

Perhaps the most distressing aspect of Lewis' book deals with alcohol and the Aborigines. The destruction of their cultures has intensified alcohol-related problems in their communities. And where alcoholism receives little official attention in the general community, it receives even less in the Aboriginal.

In total the picture that Lewis presents is not a pleasant one. Even though the economic and social costs of alcoholism are great, it is not a 'glamour' problem. Accordingly, alcohol-abuse programmes, whether preventive based or treatment based, receive little attention or funds. The 'war' against illegal drugs has higher priority, in spite of the fact that they have a significantly lower impact on society. Indeed, a reduction in drug usage probably causes an increase in alcohol consumption. The alcohol-related industries are powerful. Yet, Lewis offers the suggestion that so too were the tobacco producers. Thus, if social awareness is great enough, greater efforts can be made toward reducing alcohol consumption and all its related problems.

In summary, I found *A Rum State* interesting, though at times frustrating, reading. I feel it lacks clear focus and analysis. Clearly, a tremendous effort went into its writing, and it would be nice to see some clear proposals coming out of it. Perhaps they will in time, and if so, this book will have served a useful purpose. Ultimately, it deserves a wider readership than it will probably receive.

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**Television in Europe**, by *Eli Noam* (Oxford University Press, New York, 1991), pp. xii + 395, 32.50, ISBN 0-19-506942-0.

This 200,000 word volume has major strengths and some significant weaknesses. The bulk of the book is devoted to a country by country account of the national history of television policy. The longest and strongest sections are on Germany, France, Britain and Italy. But Noam has separate chapters on 20 countries, including Iceland, Turkey and Israel, plus a brief chapter on eastern Europe. Inevitably, these chapters are already somewhat out of date, and it is easy to find fault with the chapter on one's own country; but overall Noam has produced the best multi-country account to date of West European television in the 1980s. He is also excellent on the early television history (and its radio roots) across western Europe.

The other great strength of Noam's book is his advocacy of what he calls open television, by which he means the kind of multi-channel system now found in the United States. He is a militant believer in the benefits of the many channels provided especially by American cable systems. He also welcomes what he sees as a somewhat reluctant move of western Europe to follow the American lead towards more channels and less regulation. An important merit of this book is that it constitutes such a forcefully argued, if not extreme, case for the multiplication of channels in both Europe and the US.

Eli Noam is well qualified to argue his case. He heads the Institute of Tele-Information in the School of Business at Columbia University in New York City. In addition to his major expertise in the economics of telecommunications,

Noam has legal expertise and has also important experience as an official regulator for New York State.

One final strategic strength of Noam's book is his persuasive argument that public service broadcasting — with its varying shades of meaning across western Europe — has feet of clay. He is judiciously critical of the British BBC/TV duopoly system for the usual reasons, but in particular because he sees it as committing the sin of restricting market entry and hence restricting creativity, the plurality of voices and similar democratic desirables.

Noam also points to other common weaknesses across western European television; too often the public corporations were actually subject to governmental, political party, and religious control. In the 1980s, the public monopolies collapsed, not least because they failed to restrict market entry to new, more popular, and more politically acceptable channels.

The weaknesses of this book are the reverse of its strengths. While Noam argues his macroeconomic case with confidence and agility, he is remarkably weak on the microeconomics of television and in particular on the financing of programming. He simply does not understand some quite simple things about the costs of programming. For example, he applauds:

. . . Britain's commercial Channel 4, which strengthened small independent film producers who created artistically respectable programmes at a fraction of the cost of the ITV companies, the BBC, or American network programs (p.61).

This, frankly, is complete nonsense. Channel 4's expenditure and programming mix is, in fact, very similar to that of BBC2; independent producers are not cheaper; Channel 4 overall has lowish total expenditure because it commissions mainly cheapish factual programmes, while its most popular programming is domestic soaps and games plus imported Hollywood comedies. Noam's "at a fraction of the cost" unfortunately reveals all too clearly a macroeconomic lack of concern with the real world of programming, producers and specific audience preferences.

This latter weaknesses means that Noam fails to consider what audiences actually prefer — expensively made fiction series, movies, and comedy. Audiences in Europe, as elsewhere, also prefer domestically made entertainment (if they have a choice). These well-known tendencies are awkward for the new channels, most of which lack adequate finance to produce this expensive programming. Most new channels (of the US sort) either repeat old programming or charge extra for premium (that is new) entertainment and movies.

A second problem which Noam largely ignores is that in television — as elsewhere in the media — competition has an unpleasant habit of leading quickly to monopoly. This has been the case with cable in the US and was reflected in the cable legislation of 1992; the US Congress over-rode President Bush's veto because two-thirds majorities in both Houses of Congress were aware of public anger with the local cable operators and their excessive monopoly pricing. Behind this outright monopoly problem is another more general weakness. The open market system, when it depends upon subscription, is often very inefficient at delivering subscriber funds into programme production; the US cable operators are again the most extreme example — they simply pocket most of the money they receive from subscribers.

Nor does Noam show much interest in how advertising actually works. Despite the fact that consumers dislike the excessive levels of advertising on the US networks and local independents, and despite the lack of advertising being an attraction of premium channels, the great bulk of US TV viewing is of channels which groan under a heavy burden of advertising interruptions.

Noam assumes the superiority of Hollywood as the dominant supplier of entertainment. Indeed, he devotes some of his early pages to an essay on the virtues of Hollywood in an open market world. This may seem to be an odd beginning for a book on television in Europe. But Noam misses the significance of several threats to Hollywood. He misses the sea change of the late 1980s which seemed to indicate a marked reduction in the attractiveness of US television series (as opposed to movies) to European audiences. He scarcely mentions the success of Australian programming, not only in Britain, but elsewhere in Europe.

Although Noam is well aware of the history of cable television in Belgium, the Netherlands and elsewhere, he does not, to my mind, fully recognise the extent to which Europe was not copying the US, but was working out its own pattern of channel multiplication. Noam continues to contrast the vigorous US pursuit of the market with western Europe's more sluggish moves in the same direction. He fails to note that the similarities between European and American television both today and throughout the 1980s were perhaps greater than the differences. Even today in the US, and in each European country, at least two thirds of the audience is watching one of only four (or fewer) leading channels; advertising is the main form of revenue, backed up by license fee and/or subscription.

Eli Noam follows the tradition of many writers on these topics of being partisan to the point of dogmatism. The truth is that each of the major funding systems has feet of clay. Public service broadcasting, with two or three channels (so common across Europe before 1980), was good at providing a range of programming at a modest cost to the consumer. It was also paternalistic, politicised (in most countries) and restrictive. But most European systems combined license fee and advertising in ways which enhanced the programming menu. Television financed solely by advertising (on the traditional US pattern) was good at delivering expensive entertainment to mass audiences; the system was also quite good at TV news, especially local news. It offered a very restricted menu of programming types, with one genre dominant at any particular time of day.

The several different sorts of cable available in the US and western Europe all tend to specialise successfully in delivering one additional type of programming service. US basic cable is excellent at delivering old programming and movies, wrestling, video music, all-sports, all-news, and a few other formats; these streams of programming are largely 'acquired' from other producers at super-low cost. Imported cable channels from neighbouring countries, such as French channels in Belgium, deliver attractive programming to appropriate language groups. Home channels from abroad — such as German, French, and Dutch channels from Luxembourg and Swedish and Turkish channels from London, are a different category which generates major finance. Pay or premium cable is good at delivering mainly movies to significant audiences at a significant price. Pay-per-view will increasingly be good at turning home viewing into a special event at a special price.

Eli Noam's central argument is biased. He emphasises the vices of public service and the virtues of open television. Despite, or possibly because of, his background as a New York regulator, he has little positive to say about policy and regulation. His perfect solution seems to be the US system experienced in New York City, plus some modest regulation. He argues that there is "a place for" public broadcasting or valued programmes, but he wants any such effort to involve "additive policies of production and distribution support rather than by subtractive entry barriers" (p. 57). Some would say that this is politically naive; such additive policies are likely to be quite minor and may in practice mean the national elite merely supplying itself with a little high culture (financed out of the arts budget) and some serious politics (such as C-SPAN, subsidised by the US Congress).

Many, probably most, readers of Eli Noam's fascinating book will think that both the US and western Europe deserve something more than "additive policies of production and distribution support." We need less dogma and more recognition that each system of finance tends to generate certain types of programming. The challenge, then, is to find a policy strategy which does not allow one single form of funding to become dominant. Both the US and western Europe have found fruitful ways of combining different types of funding system. In Europe the challenge is to enable subscription to add to advertising and license fee finance.

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**Research on Domestic Telephone Use** edited by Ann Moyal with the assistance of Alison McGuigan. (CIRCIT, Melbourne, 1991), pp. 144, \$25.00, ISSN 1-034-7917.

Social research of the telephone has been, for too long, neglected. While there is considerable literature on the social impacts of radio, television and film, the telephone has been almost overlooked. Social research on that ubiquitous household appliance, that most often used means of interpersonal communication other than face-to-face interaction, has only in the past ten or so years been undertaken. And this work has been few and far between, under-reported and essentially unread.

In the past three years two major symposia have been devoted exclusively to the social uses of the telephone, the first at the Free University in Berlin in 1990 and the second at the Centre for International Research on Communication and Information Technologies (CIRCIT) in Melbourne in 1991. We comment here on the CIRCIT symposium. The proceedings of this symposium was edited by Ann Moyal with the assistance of Alison McGuigan. We comment here on this monograph.

John Burke of Telecom Australia stated these four desired outcomes of the Workshop: establishing telephone user research as an accepted area of research interest; establishing a 'tighter' perception and definition of purpose in policy terms; creating an understanding of appropriate techniques and methodologies;