

Mosco, Vincent and Janet Wasko. **The Critical Communications Review. Volume II. Changing Patterns of Communications Control.** Norwood, New Jersey: Ablex, 1984. ISBN: 0-89391-153-4. 299 pages.

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As it shatters into dozens of schools and sects, 'Marxism' becomes an imprecise tag: more than half of the world's population is governed by some kind of Marxist sect. Of the major Western revisions of Marxism, Critical Theory is the best-known. Yet "Critical Theory" is hardly more precise; Kolakowski has described its foundations (in the Frankfurt School) as obscure and inconsistent.

Vincent Mosco's opening introduction to the first volume of **The Critical Communication Review** frankly admits that critical communication is "an elusive concept." Its goal, however, is closely connected to a Marxist intention: "research that advances the critique of the capitalist world system and promotes the 'critical state' that would transform it" (I, xv). As a political act critical communications research will cease with this transformation. Nor is this "review" a conventional journal: it has a book-size format, perhaps "series" would have conveyed its intentions better.

The first volume dealt with the working class and the media. This second volume claims to deal with the changing patterns of communications control. The contributors to its thirteen articles are all academics (the first volume included trade unionists) and represent a wider range of countries than the first volume. Janet Wasko provides a brief introduction to the papers, grouped under three headings: (1) global considerations, (2) Canada, U.S.A., and Latin America, and (3) Europe.

E. G. McAnany (University of Texas at Austin) who writes on Brazilian television has the best paper. After covering a wide literature on the debate over cultural dependency, McAnany, rejecting the "simple solution" of the MacBride Report, proposes a long-term solution based on individual case studies. His paper is reasoned, well-structured and uses only a minimum of neo-Marxist jargon. Noreene Janus (ILET, Mexico), a co-editor with McAnany of *Communication and Social Structure: Critical Studies in Mass Media Research* (1981), also writes a strong paper on global advertising and the new media. Janus argues that there is a perpetual confrontation between transnational advertising and local, Third World cultures. Up to eighty percent of television advertising in Latin America is for products of transnational firms. In turn, these same firms dominate the development of satellites, video

equipment and cable television. Without national policies the citizens of the Third World will be transformed into "Global Consumers" in the "Global Shopping Centre."

H. Frederick (Ohio State University) also gives us a well-documented article on the radio war between Cuba and the United States, and one looks forward to his forthcoming book from the Ablex stable. However, less sympathetic scholars may not be too assured of his description of Radio Havana Cuba: "though there are very few members of the Communist Party...the ideological credentials of its personnel are sterling" (p. 129).

Finally, a good paper by Patrice Flichy (Institut National de l'Audiovisuel, Paris) on media control in France comes closest to discussing the topic announced on the volume's cover. Although there are some rough spots in the translation (all translated papers need closer editorial attention), they do not detract from the theoretical importance of the state of control of media in France. The state has also taken a lead role in developing videotex, telematics and communication satellites, and the presence of a Socialist government has also meant a further move from market forces.

Flichy takes his inspiration from Dallas Smythe who with Herbert Schiller, Armand Mattelart and Raymond Williams are the leading gurus of critical communication. The article by Schiller (University of California at San Diego) although passionate is somewhat anecdotal, stitching together a one-sided presentation made up of selected quotations. Smythe (Simon Fraser University) writes a piece on nuclear war, a topic not obviously related to communications control. However, his personal confession of disillusionment with the Soviet Union is not without interest (p. 49). Mattelart and J-M Piemme provide **twenty-three guidelines for communication debate based on work for a Belgian ministry**. These, excellent points in themselves, are not all obviously "critical"; most would find wide acceptance in non-critical circles.

In summary, this volume suffers from various faults. First, the vagueness of what constitutes "critical" theory leads to no coherence of viewpoint among the articles. One passes from Orthodox Marxists, still quarrying Das Kapital for insights on the labour theory of value, to ex-Leninists, to pieces like Pendakur's on United States - Canada relations that seem no different from Royal Commissions, and even to Janus's article that apart from a few code words, is also "non-critical" (as defined by Mosco). Second, the articles are also not clearly connected to the theme of changing patterns of communications control. This variety of topics added to the non-cohering viewpoints does in the end leave the reader somewhat bewildered. The critics of critical theory may be left boxing shadows. The friends of critical theory may also be disappointed.