, that this would be inherently sympathetic to their political outlook. But this has been blocked by Germany's Constitutional Court which has insisted on commercial TV organizations being run on pluralistic public service lines. A highly complex system deliberately fashioned to prevent a repetition of Germany's past history, which has been protected by constitutional guarantees and public support, has frustrated every serious attempt to impose government control, (Williams 1976 and 1985; Browne 1989; Porter and Hasselbach 1991 (a) and (b)).

The alternative civil service model, typified by the British system, has also succeeded in sustaining, as we have seen, a critical relationship to government. But the limited official inroads made during the 1980s suggest that further insulation between government and broadcasters is needed. One insulating device is to limit government financial control by linking rises in the license fee to the national earnings index: another is to limit government powers of

appointment to broadcasting authorities by 'franchising' representative national organizations and broadcasting staffs to elect some members.

A second, more intractable problem is that public service broadcasting organizations tend to be dominated by elites (even if they offer more ideologically 'open' and diverse systems of representation than commercial TV in the United States). The German and British broadcasting systems both exemplify this weakness. Thus, the output of British broadcasting has tended to be structured in terms of the assumptions of dominant power groups (Glasgow University Media Group 1976, 1980 and 1985), although its minority and fictional output has been more heterodox (Schlesinger et al. 1983; McVair 1988). The ideological range of its programmes has also expanded during periods of heightened political conflict (Curran 1990) and widening social debate (Tracey 1983). But the concept of the impartial public servant seems to lead to the mediation of a narrow range of discourses, particularly during periods of relative consensus. The German broadcasting system, by contrast, is more overtly pluralistic. German broadcasters have a public duty, in the words of the 1987 German interstate broadcasting agreement, to grant 'means of expression to the significant political, ideological and social forces and groups' in society, and this is reinforced by pluralistic representation on broadcasting authorities. But in practice, its definition of pluralism is overdetermined by the major political parties.

Both systems can be improved. Broadcast representation in Germany should include more nominees from the new social movements, while ideological and cultural diversity should be adopted in Britain as an explicit public service goal. But the fine tuning of broadcast rules and structures can achieve only limited improvement. This is because the nature of the public dialogue conducted through public service TV relates to the wider public debate taking place in society. The basic strategy that has been adopted, as we shall see, is to improve core public service broadcasting by reinvigorating the debate on which it draws.

This entails regenerating sectionalist media. To offset their particularistic effect, it may be desirable to impose a public duty on public service core organizations to promote empathy and understanding between groups through the expression of diverse values and perspectives in its fictional output. It has an integrative impact, moreover, almost by virtue of its functioning as a mass audience medium. By making public events to a large undifferentiated audience, by providing a common stock of shared experience and by offering up common symbols of identification to be shared and also exchanged, core public service institutions serve as a focal point of collective unity and reinforce ties of social association in society (Peters 1989; Scannell and Cardiff 1991). Brief reference should also be made to the potential impact of the new TV industries on public service broadcasting. Satellite and cable television threaten to disperse the TV audience and, consequently, to fragment the forum of societal debate established through public service television. Secondly, it also threatens to destabilize the economy of national public broadcasting systems by establishing a new distribution system for globally syndicated programmes. This undercuts the cost of making programmes for national audiences and bypasses existing protectionist arrangements. Its long-term effect could be to encourage some public service broadcasting systems, with

falling audiences and revenues, to rely increasingly on cheap imported programmes. Beyond a certain point, this would reduce their capacity to facilitate collective self-reflection in a national context.

But public service organizations remain both dominant and resilient in most countries (Collins 1989). At the end of the day, a mechanism is available for the protection of national public service broadcasting, should this seem advisable. Cross-frontier, satellite broadcasting is subject to internationally agreed controls – in the context of Europe through the EEC and the Council of Europe – and these can be revised. But a satisfactory case for strengthening these controls has yet to be made.

Civic Media Sector

Diversity of representation – in its dual sense of representing the world and representing interests – is best secured by having well articulated viewpoints in play in the public domain that journalists, subject to the constant pressure of reaching tight deadlines, can readily draw upon. It is also facilitated by the efficient organization of competing interests so that journalists know whom to contact and where to go in order to provide a fully balanced account. Strengthening the civic media sector will help in both respects.

The civic media sector can be seen in summary form as being composed of three tiers. The top tier consists of media (such as party controlled general interest newspapers) which are linked to collective organizations but are aimed, in principle at least, at a general audience with the intention of winning wider support. They are usually adversarial in approach, and provide a way of sustaining and renewing a particular perspective of society that reflects the sub-cultural media (such as magazines for gays and lesbians) which relate to a constituency rather than an organized group. But they can have nonetheless an important organizational role. They can foster a positive collective identity, promote a sense of group unity and project goals that can only be realized through collective action.¹⁹ The third tier consists of organizational media (for example, a national trade union journal or a newsletter of a local parents group) which serve as channels of communication between members of a group. These can provide a link between leaders, activists and supporters, reinforce commitment to the organization, relay information relevant to its functioning, and provide an internal forum for developing new ideas and strategies.

The civic media sector is in trouble. The party political press has wilted in many countries in the face of competition from entertainment oriented tabloids (Hoyer, Hadenius and Weibull 1975). Advertising has contributed to a lop-sided development of the specialist press by heavily subsidizing the growth of publications that deliver a desired target market, such as doctors or those interested in home improvements, while providing much less support for subcultural media with a less defined or useful readership in marketing terms (Curran 1986). The large increase in private spending on corporate business media has also contributed to a lop-sided development of organizational

The civic media sector can be reinvigorated in two ways. One strategy is to give large social and political groups control over part of the minority broadcasting system. This could include: direct control over radio stations, time share and part use of technical facilities of a minority TV channel, must carry rules for cable TV operators. There are precedents, however, for a more assertive version of this approach in polarized or 'pillarized' societies. Italy has given, in effect, two TV channels to rival political parties (Sassoon 1985); the Netherlands has allocated control of two TV channels to rival programme-making organizations, each representing distinctive cultural, political and religious traditions, on the basis of the size of their membership. (McQuail and Stune 1986; Broome 1989).

The other (though not mutually exclusive) approach is to establish a public agency, funded by an advertising tax, to assist the launch or development of civic media. The agency could have all-party representation, and assist those projects which most contribute to the vigour of the civic media. It could function as a modified version of the Swedish Press Subsidies Board (Hulten 1984).

Professional Media Sector

Journalists working for adversarial media linked to organized interests function partly as propagandists. Those working for traditional public service organizations operate within certain constraints; they tend to adopt a detached rather than committed stance, with a stress on mediating competing truths rather than revealing the truth. Those working for profit-driven organizations often define professionalism in terms of market values. All these different approaches contribute to the plurality of perspectives that a healthy media system should promote. But there is also a need for an additional voice – that of the independent, truth-seeking journalist – operating within an environment that encourages journalistic autonomy.

Establishing a professional sector also represents a way of establishing a section of the media that speaks to the public in a different way. It can relate to society not in terms of organized groupings – as public service broadcasting and the civic media do in different ways, nor in terms of audience ratings and sales as in the case of commercial media – but as an aggregation of individuals in a voice and idiom that it can define.

What voices emerge will depend on how journalists and programme makers respond to the opportunities given to them. But there is a vacuum that needs to be filled: the revival of a radical, unaligned, populist style of truth seeking in fiction and its equivalent in journalism. During its heyday in late nineteenth century Europe and America, its effect was to expand the boundaries of social conscience by highlighting the plight of the vulnerable, and of those who, due to their lack of organization, were not in a strong position to assert a claim on the rest of society.

The professional sector will not simply add to the diversity of the media system. It also builds into it an important watchdog element. Public service broadcasting is linked to the state; the market sector is dominated by big business; the civic sector – or, at least, the most influential part of it – is

controlled by collectively organized interests. There is a need for a professional sector which is a bedrock of independence and which can be relied upon to maintain a critical surveillance of all power centres in society, and expose them to the play of public opinion.

An institutional setting needs to be established that will enable programme makers to work in conditions of maximum freedom. This could take the form of two skeletal organizations – one controlling a minority TV channel, and the other a minority radio channel – which would commission rather than make programmes. This would ensure that programmes were made mostly in small, informal production companies. Members of boards running the two channels could be elected by people working in the radio and TV industries in order to assert their independence from government. Funding for the two channels could be supplemented by spectrum fees charged annually on commercial TV and radio franchise holders as a way of relieving market pressure. The aim, in short, is to create the ideal conditions for two showcase channels run by the broadcasting industry.

Private Enterprise Sector

Competition between commercial media encourages responsiveness to aggregate audience demand. Its presence within the system thus provides a countervailing and corrective influence to that of other forces – ranging from the journalism profession to organized interests – that will shape the rest of the media system. The tendency of private enterprise media to privilege right-wing perspectives will also contribute to the diversity of the media as a whole.

A private enterprise sector also strengthens, to some extent, the watchdog role of the media. The conventional assumption that it is a wholly independent check on the government is, as we have seen, mistaken. But a private enterprise sector is vulnerable to government influence in a different way from organizations formally linked to the state. And in this difference, there is a modest measure of security.

A substantial private enterprise sector should have a major presence in the press and perhaps the new TV industries. A deregulated commercial, over-the-air TV sector should not be established, however, because it would undermine the pluralism of the rest of the broadcasting system. It would scoop advertising revenue needed to sustain alternatives. It would also generate pressure on its rivals to converge towards the middle market at the expense of minority provision and minority perspectives.

Social Market Sector

A major deficiency of the market sector is that it no longer functions in the way that it is supposed to in theory. Market domination and economies of scale limit competition; high entry costs exert a form of ideological control; restrictions on market choice reduce audience influence.

One response to this problem, exemplified by the Swedish press subsidies system, is to modify the ground rules of competition so that the free market is

re-established as a level playing field. Its centrepiece is a complicated redistributive system, finetuned over the years, which supports low circulation papers with a graduated subsidy. It has succeeded in helping to maintain press diversity without leading to government control (Hutten 1984; Picard 1988; Strid and Weibull 1988).

An alternative approach – and one that is more easily realizable in societies that lack Sweden's tenacious social democratic culture – is to establish a social market sector as a way of regenerating the market system. Its central role is to incubate new forms of competition, rooted in social forces underrepresented in the market, as a way of extending real media choice.

This objective can be furthered in three ways. Innovative forms of media organization can be established in a way that extends diversity of output. A successful example of this is the establishment in Britain of Channel 4 with a remit to innovate and serve minorities, funded through advertising and a guaranteed safety net income from the main commercial TV network. The Channel 4 model – a cross-subsidized centre of innovation operating in a competitive context – can be extended to other media.

Second, a public funding agency can be established to fund challenges to the media conglomerates from groups with limited resources and a reasonable prospect of success. One sector where such an agency can have a considerable impact is local radio, where entry costs are still relatively low.

Third, tough anti-monopoly measures can be introduced to limit market domination by the major conglomerates. This can take the form, not merely of setting ceilings for expansion, but of curbing excessive cross-media concentration through enforced divestment. But if this is to result in a broadening of the social base of media ownership, a public agency has to be in place to assist underfinanced groups to acquire divested media. Otherwise, anti-monopoly controls could merely lead to one media conglomerate selling to another which is eligible as a purchaser under the new monopoly rules.

Retrospective

Implicit in this prescription is a complex set of requirements for a democratic media system. It should empower people by enabling them to explore where their interest lies; it should foster sectional solidarities and assist the functioning of organizations necessary for the effective representation of collective interests; it should sustain vigilant scrutiny of government and centres of power; it should provide a source of protection and redress for weak and unorganized interests; and it should create the conditions for real societal agreement or compromise, based on an open working through of differences, rather than a contrived consensus based on domination. This can be best realized through the establishment of a core public service broadcasting system, enshrined by a private enterprise, social market, professional and civic media sectors. These latter will strengthen the functioning of public service broadcasting as an open system of dialogue, and give added impetus to the collective, Do-It-Yourself tradition of civil society. In short this represents a reworking, in a contemporary context, of Habermas's historical idyll with which we started this chapter.

Notes

- 1 My thanks to the staff and students at the Department of Communications, University of California, San Diego for helpful suggestions incorporated into this chapter.
- 2 'Liberal' is a confusing word, meaning different things in Britain and the United States. It is used here in its British historical sense, and refers to the body of thought developed by liberals in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. For an account of their thinking in nineteenth century Britain, see Boyce (1978) and Curran (1978); and for the eighteenth century, in both Britain and America, see Holmes (1991).
- 3 Recent studies of the media which have drawn heavily upon Habermas include, among others, Dahlgren (1987), Elliott (1986), Garthman (1986), Hallin and Mancini (1991), Keane (1989), Scannell (1989), and Skogerboe (1990).
- 4 Indeed, Habermas himself revised implicitly his earlier, pessimistic assessment by emphasizing subsequently audience adaptation and resistance to mediated meanings. See Habermas (1984: 391ff.) which confusingly was translated and published in English before his first book (1989).
- 5 It should be noted, however, that exposés of site illegality occurred in state-linked media in Sweden and the USSR, while broadcasting in the US (then subject to more regulation than now) also played a role in the Watergate saga. In reality, investigative journalism is not confined to free market media.
- 6 Estimates for the proportion of public affairs content in contemporary media are provided by Curran and Seaton (1991), Strid and Weibull (1988), and Neumann (1986) cit. Abramson (1990).
- 7 A useful, evaluative survey of different approaches in the political economy of the radical political economy approach is provided in the essay by Golding and Murdoch in this volume.
- 8 This is particularly well documented in Etzioni-Halevy's (1987) comparative study. For additional information about the British government's failed attempt to suppress a 'Real Lives' documentary about sectarianism in northern Ireland – with striking parallels to the *Observer* saga – see also Leapin in (1987).
- 9 The two arguments are linked in that market dominance has forced up market entry costs.
- 10 This is illustrated by the difference between editorial and electoral opinion. Thus, in the 1987 general election, the Conservative press accounted for 72 per cent of national daily circulation, although the Conservative Party gained only 43 per cent of the vote.
- 11 Michael Schudson's chapter in this volume provides a useful summary of this literature. For a striking account of the way in which journalists can both resist and resist audience pressure, see Gans (1979).
- 12 A good example of this approach is provided by Hallin (1991) who shows that the average 'sound bite' on American network TV news declined from over forty seconds in 1968 to under 10 seconds in the 1980s.
- 13 For iconoclastic accounts of media professionalism, see in particular Schudson (1978), Schiller (1981), Tuchman (1978) and Elliott (1978).
- 14 This leads logically to a demand either for industrial democracy (see Ascherson (1978)) or for legal protection of journalistic autonomy (see Bastow (1985)). Though these arguments are seductive, they also raise a problem. Journalists tend to share the same news values, and to hunt in packs and develop group judgments. The greater empowerment of journalists across all media could lead potentially, therefore, to chapter editorial uniformity. Partly for this reason, the proposal at the end of this chapter adopts a deliberately selective approach to underwriting journalistic control.

- 15 Hallin and Mancini's penetrating essay relates to only one European country, Italy, which has a distinctive TV system and political culture. But there are affinities, nevertheless, between TV news in Italy and other European countries.
- 16 This definition was made particularly explicit in Germany, following a wide public debate about the role of the broadcaster. See Williams (1976).
- 17 For an example of the way in which media agenda setting and 'priming' can affect election results, see Iyengar and Kinder (1987).
- 18 A minor but telling illustration of the way in which different groups can be ignorant of what the other thinks, even though they live cheek by jowl in ostensibly integrated communities, occurred when I conducted jointly two group discussions in an East Anglian village for the Eastern Counties Newspapers Group. When asked about what most concerned them, the first group of working class couples said that they were worried about the lack of good job prospects for their children, the lack of leisure facilities for the young, and the problem of social discipline among teenagers. The second group of middle class couples were mainly concerned about the environment and the threat of increased urbanization in the area (which would generate a wider range of jobs and more 'leisure facilities') and were convinced that the first group fully shared their concerns. When informed that this was not the case, they were visibly taken aback, with some arguing rightly that the local paper should have alerted them to what other people in the community were feeling. This may seem to illustrate an aspect of rural, socially stratified England. But other monopoly papers also fail to provide an adequate channel of communication between social classes in their local community. For example the *Los Angeles Times*, arguably one of the best daily papers in the United States, with enormous resources at its disposal, is nevertheless quite extraordinarily uninformative about what members of Los Angeles's large underclass are thinking and feeling.
- 19 For the way in which media for sexual minorities can have an indirect but important organisational role, see Gross (1989).

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