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Workshops

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MEDIA AS POLITICAL ACTOR: OBSERVER, MEDIATOR, PUBLIC SERVANT?

Chairman: Bernard Guetta, *Political Columnist and Editorial Writer of L'Express, France*

If I understand well the title of our general discussion, media stay, more and more often crushed, between citizens and power. But media are not an abstraction, they are made of human beings. Televisions, even newspapers, certainly even magazines and radios are often big machines, but these machines are made of men and – more and more in the last 15 years – of women, who often face many difficulties in doing their job for very different reasons. We are far from finding all journalists having the same conception of journalism and, I would say, this conception is very much differentiating in the course of time.

The title of our workshop, more than the one of the general debate, poses a postulate about media – and so journalists – being or supposed to be political actors. Three possible definitions are proposed for this political actor: observer, mediator and public servant.

I will cite three fundamental steps. In a quarter of a century in the most part of the world countries, media passed from the state of repeater of State words to a deregulation more and more massive which certainly had positive effects, but which has not always kept its promises. This press industry, which we more and more call communication industry, in a semantic shift which is evidently not neutral, has for the most part led to a lowering of quality absolutely catastrophic, a levelling towards the bottom to make it pleasant for a bigger number of people. Moreover, because of the explosion of new technologies, especially internet, but even mobile phones, new journalists appeared, and actually often also the embryo of new media which, no doubt in a fourth stage – which we hope to be the next one – will give life to new media.

To the Berlin wall, that yesterday was between the right newspapers and the left ones, bringing to very ridiculous excesses and to the ideological defence of one part or the other, we substituted a very soft consensus on short, very little differentiated ideas. At the beginning there has certainly been a wisdom. It was necessary to break this caricatural opposition between left and right, which anyway did no more work, which no more detected reality. But the political borders in every society, in the whole world, in every period must forcedly move. It is vital for democracy, which has oppositions of ideas, of propositions and something like a choc or anyway an alternative. If there is no alternative, there is no basis for a political alternation and so less basis for democracy.

Because of this, we got to have a reality which is violently criticised today in my country, under the name of “unique thinking”, something like saying “today everywhere it is the same thing...”, even in those left or right wing journals that yesterday were opposed one to the other and which therefore were intellectually stimulating. I hasten to add that, in my eyes, this charge of unique thought is itself rather caricatural. Actually, the thought is not so unique: considerable differences remain. It was to be seen in many countries of Europe, and in particular in France, at the time of the debate on the European constitution. At the beginning this problem was a political one, and then became a problem of the press. For example before the beginning of the war in Iraq, one of the largest chains of perfectly respectable American television, Fox News, has requested its correspondent in Paris to interview me because it seemed that in my programs I was particularly virulent against the very idea of this war – and indeed I was. The journalist arrived, asked me why I was so virulent, I answered, and then, abruptly, he cut me and told me: “Yes, but in the end, you intervene in Ivory Coast!”. Then, I looked at him a little perplexed and, although

the camera turned and the microphone was open, I told him with a little constrained voice "Yes, but in the end that has nothing to do with it". He turned to the cameraman and said "Cut". The man cut and he told me "Listen, Mr Guetta, I am really terribly constrained. I know that it has nothing to do with this war. But they told me to pose you this question. When I myself answered them: 'but that has nothing to do with it, it is absurd', they answered 'No, no, pose this bloody French this question'".

Well, to comfort us – if one ever can – let's say nevertheless that in any situation of war – and wrongly or rightly September 11 was seen in the United States as the beginning of a situation of war – the common direction of the press moves back and often collapses in front of the nationalism of the moment. There is something anyway that we must keep in mind to relativize – I say only "relativize" – the problem we are talking about and which is obviously immense: there is no guarantee in our work. There has never been and there will never be. One cannot have the guarantee of his own courage, audacity, clearness, of his own intelligence of the facts and it is on these things that, a free press of course, but also a solid, recognized, read press, allowed by its users, is built or taken apart, according to the times. Is the first and essential function of the press to render comprehensible "la raison de l'autre », "the reason of the other"? I know naturally it is sometimes difficult to translated it in all languages: I imagine it works in Italian, not certainly well in English and I don't know in Russian, but the "reason of the other" is at the same time the reasons of the others and the way the others think. And this function is fundamental because when one understands the reasons and the way of thinking of the other, the other seems a little less like a devil, an enemy, a threatening being. One can keep his dissensions with him, but at least one understands that he has a reason.

In our work, today, and among those who observe and study our work, there are obviously more questions than certainties, more fears or pessimisms than optimisms about the years and the developments awaiting us men of press or men of radio and television. Do we have the temptation or the possibility to break the mouth of the journalists whom we do not love? Yes, for my part, four times per day I feel like breaking the mouth of a colleague. Naturally, I suppose that I'm not the only one in this situation, but that does not take us very far and I believe that the best way to react for everybody is trying to do our best in our work. You can hear excellent things on many radios, read excellent things in various newspapers and, I dare say, see many good things on various good televisions. Let's not fall into the opposite excess in the name of necessary and a very justified clearness on the state of problems of our work.

John Lloyd, *Essayist, Editor of the Financial Times Magazine, United Kingdom*

The English-language title of this weekend is “the media between the citizens and power”: and “between” is exactly where media should be. But there are two ways of being between. One is to link up two otherwise distant places or people, and enable communication between them. The other, is to provide a barrier between these two places or people, and impede or distort communication between them. The news media do both. I want to argue against the habit they have of doing the second – impeding or distorting communication between the citizens and power. And I want to make the following argument: that the news media do impede and distort, sometimes very badly, communication between citizens and power – but that the means by which communication between these two places is done are changing rapidly. A new universe is opening out, created by changing technologies and patterns of investment in the news media, but bringing with it, as technology does, great possibilities for new forms of communication. Journalists and others now have what has become a common fear. That is, that many of the established ways of communicating news about power to the citizens are declining, possibly disappearing. Newspapers are the most obvious sign of this: but news and current affairs on television has suffered at least as dramatic a decline. Newspapers for two hundred years, and TV news and current affairs for half a century, have been central to citizens’ apprehension of the public world – that is, to the exercise of political and other power. Now – in western countries – they are declining. People, especially the young, are turning away from newspapers. People, especially the young, watch TV news and current affairs programmes less and less. This is, as I say, a lament among journalists and scholars and politicians and others in public life – who believe or fear that the decline of these two large news sources will render citizens less knowledgeable, and thus less civic – as well as rendering more journalists unemployable.

With the decline of the news as we have known it comes the decline of the political as we have known it. Politics are usually not now the result of parties and party leaders agreeing a world view: politics are managerial, and party leaders often come to, or remain in, power by going against their party – as Tony Blair has done, and as David Cameron is doing even more enthusiastically; as Segolene Royal is doing in France; as Romano Prodi will have to do in Italy – and so on. Indeed, this conference is held under the patronage of the 20th century politician who did most to oppose his own party: Mikhail Sergeyevich Gorbachev. However one judges that, this means that, as with other civil society institutions – as organised religion, labour movements, patriotic movements – parties have declined greatly in power. The space is filled, in large part, by the media – which then vie for primacy in power with the political classes. The news media in most western countries – probably particularly in Britain – treat politicians, usually, with a gamut of attitudes ranging from irony to contempt. The irony proceeds from a view which also owes much to the decline of political and ideological considerations. It says: politicians have no principles, or even politics. They are managers, and are in politics for their own reputations, or power, or even money. So all the moves they make are nothing to do with the political or moral justification: they are simply moves in a corporate or personal power game, and that is all there is to it. As the American critic Thomas Patterson wrote over a decade ago, of US journalism, “since everything is seen as part of a larger strategy of power, no discrete project, law or statement can be accepted as having integrity of its own”. Contempt, of course, goes beyond irony: it is based on seeing politicians’ actions as lies. Sometimes, of course, they are. But contempt journalism focuses purely on that – to the extent of believing that any other journalism is beside the point. In part, this comes about because the media have filled the gap where mass politics, and mass engagement with causes and ideologies and public sentiment, have all declined.

In part, because it is a struggle for power – between two power centres, politics and media, which both fight for the trust of the same people – whom the media call the audience and the politicians call the voters. In part, it is the absorption of news and current affairs into the largest sphere of the media, and that which has expanded most and most rapidly – entertainment. Politicians and public figures are now routinely made into figures in scandals, sensation, revelations and outright fiction – either by name, or thinly disguised. “Proper” news thus finds it harder and harder to discriminate between the real figure and the fictionalised one – and sometimes doesn’t try.

I should put in a word on Italy, since we are in it. The common view of Italy over the past four years is that it has been run by a scandal: a politician who had built his wealth – and his political power base – on the back of owning the three main private TV channels; and, when Prime Minister, had a large say in the conduct of the three channels of RAI, the state TV. I believe it was a scandal, but it has to be understood. First, Silvio Berlusconi did not make the TV channels into simple means of propaganda: he couldn’t. Italy is a democracy, albeit one with weaker natural barriers to the use of media power than others. He did, especially at election times, put pressure on the channels to lean towards him: but in the end, he did lose. Second, Italian state TV had been divided up into party fiefdoms: no-one was arguing convincingly for a channel or channels which sought to give a fair and balanced view. That was not Berlusconi’s doing, though he benefited from it. Third, though Berlusconi didn’t make his channels propagandist, he encouraged them to be un-, or even anti-political. The message wasn’t “vote for Silvio” (except at election times); it was “forget politics: have a nice time”. And that is happening everywhere. The effect of this is for politics to be seen as more and more a spectator sport – and one which we are invited to criticise, with the journalists and presenters – or even jeer at. It has nothing to do with us – except when it annoys us. Politicians aren’t part of the “we” of our society, except during times of great danger, or emergency. strength

I have spoken as if the news media were wholly to blame. In part that is because discussions like this usually say that politicians, or others in power, are all to blame, and I want this to be a corrective. But of course, it isn’t the case. Politicians are deeply complicit in the media-isation of politics – how could they fail to be? The media are their way of carrying their messages. And since the media now have much more power, they become the main interlocutors of the politicians: the main worry for them when they are preparing a case; often the main cause of their fall. In government, of course, they retain the powers to legislate and to act: but these powers are increasingly constrained by the news media. Thus a huge amount of time, energy and money goes into preparing politicians, and their platforms, for the media – especially in the Anglo Saxon countries, where the power of the media is the greatest.

What is to be done? I think there are three antidotes possible.

One is to save reporting. Reporting is the way in which people learn about what is going on in the world, before historians have their say. It is a difficult business to do well. It takes time, and often is expensive. It is failing in popularity: but we have nothing with which to replace it. We – in journalism – must find ways to ensure it continues: which may mean finding new forms, or even reviving old ones.

Second, it is to save comment from the temptation of contempt. Contemptuous comment is of little use. Corruption and large incompetence should, of course, be treated harshly. But for the most part, public figures and politicians struggle to deal with real problems as best as they can, within limitations which are fairly easy to understand. Citizens need to understand what the real life contexts of decisions are: for by doing so, they can make informed judgements for themselves. Otherwise they are being asked merely to help the commentators throw rotten fruit at the freak show which is politics.

Third, it is to realise the potential of the new communication age. I began by saying that the media are undergoing a vast technological shift: the consequences of that are that the traditional media are now under pressure. Is it, after all, so important what form the news takes? If information, analysis, description and so on can reach you by electronic means, through the internet – does it matter that newspapers fade and die? If soon you will be able to select an array of programmes – past as well as present – from web sites, then we can accept the decline, even the death of the newspaper with a few nostalgic reflections on the loveliness of cafes with racks of newspapers from which to choose – as many, in Viennese or Budapest coffee houses at the height of the Austro Hungarian empire, as one hundred. The new media allow a number of different things to happen: – they involve vast numbers of people as participators, when once they had to be the audience. Their ability to express themselves – even if badly – means that on the Net now are millions and millions of publications, with audiences ranging from 3 to 3 million.

This democratises comment. It means that the talented – or the not so talented – can have their opinions expressed and read. It means that they can hook up with others of the same opinion – across the country, across countries, across the globe.

It allows knowledge to be accessed very rapidly. As everything becomes digitised, we can collect for ourselves hordes of material in a day which we could not, practically, ever hope to see in a lifetime. We have more knowledge at our fingertips than colleges of scholars had two decades ago.

The new technologies allow us instant access to public figures, without the mediation of journalists. Corporate bosses can address their employees and their customers directly. Politicians don't need journalists to get their message out, and are doing so. They answer questions directly, not from journalists, but from real people.

The internet allows endless choice, and is delivering it. A senior executive of the BBC told me a few weeks ago that the BBC would, in the course of ten years, become an organisation of the Net more than a broadcasting one. That means that the scheduled programmes will be less important than the number of programmes downloaded from the website, at times of the viewer's choosing. This will be true, sooner or later, of news and current affairs. So that what had been the case in most countries in the world – that television put out news at set times, and united large amounts of the nation round a common news agenda, will cease to be true. The relationship between power and the media will thus change, fundamentally. The media will allow direct communication – or rather, the old media will be bypassed – to allow direct communication. The individual is much more empowered with information, and can relatively easily become his own journalist. The ability of the web to link up individual and groups on an interest basis may recreate political parties, and may make transnational parties more possible.

Indrajit Banerjee, *Secretary-General of AIMC (Asian Media Information and Communication Centre), Singapore*

For the past several centuries, the media have played a significant role in political systems and processes around the world. The role of the media has ranged from a simple information dissemination mechanism to a public sphere institution where important issues relating to national and international political and economic development were debated and discussed. The media have also been used as propaganda instruments which have supported both ideological and political hegemony. The media thus play a range of roles when it comes to the political arena including its ability to drive agenda setting and shaping political discourse. In Asia, and especially in the post-colonial era, the media have essentially functioned as a tool for supporting national development which has been framed as the 'development communication' paradigm.

In this paper I will argue that recent developments in the media industry have transformed the role of the media in the political sphere and that we are witnessing simultaneously both a reinvigoration of the public sphere function of the media while at the same time undergoing a phase of disengagement and disenchantment of the media vis-à-vis political process and activity. In my opinion this change in the role of the media in the political sphere is due to several key factors including, but not limited to, the lack of freedom of expression and excessive media control, the new political economy of the media, which, through the transformation of media ownership structures has led to conglomeration and concentration, which in turn has significantly affected media diversity and independence. A third important factor which has altered the engagement of the media in the political sphere is the decline of public service media, which were supposed to be the guardians of public interest and independent political debate and discussion. Yet another critical factor that has had an impact on the role of the media in the political sphere is the advent of new media technologies such as the internet and other digital media delivery platforms. Media globalization has also played a critical role in changing the role and impact of the media in the political process and more generally in the approach to governance and politics.

Let me now elaborate on the points mentioned above. A first and significant impediment in the media's role in the political sphere in Asia is the lack of freedom of speech and expression. Many media systems continue to have too many restrictions and regulatory frameworks curtail the full participation of the media in the political process. Governments continue to exert excessive control of the national media in many Asian nations and this limits the capacity of the media to indulge in open political debate and discussion thereby restricting its public sphere function. While it is undoubtedly true that freedom of expression, especially in countries with complex religious, ethnic and political contexts, has to go hand in hand with responsibility, I believe that such extreme control of the media is unjustified and counter-productive in the long term.

A second important factor that affects the role of media in politics is the underlying political economy of media systems which critically shape the media agenda. Let us now examine the political economy of the current Asian media landscape. In most Asian countries, and since the 1980s, we have witnessed a systematic process of media deregulation and liberalization which have given birth to a vibrant commercial and competitive media landscape. In this competitive commercial regime, the media players have been forced to maximize profit and commercial viability at the expense of all other concerns. Advertising revenue drives the media industry and this has led to a significant decline in the quality of political programming and content which is clearly not the most exciting media commodity. Game shows, situation comedy, soap opera, TV drama and more recently reality shows have filled all the TV screens across Asia. It is the age of franchise broadcasting and any successful American TV show is then taken up by Asian broadcasters and adapted to the

local context. There is almost a total absence of serious political programming, debate and discussion. Election time is perhaps the only occasion when TV channels care to broadcast political debate and issues based programming. TV news, which once had a major focus on political discourse and process, is now a mosaic of tit-bits and snippets providing us with a superficial and catchy glimpse of the world of politics. Scandals, gossip, personal conflict, violence and strife seem to have become the hallmark of TV news today. TV news is about bad news and channels seem to have full heartedly espoused the belief that "if it bleeds it leads". In keeping with other TV genres, news has become nothing but a commodity, which needs to be packaged effectively for public consumption. The print media seem to be following the same pattern. Once hailed as the guardians of quality political debate and discussion, the print media have also succumbed to commercial bottom-line imperatives and logics. Some of the most successful newspapers in Asia today are tabloid papers and currently the spread of what are known as "free-sheeters" threaten to pose an even more serious challenge to what is left of mainstream, quality newspapers. One of the most negative consequences of this changing political economy of the media today is the process of conglomeration and concentration of ownership in the media sector. A few giant media corporations with clear political leanings and affiliations have built up large media empires through cross media ownership. This has seriously affected media pluralism and independence and limited the multiplicity of perspectives and the range of political discourse and analysis in the media.

This then brings me to my third key point, which is the decline of public service media and especially broadcasting. To begin with, most Asian nations have failed in managing a transition from what is known as state broadcasting to public service broadcasting. State broadcasters have essentially constituted the mouthpiece of governments and have provided them with powerful instruments to maintain their political power and hegemony. If Asian governments had taken the initiative to transform the national broadcasters to truly independent and accountable public service broadcasting institutions, it would have provided the citizenry with a genuine public service institution and would have helped to counter the monopoly of commercial broadcasting and the decline of political discourse and coverage. State broadcasters are caught in between the challenge of transforming themselves to genuine public service broadcasting institutions and the need to compete with their commercial counterparts, trapped as it were between the devil and the deep blue sea. If the media were to play any significant role in the political arena, it is imperative that every nation have at least one public service broadcasting institution committed to the public interest and to its citizens and engaging them to participate in the political arena. Ironically, the vital need for public service media is being felt at the very moment that the commercial media seem to be celebrating their great triumph and success. These then are some of the critical issues and challenges faced by the Asian media when it comes to the political arena.

However, I am not suggesting that all is gloom and doom and that the media do not play any significant role in political discourse and activity. In fact, in spite of these negative developments that I have highlighted before, the media continue to be one of the most powerful agents of political activity. The media shape the political discourse and agenda, provide insights into the political parties and candidates, highlight issues of public interest and influence public opinion through its coverage of political issues and debate. In fact, this brings me to my fourth key argument which is that major technological developments such as the advent of the internet and digital media are providing new opportunities for political debate and discussion. These technological innovations are creating new avenues for free speech and political expression and transforming citizens from passive recipients to engaged participants. Today we are witnessing new forms of political debate and engagement through internet chat rooms, bulletin boards, web-blogs and a host of other

channels of political participation. Gone are the days when citizens had limited avenues of political expression and participation through such narrow channels such as letters to the editors or telephone call-ins to radio and TV shows. Today's citizens enjoy a broad range of channels through which they can actively express their views and discuss or debate political issues. However, it is not technology itself that drives political participation but the political engagement and commitment of citizens that drives use of technology and enhances political discourse and activity.

My fifth and last argument concerning the role of the media in the political process and activity pertains to globalization in general and media globalization in particular. The political arena has evolved significantly with the increasing political and economic interdependence brought about by the process of globalization. Political issues and debate are thus no longer confined to national concerns alone. Events and developments across the globe are seen to have a powerful resonance and impact on nations around the world. What has changed significantly in the field of politics is the increasing impact of events occurring in far away locations on local and national politics. In this interdependent and globalized political world, the challenge for the media has been to provide extensive coverage of global politics and to examine the impact of these influences in specific national contexts. In this way, the media have to play a critical role in "making sense" of the world and to provide timely and accurate analysis of these global developments within a framework and context which is accessible and understandable to citizens of various nations. The media themselves have undergone a process of globalization and multinational media conglomerates now offer media channels across the world. The advent of international broadcasting and the progressive internationalization of the media have brought about new challenges to national and local media everywhere. Media systems which were once strongly controlled by governments now have to face the onslaught of international channels and media content and service providers. They have thus been forced to improve both their content and services to maintain their credibility and legitimacy in a competitive media environment. I feel that this has contributed significantly to the quality of the Asian media and has also led to a progressive deregulation and liberalization of the Asian media sector.

Media globalization has also led to the creation of a more independent and accountable national media in Asia. As citizens have a wide range of channels of news and information to choose from, the media cannot continue to provide biased and inaccurate information. Government propaganda through state owned media is also in the decline as citizens can now receive information from a diversity of sources and channels which can contradict government news and information. All in all therefore, the media in Asia have evolved significantly in the past decade or more. As I have tried to highlight in this paper, on the one hand, the quality of media coverage in Asia has declined due to several key factors but on the other hand, technological innovation offers unprecedented channels and avenues for political participation, engagement and activity.

I would like to conclude my paper by highlighting two points which in my opinion provide insights into the current state of the engagement of the media in the political arena. Firstly, the media alone cannot be held responsible for the disenchantment of citizens with political discourse and activity. There has undoubtedly been a significant decline in the quality of global politics. Political leaders are failing to inspire citizens through their leadership and engagement. Politics seem to have more to do with being in power than about good governance and commitment to development. Plebiscite democracy is the name of the game and political parties come out every four or five years to campaign for elections to maintain their political hegemony and legacy. Electoral promises are forgotten once parties triumph in the polls and terms in office are spent essentially to find ways to retain power. This has led to the disenchantment of citizens and their shying away from

political engagement and participation. In most countries in the world, we have witnessed a significant decline in electoral participation and this reflects the political disengagement of citizens.

This leads me to my final point which is that the media in any country reflect the engagement of citizens. In countries where the citizens are politically committed and engaged, even the most archaic media channels are harnessed for political discourse and debate. In the ultimate analysis, it is the commitment of citizens that will drive political commitment and participation and in turn shape the media agenda. However, the media can contribute to political participation and commitment by creating a culture of engagement and a mature citizenry.

Roberto Reale, *Journalist and Professor of Theories and Techniques of Television Information at the University of Padua, Italy*

I start with a direct question: what a political meaning does it still have today speaking about the Fourth Power? Our one is a complicated time. Not everything seeming to be white is actually white and things are different than the way slogans do present them. If saying Fourth Power we refer to main publishers, main corporations of the media sector that have to do with governments as peer to peer, it makes sense to use this term. If we consider countries as Italy or Thailand, where owners of televisions at the beginning of the millennium became Prime Ministers, the matter becomes even clearer.

But actually, helped by the myth of the Watergate case, the resignation of Nixon and what followed, in the last decades, with the term Fourth Power we meant most of all the one of editorial staffs and journalists. And we gave the term the most political sense: an active power, able to influence/determine the choices of governments and the destiny of politicians.

It is worth reflecting on this. In the logics of the fathers of democracy, the role of the press had to be that of controlling the behaviour of executive boards, of representing a constant element of defence of freedom at the service of citizenry, for a right working of the institutions. Not a counter-power, but a public place to verify the behaviours, the sincerity and the respect of legality by governments, elected by people. In the last years, unfortunately, facts used a very different language. After 9/11 2001, for at least three years, the media of the guiding nation, the United States, were paralyzed in the so called "information patriotism", sharing uncritically every stage of the political/strategic path leading to the war against Saddam.

The indications that something was wrong were there but nobody cared about them. The terrorism challenge and the logics of a totally military reaction have somehow legitimized the use of lies and illegality by governments. Since spring 2004 something changed in the attitude of the newspapers. But how much is the press important in today's America? There are very documented researches showing how 80% of the American citizens received information about the attack of Iraq only by television. And there is a "disturbing" particular. During summer 2003 an American on five was convinced that Saddam Hussein had used chemical and biological weapons against the marines attacking Baghdad. Where did all these people get information? From television. It is to be noted by the way that no reporter, how embedded or one-sided he could be, had ever said in a video report a stupid thing like that. The emphasis on the coming danger, on the anti-gas masks used by soldiers had been enough to induce the public in this error. Influenced by emotions, TV determines the nature of perceptions, producing cultural consequences becoming political. Perhaps we should reflect not so much on the relationship democracy establishes with information, but on the one it has with television.

Somebody could observe that this is just the new dimension of the Fourth or, if you prefer, of the Fifth Power of the years 2000. Actually, TV produces a lot of induced effects. Let's say, schematizing, that TV has a very strong influence on social behaviours, commercial choices, cultural tendencies, on the first impression big events produce and on the empathy between leaders and citizens reduced to public. But it is not the exercise of a positive and aware power, capable of starting a virtuous circle of information and critical knowledge. There is moreover another observation to do, probably unpleasant for journalists, whom narcissism is traditionally very strong: in the last years the most part of the main figures of information has been "strong with the weak and weak with the strong ones", perhaps very aggressive towards a normal citizen or a candidate at the beginning of his career. But looking at the relationship between journalists and real power, the one of executives and of big apparatuses, the perspective is totally changed. Information has

been silent or has lacked in efficacy. To give a concrete example: after the scandal about the tortures of Abu Grahib, very many bodies of information and TV anchormen asked for Donald Rumsfeld's resignation. Nothing happened: the Minister for Defence of the United States remained firmly at his place. On the contrary, he recently overcame, undamaged, even the critics of many American Generals. Notwithstanding the evident responsibilities and the disasters he did, he remained at the bridge. An untouchable. In these years there was no efficient supervision – not necessarily antagonist – on the work of public administrations. Regarding big political choices, the media scene has been at most dominated by the men of the spinning machine, the consensus machine, by communicators at the service of governments. They succeeded in exploiting with ability the arrogance of some reporters to instigate public opinion against liberal information. When this was not enough they used even more direct methods. For example through fake news, the TV ads produced directly by the Administration and broadcasted – without any communication to spectators – as normal and independent TV services by 77 TV channels of the United States.

My opinion in the end is that in these years we had “too little journalism”, and not that we had too much of it. An enormous problem of journalistic culture emerged, constituted by laziness and bad habits now consolidated among many editorial staffs. If they don't change, many media operators will condemn themselves to handle only gossip, or to keep up the microphone to the current potent people: anything but Fourth Power. But it is stupid to extrapolate this matter from a bigger context. Even the Pentagon, in an extraordinary document on communication explained that media “are too conditioned by commercial reasons”, by market results and by advertising. Here lies a basic element of the problem, but in wide parts of the western societies, the principle has been accepted that information is an irresponsible power, a factor of negative influence on public life. We should deal with this sort of opposition. The false scoops, sensationalism, the banalizing of big themes we see in talk-shows are menaces to the recovery of a strong credibility, the only one element which could let media take back their role of instruments of knowledge production, in a world of information more and more influenced by “commercial pressures” of the corporations on anti-monopolistic laws. We must anyway recall that about this matter, in the whole western world the confrontation is kept open and we never have the concentration levels that we see in Italy.

Meantime these are very difficult times for people trying to work hard as witnesses at the service of the community. On the Iraq territory more that 100 are up to now the information operators who became victims of capture managed by violent terrorists, of brutal executions and of the indiscriminate fire of the occupants. On our ISF website, Information Safety and Freedom (www.isfreedom.org), we defined it a massacre in the massacre. A real systematic elimination of witnesses executed in the context of a progressive massacre of the civil population. For reporters this Iraqi war is the most bloody of all times. In three years we had more victims – 124 dead people until the middle of June 2006 – than in 12 years of war in Vietnam. The involved parts, both terrorists or armies, had no hesitations: journalists are an obstacle to their action, they must be removed. We live in the time of global communication and we see that Power – or better say powers, even those using terror as a weapon – want to manage just this communication. They don't want to give space to third, independent, autonomous subjects. This is an enormous step backwards, depriving us of the possibility to get nearer to the truth of things. The most clamorous proof of this impossibility to know what happens, to be complete interpreters of the evolution of the events lies in the fact that we don't know one of the most important aspects of the Iraqi war: we have no certainties about the number of civilian victims. The English website [Iraqiboycount](http://Iraqiboycount.com) talks about 38.000/42.000 dead people since 2003 up to now. But on the last 19 April in Kerbala the association “Iraq without violence” stated that only in the period

between 15 December 2005, date of the elections, and 15 April 2006, there has been 3.457 acts of violence provoking 19.548 victims. 20.000 casualties in four months: an enormity. Is it this the proof of “democratisation”, of the “progresses towards stability” about which even many of our politicians talk? In our country these themes have been handled only by Radio Vaticana, launching again the warning about civil war, reminding that we record between 60 and 80 victims per day, but on other media we had in practice no trace of this. After the last attack in Nassirija we cried on the new Italian victims, our dead soldiers, but we totally lacked the context within which to consider the events. There is an enormous gap. There has been in the world in these years generous reporters trying to fill it even with danger for their lives. Many of them did not understand that their ones were not private vicissitudes – job risks similar to the ones run by contractors, private guards – but that freedom of expression and possibility to know are the object of the discussion: the only peaceful weapons we have to fight for the defence of human rights in a world more and more brutalized by war and terrorism and by the mountain of lies poisoning our future.

At the same time, new dimensions and communication instruments become available. Again the experts of the Pentagon acutely claim that in our times “attention and not information, is the limited resource”. They say it for their own purposes, but they actually confirm how much technological evolution is changing everything. This is moreover not a neutral or irrelevant political factor. We saw already in 2004 how much digital photos taken by non professional subjects (the most impressive case was the one of the tremendous images of Abu Grahib) could produce media effects much superior to services realised by professionals. Just regarding Abu Grahib and tortures, another consideration comes spontaneously. There had been repeating denounces by humanitarian organisations, as Amnesty International and Red Cross International, regarding violence on prisoners: why did anybody really care about it before pictures became public? This is really one of the “black holes” of the information of our time. Too many tragedies escape any attention. The criteria through which we defined priorities are too much casual or instrumental. There are whole areas of the planet wrapped in a media darkness. A journalism asserting to have the social function of knowledge promotion, should not neglect these questions, which further undermine its credibility.

If my point of view is certainly critic, I do not share instead the catastrophic pessimism of the people thinking there is nothing to do. There’s an element of interpretation that we should always consider, a sort of polar star to which we must stick: the equilibriums of the current world information system are continuously moving. Everything is transition and the dominion of the current television will not be eternal. Looking at things with a reasonable optimism, somebody sees in digitalisation and in the new technological potentials the birth of a new figure, the one of the citizen/reporter. Certainly today we already have through computers, innovative ways, once unthinkable, to spread news, information, documents. The process is destined to grow with effects which could put in discussion the equilibriums of a global system which today is much canted in favour of television, and in particular of allnews channels, till now the real managers of the play. I know that among the experts there is an inevitable – maybe corporative – scepticism on the matter of the citizen/reporter. But it would be enough to analyse what the big American newspapers do: needing oxygen from TV, they are looking on the web for the way to be competitive in “real time” with the allnews network. They do it – even in Italy – by promoting the involvement of the readers/witnesses of important events. And anyway I ask all of you: is there more truth in the 24 hours of uninterrupted programs that CNN, Foxnews and others dedicated to the death of Al Zarqawi or we find more of it in the film “The War Tapes”, filmed by three American soldiers? Three reservists of the National Guard who taped whatever they saw,

they showed us the real face of war, and who had the bravery to say about Iraqi civilians what many correspondents hide: “we are here to help them, but actually we kill them”.

What I mean, in conclusion, is that reflecting on the speed of the changes investing the forms of global communication, it is better to avoid drawing definitive or apocalyptic about the “destiny of information”. Historically we could say with sad certainty who won and who lost in the last years. In the future much could change, for one reason more than others: information denying the search for truth denies itself. Nobody in an open society, where freedom of expression exist, could never theorize publicly its reduction to propaganda or entertainment. If we agree that “democracy” is not threading a voting paper in the ballot box every 4 or 5 years and then let the winner do whatever he wants; if we think that the control and verification instruments are basic for a good working of an open and free society, then we mustn’t see with prejudicial scepticism the digital innovation which permits the citizen/witness to promote the diffusion and knowledge of the events in which he took part. The open question of our time, where “the attention of the public is the limited resource”, is that of “assessing the truth of facts in the contemporary society”. I feel the utmost respect for entertainers, opinion leaders, talk show anchormen, but I remain with the old idea that the task of information keeps being telling the facts, helping us understanding reality.

Therefore the contribution coming “from the bottom” is important, but linked to some political choices. I sum them up shortly in conclusion: firm fight against monopolistic positions, utmost transparency in the choices regarding communication, participation of the public opinion, support to the movements operating in the field of mediactivism, controlling the behaviours of operators and of information means. Awareness that the system must have different resources than the ones coming from the market. If we consider journalism as a civil service, information a property of community, than this field of activity of public usefulness cannot have only a market dimension. James T. Hamilton, liberal scholar of media economy, analysed how many types of news have today a commercial value for what concerns audience and publicity. He arrived to the conclusion that “news necessary to the functioning of democracy have a low market value”. That is as to say that to get them we need the system to be supported even by financial and participation channels, different than the asphyxiating publicity dimension. If we want to make the relationship between citizens/media and democracy better, we can do many concrete things. The agenda is rich in options. We certainly need a politics that till now has been inattentive and fragile, when not accomplice.

Ennio Remondino, RAI Journalist, Italy

I will make some considerations, maybe incomplete or simple inputs, choosing to underline the dark side of the freedom of information. There must be a reason why freedom of thinking and speaking has always been present in all the popular claiming and ambitions and it is at the top of every State Charter, Revolution and International Treaty.

Why? We have two alternatives: or this freedom is so much vested that it is ritually included among the first good intentions of civil life in common, or it is systematically menaced and this must be always reminded to society and politicians, who often forget the importance of defending this liberty.

Let's think about what happened in these last 200 years on the basic question of human rights, for example. From the "liberal" rights of the French revolution (*liberté, égalité, fraternité*), to the socialist ones of the first UN Charter of 1948 (right to instruction, work, house, health). The following discovery of global rights (the responsibility of populations towards other populations) such as self-determination, peace, development, protection of the environment. Up to the emerging, today, of a "fourth generation" of rights, that discusses bioethics, genetic manipulations and new communication technologies.

The old ideas of State, Democracy, Self-determination and Independence grow or get transformed. Everything has changed or is changing in the high organizations world, but nothing is changing in our Olympus of freedom of information. If we read the first Charter written by the members of the constituent of the National Assembly of Paris in 1789, we discover that among the "natural, inalienable and holy" rights of man freedom of thinking and expression is included. The same concepts are expressed, more or less with similar words to speak about freedom of thinking and expression, in the Charters of modernity. Even the Italian Charter, which is the youngest within the "old Europe", has been written by the pen of Cavour during the Risorgimento. I translate it today and argue: for me it is not enough to have the guarantee to be able to read Scalfari or Feltri, but I want the guarantee of having certain elements on the facts, the "news" through which I can freely form my opinion.

211 years after our friends of the National Assembly of Paris, we, the European citizens, gathered in Nice in 2000, and wrote the Charter of Fundamental Rights. We too state that "every individual has the right to express his opinion" limiting ourselves to give a sign of modernity, in adding the word "information" among the rights to defend.

Finally: the value of "news", beyond the comment. As to recover something we forgot, we added to that article the half a line paragraph 2: "freedom of media and their pluralism are respected". To me it does not seem a big effort of good intentions. Synthesis or meanness? "Media and pluralism are respected" means that they are desired, or the respect of tolerance is meant? Is it a minority vice to defend or a general right to expand? And if media were, in some countries, in probation, or if they were a few, and concentrated in the same hands - pace pluralism - what do we do? We accept it, and go on with other mercantile agreements of "economic Community", or pluralism of media that does not exist is an element of exclusion from the Club? And which is the acceptable and shared measure of that freedom and pluralism? Plural means more than one. Does pluralism in media mean two, three, ten? Do two only owners of televisions make pluralism? Is that possible that Europe – that has such detailed codes that even establish if I will still be able to eat the "taleggio di Fossa" or the lard of Colonnata – does not waste a word, even a note at the end of the page, on my right to information? Not even a little sanitary norm on the minimum guaranteed quantity of news? Is that possible that obligations and sanctions exist on how much milk I can take from my communitarian cow, but nobody tells me how much media pluralism I can and must have? Is this a legislative distraction that affects all the representatives elected in Strasbourg, in the 25 countries of the Union, or a sort of

epidemic that turns people forgetful and careless when one talks about information, and above all of television? No. I do not believe in fate. We must not believe in it. The problem is that politics, on the very concept of freedom and pluralism of information, stammers or makes distinctions. It quibbles, investigates, delays, consults, confronts, reflects, values and values again, searches for consensus and avoids the clash, mediates and negotiates, quarrels on the adjective and often loses the substantive on the way. I do not want to annoy you with the photograph of the information systems of the 25 countries of the Union. In order to summarize it in a sentence that we can easily understand, I can tell you that on media pluralism, the European Union risks to turn the “exception Berlusconi” into the rule of many “little Berlusconi” who are growing in several young democracies.

Therefore this makes me often reflect on a key-question, that Ignacio Ramonet posed last year here in Venice: in this global and commercial media system, where it is more and more the advertiser the one who chooses the target of news, considering the aim of a specific kind of user-consumer, information is good or bad for democracy?

Luckily I am still convinced not to be personally too harmful for public health, even if the danger impends. Having been a TV journalist for a long time (due to my age), I elaborated a series of theories and postulates on politics and TV, on the basis of a healthy realism, that some of you could regard as pessimism. For example, consider television: or you possess it (like Berlusconi does), or anyway you want it (and here you can put the name of any govern or governor). If you do not possess it, at least you want to control it. TV is a contagious disease: you work in it, you watch it, you live in that world, and it transforms you. The journalist, a mediator who turns himself into a protagonist (the narrator who, being used to see himself on air, is sometimes convinced to be able to think without reading) and the politician who speaks using headline-like epigrams. The problem is when, besides TV-like speaking, politics thinks too through epigrams: the famous “short thinking”. In order to be pessimistically clear: politics does not even consider the problem which is the theme of our debate today. There is no alternative on media as “political actors”. Neither observers, nor mediators, but only “political servants”. I know I am exaggerating, I know I have charged my improvised chat with too much bitter irony. I know that not all politics is like the one I denounced, and not all journalism either. I would not be here if I were not still confident in the possibility to emend the system and in the high value of politics.

If I should improvise a list of things to ask firmly and to reflect and make a project upon, I would indicate the following:

- better definition of the role of radio-TV structures of public service in the national, European and global media system;
- definition at European level of a normative on the minimum level of “media pluralism” that must be shared by all the countries that adhere to it;
- introduction of norms that widen the concept of right to information, in right to the access to information sources (de-secreting states and impose transparency in every possible public act);
- for Italy: elaboration and achievement of a different media system, above all acting on the role and function of RAI, on the composition of its governing bodies (board of administration), guaranteeing that economic and political autonomy that has always been promised and never granted.

I do not believe that, in order to obtain the desired change, we could count on internal self-correction (be it journalists professional ethics or the miracle market for editors) and neither that politicians, even the more “enlightened” ones, will be able or available to operate a self-correction.

Besides the distorted net of politics and information, only a strong public opinion that communicates by the means of alternative intellectual and communicative circuits, and a

role of protagonist for the civil society, that must be admitted in the governing structures of the radio-TV public services, can introduce that changes of attention and of information proposal that other people here indicated – better than me - as indispensable.

Maurizio Torrealta, RAINNEWS24, Italy

In order to avoid the trap of discussing optimism and pessimism, good and bad will, for what concerns information, I will only talk about goods, on this we should all agree. I do a job that produces goods, that searches for them, sometimes buys them, diffuses them and these goods have a particular characteristics. One of the characteristics is that when these goods have only one producer, they disappear, they are no more themselves, evaporate. In other words if the news are produced and diffused by only one broadcaster, by only one subject, they could be edicts, they could be national-popular epic poems, they could be propaganda, they could be what you want, but they have nothing to do with news. I think we all agree on this, on the fact that a strange relationship between the value of these goods and the fact that they have many producers exists. Well, if we can go on with this assumption, then we can also reflect on this and say: when the producers are many, these goods have a great value, when the producers are a few, these goods are depreciated. Let's look at the situation in the USA, the "big picture". I left the USA in 1968 and that year the producers of the 80% of American information were 50, today they are 5.

They are 5. Namely: Disney, that means a channel of information which is ABC, that makes a lot of good services; News Corporation, that means FOX channel (I won't praise it too much, but notwithstanding we must reflect on the extraordinary work that its journalists made in New Orleans after Katrina); then we have Time Warner, that means CNN; General Electric, that means NBC; VIACOM, that means CBC.

Now, you could find some objections to what I've just said (namely that when the number of owners decreases, or better when media owners concentration augments, the value of information diminishes): how does this RAINNEWS 24 journalist dare to say that CNN, ABC, CBC etc... do not make a good information?

Of course very good journalists work for these channels, surely they make a very good information, but at the same time there surely is a lot of information that could have been produced, but has not been produced by these channels. Lack, and censorship in particular, are themes that are not grasped, they are ways to face issues that are not developed.

I would never think of defaming any journalist of any channel, let's talk about entertainment, in order to avoid offending the subjects we are talking about. I would never dare to criticise American cinema, that depends upon the same 5 companies I just mentioned, even if it does not make valuable products: this year independent cinema got the Oscars, and not the 5 majors. Let's analyse from this point of view these goods produced by this agglomerate of 5 societies, that do not compete among each other. Every representative of these societies sits in the board of governors of the others, forming a net that has a very strong relationship with political administration and producing very good information, but there are issues which are not raised: themes that someone prefers not to touch. It is a sort of historic jam because, we have seen it, in this period the means to get information are many, technology offers incredible possibilities and there is an "underground" information, represented by the web, that is growing and that is producing phenomena that will have some consequences, sooner or later. I do not believe that there will be a sort of media revolution, but this will surely bring the richness of information to another level.

I make these reflections on information because there must be a way, to face this question, that foresees some limits, for example some limits in the control of advertisement flood, that consent the existence of different subjects. Absolute liberalism in the field of information destroys information, therefore destroys the very market of information and its added value. This must be a basis to reflect on how we can guarantee a biological information, which is to say a reliable information, a rich, different, non OGM information.

There is another aspect on which I would like to intervene: we have often talked about strong subjects, but I would not want a sort of ideological-political vision to be behind this discussion. I work for an “all news” channel, when news arrive they obviously have immediate space if they are given by public subjects. If the Pentagon makes a declaration and gives me a version of the facts, I am obliged to publish it immediately, and very often I make enormous errors because this information is not true. I have no time to check it, and no time to criticise such important subjects as the Pentagon or our Ministry of Defence can be. The demonstration of the contrary requires time and a detailed analysis that at media level can not correspond equally to this subject which is so accredited from the institutional point of view. I prefer defining it “accredited subject”, instead of talking about “strong powers” because otherwise we can think that political judgements are implied.

To make an example, let’s talk about the war in the Balkans: I have been working in this all-news channel since 1999, and I have some ideas on how an all-news channel is compelled to deal with wars. I remember that, speaking about the war in Kosovo, we very often gave (and I am horrified of this) the news that there were mass graves involving 500.000 people in Kosovo. This is absolutely false, but we were given the news by strong and reliable subjects and it was continuously repeated. Therefore this is one of the aspects I would like to underline... it is true that there is a sort of direct relationship between power of information and the credibility that power has on information. But then one pays the price, because one always pays the price, one pays afterwards but pays, when false things are said.

This is true for the arms of mass destruction of the Bush administration but it is true as well for many other information that we have been given. Because who does this job must have the possibility to work deeply on the issues. There are two things I would like to underline before I go back to the issue of deepening, and I do not say nothing new. In the Poetics Aristotle says: “There are two things that always work when we put them in a narration: Phobos (terror) and Eleos (pain)”. When one talks about these two themes the news immediately work and this is terrifying; when the narration of war, made by our news, deals with these two themes, it becomes a narration that transforms the news. It becomes something that anticipates the news. The news become enormous and goes on until it becomes a sort of virus. If it was not a correct one, this mechanism becomes terrifying, even from the media point of view. And I realized how the preparation of war insisted on this narrative element, terror, which is an extremely strong term. But this is not only a question of terminology. BBC does not use anymore the term terrorist and I think this has been a right choice that we should imitate, because the term “terrorist” does not mean anything.

The problem is not only about terminology, it is about a narrative function, and the same is true for what concerns compassion, pain, we could say that these two elements are the ones that make us relate a war, they anticipate and justify it. Let’s think about the situation of terror in Kosovo, or in the Balkans, or in Iraq, and then soon after the pain for what happened arrives. We must intervene, we must change the situation, we can not leave Iraq in this continuous pain... these are more or less the two measures on which a war is created, and then consequently there are humanitarian interventions on the war and the war is somehow concluded. It would be interesting to understand when a war is won: one wins when information does no more care about it. This is what determines a victory, not a completely peaceful territory, but a territory where tension is not so strong as to make people think that there is a real war. Afghanistan stands in that grey zone, sometimes one is interested about it and therefore it is still a war, sometimes one does not care about that war, that – anyway – is still there, with the same number of dead and attacks.

Therefore, to go back to my initial theme, these goods that we sell can not be immediately confronted with the goods you find in the super-markets: they need limits, interventions,

monitoring, checks, and I believe it is important that these goods have reliable subjects, that must be public ones. I am convinced that public TV has a fundamental role as a subject that establishes the basis of confrontation in the market of these goods. A strong public television can give some guarantees if the subjects that speak are many, and they should be not only powerful ones, but the “not accredited” ones too. This public television can be important if it does not rest on those two mechanisms – I mean terror and pain – that are efficacious ones, but can be deleterious if we use them exclusively.

Finally, I would like to make an example: we are an all-news channel, but at a certain moment we decided not to do anymore what an all-news channel normally does, that is following information. Some of us, and in particular a colleague of mine, Sigfrido Ranucci, decided not to take care anymore of what was happening, in order to dedicate his attention to what had already happened, and particularly to a series of photos of the dead in Falluja. These were repellent photos, we could not use them, they were excessive. We watched them because they were what remained of a war, of people who had been killed. There was one photo, in particular, that was the photo of a disfigured corpse that wore the jacket with the inscription “Press”. It was particularly strong and emblematic, because it represented, according to me, the death of information in all senses. Looking at that photo, looking at it as a journalist should do, and realizing that the clothes were not burnt and the face exploded, that the hair was not burnt and the soft parts of the face were not smashed, we understood that this person had been cooked with microwaves.

We made a research on this and we realized that it was true, in Iraq microwaves and laser arms had been used. We gathered testimonies and we arrived to a paradoxical situation: even if we had been stopped on that photo for months, we were able to understand what was going to happen, even if we were not yet totally aware of it. We are living a generational change of enormous dimensions that is the passage from kinetic to energy arms. For the first time (maybe not for the first time, but now evidently) in Iraq energy arms were used, which is to say arms that hit with electrons, therefore invisible ones, that produced strange effects. There is a particular weapon that has been used, that excites the receptors of pain and provokes pure pain.

According to the Convention of Geneva every weapon must obtain its effect with the minimum possible pain. This weapon is the exact contrary: it causes pure pain and, paradoxically, it is promoted as a non-lethal weapon. I believe it is an enormous dimensioned form of dominion, and we will soon find it as an internal use weapon for the control of political movements and demonstrations. This is because if it is used for just a second, it only excites pain receptors and officially it just provokes terrible pain and fear, but only for a second: therefore this weapon is defined “non lethal”. I believe it is such an enormous form of dominion, that it is able to create a new structure of power that can’t do anything but frighten everyone. The advertising of this weapon says: it can be used “from shouting to shooting”. The consequences of the use of this weapon prefigure a scenery in which demonstrate or operate non-violent actions will be impossible, because this weapon could destroy all these freedoms.

I seized this occasion to give this news. That paradoxically came out of a non-search for news, but rather of the reflection on what remained after the news: the photo of a dead who had no history, who had no future, who does not mean anything anymore.

THE INDEPENDENT PRESS UNDER PRESSURE: THE PRICE OF SURVIVAL

Chairman: Henrikas Iouchkiavitchious, *Former Deputy Director General of UNESCO in charge of Media, Lithuania*

What we are discussing today is really very important. I can tell you from my own experience in UNESCO. In 1997 the first prize for the press freedom was created by UNESCO. We gave this prize to the Chinese journalist Gao You who was in jail for not disclosing their sources of information.

We made a big noise. I am from Lithuania and lived in Moscow. For many years, for us the examples of the free press were not China, of course, but the United States, Canada or other democratic countries. But now, after nine years we were astonished to find that in some of these democratic countries journalists can go to jail for not disclosing their sources of information.

So press freedom is under great pressure everywhere. Politicians are for the press freedom when they are fighting for a power, but when they come to the power they are not so interested in the press freedom. We were thinking that after so-called “orange revolution” in Georgia and Ukraine, there would be no problems with the press freedom, but in Georgia again there are big problems and there is a danger for the journalists on the one side from power and on the other side from the mafia.

We have learnt some important lessons, one of them that the market economy must not be given the priority to the freedom of expression, human rights and democratic values.

Mikhail Gorbachev, who spoke this morning, talked about this. In the article in the Herald Tribune by his assistant Grachev he recounts how Mikhail Gorbachev did not receive assistance, financial assistance, from the west at the moment when Russia most needed it.

At that time, the only advice was “You have to help yourself and the market economy will help”. The consequence of this was that in Russia, priority was given to the market and other values were rated second.

There were lots of recommendations of how to change from capitalism to socialism but no book was written by Marx or Engels how to change from socialism to capitalism, and the media was forgotten in the programme of the assistance.

It was intellectuals who fought for the democracy, but they, in the free market, became the first victims of this market economy. The result was that the older generation of intellectuals became sceptical and the younger cynical. What we found is that the free market has led not so much to pluralism as to concentration of the media.

Another factor is terrorism. Terrorism kills not only people, it also kills press freedom. After the North-Ost tragedy in Moscow where number of hostages died, President Putin, under the pressure of non-governmental organisations, including international press institutions vetoed the law on restriction on reporting on terrorism.

Power ministries do not want the press to cover the events, because they do not want their mistakes to be exposed.

After the Beslan tragedy there were attempts by the Russian Parliament, the Duma, to limit coverage of terrorism attacks.

Thousands of people today are ill because after the Chernobyl catastrophe, they were not informed in time.

Human rights today are not actually held as a great value. We see the attitude of western leaders to the Byelorussian president, who is of course an autocrat, and no doubt he deserves to be criticised, but the same critics are silent about the Turkmenistan president. So the attitude very often depends how many Boeings, Airbuses, or MIGs are sold and what possibility there is for military bases to be established or are there natural resources or not?

These factors now have priority over human rights.

I remember when Carter met with Brezhnev and photo of the famous kiss but the next day Carter was speaking about the human rights.

My father used to say: a real independent person is a beggar who is on the street and does not have anything. He is completely independent. Otherwise, everybody else is dependent on somebody. I am for example dependent on my wife – morally not financially. It is also important, when you are talking about the press, what the relations are between power, media and citizens.

What we have found is that the media is depending on power, on governments. And citizens do not have enough voice. In the Western world, public society is already developed. In Russia, in Eastern Europe for example, in the developing world, in the Middle East – I think the Al-Jazeera representative will agree – public society is only beginning to develop.

The most important platform for successful development of the public society is media, it is broadcasting, it is public broadcasting. In the United States you have civil society.

Johann P. Fritz, *IPI (International Press Institute) Director, Austria*

In my introductory statement for this session I would like to present an analysis of the manifold aspects of pressures on the media. The organisers spoke of PRESSURES – the plural – and indeed obstructive acts against the media range from the most simple and brutal forms in authoritarian regimes to complicated and sophisticated versions in the advanced democracies.

The overall situation of press freedom in our world is, unfortunately, still rather shocking. This can be demonstrated best by two facts:

– For 2005, the IPI “World Press Freedom Review” revealed press freedom violations in 178 countries. And the report showed that, in virtually every region of the world, the media are engaged in a struggle to uphold their fundamental right to report news.

– The New York based “Freedom House” found that out of 194 monitored countries, 73 have a “Free Press Situation”, 54 are listed as “Partly Free” and 67 have no “Free Press” at all. In terms of population, this means that only 17 per cent of the world lives under the conditions of a “Free Press”, while the rest has restricted or no press freedom at all.

The exercise of free speech is a fundamental human right. Most of the world’s countries have officially recognised international treaties, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the European Convention on Human Rights, the American Convention on Human and People’s Rights, the African Charter on Human Rights, the Arab League’s Declaration regarding the Expansion of Democracy, various UNESCO Declarations on Media Freedom, and so on.

That is an unbelievably large selection of press freedom declarations and one would have thought that governments would be obliged to abide by the manifold commitments they signed. However, in practice, they barely care for what they signed.

In many countries, repressive laws and regulations hinder the media to carry out their watchdog function. Such restrictions on media freedom usually go under the name of “national security laws”, “official secrecy laws”, “privacy laws”, “defamation, libel and insult laws”, or “data-protection laws” as we find them in modern societies.

Roy Greenslade, a well-known investigative reporter had most of the facts about one of the biggest corruption cases in the media field. The publication of his book about Robert Maxwell was blocked by lawyers, who mostly used arguments based on the British data protection laws. Thus the world only became aware after the mysterious death of Maxwell that several hundred million dollars had been stolen from the pension fund of his employees.

Over the past five years approximately 700 journalists have been imprisoned worldwide. And court decisions showed a wide range of sometimes perverse reasoning, like “insulting public authorities or institutions of the state”, “distributing false information”, “inciting the public to anxiety and insecurity”, “publishing socially and politically inflammatory articles”, “endangering national security or the social order”, “writing slanderous comments”, “undermining economic stability and development”, and many others.

All such offences are usually dealt with under criminal law, but if they are not, civil suits often impose exorbitant and disproportionate damages.

Further examples of obstructive legislation are the licensing of journalists, government defined “duties” and “codes of ethics”, and legislation requiring journalists to report “truthful” news. Restricting journalists’ access to information, as recently done under the pretext of anti-terrorism, is another way of controlling the media.

The most disgusting disrespect for independent media is, however, the killing of journalists. Over the past 5 years, a total of 376 journalists have been killed in the line of duty or murdered because of their investigative reporting. The most worrying aspect is the fact that the killers are not brought to court. And stories revealing corruption often fail to

produce results because police and government officials simply ignore them. We at IPI therefore appeal, time and again, to the international community of journalists to use the existing potential for mobilising public awareness about this impunity.

Each journalist imprisoned, each journalist killed is already one too many.

A free and independent media is also one of the principal means for fighting corruption.

This fight is carried out in two different ways:

– By investigating and reporting on corruption the media can inform the public about corrupt activities, both within the government or public institutions, as well as within the private sector.

– By promoting the anti-corruption efforts of civil groups as well as prompting action by official bodies in charge of investigating or prosecuting corrupt acts. Alternatively, when official proceedings are conducted in an inept manner, the media can push for reform by highlighting legal and institutional inadequacies.

In Latin America, for example, the media has in recent years played a central role in exposing corruption resulting in the ousting of national leaders such as: President Bucaram of Ecuador, President Collor of Brazil, President Fujimori of Peru, President Perez in Venezuela and other leading politicians. (Sources: Stapenhurst, *The Media's Role in Curbing Corruption*, 2000 & Freedom House, Press Release, April 30, 2001).

Keeping that in mind, it's easy to understand why investigative journalism is an extremely dangerous profession. In many countries journalists face harassment, physical assaults and even death as the result of their crusading work. And repeated incidents of violence against journalists usually result in self-censorship, with reporters and editors refraining from covering corruption for fear of retribution.

These problems are unfortunately not limited to the less developed countries.

The failure of governments to respect media independence exists worldwide. Let me give you two examples.

In many regions of the world, to a greater or lesser extent, state-controlled broadcasting lingers on. There are millions of people who are only told what their state authorities deem suitable for broadcasting.

A Russian joke describes the situation best: When Napoleon went to Heaven, he was asked what he would like most if he could again be back on Earth: "Soviet Television and Radio", he replied, "because under such conditions no one would have known about my disaster at Waterloo". Furthermore, political authorities all over the world, have shown a strong desire to control news agencies, the providers of "raw material" to the media. Out of 145 news agencies worldwide, only 22 can be classified as fully independent, whereas over 120 are state or government owned enterprises.

These figures become even more important if we keep in mind that an average of at least 50% of all news articles published in daily newspapers is directly based on news agency content. The same applies, even to a higher degree, to news on the radio and on television.

Public Media are characterised by a lack of independence from the state, despite the fact that in some countries internal statutes exist to ensure editorial independence.

The 2002 Development Report of the World Bank stated: "Indeed, evidence collected from 97 countries suggests that state-owned media tend, in general, to be less effective than private media in monitoring government activities".

Free and independent media are not only essential for cultural, social, economic and political development, they are also indispensable for transparency and accountability, and as the basis for democratic governance.

As the former president of the World Bank, James Wolfensohn, stated: "Freedom of the press is not a luxury; it is not an extra, it is absolutely at the core of equitable development.

If the people do not have the right to expression, if there is no searchlight on corruption and inequitable practices, you cannot build the public consensus to bring about change.”

When will the political leaders of developing nations learn to understand the interdependence between media and politics. If there is a lack of understandable information for citizens about their society then there is no public awareness of the true social, economic, cultural and political problems, and consequently people become frustrated and withdraw from politics.

And, when will governments accept the fact that any political system, which does not have the trust and support of the people, will eventually collapse?

The experience of the former Soviet Union, which had total control over all media and communication channels, should by now be common knowledge.

Privatisation of the media is therefore the best way to promote democratisation.

On the other hand, private media are often handicapped by conflicts between the interests of the owners and the principles of independent journalism. This independence is defined as the journalists right to work without hindrance, free from any outside pressure.

But who determines what a free media is, and more to the point, what are the factors that condition such freedom? Is it economics, politics, ideology, ethical and moral considerations, fashions, personal interests, or is it the public and the media audience, meaning the “customers” or the “market” of the media?

Press freedom in the new democracies of Central and Eastern Europe, for example, has made impressive progress since the breakdown of the communist system. In general, the legal framework enables the print media to be relatively free and independent.

The pressure on critical print-media is nowadays mostly of an economic nature: withdrawal of state subsidies, hindrance of printing and distribution, advertising boycotts, etc. If today, media are again fighting for survival, then it is mostly because of the harsh economic conditions of the free market system. As one Hungarian editor put it: “The market economy has proven to be a stronger adversary to press freedom, than the secret police.”

Private media have to depend on financial sources, including advertisers. Pressure from advertisers on media owners and the editorial departments are in consequence influencing the content of reporting. And, the problems become even more serious in cases of concentration of media ownership and cross-ownership.

In addition, we witness the danger to accept prefabricated information of the PR type. Diminishing resources, increased competition, time pressure for the production, etc. often reduce the use of critical journalism considerably. Journalists then often rely on sources from governments, commercial enterprises or other powerful institutions. and open the door to the transmission of information which serves the interests of the disseminators rather than the interests of the public.

It has been estimated, even by journalists, that nearly 50% of the news stories found in the media, are public-relations generated (Source: E. Dennis & J. Merrill: “Media Debates: Issues in Mass Communication”, 1991).

All over, there is unfortunately a global trend that materialistic principles are gaining dominance over basic moral and ethical values. We are therefore also confronted with the phenomenon of corruption among journalists.

This is often, though not always, the consequence of a weak economic situation in those countries which make the journalists’ existence dependent on gifts, benefits and bribes. If journalists suffer from low pay, lack of medical insurance and retirement provisions, etc., resisting the temptation of corruption is not easy. The usually healthy relationship between public relations professionals and the media can then easily turn into incidents of unethical and illegal practices.

Many parties are negatively affected by this phenomenon: journalists, news sources, advertisers, government policy makers and the consumers.

In the year 2004, the International Public Relations Association (IPRA). With the support of the Dogan Media Group an IPI member from Turkey, initiated a strategy of putting an end to bribery for news coverage by publishing a Global Index of Bribery for News Coverage. Out of 66 countries covered, the top five rankings are:

- 1.) Finland
- 2.) Denmark / New Zealand / Switzerland
- 3.) Germany / Iceland / UK
- 4.) Norway
- 5.) Austria / Belgium / Canada / Sweden / USA

The potential problem regions, where bribery is most likely, are: South East Europe (45%), East Europe (41%), Africa and the Middle East (40%), Asia (37%) and Latin America (12%).

In addition, the IPRA initiated a Global Charter which was adopted last year by six international organisations, two of them media organisations, namely the IPI (International Press Institute) and the IFJ (International Federation of Journalists).

Hopefully, corruption within the news media, which robs citizens of credible information, will thus soon be minimized.

As mentioned before, I would like to again stress another problem of the industrialised world. One particular nightmare for citizens as well as politicians is the growing commercialisation of media, in particular under the manifold aspects of globalisation and conglomerisation (i.e. the merging of media and powerful non-media corporations), as well as concentration such as media chains, media trusts, the empires of media moguls and cross ownership. The editor of an Australian newspaper stated that his role as editor was to improve circulation and to deliver revenues. „I'm a cog in the wheel that helps maximise shareholder returns, be that capital growth in the share price or the dividend," he allegedly said. And the managing director of this newspaper added that he "is in a manufacturing business making widgets called newspapers".

Mark Pearson, a professor of journalism from Queensland, saw the explanation for this development in:

- The shift from family operations to large international conglomerates leaving newspapers as just another profit stream in larger, diverse organisations;
 - The erosion of the firewall between advertising and editorial, which traditionally gave editors a degree of independence from the commercial side of the operations;
- and in
- The tendency of editors to comply with the interests of shareholders rather than readers, when those interests do not coincide.

We need to be careful about this ongoing battle between content and finance, and about changing values. It is one of the great ironies of these modern times that the editors-in-chief are almost becoming publishers. More and more, editors-in chief are rewarded according to their commercial performance, not editorial performance, and they essentially spend about 90 per cent of their time on commercial and administrative issues, not on editorial issues.

The question therefore is: if newspapers are "just another business," how and why can the media claim the role of a Fourth Estate and watchdog, with greater public responsibility than other corporate operations?

Media organisations nowadays often appear to be driven by self-interest when waving the flag of press freedom. Their press freedom rhetoric is being undermined by the operations as a business.

This just shows that things have changed dramatically over the last years within the media themselves, as well as within the general communications environment: The interdependence between media and politics as well as between citizens and the media is

gaining a new dimension. In modern democracies we must become aware that new and sophisticated threats to press freedom have emerged, such as:

- Increased pressures on editors and journalists not only from politicians, advertisers, investors, but also from religious groups, civil society activists, consumer pressure groups, etc...

Commercially driven journalism, which means a specific journalistic style tailored exclusively to the advertising agency's demands for ratings and other data from readership or audience research – otherwise known as the breakdown of the walls between the business departments and the editorial departments:

- A distortion of information content by closeness to informed sources. Journalists and editors sometimes get too close, too integrated to insider-cliques of politicians, business people or other power-holders, thus becoming psychologically and emotionally dependent instead of independent.

- The phenomenon of “pack journalism” where a majority of the journalists go after the same story, and

- An increased dependence on sources such as news agencies, data banks, press departments, etc. which leads to the similarity or even uniformity of information.

However, if all media provide the same information content, speed and the time factor become one of the main competitive instruments. And this tendency to speed up the information process creates a further deterioration in quality and accuracy.

Finally, Ladies and Gentlemen, let me mention an aspect of the recent incident, called the Danish cartoon controversy, where media got caught in the clash of civilisation.

We are deeply concerned about the recent debates within the UN regarding its Resolution 60/150 on Combating Defamation of Religions. The willingness to use the word “defamation” in conjunction with religion could provide suitable legal cover for the real intentions of several countries, which is the introduction of fresh and more rigid blasphemy laws.

The media would then find it increasingly difficult to criticise religion, including its practices as well as religious leaders. Once again the focus of discussion lies on the meaning of the phrase “responsibility of journalists”, which allows several different interpretations:

- In democratic countries, a journalist is expected to accept “responsibility” for the content of the message, but is not required to adhere to a code of responsibility.

- Under a Marxist or one party regime, the journalist's “responsibility” is to the state or the ruling party.

- Third World governments set forth explicit objectives for journalists such as advancing peace, opposing racism, supporting economic development, and so on.

No matter how noble these objectives, they describe normative standards of responsibility, which invite government supervision, censorship and interventions.

Some politicians understand the dangers and speak up clearly, instead of using the standard phrases. For example, at a recent hearing, organised by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, the Finnish Rapporteur, Ms. Sinikka Hurskainen, identified the core element of the ongoing political controversy over Freedom of Expression versus Respect for Religious Beliefs, by saying: “Freedom of thought, conscience and religion also requires tolerance of criticism of religions and beliefs”.

So, Ladies and Gentlemen, let me please sum up: There is an urgent need for good governance in all countries, even in the most developed democracies. IPI has therefore committed itself to the promotion of good governance as a way of conducting public affairs through a participative communication process in which media plays a crucial role.

This is the only possibility for sustainable progress in lifting the manifold pressures on the media. We must succeed in that effort, since freedom of expression and free media are at the very centre of any democratic development.

Anna Maria Longo, Journalist RADIORAI2, Italy

One hundred signs for the Radio

I am speaking to you as a member of RadiochefaRai, a group of journalists and other professional figures working at Radio RAI.

In Italy, public radio & TV has always had a fundamental role in the media system.

It is audience-oriented, it must offer pluralistic information, cultural education, quality entertainment. It must meet the need for the promotion of culture, knowledge, human development, research and innovation, in conformity with the Italian Constitution. A public broadcasting system is a right for all citizens, it was born in Europe and confirmed by precise policies in European countries. It is even more necessary nowadays, when economic globalization creates the imperative need to provide citizens with independent information, clear of particularistic interests.

The public broadcasting system must be guaranteed by rules that may secure its full freedom. In Italy, in the new bipolar political context, R.A.I., once being the object of a spoils system between different political forces, has become a land to be conquered by the winning party.

Radio R.A.I. represents the core of the public broadcasting system because of its history – and because the radio is such a specific, pervasive, ready medium. But the fact that the company has been neglecting its radio channels for years, bestowing resources on TV; the fact that R.A.I. has always been so tied with politics; and the fact that in Italy it still does not exist a radio-frequencies regulation – all this has weakened public radio, its presence and its authority.

Radio R.A.I. is now living a very difficult period and experiencing a progressive loss of audience. It has got serious problems, partly shared with the company it is part of:

- a difficulty in preserving freedom, and thus a loss of credibility;
- the absence of an editorial policy;
- an incapable management;
- scanty financing;
- structural and technological inadequacy.

These limits, these problems have not met with consistent answers. The Gasparri Law makes the situation even worse, introducing the process that should lead to a private R.A.I. without setting precise criteria and guarantees – in this contingency, the future of Radio R.A.I. looks more and more precarious.

Radio R.A.I. doesn't need this, it doesn't want to become a private property. It needs new attention and a clear, serious plan to strengthen the public broadcasting system.

Politics and institutions can make a lot for Radio R.A.I.:

- it is necessary to modify the Gasparri Law and to promote new regulations to support the public system;
- the controlling bodies must be strong and independent;
- the board of directors must be free from the pressures coming from the Government and the political parties;
- people working in the public system must be safeguarded from governmental and parliamentary interferences;
- the economic management of the company and its editorial policy must be separated;
- the radio must get more resources, improve its technology, invest in training and research;
- R.A.I. as a public company must be aware of its duties, claim its authority, be open to the society it talks to.

Daniel Schechter, *Executive Producer MediaChannel, United States of America*

Every year, international press freedom groups release reports on the state of the independent media. Freedom House, a conservative body even publishes a map of press freedom throughout the world and lists of countries that meet and do not meet their criteria. Earlier this year, they ground out one more report in an endless stream, this time focusing on North Africa and the Middle East a region relatively close to us here in Venice. It reads in part: “Despite overall improvements in press freedom in the Middle East and North Africa over the last several years, the region continues to rank the lowest for press freedoms in the world, according to a major study released today by Freedom House...”. Generally, media in the region remain constrained by extremely restrictive legal environments in most countries. Most problematic to media freedom are the laws criminalizing libel and defamation and prohibiting any insult to monarchs and other rulers, as well as emergency legislation that remains in place which hampers the ability of journalists to write freely.....”

Who can disagree that problems persist? Yet ironically, earlier this year I was in Doha, Qatar in the Gulf region at an Al Jazeera Media Forum. A prominent Arab scholar there read a study arguing that in fact there is more press freedom with diversity of expression in the Middle East than in the West.

He expressed concern, even pity for American media consumers who are overexposed to so much government inflected news and conservative spin that they are often kept in the dark about background and context of news. He branded us virtually illiterate when it comes to understanding the background of news and information.

Even more shocking is a recent study that found that 63% of Americans can't find Iraq on a map three years after almost daily reporting on the war. And of course the war itself was sold to Americans not just by a government which now acknowledges it was wrong about the existence WMDs and the implied connection between Saddam Hussein and Al Qaeda, but by a media system that did offer more propaganda than news almost emulating the state media system that President Gorbachev began to dismantle in the old Soviet Union.

From the run-up to the war through the statues being by the US military in Baghdad, there were 800 so-called “experts” on the air. Only 6 – that's right 6 – opposed the war. No wonder that critics in the US compared the media spin exercised by what they call “The Bushviks” to the party line politics of the old Bolsheviks. There were 63 government and former government officials on the air repeatedly. In addition, the neo-conservatives and cold warriors who ran the war seemed to have developed an admiration for the Communist apparatchiks many spent their careers studying and opposing. They developed a message of the day information dominance system that was every bit as inflexible as cant of the commissars.

In fact, they even injected their own political commissars into military units and the Coalition Media Center in Doha. I know because I made a film about the media coverage of the war called WMD (Weapons of Mass Deception). It was shown at several festivals in Italy and resonated I think because this country has been coping with a situation in which a prominent politician was also a media owner, used his power to influence what news and programming Italians saw.

Incidentally, my film is now part of a book called WHEN NEWS LIES: Media Complicity and the Iraq War. It features a speech I gave in Rome on Media Crimes in Iraq to a citizen led war crimes commission. When I speak of media crimes, let me explain. I am referencing the fact that the Nuremberg trial identified aggressive war as the most serious war crime there is and discussed the role that Nazi propagandists played in building support for war among the German People. I am referencing the tribunal in Rwanda that charged radio stations there with inciting genocide.

In the former Yugoslavia tribunal, both the Serbian and Croatian state media was condemned for provoking ethnic cleansing and ugly violence. Rather than support democracy and pluralism in times of conflict, some media systems turn into crude propaganda systems undermining democracy and in the cases I have cited advocated and rationalized crimes. That makes them culpable and complicit. I joined the media 30 years ago to help spotlight the problems of the world. I worked at CNN and ABC News and, then as an independent producer. I soon came to see the media as one of the problems of the world. If we are to tackle and respond to the global challenges that inspired this conference we have to make media one of the issues we care about.

When problems are not on TV, they don't exist for millions of people. When media institutions don't promote democracy and inform citizens, they often undermine democracy legitimising fraudulent elections and serving as one-way platforms of propaganda. As editor of Mediachannel.org, the world's largest global online media issues network, almost every day I write daily about the fight for more democratic media. That often means a fight against both government muzzled and manipulated media as well as a corporate dominated media that does more selling than telling.

The bottom line of democracy is not their financial bottom line. The demand for truth and integrity in media universal and it is not just about censorship, but self-censorship... and about a climate of public discussion and debate, of citizens informed about real choices and empowered to make decisions.

The one encouraging new development in the media is the emergence of citizens journalism, blogs, podcasts, and websites that allow diverse voices to be heard and communicate with the larger world. We need a new global media order with journalists of conscience and consciousness. We need more attention paid to the serious problems that confront our planet. We need glasnost in the media. And we need it now.

Daniel Vernet, *Editor-in-Chief Foreign Affairs Section of Le Monde, France*

We can now go back to the printed press and its difficulties. I have worked for 30 years for Le Monde in Paris. The founding Father of Le Monde used to say that journalism is not a business like another one and a press enterprise is not a company like another one, simply with journalists and printing machines. But times have changed and the situation now is not the same as after World War II. I would try to define very briefly what as journalists we mean by independence.

I think that there are many kinds of independence, as far as the press is concerned, it means independence from political power, from the state, from the government, from political parties. It is not easy. It should normally be easier in democracies than in authoritarian regimes but this is not always the case, and independence from the state is still a principle we have to fight for. Two days ago, for the first time, since the beginning of the Fifth Republic in 1958, the Prime Minister in France intends to bring some journalists to trial because of libel, not because of what they published in their newspapers but because of what they published in some books.

Second, independence means independence from financial powers, not only independence from the big companies and big business but independence from advertising. Third, independence means independence from shareholders, and this is not so easy. We have to ask the question why some people are investing in newspapers or the media. There could be many reasons. There could be political reasons why some people believe it is important to own media in order to be elected as a member of parliament or elected governor of a region or head of state. It could be for financial reasons because you could expect to make a profit from a media company. It could be for ethical reasons because some investors think that information and media are important for democracy and if I refer to France there are some people, or there were some people in the past, who invested in newspapers because they thought it a civic duty to back pluralism of the press.

But generally speaking such a civic duty or civic engagement does not last very long because people expect some return from investment or are not ready to lose money on the long run. We now have the case of the newspaper Libération which was founded more than thirty years ago and was supported by some businessmen in the past, precisely because they thought it was important to have this pluralism, and to have a newspaper like Libération. They were prepared to lose money for some time, but the new owner will now have some profit from his business and is very close to shutting down the newspaper. So, what is the reason for this situation? The reason is the following one: it is more and more difficult to make money with media, and again I refer to the printed press.

For at least three reasons: first, the cost of the business. This is true for the print media but is perhaps more the case for TV and radio, not maybe for internet, but that is a business I do not know very well. So, the costs are going up, competition is increasing, and we have to face the competition not only of TV, radio – competition that appeared, in France in the 1960s. I think that the print press did face that competition rather successfully, but we have now to cope with new competition – and that is the second reason – from the so-called free newspapers, papers that you find at the metro stations without paying anything, for free every day. There are more and more such newspapers in France, in the big cities at least, and there is competition not only from the editorial point of view but also for advertising. These new media are taking away resources from the traditional newspapers. Third reason: because of competition we have a concentration of the media business in our countries, on the national and international levels.

So we have fewer and fewer newspapers in the democratic countries of the west and if I take the example of France, after WW II there were 53 newspapers in Paris; there are now

four. Not only newspapers disappeared. It would be interesting to know about the situation in other countries like Italy, but what is interesting in France, not only newspapers disappeared, but readers disappeared with the newspapers.

What could we do from a journalist's point of view to defend the independence of journalism and, if possible, the independence of media companies? I think that on the one hand we have to follow the rules of the market, although I said at the beginning that a newspaper is not a product like any other, journalism is not like any other business.

In a market economy, in a free country, we have to follow the rules of the market.

There are three points we could stress in order to try to defend and, if possible, to expand the independence of journalists under such conditions. The first is diversification: diversification of shareholders and diversification of advertising. This means that we must avoid dependence on one or two people, one or two big companies. We must have diversification of the financial resources we need. We do this with Le Monde.

The newspaper worked from the fifties to the mid eighties as a sort of co-operative.

Journalists owned 42% of the company, but as everybody knows journalists have no money to invest in business, even in their own business, and we need investment in the printing machines, new lay out, internet, etc... So we had to diversify our capital. Hence we opened the capital to private shareholders, but we tried to do that by diversifying the shareholders in order not to remain independent and free to choose our partners. On the other hand, it is very important for journalists to have a kind of treaty, call it agreement or contract between the writing staff and the owners, and that agreement should guarantee the independence of the editorial staff.

Third and last point: I think that the independence of journalists depends on the journalists themselves and maybe sometimes we need to be more courageous in the defence of our own independence, of our freedom of expression. Freedom of the press depends not only on economic conditions but also on intellectual engagement of the people working in the media.

Andrea Di Stefano, *Director of the magazine Valori, Italy*

I believe that a democratic instance should be that of proposing a real anti trust on international level in the property of media. A limit, or even a strict separation between financial power – therefore the shareholders of the publishing groups – and the very publishing groups. We must avoid that things work as in Italy – which is one of the worst cases in the world – where important information is controlled by the financial-economic system. It could be banks, as it happens for the “Corriere della Sera”, or it could be publishers that in reality are businessmen, as it happens in the case of “L’Espresso”, or as it happens sensationally in the Mondadori group.

Together with the anti-trust hypothesis, that I consider a feasible one, the other interesting hypothesis is that of considering the possibility to have a form of financing of independent press.

We must avoid that “legislative monster” that we have in Italy, whose rules are widely evaded and that does not act for independent press, as was demonstrated in the case of “Il Manifesto” which is undergoing a serious financial crisis. A hypothesis could be that of supporting a sort of Tobin Tax addressed to freedom of information, so to have independent resources that could be addressed to the support of real sources of independent information.

The third question is the relationship between advertising and media. It is a globally unresolved issue – it is more serious in our country, where all the forms of self-regulation of the category of journalists are absolutely inefficacious – but the necessity of an independent form of control exists on the relation between media and advertising. When I say independent control, I mean the possibility of controlling that the flux of information which is proposed to the reader is a little more transparent. I don’t have great expectations, but I believe that a better transparency towards the reader is possible on the role and capacity of conditioning of advertising and of public relations as well, as they are obviously connected with the themes of advertising.

This does not mean being able to have access to independent information. This does not solve the problem, but probably it allows us to put on the table a series of elements that contribute in leading stakeholders to consider more seriously the problem of freedom of information.

From this point of view, Italy represents a laboratory from the negative point of view. I say negative for the forms of experimentation of the control on media, and emblematically of new technologies as well, as the forms that have been used for the privatization of Telecom – therefore to the access net – demonstrate. I must say that this is a problem that other countries solved more efficaciously.

Great Britain, for example, operated a strict separation between the society that manages the access net and the society that offers the services that can be provided through the net.

The access net must necessarily remain under public control, that must guarantee access at low and above all transparent prices.

GLOCAL WORLD, MEDIA AND DEMOCRACY

Chairman: Piero Bassetti, *President of Globus et Locus, Italy*

We talked a lot about media and their problems and forms, while we talked less about democracy and democratic forms and institutions. If our group will reflect on the problem which poses democracy at the centre, that today is influenced by the aspect of media, we will have a good focus on the theme of our conference, that is about media between citizens and power, and about the citizen, who is in a position between media and power, too.

First of all, I would like to underline that we talked about globalization without specifying what we mean for globalization. If we accept that globalization is not only a big economic or technologic phenomena, but an enormous cultural one, linked to the fact that technology has quite eliminated time and space, (for the first time in the history of man we live with a conceptual category of time and space that is completely different from the past) then we can also understand that, for example, democracy and its forms have been conceived in the hypothesis of a time which is not zero. Representative democracy needs indeed time among nomination, representation, elections' result, and it needs a precise space: the district, in fact.

Democracy is organized and works in relation with the control of territory. Today, instead, also because of media, politics more and more endorse a global culture, which obliges the forms of organization of power to consider the effects of a radical change, that are difficult to manage.

The theme "glocal world, media and democracy" brings us not only to reflect on the fact that media directly resent of the process of glocalization of the world, but also on the repercussions on the organization of power, that must be updated and consider the new conception of time and space.

The consequence is important: we should begin reflecting– and it would be appropriate that we start here today – on the phenomenon called e-democracy, that implies the control of power and information in a minimum time and on a quite infinite space.

The second question to face is if this new phenomenon is characterized by top-down or bottom-up relationships. This morning we talked about media and their relationship with power within a strictly top-down scheme, starting from the conviction that media are controlled by power. Media as an instrument of bottom-up power have been equalized to functions which are typical of revolutionary or guerrilla situation. Instead, it would be interesting asking ourselves whether democracy assumes today forms that come from a bottom-up rather than from the top-down model.

If we think that the entire world of production is managed and controlled by market rules, we realize that the relationship that links media to advertisement is not totally far from the kind of information that these media offer. The change of role of media, caused by the power of market in the form of advertisement, with respect to the classic political power that was expressed by the means of chronicle and historic information, must make us reflect on the fact that media are in a completely new position, due to the effect of glocalization. Their interlocutor, namely political power, was radically changed by these same processes of glocalization.

For example, this morning someone said that there is asymmetry among the global dimension of some big enterprises and of some big media (the big multi-media groups that assert themselves as power forces too) and the absence of political counter-powers of the same dimension. Only in the US a more or less equal relationship exists between media and political power centres, but undoubtedly, outside these, everyone is influenced by a

media hegemony which is concentrated in a few hands (CNN and Al-Jazeera are the typical examples of glocal information, which is to say linked to a local vision of global processes). Anyway, if we admit that media are important in the organization of democracy, we must immediately ask the following question: but what media? The ones that faced with success the new glocal dimension or the ones which are linked to a national logic? The ones that prefer democratic forms and methods, or the ones who do not?

But what is democracy for us? Democracy, as we have seen and discussed it, has been an institutional and political form, which is to say a way of organizing formalized power in order to obtain respect of the people's interest. While the fourth power was born to contrast the other three practical powers of the state. A state that we wished would be democratic. Today the real power to which citizens are subjected, that is able to influence their thought and therefore is the most penetrating one, is centred on media. Here we do not talk about media as they were meant to be when we used to talk about the fourth power, namely as institutions structured on and structural to power, but we concentrate as well on media as instruments of mediation, not necessarily in only one direction. In fact, an instrument of mediation can mediate from bottom to top or from the top to the bottom. New media appeared, for example the form of communication that developed around the net. Form that mediate a power that comes from the bottom. But then, the question we must ask is the following: what do traditional, political forms of organization of power do of when confronted with these manifestations of media power? They are undergoing a crisis. A cause certainly is the change of competence in treating some problems and the super-nationality which is substituting nationality, etc...

Notwithstanding, the question remains: is that possible that the citizens who use the power of media which is available thanks to modern technology can not receive a contribution on behalf of formalized institutions? Despite all, they keep on maintaining a form of power in the elaboration of laws, or in the legitimate monopoly of violence. It is clear that if we were really convinced that public opinion can no more obtain any contribution from the formal organization of politics and democracy, the conclusion on the relationship between citizens and power would raise a considerable preoccupation.

It would make politics useless, even if considered by an innovative point of view. It would be irrelevant when it is about improving the condition of freedom of the citizen who has to deal daily with the power of richness, power of violence and power of persuasion.

Thinking to media as to subjects of power is incorrect, above all when we talk about modern media. The problem is that of understanding how the citizen will be able to use the power of media, both as user and as an agent from within, so that the result is an increase and not a diminution of democracy. Moreover, if it is true that the new media can be used by the counter-power, too, is obvious that the problem for democracy becomes that of asking who does a democratic politics.

Is it a politics that must find its meaning within the formal bodies or would it be better that it is shaped from the bodies of media counter-power? This is the real challenge that modernity poses and that is coming out today.

In fact, even if we do not realize it, we are no more governed by formal institutions. We are organized and organize ourselves around some mechanisms of aggregation of power that are different from those of the bodies of the state. I am talking about science, the organization of the use of media, the organization of the use of capital. The problem of the control of power remains a central one, whichever the matrix of power may be. Until media maintain a neutral position in this context, the real dimension remains that of politics. In the past, power was a prerogative of the prince, then it was dependent on the will of voters, today we would say that power stands on a platform which is different from that of party lists.

Today power passes through many ways: through the opinions on the blogs as well. Consider that media can be extraordinary instruments of aggregation of counter-power and counter-power is a power which defines itself in opposition to another one. The regulation of media on behalf of the political class does not stand anymore at the centre of the question of media (this is the discussion that is often made about RAI, for example) but it is not a problem of regulation of the citizens in their respect either. We have to work on the possibility of the instrumentation of media to intrinsically democratic terms, such as the diffusion of awareness, the constitution of a common charter, the sense of belonging to the polis, that is what makes the very substance of democracy.

If up to now we thought we could promote this value within the state, today we think it can be done by the means of civil society, in which the game of powers and counter-powers is regulated by the possibility of participation which is made possible by information and communication technologies.

I would like to conclude with a reflection that I mentioned at the beginning of my intervention: the real novelty today is not the development of a new media technology, but the fact that this technology introduced – in a field that is not the one of power – the elimination of time and space.

The organisation of politics was based on a deferred time. Politicians asked for an electoral mandate, they carried it on, informing people on their way of working, and undergoing peoples' judgement. These things are no more actual. You can notice it at the elections. Today political preferences are very often anticipated by the exit polls, while once they were linked to the electoral results, to the real count of votes. Political judgement is no more given by the periodical calculation of votes (elections), but by the instantaneous check of how popular will would express itself in that particular moment. The role of politicians, as interpreters of popular will (representation) for a determinate period, has lost much of its meaning. Therefore I think that the real challenge is the return to true politics. We want the citizens to find in media an instrument of realization and growth. But politics must remain able to play its fundamental role of placing these instruments at people's disposal, so that people can receive an appropriate service of power.

I would also like to underline that the reconstruction of a democratic process in the use of media will not be produced in a global context, but its realization will be possible in a global perspective, starting from local realities.

Modern media push us towards the discovery of the local dimension as a place where real autonomies can affirm themselves.

Fausto Colombo, *Professor of Theories and Techniques of Mass Communication at the Catholic University of Milan, Italy*

Multidimensional approaches to media and cultural frameworks of digital divide

1. Introduction

This speech wants to focus some questions about digital divide as cultural problem. This approaches to reading phenomena doesn't want to underestimate the economic dimension of the problem, but we think that a multidimensional approach is very important nowadays overall because some scholars and strategy makers talk about digital divide simply inside a strict neo-liberist framework.

To clarify this point, let's talk about i2010. The conclusions of this document, drafted on the occasion of the European Forum on the Information Society by the UK Department of Trade and Industry, are clearly in a Blairite vein: to meet the worldwide challenges of digital innovation, Europe must equip itself with a regulatory framework that favours economic flexibility and the reduction of taxation. We propose a focus on:

[...] Developing solutions to problems of access and discrimination in communications markets that is focused on key bottlenecks, and which encourages initiatives from market operators rather than relying on detailed intervention. [DTI i2010 – Responding to the challenge, 2005, www.i2010.org.uk]

According to the document, reduction of taxation can be a valid instrument for resolving problems concerning the diffusion of technologies in the information society and for reducing the digital divide.

This approach has its own dignity and harkens back to an age-old political tradition that conceives the direct intervention of the State as potentially destabilising in relation to an economic system capable of functioning autonomously in an efficient if (not excessively) regulated manner.

The idea that, in order to work well and reduce its own internal distortions, both on the offer side (concentrations), and on the demand side (digital divide), the ICT system must be (not) governed according to free market logics, is in our view debatable.

On one hand, because the sole fact that governments and legislators decide not to intervene in a market produces in itself consequences that are just as loaded with implications as is direct intervention: the refusal to govern a phenomenon is also a way of governing it.

On the other, because the idea that the governance of the Information Society can be based on interventions that only involve the economic framework denies the evidence of a complex and multidimensional phenomenon.

Below we will seek to give an idea of this complexity and to illustrate how a non-systemic management of the Information Society is ineffective in achieving the binding objectives of economic, social and cultural development of the Network and networks.

The model that we propose here attempts to underline the plurality of the social dimensions that are active in the development and operation of media.

The paper has the purpose not only of presenting the multidimensional model, but, starting from this, of rendering explicit some critical elements in certain aspects of the phenomenon of digitisation that run the risk of developing socially, culturally and digitally divisive processes (which are opaque and therefore even more dangerous) in the global system.

2. The notion of medium in the social sciences

The point of departure of the discourse, naturally, is the technological transformations produced by digitisation. New digital media (such as the computer or the internet,

videogames or MP3 players) and digital versions of traditional media (such as DTT, but also DAB, which correspond to it in radio broadcasting, second and third generation mobile phones, CDs, online newspapers and so on, not to mention films or audiovisuals generally distributed on DVD or DVX or online) make up a complex yet unitary context, characterised by considerable compatibility between the products in circulation (image, musical, audiovisual or data files), between the interfaces (with recurring stylemes) and between the various types of specialist hardware.

Yet the main characteristic that digitisation offers media as a whole is that of detaching a given medium from a specific technological platform, and vice versa.

For a very long period, a medium was defined on the basis of the welding together of a certain technology, a certain language and given conditions of use. This made it possible to consider the distinguishing of the production chains and life cycles of products in some way natural. The effect was so strong as to push certain significant fractures into the background. For example, in the late seventies the Italian television system changed from the technological standpoint (the introduction of colour, the birth of the remote control), as well as the institutional (from the legally established status of the monopoly to the opening up to competition), the economic (from financing by licence fee to that exclusively through advertising) to the cultural proper (TV schedules and contents changed, languages and viewing habits changed). The phenomenon was noted, studied, catalogued (Eco coined the beautiful and appropriate term "neo-television"), but the debate continued to revolve around the idea of two different models of the same medium: an evolution, in fact.

Why? Because the system of shooting, transmission and reception nevertheless remained the same (with some improvement): the type of technological platform remained identical, particularly in the light of the unchanged differences with respect to other media.

Here we have it: today that error of underestimation is no longer possible, because almost no medium adheres exclusively to one technological platform. This is also the case of TV, which is present today in the analogue version over the air and in various digital versions: DTT, satellite, via broadband, via internet (the various types of WebTV) and via mobile terminals.

Therefore, at the very least, we are in the presence of a medium on a number of platforms. Furthermore, as we have already mentioned, each of the technologies we have cited (with the exception of analogue TV, which in any case is in the process of becoming obsolete) also hosts other media: the mobile terminal or the computer connected to the internet enable you to download movie or music files, to listen to the radio or read a newspaper, to exchange e-mails and surf the web. And so on.

With the result (a consequence that is of great importance for the theorists, but that here we will restrict ourselves to mentioning briefly) that the definition of medium in a strict sense refers to a certain type of social use. We can perhaps hypothesise a future distinction between personal media, associated with the use of an individual, mobile and multi-purpose terminal, and social media, associated with a group use, such as the family or the wider public of a cinema. These media would have various platforms available, but it cannot be ruled out that the contents could, if not the same, at least be variations on the same.

If we start from the premise that the technological platform does not define the medium (or at least no longer defines it), we may be ready to accept the fact that another feature that does not exist is a substance for the media, that is that they are neither subjects nor stable today. We cannot, for example, assign to the media the classic definition of institutions or agencies just as it has been attributed to because the instability of the former has nothing in common with the typical evolution of the latter. For example, the shift from the monopolist, educational TV of the 1950s and 1960s in Italy to the mixed system of the 1980s and 1990s has not implied a simple transformation of state TV into something else,

but has seen the birth of an unusual co-habitation of strategies (educational vs. commercial), business models (financed by TV licence fees and advertising on the one hand, and by advertising alone on the other), types of product (programme vs. public) and so on, which might cause us to speak of at least two different media, kept together by similar patterns of consumption.

Nor would it help us to think of the media as stable instruments or vehicles in terms of language, at the disposal of social, institutional and other subjects.

Our proposal is therefore to consider a single medium in a given historical period as a momentary equilibrium between a multiplicity of social dimensions that go beyond the medium itself, but which also shape it and are in turn moved by it. Such a configuration might be shown as follows:

The technological framework

The framework concerns invention, the development of technological objects, in the hardware and software dimension, the drawing up of standards, their life cycle; the technological mix at the disposal of families and more generally the technological panorama of a country and of the whole global scene.

The economic framework

By this we mean both the economic philosophies of reference in production and consumer behaviour and business models, market dynamics, financing mechanisms and production organisation.

The institutional framework

The institutional regulatory framework includes the principles, the laws, but also the parties and the real power relations in a given sphere, and sees the increasing interaction of supranational institutions, such as the European one, and national ones.

The cultural framework

This framework concerns the forms of transmission and the faith in these; the preferential contents considered socially relevant. For example, it is difficult to evaluate the current Italian television system without taking account of the fact that in the culture of users the awareness is growing of a kind of clear-cut division between what we could call a premium television (Sky satellite TV and some contents of pay-per-view digital terrestrial) and a basic television.

Premium contents have value in themselves, as they perform a function of contact with reality or full-blown acculturation. The social discourses on these start from the need to manifest your interests to your own group of affiliation. In contrast, the basic contents have no cultural value attributed to them. They exist as opportunities for social discourses that are useful for entertaining relationships, as happens with gossip.

3. ICT and inequalities

The model presented thus far attempts to account for the difficulty in constructing a definition of media, so interwoven with nodes and networks of actions and meanings. Furthermore, it seeks to give some idea of the difficulty in managing a system that rests on the relationship between heterogeneous nodes and frames with parties from diverging positions and with conflicting instruments of intervention.

We believe that the need to regulate the system, so essential in order to prevent the distortions typical of a market with oligopolistic tendencies, becomes dramatically pressing in order to deal with the problems of access to the Information Society.

In our view, there are three problems posed by ICT in terms of inequalities: the unequal diffusion of technologies, the concept of property and the theme of privacy. In this speech we want to focus on only the first of these problems.

3.1 The unequal diffusion of technologies and computerisation

The term “computerisation” can be used to indicate two processes that are very different, even if they have in common the centrality of computer science/I.T. understood as both science and technology.

The first process (which we will call the “intensive dimension”) consists in the transformation of traditional techniques and practices into I.T. techniques and practices.

The most elementary of examples is provided by calculation instruments, with respect to which the computer affords an improvement in the quality and speed of calculations, allowing the use of highly sophisticated algorithms in very limited periods of time. Algorithms are a typically mathematical problem, but computerisation enables them to work within much more acceptable timescales than the mind or an electromechanical calculator would allow, for example.

The electronic control units that run the operation of electrical appliances, cars and so on are very efficient replacements for previous instruments. Finally, the computerisation of certain company practices (such as the management of warehouse stock, payroll and contributions) optimises similar practices prior to the availability of computers, and the same can be said in general for every use of the Net by businesses, which, using the internet, Intranet and e-mail, or creating websites, improve routines and the results of internal and external communication.

The second process, on the other hand, (which we could define as the “extensive dimension”), concerns the diffusion of I.T. in the various geographical areas of individual countries and the whole globe. In this case, we are faced not with the problem of the quality of technology, but with its availability, an issue that reveals clear differences, and may constitute an element of discrimination between the “haves” and the “have nots”. Today governments and international institutions consider computerisation the cornerstone of any technological development, and this ensures that its diffusion is placed at the centre of policies for the conversion and regeneration of the poorest areas.

The interesting aspect of the double value of the term is the possibility of rendering palpable one of the contradictions of our age. Research makes it possible to improve the performance of computers exponentially (and therefore to accelerate computerisation in the key meaning of its intensive dimension); this requires major investment and occurs in the richest areas of the planet. As a consequence, the progressive computerisation of many practices (from medicine to military activity) and techniques (from diagnostic instruments to the control of ever more sophisticated weapons) brings with it an increasing divide between rich countries and poor countries in terms of possibilities. Therefore the intensive growth in computerisation ends up making its extensive diffusion increasingly difficult (at least in its most up-to-date forms).

From this point of view, it seems to us to be useful to highlight that, faced with an interest in the theme of the digital divide that has never died down, the attention of the academic world is shifting from the mere diffusion of ICT as a fundamental infrastructure of knowledge to focusing on the importance of the contents conveyed and the uses of technology and on the idea that it is not enough to have or not to have but also to use and not to know how to use the technological instruments, to take in or not to take in the meanings and contents proposed.

It is a matter, therefore, of a process that not only concerns the substitution of analogue technologies with digital ones: taking our model, the data on the speed of substitution, which seem to be data to be associated simply at the level of the technological or economic framework (in the most classical sense of the digital divide as economic affordability) also interacts considerably with the cultural framework.

The phenomenon of “computerisation” in fact has both a quantitative dimension of diffusion and a qualitative depth of substitution. The latter has to do with real practices of use, with the intensity of use of the technology. From this point of view we cannot fail to

note with particular favour the development of lines of research that aim to combine the reflection on the digital divide with concepts of media literacy and domestication.

Regarding the former, we can highlight the attention to development (or non-development) on the part of the users of digital skills and updating of software and hardware, but also people's capacity to become producers of digital media contents.

Regarding the latter, the literature on domestication [Cf. Silverstone 1994 "Television and Everyday Life", Routledge, London] reflects on the forms of cultural definition of technological artefacts, in the tension in the negotiation between production and consumption: a negotiation that may not always be successful and distort (or simply interpret) the meanings of a technology.

4. Conclusion

In this contribution we have attempted to underline how the plurality of social dimensions active in the development and operation of the (new) media make the object of study increasingly difficult to grasp and, at the same time, increasingly fascinating.

Precisely the dynamism that the model takes on seeks to relate together not only the differences/similarities of European and world scenarios, of economic, cultural, regulatory and technological characteristics, but attempts to understand the reasons for the various paths that the phenomena of digitisation are taking (or have taken) in the old continent and throughout the world.

In particular, the contribution that we have offered is useful for us to understand how a real policy of governance of (new) media cannot be implemented without understanding the multidimensional nature of the system of the communication media. Thinking of building an effective new media policy simply through legislative-regulatory instruments, for example with the objective of reducing the risks of formation of pockets of "technological depression" (risks that no country can afford to underestimate as things stand), without having a clear idea of the relations between the economic, cultural and technological dimension, means falling into the trap of naïve dirigisme.

To focus exclusively on one of the dimensions described here means running the risk of producing ineffective and self-defeating actions for the people who put them into effect: this applies not only to the regulators and legislators, often involved in good faith in processes that in reality they govern only partially, but also for the productive-economic world, still permeated with elements of deterministic culture.

We believe it is appropriate to understand that it is only possible to react to a complex situation through structured solutions: probably only governments and supranational authorities possess the legislative and regulatory instruments (but, we hope, also the training and, perhaps, the courage) to intervene in the governance of a phenomenon that is becoming increasingly complicated. The governing of change becomes a challenge that must pass through all four dimensions of our model: we are extremely sceptical about the desire to govern the development of ICT by only having recourse to the economic framework (through liberalisation, reduced taxation, incentives and subsidies) without dwelling on the value of management of the system. At the start we cited the i2010 document, which sustains that there has been (and will be) innovation where there has been a free market approach, under-regulation and flexibility. In reality we cannot help but underline that the most advanced rates of innovation are recorded in the Scandinavian countries, young countries with an advanced welfare system. And at the same time we cannot avoid condemning government actions that drive the diffusion of technologies through financing and state incentives (as has happened in Italy for the diffusion of digital terrestrial) as vetero-dirigisme.

The hope is that an attentive analysis of the dimensions and interconnections of the frameworks analysed here will also allow the development of a new digital media policy in

the glocal world that is capable of protecting countries from the risk of opening a gap between citizens that have (skills, economic and cultural resources, curiosity) and those that do not have (money, education, the capacity to understand that it is increasingly necessary to have skills).

All through a governance of the development of media that takes account of the specificities of the single contexts (local and national) but that does not make the mistake of thinking that those who are born into poverty can remain on the margins of the digital world without any consequences.

Or the mistake of thinking that being born in a rich country means not running in any way the risk of have dramatic problems with the social and cultural divide.

Serge Latouche, *Sociologist, Professor Emeritus at the University of Paris-Sud, France*

When it appeared, in the XIX century, press (we did not talk about media yet) was welcomed as the «fourth power». It was the power of public opinion, confronted with the three traditional powers (legislative, executive, judiciary).

This power was considered as largely positive from the majority of liberal thinkers (Benjamin Constant, Chateaubriand, Alexis de Tocqueville).

In the tradition of Montesquieu, it consented to counterbalance the danger of the monarchic or absolutistic drift of the solitary exercise of government. The Dreyfus affair represented, in France, the exemplification of this phenomenon.

Today, media have reached a considerable dimension (newspapers, radios, TVs, internet) but the myth of their salutary role still works very well, in spite of evidences. Some media, qualified as “free” (that means independent from the State) would be part of the guarantors of the democratic game against the totalitarian menace. The impossibility of total appropriation of media on behalf of the State would have given a big contribution to the fall of the Empire of evil.

Notwithstanding, in their passage to a superior level, media lost a big part of their relative independence. Does not the actual collusion among information, advertisement, commercial marketing and politics, and the take of possession of the multimedia world on behalf of powerful economic groups allow quite a total manipulation of citizens, who are reduced to users in a world where economy has become the stake of politicians?

Has not the fourth power become the instrument of absolute control of the other three? Against the menace of destruction that the tyranny of economic growth imposes on the world echo-system, there can be a hope for the raising of a media counter-power that could seize this challenge and work for the necessary decolonisation of the imagination?

I – Media manipulation and the economic colonisation of imagination

According to Jacques Ellul's analysis, information, and in its excess over-information, has become disinformation that, combined with political and commercial advertising, becomes deformation, propaganda and manipulation. It is a real enterprise for intoxication. It is run by colossal groups that aim at the infinite search of power and wealth.

J6M (Jean-Marie Messier Moi- Même Maître du Monde) claimed it with a naive humour. Rupert Murdoch and his compatriot Kerry Packer realised it with a more reserved cynicism. Berlusconi pushed the indecency of this phenomenon to pure caricature. Media empires aim less at informing the citizens than at manipulating them and at bringing them to consume.

Majid Rahnema notes that the first Homo Oeconomicus adopted two methods to introduce himself in the vernacular spaces, that remind the action of the retrovirus HIV and the means used by the drugs dealers. (Majid Rahnema, *Quand la misère chasse la pauvreté*, Fayard/Actes Sud, Paris 2003, P. 214.) Namely, the destruction of the immune defences and the creation of new needs. The first one is well realized by school, the second by advertising. Anyway, addiction is caused above all by habit.

Growth, together with consumerism, has in fact been both a virus and a drogue. And advertisement has been its privileged vector.

Yves Cochet, former French Minister of Environment, expert of the system, gives us a charming illustration that I would like to quote: “Monsanto aims at what is called biotech acceptance, the society's acceptance of OGM. The enterprise committed to Wirthlin Worldwide, world-wide specialist of enterprise communication, the task of finding the mechanisms and instruments that could aid Monsanto in persuading consumers by the means of their reason and motivate them by the means of emotions. This enterprise -

opportunately called Project Vista – is founded on the “detection of the consumers’ systems of values”. It aims at establishing “a cartography of the way of thinking in four levels (....) ideas, facts, feelings and values. In the US, the results of this study conducted to establish the messages that impress the audience, to know the importance of the thesis in favour of the biotech less pesticides in your plates” (Yves Cochet et Agnès Sinaï, Sauver la terre, Fayard, Paris 2003. p. 206). “Messages concentrate on three main themes: OGM allow the suppression of pesticides and provide healthy food. OGM maintain the quality of soil and biodiversity. They would be conceived in order to be apt to saline or arid zones. They would solve the problem of dryness in the Third World and would adapt themselves to climatic changes.

In France, these slogans are diffused by the association Deba in the form of brochures in the schools and in the waiting rooms of the doctors. In Monsanto’s advertising campaign of 2001, we have the inventive slogan – in the inimitable slang of professionals - «Pour plus d’écologie gie gie, la biotechnologie gie gie». Unfortunately, we have to recognize that it works. Not only with children, but with all the audience and with the judges too. Recent researches tells us that the resistance to OGM diminishes and a court condemned the country Confederation to pay a great compensation to Monsanto. Illich analyses the creation of needs on behalf of advertising as an alienating reification. He writes: “Being thirsty means that one needs Coke! This kind of reification is the result of a manipulation of human needs on behalf of big organisations that gained the dominion of the imagination of possible consumers”. («Libérer l’avenir», p. 180).

There are evident manipulators, trans-national enterprises and economic lobbies (Monsanto, Novartis, Bayer, Dow Chemicals and Cie) and the States and their special services (CIA, KGB and their personifications,...). The examples of successful manipulations are many. We remember the announce of the false massacres of Timisoara diffused by the KGB, we remember the arms of mass destruction that served as a pretext to provoke the war in Iraq by the Bush clan.

In both cases, even if the fraud is discovered, it is too late, disinformation obtained its objectives. Advertising manipulation is more difficult to unmask and the effects of its denouncement are even more limited. With certain media, systematic and aware manipulation reaches a degree of cynicism which is difficult to surpass, like the famous declarations by Patrick Le Lay testify. “There are different ways to talk about television. But from a business perspective – let’s be realistic – the job of TF1 is to help Coke, for example, to sell its product. In order for an advertising to be well received, the brain of the audience must be available. The vocation of our emissions is that of making it available: that it to say amuse it, relax it and prepare it between two messages. What we sell to Coke, is some time of available human brain”. (Declaration by Patrick Le Lay, President of TF1 in the book «Dirigeants face au changement» quoted by Viveret Patrick, Reconsidérer la richesse. L’aube/nord, 2003. p. 32).

According to Jean-Paul Besset, the advertising system “takes possession of the street, invades the collective space - deforming it – taking possession of everything that has a public vocation: streets, cities, transports, stadiums, beaches, parties. It submerges the night just like it monopolises the day, it cannibalizes internet, it colonises newspapers, imposing them financial dependence and reducing some of them to mere supports. With television, it owns its weapon of mass destruction, by settling the dictatorship of the share index on the main cultural vector of our age. This is not enough. Advertising assaults the private sphere as well: private mail, e-mails, sms, telephones, radio and bathrooms. Aggression is everywhere, the chase is permanent. Mind pollution, visual pollution, sound pollution”. (Besset, p. 251).

Tyranny of media has become the most powerful vehicle of imagination colonisation and addiction to growth that brings us to the catastrophe.

II – The challenge of the decolonisation of imagination

In order to make things go in the right direction, we have the work of delegitimization of the dominant values and ideology and the counter-information or the counter-manipulation, both obeying to the “devoir iconoclastie” (to quote a beautiful definition by François Brune), and the education to decrease or the cure of detoxification.

The denounce of the advertisement aggression, which is vehicle of ideology, is today the starting point for the counter-attack, in order to come out of what Castoriadis calls “the consumeristic and TV onanism”. He remarks: “Everything that happens, does not happen in the absence of society. People want this kind of consummation, this kind of life, they want to spend some hours of their life watching TV or playing on their pc. There is something else than a simple manipulation by the system and the industries that profit from it. There is an enormous movement where everything stands. People get de-politicised, more private, they turn themselves toward their little private sphere – and the system gives them the means to do it. And what they find, in this private sphere, gets them more and more far from responsibilities and from political participation”.

According to someone: “Man loves being manipulated, manipulation is something legitimized because it answers to a need”! “Just like rape, that corresponds to the desire to be raped...” mocks F. Brune.

Even a philosopher, Robert Redeker, has been found to praise advertising on Le Monde... Undoubtedly, too much manipulation kills manipulation. According to the famous sentence generally attributed to President Lincoln “one can always lie to someone, one can lie sometimes to everyone, but one can not lie all the time to everyone”. At most, even manipulators are manipulated and we don't know any more who is manipulating and who is being manipulated, just like in happens in the novel “Absolute friends” by John le Carré. All the more so because there is a more dangerous and invisible manipulation generated by “the air of times”, which is produced by nobody and everybody at the same time and is now linked to our way of life.

It is encouraging to see some manipulations that fail. Recently, for example, some oracles of the media propaganda have been a flop, just like in 2004 the Spanish elections, the Indian elections, and in a certain measure the French referendum on the project of a European Constitution.

In spite of lobbies, the carcinogenic role of amianthus, the harmfulness of Gaucho on bees or the existence of a menace on climate have finally been recognized. Certainly counter-manipulation includes in its program counter-experience and counter-research. Illich tells us that it is necessary “if we want to have some chances to find solutions in replacement of cars, hospitals, schools, and to all the equipment that we consider indispensable for modern life”.

In all the examples of failure of the propaganda, counter-experience and counter-manipulation played an important role together with the force of reality (“Facts are stubborn”), without any possibility to distinguish the part of the two factors. Anyway, we don't have to fool ourselves, this process has its limits. There is always something to manipulate. We win some battles, but we risk to lose the war.

Berlusconi nearly endangered the survival of the State of right with the power of his media system. Notwithstanding, I think that the total colonisation of the spirits is impossible to. A bit of critical sense always remains.

One believes that people are completely alienated and dominated, but this is never totally true. We saw it with the experience of socialism in the Soviet Union. Even under a totalitarian regime, there are dissidents. When the moment arrives, dissidence finally triumphs.

We don't have (yet?) an instrument to enter peoples' minds. Sartre used to say that it is not important what they did to us, but what we do of what they did to us. (quoted by Georges Didier Silence N°302 p. 11). The fabrication of citizens can be made or made again with practice. The construction of a society of decrease is facing the same problem and shares those values with socialism.

The REPAS (Réseau d'Échange des Pratiques Alternatives et Solidaires, that include Ambiance-bois and Ardelaine) and the whole alternative experiences, the collectives such as the ones that want to live according to a "balance of justice", which is to say an equitable ecological imprint (1300 families only in Veneto), the eco-villages, the AMAP (Associations pour le maintien d'une agriculture paysanne), the nets of commons in Italy (La rete nuovo municipio), the Jardins de Cocagne, the Sels, the Time Banks... these are actually, without any doubt, schools of serene decrease.

Alternative media have their place in this process, in spite of their financial meaninglessness. We can not deny the extraordinary power of the internet instrument, it may change the data of the social fight. The case of the Satanic verses by Salman Rushdie or the scandal of the top with a verse of the Koran worn by Claudia Shiffer during a fashion show in Indonesia demonstrate the change produced by the couple globalisation/mediatization, of which internet is a leading part.

Internet allows the researchers of all the world to work in a net, just like one community, forming a "collective intelligence", sharing knowledge in real time. That's extraordinary! But, as Jean Loup Anthony notes: "Is that really useful that the researchers get together to destroy the planet? Einstein already asked this question at the end of his life!" (Jean- Loup Anthony, Croissance d'entreprise ou développement humain, in CIEPAD, rencontres d'été 1995. p. 12).

Notwithstanding, in the fight against the mega-machine, the use made of internet by the sub-commander Marcos is quite encouraging. We can conclude quite realistically with the philosopher Jacques Poulain that we have the extraordinary possibility of sharing worldwide the report of our powerless protest. It is not nothing.