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find the CD form reader-friendly, but it is educational both for book producers and book readers to experiment with real examples.

The book does have some of the limitations that attach to all such handbooks (and there are several others that have some similarities of aim and structure). The national cases studies are somewhat uneven in format, focus and amount of detail. For instance, more space is allocated jointly to Belgium, Luxembourg and the Netherlands than to France, Germany and Italy combined. The omission of a number of European countries may be inevitable, but it can also be irritating. On the whole, the inclusion of non-European examples is welcome, but the opportunity to draw lessons from comparisons, as noted above, is not fully made use of.

Despite reservations on some points, this book does generally live up to its promise to provide a valuable handbook to students and teachers in the field of media regulation and it does have features that other handbooks lack. There is a great deal of information and authoritative comment, and the bibliographic sections are of great value. In earlier remarks there is a suggestion that a different kind of book is embedded somewhere in this material – a book about European broadcasting, with its typical histories, shared problems, issues and means of dealing with them, including a strong social and cultural framework, which deserves more recognition and possibly even celebration. Many of the strengths of European broadcasting are recorded in the facts and figures, which demonstrate the viability of public broadcasting, the innovatory and diverse character of many private enterprises, the continuity of national cultural traditions, the rather high production capacity and self-sufficiency where it arguably matters most – in relation to news, information and education. Although much is presented as problematic in these pages, there is also much indication of a successful ‘model’ in action, and support for the view that regulation is by no means inconsistent with freedom in a complex information society and may even be a necessary condition of freedom.

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Louw, P. E. (2001). *The media and cultural production*. London: Sage. ISBN 0-7619-6583-1 (pp. 229).

This book by the Australian senior lecturer in communications, Eric Louw, witnesses a revival of the once dominant issues of media pro-

duction within critical media and communication studies. Some twenty years after the dismissal of the 'encoding' dimension, which included notions such as communicators and the media, media ownership and 'ideology', and the subsequent rise of the notion of the 'active reader' or 'decoder', it is now time for the latter to be dismissed as outdated. The author attempts to forge a synthesis between these two dimensions of the communication process and to overcome inherent weaknesses of both.

To introduce an understanding of the communication process as a whole, while focused on the media and media professionals, the book re-activates a number of media production themes, the "objective of this book being to produce an undergraduate text which brings together in one volume a wide range of communication studies on media production. Further, the book aims to introduce undergraduates to the relationship between cultural production and power – to explore how the socially powerful attempt to use the media to maintain their positions of dominance over others" (viii). The question of the powerful media is raised at a macro level of analysis, from the vantage point of the capacity of the media to 'manipulate' consumers, and moreover of the enmeshment of media organizations and media professionals within wider struggles for social power. The author sees media as "possessing the potential to influence" not in a direct way but in a rather diffuse way, drawing upon the logic of agenda setting, in which the media are not so much successful in telling people what to think, but rather in telling them what to think about. Media may limit what we perceive, but still allows for the 'active audience', or the notion of active decoders.

The book consists of ten chapters. The first five chapters introduce classical political economy themes and apply these to the development of the media. Concepts are explained and illustrated with examples from all over the world. This first half of the book, which is easy on the reader, can also be considered a very useful and concise historical account. The last five chapters provide an analysis of the contemporary situation of the developing stage of global network capitalism, or the New World Order, as facilitated by information technologies. Because we are currently witnessing an emergent global mediated structure, which is essentially and profoundly an Anglo-dominated system, the book focuses on Anglo-meaning-making processes and developments.

The first chapter, *The struggle for power and the struggle for meaning*, presents the basic ideas of the book in a nutshell. It introduces the core concept of 'meaning-making' as a human capacity and as an activity that nowadays takes place in specialized institutions; i. e., the media. The author expresses his intention of complementing the contextual analysis of the political economy approach with the cultural studies approach in terms of the notion of deconstructing meaning (which is in my view a

rather limited vision of cultural studies). In a joint application of these two, power is perceived as a crucial dimension, a notion that is elaborated on in the first chapter, together with the concepts ideology and hegemony. The media, sites of institutionalized meaning production, are seen in a historical perspective that encompasses the ideas of the Frankfurt School on the culture industry, the re-organizing post-Fordist logic of niche medias in the 90's, and notions of Gramsci and Foucault on the struggle for closure of public discourse and debate, including the ambivalent position of intellectuals.

The second chapter, *Sites for making meaning I: The culture industry* discusses the machineries of the meaning-making process, by expanding on the vision of the Frankfurt School, and applying this to media ownership and media control in several countries. The following two chapters also focus on sites of making meaning. Chapter three, *Sites for making meaning II: The regulatory framework*, discusses how problems, resulting from communications with mass populations have been countered by the ruling elite. Regulatory models, deregulation, re-regulation and new spaces and opportunities of the global networking elite are presented using several examples. The sequel is called: *Sites for meaning making III: Commercialization and the 'death of the public sphere'*. This chapter continues the analysis of the changes within the cultural industry and focuses on the changing media content. The commercialization of the cultural sphere, partly driven by the rise of new right, grew to dominate the 1980's and 1990's and encounters an opponent in the notion of the public sphere. Thus, the question addressed in this chapter is: what is the potential of this notion in the era of global information capitalism?

Chapter five, *Striving for discursive closure: The struggle for hegemony*, opens with an exhortation to abandon all normative idealism of communicative 'openness' and dialogue (Habermas) and to focus on the "real communication flows" (105). This in order to explore the (true) nature of communication, which consists of a struggle for hegemony between those who wish to restrict and manipulate communication flows and those who resist these closures. Both are inevitable outcomes of humans organizing themselves, since communication is embedded within power relations. Media are the core institution where the struggle over power takes place between ruling (alliances of) elites; i. e., their professional communicators as spin doctors, PR people and communication advisers. By the end of this chapter, these professions for ever have lost their innocence.

Chapter six, *Moving to an informational economy: The new rules of the power game in global network capitalism* discusses the characteristics of the emerging global informational economy. Network capitalism poses a number of questions that are tentatively answered. In this chapter the

historical analysis ends in an analysis of the potential meaning of what we are witnessing today.

Chapters 8, 9 and 10 are called *Circulating meaning I, II and III*. These are short chapters on journalistic practices on “making news”, “the public relations-izing of war” and “making sense of distant places”. These chapters seem to have been written independently of each other, and could well be read separately. They all concern consequences of the New World Order for journalism, and intend to illustrate concepts and processes described in former chapters. How interesting and compelling they may be, they contain several repetitions and overlapping phrases. For didactical reasons this may be useful, but it underlines that, at a textual level, the last part is not very well integrated with the rest of the book.

The last chapter, *The limits of power: Resisting dominant meanings* is a ten page attempt to recapture the cultural studies perspective. Just as the reader reaches the conclusion that there is no hope left, after reading 200 pages of how the mechanisms of power and control have ensnared practically everyone, media professionals as well as the public, without any other outlook than to be compromised in inevitable complicity, the author suddenly remembers that struggles, so omnipresent in the book, are fought by people that have opportunities and goals of their own and that active decoding is possible after all. In other words, the author did not succeed very well in integrating the cultural studies approach. To my knowledge the encoding/decoding model of Hall was never intended to be separated into two components, so integration is nothing new. In the book encoding is stressed and overtones of conspiracy theories of the ‘old’ political economy can still be heard, as seen in wording and phrasing such as references to the ‘lazy’ journalists that make news reports from their comfortable hotel room in far away places that they are unable to understand (200), or the professional communicators who are “complicit in making the news” (167). However unconscious these processes may be, on the whole the book leaves a rather gloomy impression of the contemporary situation and the intentions of media professionals. This is partly due to the macro level of analysis, which contains by definition a distant and all-encompassing perspective. Although the book does not present a very encouraging picture of the future occupations of its (student) readers, it might be important for them to acknowledge the ratio behind the book and the attempts it makes to understand the mediated ‘meaning-environment’. Louw states that reflection on this situation and an awareness of the nature and origin of meanings can prevent manipulation by the media. So, here Louw acknowledges the potential of idealism for the practice of everyday life. The fact that he intends to show the possibilities for journalists for autonomy in Chapter 7 could

mean that the author is not as pessimistic as he seems, but is taken away by his own analysis and 'forgets' to highlight the other side of the story.

Notwithstanding some weaknesses I find this book useful. A contextual analysis of mediated communication in historical perspective undoubtedly has merits for understanding contemporary mediated communication. The themes in the book, the structure and the compelling, actual and well informed examples are extremely valuable in sharpening the critical and intellectual abilities of both students and instructors. Although the synthesis of cultural studies and political economy may not have been very successful, the reader is most certainly sensitized to the intricacies of global network capitalism.

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Atton, C. (2001). *Alternative Media*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. ISBN 0-7619-6770-2 ISBN 0-7619-6771-0 (pbk) (pp.172).

The significance of alternative media as a tool for social, cultural and political empowerment has received much attention of late. Two early beacons of research in this area, John Downing's *Radical Media*, and Nicholas Jankowski and Ole Prehn's *The People's Voice* (renamed *Community Media in the Information Age*) have recently been updated and revised. New books on the subject include Clemencia Rodriguez's *Fissures in the Mediascape*, Keyan Tomaselli's *The Alternative Press in South Africa*, and DeeDee Halleck's *Hand-held Visions*. In addition, ICA held a pre-conference on alternative media in 2001, and another is slated for IAMCR in 2002. This flurry of activity around alternative media suggests that the subject is gaining steam as a sub-field of media studies. It has also resulted in increased scholarly attention to how non-professional groups produce, distribute and use the media.

Chris Atton's *Alternative Media* is another contribution to this field. Atton's work is notable for a definition of alternative media that brings media genres not usually recognized as alternative into the purview of scholars working in the field. Typically, theorists of alternative media pinpoint content as a central feature of the research area. For Atton, the key feature defining alternative media is its commitment to modes of production outside of the professional, institutional and well-capitalized production practices of dominant media makers. By privileging the context of production over its content, Atton is able to detect dimensions of radicalism in media that lack an overt political content, including zines, small creative presses, and personal web pages. He argues that