



**The World Political Forum
Round Table
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Information or Manipulation Society?

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Giulietto Chiesa, *Journalist, essayist*
Chairman

This round table was included in the World Political Forum because, in agreement with its Scientific Committee, we believe that the outcome of globalisation in our countries and communities, and the future of democracy appear closely intertwined with the possibility of promoting them through communication. Peace, war, and (self) awareness in the community are the issues underlying the present day landscape in developed societies. I believe major events and changes have taken place in this areas: the key role of media in opinion-shaping and control in mass societies, the lack of control on how they operate: all ingredients which weigh so much on public opinion.

I would like to make it clear that I am not interpreting nor stating whether one should or should not accept this situation, and I am even turning to our participants: I am not merely speaking about information, but also of communication, that is most of what does not fall into the remit of information, of our everyday perception, but which is 95% of television broadcasting and makes up most of the information included in newspapers and magazines, leisure, advertising, gossip, variety and sport. It is communication in a general sense, although I believe that even if it is not merely information it is just as important as it is. In fact, as time passes, I believe more and more that the ‘non-information’ part of communication, plays a key role in the cultural and spiritual life of so many people. As a consequence it has to be studied because of the influence it has on the behaviour of millions, in fact of billions people all over the world.

So, the main topic of this meeting is not information in the literal sense of the word but information as a form of communication. I believe you are more aware than I am that television has become a dominant feature for billions of people’s lives, covering tens and tens of hours each week: what does it broadcast, what do they say? How is communication built, what impact does it have on our children who lack the means to defend themselves and are not aware of the used language. In fact, no one is aware of the language of this kind of television communication.

My task is very simple: we have a number of questions to pose to these very expert colleagues, on what they think about the topics we chose to debate as World Political Forum. The discussion will be recorded, published and used as a spring board for possible future work. There will be no prevailing opinions, nor are we aware of what other people’s opinions are. This is a panel of speakers and not only of journalists: communication experts are present, such as the Georgian film director, Otar Iosseliani.

The idea is to highlight some key points. In the end we will produce materials to improve our knowledge and understanding. Opinions can then be left behind in an attempt to identify a number of firm points, for instance deciding whether this is one of the main issues of our time or merely a marginal point.

Let me just ask a few questions, each one not being neutral but biased: being the title of this conference “Information or manipulation society?”, are we informed or manipulated?

The second question is: do you believe the world media system, the one we all operate in, corresponds to the entertainment and information needs of the population? Does it answer the needs of a democratic society, the need to be adequately informed not in terms of gossip and details but in terms of general issues which touch upon all our lives?

The third question is: do you believe the current world, defined in global and local terms, is better or worse than the one we had 20 years ago? In other words, do you think there is a fourth power, monitoring the others while remaining distinct and separate, that is a power able to maintain criticism and be a social watchdog controlling the other three powers? Otherwise, said more bluntly, is there still a fourth power or have the media become part and parcel of the power circuits so that it is unable to control them in any way?

I mentioned the title of this conversation because it is controversial, as the debate itself is: manipulation implies in fact an active role of the communication manipulators: one can be aware of one's lies, and lie just the same. Manipulation also exists referring to those who have been concentrating the media in the hands of few over the past 20 years. Currently there are five or six large media moguls who have a virtual world monopoly of communication: can one inform and communicate or amuse without manipulating when one company owns a whole chain of means? If information and entertainment are seen as merchandise, as goods, is then the important the sale of the good itself? If an incorrect or inaccurate good is successfully sold, are we to accept bad goods?

I'll suggest another very important issue, although I realize we can not answer them all, but you can choose out of the many I am going to propose you: publicly owned information is often thought to be not good, suggesting that privately owned information is good. I don't know how we feel about it in Italy, but I would like to know what people from other countries feel about it. In an authoritarian society publicly owned information can not be good, but in a democratic society can it be good?

Lastly: pluralism in information and communication. I believe there is a basic principle and a fundamental right whereby a person is entitled to free, pluralistic and independent information, not controlled by powers. Is the right enforced in Italy and abroad? Is it like this more now than it was some times ago? What is the impact of public opinion awareness in the light of the questions I have just listed? Are we living in a large dream-factory where the world we see is not like the real world outside?

This debate has no conclusion and I am sure you will hear a number of very different opinions: we can consider this exchange of ideas as an introduction to the research which the Forum, I hope, will be carrying out in the near future.

Rudolph Chimelli, *Journalist, Suddeutsche Zeitung (Italy)*

The question suggested by Mr. Chiesa, whether the quality of today's reporting is the same as twenty years ago, requires, in my opinion, a negative answer.

Reporting has become much more bulky, much more massive in quantity, but its quality is probably not as high as it was. One of the main reasons seems to me that new technologies have introduced the concept of simultaneousness into the news: events can now be reported at the time in which they actually happen.

You all remember the beginning of the first Gulf war and the sensational CNN-broadcasts from Baghdad. For the first time in media history, war was reported on live with bombs exploding and tracer ammunition lighting up the sky on television screens all over the world. I remember an English colleague, an expert on Middle-Eastern affairs, saying afterwards that he had an almost physical perception of the fundamental change which was happening to our profession at that particular moment. Until then, the printed press had set the pace, and news reporting on television followed essentially the same pattern. From now on roles would be reversed. The electronic media create the public's image of what happened while press picks up the message and develops it.

The results of simultaneity are completely different from those of traditional reporting, in which journalists gather information, examine the facts, assess them thoroughly and try to present a balanced analysis. Since technical means have made events and their projection by media simultaneous, there is less room left for reflection. On the other hand, the scope for manipulation is increased, because the power to either grant or deny journalists access to information is largely in the hands of governments, or of political bodies or in the case of an armed conflict managed by military forces. It is they who decide what cameras and reporters are allowed to see, whether journalists have the facilities to report what is going on. For in a world largely dominated by images, what is not taped and broadcast does not exist.

There are some other significant elements to be considered. Through the pictures and the words we use we (journalists, media) create a certain perception of the world. We also need standard, concise expressions, which can easily be understood, remembered and placed into a recurring context. And speed is always a need, for quick reaction. Space is limited, even more so near to headlines. Impact is more important than subtleness. For example, in our discussions today we have extensively debated "democracy". It is a key concept, because the future of many countries in the world depends on their democratic evolution. Whenever a political movement opposes a dictatorship, media tend to define it as *pro-democracy*. This expression is practical, it is concise and easily understood. But it does not always turn out to be true, because opposing a dictatorship does not necessarily mean being democratic. Just to cite one case, the one of Burma: as we see the situation, there is a *pro-democracy movement* opposing the political system, which is dictatorial and directed by military. An expert of Burma affairs told me recently that there are 46 ethnic groups in Burma and they all are afraid of the main power. The generals who rule the country are ethnic Burmese, and the leader himself of the main opposition party, the so-called *pro-democracy movement*,

is ethnic Burmese as well. The other ethnic groups, representing close to 50% of the population, are afraid both of the opposition and of the ruling generals. And let us not forget that at a certain moment in history even the Khmer Rouge were seen by some as a pro-democracy-movement opposed to an authoritarian regime. Therefore, we should be careful when we use terms which could be easily exploited and turned into propaganda.

I would like to give you a last example, by reminding you that before and during the war against Iraq, many of its advocates spoke of *pre-emptive action*. The concept of pre-emptive war necessarily implies the existence of a real danger. If there is no such danger, war is no longer a pre-emptive action, but becomes a mere act of aggression. The war in Iraq had been proclaimed as a necessary defence against weapons of mass destruction – which were never found. In the end, those media who relayed such justifications to start a war did not report facts. They handed out government propaganda.

Vittorio Sabadin, *Deputy Editor in Chief, La Stampa (Italy)*

The title that given to this roundtable was defined as "malicious". I would call it slightly provocative, in the sense that it seems to me a bit premature to talk about a manipulating information society. I am referring to my reality, the Italian one, but I will obviously mention the foreign one as well. But let us start from the question: is information today better or worse than twenty years ago? I would certainly say better. When this same question was addressed to Ezio Mauro, current Editor-in-Chief of *La Repubblica* and formerly at *La Stampa*, with whom I worked for a few years, it always cited the example of the "political note", something he was used to do when he worked in Rome and was a political correspondent for *La Stampa*. Twenty years ago the political note in all the Italian newspapers, was a piece that reflected the opinions of all parties and the last two lines were usually devoted to communists: "For their part, Communists said so and so." This was political information twenty years ago in Italy. Since then an enormous development has occurred. Today we know everything that happens in Italian politics, even too much, in the sense that our readers tell us that there are too many pages about politics in our newspapers. However, unfortunately, especially in the current phase, the Italian political life is extremely relevant also to the private life of people.

When you, Giulietto, were a correspondent from Moscow twenty years ago, the meetings of the Politburo used to open with a press release from TASS saying: "The meeting of the Politburo has begun", period. At 7 pm, at the end of the meeting, another press release would arrive that read: "The meeting of the Politburo has ended" and that was all that we knew about that event.

Newspapers have changed, but compared to twenty years ago we have also witnessed an enormous development in the communication systems. Twenty years ago there were fewer television networks, the radio was even less developed than it is today, there was no internet and there were no cell phones.

Therefore, while I agree with you when you talk about the danger of a media concentration at international level and of a danger to let an individual take control of global information, and when you say that we must therefore watch this situation carefully. On the other hand, different, non-traditional systems of communication are developing – and internet is one of them – and becoming much more powerful than the traditional communications systems. I mean that, if you surf the Internet, you are likely to find many more references, many more articles and much more critical information on Bush's current policy than are to be found in the press worldwide, including the papers against Bush. These opinions are read by millions of people. Moreover, the net has a democratic nature: if I have an opinion that none of my papers will print, maybe because it is odd (let's say I want to communicate that Martians will land in Washington DC on January 1st, 2004), I can print it on internet. I see internet and I see cell phones – also considering their future development in terms of technology, of their capacity to transmit data in a much faster way – as a democratic watchdog for the world of information, as a guarantee of global democracy. I don't mean we must believe

all we can read on the web. I am only saying that it is an important mean that should be taken into consideration, because it exists and will develop further and further.

Is information manipulated? It depends on the journalists. A few days ago the President of the Italian Republic, Carlo Azeglio Ciampi, invited journalists to keep their back straight. This is an invitation that can apply to all journalists in the world: it depends only on them. Readers can judge every morning by buying the newspaper, by turning on their television sets and listening to the news: the product we make every day is available, always open and it can be judged at any given moment. I must say that today, compared with twenty years ago, working in a newsroom is much more difficult, because when I started in this field, there was a messenger who would bring me five news releases every half an hour. Today five press releases arrive in one second. Moreover technology has allowed to speed up considerably the process to make a newspaper.

Therefore, when war breaks out and the Americans bomb Baghdad, I have half an hour to decide how to communicate the event in the newspaper. So I can decide, basing on the information I possess at the time, what pieces of information to communicate through the paper. I may be wrong, because if at that moment my only source is, for example, the American command telling me they have dropped fifty bombs on Baghdad, I can't know if the bombs were, in fact, one thousand. But if I write that they were fifty, do I actually manipulate information? No, because I acted honestly and as soon as I realize that I may have provided information that was not completely accurate, I am ready to correct it in the newspaper. We have witnessed even very surprising cases like this in recent times: the *New York Times* dismissed two journalists who had made up a few stories. They had the valor to correct the information. Now, I don't believe that it exists, on the part of a journalist who follows the ethical principles of the profession, the willingness to manipulate people. There can be the interest, undoubtedly, on the part of the owner of a newspaper who could have different goals than being a publisher. Certainly the Italian case, where the Prime Minister is also the owner of a number of newspapers, magazines and television networks, is very rare – as it is widely recognized in Europe. This is a thorny issue that has not been solved yet. But the most part of publishers all over the world base the newspaper they make on two principles: the first is to make money. The second should be to play an ethical function in their society, to practice that fourth power you mentioned earlier. It is no coincidence, perhaps, that the first newspapers coming out in the eighteenth century, especially in the United States, had titles that stressed their function of social monitoring: *Guardian*, *Sentinel*, *Herald*, *Enquirer*.

Another issue we raised is the kind of information we provide. Do we offer a certain kind of information because we want to sell it and therefore are we forced to provide the kind of information that you defined as "bad", because bad information is the one that sells? Alas, it is so, you told the exact truth. Let us consider the British case: quality newspapers like *The Guardian* or the *Times* sell 350,000 copies; newspapers like *The Sun* sell one million. Every day *The Sun* has on its cover the story of Diana, Al Fayed and I believe it is still printing, on its third page, like it always did, pictures of naked women. That's how to sell a million copies. But it is also important that many,

many newspapers in the world do not follow this example, but they choose a road that leads to quality of information, avoiding "bad" arguments that, alas, do sell. However it still exists, as I said before, an ethical code that really prevents quality newspapers from looking for the maximum number of copies at all costs. There is a limit that no quality newspaper is willing to pass.

Otar Iosseliani, *Film Director*

I have no experience in the field of formidable newspapers like *La Stampa* in Italy, but I am an expert on the Soviet press.

The Russian term *prawda* means truth and *Prawda* was, at the time of Lenin, the title of a newspaper which goal was, in a sense, to let people know the truth. The newspaper was filled with lies, lies that would often become contradictory according to the month of the year in which they were printed. To quote an example, I recall that the newspaper wrote that, before dying, Stalin had put the medical staff on trial on the accuse of attempting to poison members of the government. Only a few months later, the same newspaper retracted.

In the film industry we know that lying is part of our job. I know the Soviet film industry very well: it follows the Hollywood model and it is based entirely on myth. This can probably be forgiven, since the goal is entertaining the audience. As you all know, in American films there is always a hero fighting alone against the whole world to make good prevail upon evil. The content of Soviet films was more or less the same. Later films appeared that were purportedly based on reality, along with the Italian neo-realist film, much more genuine if compared to the articles in the press that described the same period. I believe that, thanks to the neo-realist movement, we have today a faithful document that illustrates the past of the Country and to which we can constantly refer if we want to analyze the mentality and the good or bad conditions in which the population of that Country lived.

I have little confidence in documentary films, for I think they also contain lies. As you all know, the documentary film is based on what is in front of the camera and everything that lies behind it remains unseen. Furthermore, it follows the so-called “cut, choice and trend” method, meaning that it is possible to cut the image at a certain time and change it at will. At this point comment is added, that can be entirely made up and not based on the truth of the subject filmed to attract the attention of the audience. Nazi films, for example, shot during the second World War and meant for use as propaganda of the Nazi army and the victory of its troops, were taken apart and then re-edited by my fellow director Mickhail Romm, who edited the film “Ordinary fascism”. He used the same images, the same filmed documents but manipulated them, editing and commenting the Nazi movement, in full contradiction with what had been filmed.

I believe that my public enemy number one is television, that prevents our children from reading, music lovers from listening to it, young people from playing the violin or the piano. Television hypnotizes people, it is an absolutely destructive invention. As you all know, it was Edison who invented, in the early nineteenth century, all this “rubbish”, including the telephone, the light bulb and the gramophone. These inventions have made our life fictitious and this has turned against the inventions themselves.

Television gave us, for example, the opportunity to see the appearance of politicians and, by looking at those politicians, we realize perfectly well that they are lying. They are very close, in close-up, and you can tell that their smile is fake and that

their look does not inspire confidence. Therefore this is a positive invention, because it allows us to understand who we are dealing with and by whom we are constantly being manipulated. The manipulation of which we are the victims is constant because some people suffer from a disease, similar to cholera, that spurs in them a thirst for power that makes them believe they know what they must achieve.

You all know, in Venezia Square in Rome, the famous balcony from which Mussolini used to address the acclaiming crowds who believed in everything they were told. In the Soviet Union, monuments portraying Lenin with his arm outstretched toward all the cardinal points symbolized the fact that he knew which was the right way to follow. That gesture is generally forbidden, for it did not lead to anything good: at first it was followed by the Bolshevik government, made essentially of criminals, that gave rise to symbols such as the hammer and the sickle and that, after a very long bloodshed and after all the suffering inflicted on the local population, led to the reconstitution of a two-headed eagle. The eagle is missing the feathers because it lacks all the symbols that characterized the Russian regions, but anyway it replaced the gesture above as a fake.

I believe that we are constantly being manipulated. What is the “kindergarten” of the United States? The United States is a huge country populated by people who let themselves be manipulated by an individual whom I could not define and who asserts that he wants to destroy a sort of dragon – dictator in Iraq. Why, instead of going to Iraq, won't he confront Putin for example, who is rising to an ever-growing power?

It is well known that in Russia television does not broadcast live any longer. Everything is recorded and, therefore, edited. Considering what I have told you earlier about editing, you can well imagine that this is manipulation.

I am glad to hear that the newspaper *La Stampa* is honest and pure and that the Italian press is making progress in spite of a man who owns practically all the information means and who keeps the whole situation under his control. This, unfortunately, is not the case in all countries, including some European ones.

Amr El Choubaki, *Journalist, Al Ahram (Egypt)*

Are we facing a decline or a new form of information? I believe that today a new form of information has appeared. Therefore, I hardly ever express a negative judgment towards, for example, *CNN* or the role of television. In the last few years the whole world, including Egypt and the Arab world, has entered a new phase in communication, thanks to the central role played by international and global networks, like *CNN*. It is a phase that is totally different from the one that characterized the Sixties, the Seventies, or the Eighties.

We discussed earlier the role of *CNN* during the War in Iraq, in Baghdad. I believe there's need for more competition. In 1991, during the first Gulf War, *CNN* engaged in a number of manipulations. A few years ago, however, a competitor appeared in the region, *Al Jazeera*. The creation of *Al Jazeera* represents, in my view, a significant achievement. *Al Jazeera* has been accused by the Americans, the Arab regime, the Israelis at times, left-wing militants and Islamic portions of the Arab world, to invite too many Israelis and to be a pro-Palestinian network. In my opinion, the creation of *Al Jazeera* was significant because it brought to an end the constant manipulations on the part of *CNN*. I think, indeed, that it is important to be constantly looking for new competitors and to have competition in order to stand against manipulation.

The second aspect that I would like to discuss is the swiftness of execution. I am a member of the *Al Haram* Foundation that has a circulation of 800,000 copies in Egypt and in all the Arab world. There is today a new situation, a new generation that uses Internet and expresses itself in a totally different way. I believe the press cannot ignore this development. We must therefore renew our language, be close to the young and be aware of the existence of a new generation that has ideas which are different from ours. I don't agree, then, with the statement that television does not allow people to learn. There are today new ambitions, a new world and a new era and we cannot ignore those aspects.

The region where I live presents two problems that are different from those generally afflicting the Western world. Firstly, the Egyptian press and the Arab press are not subject to censure any longer. For example my colleagues and I at *Al Haram* are not victims of censure, even though we can, obviously, resort to self-censure. The problem lies in the presence of a press that belongs to the State or to political parties (such as the newspaper *L'Humanité* in France in the Seventies), a press containing extremely significant political issues. With the rise of the new world that I mentioned earlier, new examples of independent press have appeared in Egypt, that don't belong to the State or to political parties. Though in its initial phase, this is an important experience that must be encouraged, for it requires constant exchanges with the European press, that generally does not belong to the State or to political parties.

As it was said by the speaker before me, the second problem in Egypt lies in the need to create models for the press to export in order to seduce the Western world. Therefore very good newspapers in foreign languages (English or French) have

appeared that are meant to prove to the West that we are democratic and that we enjoy freedom of expression and freedom of the press. All this conceals at times the real conditions of the press and of journalism in some Countries. This strategy must not, therefore, be deceiving because it does not relate to the press only, but to several political activities carried out in the Arab Countries to the sole purpose of seducing the West. Reality is very different from what is printed in the press to be exported.

My answer to the question at the heart of this debate, that is if the quality of information today is better when compared to the one of twenty years ago, is decidedly positive, even though I believe that much remains to be done in order to improve our professionalism. We must not, in my view, follow the model of the committed press of the Sixties, but we must be independent, professional and honest.

Galina Ackerman, *Journalist, Radio France International*

The debate is being animated by the following question: are we reporting on or manipulating facts? I think we should answer this question in an extremely vague way.

We journalists represent the public opinion of our countries, but in each country the journalists' community is extremely large. I have been a journalist for about twenty years and when I entered this profession there were already many journalists in France. I think their number has increased threefold or even fourfold till today. Therefore, in each country we are a fully-fledged, quite significant community, in which there is a sort of public opinion influencing our work.

As to the issue of manipulation, I think that most journalists are honest people. All the journalists I know are committed to their work and are willing to convey information. However, we are often influenced by the prejudice of political opinions and this leads to the onset of a sort of widespread consensus in our community.

To give you an example, I think we can compare the coverage of the war in Kosovo and of bombings in both the former Yugoslavia and Serbia with the coverage of the recent war on Iraq. As a matter of fact, there are many resemblances between the two wars. They were both fought against cruel dictators, who were guilty of sparking off several wars: the three Balkan wars in the 1990s in the case of Milosevic, and the Gulf war and the war on Iran – which caused millions of casualties – in the case of Saddam Hussein. In both cases there was no support from the UN. The decision to intervene in Kosovo and to bomb Serbia was made by NATO. In the second case, the decision was not made by NATO, but by the so-called international coalition led by the United States, because France and Germany opposed the decision.

In France, the war on Kosovo was fully approved by the press. Prior to the bombings, television, press and radio reported on violations, rapes, murders of Albanians and on the ordeal of displaced people in refugee camps. The press, of which I am a representative, biased the public opinion, preparing it to accept military intervention. In the few months before the onset of war, press didn't report on what Kosovars were doing, on the war they were fighting against the Serb police, on the historical situation prior to the conflict or on the reasons which led Serbs to spark off a war. It is not my intention to justify the Serbs, because what Milosevic's regime did is, in my opinion, unforgivable; what I mean is that the coverage was incomplete and biased. The war on Kosovo is over now, Milosevic was tried before the international criminal court and today hardly anyone speaks about what is happening in Kosovo, about the 300,000 Serbs Kosovars forced to flee, or about Albanians who chased gipsies and all other ethnic minorities. In the newspapers, hardly short paragraphs are written about innocent casualties caused by Kosovars among Serbs and this leads us to think that the journalists' community was in favour of the war. When the situation became more complicated, there were neither second thoughts nor corrections and nobody tried to convey a more complex image of the military conflict.

As far as the coverage of the war on Iraq is concerned, the journalists' community was influenced by anti-Americanism and by the willingness to oppose both the

American power and unilateralism. For example, all French television channels broadcast pictures of refugee camps and atrocities, without even mentioning the hundreds of thousands of Iraqi refugees who begged the Americans to intervene and overthrow Saddam Hussein's regime. Not many words have been spent on the crimes committed by Saddam Hussein either: the only thing which was mentioned, because it was so evident, was the killing of 100,000 Kurds in Halabj with nerve gas. This is only one of the thousands of crimes committed by Saddam Hussein, maybe one of the worst in the 21st century.

Who prevented us from doing a more independent investigative work, and from reporting on events in a more balanced and complex way? Some people believe that French media act in connivance with authorities and that in the case of the two aforementioned conflicts they acted as a mouthpiece of their master. I don't agree with that. Straight after the onset of the war on Iraq, a social protest arose in France and the press wasn't on the same wavelength of the government, thus proving independent. I think that a sort of political correctness of the press and the prevailing opinions in the press community prevent us from going against the tide and saying something which not only the editor-in-chief, but also our colleagues, could dislike. Therefore, in some sectors there is a sort of "manipulation", or better still a not altogether objective approach aiming at searching for information.

I write for a newspaper three times a week and so I know perfectly well the procedures we follow. Among several agency dispatches we have to choose something as a starting point to build the image of the world we convey to our listeners, our readers, and our audience. On what grounds do we make this choice? What do we emphasize? It depends on the personal responsibility of each of us, which is however influenced not only by our political opinions, but also by some "conditioning". Younger journalists are particularly sensitive to this conditioning, because, unlike older journalists who took different paths, they attended the same school of journalism and are thus influenced by basic theses which bias their view of the world. Examining my own conscience, I think that we all should always wonder whether we are reporting on or manipulating facts.

Pedrag Matvejevic, *Writer (Bosnia-Erzegovina)*

I am not a journalist, but just a newspaper reader. I sometimes co-operate with the press and, before migrating to Italy, sometimes I used to write some articles, which were not entirely published then.

Since I am a writer rather than a journalist, I would like to tell you how since my childhood I have perceived the manipulation system and the fundamental relationships which are necessary to understand the way both reporting and the press work.

During the Second World War I was eight or nine years old, my father was convicted in a concentration camp in Germany and my family was antifascist. I remember that every evening my uncle and aunt used to listen to Radio London: being just a child, I considered it a sort of Mass. During the day, instead, the radio reported on the victories of the German army in Russia. I lived in Bosnia-Herzegovina, in Mostar, which was occupied by the Italians. I could feel a great difference between the news broadcast during the day and the news broadcast in the evening. Then I experienced censorship: my mother didn't want me to tell anyone that my uncle and aunt listened to Radio London every evening. I realized that censorship was in force and that to a certain extent I was in charge of censoring what I heard on Radio London in the evening.

Then I became a sort of go-between. Till 1948, the year when I turned six, the former Yugoslavia was still annexed to the Soviet Union. After that year, when borders were opened, it became possible for us to buy newspapers abroad. My father, who fortunately had come back safe and sound from the concentration camp, went to France where, since he was of Russian origin, he bought the newspaper *Russkaia Mysl* – Russian thought. Then he asked me to take it to the Russian engineer Timofeev. So I became a go-between, taking newspapers which otherwise could not have been around. I was the archetypal go-between, so to say. One day, a family coming from the Soviet Union went to see Mr. Timofeev and found the newspaper *Russkaia Mysl*. By then, the former Yugoslavia was completely at odds with the Soviet Union and the newspaper was identified as a Soviet one. On the contrary, *Russkaia Mysl* was the newspaper of Russian immigrants, and it was exactly the opposite of a Soviet newspaper. Timofeev was accused of reading the Stalinist press and he was arrested.

Another thing I understood when I was a child is that interference was deliberately caused to Radio London transmissions, so that the audience could not clearly understand the messages being conveyed.

The short story I have just told you contains all possible facets – censorship, the dissemination of foreign newspapers, the authorized press and the banned press, and the stupidity of the police that couldn't tell a right-wing immigrants' newspaper from a Soviet newspaper.

Another issue I would like to talk about is the press at the time when communism was a bit more liberal than under the Soviet regime. In that period I published literary reports, essays, etc. In my opinion, at that time there were different kinds of newspapers: some of them were manifestly communist and disseminated the opinions of the ruling party, while others, such as the newspaper *Borba* (Struggle), were a little less

official. The latter drew its inspiration from the French *Combat* and was quite strict, even though not as much as communist newspapers. There were then other newspapers that tried to keep their distance from the ruling party, despite their respect for it.

I couldn't have grown intellectually by writing for a newspaper, and so I founded, in the former Yugoslavia, a philosophers' group called *Praxis*, whose members were distinguished Western philosophers from the Frankfurt school, Habermas's school. Soviets were the only ones who were not admitted to the group, while Czechoslovaks were allowed till 1968. People like Marcuse came every summer and together we founded a school. The Italians were represented by the co-operators of the Gramsci Institute, such as Mario Spinella and Lombardo Radice, who were the only communists admitted to the group. We wrote a magazine, which was in disfavour with officers and most of all with nationalists, who came to power in an ever increasing way. They considered us Jews, Serbs, individuals paid by foreign governments. In a sense, this was my apprenticeship in the press.

Then Yugoslavia was destroyed and, since I belong to more than one ethnic group, I couldn't accept ethnic cleansing. I opposed the regime of both Milosevic and Tudjman, in particular when I realized that Milosevic was an insane individual. I was surprised to see that almost all the Serb intelligentsia supported him and that the Belgrade newspaper *Politika*, which was extremely serious and the most liberal of the former Yugoslavia, praised him and attacked those who criticized him. In Croatia, where I used to live, Tudjman's ministries had even begun to give the fascist salute.

I decided to write Tudjman's biography, which was also published abroad, and I gave an interview to the French newspaper *Libération*. A couple of days after the publication of my interview, someone fired three revolver shots to my mailbox. I understood that it was impossible to keep on fighting, giving interviews, co-operating with newspapers and so I decided to pack up and leave with my wife.

This was my experience and I told you the whole story because, in my opinion, it highlights the role the press played during the war in Yugoslavia, as well as its responsibility and its guilt.

In Belgrade every evening television and newspapers disseminated the terrible pictures of the Serbs slaughtered by the so-called *oustachi*. Some of these images were true, but most of them were the result of manipulation, because not all Croats were *oustachi*. For example, Tito, who was the leader of the resistance, was Croatian and there was a very strong antifascist resistance in Dalmatia, which allowed many Jews from Yugoslavia to be saved. In Zagreb every evening television said that Croats were all *oustachi*.

Before leaving my country I witnessed this appalling war and the way it poisoned people's lives. My neighbours, who were honest Croats, asked me every day if I had heard what had been said on television the night before. Therefore I think that television contributed to arm extremist nationalists.

At the end of this phase another phenomenon occurred, i.e. the introduction of amnesia in the fabric of society. We went through the period of amnesia of the former Stalinist communists, who were very hard and persecuted us freethinkers. By the way, I would like to remind you that the *Praxis* group was left-wing, Marxist in a way.

All of a sudden the press forgot what our persecutors did, and described them even as masters. The press did its best to forget the past.

I don't know whether I have already run out of the time I was given, but I would like to briefly talk about a phenomenon which characterized all East European countries, i.e. the presence of a poor-quality press, which was essentially made up of gossip. This phenomenon was due to the fact that, since the purchasing power was very low, competition was very heavy.

To conclude my speech, I would like to tell you about how I became an Italian agent. During the siege, I was in Sarajevo because I studied there. I lived two weeks with the inhabitants of Sarajevo, which was bombed by Serb nationalists. Thanks to the UN, I landed at the Sarajevo airport, I went into town, I visited my friends and brought them some medicines. According to the Serb press, I was paid for that by Saudi Arabia. In addition, as I said before, I had written a biography of Franjo Tudjman, a former communist general who had become an ultra-nationalist and had exiled 300,000 Serbs from Croatia. After the publication of that biography, a Croatian newspaper wrote that I was a traitor and that I was paid by the "Italian irredentists", who wanted to occupy Nova's Dalmatian bank. How should I have behaved vis-à-vis such a press?

This is the story of the press in East European countries, and in particular in a country that was much more liberal than others. People from Russia came to Yugoslavia, and the inhabitants of Prague – the only Slavic capital which experienced real democracy – considered Belgrade and Zagreb a sort of America. Despite all this, also this country went through the experience I have just told you about.

I personally experienced manipulation during the Second World War, when my father was convicted in a concentration camp, and I was starving and lived in a small family that listened to Radio London and that already had all the "coordinates", all the means I have just talked about.

Vitalij Tret'jakov, *Journalist, Russkaia Gazieta (Russia)*

Referring to the issue at hand, I have a better knowledge, of course, of what the situation is in Russia, but I also know what is happening outside Russia. I think that, basically, the situation in Russia is quite alike that of the rest of the world. I have a very clear answer to Giulietto Chiesa's questions. There is no doubt that today what the media, as a system, do is manipulation. Which is not the same as saying that they manipulate the information they give. They cannot but disseminate a truthful part of the news or else they would be totally useless and it would be impossible to manipulate the conscience of society and peoples' behavior through them. This is clear. Today's media, television in particular, are total media and anything that is total is potentially totalitarian. When desired, this totalitarian aspect of the modern media, first of all of TV, is completely and successfully achieved. I wouldn't be particularly pleased about the fact that today it is possible to broadcast news reports live (we always have the example of CNN in mind), as it were a special achievement of modern journalism, or else we should consider journalism what the TV cameras show us when we move around a supermarket. Live reporting has actually driven journalists out of news reporting. There is no journalist there. While news are being reported and broadcast live there is no manipulation or distortion. But what facts do they show us of an event? and what don't they show us? If we tried to answer these questions we would see that through this 'CNN know-how' you can manipulate public opinion even more effectively.

In all western societies journalists, today, are part of the ruling class. To me this is as clear as daylight. And where within the ruling class discussions or arguments arise about specific issues, among journalists different points of view emerge. When the ruling class is in agreement – on questions that are vitally important to the ruling class itself – then there is no discussion and as a consequence no debate on the media.

I think that nowadays journalism is a system through which the ruling class controls society. This is not the only function of journalism, but it is one of the most important and no journalist, not even those who write for the main newspaper of the opposition or for the television networks, can skirt it.

Another thing is the false illusion that in the more pluralistic societies, with a more pluralistically oriented ruling class, there is real freedom of speech and freedom of the press, compared to other societies. To me this is very clear as well. I can't even think how anyone could hold a different view of present day journalism. Let us see some examples as it will be easier to show what is behind them.

All of us, journalists, should think about this: why, in the year that preceded the war in Iraq, the last American war against Iraq, almost all of the press of the Anglo-Saxon world, 95% of it, showed Saddam Hussein as the bad guy? He has certainly been an evil man, a dictator for sure. This is clear to all. But it is odd: why, for a whole year before the beginning of military operations, American and British journalists – which nobody had enlisted in the US or British army, who certainly do not collaborate with the CIA or the MI6 and nobody suspects them of doing so – did exactly what amounted to a

service to the American military? This position of the free American press can be seen only as their participation to a first phase of the war operations, maybe war operations with noble ends, to free Iraq from their dictator, to liberate the Iraqi people. But still it is the participation of free American journalists, for a whole year, in the first phase of military operations, in a psychological war that aimed at creating the necessary atmosphere in the American society to gain support to the war and to weaken the opponent, in this case Saddam's Iraqi regime.

This also, I believe, is clear and every journalist should wonder why in the present world we are forced to be part in this, beyond our will. The free will of the individual journalist is here of little importance.

Sylvie Braibant, *TV5, La Television International (France)*

I'm going to speak much more directly than my colleagues.

I think I am the only television journalist here and I'll give an absolutely affirmative answer to the question about manipulation. I have been a television journalist for twenty years and I have been manipulating information for twenty years. In addition, as an employee of TV5 – a large international French-speaking television network – for ten years I have been manipulating information at an international level too. I have recourse to manipulation virtually every Sunday and I do it intentionally and in all honesty.

I am the organizer of an international press club, whose members are distinguished colleagues who are absolutely above suspicion as far as the contents of their reportages are concerned. Alberto Toscano and Rudolph Chimelli, who are here today, attend our meetings on a regular basis. I always try to invite both colleagues from the North and from the South, both men and women. Despite all this, I manipulate information, because television consists of images and sounds, and art historians, anthropologists and psychoanalysts have shown that images and sounds convey emotions. Therefore, when you have in front of you an image combined with sounds, you are manipulated despite yourselves.

I think that manipulation should not be the central issue, because television, images and sounds are there and they will be more and more present in the future.

We ourselves have created an international network with such a small amount of resources that, as a joke, we always say that we are working at a worldwide level in a sort of bathroom, since spaces are so small.

More and more people will have the chance to work in television, thus easily disseminating messages everywhere, also on the Internet, which is however not completely developed yet.

Therefore, I think we'd better learn to decipher such manipulation and to exploit it some way.

First of all, images can be used as backgrounds. When I started working at TV5 ten years ago, the French director Raoul Servais directed news broadcasts and took care of guests. In the small television studio, which was entirely decorated with black wallpaper and badly lit, he made guests stand one in front of the other, as if they were at the bar, leaning against the counter. In his opinion, a great deal of sobriety was necessary to focus only on what was being said, without getting distracted by the images. As you can imagine, this kind of approach didn't last long: since then, we have changed our backgrounds several times, guests are sitting now and the studio is very well lit.

We are constantly influenced by images. That is why we must learn to both look at them and understand them.

As I said before, I have recourse to manipulation every Sunday, by using not only the studio and my guests, but also images of the international news. As a matter of fact, manipulation can lie both in the selection of the images and in their contents. Our floor

managers have decided to frame these images on a black background. I often wonder which impact this kind of framing can have on our audience. Does it further increase the distance? Does it make images less real? Is it another sham?

In addition, thanks to exchanges occurring at an international level, the images we use come from outside our network and therefore we can't control them directly. Television networks from the South, which don't produce their own images, are largely dependent on the networks from the North, which on the contrary produce their own images. Nowadays production costs have been significantly cut. In the past, when a reportage had to be shot, there were four of us involved, today I am alone with my camera.

Talking about the dependence of the South on the North, when I started working at TV5, the network was managed by Belgians, Swiss, French and Quebeckers. There were only two news broadcasts per day and only the news broadcasts coming from the associated networks – i.e. from France, Belgium, Switzerland and Quebec – could be aired. At that time TV5 programmes were broadcast in Africa too and I often wondered what the point was for African people to watch news broadcasts which reported mainly on car accidents and which never addressed African issues.

Rudolph Chimelli has just said that there are no conflicts or atrocities lacking images. I can't understand that, because in the last decades the bloodiest conflicts occurred without any image broadcasting. In Rwanda, for example, people had no television, but only the radio – *Mille Collines* – which is well known for what it did.

In the light of the different forms of manipulation I have described so far, we have two alternatives: either we never turn the television on again – and I hope this won't happen, because otherwise thousands of people, including myself, will be suddenly unemployed – or we learn to look at images, to decipher them and to accept the fact that we are manipulated by television channels from all over the world.

I don't know if you have seen "*Goodbye, Lenin!*", a successful movie which is currently showing in Germany and France. One of the supporting characters, my favourite one, is an amateur music video maker who reshapes reality and disseminates false news starting from true images, just to amuse his audience. As you can see, it is possible to do anything we want.

Bernard Guetta, *Journalist, L'Express (France)*

Contrary to what Giulietto said, I am not the editor of *L'Express*, but just its leader writer.

My opinion on the issue being debated is extremely confused because the issue itself is confused. I'll give you some examples.

I know well two countries of the Maghreb: Morocco and Algeria. Thanks to the technological development, which let television networks and satellite aeriels on the roofs proliferate, in the last few years these two countries have been literally forced to loosen their grip on the press, on the radio and on their television networks, in order to keep up with their competitors. Therefore, beyond a judgement on CNN, on TV5 and on many other television networks, whether positive or negative, the result that has been achieved is, in my opinion, extremely satisfying. The very outburst of the so-called "voluntary communication" has been extremely beneficial, not only in the two countries I mentioned before.

Another significant example is the Internet. Some people praise the Internet and consider it extraordinary because it allows us to find anything we are looking for and because it contains a huge amount of contradictory information and opinions. I belong to another category of people, who believe that information without reflection is a sort of science without conscience, i.e. the ruin of our souls, and that the display of bare information could prove to be terrifying, because nobody is responsible for the dissemination of this information. When a newspaper disseminates lies, fabrications or slanders, it is possible to lodge a complaint against it and take legal steps. In the case of the Internet, instead, the situation is much more complex.

I work as a commentator not only for a magazine, but also on the radio. During radio broadcasts, what matters is quickness: when I comment on an event, I have to react as quickly as possible and this is really important for me, because it is a matter of professional pride. I can assure you that, when a serious and important event occurs in the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians, the possibility to surf the Internet and read the analyses and the reportages of both the Israeli and the Palestinian press is a trump card for a commentator like me. Without the Internet I couldn't do that and I should content myself with reading, at least twelve or twenty-four hours later, a press dispatch containing a summary of the reactions of both Israeli and Palestinian journalists. I assure you that it is not the same thing as reading the editorials of these newspapers in real time.

I appreciated Ms. Ackerman's speech about the conflict in Kosovo. I reported on the bombings in Kosovo for the Italian newspaper *La Repubblica* and I felt awkward too. I felt even more awkward when my three articles appeared in *La Repubblica* and the newspaper I used to write for – *Le monde* – bought only the first one, in which I described the atrocities the Albanians from Kosovo had been subjected to by the Serbs. The other two articles, which introduced a historical perspective and portrayed the sufferings the Serbs had had to endure fifteen years before, when Kosovo had become independent and had fallen into the hands of the Albanians, were not bought because

they were considered of little interest. Why? Surely not because of manipulation, because nobody was manipulating anything there. The answer is quite simple: the editorial staff and the people who report on events, whether on television, on the radio or in newspapers, are the reflection of that society they are the fruit of. People often say presumptuously – and journalists are convinced of that – that newspapers shape public opinion. I think, instead, that public opinion shapes newspapers. This is not a paradox: public opinion shapes newspapers because journalists often think in the same way as public opinion does in their countries. For some people they think in the right way, for other people they think in the wrong way. Therefore, it is a matter of subjectivity, which is extremely difficult to be judged.

I gave you this example to show you that I hate debates in the newspapers because I know from experience that these debates are confused. They are not confused because the people who take part in the debate are not intelligent, but they are confused because, when we speak about the press, we speak about a bit of everything, i.e. about history, about democracy, about the psychological reactions of the peoples, about economy, about cinema, about avant-garde sculpture, etc., but we never speak about the press itself. Therefore, it is an extremely difficult issue to deal with.

I have just said that I hate debates in the papers, but I'll redeem myself by saying that the one you organized, Giulietto, has a justification. Beyond the traditional debate in the papers, however, there are some problems that have a link with our time. This does not mean that these problems have never existed before, but now we see them re-emerge.

To this purpose, I'll give you two examples. First of all, the involvement of Bill Clinton in a sex scandal. Clinton was the President of the United States for eight years, and he did a lot of things, both positive and negative. Today, when we talk about Clinton, we immediately think of the Lewinsky affair, i.e. of his affair with that girl. I don't care if this is a problem for the press or for the American society. What really impresses me is the fact that, a few months after the scandal, a distinguished French politician, former prime minister Michel Rocard, was invited as a guest in a very well-known French talk show, whose host asked him, in a rather coarse language, whether it was wrong to do something like that. The worst thing is that former prime minister tried to answer instead of leaving the television studio.

Let me now give you a last example. You all remember that the French socialist party has recently taken a stand against a cut in taxes promoted by President Chirac. During a live news broadcast, the presenter of a television network stated in all sincerity that the socialist party was surprisingly, incredibly against the cut in taxes. He couldn't understand how someone could be against tax reduction. Another problem – journalists' poor education – emerges here. That individual was not the host of a television show, but a journalist who didn't know that, in the Western political thought, there is a very important current of thought which shaped the whole 20th century and which defends taxes, because it considers them an instrument of social redistribution and an investment in times of war. He absolutely didn't know of that, and so he thought a cut in taxes would be positive because it would allow citizens to give the State less money. I want to

stress the point that the journalist was not polemical at all, he wasn't simply aware of the issue.

I could give you a lot of examples, but I'll conclude my speech by saying that editorial staffs are not only the reflection of the society they live in, but the intellectual elites of their countries. Therefore, let us think of the condition of the intelligentsia in the whole Western world. As a tradition, newspapers and editorial staffs react either in favour or against an existing current of thought, which shapes a debate of some account. When in the intellectual world there is a sidereal void similar to the one we experience today, editorial offices fill up with nonsense and ignorance.

Julian Nundy, *Journalist, Bloomberg Television (France)*

As a British journalist, perhaps my least favourite bit of English poetry comes in lines by Humbert Wolfe, who died in 1940. He wrote:

You cannot hope to bribe or twist.
Thank God, the British journalist!

But seeing what the man will do unbribed, there's no occasion to. These words, of course, would be grossly unfair in many cases and in others all too accurate. For me in the past year the behaviour of some media, let's take Fox News in the United States, backs the notion that some people don't need bribing: they'll produce propaganda and promote one side of the story, without prompting. Why bribe or manipulate them, when they do things so willingly unbidden.

In the British newspaper world there has traditionally been a line drawn between 'respectable' newspapers, usually broad-sheet publications such as The Times, The Financial Times, The Guardian and The Daily Telegraph, and the popular, tabloid papers such the Sun and The Mirror. The Express and the Daily Mail, now tabloid, were traditionally middle-brown newspapers, broad-sheets that sought the middle road both intellectually, if I dare use the word, and in class terms, often quite successfully, until they were swallowed up by the tabloid culture in the 1960's and 1970's, even if the Daily Mail still makes an effort to plug the gap between serious and popular. Today, in some media empires, the line between serious and popular has become blurred, as both categories have tended to head South.

On holiday in Greece last July, I was giving my brain a rest from news and I wasn't reading newspapers or listening to the radio. I did, however, cast a glance at newspaper kiosks every morning to see what the headlines were. One day I saw that David Kelly, the British Defence Ministry expert in weapons of mass destruction, who had been exposed to the source of the report by the BBC, that the British Government had exaggerated or 'sexed up' its case for going to war in Iraq, had been found dead. I confess I had a problem deciding which British newspaper to buy to get a good account of this development. There was no question for me of reading a popular paper, perhaps wrongly, because it's often the Sun that sets the tone in British politics. I looked at the front page of The Times and rejected it instantly: its headlines were transparent. This newspaper, owned by Rupert Murdoch - also the owner of Fox News in America, and Sky Television, and the tabloid Sun in Britain - was intent on attacking Sky's rival, the BBC, in particular, as much as it was in reporting the story in general. Another option would have been the Daily Telegraph. The Telegraph was generally supportive of the war in Iraq, although it is ideologically opposed to Prime Minister Tony Blair because he comes from the wrong part of the political spectrum. In the end, after a long deliberation, I decided to buy The Guardian, a newspaper that has become anti-Blair, even though it is of the left. I was disappointed: the coverage was weak and rambling; only a well written commentary attacking a prime minister who, the author suggested,

put his personal image ahead of the public interest, had any force. In the weeks since then, as you know, the behaviour of the BBC, once considered a paragon of journalistic and stylistic virtue, even a guardian of the English language, has come under scrutiny, and for good reason. Even the journalists directly involved in the sexing up claims have acknowledged that basic professional standards were ignored in the rush to get a good story onto breakfast radio.

What I've been talking about here, of course, is standards rather than manipulation. Some of the preparatory papers I received for this conference contained a suggestion that private ownership of media leads to manipulation and therefore to disinformation. The profit motive has undoubtedly lowered the quality of many media in recent years. The development of multimedia newsrooms, especially in provincial and regional media companies in the United States, means that journalists are pulled between working for their company's radio and television stations at the same time as they have to work for writing for web sites and for the old style newspaper. All of this takes reporters away from making contacts and verifying the facts. The first casualty of this, as one American writer put it, is depth. However, I really can't see private ownership as the problem *per se*. The New York Times has always been a private concern, yet it is considered to be the world's best newspaper. Recent troubles may have dented their reputation, but those troubles came into the open and were dealt with quickly and publicly. I studied and worked for the early part of my career in the Soviet Union, when it was ruled by Leonid Bresniev. There the media were exclusively state owned and there was never any doubt – as Istvetia fulminated against such evils as the latest Beatles album, or as air and rail crashes were ignored by Pravda – that someone somewhere was manipulating them. Whatever the problems in Russia since then, the privatisation of the media has led to open information being available to the ordinary citizen for the first time in many decades. Later, working in Cairo, I was struck by the often independent and pugnacious tone of the main Egyptian daily newspaper, the government's Al Ahram. The government in Algeria has recently tried to rain independent newspapers there. If you check their web sites you can see why: they are highly combative and critical of the government. Obviously, the problem is just who runs the media, whether it's the state or privately owned. When the owner is serious, professional, and democratically minded, then there are few ethical worries. This country has much experience of what can go wrong when an owner has a personal agenda.

Information has been manipulated since the beginning of time, with rulers covering up failures and exaggerating or even inventing successes. This is particularly acute in wartime and no war, even the latest, has been an exception. In recent decades it has been the search and the means of information and communication that has changed matters, even sending things perhaps out of control. From the arrival of television after World War II, which was initially a great favour to dictatorships because it could not be transmitted across frontiers, to the development of the internet; with communication more visual than ever, with the ability to copy and paste on a Microsoft window, replacing more traditional skills and the need for memory, language and background are suffering.

To conclude, I'd like to quote from John Humphreys, a long time BBC radio anchor and the author of a new book about misuse of the language. He argues that media standards need to be revived, first by concentrating on the quality of the language used. "Politicians – he says – have a lot to answer for in the debasement of language. But the real villain is business, which has introduced terms such as 'human resources' into everyday use." Humphreys suggests that we could start to solve some media problems by a return to stricter linguistic standards. In the Guardian this week Humphreys wrote: "The more clearly we are able to express ourselves, the less room there is for ambiguity. Language is about subtlety and nuance. It is powerful and it is potent. We can woo with words and we can wound. Despots fear the words of the articulate opponent."

Alberto Toscano, Journalist (*Panorama*)

I would answer Giulietto's question – "News reporting or manipulation?" – with a statement which is as provocative as the question itself: news reporting equals manipulation. I think this is proven by the very interesting things said by both Galina Ackerman and Sylvie Braibant, as well as by the cases they reported on. Besides, when we decide, or better still when the editor decides – we have an assistant editor among us who can confirm what I'm saying –, when he/she decides to favour an article instead of another, or to let a piece of news appear on the front-page, he/she makes a choice which is, objectively speaking, discriminatory. Well, manipulation is an ugly word, I agree on that, but we journalists can't help influencing reality, and this appears absolutely obvious to me.

Two weeks ago in France, where I live, some members of the Gaullist party were tried on charges of corruption – or alleged corruption – and one day the cabinet head of former Gaullist Prime Minister Alain Juppé, who is now the leader of the party loyal to President Jacques Chirac, stated: "Everyone knew there were bribes, everyone knew". Well, this statement – "Everyone knew" – couldn't be found in *Le Figaro* the following day, because it hadn't been reported. *Le Figaro* reported a lot of things about that trial, but the statement "Everyone knew" didn't appear in any article.

Therefore, we are living in a situation where certain choices imply biasing public opinion, more or less deliberately, in a more or less fair way vis-à-vis the audience. Bias is particularly gross on television, because television... Once I saw a correspondent who, during one of the many Middle-Eastern conflicts, appeared in the evening news in his bullet-proof vest. A person who was there with him told me that, when he went off the air, the correspondent took off his bullet-proof vest and confidently went to dinner. Well, the relationship with either the audience or the readership is often pulled by the air and poorly fair.

I could give you a lot of examples. One and a half months ago, on behalf of *Panorama*, I interviewed a great French sociologist, Alain Touraine, on France's decline. Alain Touraine developed a very simple thesis: nowadays Italian society is much more dynamic than French society. He never, ever, mentioned Berlusconi; nevertheless, when the interview appeared in *Le Monde*, in an article which hit out at Alain Touraine, the headline read: "According to Alain Touraine Berlusconi's Italy is better than France". It was the exact opposite: Alain Touraine had said that today Italian opposition is better than French opposition and that Italian society is much more dynamic than French society, but *Le Monde* used this statement in an absolutely unfair way.

Now, unfortunately things like that occur very frequently in our profession. There are people who do it in good faith, because they have to favour one piece of news instead of another; there are people who do it because they are loyal to a political line, i.e. to what they consider their values; there are other people who do it because they are loyal to the owner of the publishing company they work for. It is a pleasure and an honour for me to be the last speaker in this round table, during which we have debated

the issue of media concentration in our countries. This is a real phenomenon. In the case of France, I must say that I am surprised to see that the Dassault group can get control over a large publishing group such as the one which publishes *Le Figaro* – this is a de facto control, because its share in the publishing group officially amounts to 30% – and that, at the same time, it can control the weekly magazine *L'Express* and the magazine *L'Expansion*. Now, the Dassault group works for the State, the State purchases its products, so it is little wonder that citizens suspect there may be an exchange of interests.

Then which is the remedy for this situation, where we are at risk of being manipulated? The remedy is a sense of responsibility among journalists. At Dassault they will never be able to do whatever they like with *L'Express* because there are journalists like Bernard Guetta who can prevent this from happening. In Italy, companies cannot do whatever they like with either their newspapers or television networks – in Italy there are several newspapers which are controlled by the industry – because there are serious journalists, but also serious newspapers, even though in my opinion there are most of all serious journalists.

Viewing the issue in perspective, I think we should change our conception of both manipulation and censorship. Censorship does not only mean saying “You won’t let this article appear”. For a journalist, fighting censorship means doing a disturbing reportage, a difficult reportage. If we limit ourselves to either publishing or reading, as happens on television and on the radio, the press dispatches we receive – nobody has mentioned this issue so far, but it must be emphasized that, even though serious colleagues work for press agencies, the latter, such as ANSA or *France Press*, are often financed by Ministries of Foreign Affairs, and it is from press agencies that news come – if journalists, whether television or newspaper journalists, limit themselves to disseminate the messages contained in press dispatches, they will never be censored, because press dispatches themselves have already been inspected before being sent. Nevertheless, those journalists will never be good journalists and the information will be manipulated and disseminated in bad faith. I think that journalists should be given a sense of responsibility and that censorship should be fought in a dynamic way and not in a merely defensive way.

Gilbert Wasserman, *Journalist (Mouvements)*

The title of this round table, i.e. “Information society vs. manipulation society”, makes me think of an idea Pier Paolo Pasolini expressed in “*Pagine corsare*”: he wrote that, thanks to the standardisation of individuals, television could achieve the goal fascism had not been able to. For a long time I have thought that this idea was exaggerated, but I must confess that today I wonder if it is so.

In my opinion, when we speak about manipulation, we should discard wrong leads, because our aim is not to hatch a plot with international leaders. “Big Manipulator” does not exist, even though it is undeniable that, on a worldwide scale, control over the media is concentrated in the hands of few individuals, who consider communication a sort of commodity. If this were the case, it would be easy to fight manipulation. In actual fact the media biasing system is, in my opinion, much more resistant, subtle and cunning, because it can repeat itself at all levels and it can make those who have no access to the control room adhere to it.

This does not mean that there are no spectacular forms of information manipulation, whose origin is to be sought in the highest echelons of either the State or large multinational companies. The issue of weapons of mass destruction in Irak is a clear demonstration of this.

I think, though, that any strategy of organized falsehood has some weak points. It is evident that it must be uncovered and reported, and in this respect I agree with *Le Monde Diplomatique* and with those who think that civil society should find the right instruments which could allow it to take a critical look at the media and to create a sort of *Greenpeace* in the field of news reporting.

The most evident forms of information manipulation often backfire on their own perpetrators and this phenomenon will be more and more rapid with the globalization of news reporting. This leads me to take a relativist look at the specific contribution of news reporting, or better still of political news reporting, to the so-called manipulation.

Almost all opinion polls carried out in Western countries show that the level of credibility of political news reporting is extremely low. The judgements made on journalists are hardly better than the ones made on politicians and this credibility loss is one of the symptoms of the serious crisis facing representative democracy. Furthermore, the loss of trust in those who report news is a dual issue: on the one hand, it has some positive aspects, because it shows – at least potentially – critical judgement; on the other hand, it has some negative aspects, because it increases the citizens’ unconcern.

The fact that either political or economic powers can control information and its sources represents a serious problem for democracy. At the same time, though, I am not sure that this can grant control of society to these powers. The example of the countries of the former Socialist block shows that controlling information does not necessarily mean controlling society too, even though it is undeniable that the biasing techniques used at that time were definitely less subtle than the ones used today.

Now, it is natural for me to wonder what the loophole is for something that, instead of manipulation, we’d better define as formatting of minds and behaviours. I usually think that, on the one hand, it is true political manipulation of topical issues is

considerable, but on the other hand the cause of the problem lies at a cultural level. The power of the media is, above all, biasing power, which shapes behaviours on the long term and, like advertisement, is effective only if it is repetitive; the ideological approach is reinforced on the long term and it imposes itself only because it is habit-forming and there are no other reasons to oppose. The main instrument of manipulation could therefore be represented by what I define as an act of aggression against cultural models, life standards, and models of both consumption and behaviour.

What we commonly call neo-liberalism does not only derive from either the economic strategies of common deregulation or thought automatism, which is well-known to those politicians who control public authorities. It resides in penetrating people's thoughts, which is not the result of mere manipulation in the most widely used sense of the word, but the result of strategies of both seduction and cultural standardization.

A well-known German economist and philosopher has created the concept of market society, in contrast to solidarity society, which others call welfare state. Today we live, to a certain extent, in a market society. When free market economy is no longer subject to a set of rules, it spontaneously generates a market society and the corresponding individual behaviour. In my opinion, the media system represents and intensifies this behaviour. Furthermore, it is circular in the way it works, just like the system searching for the audience.

People understand individualisation as juxtaposition with being either competitors or consumers, but not players. This is the opposite of a positive individualisation, which is achieved if the community collectively gains the possibility for all its members to express themselves.

Communication and news reporting are turned into a show, into goods to be consumed right away, and not into a necessary, meaningful exchange between human beings.

As to the relationships with other people in terms of power, the latter is power over individuals and not power as an instrument for a common action.

In such a context, my impression is that the imagination of the professionals working in the media has become poorer and has undergone radical changes in terms of a reduction of its critical judgement. I'm afraid future journalists would like to model themselves on the anchorman of the 8 p.m. news, who has been turned into a star, rather than on a great writer and reporter, such as Joseph Kessel, or on a journalist who puts his/her life in danger to uncover what other people would like to conceal. Maybe I have been a bit too strict in my judgement, but I think this is the path that is being taken.

All of this leads to anthropological issues. Every society relies on fundamental social links, which have to find a balance. These links can be economic, political, human or philosophical. If all of a sudden one of these links – the economic one, in our specific case – is put above all the others or if it absorbs them, the latter tend to reappear in the form of victims of a removal process. There is a risk that these links re-emerge too repressively, as shown by the right extremists who have come to power in all Western societies.

The idea expressed by Pasolini seems to be confirmed then. By saying so I don't mean to blame it all on television, I am simply trying to find out who is responsible.

Furthermore, analysing how the media format individuals makes the mission of public service broadcasting even more crucial. When television networks were privatised, we were told that public service broadcasting would maintain a good quality level. Nevertheless, in France, and in Italy in particular, the way news reporting is managed has not changed: as to television programmes and the so-called formatting of both individuals and their life and consumption standards, public service broadcasting simply followed, accompanied and sometimes enriched private service broadcasting. This arouses a question, to which three different answers can be given. The first answer consists in saying that, given the complexity and the development of new technologies, there is nothing left to do. The second answer consists in agreeing to content ourselves with some "pockets of culture", of some television networks which could take a different path at least at a local level. Finally, the third answer, which in my opinion should be defended – I'm not saying so out of nostalgia for state television – consists in using what remains of public service broadcasting in order to create a new television. I think this is a fundamental question to ask citizens.