

global markets and global stories taking place in Canadian cities that are dressed up like American cities, reflects the changing market conditions and processes of convergence and deregulation. Simon Cottle ends the list of production contexts by documenting the changing 'production ecology' of natural history programs; the old-fashioned biology lesson approach made way for the pursuit of strong emotional storylines and more interaction with people.

Although broad in scope and diverse in its selection of production settings – the book gives ample evidence of both the social/cultural and economic dimensions of the public sphere – the political dimension of the public sphere tends to be brushed under the carpet. This is unfortunate since a different choice in production settings, e. g., by choosing a crisis context from which to document the changing processes and patterns of journalistic practices, would have remedied this shortcoming. Moreover, some insight into the history of the institutionalization of media organization and production (i. e., newspaper, telex, radio, television, Internet) would have added a very useful chapter to a relatively short book. Instead of the now perhaps too synchronic patchwork of very insightful accounts of media organization and production settings, the book would benefit from a more diachronic perspective, offering more tools to understand the present.

In all, the book addresses a wide range of media organisations and the 'production ecology' of different media genres. The well-written chapters of this book are undoubtedly suited for pedagogical purposes. The cutting-edge style in which current arguments and recent research findings are presented makes this book a useful – if not the only, because of its lack of a more historical perspective – textbook for courses dealing with contemporary issues of media policy, the media as social institutions in complex interplay with government, market and civil society.

Department of Communication
University of Nijmegen

Leen d'Haenens

Cottle, S. (Ed.) (2003). *News, public relations, and power*. London: Sage. ISBN 0 7619 7495 4 (187 pp.)

We live in promotional times. This observation is the starting point of *News, Public Relations and Power*. Edited by Simon Cottle, this volume in Sage's *Media in Focus* series – which partially consists of rewritten teaching material – aims at providing students and lecturers with a com-

pact, but balanced account of public relations. Its quality lies not in its focus on details, but in the well-balanced presentation of arguments. As such, it delivers.

In nine chapters, the volume summarizes the major theories and findings on this ever-expanding sector of society where information is 'created' for specific organizational purposes. Here, the contributions mainly focus on public relations of the state, and less on those of commercial actors. This subject is popular both in science and in the public debate. In the latter, the 'mediatized society' (a more correct term than the often used 'information society') and specifically its media-regulated politics seem to be regarded as primarily negative entities in the modern liberal democracies.

The empirical sections of this book provide some basic illustrations of the development of public relations in the UK. The number of information officers employed in UK government departments has increased by more than 150 percent in most departments in the last twenty years, and corporate sector public relations has risen by a factor of 31. The political and business elite have virtually unlimited resources for access to the media at their disposal, in terms of funding and human resources. As a consequence, it is often stated, these institutions have equally unlimited power to affect public opinion. Concerns about this potential for influence and questions about whether the journalistic profession can continue to function as a 'fourth estate' in such a climate go to the heart of our conceptions of how a liberal democracy should function. They are certainly legitimate, but it is easy to succumb to the lure of doomsday thinking. Critical scholars in the past have all too often confined themselves to conspiracy theories in which the official sources all cooperate to discredit and marginalize the opposition. The authors of this volume however succeed in avoiding this trap, instead emphasizing a field in which a relatively diverse range of actors compete in continually shifting balances of power. The focus is on the battle between journalists and institutions, which is fought over two issues: access to the media, and the power to define the way things really are.

This more balanced view is apparent in the multi-theoretical approach that is chosen to introduce the contributions. Cottle sketches three overlapping paradigms by which the field can be analyzed; a social paradigm, focusing on the actions of the various interest groups to secure access; a cultural paradigm, concerned with the representational nature of media portrayal; and a less well-defined communicative paradigm, examining how forms of 'communicative power' are performed. Each is presented as having its own merits, setting the scene for the rest of the contributions.

The most interesting parts of the book deal with the ways in which public relations officers and journalists negotiate, each to defend their own interests in bringing their version of 'information' to the public. This process involves different strategies of alternatively bullying and pampering in an unstable equilibrium, sometimes collapsing into sheer hostility. Social developments such as individualization and globalization, together with continuing commercialization of news production have presented journalists with new problems in dealing with an expanding group of public relations professionals. Desk-top journalism has driven newsmakers into the arms of 'official sources' high in the 'hierarchy of credibility', thus risking to compromise their objectivity. 'Old fashioned' investigative journalism is both time and money consuming, making the journalist largely dependent on official sources. The sources in turn are dependent on the media for getting the message to the public.

A number of chapters provide first-hand accounts of the strategies applied by both sides to get what they want from this co-dependent relationship. 'Media handling' strategies of Downing Street 10, for instance, not only include leaking to the media to evaluate and anticipate public opinion on political issues, and dictating formerly independent information offices that four key messages (the government is a modernizing government, a government for all the people, which is delivering on its promises, with mainstream politics) are to be incorporated into every possible message. State officials also frequently privately and publicly harass journalists who fail to write favorably about the government. High salience events, such as the events of September 11, 2001, are seen as opportunities to bury news that could be perceived as negative for the state. In this particular case, we learn from one of the chapters, the order to release bad news under the cover of a cataclysm was given mere minutes after the attacks in the United States. In recent times, we have witnessed how reporters in the Iraqi-American conflict were so effectively embedded in the coalition army that they lost all ability to analyze what was going on. This resulted in 'live images from the front', that contained no information whatsoever. This volume explains that independent, critical war-time journalism, historically highly feared by the military as a power that can foster anti-war sentiments and destabilize morale, is a myth. Journalists willingly cooperate with the military up to the point of self-censorship, especially in times of war. However fictional, the myth of anti-war journalism has inspired military and political media officials to invent new strategies, such as the above-mentioned 'embedded journalism'. Reading some of these strategies makes it all too easy for the mind to wander to a certain fictional society which gets its information from a 'Ministry of Truth'.

Still, the relationship of media and their sources should be seen as collaborative rather than one-sided or conflict-based. Although official sources do often dominate the relationship, it is complex and shifting and the success of media strategies is achieved within parameters established by the media. Journalists, despite having to keep on more or less friendly terms with their sources do challenge powerful sources, for instance when they report on conflicts within institutions. Especially when sources do not meet journalist news values and ideals, as is most frequently the case in business reporting, their attempts to become the 'primary definer' – the source most capable of defining the meaning of an issue or event – often fail, occasionally resulting in loss of the status of credible source.

The one-sided power-relationship is also counter-balanced by the fact that non-governmental and non-corporate organizations, with only limited financial and social resources can in fact exert influence in this area. Grass-root activist organizations such as Greenpeace, which uses increasingly sophisticated strategies, do find ways of having their voice heard despite lacking routine access to the media.

Overall, the anecdotes with which many of the arguments are richly illustrated, provide a good overview of the field and interesting food for thought. Unfortunately, on occasion they remain merely that, anecdotes. Personal experiences of the author ("that reminds me of ..." one author writes) can certainly serve the purpose of keeping the material interesting for students, but the absence of empirical verification sometimes makes it hard to get a picture of how representative these stories really are.

Not all contributions are equally relevant or up to date, and consequently some statements and conclusions are less than shocking. A chapter on 'tabloidization' as a feature of television news as a 'text', for instance, fails to postulate concepts or data that have much 'news value'. This is illustrated by the fact that, save a few, all literature references in this chapter are from the 1970s and 1980s, resulting in the main conclusion that news items are 'shaped by storytelling techniques', hardly a novel idea. In contrast, although the empirical studies in this volume were all conducted in the UK, the literature used in the respective chapters covers a much larger part of the globe, thus adding to their relevance.

One hiatus in this book is that the insights into the complex power relations between media and sources, and the various strategies they employ, are not complemented by a clear view on how these relations influence the actual content of media messages. Do the developments in the journalistic and public relations professions lead to an increase in for instance pro-government reporting? Do they influence what kinds of

issues are reported and in what form or shape they are reported? Perhaps even more important are questions concerning the ultimate targets of all these efforts: the media consumers. To what extent are they aware of this battle for the public image, and its dangers? Does success in acquiring access to the media equal success in affecting public opinion, much less behavior? Although the focus of the book is on production factors, some hints as to the answers of these questions would have been welcome; now they are left to the imagination and it leaves the reader wondering if all the trouble everybody goes through is actually worth the effort.

In sum, *News, Public Relations and Power* sketches a domain of mass communication in which boundaries between 'serious' journalism and interest-driven propaganda are sometimes fuzzy, where a growing number of groups compete for access and meaning in an environment of continually changing power hierarchies in which the large institutions normally have the upper hand, but in which the little ones are not powerless. What the volume lacks in empirical material, it makes up for in terms of concise presentation and nuance in the various issues and viewpoints, and thus provides an excellent introduction into the field for communication students.

Department of Communication
University of Nijmegen

Gabi Schaap

Bonner, F. (2003). *Ordinary television. Analyzing popular TV*. London: Sage. ISBN 0-8039-7570-8 ISBN 0-8039-7571-6 (pbk) (240 pp.)

Ordinary Television offers a comprehensive view of what seems to be one of the most neglected areas of cultural analysis of non-fiction television, namely everyday television. It focuses not on news or current affairs, but on the 'ordinary', meaning generally disregarded programs such as game shows, lifestyle and reality programs, chat shows, breakfast, morning and late-night shows and advice programs. Besides these seemingly 'unimportant' programs, the book also considers more serious magazine programs looking at science or economics and 'crime-stopper' programs such as *Crimewatch UK*. The overall purpose of the book is to investigate what these programs contribute to the television mix, and to challenge their apparent dismissal. Although talk TV recently did receive much attention, the author wonders why so much of the television schedule is ignored by academics, critics and reviewers, when ratings show that audiences do watch. She suspects that the lightweight, ephemeral