

This critique should shake any complacent acceptance of the assumptions which underlie all theories of industrial society. Badham's goal, to provide the social sciences with the basis for including alternative perspectives, should be welcomed by those struggling with the rigidities of old classification schemes. For myself, grappling with the characteristics of information-oriented industrial societies, Badham presents much that must be taken into consideration.

Ultimately, like previous social theorists, he believes in the uses of sociological inquiry for the attainment of a more humane future. His own summary is best, "Industrial society theory may be one of the most impressive conceptual dinosaurs in social theory, but its bulk and long history must not deflect attention from the basic flaws in its design." Badham has not yet tamed the beast, though he has roped it. His future writings should be of great interest to us all.

Jorge Reina Schement

University of California, Los Angeles

Connecting You — Bridging the Communications Gap by Ian Reinecke
(McPhee Gribble/Penguin, Fitzroy, Victoria 1985) pp. 202, \$7.95,
ISBN 0 14 008585 8.

In his introduction to *Connecting You — Bridging the Communications Gap*, Ian Reinecke asks: "What sort of communications system could we have if we required that it promote democracy, information sharing, decentralisation, and social equity?" He argues that the communications system and industry should serve citizens rather than simply institutions, whether corporations or government agencies.

The book began as a report on the future of telecommunications technology commissioned by the Australian Telecommunications Employees' Association. The ATEA has provided a valuable public service by sponsoring this informative and thoughtful study of new technologies and options for shaping the telecommunications system, a system which functions as the nervous system of the so-called 'information society'.

Although intended as background to the discussion of information society issues, the chapters on technology and services, including, for example, telephones, facsimile, computers and printers, teletex and vieotex (*sic*), PABX and local area networks, etc. are particularly useful as clearly written and relatively up-to-date descriptions of new technologies and their applications.

The analytical chapters of the book are less satisfying. Although I share Reinecke's concern with the need for citizen access and participation, I find his rejection of the marketplace as having any role in achieving these goals unconvincing and frequently misinformed.

Reinecke finds the US deregulatory approach highly flawed, and appears enamoured of the French approach of distributing information technology throughout society as national policy. Surely both approaches deserve more careful scrutiny. It is true that the deregulation of US telecommunications has frequently resulted in increasing local service charges, threatening the concept of universal service, a matter of great concern to consumer groups and

legislators at the national and state level. However, it is simply not true that "deregulation in the US appears to be retarding moves toward universal ownership or access to computing and telecommunications technology" (p.18). Quite the contrary. Computers and assorted peripherals (which have never been regulated) have dropped dramatically in price as a result of both competition and advances in microprocessor technology. Telecommunications equipment, ranging from telephones to answering machines to PABXs, is dramatically cheaper today because of the deregulation of customer premises equipment (CPE).

Reinecke fails to see the importance of the market in making equipment more accessible. For example, he points out that much telecommunications equipment and computer software is designed for the office and not the home. Yet thousands of software programs have been written for microcomputers that continue to increase in power and decrease in cost. Many of these programs are used in schools, which may be a very appropriate way of applying computers to benefit citizens. A flourishing market of 'public domain' software, primarily for individual use, has also developed. Computing through electronic bulletin boards is another way US citizens have used computers and communications to exchange information.

Reinecke also ignores small business as an important economic force in society. To the extent that communications and information technology becomes cheaper, these tools become accessible not only to large corporations, but also to small companies and non-profit organisations, enabling them to be more efficient and to serve more citizens.

In his analysis of the effects of Australia's satellite system, Reinecke relies very heavily on the Telecom Australia perspective. In the outback, for example, satellite earth stations will bring telephone service many years before Telecom's digital radio concentrator system could reach isolated villages and homesteads; the flexible capacity of the satellite allows radio and television services to be provided as well. Rather than Aussat being a potential danger to Telecom (p.140), could the threat of competition not stimulate the introduction of more innovative, less costly services from Telecom? Is what is best for Telecom necessarily what is best for Australia?

Reinecke raises many important issues, including the threat of centralisation of power and dehumanisation of work. Clearly, there is a need for policy concerning information technology access and applications at both the national and institutional levels, whether the institutions be government agencies, multinational corporations or small businesses. The challenge should be to harness and humanise the power of the technology for the benefits of citizens and workers. In the introduction, Reinecke states:

Unless the trade unions initiate debate about technological options it is difficult to see where such discussion will begin in Australia. Certainly community groups and academic institutions can contribute, but neither have the power or influence of the trade union movement.

It is to be hoped that all of these organisations, as well as concerned individuals, will take up Reinecke's challenge to shape the development of information technologies and services to Australia.

Heather Hudson

University of Texas at Austin