

warning that will stimulate debate and perhaps help identify dangers to individual rights before they are usurped by unchecked institutions and interests.

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Toward a global view

Medias et Société edited by Francis Balle. Paris: Editions Montchrestien, 1980. 750 pages.

This book strikes me as exceptional. To represent within 750 pages all that has been written over a half-century about media and communication, as well as its impact on society, is, to my mind, an amazing feat. The book is tightly organized, precise, and well documented. It is particularly impressive because this is not a compendium of articles from which one singles out individual articles. Rather, it is a book that is, at the same time, well documented and well constructed according to its theses and perspectives. Each author's selection appears with a summary of his ideas and is placed within the mainstream of thought.

I admire the way Francis Balle has extracted the chief characteristics of thought from each writer represented in a few lines of accurate interpretation. (As one of these writers, I was able to judge this for myself.) Moreover, he discusses all the great problems that we now face because of the media—the problems of both analytic approaches and their methodology, and of the evolution of technology and its accompanying but questionable freedom. He also deals with the challenges that have been presented to media systems and practices by the socialist systems, and the questioning of the role and influence of the media in the developed countries. The other aspect of this book is its synthesis of many details that guides the reader toward a

global view and deeper understanding of today's communication problems.

We are at the very heart of the two-way relationship between media and society. The concept of "flow," so often used nowadays by social scientists, takes its origin and importance from the advent of the media. It is significant that although communication has always been part of any society, it had almost never been considered as a flowing set of combined currents and information. Formerly we thought only in terms of institutions, structure, and organization. We considered media as objects; on the human level, we considered essence and ontology primary. The material multiplication of the means of communication gave rise to the articulation of communication, stressing its decisive importance in our society (and therefore in any society) and resulting in its interpretation as a social phenomenon of exchange, relation, and flow. Of course, this book does contain material on such topics as media organizations and institutions, and statutes and regulations, but it also takes into consideration the most difficult political question: are the regulations made to work for stable and permanent systems still appropriate to the new phenomena? The technical changes that make the media available to almost everyone (e.g., CBs, decreasing prices of setting up broadcasting systems) have also made the systems less stable. Thus the book leads us through its organization and interpretations, toward the current concerns with the uses of the media, the expectations and gratifications through social images.

The great virtue of these selections lies in the manner in which the questions are asked as they have been perceived and analyzed by various authors; it also lies in the manner in which their answers are presented—not as abstract theories but as part of this global process.

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