

Broadcasting and Convergence

Rearticulating the Future Past

Taisto Hujanen & Gregory Ferrell Lowe

Since the telegraph was invented in the 19th Century, each successive advance in media technology has featured a “rhetoric of the electronic sublime” (Carey & Quirk, 1989). Thus it isn’t surprising that so much of what passes as public debate about convergence, especially in media policy discourse, again promises the eventual achievement of a familiar prediction: the realization of some technological utopia. In this most recent rhetorical iteration, convergence is the premise, digitization is the platform, but as always *utopia remains the promise*.

In the broadest sense, convergence refers to processes of transformation that impact entire societies. As Briggs and Burke (2002) demonstrate, that understanding is much older than the present technology orientation. A broader understanding is represented, for example, in cultural studies theory addressing ‘hybridization, intertextuality, intermediality and multimodality.’ Each represents some thread of convergence process of importance for media culture.

But as Briggs and Burke (ibid: 266) further observe, since the 1990s the notion has mainly been applied to describe digital integration. That is the governing construct for multimedia, but would also include what Alm and Lowe (2001) treat more expansively as ‘polymedia’. In this narrower sense, convergence celebrates the rapid pace of innovation and integration as computing, telecommunications, broadcast and print media are merged into increasingly common digitally-based and digitally-encoded techniques (Dutton, 1996).

As always, what is most important for societies and cultures is not the technology per se but the consequences of application. Convergence is a complex construct affecting much more than the mutual identities of different media; it is crucially about legitimating their social and political roles in relation to everyday uses (the chapter by Raudaskoski & Rasmussen offers pertinent discussion). That is already evident when assessing organization and institutional forms of media operation, especially in corporate restructuring and the consolidation of media systems (Murdock, 2000).

Will broadcasting survive convergence, and should it survive? If yes, why and in what form? Those questions were fundamental to deliberations in the RIPE@2002 conference that laid the groundwork for this book, and remain animate concerns in much of the content that follows (1). The questions can only be answered in some context, and for our purposes the context has three dimensions.

First, in various ways this book highlights the importance of broadcasting as a *utilization of resource*. Broadcasting uses electromagnetic spectrum and, despite claims to the contrary, that is a finite natural resource that must be somehow managed in the public interest. Second, this book variously highlights the importance of broadcasting in *social application*. Any robust understanding requires taking account of the media-society histories that define what broadcasting means and is supposed to do in situated contexts. Third, this book variously highlights the significance of broadcasting in *comparative cultural contexts*. The legitimacy of what broadcasting is supposed to be, and subsequently how it ought to be organized and operated, relies on normative judgements informed by cultural values. These dimensions are essential for excavating shared concerns about the future of broadcasting in consideration of convergence dynamics.

In this introductory chapter we have selected not to focus our treatment tightly on the public service remit because the summative contents of the various chapters that follow treat the topic in considerable detail and from many relevant angles. Instead, we seek to contribute an essay that may help to frame an abiding conviction that broadcasting must not be marginalized in the convergence debate. Thus, our contribution reviews historic principles as a platform for discussion about broadcasting – aspects that are of continuing relevance for any consideration of its social applications and cultural implications.

Media scholarship doesn't have to be in a hurry. Theory develops slowly and assessment takes time. In a sense, scholars can 'afford' to wait and see. But broadcasters must often define operational strategies and launch before they can actually know what convergence is all about, and with what effects. They rely on past experience and, in view of their own and other actors' (including scholars) projections of the future, they act (the chapters by Steemers and also Alm & Lowe, address such issues from varying perspectives). But at the same time (as discussed in Born's chapter in relation to the UK), broadcasters' projections contribute to constructing the future. They are not 'accidental tourists' in these processes, and thus ultimately cannot evade responsibility for choices that shape the future.

The launch of digital terrestrial television [DTT] in Finland offers a recent example of what can happen when broadcasters' projections are unrealistic. The initial campaign for DTT (introduced in 2001) failed for at least two reasons. First, because the broadcasting industry and the electronic industry envisioned different projections concerning the pace of digital diffusion. Finland had DTT channels when few people were able to watch because

the set-top boxes needed for digital reception on analogue devices were unavailable. And, secondly, because the initial campaign focused too much on DTT as 'enhanced television' which didn't correspond to the technical capacity of first generation set-top boxes (Theodoropoulou's chapter is also relevant here).

As to the question of 'survival', the Finnish case in DTT paints a pessimistic view regarding the future of broadcasting. In Finland, policy has driven the digitization of broadcasting in the public sector because that has been explicitly connected with building the so-called Information Society. Digital television was projected in policy discourse as a multimedia platform for each Finnish home. Thus, whether something survives depends a great deal on how it is defined, and especially on the degree to which it is defined in similar terms by different agencies (for a broader treatment, see the chapter by Thomass).

When thinking about broadcasting more fundamentally – primarily as one-to-many media that harness electromagnetic spectrum for wireless, terrestrial transmission and reception – it's useful to begin with discussion about utilization of the resource on which that depends.

Broadcasting as a utilization of resource

The electromagnetic spectrum is not a man-made property but rather a phenomenon of nature. With cumulative development in 20th Century technology, humanity enjoys capabilities to use an expansive range of spectrum frequencies harnessed to facilitate radio, television, satellites, x-rays, lasers and so forth. The history of modern civilization owes something to successive advances in our capability to use more frequencies for varied and improved communication. Such advances account for a dramatic multiplication of communication patterns, practices and channels.

But the electromagnetic spectrum is not growing. The spectrum is immense, but quite finite. Actually, limitations fertilized media technology invention in the 20th Century because advances were frequently made when figuring out ways to work in, on and without spectrum space. To accommodate a growing variety of applications, humans have had to learn to use more of the spectrum, and to use each 'bandwidth' of spectrum space with increasing efficiency, because the need, desire and possibilities for spectrum application continually expand. We need radio telescopes to map the heavens and satellite surveillance to map the earth. We want more to see on television and to have more flexibility in where and how we use telephones. We are excited by the newest possibilities that digitization opens for recombinant media and more personalized involvement.

This period is watermarked by the indelible influences of creative hybrids and recombinant innovation. It is undeniably innovative because so much

of what is new and influential appears as fresh combinations of known formulas and tools. Web content is increasingly financed by advertising strategies that are nearly identical to the newspaper model, but also by subscription strategies similar to pay-TV via satellite and cable channels. Similarly, public institutions are increasingly organized and operated as though they were private companies, a growing number of which also have commercial subsidiaries with managers busily absorbed in learning about markets and marketing.

In this context, attacks on broadcasting frequently imply ‘retro’ flavors. There is an idea that broadcasting is ‘over the hill’ and ‘out of step’ with modern fashions. It’s akin to the gleaming chrome expanse of a 1950s automobile – nostalgic perhaps, but anyway antiquated. It isn’t considered sleek, compact or aerodynamic; it’s criticized as being big, inefficient and difficult to maneuver.

What accounts for the implied ‘bad’ reputation of broadcasting? One could start with its definition as a media technology in application. The following is borrowed from a key-word book from the late 1980s, reflecting the British cultural studies approach to media scholarship. The definition highlights what has been considered bothersome about broadcasting, positioned in explicit contrast to ‘narrowcasting,’ participatory approaches enthusiastically greeted by cultural studies.

Broadcasting:

The sending of messages via the media of TV or radio with *no technical control* over who receives them. *Anyone* who has the appropriate receiver and is within the range of the transmitter can receive them. (Contrast with narrowcasting). By extension it means sending messages via the airwaves to a *mass audience*, and thus involves the use of broadcast codes and conventions designed to appeal to that mass audience (O’Sullivan et al., 1987; italics by TH & GL).

This definition emphasizes the technical characteristics of broadcasting, that is the use of electromagnetic radio waves for transmitting messages. Although implied as such, lacking technical control over reception is not necessarily detrimental. That lack accounts in part for requirements to provide free-to-air and open access to broadcast signals; it is the technical basis for universalism in broadcasting. Moreover, as van Cuilenburg and McQuail (1998: 77) suggest, control of access is a critical concern in today’s converging media environment because the absence of any similar standardization long requisite for analogue broadcasting threatens open access to digital broadcast signals (see the chapter by Näränen for more).

The definition also implies that technology as such does not determine social use, which is exactly right. Electromagnetic spectrum has long been used to facilitate communication. Harnessing the resource for broadcasting that transmits messages to a *mass audience* is one useful application, but as

indicated narrowcasting is another – and one could add mobile phones for that matter. This illustrates that the same resource can be used for more targeted forms of communication via transmission. Of course it remains an open question as to how big an audience would need to be to qualify as a ‘mass’ and whether, at any size, that is somehow inherently a bad thing.

There are technical and historical reasons to define the people receiving broadcast signals as a ‘mass audience,’ if one is only discussing scale (cf. Lewis, 1991). Due to the nature of the technical platform and the attributes of its use in broadcasting, the source has only very limited control of audience behaviors. For a long time, then, broadcasters knew little about their audience and, as advocates of narrowcasting argued, too often seemed not to even care (Ang, 1991). But the situation is quite different today because broadcasters and sister industries have developed elaborate and increasingly sophisticated tools for knowing, and research results are taken seriously (cf. Stavitsky, 1995; Schulz, 2000). One can hardly argue today that audience is an undefined mass for broadcasters. There are, in other words, good reasons to re-articulate the notion of a mass in relation to broadcasting audiences.

This was highlighted by one of the four work groups participating in the RIPE@2002 conference. Colleagues suggested the ‘broad’ aspects of broadcasting should be featured more prominently instead of dismissed out of hand. Broadcasting is a means for communication with broad audiences, and the most immediate means at that. This characteristic of being ‘broad’ is not only about size but, significantly, also the diversity of broadcast audiences. It emphasizes the ability of broadcasting to *connect* people across geographical, social and cultural borders in a public life that can be *shared* as a result.

With that in mind, the semantic also signals a second crucial aspect of universalism, this time keyed to broadcast content. Because the casting is broad, makers must search out differences in opinions and interests, and then seek to portray this variety fairly and also as comprehensively as practically possible. At the same time, they must work to create opportunities for cultural self-expression, and thereby assist individuals and groups in their respective efforts to negotiate identities. Because broadcasting utilizes a public resource, it is supposed to do these things in ways that emphasize possibilities for enhancing mutual understanding and interaction between different kinds of people. That is in fact the operational fulcrum for pluralism in broadcasting.

And yet in so much of the digital vision animating future think today, broadcasting is mainly construed as unidirectional communication that is altogether inferior to the presumed interactivity of ‘new’ media. But any fair-minded critic must acknowledge that in the history of broadcasting those absent technical possibilities for immediate feedback do not mean broadcasters have acted independently of their audiences, much less of social and political environments. In the European broadcasting tradition, the feedback system has been typically of a political character. Parliamentarians elected

by the voting public have been responsible for the legislation and regulation of broadcasting in the public's interest. Moreover, the governing principle of editorial independence explains why European public broadcasters have been keenly interested in more direct accountability to their audiences, both in their capacity as consumers paying the costs and as citizens casting the votes. But whether broadcasting is public or private, constructing appropriate accountability measures represents a forbidding challenge (the chapter by Jakubowicz has much more).

This desire for more direct accountability is a decisive reason why interactivity also arouses enthusiasm among broadcasters. But thinking about the nature of broadcasting, that also merits critical comment. If broadcasting is seen as a social good, following Scannell (1989 & 1996), then its social and cultural relevance doesn't depend on *immediate* feedback in media-audience interactions. Feedback comes in various ways and over extended periods, but in this perspective it's most relevant to highlight how people use the social good in interaction with each other, and actually in their participation in society and culture most generally. Much of the interactivity offered by new media instead focuses on direct media-user relationships that neglect those *broader* social and cultural dynamics.

Finally, one could also wonder why the cultural studies approach frequently appears to be so worried about the unidirectionality of broadcasting? As reception studies (cf. Lindlof, 1988; Morley, 1992; Ang, 1996) effectively demonstrate, reception is a creative process wherein receivers use content to negotiate their own meanings, regardless of the unidirectional flow of messages in any medium.

Broadcasting in social application

The foregoing has hinted at ingredients that must frame any consideration of the social application of broadcasting. Here we return to a point earlier set aside. Of course there are different ways to handle the management of processes and practices necessary to exploit any resource. Although the resource is natural, deciding between alternatives depends on normative judgement. Judgements are made in light of values, often in contradiction and constantly evolving.

Consider the North Sea and the oil that lies beneath it to illustrate. Is the sea of greater value than the oil? What are the standards for judging comparative worth? What is the value of the oil if it can't be extracted? Are all things natural inherently of greatest worth or all things industrial inherently threatening? Can the oil be exploited without damaging the ocean and, if so, at a profit? Is the environment more secure if extraction were managed by a public institution or a private corporation? Should something be a business simply because it can be economically profitable? Are there non-com-

merce values that ought to be compelled via regulation? Is competition always, only beneficial and regulation always, only detrimental?

In our example, the focus is on who should be allowed to exploit a resource, for what purposes, to whose benefit, and at what cost? In recent years, neo-liberal ideas have become extremely influential in normative discourse and judgements about how best to do most society functions (see the chapter by Sampson & Lugo for more discussion). It seems to us that the 'neo' in this formulation is about capturing the Center via co-optation. Ideals historically associated with Liberal ideology now animate party platforms on the Left, as evident for example in the so-called 'Third Way and New Labour,' while in America the Bush administration (Right) trumpets 'Compassionate Conservatism.'

The success of neo-liberal ideology is by now so great that in official policy discourse one rarely hears much in rebuttal about the glorified virtues of 'competition, deregulation, and market forces' as remedial for nearly every problem. The idea seems to be that if something can be privatized it ought to be, and that every public institution should be organized and operated on the same principles as 'any normal' (i.e., commercial) company. For example, according to EU policy discourse, public service broadcasting must now be legitimated as an 'exception' or even an 'exemption' to *normal* practice. Private ownership of the public interest is already well down the road towards being naturalized.

But the fundamental questions have not been explicitly addressed: who should be allowed to exploit the electromagnetic spectrum resource, for what purposes and at what cost? Is this resource still held to be a public property? Since there isn't enough spectrum space for everyone to own a radio or television channel in every locality, what ought to be obligatory for any person or organization licensed for the privilege? Isn't it fair to call this a privilege since licenses convey comparative advantages to those having them? Perhaps everyone tuning in or turning on benefits from broadcasting, but is that precisely the same as to say that everyone benefits equally from the exploitation of the resource? What are the boundaries beyond which use should be legally accountable as abuse? Is the best idea only to have competition between channels operated on the basis of one approach, or instead to have that complemented by competition between organizations embracing different approaches (cf. Lowe, 1997)? Since broadcasting can be used in many ways for many reasons, which combinations promise the greatest potential for enhancing any comprehensive quality of life? Such questions are supremely relevant for media policy discussion and deliberation in the "age of access" (Rifkin, 2000).

Historically, media policy has made pointed distinctions between the kinds of obligations and correlated regulations that govern wired versus wireless communication. Telephone operators haven't controlled content while broadcasters have, so the rules have been different. Cable and satellite television companies have been allowed to transmit genre and scenes that were for-

bidden for terrestrial broadcasters because the former were contracted services while the later are free-to-air. In recent years such distinctions are increasingly blurred in media policy, especially evident for example in the U.S. Telecommunications Act of 1996 (for more, see the chapter by Stavitsky & Avery). It's as though the same broad blanket is presumed to cover all under the rubric of something we might call 'telecasting.' Still more recently, there has been discussion about 'auctioning spectrum space.' That formulation explicitly frames the resource as nothing more or less than a commodity per se, the worth of which would be determined exclusively by the highest bidder. It seems only a matter of time before 'the public airwaves' are owned as private property. No hunting or fishing. Do not trespass. Beware of dog.

These notions are legitimated by a presumptive 'thesis of abundance.' The Big Idea hinges on an argument that broadcasting is only one part of a bountiful new media environment. Because there are so many ways to deliver any type of content, the medium in itself is *only* a utility. Expansive consumer choice is loudly heralded and abundance is quite gratifying to contemplate. Although there is truth in that, it neatly but regrettably sidesteps the factual limitations of resource availability as well as the historic recognition that broadcasting is not a private right but a public privilege. Stated bluntly, broadcasting is not telephones, the Internet or a newspaper. It shares some roles in common, and can have similar functions in select areas, but it also has unique attributes.

As a medium, broadcasting facilitates the most rapid, broad and cost-efficient participation in anything unfolding moment by moment. As John Ellis, the British television theorist, concluded in his recent book (2000: 74-75), broadcasting creates a sense of contact with other members of the dispersed audience, a sense that others, anonymous though they may be, are *sharing* the same moment. Broadcast television is present both in the here and now of the individual viewer and of the world that surrounds them.

Broadcasting is also a forum of common ground linking social relations and flattening social hierarchy, as mentioned earlier. It is in fact necessary to many of the practices that by now characterize large-scale democratic systems and discursive process in societies with millions of citizens and increasingly multicultural complexions. There is nothing inherently wrong with harnessing the resource to also support market processes, practices and growth. But acknowledging that doesn't obviate anything in this discussion.

Scannell (1989) has emphasized the role of broadcasting in the constitution of modern democracy as "a shared public life". Broadcasting contributed to new, interactive relationships between public and private life that helped, as he argues, to normalize the former and socialize the latter. In that light, broadcasting can be construed as a right:

In my view equal access for all to a wide and varied range of common informational, entertainment and cultural services, carried on channels that can be received throughout the country, should be thought as an important *citizenship right* in mass democratic societies. It is a crucial means – perhaps the only means at present – whereby common knowledges and pleasures in a shared public life are maintained as social good for the whole population (ibid.; italics by TH & GL).

In light of that, one wonders why or how broadcasting would be less important for the future constitution of democracy? (The chapter by McNair & Hibberd is relevant to this discussion)

Another unique attribute of broadcasting in Scannell's analysis (ibid.) of modern democracy that seems ironic at first blush is the opportunity for participation without involvement (see also McQuail, 1997, who characterizes television as "uninvolving"). Scannell compares live audiences (i.e. on-site participants) of events with television viewers and radio listeners. Whereas a live audience is 'committed' to the event, viewers and listeners can take a non-committal stance. Although viewers and listeners witness the same event, they in fact share it from a critical distance. This notion of 'critical distance', so often celebrated in scholarship, is in fact *institutionalized* in broadcasting via codes like neutrality and balance, and also in essential values like diversity and pluralism.

But Scannell's notion of participation without involvement contrasts rather sharply with one characteristic critique of broadcasting associated with the 'community media' movement beginning in the 1970s, and which continues to be quite important today (see the chapters by Himmelstein & Aslama, and also by Carpentier et al). Throughout the period one thread of relevant discussion seeks to replace institutionalized broadcasting with non-institutionalized narrowcasting to achieve more participatory forms of radio and television. Public broadcasters have been sometimes harshly criticized for being authoritarian and paternalistic (and in Europe also nationalist), while private broadcasters have been castigated for the commercial imperatives that defend barriers against 'non-commercial' involvement.

Ironically, although the various models of citizens' radio and television have remained marginal in practice, characteristic themes keyed to the desirability of narrowcasting have become a norm in today's increasingly deregulated and commercialized media environment. Deregulation discourse about audiences first shifted emphasis from 'mass to segments' and contemporary rhetoric about digitization now takes that a step further in shifting the focus from 'segments to individuals.' This begs the question: what would segmented society and individualized culture need more than shared experiences via channels for interaction to explore their respective but also joint interests? Although some will undoubtedly answer "something other than broadcasting", economies of scale at many levels are clearly involved here (see Turpeinen's chapter).

Europe and America: Comparative cultural contexts

Any discussion about values and judgement inherently signals consideration of complexities inherent in cultural phenomena. As the most complex but fundamental aspect we will treat in brief, we select variables considered most important for the book's contents. With that in mind, we focus on some comparative dynamics in order to highlight the public service approach to broadcasting in view of the book's intended emphasis on new articulations of the remit.

Much of the substance in the various chapters that follow is keyed to American influences, even when an author isn't especially focused on that (2). The United States is the singular Superpower today. The qualities and ingredients entailed in being 'super,' and also whether that inherently means 'superior' as well, are of shared concern. The preponderance of American influence on, in and via modern media is remarkable, and that has detectable heft and hue in many of the contributions (for a global view see the chapter by Raboy; for a view closer to home, see Jackson & Vipond). Although American influence is fortunately benign for the most part, it is important to be clear: the cultural values that ground social theory defining 'the American experiment' are distinctive and often at odds with preferred theory and cherished values grounding life in other places (cf. Kissinger, 2002). That is increasingly understood in comparative assessments of social and cultural dynamics, but worrisomely less so when assessing media policy and economic trends.

The 'Old World' of established heritage and identity is embracing 'a European experiment' that is both alternative to and correlated with its American counterpart (cf. Schlesinger, 1993; Pinder, 1998). As European society grew past its post-War reconstruction trauma, America was a booming business. The long reach and deep pockets of American enterprise, combined with the sincere faith of its citizens in the so-called American Dream, were increasingly influential throughout the period (Hobsbawm, 1995). The Americans enjoyed particular advantages that help account for this.

America didn't have to rebuild a country devastated by war. Although Americans paid a heavy price in loss of life and economic expenditure to win the war, afterwards the US infrastructure was not only still intact – it was factually bigger, stronger and more productive than before (Landes, 1998). America had become a global presence that could start fresh, so to say, by building on something even stronger than before. Of course America invested large sums in helping to rebuild quite a lot elsewhere, but it wasn't simple charity to do so. The United States certainly profited from those investments, as the later decades of the 20th Century amply demonstrate. The Cold War further fueled the rise of American global influence, and ultimately her prestige given the collapse of the Soviet Union (cf. Volkogonov, 1998). There is a lot that is good in all of that, and indeed so much that is infinitely preferable to the likely alternatives had America and her European allies lost either war.

In global affairs, contemporary American influence is ubiquitous and pervasive. The weight she carries in military, industrial and political affairs is frequently overwhelming and always considerable. Less often highlighted but potentially of even greater significance is the increasingly robust 'ideological' influence America enjoys today (cf. Dorfman, 1983; Walker, 2001), if that can be fairly construed as meaning a particular system of thought proscribed by a characteristic construct of normative values. When reviewing founding documents such as the *Declaration of Independence*, the *U.S. Constitution* and the *Bill of Rights*, for example, there is such striking emphasis on the supreme value of the individual and the sanctity of the private sphere. The American social system is partly premised on the idea that government can't be trusted and one really ought to avoid it to the greatest possible extent.

Fundamental American values keenly focus on the primacy of privacy keyed to an ideology of individualism. From its early history as an independent nation, the foundation principles defining social values and ideas about government represent a specifically American view and experience (cf. Hibbert, 1990). That view is certainly reflected in the frequently exuberant and often sacred flavor of self-congratulatory satisfaction attributed to 'the American way.' Both for good and ill, America is a wealthy society because it is devoted to wealth creation. The same system of thought that legitimates America's strengths simultaneously accounts for unenviable weaknesses.

This overview provides a useful framework for understanding that Americans do broadcasting for reasons and in ways that satisfy their underpinning system of beliefs and values that continually cultivate American culture (cf. Barnouw, 1975). Despite recurrent concerns and critiques (McChesney, 1990; McCourt, 1999), there's no denying that broadcasting is good business. The Americans have done the best job of figuring out why and how. American producers have learned how to make shows that people want to watch because if they don't watch, or if not enough of the right kind of people watch, one can't sell enough advertising or sell any of it at a dear enough price. So content doesn't have to be great art or deeply provocative or even especially precise. It must be something to which enough people will watch or listen to comprise a market that advertisers want to 'target.' Don't worry; be happy. It's just TV. It's only radio. And, anyway, how many people actually go to an art gallery every week, or buy and read deeply provocative books, or check one news source against other sources to determine the accuracy of a story?

This is what the fight for a different theory of broadcasting is up against. It's far from certain this is a winnable battle, and that would be a pity because there's little in the American approach today even hinting at a mission. On the contrary, since the early 1980s there has been cumulative deterioration in standards and principles that would highlight any recognition that private privileges obligate social responsibilities. That view is by now quite alternative in the US and far more characteristic at present of the 'hu-

manistic traditions' inscribing European social theories. But the ideological influences discussed earlier highlight why such are evidently under siege in Europe, too. Although the Americans are frequently blamed, in point of fact Americans aren't making laws in Europe. Influencing, yes, but that isn't the same thing, is it?

European governments are making choices between alternative approaches, judging normative matters by varying and often contending points of view, while slowly making progress towards a constitutionally federal Union. Moving that process forward has largely been operationalized via economic trade and commercial relations (Urwin, 1993). That is one bright thread in pan-European treaty obligations beginning with the 1957 Treaty of Rome down to the present day (Burgess, 2000). To paraphrase a familiar quote from an early 20th Century American President, Mr. Calvin Coolidge, "the business of Europe has become business."

Contextual dynamics and the public service remit

In these murky waters of social transformation on so many levels and involving so many actors, it's difficult to swim against such a powerful tide in discussing alternative principles for broadcasting. But such principles are the animate ideals that cultivate an ethic which is known today as 'public service broadcasting'. Although varied because of contextual dependencies, in general that ethic includes the following ideals (c.f. Collins, 1998: 51-74; Tracey, 1998: 18-32):

- Broadcasting is for everyone
- Broadcasting has mandated responsibilities for serving cultural and social minorities, not only markets or majorities, thereby guaranteeing pluralism and diversity
- Broadcasting is one essential tool supporting contemporary democratic practice
- Equal opportunity to know more and understand better is a civic right and social necessity that broadcasting must help facilitate
- Broadcasting is owned by everyone who pays the same tax, the payment of which entitles one to receive the same benefit as any other taxpayer
- Broadcasting must nourish culture because it is a living record and active embodiment of human understanding
- Broadcasting is vital for broad content provision of information, entertainment and education

- Broadcasting is an essential platform for social sharing, nurturing identities and supporting the construction of communities

It's relevant to observe that the motivation and correlated objectives for broadcasting practice have content implications. Commercial media operators are fond of saying they 'give people what they want' instead of presuming they know what people need. More precisely if less laudatory, they offer whatever consumers are willing to purchase and discontinue any offer that doesn't earn profit. And that's fine as far as it goes. The problem is that it doesn't go far enough because broadcasting is about much more than programs.

Although much is made of competition as an inherent commercial good, the biggest profits and highest security are only realized when a business has a monopoly. Although the deregulation mantra always promises greater competition, in application it usually results in fewer competitors (Horowitz, 1989). The historical record is remarkably consistent. Deregulation encourages consolidation and, rather often, eventually results in oligopoly. A handful of giant and increasingly global, multinational corporations eventually control the market, which is certainly happening in media industries (Miller, 2002).

The *mission* for the public service approach to broadcasting is premised on principled understandings that have nothing to do with private ownership and, until recently, also nothing to do with financial gain. The later is changing because policy makers enamoured with neo-liberal ideology often encourage and even require such. Public broadcasting companies are typically underfunded today, and financial problems are further compounded by mandates for new media and other infrastructure development that are costly and uncertain. The earlier example of Finnish DTT illustrates rather too well.

The motivations reflected in the ethic that underpins public service broadcasting – the motivations that frame mission objectives – are therefore increasingly conflicted with other motivations framing operational intentions (cf. Engelman, 1996; the chapter by Holtz-Bacha is also pertinent to this discussion). In this period of hybrids and amalgamation, public institutions are expected to organize and even operate as private companies while private companies are released from social obligations to serve the public interest. Broadcasting is not the only thing at stake here – at stake are the much broader culture values and social theories that define society relations. Even if one isn't especially interested in broadcasting per se, broadcasting is nonetheless extremely relevant as a nexus of broader trends and policy elaboration today.

Re-visionary interpretations of the public enterprise

The essential idea behind Re-visionary Interpretations of the Public Enterprise [RIPE] is a recognition that conceptual justification (i.e. legitimacy) for

public service broadcasting no longer resonates. The mission and mandate for PSB was framed in a social context that no longer exists (c.f. Tracey, 1998). In the period between 1935 and 1965, social relations and society conditions legitimated an approach to broadcasting that remains the only robust alternative to the industrial, commercial model that dominates in North America and is increasingly influential nearly everywhere. The case remains to be made as to whether that alternative can weather the storm of legislative and environmental changes that so fundamentally challenge its historic legitimacy, and also whether the approach can even be launched in countries lacking this electronic media heritage (consider the chapter by Vartanova & Zassoursky). Is our faith in public service broadcasting justified? Is this really *worth* believing in?

Such can only be answered by considering two essential questions that ground the RIPE initiative. What is compellingly different about the public service approach that could convincingly justify its remit today, and if compelling and convincing then what contemporary ingredients could fruitfully reframe its conceptual and operational designs? There is breathing space to make the case after the Amsterdam Protocol (1997) and subsequent, related decisions taken by the European Commission and the Council of Europe. Much of that is variously treated in the chapters that follow. But this breathing space is arguably limited in scope and duration, and the outcome remains uncertain. The authors illustrate complexities that must exercise media scholars and public broadcasters choosing to accept the challenge.

It is crucial to observe, however, that neither community (media scholars or public broadcasters) is likely to achieve any confident resolution in the absence of the other. Both conceptual and institutional issues are at stake. Although theory can (and actually must) divorce the two in the pursuit of intellectual enrichment, in practice it has long been clear that conceptual identity and institutional arrangement are interdependent. Public service broadcasting is a conceptual frame that informs and steers a correlated practice, and simultaneously a practical system of organizational operation with theoretical implications (for analysis and discussion about such interdependencies, see the chapter case offered by Bardoel & Brants).

These communities often diverge in the values and stakes that define their respective involvement. Although both cherish a tradition of autonomy, for academicians such is largely a matter of intellectual independence while for practitioners the issues are more often about editorial independence. Most academicians are able to view the institution from the outside-in while most practitioners must view it from the inside-out. For the former, PSB is mainly a subject for research and discourse to enrich social and media theory, while for the latter it is mainly an object in application that defines one's daily work and professional identity. There are also specialized professional languages involved, so quite often each community finds discourse in the other at least difficult to decipher, if not impenetrable. Moreover, ideal outcomes and operational limitations frequently diverge. While scholars advance proposi-

tions for expanding audience involvement in program making and even organization decision making, for example, practitioners have found this difficult to accommodate in practice, and, even when pursued with patient determination, too often a regrettably unfruitful endeavor.

And yet we dare to trust that the contents of this book will demonstrate that there is much to be learned and accomplished in working collaboratively – and arguably much that can only be achieved by doing so. Despite acknowledged difficulties and occasional frustrations, the RIPE project is a good will effort on the part of both communities to open doors for deliberation in collaboration. There is much to be done and in this project to date we've only taken the first tentative steps. But so far at least, those steps have taken us somewhere worth going – and worth going further. There is at best a shared conviction that the journey matters to a quality of public life interdependent with social processes that continue to respect and also defend values that nourish media pluralism, cultural diversity, political democracy and social tolerance. There are things that matter more than material matters, and material benefits that can only be realized in full when non-material conditions are conducive.

Thus, the RIPE project also represents convergence – but in areas that have little or nothing to do with technology or industrial dynamics. This collaboration is predicated on shared interests in the public quality of the public interest.

Organization of the text

This book is divided into three sections. It begins with the large-scale society and policy framework, moving next to the institutional framework and organizational practices, and concludes with consideration of reception and application. Thus, *Section One* is about society context, policy discourse and governing concepts, considering PSB from the outside-in. *Section Two* is about mission and mandate, adaptation and change, and looking from the inside-out. *Section Three* is about community involvement, new media, application dynamics, and the borders rather than the sides. Each of the three sections begins with the most general chapter first and ends with the chapter we consider most specific.

The authors of the chapters that follow represent the Trans-Atlantic nature of the RIPE initiative. Most contributions are developed from scholarly papers earlier presented in the *RIPE@2002* conference, and then developed more fully and in various directions for the book. Hujanen and Lowe also invited a few contributions from RIPE conference participants that did not initially present papers in order to fill gaps or to enrich relevant areas of importance to the topic and objectives for this book.

Notes

1. The reader can review all of the materials from the RIPE@2002 conference, including the papers, abstracts, participant list and a transcription of the concluding session, at the following web site address for Re-visionary Interpretations of the Public Enterprise: www.yle.fi/keto/ripe
2. The discussion relates to concerns about the Americanization of European broadcasting (c.f. Sepstrup, 1989; Wieten et al., 2000: x-xi, and then especially also Hujanen's contribution to that volume).

References

- Alm, A. and G.F. Lowe (2001) Managing Transformation in the Public Polymedia Enterprise: Amalgamation and Synergy in Finnish Public Broadcasting. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 45(3), pp. 367-390.
- Ang, I. (1991) *Desparately Seeking the Audience*. New York: Routledge.
- Ang, I. (1996) *Living Room Wars: Rethinking Media Audiences for a Postmodern World*. New York: Routledge.
- Barnouw, E. (1975) *Tube of Plenty: The Evolution of American Television*. NY: Oxford University Press.
- Briggs, A. and P. Burke (2002) *A Social History of the Media: From Gutenberg to the Internet*. Padstow, UK: Polity.
- Carey, J. and J.J. Quirk (1989) The Mythos of Electronic Revolution. In *Communication as Culture*, J. Carey (ed.). London: Unwin Hyman Ltd.
- Collins, R. (1998) *From Satellite to Single Market: New Communication Technology and European Public Service Television*. London: Routledge.
- Dorfman, A. (1983). *The Empire's Old Clothes*. NY: Pantheon Books.
- Dutton, W.H. [ed. with the assistance of M. Peltu] (1996) *Information and Communication Technologies: Visions and Realities*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Ellis, J. (2000) *Seeing Things: Television in the Age of Uncertainty*. London: I.B. Tauris Publishers.
- Engelman, R. (1996) *Public Radio and Television in America: A Political History*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.
- Hibbert, C. (1990) *Redcoats and Rebels: The War for America 1770-1781*. London: Penguin Books.
- Hobsbawm, E. (1995) *Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century 1914 – 1991*. London: Abacus.
- Horwitz, R.B. (1989) *The Irony of Regulatory Reform: The Deregulation of American Telecommunications*. NY: Oxford University Press.
- Hujanen, T. (2000) Programming and Channel Competition in European Television. In *Television across Europe*, ed. by J. Wieten et al., pp. 65-83. London: SAGE.
- Kissinger, H. (2002) *Does America need a Foreign Policy? Toward a Diplomacy for the 21st Century*. London: The Free Press
- Landes, D. (1998) *The Wealth and Poverty of Nations*. London: Abacus.
- Lewis, T. (1991) *Empire of the Air: The Men who Made Radio*. NY: Harper Collins Publishers, Inc.
- Lindlof, T. R. (1988) Media Audiences as Interpretative Communities, *Communication year-book*, 11, pp.81-107.
- Lowe, G.F. (1997) Broadcasting in Eastern Europe: Public or Private? *Diffusion*, Autumn, pp.54-58.
- Lowe, G.F. and A. Alm (1997) Public Service Broadcasting as Cultural Industry: Value Transformation in the Finnish Market-place. *European Journal of Communication*, 12(2), pp. 169-191.

- Lowe, G.F. (2000) A Discourse of Legitimacy: Critiquing the Cultural Agenda in Finnish Public Broadcasting. *Nordicom Review*, 21(1), pp.13-24.
- McChesney, R. (1990) The Battle for the U.S. Airwaves, 1928-1935. *Journal of Communication*, 40(4), pp.29-57.
- McCourt, T. (1999) *Conflicting Communication Interests in America: The Case of National Public Radio*. London: Praeger.
- McQuail, D. (1997) After Fire – Television: The Past Half Century in Broadcasting, Its Impact on our Civilization. *Studies of Broadcasting*, 33, pp. 7-36.
- Miller, M.C. (2002). What's Wrong With this Picture? *The Nation*, Jan.7.
- Morley, D. (1992). *Television, Audiences & Cultural Studies*. London: Routledge.
- Murdock, G. (2000). Digital Futures: European Television in the Age of Convergence. In J. Wieten et al. (ed.) *Television across Europe*. London: SAGE, pp. 35-57.
- O'Sullivan, T., J. Hartley, D. Saunders and J. Fiske (1987). *Key Concepts in Communication*. New York: Methuen.
- Pinder, J. (1998) *The Building of European Union*. NY: Oxford University Press.
- Rifkin, J. (2000) *The Age of Access: How the Shift from Ownership to Access Is Transforming Modern Life*. NY: Penguin Books.
- Scannell, P. (1989) Public Service Broadcasting and Modern Public Life. *Media, Culture and Society*, 11(2), pp. 135-166.
- Scannell, P. (1996) *Radio, Television and Modern Life*. Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers Ltd.
- Schlesinger, P. (1993) Wishful Thinking: Cultural Politics, Media and Collective Identities in Europe. *Journal of Communication*, 43(2), pp.6-16.
- Schulz, W. (2000) Television Audiences. In: J. Wieten et al. (ed.) *Television across Europe*. London: SAGE, pp.113-134.
- Sepstrup, B. (1989) Implications of Current Developments in West European Broadcasting. *Media, Culture & Society*, 11(1), pp. 29-54.
- Stavitsky, A.G. (1995) 'Guys in Suits with Charts': Audience Research in U.S. Public Radio. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 39(2), pp. 177-189.
- Tracey, M. (1998) *The Decline and Fall of Public Service Broadcasting*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Van Cuilenburg, J. and D. McQuail (1998) Media Policy Paradigm Shifts: In search of a New Communications Policy Paradigm. In R.G. Picard (ed.) *Evolving Media Markets: Effects of Economy and Policy Changes*. Turku, Finland: Turku School of Economics and Business Administration. The Economic Research Foundation for Mass Communication.
- Volkogonov, D. (1998) *The Rise and Fall of the Soviet Empire*. London: HarperCollins Publishers, Ltd.
- Walker, M. (2001) *Makers of the American Century*. London: Vintage.
- Wieten, J.G. Murdock and P. Dahlgren (2000) *Television across Europe: A Comparative Introduction*. London: SAGE.

