

NEWSFORUM

Conference Report

On January 22, 1993, Carleton University hosted an all day seminar in Canadian Communication Policy at the School of Journalism and Communication. The seminar: *Publics, Markets and the State*, featured presentations from academia, the public and private sectors.

PANEL 1:

Revisiting Convergence: Information, Technology and Communication Services, included speakers: David Ellis of Friends of Canadian Broadcasting, Heather Menzies of Carleton University, and Michael Ferris of the CRTC. Ellis, referring to aspects of his latest book *Split Screen: Home Entertainment and the New Technologies*, stated that the convergence of broadcasting, computing, and television has meant the CRTC has been more concerned with orderly market place distribution of video and information services than regulating to serve public interest. Menzies suggested that one of the features of convergence in post-industrial society is the end of old mass culture. The new mass culture tends to be more defined in Canada by trade relations such as NAFTA which will have devastating effects on protecting Canadian content and cultural industries. Ferris focused on CRTC restructuring of the Canadian broadcasting system which has been influenced by structural changes such as U.S. direct broadcast satellites, digital video compression and extended basic cable tiers.

PANEL 2:

The New Broadcasting Environment: Audiences, Technologies, Issues included speakers Ivan Emke of Carleton University, Kenneth Katz of the Department of Justice, and Alexander Crawley of ACTRA. Emke raised a number of questions regarding who or what are audiences. If they are composed of many divergent groups rather than a unitary mass how do

regulatory authorities determine what policy is in the public interest? Katz explains that the Charter of Rights and Freedoms will increasingly force the CRTC to confront its own role and reexamine its historical attitude to broadcasting regulation with the development of niche market services such as single religion or politically oriented channels. Crawley noted that the creative artist has had to rapidly adapt because of changes in new technologies. As consumption for cultural products increases it should mean an increase for cultural creators but in Canada this will not happen without the state, cultural policies and cultural content. George Fierheller of Rogers Cantel Mobile Communication stated that from the communication industries' point of view the CRTC needs to open competition to serve the public needs and demands for communication services.

PANEL 3:

Telecommunications Market Services and the Public Interest, included speakers: David Colville of the CRTC, Joan McCalla of the Ontario Ministry of Culture and Communications, and Larry Shaw of Communications Canada (Department of Communication). Colville described the changed arena for CRTC telecommunication regulation as one which not only protects monopoly subscribers but that includes the benefits of competition which accrue to the public in a fair and equitable manner. McCalla focused on the current provincial telecommunication strategy initiative which addresses telecommunications as both an important sector of the provincial economy and as an enabling infrastructure for all aspects of life. Shaw provided an overview of a number of policy issues currently being addressed by the federal Department of Communications. Guiding policies for telecommunication s include keeping telecommunication local rates low, maintaining universality, and providing the most good for the most people through access to new services.

PANEL 4:

Does the Work Get Out? Reporting on Communications and Cultural Policy included speakers: Tony Atherton of *The Ottawa Citizen*, Val Ross of *The Globe and Mail*, and Alberto Manguel, a Toronto author and critic. Atherton explained how newspapers work against the reporting of cultural policy because reporters who cover this area often have other priorities. As a result, cultural policies are covered haphazardly, without context and sometimes fall through the cracks. Ross asks, in cultural policy reporting, what is the role of the reporter? And what, for example, is the public's interest in the public interest? Reporters have to be able to tell people why they should care, what is at stake and what the long term effects of a decision or a policy change might be. Complex policy issues involve telling a story in the context of a bigger picture. Manguel explained that book reviewing has become more of a token showcase in newspapers. The review is less of a focus on the book and tends to be more a profile of the author. Often, U.S. publishers and reviewers set the parameters of what a 'good' book review is. This means that reviews of Canadian books are defined in an American context and literature from Latin America often is seen as quaint local colour.

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