

rare in Australia at a time when more information and analysis in the competitive telecommunications environment is being shrouded in an acrid mist of commercial confidentiality. The role of Telecom's Social and Policy Fund as one of the few bodies supporting such research should be commended, and hopefully other institutional spaces will be opened up to encourage a greater range of voices to be heard in debates on new communications technologies. The Information Superhighway takes up this challenge and deserves to be read as an important attempt to think new media differently.

REFERENCE

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Australian Television Culture by Tom O'Regan (Allen & Unwin, St Leonards, NSW, 1993) pp.xxv + 219, \$22.95, ISBN 1-86373-527-5.

Almost a decade ago I reviewed *International Image Markets* by A. Mattelart, M. Mattelart and X. Delacourt for another journal. I was impressed by the level of detailed information it marshalled to substantiate its arguments regarding the production, sale and purchase of symbolic goods, chiefly television programs, across national (third world) boundaries. In many ways, Tom O'Regan's book makes a similar contribution to characterising and accounting for Australia as a producer, importer, exporter and consumer of television programs. Like Mattelart *et al*, O'Regan makes a thoroughly documented case for the interconnectedness of political action, technological change, international and national economic factors, and public policy developments in his study of Australian 'television culture'. O'Regan defines this television culture as the totality of that which is moulded by a "television service" which is "made up of policy, regulation, politics, criticism, industry and programs" (p.xix).

It is not an easy task to sustain arguments over such diverse discourses, but O'Regan succeeds in doing so over the nine chapters of this information-dense book. (Chapters 7 and 8, on SBS-TV, are co-written with Dona Kolar-Panov, and chapter 9 on Aboriginal Television Culture is co-written with Philip Batty.) Part of this success is due to O'Regan's painstaking definition of terms and concepts, and his reiteration of key elements of his arguments in each of the separate chapters. The central thesis of the book is that "Australian television functions in an interdependent fashion within a larger transnational television system" (p.xxi). Its defining categories are spatial (local, regional, national and international levels, each with its own core and periphery) and cultural (indigenous, ethnic, minoritarian, mainstream and ethnically "unmarked" Australians).

The first chapter sets out the historical background to the Australian television service within an international Anglophone context, and looks at how Australian television is both an imitative part of transnational television and a particular invention of television.

The second chapter engages with the significant changes to the television service which occurred during the 1980s with respect to technology (such as the Aussat launches), the internationalising of Australian state and regional industries, including television, the nationalising of Australian political life under a federal labour government, and the changes to the policy-regulating body/ies - specifically the shift in the central vehicle for broadcasting policy from the Australian Broadcasting Tribunal (later the Australian Broadcasting Authority) to federal government departments (Department of Communications, and later the Department of Transport and Communications). O'Regan argues that these changes resulted in an Australian version of what James Carey has called "High Communications Policy".

O'Regan contextualises with authority the changes in the television industry within structural changes to other Australian industries: the nationalisation, then internationalisation of the state or regional beers - XXXX, Fosters and Swan -; the state-wide and national computer linking of livestock sales; and the national networking of the real estate industry. Such illustrations serve to highlight the industrial/economic aspects of Australian television which are subject to the same limitations and developments as other Australian industries.

The book, on the whole, adopts an analytical rather than a critical approach to the vast amount of information it synthesises. The exception to this is in the chapter on "the Entrepreneurs". Here, O'Regan is strongly critical of the damage that Skase, Bond and Lowy did to the developing Australian television industry during the 1980s when they bought channels 7, 9 and 10 respectively and seemed to apply the rules of property development to media ownership. Again, in this chapter, O'Regan integrates policy issues with industry-specific issues to show the complex factors involved in any analysis of Australian television. The deregulation of the financial sector enabled the emergence of the media entrepreneurs. This policy decision was therefore partly responsible for Australian television's loss of its comparative advantage internationally in the form of a debt-free service and a growing bank of quality exportable programs. O'Regan contends that the period of debt-financed media "entrepreneurship" resulted in the loss of opportunities to the Australian television industry which it had taken decades to build up: "There had probably never been a more propitious time for Australia to secure a larger international market niche" (p.52). But the inexperience and irresponsibility of the entrepreneurs who saw television as a "licence to print money", combined with reduced advertising expenditure during the recession, plunged the industry into large debt and resulted in cut-backs in spending on Australian productions and a destabilisation of the delicate economic balance in an industry whose local production component is cross-subsidised by imported product.

Chapter 4 develops this notion of the economic symbiotic relationship between imported and locally produced programs in the Australian television industry. For an effective balance to be maintained — that is, for there to be enough advertising revenue from popular and sufficiently inexpensive imported programs to pay for the production of more Australian programs — there needs to be a fairly low level of competition between the Australian commercial stations for the imported product. If competition becomes too high, then inflated prices are paid for foreign product and there is concomitantly much less money available for local production. O'Regan also ties this notion of cross-subsidisation into the Australian /US bilateral trade agreements which affects all our trade with that country, including television programs as well as agricultural trade.

Other political economy issues dealt with in this chapter on imported and local programming include a brief discussion of the advertising industry. O'Regan points out that as a percentage of GNP, advertising in Australia is the second-highest in the world, after the US. There is also an explanation for the high salaries paid to Australian newsreaders, quizmasters and talk-show hosts as being due to lack of competition in these genres from imported product, causing such people to benefit from a seller's labour market. This same principle,

reversed, accounts for the comparatively low prices paid for local drama and documentary, for which there is often a comparable imported product. O'Regan praises the economic rationalism behind Australian content regulations which have, over the years, had the effect of "nurturing an internationally competitive drama industry" (p.78) rather than an over-protected, non-competitive industry as occurred in Australian manufacturing during the period of high protectionism.

Chapters 5 and 6 present an absorbing discussion of national culture and the role of television in the national culture of an increasingly "multicultural society". O'Regan spends most of chapter 5 defining "national culture", and largely follows Hobsbawm and Ranger when he asserts that "it is not simply a matter of feeling and sentiment but of mobilised feelings and sentiments. It is not a matter of representation, but of intervention, not of tradition but invention from available materials" (p.91). He then looks at the role of television in Australia's changing geopolitics orientations, that is, the shift in economic and political consciousness from Europe and the US to Asia. He notes that the persistence of Anglophone symbolic goods in Australian television will be hard to shift, given the central position they hold in Australia's national culture. Such cultural resistance to "these civil, rational and technicist projects" of geopolitics are seen by O'Regan as "no bad thing" (p.120).

In terms of trends towards internationalisation or globalisation of television services, O'Regan asserts that while this may be a new trend for European and US audiences, for Australia it represents nothing new. Australia has always had a global orientation, both in colonial and post-colonial times, and Australian television services have, in common with other services in similarly sized countries, always had a mix of local and international offerings. He predicts that globalisation will result for Australia in more television stations, a more open international marketplace for our television exports as well as further deregulation of the television industry. The existing trends towards weaker state and regional centres, and stronger national institutions will also continue. He also predicts that US influences on Australian television may well decline as our trading relationship with that country becomes less important. O'Regan, writing in 1993, unfortunately retreats from making any clear predictions about changes to Australia's television culture after the introduction of Pay-TV this year.

The chapters on SBS-TV form a thorough discussion of policy, political and economic factors relating to the establishment and maintenance of that station. They also provide a detailed examination of SBS-TV as a "narrowcaster which has specialised audiences for its programs" (p.143). These audiences are not only the "ethnic Australians" on whose behalf lies much of the political push for continuance of the service. SBS-TV also serves "minoritarian" audiences comprising non-ethnically-marked minorities such as the gay and lesbian community, environmentalists, feminists, minority religious groups, and "cosmopolitan" audiences — people of unspecified ethnicity whose cultural orientations are international, outward-looking.

The final chapter analyses the invention of an Aboriginal television culture, and the various means by which that is occurring. The complexities of different aboriginal cultures, the tensions of different aboriginal interests in the establishment of priorities for new aboriginal forms of television, and of what has occurred in the past, are all discussed in this chapter. Television is conceptualised as more intrinsically political for Aboriginal people than for other Australians because of their long history of dispossession and subsequent social and economic disadvantage. The right to access to communications, including television services, is more urgent for this group than for any other in the country. And there remains the problem of non-Aboriginal involvement, and the extent to which it may or may not be required by Aboriginal people. As the authors admit, "Almost all published commentary on Aboriginal television is by non-Aboriginals, including this chapter" (p.187). This poses

important questions about who is constructing aboriginality through representing it on television. Also, the public service nature of Aboriginal television services imposes its own restraints upon what kind of television emerges.

I had some minor criticisms of this book. Firstly, there were several places where a table or chart may have helped to present some of the information in a more easily digestible form. For example, a chart showing the proportion of SBS's foreign language programming, compared with the proportional ethnic composition of Australia would have been useful, as might a table showing the relative place of advertising revenue in the GNPs of various countries in comparison with Australia's, or the proportion of local to international program sourcing over a number of years or compared with other countries. There were also some annoying editorial glitches, such as several disagreements of verb and subject, and some misspellings (for example, "proffered", "comeraperson"). Such errors seem to be on the increase in contemporary publishing. Perhaps their purpose is to keep the pedants and ex-English teachers among us perpetually vigilant.

The major strengths of the book are the authors' breadth of research in the various discipline areas which relate to something as polymorphous as television is in Australian cultural, social, economic and political life, and the supporting of the book's arguments by a vast amount of data from "the ground". This data is both quantitative in the form of statistics, and qualitative in the form of comments from sources as varied as Aboriginal writer Mudrooroo Narogin and media magnate Kerry Packer. It is no mean achievement that the book manages to synthesise all of this data into a thoughtful series of interweaving discourses on Australia's complex television culture. I recommend the book to both students and practitioners of communications policy and the Australian television industry, and to the "Australian viewing public" generally.

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Reforming Universal Service: the Future of Consumer Access and Equity in Australian Telecommunications by Ian Wilson and Gerard Goggin (Consumers' Telecommunications Network, Sydney, 1993) pp xii + 119, \$35.00 ISBN 0 646 16760X.

Ian Wilson and Gerard Goggin seek to demonstrate that universal service, 'the goal of making telecommunications universally accessible to all consumers' (pi), consists of: universal geographic availability, universal accessibility, universal affordability, universal technological standard, and universal telecommunications and participation in society. The book's chapters, which attempt to exemplify these dimensions of universal service, include a brief history of universal service, dimensions of universal service, future considerations for universal service delivery, and reforming Australian telecommunications (including a series of thirty-three recommendations to carry this out).

Universal geographic availability is defined by the authors as the provision of a full range of identical services available irrespective of location, including pay phones. *Universal accessibility* is defined as provision of equipment to ensure functionality for all users and non-discriminatory access to all facilities. *Universal technological standard* includes policies to ensure that innovations are made universal on the basis of need, social expectation and social desirability, including uniform quality of service for all users, and periodic upgrading