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Editorial

This, the seventh edition of Irish Communications Review, marks a new departure in the history of media and communications research in Ireland. The first six volumes of the ICR were published as a traditional print journal; Volume 7 breaks new ground. It is being published as an electronic journal on the Internet (www.icr.dit.ie).

Web publishing significantly expands the potential reader-audience, and creates the space to exchange information and views about a range of issues affecting the rapidly changing media environment. The electronic publication of the ICR entails a number of changes. As a new peer-reviewed electronic publication, the ICR joins an established and growing tradition, the oldest peer-reviewed electronic journal in the humanities going back to 1990.

The Contact ICR section in the electronic version will provide space for dialogue either in response to particular reports, articles, or related issues. You will also find contact details for the ICR on this page. A further change is encouraged by the publishing medium itself; web publishing dramatically reduces the publishing time. Thus, it is intended to immediate publish all articles accepted for publication on the ICR web site; subscribers will be regularly informed of all new publications by email. Specific stylistic changes are mentioned in the Notes for Contributors.

To subscribe to the electronic ICR send us your Email address by sending an email to icr@dit.ie with the word ‘subscribe’ in the subject line. This printed version is a bound print-out of the electronic edition of the ICR and is offered to subscribers at a reduced rate.

Readers wishing to contribute to the Contact ICR section in the electronic edition, should send their comments addressed to the Editors: icr@dit.ie. The list of contents for Volumes 1-6 of the ICR will shortly be made available in the Archive section of the ICR website.
Maple and Shamrock: seeking a strategy for survival in the audiovisual jungle.

Colum Kenny

Context

Attempting to assess what the future might hold for Irish broadcasters and producers, especially in the light of digital and multimedia developments and of increasing competition, I recently paid a visit to Ontario and Quebec, two adjacent provinces of Canada. It is a country where audiovisual matters have long been taken seriously. Canada's proximity to the U.S. 'elephant', as that neighbour is sometimes known, concentrates the northern state's collective mind on survival strategies.

Previous trips to Canada, including attendance at the Toronto Film Festival and participation as a guest in the Banff Television Festival in Alberta, had induced in the author an admiration for the practical ways in which Canadians have responded to audiovisual challenges.

In contrast, Irish broadcasting developments have been stunted by bad planning and poor preparation and marked by an absence of clear strategic focus. Policy has been eschewed in favour of politics and opportunities to build up the kind of audiovisual sector we might have had have been lost. It was at Ottawa, in September 1948, that a visiting Taoiseach, John A. Costello, proclaimed for the first time his own government's intention of declaring Ireland a republic. His successors might consider another visit, specifically to see how a relatively small country can articulate successfully an elaborate media policy.

Canada enjoys a remarkably sophisticated system of regulation, licensing and support which manages to keep scores of television stations and hundreds of radio services on the air in a country of under 30 million people. Most of those people are primarily English-speaking although the substantial population of French Canada, including some seven million citizens in the province of Quebec, is often underestimated by observers both inside and outside the North American state of 'two solitudes'.

Like Ireland, Canada is overshadowed by a powerful neighbour with the same dominant language, a big population and a much greater audiovisual economy. Like Ireland it faces an uncertain future as free trade negotiations break down its self-imposed barriers and new technology creates internal uncertainty about market trends. Like Ireland its policy makers worry that they will not be able to hold back the international tide. We also have at least one other thing in common, the first names of the respective cabinet members responsible for broadcasting (even if they are spelt differently): Ireland's Minister for Arts, Ms Sile de Valera, and Canada's Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Canadian Heritage, Ms Sheila Copps!

Aware of the various similarities and of Canada's pride in coping with past challenges to its film and television sectors, I travelled...
to Ottawa, Hull and Montreal in July 1997, with the financial support of both the Association of Canadian Studies in Ireland and Dublin City University, and met there with key regulators and professionals.

Fragmentation

There were a number of surprises awaiting me. I discovered that, in the highly fragmented English-speaking television market, an audience of one million people is regarded as being top of the range. With an English-speaking population six times that of the Republic, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation’s network is delighted to attract occasionally as many viewers as RTE’s ‘Late Late Show’ and other leading programmes get in a normal week. CBC itself is in big trouble, with a falling share of the market and cut-backs in government funding of its service. That service must compete for a budget with other government departments, there being no household licence fee paid by the public as in Ireland or Britain. In this respect CBC’s recent decline is a cautionary tale not only for Teilifis na Gaeilge, which depends on annual exchequer funding, but also for the IRTC, which the present Taoiseach has said will soon be funded in the same way. CBC has recently moved offices in Ottawa, to an uninspired suburban building.

CBC today commands less than twelve per cent of the Canadian Television market. Its main rival, the privately-owned CTV, has nearly double that audience and CanWest Global, which recently acquired effective control of Ireland’s TV3, is nibbling at CBC’s heels with almost ten per cent. CanWest has avoided the regulatory responsibilities of a Canadian network by describing itself as a ‘system’ and is using its healthy profits to expand internationally with some success. Its formula for expansion has relied heavily on the acquisition of US programming rights and it remains to be seen if this approach, which contributed to one significant failure at its Chilean subsidiary when CanWest underestimated the demand for local content, is tried in the busy Irish market (Taylor 1993; Kenny 1997).

Adding up the figures for the two main networks and CanWest’s ‘system’ it turns out that half of the Canadian audience is missing. Where has it gone? Well, painting a broad picture, about a quarter of the viewers at any given time are tuned into US channels. These may be received by some citizens off-air, as most Canadians live close to the very long border with the States, or otherwise via the ubiquitous cable systems which dot the provinces and cities of Canada. However, the invaders from the south have some of their teeth pulled because of a remarkable requirement for ‘simultaneous substitution’.

Simultaneous substitution

‘Simultaneous substitution’ obliges cable providers to replace the output of any distant channels with the corresponding output of any local Canadian channel whenever the latter is transmitting the same programme at the same time. So if NYPD is simultaneously on Channel X originating from the U.S. and on Channel Y originating locally in Canada then the cable provider in the franchise area of Channel Y must transmit or ‘drop-in’ the output of Channel Y over that of Channel X including, most importantly, the Canadian advertising breaks during that particular programme. Imagine if RTE could force cable and MMDS providers to transmit its output of U.S.-made programmes and accompanying ad breaks not only on the RTE channel but also in place of identical American programmes on UTV or Channel Four!

It is not surprising to find in the circumstances that as soon as a
local Canadian station acquires the rights to a U.S. programme it tends immediately to schedule it directly against its U.S. competitor. The 'simultaneous substitution' regulation is said to be worth over $100 million dollars annually to the Canadian industry so, as might be expected, there is some concern at recent indications that American producers may be sympathetic to allowing U.S. stations along the border acquire sole rights to certain programmes for both the U.S. and Canada.

'Some of these U.S. stations consider Canada as being very much part of their market, just as Ulster Television might so regard the Republic of Ireland. To allow these U.S. stations sole rights would be even worse for the Canadians than if UTV were allowed sole rights to certain U.K.-made programmes currently on RTE, because it would put an end in effect to 'simultaneous substitution'. What really worries Canadians is that already it has happened that no Canadian TV rights were sold to The Lion King or Schindler's List and that stations south of the border had a unique opportunity to acquire these films for screening.

U.S. channels are also being watched via direct satellite broadcasts from across the border, despite desperate and seemingly doomed attempts by Canada's government to outlaw the sale and distribution of equipment which is capable of receiving direct broadcasts from the states. Apart from offending the free trade sensitivities of their American cousins, such attempts smack of censorship and undue interference to many Canadians (Daglish, 1997).

Specialty services

The final quarter of Canadian viewers are tuned into specialty channels, of which there is a remarkable and growing number. Some of these are small community channels while others are private ventures. The business models for the specialty channels are based on low penetration and many perform nicely for their investors on a share of less than one or two per cent of the market. These are again distributed largely via cable, although direct broadcasting by satellite within Canada is now being franchised. M. Pierre Marchand, general manager of Musique Plus in Montreal, told me that for his leading specialty channel 400,000 viewers is 'an excellent audience' and 1% a good market-share. He added, 'we can make a decent share because we are very focused. Advertisers buy an environment and not just numbers'. He described some other successful operations as 'no risk stations: they gets subs and balance the books'. His company, part of the ChumCity group which pioneered City TV in Toronto, is about to employ thirty people to run another music channel in Montreal, this time aimed at an older age-group.

Canada first

Canadian channels are advantaged by a 'predominant signal rule' which means that cable operators must carry more local channels than U.S. ones and by a requirement that Canadian companies be given first option on each particular specialty service. This is partly because cable is now at the limit of its analogue capacity. Thus, if a cable provider thinks it a good idea to carry a classical music channel then this intention must be made known in order that a new or existing Canadian channel can provide such a service and bump any U.S. one, rather than the cable provider simply relaying an existing U.S. specialty channel. An exception is made for CNN which is allowed to compete with Canada's Newsworld.

Such a 'Canada First' regulation would be likely to be deemed unacceptable in Europe as a means of discriminating against the services of a fellow member state of the E.U. but the rule...
survives so far in Canada despite a growth in free trade with its southern neighbour. Equally problematic in Europe would be the tax regime which allows Canadians to deduct advertising expenditure on Canadian stations but not on U.S. stations active in the Canadian market. Nevertheless, Mr André Bureau, president of the big Astral group of media companies, told me at his Montreal office that he still feels that Canada is 'probably the most open country in the world' in terms of what services are available.

For one thing, the measure of what constitutes a Canadian company is broader than what it used to be and a growing proportion of U.S. investment may be found in local ventures. Yet an Irish or other foreign company would still not be permitted to acquire a stake in a Canadian broadcasting company equivalent to that which CanWest is being allowed in Ireland's TV3.

Putting a positive spin on the prospect of increasing foreign involvement in Canada, especially where protectionism is now yielding to free trade in North America, Mr Peter Fleming, Director General of Broadcast Planning at CRTC, remarked to me that there is no great fear anymore that Canada has become a U.S. plant. Canada now welcomes U.S. investment'. M. Jean Guérette, Director of Distribution Systems and Multimedia at Canadian Heritage (the government department responsible for broadcasting policy) defined the objective of current policy as being 'to ensure Canadian presence rather than closed borders. Various surveys reflect the fact that Canadians want Canadian content. People don't simply want freedom of choice'.

The viewing proportions which I have given so far have been for English-speaking Canada. In the province of Quebec the audiences are proportionately greater for Canadian productions, largely in the French language, and the CBC's French service, SRC, has a much healthier market share of about one quarter of the population. The influence of U.S. stations is also far less than elsewhere in Canada, with francophone audiences sharing a more vibrant if insular culture of their own. Not even programmes from France go down particularly well here and, as in the rest of Canada, a wide range of speciality channels has developed.

The Canadian broadcasting sector still seems quite vibrant indeed, with more than one hundred stations or services commanding at least seventy-five per cent of the market, albeit their schedules including a considerable amount of programming from the United States.

**Canadian production**

The share of viewers commanded by actual Canadian programmes is less than half of that commanded by Canadian stations and may stand as low as 30%. The position has improved since the 1980s as the price of US programming rose and the government insisted on broadcasters sustaining their Canadian content. There is a good market for Canadian programmes and producers receive substantial support in the form of tax-breaks, grants and direct investment. There is 'a vast array of public and private funds accessible to domestic producers' and few countries 'can match the level of international co-production activity generated by broadcasters and producers in Canada', activity which has included three co-productions with Ireland since 1991 (Murray, 1997).

Mr Michael McCabe, President and Chief Executive Officer of the Canadian Association of Broadcasters told me that, with the prospect of ever more stations being received from abroad, 'in the late '80s and early '90s we as an industry decided that Canadian programming is our future'. This reminded me of how
RTE had long ago decided that investment in 'home-production' is an essential part of its strategy to compete for audience against British terrestrial and satellite broadcasters.

**Quotas**

Domestic broadcasters are subject to national quotas which require that 60% of programming presented on television must qualify as Canadian content (Cancon), with 50% being allowed during peak times. CAVCO (the Canadian Audiovisual Certification Office) is one of the agencies charged with determining what constitutes 'Canadian content'. While broadcasters conform to the letter of the Cancon requirement they do so in a spirit which does not always please independent producers. Ms Elizabeth McDonald, president of the Canadian Film and Television Producers Association, expressed to me her scepticism about the long-term commitment of private broadcasters to her members. (The CFTPA produces a very useful annual guide to the Canadian audiovisual sector).

The attitude of the private sector in Canada towards 'home production' has already received some attention in Ireland (Saint-Lauren and Tremblay 1994). In general that attitude is considered by traditional broadcasters to be disappointing, especially in qualitative terms. Mr David Keeble, senior director of strategic planning and regulatory affairs at CBC, put it this way for me: 'There is a thriving independent sector but the product is not very helpful in terms of a cultural policy'.

Public policy is directed at ensuring that private broadcasters invest in the indigenous production industry but the results are not always very evident. Yet companies like CanWest Global, sometimes accused of minimising their programming commitments, more than conform in practice to the criteria of the CRTC. The ways in which they do so are the cause of some comment, with CanWest's showcase serial, Traders, for example being funded through a variety of creative mechanisms which ease considerably the potential burden on CanWest's coffers. One senior executive in a competing service whom I met claimed that by clever use of production funds and tax incentives CanWest is getting Traders for just one tenth of its actual budget. However, this does not appear to be exceptional as one recent profile of the entire Canadian industry found that broadcaster 'licence fees' (i.e. what the broadcaster actually pays for a programme), 'typically account for 10% to 25% of a program's budget', which is small compared to the usual contribution in Ireland or Britain (Canadian Film and Television Production Association et al. 1997: 3).

On the other hand, it has to be said that in the competitive Canadian market there is not a great demand for home-made drama or for the other types of what are designated 'underrepresented' categories of variety, documentary and children's programming. Despite the well-deserved reputation of Canadian film-makers the share of the box-office which is today commanded by their productions is minuscule.

In television not even CBC has succeeded in creating a standard soap such as Eastenders, Neighbours or Glenroe. Canadians whom I met were amazed to hear how RTE has managed to support programmes like The Riordans, Tolka Row, Glenroe, Fair City and Ros na Rún. CBC is currently trying to import writing talent to build up it portfolio in this area and the failure to do so to date is largely put down to the fact that Canadians became addicts of U.S. sit-coms, soaps and serials from a very early date. Even expensive productions such as CanWest's Traders have tended to be regarded as 'throw-aways', screened in its case against ER on a competing service and in many cases seen as a way to fulfil regulatory requirements rather than viewer needs. An ad spot on a programme like Traders or the family-show Jake and the Kid is a
fraction of the cost of a similar spot during the very popular U.S. series *Seinfeld*.

** Production support **

Canadian authorities have long been conscious of the need to take active measures aimed at realistic support for its cultural industries. For example, the Ottawa government's decision in 1976 to enact legislation to prevent foreign magazines from skimming Canadian advertising by reusing editorial material which was already paid for in the magazine's domestic market was regarded as crucial in the process which saw more than two hundred new Canadian magazine titles being established during the following twelve years (Campbell 1997).

Perhaps to encourage the private sector some of the regulations concerning Canadian television content are themselves flexible, with prime-time being defined as between 6.00 p.m. and midnight and certain categories of programme being counted two-hours for one actual hour. CBC's David Keeble observed dryly that 'most regulatory bodies become captured by the industry which they regulate'.

Private Canadian broadcasters are now producing programmes for themselves where before they might simply have acquired them from independents. Michael McCabe told me that 'programmes must be saleable internationally. We must build an internationally focused industry'. While this sounds in principle like an admirable objective some independent producers fear that in practice they may lose out to powerful companies which control production, distribution and transmission. They note that in the last round of licensing the majority of speciality channels went to existing broadcasters rather than to new players as had previously been the case.

** Industrially Canadian **

The volume and turnover figures for Canadian production sometimes mask the fact that shows such as *The Outer Limits* are being shot in Canada to look like they are made in the U.S. Both Vancouver and Toronto benefit from this cross-border service business which is 'industrially Canadian' and which takes advantage of the weaker Canadian dollar. However, the end product is scarcely Canadian in any significant cultural or creative sense (Doyle, 1997). Moreover, these practices also push up costs for Canadians and have made them expect to spend a lot on their own productions. A series like *Due South*, which is now exported to the US, costs over $2 million per episode. If Canadian technicians and actors don't get what they want in their own country then it's a short hop to Los Angeles, which is described sometimes as the fourth largest Canadian city in the world.

Some of the programmes which Canadians themselves produce look like they might have been shot in the U.S. This is done deliberately with a view to U.S. and international sales. They may include Canadian actors, but only because their accents are not nearly as off-putting to their neighbours as are British or Australian accents. As Peter Fleming, Director General of Broadcast Planning at CRTC said to me of U.S. mass audiences, 'if it doesn't look like their country they aren't interested'.

** Production funds **

For those Canadians wishing to produce locally, one fruitful source of investment has been the production funds which were
set up over the years by cable companies, usually as a condition of their being allowed to expand in some way. In effect all cable suppliers are expected to pay for some production, a 'significant benefit test' being applied to their proposals for services. Other funds are entirely independent. A new 'Canada Television and Cable Production Fund' has also been created jointly by public and private interests but on closer inspection it is seen that some of this fund's $200 millions has been redirected from elsewhere in the system (a Canadian Heritage news release P-09/96-149, 9 Sept. 96, notes that the fund is constituted by a Federal Budget commitment of $100m together with $50m each from Telefilm Canada and the private-sector Cable Production Fund. Drama, variety, children's shows, documentaries and performing arts are the eligible programme categories).

Telefilm Canada and the National Film Board are both long-established and highly reputable sources or revenue. Since its inception thirty years ago Telefilm Canada has invested more than $1 billion in films and television programming (Barker 1997:8). Telefilm Canada (1997) is a useful and informative catalogue of productions funded by that organisation.

Telefilm Canada can give up to 50% of a programme budget to independent producers wishing to make productions for television. Because of a fear that money has been spent indulgently in the past, it is now the case according to M Guy DeRepentigny, Telefilm's director of Policy, Planning and Research, that 'if you look for money you must have a commitment from a broadcaster and your proposed programme must have been scheduled during prime time'. There is a tendency to support the higher end of the market which reflects the desire to ensure that big audiences are watching Canadian productions.

The National Film Board, like CBC, has suffered serious cutbacks. Nevertheless, the budgets which the Film Board makes available to some producers of hour-long documentaries would reduce their Irish counterparts to uncontrollable fits of celebratory weeping. Each year around a dozen proposals get $750,000 on average, while about forty more get $450,000 each. While Canada's whole population is about eight times that of the Republic, its Film Board has an annual budget about twenty one times that of Ireland's Film Board.

As Chairwoman of the Film Board, Ms Sandra MacDonald was at pains to point out to me the importance of an active government policy: 'How much programming you can afford to make if it is not based on selling to the largest number of people is a political choice. We have had pretty extreme pressure at all levels of government to reduce spending'.

She does not see her board as being 'part of the solution to the problem of drama on television'. The Board's mission has been and remains principally factual and outside broadcasting. Its exceptions still tend towards the factually based, such as the acclaimed Boys of Saint Vincent, a series about sex abuse by Christian Brothers which was made with CBC participation and which remarkably, given its relevant content, has been passed up by RTE's buyers. Another programme which the Film Board made with CBC on the bombing of Germany during World War II landed them in the Canadian Supreme Court in a libel action taken by veterans. There is a fresh demand from speciality channels for the sort of films and documentaries which the Film Board funds and Ms MacDonald told me enthusiastically that Discovery, Vision, Bravo and the Cartoon and History channels are a 'great boon'.

Policy making

To this visiting Irishman there seems to be in Canada a striking commitment to policy-making and planning. Allowing for the
differential in the size of our respective populations, the CRTC has a far larger staff than has the IRTC and the government seems to understand the need for a coherent position on the convergence of new technologies in communications and broadcasting. The CRTC employs nearly 400 people and has a budget of about $30 million to handle both broadcasting and telecom matters, about 40% of its resources being allocated to the latter areas. Its full title is 'the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission'. It boasts of regulating no less than 5,600 licensed broadcasters including AM and FM radio, television, cable, pay and specialty television, Direct-to-Home satellite systems, MMDS, subscription TV and Pay Audio. An active Information Highway Advisory Council has also been established, with a specific interest in sustaining Canadian content in any new information order.

While not wishing to idealise the Canadian position, which has its own imperfections, a glance at some of the recently published documents and discussion papers listed in the references below speaks for itself. On the other hand there is a right of appeal from the CRTC to government, which may send back or overturn decisions. CanWest, for example, appealed last year when they failed to get certain licences in Alberta. While the government did not allow the narrow appeal CanWest did win some collateral concessions which may permit it finally to become a fully nation-wide operation. Whether such interventions constitute policy or politics is a matter for Canadians to debate.

Among the practical questions being addressed by Canadian audiovisual professionals is how to ensure that television delivery systems such as cable, satellite and DTT will give priority to Canadian channels by having them appear first on their menus and not losing them in a mass of information and services. This would mean the protection of prominent 'shelf-space' for indigenous producers and broadcasters. All systems of delivery may even have to carry a little maple leaf in the corner of the screen of Canadian channels in order to alert the casual surfer to what is non-Canadian, although some fear that this could be counter-productive.

Multimedia

Of particular concern to policy-makers is potential U.S. dominance of the global information infrastructure. Says M. Jean Guérette of Canadian Heritage: 'We must ensure our presence on this infrastructure. There must not only be networks for dominant players.' For him the protection and development of Canadian content is crucial in devolving a strategy for the multimedia age. In this context one of the striking things about Canada is how its policy of actively nurturing and adjusting the circumstances of its audiovisual industries over the years, cultivating competition in a gradualist but expansive manner, has resulted in a strong sector united around certain objectives. Although Mr. André Bureau of Astral is as commercial a broadcaster as you might find, he sounds like a public servant when he argues that 'you have to be constantly able to develop a mechanism which can support programme development. There is an obsession with allowing competition in everything. We have to get back to saying, "Look, we have here a country of 28 million people... so by allowing competition we will not increase their market".'

Conclusion

The advent of digital terrestrial television and the Internet, together with an expansion in free trade and the difficulties of protecting indigenous producers and broadcasters, are all factors which are as challenging to Canada as to Ireland and
there is a high degree of uncertainty about the future of the audiovisual sector in both countries. Where Ireland can learn from Canada is in reference to the latter's active cultivation of a strong and competitive local industry, its consistent sustenance of a continuing commitment to local content and its manifesting a great readiness to make, publish and evolve policy as required. Where Ireland can benefit Canada is in sharing its experience of the European Union. Because of their respective geographical and historical positions in the world and certain common cultural and economic hazards facing them, Canada and Ireland can usefully learn from each other. The two countries would profit from co-operation in the formulation of appropriate responses to the threats and opportunities of the new global information age.

Note

Quotations, unless otherwise stated, are from personal interviews conducted by the author in July 1997. In addition to people mentioned in the text I wish to thank the following for assistance in the preparation of this article: M. Jean Bouchard of the Association des Producteurs de Films et de Télévision du Québec, Ms Claire Dion of the Maclean Hunter Television Fund, Ms Barbara Doran, independent producer, M. Harry Gulkin of the Société de Développement des Entreprises Culturelles, Mr Bob O'Reilly of Radio Canada International, Mr Philip Pinnington of the Canadian Embassy in Dublin and the librarian and staff of McGill University, Montreal.

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Do West Ham play in Walford? Viewing Match of the Day as soap opera

Eoin Kirk

Introduction

Julian Dicks thunders a penalty past the disconsolate Mark Fowler. Albert Square goes wild with excitement. The camera shows Julian's elaborate celebrations before cutting to a replay. The next shot is of Phil Mitchell with a knife in his hand. Cue the music.

Football has always been considered dramatic by the participants and the live spectators. The advent of saturation television coverage has changed this element utterly. Alcoholism, drug addiction, wife battering, racial tension, paternity suits and police investigations are no longer the preserve of Grant Mitchell, Paul Brennan and the characters of Brookside. The traumas of Tony Adams, Paul Merson, Paul Gascoigne, John Barnes and Eric Cantona are examined in their performances on Match of the Day every Saturday night and talked about in pubs, in offices, in schools and in homes until the following week. Sport in general and football, in particular, were once believed to be areas where men could test their capabilities and be tested without fear of female contamination (Barthel, 1988). Messner (1987) views sport as the last bastion of traditional male ideas of success, of male power and superiority and separation from the feminization of society. Yet, football appears to have adopted in its televisal codes and forms many of the features of the most feminine genre, the soap opera. This essay traces this development, by comparing and contrasting the football highlights flagship Match of the Day with the characteristics of soap opera.

History

Whannel (1991) writes about how Match of the Day emerged from a programme called Sports Special which was first presented on 10 September 1955 featuring fifteen minutes of football action. It became a separate entity on BBC 2 in an early evening slot in 1964. Later in the same year it moved to its now established Saturday 10 PM slot on BBC 1. The football fan was considered male at the time but internal BBC memos realized that a balance was needed to be found between the slickness, pace and immediacy of coverage with entertainment values to include and interest all the family. But it was in the United States of America that sports coverage was undergoing serious changes.

Cashmore (1994) points that the ABC network prioritized the conversion of sport into populist, prime-time entertainment in the 1950s and 1960s. Its showpiece, Monday Night Football, used a variety of technical innovations including close-ups, replays,
slow motions, split screens and inserts in order to emphasize the humanity of players and commentators. It succeeded in its goal of creating interest by grabbing good ratings. It applied these techniques and added interviews and backgrounds to 'sport' such as cliff jumping, rodeos and frog hopping. An entry point was opened for the viewer who could view the event in a context and not in isolation. The seeds of soap opera sport had been sown.

The first major impact of this new linkage in Britain and in soccer was the World Cup Final in 1966. Geoff Hurst's 'goal' which ricocheted off the crossbar was a defining moment in the relationship between television, football and soap opera sensibilities. Television captured the moment and gave the impression that it was superior to being actually present because of technology. The instant replay, the freeze frame and the experts tried to decide definitively whether the ball crossed the line. Controversy reigned. The Russian linesman, Geoff Hurst, the German keeper and Kenneth Wolstenhome were all central characters to this story. The public created whole scenarios around the incident. Would England still have won? Should there be a replay? Was this divine revenge for the bombing of Coventry? People still discuss the case and indeed in Euro '96 Trevor Brooking referred to a Russian linesman after a legitimate Spanish goal was disallowed in the quarter finals. The idea that football could be interacted with on television entered the public consciousness. Drama and soccer were most compatible and over time following the trends and example of the United States, ITV and more recently Sky Sports, the BBC have incorporated soap opera style into Match of the Day.

Features of soap opera and Match of the Day

*Match of the Day* was viewed on the 23 and 30 November 1996 in light of generic soap opera characteristics listed in Fiske (1987). They are:-

1. Serial Form which resists narrative closure,
2. Multiple characters and plots,
3. Use of time which parallels actual time and implied continuing action,
4. Abrupt segmentation between parts,
5. Emphasis on dialogue, problem solving and intimate conversations,
6. Male characters who are sensitive men,
7. Female characters who are often professional and otherwise powerful in the world outside the home, and
8. The home or setting of the show.

Most of the these traits have impacted on *Match of the Day*. The remainder of the essay will examine melodramatic excess in relation to the programme since it is such a crucial construct in soap opera; a proper treatment of masculinity and femininity (as nos. 6 and 7 above) in *Match of the Day* is, however, beyond the limits of this essay.

Narrative structure

Ellis (1992) views the repetition of a problematic, ongoing enigma, anticipation and premium events as defining aspects of a narrative in a serial. Fiske (1987) sees no state of equilibrium and a world of continuous disturbances where the process is more important than the end result as vital to soap opera. The pleasure lies in seeing how events may occur and speculating about them rather than the big climax. In many ways *Match of the Day* replicates this pleasure.
All matches are shown as minor triumphs on the long and winding road to the Premiership title. The programme tries to postpone the climax and create suspense despite the nominal resolutions of winners and losers. We know the closures are false since even though Nottingham Forest secured victory, they do not live happily ever after. The league table confirms they are still relegation candidates. Arsenal may have beaten Newcastle away but Alan Hansen still believes they will not win the title and considers their difficult fixture set for the next week in light of their mounting injury crisis. The result is emphasized as a minor conclusion but we all have to keep tuned for further tension and suffering next week as the status quo is in constant flux since the table toppers may be well be beaten and their pursuers humiliated. Every winner will lose some day. Every 'over the Moon' manager will leave or be fired. For every happy team someone else is 'as sick as a parrot.' In true melodramatic nature 'all my children cannot be happy at the same time' (Feuer 1984).

The build up to next week's Match of the Day begins in the current programme with league tables, opinions, interviews and the panel's comments. It is continued by the chat and gossip of football supporters. It gathers momentum through the speculation of newspapers and magazines such as Shoot and Match. Anticipation is further heightened by preview programmes such as Football Focus which is famous for 'the leader in November, winner in May' and 'Christmas is crucial' type analysis. Then during Grandstand reporters talk of 'scintillating strikes' and 'glorious goals' before tantalising post match interview snippets are shown after Final Score. Everything gears up for Saturday at 10 PM and ultimately the mythical future in May when the big question of who is 'the best team in Britain' is answered but only temporarily. The transfers during the Summer and 'the easier to win but harder to defend' talk ensure that this climax is momentary.

Within the programme the anticipation is raised by the initial signature tune, three minute musical introductions to the matches, team lists and comments from Des Lynam such as 'in the one hundred years of encounters between Arsenal and Newcastle there has never been a goal-less draw and there wasn't today'. The commentator tells us that the fixture is being watched on closed circuit TV in London. Such creation of suspense happens all through the programme even during the round up phase where a graphic showing the opposing crests is displayed.

Since only a particular type of event can be anticipated, cause gossip, stir controversy and instigate speculation the producers highlight particular moments. Replays interviews and post match contemplation exaggerate the goals, dubious penalties, near misses, bookings, fracas and sendings off. Similar to soap opera these clinches defined by Ellis (1992) as 'a struggle at close quarters' are what will be discussed intently over garden walls and pints of beer during the following week. Given that a sizeable audience know the results of the matches beforehand, high viewer participation is created through these incidents. The audience is on tenderhooks, forever wishing to know whether there was a deflection or a player in an off-side position. 'Did you see ... ?'

It is clear in Match of the Day through its narrative emphasis on a non-climatic format, the future and selective highlighting becomes primarily concerned with the interactive relationship between the characters, teams, commentator, panelists but more importantly the viewers. This pro-active, para-social interplay makes Match of the Day most like soap opera in its narrative thrust (Watson and Hill 1993).

Multiple characters and plots
Modleski (1995) states that soap opera emphasizes the unimportance of the individual life in its treatment of characters and stories. This allows the viewer to have multiple identification and enter the narrative from a variety of directions. The spectator is thus constituted as 'ideal mother' whereby she or he is a person who possess greater wisdom than all her character children and can extend sympathy to all. *Match of the Day* positions its audience in a similar role by offering an assortment of perspectives from where you can enter the plots.

The very first shot of the opening credits emphasize this. We are positioned as emerging from the tunnel behind faceless players. Then, we are shown a rapid montage of identifiable characters. You can be cool Steve McManamnen, artistic but flawed Eric Cantona, cheeky Emerson, clinical Les Ferdinand, hardman Vinnie Jones or the intelligent, cultured Ruud Gullit. All are seen in close-up with accompanying exaggerated sound effects. However, if you don't want to enter this plot at that level, you can always be part of the *Match of the Day* studio or commentary team. Choose between being the humorous, wily old uncle Des Lynam, the harmless caring Trevor Brooking, the opinionated Barry Davis, the cliched 'trainspotting' John Motson or the suave insightful Alan Hansen. Then, through the introduction and post match interviews further entry points are permitted through local rivalries, league positions and returning players. This was illustrated on the 30 November 1996 programme with constant reference to Sunderland's manager, Peter Reid and player Paul Bracewell being old Evertonians. Visually, there were many shots of Peter in the stand while the commentator claimed that the pair were the finest midfield combination in Everton history before interviewing them in turn. But if the audience does not like that plot or those characters there is another match in a few minutes which has been previously signposted during the opening musical segment.

The emphasis on characters in television sport has resulted in the personalities becoming larger than life. One need only look at Denis Rodman and Paul Gascoigne on both sides of the Atlantic to realise that they have become narrative stars in their own right before a basketball is dunked or a goal is scored (Thomson 1996). They have transcended their narrow stages and through intertextuality can be identified within a variety of arenas. We reach a stage where our familiarity with the stars such as Ravinelli, Fowler, Beardsley, Giggs, Pearse and Keane bring us to a sense of community around them. We understand their greatness but also their foibles. We experience joy with them. We suffer with them (Stevenson 1995). Like Bella Doyle in *Fair City* changing from a wife-cheater to a pillar of the community within two series, Eric Cantona's karate kicking is soon forgotten when he scores the winner at Wembley. We identify with the good, the bad and Iain Dowie because of the multiplicity of characters and openings in *Match of the Day*.

**Time**

According to Fiske (1987) soap operas attempt to make the correspondence between its time and real time as close as possible. He contends that male narrative, such as the *A-Team*, works to compress time, to leave no impression of living characters between episodes and eliminate memory from episode to episode. Thus, editing speeds through times of limited action to concentrate on moments of power and performance.

Viewing *Match of the Day*, it is clear that it does edit out non-action and concertinas time. However, with its emphasis on characters, one has only to pick up and read the back pages of a newspaper to find out how life continues between episodes. Furthermore, it stridently refuses to erase memory by showing past performances during the introduction sequence. For example, on the 30 November 1996, Beardley's and Shearer's
goals in Newcastle's previous two fixtures were highlighted to show how the Magpies were maintaining their championship chase. It was reminiscent of Neighbours. Because of the open-ended narrative, an evocation of the present, e.g. today's matches, being most important for the imagined future (the final table in May), is given. This sense of the future is balanced with the presentation of the past through the old professionals Brooking and Hansen to produce a continuing present. All their analysis finishes with Des Lynam asking about future league prospects. Time, a male construct of control, is postponed indefinitely by using a soap opera strategy of tomorrow never arriving.

Segmentation, dialogue and problem solving

Ellis (1992) views segmentation in soaps and serials as the rapid alteration between scenes with a repeated return to a habitual location and setting. While Match of the Day cannot intercut between scenes of games, it does segment the presentation clearly into pre-match build-up, action, half-time crowd scenes, action, summing up and post-match interviews before returning to the studio. There is a sequential logic which may not be true of pure soap opera but allied to the other non-game segments such as the title sequence, match introductions, analysis, previews, goal of the month competitions, goals from other matches, tables and the man of the day the programme relates itself as an updating rather than a final explanation.

Dialogue is encouraged throughout the seventy minutes and anyone who has watched the programme in the company of friends or in a bar will testify its effectiveness. Approximately forty per cent of the show is talk or direct address using introductions, discussions, interviews and controversies. Indeed a Nick Barmby goal between Everton and Leicester sparked a three minute analysis after match coverage lasting one minute. The following week a crisis at Nottingham Forest gave us thirty seconds of action but over two minutes of speculation on the situation. Even during the sixty per cent of action Barry Davies makes comments such as 'there isn't the change of pace you'd expect the imports to produce' referring to Zola, Esprilla and Vialli which ignite interaction will view. The panel of experts, of course, serves the dual soap roles of creating dialogue and problem-solving but in a very masculine way. Using Baudrillard's idea of exigency, Alan Hansen and Trevor Brooking demand the best and aim for perfection (Barthel 1988). For the viewer, it adds the satisfaction of 'being in the know' to 'being an achiever' with the characters and teams. This evaluation empowers the spectator and allows informed gossip (Fiske and Hartley 1978). This section is quite formalized with Alan and Trevor taking matches in hierarchical order. A controversy, some tactical thoughts and a player focus are covered usually using replay and the 'magic-pen'. With little argument between them, the impression of a male-oriented unified reading is given. Yet, with commentators giving separate opinions, multiple identification possibilities and Des Lynam taking one of it seriously, it is often difficult to extract one coherent meaning. Instead we are given the choice to agree or disagree with the views expressed because we have built up a body of knowledge through our repeated viewings. If you watch enough experts, your views on dodgy goals and Christmas tree formations become as valid as those of the panellist. Everyone is an expert when watching Match of the Day.

Setting and excess

Feuer (1984) sees melodramatic excess as the magnification and opulence of emotion through choreography, musical
under-scoring, editing and camera-work. According to Fiske (1987) this can result in the dominant ideology being subverted since the overspill of meaning may escape ideological control. For example, the sumptuous nature of the Dallas sets and the repeated exaggerated sufferings of Sue Ellen allowed female viewers to move beyond a patriarchal reading to a secondary textual examination. Television football is little different.

The comfortable studio setting is the first sign of excess with giant footballs casting shadows on the presenters. Then Lynam hands us over to the 'Theatre of Dreams' otherwise known as Old Trafford, Manchester. Next we meet all the greatest players of the century such as Shearer who at stg. £15m far exceeds the economic norms of the viewer. But once the action begins, the emotional over-indulgence begins in earnest. Through constant close-ups, three different angled replays and the commentators' hyperbole emotional abundance is assured. Pathos is evoked after every near miss with the obligatory lingering shot of the forlorn striker. It can also be evident with the close-up shot of the keeper after a goal. However, the finest recent example was the shot of the shell-shocked Newcastle fans after Liverpool beat them 4 - 3 last season (1995) and destroyed their Championship hopes. Ironically, this was in many ways the football image of the year.

After goals have been scored the sequence of shots has changed since Fiske and Hartley's (1978) mid shot to close up of scorer to beaten goalkeeper to celebrating players to fans to replay to action. Now it is generally mid shot to celebration to crowd to replay to replay to action. Indeed the crowd shot is becoming less important to showing the players' celebrations which has resulted in players doing their rehearsed party pieces (Ravinelli and Asprilla) after scoring. The emphasis is on emotion and recreating it. The replay is used again during analysis and goals are shown once more during the closing credits. In fact replays have often become more important than the continuing action during live transmissions where they come with a deafening whoosh on Sky Sports. Just showing the match is not enough. Emotion is replacing action. The last bastion of masculinity is being stormed.

Conclusion

While on holiday in the United States in 1992, I tuned into the local Olympic Games coverage. For ten minutes, segmented by advertisements, I viewed a biographical account on what Shannon Miller, a gymnast had for breakfast, lunch and dinner during the previous four years using soft focus and music building to a crescendo. She duly won her medal after thirty seconds of vaulting and we all cried as the 'Star Spangled Banner' boomed. Likewise I was in Australia in the Summer of 1996 and learnt how Kieron Perkins had overcome age, advertising, self doubt and a broken relationship to become Olympic 1500m swimming champion. His new girlfriend Janine was intercut with every twenty-five metres of action and lumps in our throats were difficult to swallow when he touched first. In Ireland, we know all Michelle Smith's family personally while images of travellers watching Francis Barrett's contest outside caravans remain in my mind. It is memorable, heart tugging television and it is the future of television sport.

In football, it is clear that Match of the Day has taken on many of the characteristics of soap opera. It has adopted the narrative structure, the multiplicity of characters and plots, the usage of time, segmented dialogue and action and excess for its perceived needs. With sixty per cent action, authoritative commentators, man of the day and the absence of women in person, male chauvinist viewers may feel safe against Barthel's female genre contamination. They are, however, deluding themselves since Shannon Miller is in the dug-out and about to warm up. I predict that O J Simpson will play in defence for the
Hammers in the game outside the Queen Victoria. Meanwhile, Ian and Cindy feel very much at home in Upton Park.

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Ireland's Alternative Press: Writing from the Margins

Lance Pettit

Introduction

[Alternative media are those that] avowedly reject or challenge established and institutionalised politics, in the sense that they all advocate change in society, or at least a critical assessment of traditional values. [...] Often founded to campaign on one particular issue, alternative media face considerable problems of survival, given their tendency to be under-financed, and unattractive to advertisers and the mass commercial market. (O'Sullivan, 1994: 10)

Given the relative scarcity of published sources on the press in Ireland, it is perhaps not surprising that there is little writing on alternative publications. An Phoblacht/Republican News (AP), Gay Community News (GCN) and The Big Issues (BI) might appear to exemplify O'Sullivan's definition of 'alternative media'. This article provides an examination of the term using examples that are specific to the social and political context of Ireland in the 1990s. The material presented here is largely based on three, hour-long interviews carried out with the editors in October 1996. Table 1 below provides some key facts about the publications for reference and comparison. The aim of this article is to understand these publications in relation to, and indicators of, the wider cultural dynamic of contemporary Ireland and its mainstream press.

Table 1. Ireland's Alternative Press: KEY FACTS
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>An Phoblacht</th>
<th>Gay Community News</th>
<th>The Big Issues</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Founded</td>
<td>1978 but dates back to 1920s</td>
<td>1988</td>
<td>1994</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Head Office</td>
<td>Parnell Square, D1</td>
<td>1988-97 Hirschfield Centre, D2</td>
<td>Amiens St, Dublin 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Editor</td>
<td>Brian Campbell</td>
<td>Cathal Kelly</td>
<td>Niall Skelly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Circulation (1996)</td>
<td>20-23,000</td>
<td>9,000</td>
<td>33-34,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(multiple readers per copy)</td>
<td>3-4</td>
<td>(2.3)</td>
<td>(3-4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estimated Readership</td>
<td>60,000-92,000</td>
<td>20,700</td>
<td>99,000-136,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Size (Oct. 1996)</td>
<td>Tabloid</td>
<td>Tabloid</td>
<td>A4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visual Features</td>
<td>Newsprint with two colour print on cover</td>
<td>Newsprint: full colour cover and selected features</td>
<td>Glossy, full colour throughout</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Page Numbers</td>
<td>20pp</td>
<td>32pp</td>
<td>40pp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Price</td>
<td>IRE0.50</td>
<td>Free</td>
<td>IRE1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional Financial Support</td>
<td>No adverts (1996)</td>
<td>Advertising sales for production + FAS support for staffing</td>
<td>Advertising (small business + corporate), state start up grant and FAS support for staffing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distribution Spread</td>
<td>Ireland nation-wide, Internet Page since 1995</td>
<td>Ireland nation-wide, 300 postal subscribers abroad</td>
<td>Ireland nation-wide</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1200 postal subscribers</td>
<td>Postal subscribers (no figures)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distribution of Hard Copy</td>
<td>Six vans to regions; sale door to door by AP vendors</td>
<td>Rail to outlet venues around Ireland; by hand trolley within Dublin</td>
<td>Rail to regional centres; sold on street by vendors working patch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motto or Masthead</td>
<td>'Equality: it is new strung and shall be heard' [Harp Emblem]</td>
<td>'Ireland's National Lesbian and Gay Newspaper'</td>
<td>A Hand up not a Hand Out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Production Technology</td>
<td>Apple Mac</td>
<td>Apple Mac, QuarkXpress, Adobe Photoshop</td>
<td>Apple Mac, Adobe Photoshop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Printed</td>
<td>Location information withheld</td>
<td>The Meath Chronicle</td>
<td>Smurfit Web Press, Dublin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staffing</td>
<td>30 part-time volunteers</td>
<td>2 full-time, 21 part-time FAS-funded</td>
<td>Dublin Office: 6 full-time, 6.5 part-time, FAS funded + 1 staff photographer. Countrywide: 120 employed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
AP, GCN and BI articulate and contest various forms of political and social marginalization experienced by different kinds of subordinate groups in Ireland. Written from the margins these publications remain significant to the lives of their workers and many of their readers in material and social terms in ways that differ from mainstream press. For the volunteers, part-timers and core readers of AP and GCN in particular, these newspapers remain vital sources of information and identity. For the vendors and FAS workers on BI, the magazine represents an immediate source of income, an introduction to self-help enterprise and a way to 'get themselves on the road to mainstream society'. For the cultural analyst, these publications are significant because they are products of subcultural activity and 'sub cultures have tended to be envisaged as disenfranchised, disaffected and unofficial' (Gelder and Thornton, 1997: 2), terms that describe the socio-political location of homeless people, homosexuals and socialist republicans in Irish history. However, to designate these publications as 'alternative' does not infer that this term has static boundaries. As Stuart Hall has put it: "there is no fixed content to the category of "popular culture". Instead it is better to think of 'alternative' as a relational concept, defined in process within and against a dominant culture and subject to change over history. To deem a publication 'alternative' is to make a provisional judgement, ascribing it a location within a particular context. The degree to which a newspaper or magazine may be judged 'alternative' at any given historical moment is therefore dependent on an examination of the interaction between different factors. These are principally concerned with the production process, distribution of the publication and its differentiated readerships.

The Mainstream Newspaper Industry

Given that 'oppositional cultural values are formed and take shape only in the context of their struggle with the dominant culture' (Bennett, 1986:19), this section provides a critical examination of the mainstream press in Ireland. The recent government-commissioned Report of the Commission on the Newspaper Industry in Ireland (Report) provides a valuable insight into an official view of the national newspaper industry. Against a background of a seven per cent drop in Irish newspapers between 1990-1995 (p.16), the 'Preface' to this study identified a set of wide-ranging terms of reference including amongst other things: the importance of the press in maintaining a distinct national identity, plurality of ownership and diversity of editorial viewpoint, the competition from British newspaper imports, taxation levels on Irish newspapers, the challenge of new technologies, editorial independence, law on libel and concentration of media ownership. Among its conclusions it recommended that the 12.5 per cent rate of VAT levied on Irish newspapers should be zero-rated in order to off-set the 'dumping' of British newspapers on the Irish market. (p.35) It also noted the continued concentration of ownership of media in Ireland, within the press. The closure of the Irish Press in 1995 and the short-lived existence of The Evening News in 1996 emphasize the dominance of the Independent Newspaper Group titles in both broad sheet and tabloid forms. Although the Report suggested that there is not an 'automatic connection' between plurality of ownership and diversity of viewpoint (p.29), it could only record 'a satisfactory diversity of editorial viewpoint and of cultural content' (p.29) in the Irish national press. In an 'Introductory Chapter', outlining the role of the press in Ireland's national culture, the Report stressed the importance of representing minority views and interests in a fair and compassionate way. Later (Chapter 5) it reiterates that the indigenous newspaper industry 'has a clear responsibility in its coverage to reflect minority interests and minority aspects of Irish identity.' (p.49)

While several prominent individuals, trade unions, interest
groups and institutions involved in journalism and the press industry (local and national) were approached by the Commission for submissions, none of the editors of the three papers discussed in this article were contacted. Equally, the Report's Appendices indicate that none of the editors submitted material to the Commission, though some submissions were received and accepted from travellers, poverty action and community groups for instance. The marginalization of socialist republican politics from the mainstream of Irish life is endorsed by the Report's failure to acknowledge An Phoblacht/Republican News as a national weekly newspaper which has circulation figures (20-23,000) comparable with or greater than many local newspapers and three weeklies addressing specialized readerships: Anois, an Irish language weekly 'niche publication', The Irish Catholic, with a circulation of 27,000 and The Sporting Press, providing coverage of greyhound results with a circulation of 8,000. (Report, pp.15-16) However, there is no mention in the entire Report of other nationally-distributed (albeit it monthly) newspapers like GCN. Small, independent newspapers representing important minority views and cultural perspectives seem to be less significant to the official 'national life' than press coverage of Gaelic and greyhounds.

The Alternative Press: Historical Emergence and Financial Survival

As O'Sullivan (1994) has already pointed out, there are particular difficulties of survival faced by the alternative press. Yet AP has a pedigree going back seventy years, takes no advertising and maintains a principled distance from Irish state funding. Historically the paper can be traced back to the 1920s (Patterson, 1989: 26-68), has always endorsed a socialist republican ideology and been coercively censored periodically since then. The present paper was formed from a merger with The Republican News in 1978 and is run from its inner city, Northside Dublin office. It remains doggedly 'socialist, Republican, left-wing' but 'while not an arm of Sinn Fein' (SF) it provides the kind of political analysis associated with SF policy. In fact in the issue on sale at the time of interview, the newspaper carried a two-page centre spread of an abridged version of SF's submission document to the British government on procedures concerning Loyalist marching. AP raises finance entirely through sales (drawing in approximately £1R10,000 a week on current figures) and claims some 1,200 postal subscribers. The newspaper has been available on the Internet since 1995, 'paid for by supporters'. The paper receives no money from SF but received money from the US organization 'Caide Sinn Fein' to help set up an office in Belfast.

GCN represents a different kind of alternative newspaper in Ireland. Established in 1988 as a free paper published by the National Gay Federation, it remains Ireland's only indigenous national paper for lesbians and gays. Its finance is raised through advertising sales (some thirty four per cent of its pages comprise adverts: see Table 3) and most of the staffing costs are met through government FAS/CE (Community Employment) training schemes. The emergence of GCN corresponded with the growing momentum for lesbian and gay rights and the decriminalization of homosexuality in the 1988-1993 period. Indeed GCN had a crucial role in articulating the growing confidence of a subculture, which formed itself into a workable community. The 'community' comprises a complicated overlapping of interests and activities including health work organizations, commercial 'scene' businesses (pubs, clubs and saunas) organized support and social groups and those interested in political activism and lobbying. GCN embraced this 'alternative family', expressed its needs, celebrated its existence and provided a visible presence of homosexuality in Irish society.

Big Issue (BI) was set up in 1994, moving quickly from the front
room of its founders, via a temporary base in the Ormond
Multi-Media Centre to its present head offices in Amiens Street,
neir Connolly railway station on Dublin's inner city Northside. In
addition there are fifteen regional offices around the country. Bl
was set up as an Irish version of John Bird's London-based big
issue street magazine (Mitchell, 1995:3-5), except that it has 'the
social initiative', a skills and training scheme for homeless and
long-term unemployed. Bl received a £15,000 government
'pump-priming' grant and mainly on-going government FAS/CE
schemes fund its staffing. It also raises revenue from 50 per cent
of sales (the other 50 per cent remains with the street vendor)
and income generated from advertising. 25 per cent of the
magazine's forty pages are given over to adverts (see Table 4)
raising on average £7,000 per issue to offset printing costs
and office overheads. Customers include large business
corporations like AIB, Bank of Ireland and Cablelink, government
bodies like Bord na Gaeilge, international charities (Amnesty
International), food and 'alco pop' products and smaller local
businesses. Bl also has to run 'an occasional fund-raiser each
year in order to be able to keep going' financially. Economically,
therefore, areas of the Bl enterprise are closely tied into state
employment schemes and its list of advertising clientele suggest
the magazine has carved a niche in the buoyant, mixed capitalist
economy which characterizes Ireland in the mid-1990s. But the
wealth produced in this boom has not been equally distributed.
The 'hard news', which Bl seeks to highlight, like long-term
unemployment, the associated social problems of poverty and
crime, and homelessness, all, remain features of Irish society.
The magazine circulates as a popular media product within the
economic system which re-produces these features as an
'insoluble', problematic by-product.

News Sources & Human Resources

All three publications claim to be investigative though all have
differing perspectives on news coverage, which are explained
only partly by their different frequency of appearance. In terms of
quantity, the weekly AP has the highest news content (42.5 per
cent), the monthly GCN has 13 per cent and the fortnightly Bl
the least with just 10 per cent. [See Tables 2-4] GCN 'strives to
report the news independently, objectively - from a lesbian and
gay perspective'. Its editor stressed that press releases received
were checked out and not accepted on face value. The paper
has also printed an editorial since Kelly was appointed in 1995.
Brian Campbell says: 'AP always looks for accuracy, for the truth
and if we have political analysis, it has to stand up on its
merits. [...] We aren't obviously the same as any other paper, I
think that papers which say that they don't have certain political
lines are entirely wrong. We are just more honest and up front
about our politics'. Bl claims to 'tackle issues from a slightly
different way than you would get in the mainstream print media'
but since 58 per cent of the magazine is given over to listings,
reviews and advertising, the space in which it has to do this is
limited. The cover story and features appearing in the sample
were concerned with the link between mobile phones and
prostitution, a dissident priest and Romanian orphans. The
alternative press is at a disadvantage to the mainstream papers
since newsgathering is costly: it takes time and money to
develop contacts and follow up enquiries. 'Investigations are
down to resources, not to a lack of will' commented Campbell.

Although all publications have at least some bone fide NUJ
(National Union of Journalists) members none of them have
been allocated official press passes to attend Dail Eireann for
political briefings. As a weekly, AP is seriously impaired in its
political coverage and admitted that it picked up story lines from
the The Irish Times. All the editors cited lines of communication
with trade unions, press releases from state departments,
business and other institutions and other informal contacts as
sources. Skelly claimed that the non-official reputation of the
magazine allowed his journalists access to a situation involving
local Dublin residents evicting drug pushers where mainstream journalists and Gardai were excluded, though this is disputed by the magazine’s staff photographer. For GCN and BI, reliant on advertising and state funding, the question of editorial independence does arise. Kelly was emphatic that he receives no editorial interference from FAS: ‘they are squeaky clean on that’. Despite the fact that one major gay venue had withdrawn advertising and refused to stock the paper for a short period, GCN has established that it ‘will report independently of advertisers on events and venues […] A right of reply is always extended.’ BI has lobbied politicians for funding and support but Skelly emphasized that the magazine strives to be objective: ‘what we want to tackle are the issues. If the issues happen to relate to a politician, his view and things are against what should be done, we have to tackle it’.

It would be fair to say that all three publications were curtailed in their investigative reporting because of human resource limitations. All relied to varying degrees on voluntary work often by people with no formal journalism training; much of the staffing was part-time and nearly all of it was on a temporary contract basis. (See details in Table 1.) These factors produce a lack of continuity, which has implications for quality of work possible, and hinder the longer-term development of the publication. All the full-timers are NUJ members and a proportion of the part-time workers may have affiliated membership with the NUJ though BI did report initial problems in the union recognizing membership. Given AP’s anti-establishment stance, it does not receive nor has it applied for FAS/CE funding. The editors themselves have varied backgrounds: Kelly was a professional copy editor prior to work on GCN; Campbell had written for newspapers and edited a book in the US; Skelly had a background in social work. A few of the staff on the newspapers and magazine had training in journalism but most learned skills on the job.

Censorship Issues

None of the papers is subject to the direct, coercive suppression by state agencies that is sometimes associated with alternative or underground publications. In the past AP has been raided by the Special Branch at its Parnell Square offices, its fleet of distribution vans has been harassed and copy destroyed on the road. Indirect censorship takes other forms such as the exclusion from the Dail and AP has long been subject to an embargo by one of Ireland’s largest retail outlets, Easons, curbing that form of distribution. As a result of some of its crime investigations, the BI has reported threats of physical violence from illegal taxi drivers. As has been mentioned, neither BI nor GCN felt that its editorial independence was in any way infringed by its links with government agencies or its commercial advertisers. Perhaps the most interesting points raised about censorship concern the internal editorial processes through which particular issues are filtered out or marginalized by the publications themselves.

AP maintains that it follows normal conventions on accuracy and truth in its reporting. It would not publish material which was racist as a matter of principle, but it would run a pro-Unionist feature. This would be set in the context of other articles putting forward opposing points of view to interrogate and answer the Unionist case. AP is a newspaper with a clearly Republican stance, a significant but subordinate ideological position in the politics of contemporary Ireland: ‘All papers have to speak to their readers, have to weed out stuff that they think their readers aren’t going to be interested in, or even I suppose, they only write about stuff they want to write about.’

The editor of GCN recognized that there were tensions within the gay community about the role of the paper in running investigative news stories about politically sensitive areas.
concerned with representatives of gay health organizations and government departments:

I know that a number of organizations are pissed off because we have said things either in the way (sic) or at all that they don't want us to say but I think in a way that's servicing the broader readership.

Kelly continued that:

There are issues going on behind the scenes within the community, individuals and organizations, who are doing things that I feel people should be aware of and that they don't want made public and it's an issue of dispute and debate within the paper as whether or not or how we should cover them.

It is revealing that GCN should be experiencing this dilemma four years after the law changes in Ireland took place. Some figures within the gay community are not used to having their actions reported in such a rigorous fashion by its own newspaper. Since gay life has been conducted behind closed doors for so long, it might be felt that certain negotiations on government policy should go ahead in a similar fashion. In this new era lobbyists and representatives might have to get used to 'community' accountability that includes open, independent press coverage from GCN. The editor noted that 'at the moment, under instructions from my employers, we have not dealt with [the issue]' and Kelly argued that it would be far better for GCN to be proactive and cover the story to at least give the issues a fair, objective airing before the story leaked to popular tabloids like The Sunday World. Complaining that there was too often a narrow-minded 'political correctness around the term "diversity"', Kelly felt that a maturing and developing GCN should address a much wider range of tastes and issues. It was a challenge for a small paper to provide for a spectrum of interests, from people 'who want to see pretty pictures of naked or semi-naked men to those who want an in-depth analysis of the Equality Bill'. The paper is also waking up to the fact that it needs to tackle issues that are awkward for the gay community, like the question of the unconscious sexism of gay men, the morality of 'outing' or the tactics of the Lesbian Avengers.

Technology and Visual Styles

All the publications use Apple Macs in their day to day work and software that is compatible with mainstream industry. As BI put it, 'we do everything here except print the magazine'. The alternative press - particularly the more recent publications - have adopted electronic, desktop publishing practice from the start and have not had to overcome the inertia of old-fashioned print technology traditions represented in the mainstream newspaper industry. As with staffing patterns, the mainstream adoption of computer technology may be seen in some ways to be following trends in the alternative press. Independent publications have the advantage of being flexible because small and (providing they can raise the finance) they are able to change relatively easily compared to larger commercial enterprises. However, in the last stage of the production cycle - printing the final product - the alternatives are forced by cost to tap into the existing printing and reprographics industry, GCN using the The Meath Chronicle press for example.

The editors interviewed were all self-critical about the visual appearance of their publications and spoke candidly about the problems of achieving acceptable standards of photography and layout. Brian Campbell admitted that 'layout is not the strongest element' even though it was given a 'partial re-design' in 1995 and Cathal Kelly noted that since the departure of its half-time photographer (Kelly Green) 'the October and November 1996 issues are way down in visuals for news stories'. AP and GCN
relied on being sent publicity photos, used amateur photographers (AP has two volunteers dedicated to photography) or bought-in pictures from established photographic agencies. The photography of AP and GCN lack the quality of image and polish associated with the mainstream and the layout is dated. Recent attempts by GCN to run fashion and lifestyle features (April 1997) have misfired because an attempted 'retro' look has been poorly designed and reproduced. Only BI has a full-time staff photographer (Marc O'Sullivan) and the magazine is largely successful in attaining a mainstream look with its full-colour, glossy finish and the considered design of its visuals. Niall Skelly argued pragmatically that BI needed to have an attractive front cover since it is sold on the street and has to grab the potential buyer's attention in a moment.

**Distribution Networks**

All three publications are distinct from the mainstream press in Ireland because they are not generally sold through the established system of retail outlets. AP is distributed around the country using a fleet of its own vans. The paper is picked up by vendors who mostly sell it door to door in particular local patches. It is also sold in some pubs, at football matches, public meetings or some individual news stands. It can sometimes be obtained off the shelf in some inner city, independent newsagents, but it is not generally available on retail. The AP also has 1,200 postal subscribers and went on to the Internet in 1995 which represents a considerable expansion of its readership worldwide. BI uses rail and van to shift it around the country to the regional centres where bundles are collected by vendors who sell it exclusively on the street. The vendors of BI are carefully controlled in their activities, being allocated a particular street pitch. They are also required to sign a legal document agreeing to conditions of conduct whilst selling the paper and are encouraged to open bank accounts for their own safety and to facilitate re-entry into a more settled life. The main distribution outlets for GCN in Ireland are pubs and clubs on the gay scene, gay-friendly cafes, community and arts centres, University and college Student Unions (SUs) and one or two of the more progressive book shops. GCN is a free paper but its limited distribution can hamper it being more widely read. In colleges 'because the SU staff change each year it may vary whether GCN gets stocked appropriately or if at all'. Especially in non-gay venues, people may be reluctant to be seen reading it openly. Kelly pointed out that for those not 'out' the paper provided a valuable source of basic information for lesbians and gays - pubs, groups, services - and for many was the first point of contact to the 'scene culture' and the networks of the gay community. GCN has some three hundred postal subscribers abroad.

**Readership and Markets**

There are a complex set of relations between alternative publications and their readers. The groups of people who buy and read AP, GCN and BI do not provide the straightforward indices of political affiliation or social location that one might expect. The majority of BI's readers are not homeless or unemployed; people other than Republicans read AP. GCN perhaps has the most tightly-defined readership, being read almost exclusively by lesbians and gays according to the paper's own readership survey.

Although BI campaigns on behalf of those who are socially excluded, its aim is 'to produce a magazine that the mainstream people want to buy [...]' people still have this misperception that it is made, sold and read just by homeless people. That wouldn't make any sense. It's read by the ABC1 consumer in our
readership survey'. In aiming at this sector of the advertising market and its associated readership, the publication represents reformist rather than radical politics: 'we realize that we live in an economic world, you have to do something in order for a reward, so people who sell The Big Issues get that reward'.

In contrast to this consumerist-led definition, AP's core readership is more likely to be defined by class politics, principally a political-class formation which is socially, economically and politically marginalized in both states of Ireland. 'I would say that 90 per cent of our readership is working class, that's who we aim at'. But Campbell is keen to stress that the survival and expansion of the paper depends on its 'role as an arena of debate. Y'see it's not only news, opinions and analysis, it's a forum for Republicans to debate ideas.' However, the paper is also read by people with an interest in Republicanism who may not be members of SF or who vote Republican in elections. Indeed, he argues, 'AP is read surprisingly by an enormous number of people in that broad (sic) political movers and shakers, the media, they all read AP. AP has had to confront political change in the recent cease-fire period and subsequent lifting of broadcasting restrictions on SF.

The ceasefires meant that sales of AP rose by 2,000 for the first two months but then levelled out. More significant to the paper itself was the lifting of Irish 'Section 31' broadcasting censorship in early 1994 (followed in September 1994 by loosening of restrictions in British television and radio). In effect, AP lost what was 'a world exclusive'. Prior to these changes, interviews with banned Republican leadership figures like Gerry Adams were a major selling point for the paper. In the North, AP is in competition with the weekly local Belfast paper the Andersonstown News, but in the Republic AP has been facing competition from a more unlikely source: The Sunday Business Post (SBP)! Launched in 1989, its engaging coverage of Republican politics has included a interview with Martin McGuinness (October 1996). Despite its primary aim to cover financial news for Irish business readers, Campbell had found the SBP editorial line difficult to pin down:

you would expect it to have a right-wing agenda and be anti-republican but it's not. I still haven't really worked it out but it would appear to me that in Ireland there is room within the business world, there is a view that a united Ireland would be good for them as well.

AP has responded to these challenges by trying to increase its coverage of 'modern culture' and to get more columnists to write for the paper, but admitted that this was difficult since contributors were not paid. It is perhaps for this reason that AP is considering advertising as a way of raising further revenue.

Whereas BI and AP do reflect an element of crossover in readership, GCN is hardly read outside the lesbian and gay community. GCN also faces a degree of commercial competition since US and British gay publications are available on retail. However, to such titles, 'Ireland is a nice addition to their markets rather than an exclusively Irish market. It wouldn't be big, sufficiently large for a commercial paper'. The limitations of market size means that 'there is only room for one paper really as the attempt to set up a competitor (Dublin Guyz) showed last year. And that can be a limitation. There isn't an outlet for people to criticize us apart from the letters page.' It seems for the foreseeable future that the development of the gay press in Ireland reflects some of the problems acknowledged to exist in the mainstream industry.

Conclusions

The extent to which these publications may be termed 'alternative' has been shown to vary across a range of criteria.
Economically, AP has so far survived in the margins due to readership loyalty and postal subscribers in the tradition of a radical press. Bi and GCN survive through a combination of state-funded support, sales and advertising revenue. Bi is able to court the commercial mainstream, while GCN’s range of advertisers remains narrow. In terms of production, all three publications use industry-standard computer software to produce copy for reproduction by conventional, mainstream printers. Apart from scale, the production cycles and organization of work by journalists is similar to mainstream practice. One exception to this concerns staffing: the alternative press rely on mainly untrained, often voluntary staff, most of who work part-time. All of the publications are distributed in alternative ways including hand-cart, selling on the streets and the World Wide Web. None of the publications is innovative or alternative in design or visual style. Indeed, all editors aspire to ‘professional’ photographic norms and conventional, rather dated layout is typical in the newspapers, while Bi mimics the mainstream look of a glossy, current affairs magazine.

Politically, AP is clearly the most oppositional. Its news coverage (see Table 2) highlights what it views as a military war in the North of Ireland and engages in an ideological war with the dominant political parties in Ireland, North and South, particularly focused on the issue of partition. Conscious that such a politics must engage with the mainstream at some level, AP recognizes that it must be flexible and develop an alternative struggle as a newspaper, to build up its cultural coverage ‘to make it more relevant to people’s every day lives’. It is a struggle which may borrow some of its resources from that [dominant] culture and which must concede some ground to it if it is to be able to connect with it. (Bennett, 1986: 19) Politically, Bi seems to have conceded considerable ground to the mainstream. Although the magazine’s ethos is self-empowerment for the disadvantaged, its social initiative aims to help those who want ‘to get back into the mainstream society’, i.e. on its normative terms. Working ‘holistically’, the Bi project of rehabilitation and re-entry does implicitly critique past attempts by state and charitable organizations to improve a hitherto hidden social problem but Skelly’s portrayal of Bi as part of an ‘international street papers movement’ is less radical than it sounds. His vision for its future is limited: ‘it is something that will have to be looked at by the European Parliament so that it can be accommodated’ [my italics]. In terms of its investigative agenda, Bi seems to have joined in a popular battle against crime in Ireland (it launched a ‘Crime Supplement’ in November 1996), terrain long-occupied by the mainstream press and intensified with the killing of the journalist Veronica Guerin. Given the lead by editorial remarks that ‘crime is taking over in Ireland, it’s ruling everyone’s lives’ and ‘there could possibly be a serial killer in Ireland which we have never had’, Bi’s journalism is in danger of sounding not unlike the populist, campaigning tabloids or the middle-class alarm of the broad sheet mainstream. (McCullough, 1988: 7-10) Ironically, this role is criticized in Eamonn McCann’s column (‘Write Arm of the Law’) in the issue of Bi current at time of interview.

Although GCN is ‘Ireland’s national lesbian and gay paper’, the editor admitted that ‘there isn’t clarity about the paper’s role’ for the future. Until recently, its role was mainly confined to servicing the immediate needs of a diverse community of people, but during Kelly’s editorship attempts have been made to re-shape the paper politically and journalistically: ‘reporting things to lesbians and gays that they are entitled to know, including covering things that they may pick up in the mainstream media but reporting them from a lesbian and gay perspective.’ GCN is in an important period of transition, re-structuring to adapt itself to the changes brought about by the legislation of 1993 and a shift in social attitudes. The problem for GCN comes from the tension between wishing to enhance its journalistic resources to achieve a consistently professional standard and remaining essentially a part-time, ‘free’ newspaper.
To have survived during a period of declining newspaper sales and immense political and social change, these publications have been forced to adapt to the terrain of the dominant culture and its mainstream press. Despite this, all three publications continue to represent different kinds of political and social alternatives that are possible in contemporary Ireland. The alternative press in Ireland has to some extent had to absorb elements of the dominant values, attitudes and styles of mainstream newspaper production in order to stay in contact with the potential readers of the future.

Tables

Here follows three tables detailing the content breakdown from AP, GCN, and BI.

Table 2. An Phoblacht: Content Breakdown 24 October 1996

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Generic Category</th>
<th>Details of Content</th>
<th>No. of Pages</th>
<th>As %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>News</td>
<td>Headlines: 'Deceit'; Apprentice boys lied about march'; Pat Kelly Released</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>42.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>News: London, Derry, Belfast</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Europe + Nicaragua</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Document</td>
<td>Abridged version of S.Fein policy on Marching Season</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Book Extract</td>
<td>Extract from new History of the IRA 1916-1922</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feature Article</td>
<td>'Good News: The Irish Just Don't Get it'; on threats to Press in Ireland</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Book/Film Reviews</td>
<td>Two history books and a new Irish film reviewed</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TV and Sport</td>
<td>'Surfing the Set'</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sports View</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deaths Notices</td>
<td>Anniversaries of relatives</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letters/Remembering the Past</td>
<td>Bloody Sunday, Repatriation, Bombing Campaign; 1641 Rising</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gaelige</td>
<td>Articles on Irish language TV and 'Foinsie' newspaper</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Editor's Desk, Cartoon, Contents</td>
<td>Snippets of news and Cormac featuring an Orangeman</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Editorial</td>
<td>Unionism, opening of British Parliament, sectarianism and Sport in NI</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3. Gay Community News: Content Breakdown 16 October 1996
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Generic Category</th>
<th>Details of Content</th>
<th>No. of Pages</th>
<th>As %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Advertising</td>
<td>Gay/Lesbian Clubs, Pubs, Phone Lines, Accommodation, Magazines, Videos, Solicitors</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesbian Pages</td>
<td>Features, articles and ‘Dyke Forum’</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health/Lifestyle</td>
<td>Interview with LEN</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Report on AIDS conference</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Book Reviews</td>
<td>Gay/lesbian interest: fiction and non-fiction</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts Pages</td>
<td>Film, music and video reviews + Interview with choreographer</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classified Ads</td>
<td>Personal Adverts, goods and services</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feature Articles</td>
<td>Evening Classes and Queer Choir</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media Watch</td>
<td>TV, newspapers, radio reviewed</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts Feature</td>
<td>Dublin Theatre Festival</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Life Coverage</td>
<td>Cork Women’s Weekend</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listings, Community Information</td>
<td>Venues and organisations in cities and towns nationwide, Britain and world.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Editorial</td>
<td>Picks up on Official recognition of suicide rates</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practical Advice</td>
<td>What to do if beaten up</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4. *The Big Issues: Content Breakdown 16 October 1996*
### Generic Category | Details of Content | No. of Pages | As %
--- | --- | --- | ---
Listings/Reviews | 'The Buzz' includes reviews of: pop music, comedy, fashion, books, cinema, theatre; listing of events and gigs; plus 'Rant: on Catholic Church and Celibacy' | 13 | 32.5
Advertising | Bord na Gaeilge, AIB, B of Ireland, Food, Alco Pops, Charities, Cable Link | 10 | 25
Cover Story | Feature on mobile phones and sex industry in Ireland | 2 | 5
News: Ireland | 'Exploitation of Homeless Children'; 'Aliens in Leitrim'; 'Stop Playing Politics' | 2 | 5
News International | Romanian Orphans | 2 | 5
Vendors' Contributions | 'Street Life' | 2 | 5
Feature Articles | 'New Lads Mentality' | 2 | 5
Front Page | 'Mobile Phone/Sex feature: Visual' | 1 | 2.5
Letters Page | Cultural Snobbery, Welfare Fraud. | 1 | 2.5
Interview | 'Focus': Prominent Priest interviewed | 1 | 2.5
Missing Persons News | Details + photograph | 1 | 2.5
Opinion Article | E. McCann on crime reporting in the Media | 1 | 2.5
Initiatives | Information about 3rd Level funding, an exhibition and professional women's network | 1 | 2.5
Contents | | 1 | 2.5

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### References
Ireland's Alternative Press: Interviews with the Editors of An Phoblacht/Republican News, The Big Issues and Gay Community News. Full-text of the interviews on which this article is based are available on the pages of Centre for Irish Studies web site at St Mary's University College from October 1997. For further information contact: pettittl@smuc.ac.uk

An Phoblacht (1996) 'Readers Questionnaire'.


Dancing About Architecture: Postmodernism and Irish Popular Music

Stephen Ryan

"Writing about music is like dancing about architecture"
Elvis Costello

Introduction

Listening to Bono of U2 in a recent radio interview, I was struck by a comment he made. He was talking about contemporary and past musics, and how the past and the present are tied up with hopes and fears about the future. It was, he argued, a case of the difference between yesterdays tomorrow and todays tomorrow. Yesterday's tomorrow was about a confidence for the future, a belief that progress was more or less inevitable and, for music, that artistic creativity would continue to blossom and produce great works.

By contrast, today's tomorrow is characterised by a chronic lack of confidence in the future, a deep-seated questioning of the possibility of further progress, and a resigned belief that absolute musical creativity is no longer possible (if it had ever existed in the first place) simply because all the good music has been written already. This, for me, is crucial to the very idea of postmodern music.

However, as Elvis Costello's quote above suggests, any attempt to rationalise, analyse or intellectualise music is bound to fail. By its very nature, music is not readily suited to a written discourse. Added to this is the problem of how different sectors of the music community react to attempts of any academic approach to popular music is bound to come up against some resistance. The industry response tends to ridicule attempts to analyse or intellectualise music as being hopelessly inappropriate to the energy, vitality and essence of the musical experience.

Academic objections, on the other hand, emphasise the lack of worth inherent in the subject matter for any kind of self respecting serious inquiry. Jackson (1996: 12) argues that only more recently has sociology, cultural studies, and communications/media studies begun to take the whole area more seriously. This interest has taken a number of forms, with postmodernism being one of the more prominent. Ironically however, much postmodernist writing on music has concentrated on high culture forms, thereby taking a remarkably modernist approach to their study of a conservative choice of material.

This article will look at definitions of postmodernism in this context and will examine how it might be relevant to contemporary Irish popular music. Specific mention will be made to eclectic mixing of styles, appropriation of older musical texts and the questions of irony and parody.
Defining Postmodernism

The term postmodernism is notoriously a strongly contested and controversial one. The very existence of the phenomenon is debated, and even amongst those who accept that it does exist in some form, there is little agreement on whether it should be seen in a positive or negative light.

The first thing that needs to be said about postmodernism is that it is obviously a relational term. The word modernism is inscribed into the very word with which we describe our distance from modernism (Huyssen, 1988: 183). The term is intended to indicate a critique and a rejection of a modernist project, a project that came under intense scrutiny because of its conspicuous failure:

This modern era was predicated on a notion of progress in knowledge, in the arts, in technology, and in human freedom as well, all of which was thought of as leading to a truly emancipator society; a society emancipated from poverty, despotism and ignorance. But all of us can see that development continues to take place without leading to the realization of any of those dreams of emancipation (Jean-Francois Lyotard, quoted in Kearney, 1988: 21).

Similarly, Michael Ryan (1989: 82) states how postmodernism is cynical regarding the progressivist dreams of modernism, which hoped to shape the cultural world in the image of technology, industry and science, and is resolutely ironic regarding the enabling myths of art, culture, society and philosophy.

Andreas Huyssen has outlined four factors that have contributed to this cynicism towards modernist thought. First is the link between imperialism and modernity, an imperialism which no longer goes unchallenged either politically, economically or culturally (Huyssen, 1988: 219). Secondly, he argues that the influence of feminist thinking has contributed to a radical change in the way we can now think about gender and sexual identity, as well as our perception of art forms previously accepted as being male dominated, which according to Huyssen (1988: 220), contributes substantially to revisions of the history of modernism, not just by unearthing forgotten artists, but also by approaching the male modernists in novel ways. Linked to challenges to imperialism is a growing pluralism and respect for cultural diversity that at least has the potential to develop into a type of intellectual work different from that of the modernist intellect who typically spoke with the confidence of standing at the cutting edge of time and of being able to speak for others (Huyssen, 1988: 220).

Arguably the most important influencing factor though, is the effect that environmental and ecological campaigning and thinking have had on existing approaches to modernity. The sense that industrial and technological modernisation are not inherently good things has contributed greatly to the view in the context of art and culture that we are not bound to complete the project of modernity (Huyssen, 1988: 217).

The earliest references to the term stem from the late 1950s from literary critics such as Irving Lowe and Harry Levin. It was used primarily as a criticism of modernist assumptions, rather than as a coherent set of ideas in itself, but it gradually came to be used in a more positive manner, and gained broader currency during the 1960s, becoming used in relation not just to literature, but also to architecture, dance, theatre, painting, film, and music. In terms of how postmodernism manifests itself in cultural production, Huyssen asserts that it operates in a field of tension between tradition and innovation, conservation and renewal, mass culture and high art, in which the second terms are no longer automatically privileged over the first (Huyssen, 1986: 216-7).
Po s tm ode rni sm a nd Musi c

Two important works on postmodern music (Clarke, 1985, and Edwards, 1991) refer almost exclusively to areas of high culture, with only a tokenistic reference to the work of Laurie Anderson (Clarke, 1985: 167): ironically, an artist who has consistently challenged notions of a hierarchical differentiation between high and low culture.

In other words, part of the problem with discussing postmodernism and popular music is that a lot of the academic work on postmodernism takes a modernist approach in its conservative choice of appropriate material for study. Accepting this, it is still possible to piece together some components of what a postmodernist popular music might look, or indeed sound like. Featherstone put it clearly, when he highlighted the effacement of the boundary between art and everyday life; the collapse of the hierarchical distinction between high and mass/popular culture; a stylistic promiscuity favouring eclecticism and the mixing of codes; parody, pastiche, irony, playfulness and the celebration of the surface depthlessness of culture; the decline of the originality/genius of the artistic producer and the assumption that art can only be repetitious (Featherstone, 1988: 203).

The Death of the Cult of Genius

One of the most important of these elements is the cult of genius surrounding the concept of original creation of art as being the benchmark for all true artistic endeavour. Modernism with its commitment to artistic progress and the avant-garde reinforced the dogma that radical novelty was the essence of art (Shusterman, 1991: 617). It is this unquestioned belief in the perpetual modernization of art (Huyssen, 1988: 185) that has provoked the greatest response.

Many people simply no longer believe that art must be, or even can be totally new and original; the apparently original work of art is itself always a product of unacknowledged borrowings, the unique and novel text always a tissue of echoes and fragments of earlier texts (Shusterman, 1991: 617).

We began to see through the deification of the artist. Unacknowledged borrowing is borrowing nonetheless. Established artists may say that they are paying homage or tribute, but they cannot deny that they are still taking from the earlier text. In direct reference to a form of popular music - rap/hip hop - Shusterman includes:

recycling appropriation rather than unique originative creation, the eclectic mixing of styles, the enthusiastic embracing of the new technology and mass culture, the challenging of modernist notions of aesthetic autonomy and artistic purity, and an emphasis on the localised and temporal rather than the putatively universal and eternal (Shusterman, 1991: 614).

Eclecticism

Kearney (1988: 24) places emphasis on eclecticism; thus we find the modernist view of culture as a linear sequence of phases being replaced by the postmodern idea of a synchronic polyphony of styles. He also recognises, in specific reference to music, a noticeable tendency in certain quarters to confound the conventional distinction between classical and commercial (Kearney, 1988: 355), indeed he expands on this by referring to
a postmodern trend in music that not only erodes the distinction between serious and pop music but also breaks down, in certain instances, the very distinction between music and other media (Kearney, 1988: 357).

Similarly to other writers, Kearney mentions the technological advances in music recording that have facilitated a process of musical bricolage... such procedures have suggested alternatives to the modernist model of the compositional author as an individual imagination working from its own inner resources or genius (Kearney, 1988: 356). Overall, he sees a trend in pop music towards self-parody, and describes the way the music is becoming increasingly an assortment of musical footnotes to itself (Kearney, 1988: 357).

Garry E. Clarke stresses the contribution of contemporary composers such as John Cage to the development of music in the last forty years. In the (in)famous piece entitled 433" (first recorded in 1952, see Cage, 1973), Cage devised a composition whereby the performer or performers remain silent for the amount of time prescribed by the work's title. Yet this deceptively simple composition - it is nothing, in essence - shows that pure silence does not exist (Clarke, 1985: 162).

The noises made by both audience and performers in attempting to maintain a silence would contribute to what is actually a complex composition (Clarke, 1985: 162). Brian Eno, the leading exponent of ambient music since the 1970s, described 433" as being almost like a slogan, that piece. It's one of those pieces of music that you don't really need to hear. What you need to know is that somebody thought of it. It defines a boundary condition in music. (Eno, 1995)

In so doing, Cage helped redefine not only aspects of the relationship between artist and audience, but also the division between what constitutes noise and what constitutes music, a redefinition that has had major implications for contemporary popular music.

Another highly significant exploration by Cage is a collaboration with Irish traditional musicians, which centres around a recitation of one of James Joyce's most famous works, Roaratorio: An Irish Circus on Finnegans Wake (first performed in 1979, see Cage, 1992, and Belfast Festival Programme Notes, 1997), combines a recording of Cage himself half-reading and half-singing excerpts from the book, with a multi-track recording of 2,293 randomly selected sounds to represent locations mentioned in the book (including city noises, birdsong, and children's cries), intermixed with the traditional Irish music of Paddy Glackin, Matt Molloy, and Mel Mercier, amongst others.

This was obviously a composition of immense complexity in its construction. The piece was performed as a sound installation at the 1997 Belfast Festival. The installation was placed not in a conventional auditorium, but in the foyers and bars of the Waterfront Hall. This aspect of the installation led to a widespread disorientation of the audience, not sure where they stood (quite literally) in relation to the performance. A sign inside the main entrance simply said 'Roaratorio' and had two arrows pointing in opposite directions. Each of the 34 speakers carried a different audio track, and as the installation could be listened to from any number of vantage points, each member of the audience was enabled to have a unique experience of the text. The lack of a conventional boundary between artist and audience was further highlighted by the difficulty in telling apart sounds that were part of the performance, and sounds that belonged to the audience (such as children running around the foyer, and the noises of children on the recording). The overall effect was one of a mesmerisingly disorientating soundscape, that brought together sounds and musics in a clearly innovative fashion. In doing so, Cage went beyond conventional ideas of how musical composition could be conceived, and laid the groundwork for later, more accessible and commercial pieces of
However, in seeking to examine postmodernism in music, it is always tempting to think of specific phenomena as being more or less completely new. But, as the discussion of postmodernism above showed, there is no clear cut-off point between modernism and postmodernism. Because of this, we can expect to find early pioneering examples of postmodern popular music forms before they came to be acknowledged as such. The best illustration of this is The Beatles.

So many of the postmodern attributes that will be discussed here in relation to contemporary Irish musicians had early manifestations in the work of The Beatles. For example, eclectic mixing of styles can be found in 'Norwegian Wood' (This Bird Has Flown) which was the first time a sitar was used in Western popular music, 'All You Need Is Love' which appropriated a portion of the French national anthem, as well as a line from their earlier hit 'She Loves You'. Spoken word samples were featured on 'I Am The Walrus', and 'Strawberry Fields Forever' utilised tape recordings played backwards. 'Back In The USSR' pastiched the trademark vocal sound of The Beach Boys, transferring the lyrical setting from the beaches of Southern California to Moscow and the Ukraine. Perhaps one of the most important examples though is 'A Day In The Life' which radically changed notions of song structure, by colliding together two entirely different songs that McCartney and Lennon had previously been working on separately, with an ambitious string arrangement that dramatically bridged the two halves of the song.

What is arguably different about the situation now is that such musical patterns are far more commonplace, and to an extent have become the norm rather than the exception. Another particularly important element is the influence of rap and dance musics, in terms of freeing up notions of what was considered appropriate or even possible to do with music. This covers two elements: one is the range of possible styles that can be mixed together, and the other is the way in which different types of sounds were redefined as musical.

It is here that the influence of Cage, as mediated through performers like Laurie Anderson and Brian Eno, has had a (largely unacknowledged) influence in opening up the range of musical possibilities in contemporary music. While the extreme manner of most of his work is not represented in this influence, many of the ideas behind it are. An example here would be Anderson's use of a sample of a single vocal utterance (huh), looped around to form the basis of the entire song 'O Superman' (For Massenet), which incidentally was a major hit single in both the UK and the US, forging the first significant crossover from that branch of high brow conceptual music into the mainstream.

In a different way, rap and hip hop, originating in the North East of the USA in the late 1970s and early 1980s, have had a huge influence, even beyond the music's own fans. The rhythmic origins of hip hop lie in samples of rock songs by bands such as Led Zeppelin and these rhythms have subsequently fed back into rock music, completing the circle.

**Irish Music: Appropriation (Decade Blending)**

While much has been written about the global success of recent Irish recording acts, little has been said about some developments in Irish music over the last ten to fifteen years. What I intend to demonstrate here is the variety of phenomena that could be defined as being postmodern, and that characterise much of contemporary Irish music. Recycling material from earlier forms is one such element of postmodern cultural production. In some cases this can take the form of copying elements of an earlier piece, or more explicitly, it can be
a sample of an actual earlier recording. This latter approach, facilitated by improvements in recording technologies, and in particular, digital technologies, highlights rather than apologises for the borrowing in question. Shusterman argues that postmodern forms of music like rap undermine the modernist (false) dichotomy between original creation and derivative borrowing, because of its upfront thematising of its appropriation of earlier musical texts. This demonstrates that borrowing and creation are not at all incompatible. It further suggests that the apparently original work of art is itself always a product of unacknowledged borrowings, the unique and novel text is always a tissue of echoes and fragments of earlier texts" (Shusterman, 1991: 617).

This view has gradually become more widely held, and practised, with many artists not just openly borrowing from other sources, but much more importantly, celebrating the fact that they have stolen from others. This crime takes two broad forms: one is digital sampling of earlier recordings, the other is covering other artists songs. Both have noticeably increased in popularity over the last ten years. Irish artists have experienced this from both ends of the relationship, so to speak.

A memorable recent example of sampling in Irish music is that of Fourth Dimension, a Kerry techno band who sampled a Sharon Shannon tune, and reused it within their own composition, setting it to a strong, up-tempo dance rhythm, while relying on the sample for melody. Viewed from a modernist perspective, this would represent a simple lack of creativity, evidenced by the need to take an idea from another artist. However, when viewed as a postmodern ploy, it can be seen as attempting to be judged on a new standard of creativity: that of successfully taking from the old in order to produce a new work.

This new yardstick of creativity is also at work in relation to cover versions. In a way, the upsurge in numbers of cover versions in the charts harks back to pre-Beatle days, when the norm was for bands to record songs either specifically written for them by record company song writing teams, or else simply to record songs by other (usually) less well known artists.

The cover version has undergone a sort of renaissance of interest and of critical acceptance. The real measure of creative work is not so much whether or not an artist records a cover version, but rather how innovatively, or radically they deconstruct the song, in order to make it their own. This can be done either with a conscious ironic agenda, or simply with the intention of updating the song for a new listenership.

Two examples of the former are The Fatima Mansions cover of Bryan Adams' 'Everything I Do (I Do It For You)', the Hollywood blockbuster soundtrack song, and huge hit single, and their cover of R.E.M.'s hit 'Shiny Happy People'. 'Everything I Do... 'is turned from a schmaltzy lighters-held-aloft ballad into a tripped-out dance track, with dispassionate vocals marking itself out from the over-done heartfelt delivery in the original. The cover of 'Shiny... 'is even more radical. Gone is the bouncy, cheerful demeanour of the original, to be replaced with a darkened, almost menacing sound, bizarrely married to a waltz time signature. The archtypically catchy pop chorus of the original is disguised under a heavy layer of distortion, and most of the happy-go-lucky lyrics are replaced by condemnations of the complacency the band felt the R.E.M. song represented. The spoken word samples used are deliberately designed to provoke, with one commenting specifically on the music business that both R.E.M. and The Fatima Mansions occupy: 'Fuck Your Showbusiness'.
ballad, and R.E.M.'s saccharine pop ditty more interesting. By attempting to shock their audience with their risky choice of material, they are also saying that they are capable of making even the worst music from their point of view, into something not only palatable to their tastes, but something that is positively making a statement about the ability of more marginal, peripheral bands such as The Fatima Mansions to take on the commercial might of Adams and R.E.M., and to so totally appropriate their material as to render the covers virtually unrecognisable from the originals.

Another facet of this is dance remixes of songs, which is in effect a band covering one of their own songs. This has become increasingly common in recent years, with bands using it both to explore other dimensions of their music and perhaps more cynically, to demonstrate their credibility with a younger audience and with critical opinion.

One Irish pioneer of this phenomenon was That Petrol Emotion, a Derry/Seattle band that was based in London. Their 1987 album Babble contained the single 'Big Decision' which was one of the earliest attempts to fuse strong rock guitars with dance rhythms. That a largely Irish band should have taken this route was perhaps surprising considering the conservative guitar-based approach of most of their Ireland-based contemporaries. Similarly, That Petrol Emotion was one of the first Irish groups to explore the use of remixes for their single releases. Tingle, released in 1991, featured two 12" vinyl singles and one CD single that contained five separate remixes of varying degrees of radicalism.

At the other end of the spectrum of commercial success, U2 have been criticised in some quarters for jumping on the dance bandwagon by having their songs remixed by prominent DJs such as Howie B., for example Discothèque (see U2, 1997, in the discography). Even if some of the music critics are right that this is simply a cynical exercise in seeking credibility, a move of this nature by a band of U2's stature is significant both in terms of popularising this approach and indicating the growing influence of remixing in mainstream popular music.

Irish Music: Eclecticism (from Nina Simone to the Aphex Twin)

One of the most striking aspects of postmodern music is the mixing together of styles that previously would have been considered not just unlikely, but actually incompatible. A breaking down of previously respected categories and boundaries within music has gradually taken hold, being replaced with a determined curiosity to experiment with new or novel potential eclectic combinations. Once again, The Beatles are responsible for a landmark song - 'Norwegian Wood' (This Bird Has Flown). George Harrison's addition of sitar to John Lennon's otherwise comparatively unremarkable acoustic guitar track, transformed the song, but far more importantly, it also transformed the future possibilities of popular music. By bringing together two previously totally distinct styles, they not only created a new hybrid, they also created a template for future experiments in eclecticism.

The sources of musical styles do not have to be ethnic or folk musics. Many contemporary artists simply plunder the range of genres that surround them, taking in styles as diverse as country, jazz, classical, techno and hip hop. One of the most striking examples of this approach is the young American musician Beck (who has sampled Van Morrison's 'Them' covering Bob Dylan's 'It's All Over Now', 'Baby Blue': see Beck's 'Jack-Ass' in discography), with his trademark radical mixing of blues, country, hip hop and rock, frequently within the same song.
Two of the earliest and most influential examples of eclectic mixing of styles were from The Horslips and Thin Lizzy. Working in the early Seventies, The Horslips set about melding Irish traditional music with the heavy guitar sound that was fashionable in rock music at the time, most notably in songs such as 'Dearg Doom'. Thin Lizzy, with their hit single 'Whiskey in the Jar' (recently played in the karaoke section of one of U2's recent Popmart 97 Dublin concerts) further broadened the appeal for this kind of musical cross-over.

It has been argued that Irish music is, for historical reasons particularly suited to certain eclectic relationships:

one of the things you have to realise is that it's an old musical tradition that goes back behind the present classical tradition. And if you impose classical type influences on it, they don't fit well, because it actually has more relationship to Indian or North African music - the use of the natural scale. (Ivor Browne, quoted in Waters, 1994: 232).

A pioneering figure in this context is Micheál Ó Súilleabháin, the academic and composer who has explored the possibilities of mixing traditional Irish tunes with classical string arrangements as well as Indian instrumentation (see Ó Súilleabháin, 1989 in discography). One of the most interesting examples of this relationship to Indian and African musics is Sinead O'Connor's cover version of Philip King's 'I Am Stretched On Your Grave'. King's original song was written in the traditional Irish sean nós a capella style, evoking a long history of Irish traditional singing, and introducing it to a new audience, many of whom would have heard very little of the genre before. The song was recorded by O'Connor on her second album I Do Not Want What I Havent Got. She reworked the song by upping the tempo, and more interestingly by adding a hip hop rhythm track that gave the song a more contemporary edge. This effect was then offset by the addition towards the end of the song of a fiddle track that drew the song back to its traditional roots. The release of Earthapella, a club-only remix CD with several versions of the song included, developed this direction for O'Connor, with a later song 'Famine' attempting to further progress this sub-genre. The overall effect is one of updating and renewal, through the unexpected convergence of two music styles previously held to be too divergent to make proper partners.

A House, a Dublin guitar band took this principle in the direction of classical music, by sampling Beethoven, and intoned a list of influential writers, actors, and musicians for their 1991 single 'Endless Art'. In 1995, the four members of U2, with Brian Eno and a number of guest musicians and DJs released an album of collaborative projects under the name Passengers. The single 'Miss Sarajevo' was recorded with high profile opera singer Luciano Pavarotti. The resulting song, which on paper might have seemed a step too far for both U2 and Pavarotti, gracefully combined the rock ballad approach of some of U2s own work, with the ambient sense of space contributed by Eno's arrangement, and the grandeur and emotion of Pavarotti's voice. The overall effect is a startling realisation that not only are the two music genres, opera and rock, not mutually incompatible, but that Bono and Pavarotti's very different singing styles and capabilities sit unexpectedly well alongside one another.

Another important recent example in this area is Afro Celt Sound System, a group of Irish and African musicians who aim to produce not only a mix of African and Irish traditional musics and styles, but also to set this mixture to a trip hop and drum n bass setting, which acts to further alter the atmosphere of the music and update the sound. Their album Volume 1 Sound Magic includes sean nós singing, uileann pipes, kora, and
talking drums, and the CDs liner notes give a credit for Samburu warrior chants recorded on location in Kenya. This is echoed by the music of others that have also experimented along these lines, such as Kila, while a similar interest in eclecticism has been shown by Marxman, Black 47 and Hyperborea, all of whom have explored the potential of combining dance music and/or hip hop with various Irish traditional musics.

A different direction, but very much in the same spirit of experimentation and curiosity is some of the work by Dublin band Rollerskate Skinny. Shallow Thunder from their debut album Shoulder Voices featured an unusual melodic sound in the introduction. On further examination the sound turned out to be sampled from an anthropological recording of an African pygmy tribe, and speeded up. The effect is startling, with the melody being composed of many voices yet remaining simultaneously both unearthly and familiar. Not only is this an example of bringing together previously unacquainted forms, it is also an interesting thought provoker about where influences for a song's melodies can come from. One of the guitar parts for Shallow Thunder acts as a counter melody to the strangely altered tribal song, producing a result that is clearly more than the sum of its parts.

Irish Music: Irony and Parody

So much of what postmodern musics attempt to do would be impossible without a sense of irony. One of the most crucial aspects of appropriating material from previous times is the ability to distance yourself from any negative associations with that material. By taking a tongue in cheek attitude to the material, it can be possible for acts to have their cake and eat it, by sounding like earlier styles, but remaining distant from the unfashionable excesses of the period concerned that would tinge their own contemporary musical credibility.

Brian Boyd in an article on the English joke act, the Mike Flowers Pops, attacked the type of easy-listening covers typified by Robson and Jerome. Boyd asserts that Robson and Jerome represent faux emotional sincerity, while the Mike Flowers Pops offer a knowing, self-referential aspect to their work and, crucially, they have gone beyond the campy, kitsch barrier (1996: 21). Their work is exemplified by the hit single cover version of Oasis' 'Wonderwall' that was released shortly after the original had become a huge chart hit. The cover radically reconstructed the song as easy listening, with lush production values, backing vocals and orchestral arrangements, and a video featuring the band in over-the-top Seventies clothes. Their whole rationale is not just to cover the song in an innovative way, but also to make a statement about seventies music, and our (very postmodern) harking back to that same music.

Equally interesting here is the recent phenomenon of 'tribute' bands. With origins in Australia (concert-going audiences being starved of the opportunity to see artists from Europe or the USA, let alone those who were dead), this trend has been exemplified by bands paying tribute to ABBA, The Beatles and others, often with a straight-forward reference to the original artist in the title; The Australian Doors, The Australian Pink Floyd, for instance. In Ireland, two examples stick out; The Joshua Trio, subverting U2s canon (the name is a wordplay on U2s 1987 album The Joshua Tree), and The Down Undertones, playing the songs of The Undertones, and wordplaying on the association of the mini-genre with Australia.

It is this sense of playfulness and ironic distancing that so characterised the reinvention of U2 in the early 1990s. The band had gained huge commercial success in the 1980s, but had been the recipients of harsh criticism for their alleged pomposity, earnestness, and inability to not take themselves very seriously. For their 1991 album Achtung Baby, the band sought to discard
much of their earnestly political image, and present themselves in a more irreverent and self-aware light. Their 1992/3 world tour Zoo TV encapsulated this approach.

The tour sought to comment not just on the band's role as rock stars, but also on the nature of media communication in recent years. A major theme of the visual presentation of the concerts was image saturation, and its perceived effect on us, the media audiences. Bono's attempts to update his image, and also to tackle some of the criticisms levelled at him, centred around the creation of a stage character called McPhisto. This character allowed Bono to simultaneously distance himself from the normal rock star on-stage persona that he had become over the preceding years, while allowing him to pastiche and/or parody the self-same persona. Suddenly, Bono and U2 could still be rock stars, yet remain crucially aloof from at least certain aspects of the embarrassing excesses of rock stardom, by positioning themselves as clued-in, self-aware, self-parodying commentators on themselves, their peers, and their relationship with their audience.

Another intriguing aspect of U2's reinvention was their lyrical commentary on their position. The first single off Achtung Baby was 'The Fly', which heralded the new direction the band had taken, both musically and attitudinally. The song is different in tone and style to earlier recordings by the band, while the lyrics are unusually self-conscious about the process of song writing. The most important line in the song in this regard is: 'Every artist is a cannibal/Every poet is a thief'. Here is an explicit recognition of the true nature of the creative process, or at least the creative process as understood by postmodernism. It echoes the critique of the cult of genius, and highlights the relatively new situation of unrepentant borrowing in a positively gleeful fashion.

Discussion

What I have tried to demonstrate in this article is that while it would be mistaken to uniformly characterise contemporary Irish popular music as being postmodern, there are however, a large number of important examples and landmarks that point, I believe, to changes occurring in Irish music, as they have elsewhere.

A generation of musicians and songwriters has emerged that pay little respect to many of the traditions and divisions that have dominated music for so long. A healthy refusal to be bound by either genre or generation has partially succeeded in getting around the seemingly impassable barrier of all the good tunes having been already written. Artists as diverse in both musical style and commercial success as Sinéad O'Connor, Rollerskate Skinny, Afro Celt Sound System, and U2 have all contributed to a reshaping of Irish music in the 1990s. It is no longer considered odd or inappropriate to claim a range of influences from Nina Simone to the Aphex Twin, nor is it considered an admission of creative failure to record a cover version, or include a sample or other form of reference to an earlier musical text. Sometimes in music it is simply necessary to go backwards and sideways in order to go forwards.

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**Discography**


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Introduction

The debate on media policy ... has undergone a profound change in emphasis. It has become focused on 'information superhighway', 'multimedia' and 'convergence' ... there is a real sense in which a gradual accumulation of quantitative changes has now produced a qualitative transformation in the framework of media policy debate. (Goodwin: 1995:677).

When, in the spring of 1996, the Irish government appointed an official Information Society Steering Committee (ISSC) with a brief to develop a national 'information society strategy and action plan' it was following a significant international policy trend. In so doing, Ireland became the latest member of the OECD to launch a policy and research initiative focused on the economic and social implications of new information and communication technologies (ICTs).

This latest wave of official policy and research interest in the socio-economic implications of new ICTs began with the Clinton/Gore National Information Infrastructure initiative in the USA in the early 1990s. It was subsequently extended with the launch of the Global Information Infrastructure by member governments of the Group of Seven (Gore, 1994) as well as of other similar projects in other countries (e.g. Denmark, 1994; Canada, 1994). Another important marker of this new policy trend was the publication of the Bangemann Report and related policy initiatives in the European Union context (CEC, 1994a, 1994b, 1994c, 1996a, 1996b). These key EU-level documents and related discourses and initiatives have major implications for the Irish policy context. Compared even to most other member states, the EU context is critically important in any consideration of national information sector strategies in Ireland. Not only is it the crucial nexus in industrial and employment terms — it has shaped the key developments in the information economy in Ireland over the past ten to twenty years, not least the relatively large ICT supply sector located here. But the EU context is also crucial to any understanding of the development and orientation of most recent national policy initiatives in Ireland related to new ICTs and indeed any other aspects of the information economy (Preston, 1994, 1995a, 1995b, 1996a).

The Irish government's ISSC published its report, Information Society Ireland: Strategy for Action' (ISSC, 1997), in March 1997. Like its predecessors in other countries, the ISSC report places a great stress on the radical implications of new ICTs for the future of employment, industry and business practices as
well as government services in Ireland, including an expanding future role for information and communication services in terms of job and wealth creation. Soon after its publication, the report led to a number of relatively rapid follow-up actions. These included the announcement of the establishment of a more permanent Information Society (IS) Commission under the Taoiseach's office. It was also followed in April 1997 by the announcement of an initiative to link the nation’s schools to the new electronic communications networks. These and other recent responses suggest that this is one policy report which will not merely sit on the shelves like many of its predecessors. Rather it is one whose recommendations are likely to move to implementation stage in the near future. As it is likely to be an important guide and reference point for subsequent policy initiatives, and especially those related to the development of the media and communications sectors, the ISSC report deserves close and critical scrutiny.

This paper will focus on a particular aspect of the ISSC report and related EU policy documents: their stress on the changing role and characteristics of the media and other information ‘content’ services — and especially new multimedia or digital media based services — and their perceived future role for job and wealth creation in Ireland. In this context, it explores a number of key issues related to the direction and components of a coherent information sector strategy and more targeted national innovation networks in the Irish and all-important EU policymaking contexts. In so doing, the paper will also provide a critical commentary on some issues raised in the recent ISSC report and their underlying conceptions or assumptions, especially those which directly concern the media and information content services.

Like many of its counterparts elsewhere, the content of the ISSC document tends to be high on the rhetoric and hype usually associated with popular discussions of the implications of new ICTs and low in terms of the specificities of the economic, social and cultural dimensions (Preston, 1997a). This paper will seek to transcend some of the limitations of the analysis of the ISSC report by outlining aspects of a more grounded and comprehensive approach to the content industries and some of the key policy implications in the Irish and EU policy contexts. In other words, it will seek to move beyond the heady realms of hype and abstract visions to consider some of the more concrete nuts and bolts (or atoms and bits) of the information content sectors and related strategy debates in Ireland and the EU, including the tensions between industrial and cultural policy goals.

Although the ISSC report does not explicitly address this matter, it is important to note here that the publication of the document also follows on from two other important and related sets of recently published policy proposals which need to be more closely integrated into the discussion of any coherent information sector strategy. The first includes the October 1996 White Paper on science and technology and the more recent appointment of a Science, Technology and Innovation Advisory Council (STIAC). Basically these and other related initiatives follow on from the STIAC report and they aim to develop a more coherent set of national technology and industrial innovation policies. Second, the ISSC report also closely follows the publication of Clear Focus by the Department of Arts, Culture and the Gaeltacht. This latter document sets out the government’s proposals for new broadcasting structures and policies and explicitly seeks to respond to the changing economic role and policy environment of broadcasting activities, including some of the implications of convergence tendencies associated with new information and communication technologies.

In this author's view any coherent proposals for a future national information strategy must also be directly related to policy debates and initiatives concerning the direction of both industrial
innovation and broadcasting policy initiatives. In the ISSC report's analysis and in the follow up debates so far, there has been little attempt to relate these convergent industrial and policy fields within a coherent strategic framework in the Irish context. Hence, in what follows, I will also indicate some of the implications of the other recent national policy initiatives as they relate to the development of a more coherent information strategy, with particular reference to the media and 'content' sub-sectors.

Thus, this paper will explore the meaning and implications of the recent spate of national, EU and global information society and infrastructure initiatives for the media and cultural industries in Ireland and the EU. I will consider some of the key conceptual problems involved in recent national as well as EU 'information society' policy analyses and discourses, especially as they relate to the future role, development and regulation of this particular cluster of industries: the so-called 'content' sector. In the next section, I will explore some of the conceptual difficulties involved in national and EU policy documents and discourses based on the notion of an 'information society' and some of their implications. In section three, I will move on to explore some of the more practical policy problems posed by the tensions between industrial/economic development and more cultural policy goals. Section four will present some specific policy recommendations and some concluding comments. The paper will focus on the mature media industries as well as the new/emergent multimedia fields which have been identified as potential rapid growth areas in many recent policy reports.

Limits of the 'Info Society' Idea and 'Content' as Focus

The increasing popularity of the 'information society' notion (and related information superhighway/infrastructure' metaphors) within official EU and more global policy debates over the past 3-4 years has been rather striking, as noted above. But the growing popularity of such notions must be greeted with a mixture of apprehension as well as a critical welcome. Certainly this trend provides an additional spur to the funding of social and economic research focused on the implications of new ICTs. However such notions and conceptions must be held up to critical scrutiny in terms of their adequacy as guides to understanding the key contours of contemporary social and economic change on the part of politicians, industrialists and ordinary citizens as well as researchers. I believe that this is one of the important lessons to be drawn from the work of many social scientists who have addressed competing models and approaches to the socio-economic and policy implications of new ICTs over the years and who have strongly criticised the core notion of the 'information society' since it was first advanced more than twenty years ago (see, for example, Garnham, 1981, 1994; Melody, 1985; Bannon, ed., 1981; Douglas and Guback, 1984; Slack and Fejes, 1987).

There have been many dimensions to this criticism of the 'information society' idea. For present purposes, I will simply note the fact that many of the criticisms focused on an inherent or frequent tendency to adopt a highly abstract and idealized technology-centred analysis of the changing role, characteristics and implications of information and knowledge production, as well as its control, distribution and management in advanced capitalist economies. As a result, the notion tends to gloss over or neglect the important political, economic and institutional settings of information production, ownership rights, and management/control questions. A parallel criticism is that the information society notion relies on very partial ethno-centric (socially and temporally-specific) assumptions about of what constitutes 'information' and 'non-information' work or occupations as well as their implications for social and cultural activities. These and other criticisms point to a lack of coherence and the inadequacy of this notion as a guide to a practical

In essence, the past criticisms indicate that the 'information society' notion places an exaggerated emphasis on the inherent technical characteristics and benefits of new ICTs and that it ultimately involves a very particular and technocratic vision of society and the processes of change. Its understanding of what constitutes 'information' (as good, service, resource) and knowledge and its relation to socio-economic wealth, welfare and well-being is very partial and specific. As an attempt to theorize socio-economic and cultural change, it starts off and ends up confusing goals with means. It is inherently focused on the pace and scale of production and adoption of information technologies, services and products. Whilst this may help to further expand the sales and markets of new ICTs products and services and the related high-tech sector, it fails to address the wider public interest issues involved in developing a progressive strategy for macro socio-economic change and development in the Advanced Capitalist Countries (ACCs) at the close of the twentieth century. Its ultimately flawed and narrow 'vision' is marked by one key irony: on the one hand it extols the revolutionary power of new ICTs to transform social and economic relations and yet, on the other hand, it combines it with an extremely conservative set of political-economic and cultural orientations and values. In general, the overall drift of the information society discourses is one which asserts a strong (if not necessary) relationship between new ICTs and the (perceived) 'market-driven' logic of neo-liberal political economy approaches (Preston, 1994, 1995b, 1996a). Indeed, this linkage is generally asserted or assumed, without ever explaining why or how this is so.

But, of course, despite the many earlier criticisms of social scientists, the 'information society' notion is very much alive and well today. Indeed, as the recent spate of policy reports, initiatives and conferences testify, it has become an ever more highly fashionable item on the menu of political rhetoric in the late 1990s. In the EU context, the 'Information Society' (with appropriate capitals) has been ascribed an enhanced role and status (and indeed 'aura') as a central reference point or meta-text for many, if not most, areas of policy debate and planning in more recent years (Garnham, 1997). Thus, the popularity of the 'information society' idea amongst the political and economic elites in the late 1990s is itself an important social phenomenon and political fact that cannot be ignored. But this does not mean that the previous criticisms of the concept have now been rendered invalid in the light of subsequent technological and socio-economic changes.

This is not some question of scoring a mere academic point concerning the adequacy of different conceptual models of the nature of current changes (and continuities) in the social and economic landscape at the close of the twentieth century. Rather, given the context, my argument here is primarily based on some pressing practical considerations and it is necessarily brief. It is focused on the practical adequacy and utility of the 'information society' approach for policy-makers, industrialists, and the vast majority of citizens concerned with some of the most pressing socio-economic and indeed cultural aspects of change in the late 1990s. For one of the more practical problems with the information society notion is the real difficulty involved in seeking to apply or operationalize it for the purposes of empirical research or practical policy analysis. In brief, the information society approach is markedly flawed when it comes to concrete attempts to map and measure the contours of socio-economic change and continuities.

For one thing, and perhaps most fundamentally, the notion of a singular 'content' sector adopted in many such information society policy documents is based on a very crude and minimalist distinction between different primary information
industries and markets. It tends to apply a similar market-focused and economic reasoning to all segments of the primary information economy (i.e. whether involved in the supply of ICT devices, systems and 'tools' or more purely content or hybrid information services). Secondly and relatedly, it fails to recognise or adequately address the fundamentally different characteristics and roles of different types of information 'content' services (e.g. as indicated in boxes 1b, 1c and 1d of Table 1). As a result, it tends to assert or assume an economic approach to communication and cultural matters which fails to recognise the specific cultural and political role of the media and cultural services and the special requirements for diversity and pluralism which apply to policy approaches in this sphere (as will be discussed further below). Thirdly, and most directly relevant to present concerns, even in terms of purely economic sectoral analysis, market development or industrial policy considerations, this approach is incoherent. The notion of a singular 'content' sector within these information society discourses is a rather chaotic concept. It tends to lump together a wide range of quite diverse and distinctive sets of product/service characteristics, industrial activities, and market segments under the single but inadequate category. For example, at a very basic level, it fails to stress the important distinctions between information content services which are directed at intermediate markets ('producer' information services) and those which are directed at final consumers and citizens.

These conceptual problems with the notion of 'content' within prevailing information society policy discourses have very real practical effects in relation to the framing of policy options and debate. For example, like many of its recent counterparts published by the European Union institutions, the ISSC report places a great emphasis on the growth potential of the existing media and emerging new ICT-based multi/digital media industries and other information 'content' services (ISSC, 1997; CEC, 1994a, 1994b, 1994c, 1996a, 1996b). Both sets of policy documents tend to exclusively stress the role of the media and cultural industries (alongside other information content services) in terms of their industrial and employment development potential. In stressing their future role in wealth and job creation in an assumed emerging or expanding 'information society', the distinctive cultural and political roles of the media and other content services is neglected or actually denied. In addition, they tend to privilege the role of the emergent, new ICT-based or multimedia content services and thus neglect the continuing role of mature or established media and content industries, including their role as important sites for process innovations. In the case of new ICT-based developments, they also often fail to make adequate distinctions between new multimedia developments as ICT-based tools, devices or systems on the one hand and as new media and cultural forms ('content') on the other hand (Preston, 1996b, 1996c).

Thus, at the very least, a more nuanced alternative approach is required, one which is sensitive to the different components of the 'content' services sectors within the overall primary information sector. Clearly it is also important to link this to the development of national information strategies which are relevant and appropriate to the specificities of national economic and institutional conditions (Melody, 1997; Preston, 1995a, 1995b, 1996b). In brief, I would suggest that the concept of an information 'sector' or 'economy' can provide a more concrete and illuminating alternative to the 'information society' idea, especially when seeking to explore the strategic socio-economic implications and historical specificity of new ICTs with respect to the media and cultural industries. These alternative concepts also carry much less ideological baggage than the 'information society'. I believe that a nuanced reworking of the information sector/economy concept can provide a useful initial framework for many kinds of empirical inquiry and research addressing the strategic national industrial and policy implications of new ICTs (Preston, 1997a). As briefly indicated in Table 1, it can be
utilised to explore the scope of different types of content services and move beyond the rather crude singular or simplistic conceptions of ‘information’ sub-sectors which are often implicit in many recent ‘information society’ policy documents and associated debates.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Broad Components of the Information Sector or Economy</th>
<th>Position and Potential of the Sub-Sectors in Ireland</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) Primary Information Sector (PIS)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The ‘Primary Information Sector’ (PIS) covers those goods and services which intrinsically convey information (e.g. books, newspapers) or which are directly useful in its production, processing or distribution (e.g. computers, telecommunications). The PIS has four basic sub-sectors:</td>
<td>Ireland is already a favoured location for foreign Multinational Companies (MNCs) in this sub-sector. But generally poor/low indigenous industry performance. Recent evidence of some scope for indigenous ‘application’ innovations in specific niche markets, especially in software.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1a) ICT devices, systems, ‘tools’ and services</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industries supplying ICT Hardware, Software, Components and Electronic Communications, Facilities, Networks and Services: Production and distribution of devices, blank media, systems (and components) required for the storage, processing, manipulation, distribution and communication of information.</td>
<td>Very high economies of scale; highly centralised in a few global centres; low inward investment or indigenous growth potential in Ireland (few exceptions e.g. FEXCO).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1b) Specialized ‘producer’ Info services</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activities involved in the supply and/or distribution of specialized scientific, technical, economic, financial, etc., knowledge and information.</td>
<td>Popular perceptions of Irish ‘advantages’ in the initial/creative moments of the value-chain. But weak in the economically more important downstream stages of the value chain: i.e. publishing, packaging, marketing and distribution of content products. Challenge: to develop key ‘downstream’ stages in both ‘mature’ and emerging multimedia content industries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1c) Media and ‘content’ products or services directed at the final consumer and citizens</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This category covers the production and distribution of the mass media, cultural products and other information services to final consumers, households and individual citizens (i.e. primarily for use/consumption outside a work setting, sometimes referred to as the sphere of everyday life).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1d) ‘Hybrid professional/information, services’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional, financial, business and other ‘producer’ services with a separate and distinctive primary economic function but which are also deemed to be highly/increasingly information/knowledge based (e.g. consultative [medical, invest, business, etc.] services; monetary and other financial institutions; financial, security and insurance brokers, agents and jobbers; components of legal services, accounting, audit and book-keeping services, engineering, architectural and technical services.</td>
<td>The domain of many ‘new ICT-based growth service industries’. Some of these hybrids will increase ‘tradability’ via impact of new ICTs. Some offer significant ICT ‘application innovation’ opportunities (e.g. new CD-ROM and Internet-based products), especially in services with indigenous industrial competencies and strength (e.g. banking, medical, etc. fields).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) The Secondary Info Sector (SIS)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This refers to the ‘value added’ and role/content of information, activities used in producing ‘non-informational’ goods and services, and which are not supplied by or purchased/bought-in from the PIS.</td>
<td>An important component of the information economy in Ireland as elsewhere but not directly relevant to this paper/sector study.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. ‘Content’ services in the overall ‘Information’ economy and potential for Irish content industries

Source: Preston (1984, 1985, 1989, 1996b). This particular typology is based
'Content matters' and the ISSC report: the Irish media and cultural 'content' industries

The perception that the various information 'content' services, including the media and cultural 'content' industries, are marked by a relatively high potential for growth and 'tradability' (or marketability or commodification) as a result of new ICTs dates back to the early 1980s (e.g. Toffler, 1980, 1983; ITAP, 1983, 1986; GLC, 1983; CICI/RIIA, 1986). Thus, the perception that 'content' represents an expanding 'new frontier' for economic growth long pre-dates the surge of information infrastructure/society policy initiatives and debates which have emerged since the early 1990s. But what is very striking is the degree to which the growth potential of the media and cultural industries, and especially new multimedia services, has been re-emphasised in many national, EU and global strategy documents in more recent years (CEC, 1994a, 1994b, 1994c, 1995, 1996, 1997; ISSC, 1997, 42). The report focuses on the content sub-sectors of film, music, radio, publishing, and advertising (and in this respect, the report avoids the conflation of different content sub-sectors which occurs in many other parallel reports from the EU). The ISSC report suggests that this is already a significant sector in Ireland in terms of employment; it suggests that 'already over 30,000 are employed' and that output amounts to more than £1 billion annually. It further suggests that 'this value can be increased several-fold'. The report goes on to suggest that the 'content industry in the Information Society involves the creation of products and services that aggregate (sic) music, audio-visual and information/data services, drawing on Ireland's culture and heritage, using digital delivery technology and skills' (ISSC, 1997, 42).

The ISSC claims that 'significant opportunities will arise for adding value in such areas as localisation and adaptation of such new digital products and services as, in general, content is most attractive when it is local. (Recent examples of this are the success of Riverdance and the film Michael Collins'). It declares that Ireland's youthful, educated, English-speaking population is a crucial advantage in this global industry. Furthermore, it argues that Ireland has internationally recognized abilities in the conception, creation and generation stages of content production, especially in literature and music and increasingly in film/video (ISSC, 1997, 42). It proposes that Irish enterprises 'must develop a leadership position in key growth areas such as the content industry' (ISSC, 1997:58).

Thus, in general the ISSC report provides a very optimistic and upbeat account of the past and potential future growth and performance of the media and cultural industries sub-sector in Ireland. Essentially this is based on a celebration of the creativity of Irish authors, musicians and artists — in itself a rare event in what is essentially an industrial policy document. But such an optimistic reading of national creative competencies or comparative advantages in relation to the media and cultural industries is not an Irish monopoly however. As noted above, it is almost the norm or convention in many other national information strategy reports of this kind, although the analysis in
the ISSC report seems to assume otherwise.

Now I do not wish to dispute the ISSC report’s identification of these particular content industries as major sites for potential industrial growth in Ireland. It is my own belief that these fields may well represent one of the most promising sites for indigenous and application innovations within the national information economy. But on close reading, it appears that the ISSC report’s analysis is based on a rather abstract and idealized reading of both the past economic performance of the Irish media and cultural services (in industrial and employment terms) and the future opportunities afforded by new technologies. What is required is a more focused and grounded analysis, which addresses the strengths and weaknesses of the sector and the challenges that must be addressed by both public and private sector actors. This is especially the case if appropriate policies and support systems are to be developed and implemented in the future in order to realise the goal of rapid job growth promised in the report.

First, despite its very optimistic view of the strengths and growth potential of the media and cultural industries, the ISSC report registers one apparent sectoral weakness: it notes that the ‘Irish content providers and creators have only limited experience in exploiting new channels such as the Internet and multimedia’ (ISSC, 1997: 42). The identified weakness is a technology-centred one — which again is typical of the conceptual framework underpinning this and similar information strategy policy reports. However, this apparent lack of experience of new/emergent media is hardly unique to the Irish industry, especially since very few of the CD-ROM based multimedia content products produced (including those produced with major subsidies within the EU) have yet proved to be commercially successful. Indeed, apart from pornographic services, very few of the Internet/WWW-based ‘content’ service offerings produced in the EU or USA have achieved the stage of commercial success either.

Second, there are more fundamental sectoral weaknesses (besides the lack of experience with new/multimedia technologies) which the ISSC report tends to gloss over too lightly. By many of the available indicators, the ISSC report may well be essentially accurate in its stress on the performance of Irish authors, musicians and artists in relation to the initial creative (originating) stages of the value-added chain in the media and cultural industries. But the report is marked by a significant silence concerning a very important and long-established weakness in national performance in relation to other moments of the overall value-added chain in the cultural and media content industries.

Here I am referring to the general and long-established failure to follow-through and harness the potential of these undoubted achievements in the initial creative moments with respect to the all-important ‘downstream’ high-value added functions and labour-intensive occupations within most if not all the established Irish media and cultural industries. For well over a century, the celebrated performance of Irish writers, for example, has not been ‘exploited’ for job and wealth creation in the downstream fields of publishing, printing, marketing and distribution, for example. Turning the focus away from a predominantly technology-centred approach, it is first of all, both possible and important to recognise that Irish content industries have very limited experience in exploiting the creative performance of Irish content originators (writers, musicians) based on the established/mature technologies or platforms of print-based publishing and distribution, as well as in the fields of film, television and recorded music. This fact, and its underlying reasons, must be more fully addressed and analyzed. This is an essential step before cultural entrepreneurs or policy-makers can move on to successfully embark on the road to ‘exploiting the new channels such as the Internet and multimedia’ as suggested in the ISSC report (1997:42). In essence, there is no
simple 'technological fix' to the long-established dependency on imported content in most media market fields in Ireland, most notably in the audio-visual arena.

The underlying causes of this weak performance in the past cannot be primarily defined as technical in nature. Nor, even in the case of new multimedia content products and services (especially if defined in terms of process as well as product innovations), can they be addressed and remedied by a purely technology-centred analyses and policy responses. The policy and industrial challenges I am pointing to here are very important, if little understood in the Irish policy context as yet. They are central to any viable and sustainable strategy for the Irish content sector, whether this is focused on emergent new multimedia content industries or the more established media content sectors, or — which seems indisputably preferable to this author — both. They involve much more than mere questions about awareness of, training in, or exploitation of, new communication technologies, important though these may be.

1) Firstly, they involve important research and strategic policy questions concerning the matter of entrepreneurship, managerial, marketing and other (non-technical) competencies and skills related to the development of media and cultural content industries in the Irish context. They also concern the matter of how these elusive competencies may be developed to play an important role in the fuller exploitation of the potential of indigenous creative/origination efforts for wealth and job creation. This challenge must be addressed more fully both in relation to home and overseas markets and in the case of both mature and new/emergent media markets.

2) Secondly, they require a comprehensive approach which addresses the peculiar economic and political-economic characteristics and policy structures which have marked the media and cultural content industries in the past as well as in the 1990s (Grisold and Preston, 1995). This must involve a concern with the specific economic characteristics of these markets, including the tendencies towards monopoly/oligopoly structures at global, regional and national levels and the crucial controlling role of distribution bottlenecks (which appear to be rapidly emerging in the new media content fields despite all the hype about open accesses and the democratization of publishing functions). Important concerns here include the role of cultural 'proximities' and affinities as opposed to purely economic factors in shaping the scale and form of such 'content' market boundaries. These and related specificities of the content industries suggest the need to abandon or radically modify the notion of 'localization' which the ISSC report appears to borrow from the ICT supply sector.

3) Thirdly, a more focused and explicit consideration of the very specific social and cultural characteristics and roles of media/cultural products and services is required compared to that suggested in the ISSC report. This includes active consideration of the potential role of new ICTs in enhancing and sustaining the continuing value of cultural pluralism and diversity in the content spheres. The absence of such considerations is particularly striking in the case of the key policy documents and approaches to the media and cultural industries produced as part of the EU's 'information society' initiatives. As noted earlier, the media and cultural content sectors are generally treated within a singular and undifferentiated 'information market' and industrial logic — alongside microchips, computers, telephone systems and other ICT hardware and software tools and systems. Here the information society approach (especially as it underpins the analysis within the most influential EU policy documents) tends to put the technological cart before the social or cultural horse — despite the token and superficial rhetorical stress on 'society' and 'People First' in many of the key documents and surrounding discourses. For example, a similar
neglect of the specificities of the cultural and media sphere can be found in the EU's 1996 Green Paper on 'social dimensions of the information society' (CEU, 1996b). This neglect is all the more surprising since there was at least some tentative recognition of the specificity of content matters and the potential to use new ICTs to enhance diversity of content and expression within the interim report produced by the High Level Group of Experts prior to the publication of the Green Paper (CEC, 1996a).

These represent important gaps in the analysis advanced by the ISSC report and key EU information strategy reports concerning the role and characteristics of the media and cultural content industries. In essence, there is a significant silence in these and information society discourses concerning the crucial role of the media of public communication in fostering any meaningful sense of 'development' and socio-political cohesion, both in the past (McBride Commission, 1980) as well as in the construction of a distinctive conception of 'Europe's Way to the Information Society' for the future (Preston, 1996a, 1996b).

There is a one-sided and rather crude economistic approach to the industrial aspects of the media and cultural content industries and a marked failure to address let alone promote the cultural policy issues involved. This results not only in an impoverished cultural strategy at national and EU levels, but it may also result in a flawed approach in terms of realising the job creation goals identified in these reports. So far there has been little evidence of the rapid growth in the numbers of 'high-level, grey-matter' jobs involved the audio-visual 'content' industries which were promised and anticipated by the European Commission in 1993/4. A radical re-orientation of such EU and national policies which seeks to take diversity/pluralism of content seriously and actively stimulate local production of films, television programming (and other types of new and mature media content) not only makes sense in terms of cultural policy goals. It also makes sense in terms of these declared job creation goals.

Some conclusions and recommendations

In this paper I have sought to explore some of the features and implications of the ISSC report and related EU 'information society' policy documents, especially in relation to the changing role of the media and cultural 'content' services. I have argued that many of the earlier criticisms of the information society concept are still relevant, despite its growing popularity in policy circles in the 1990s. I have examined some of the key conceptual problems and their implications for policy debate and initiatives related to these particular content services at the national and EU levels.

On balance, I believe that the appointment of an Information Society Steering Committee in Ireland and the recent publication of its report is to be welcomed. Clearly, several aspects of the report's analysis have been criticised here, especially those related to its conception and analysis of the media and cultural content industries. Nevertheless, I concur with the report's basic argument that these represent important sites for industrial and employment growth. They represent important centres for indigenous innovation, both product and process innovation, related to the application of new ICTs in an expanding information economy. Thus I believe that the ISSC report provides a useful and valuable starting point for further debate concerning the requirements for a more strategic and comprehensive approach to the future development of the sector in Ireland, not least in response to the implications of new ICTs. The criticisms and ideas advanced here represent simply one contribution to the kind of debate that is required if the cultural and industrial goals of a stronger and more vibrant set of national media and cultural industries is to be realized.
In this final section I will now also seek to advance some suggestions concerning a more coherent policy response for both the new and mature media content industries in Ireland. Here, I will propose a number of related but quite specific recommendations for the policy debate and actions which are expected to follow from the publication of the ISSC report.

1) A key requirement is the creation of more coherent and comprehensive policy fora and structures which can address both (a) the convergence tendencies across traditional media and policy boundaries, and (b) the specificity of the media and cultural content services. For too long considerations of media policies have not been sufficiently related to broader developments within the communication and information services sectors related to the diffusion of new ICTs (Preston, 1993). The recent legislative proposals for broadcasting contained in the Clear Focus document go some way in this direction, but a more radical reorientation and broadening of the institutional support and policy matrix shaping both the mature and new multimedia content services may be usefully explored in this context. Figure 1 (at the end of this article) sets out one set of proposals related to the recommendations outlined here and which may contribute to further discussions concerning the possible policy structures and options in this regard.

2) The (currently disparate) activities and goals of government departments and agencies concerned with both (a) industrial and innovation policy on the one hand and (b) cultural and media policy on the other must be brought into greater dialogue and cross-engagement. This is necessary, I believe, if appropriate action and support is to be provided to enable these content services to realise their potential as major sites for indigenous application innovations. This means that new institutional arrangements are required in order to provide:

(i) an increased share of industrial development supports and investment resources corresponding to the sector's growth potential;

(ii) the very specific forms of institutional and policy structures appropriate to the special industrial culture and managerial styles of these industries, including its relatively small scale and fragmented 'cottage industry' organisational structures (with RTE and the Independent Group as the two notable exceptions in terms of scale and scope of resources and operations);

(iii) promotion and protection of the goals of diversity and pluralism of content, including an increasing share of local (national and regional etc.) content within the various domestic media markets;

3) Appropriate new national policy institutions are needed to support the particular mixes or configurations of skills and competencies which are required for the development of multidisciplinary content productions (i.e. to promote and broker links between the disparate disciplines, professions and other components of the media cultural industries sector). New forms of innovation networking, across wider industrial, professional and technical competencies are required especially (but not exclusively) to promote/realize the potential development of new/emergent multimedia products and services.

This may involve the development of novel brokering and support institutions in order to stimulate the diverse forms of innovation networking across different professional disciplines and specialist industrial competencies. Some of these may be 'virtual' and ICT-based. But some could be based around the notion of 'industrial districts' as in the original conception and plan for the cultural industries quarter in the Temple Bar area in Dublin. These kinds of networking supports are very important given the generally small scale and fragmented structure of the
indigenous content industries. Besides, some new forms of industrial support and brokerage institutions, specifically attuned to the culture and style of these industries may be required. Indeed, the 'digital park' idea proposed in the ISSC report might be best approached in these terms (rather than in terms of a single island site centred around the assumed benefits of a separate and expensive high-tech infrastructure).

4) Education and training policies must address not only the technical skill requirements related to the application of new multimedia technologies. An equal or probably more important requirement is to address the shortage of managerial, entrepreneurial, marketing, and policy-related skills/competencies which led to relative under-performance in the important 'downstream' segments of the value-added chain in these industries in the past (i.e. compared to the high national performance in the initial authoring and creative stages).

5) There is a pressing requirement to develop more pro-active and comprehensive national approaches to shaping the disparate range of EU policies which impinge upon the media and cultural industries (especially those based in a relatively small economy/society). This must be linked to a more positive role in shaping all areas of EU policy which impinge upon the development and application of new information technologies and infrastructures and services compared to the past (Preston, 1994, 1995b, 1996a). This involves a shift towards more active engagement in the whole spectrum of relevant policy fora, not only those which explicitly or solely address media and cultural policy issues (e.g. it includes those dealing with competition and trade policy, technology and standards matters, regulatory policies related to the new distribution systems such as the Internet/www, intellectual property rights, digital broadcasting, etc.).

6) The EU's singular information society/market approach must be challenged and reversed not only for (very valid) cultural diversity and pluralism reasons. A radical re-assertion of these goals is also necessary in employment terms — if the declared goals of significant increases in the numbers of 'high-level, grey-matter' jobs within the audio-visual and other media industries are to be realized.

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Figure 1:
Proposed New ‘Content’ Policy Structures

NCC's ROLE & OBJECTIVES:
1. Policy implementation and co-ordination across the content industries in order to:
   (a) maximize industrial growth potential; (b) promote diversity of content, cultural,
       and political expression objectives, (c) regulate ownership and competition etc. issues;
2. Provide strategic policy advise regarding the promotion/development of the
   indigenous content industries taking account of the economic as well as the special
   cultural and socio-political features/role of these services and activities;
3. To ensure broad co-ordination of all public policies (and cross-media co-ordination)
   towards these complementary objectives/goals;
4. To ensure all radio/TV etc. distribution services provide platforms for Irish content
   and cultural creators;
5. To co-ordinate pro-active policies at the EU-level and other policy-making fora in line
   with these important national interests and policy goals.

Paschal Preston
24/11/98
In 'Out of Time: Reflections on the Programming Life', Ellen Ullman writes that a senior (male) engineer once asked her why she left full-time engineering for consulting. She replied that she found the engineering culture very 'teenage-boy puerile'. The engineer replied to the effect that such loss of talent was too bad. She continues:

I felt immense gratitude at this unexpected opening. I opened my mouth to go on, to explore the reasons for the cult of the boy engineer.... But immediately we were interrupted. The company was about to have an interdivisional water-balloon fight. For weeks, the entire organization had been engaged in the design of intricate devices for the delivery of rubberized inflatable containers filled with fluid. Work had all but stopped.... The engineer joined the planning with great enthusiasm.... (Ullman, 1995, p140).

The 'play principle' has had a mixed press, from this kind of account of masculine infantilism to more positive views. From Dada onwards a sub-text in twentieth century culture, the play principle underwent a revival in the sixties with Situationism and Marcuse's attempt to merge Schiller, Marx and Freud in a progressive, 'erotic' cultural mélange for an economically carefree (though atomically threatened) post-fascist West (Marcuse, 1974). In this positive view of play, it may be seen not as something children or young animals do to prepare them for the tasks of adult life but as something which exists for its own sake. You play because it's fun to play.

Toles defines play as:

a free-standing activity that is differentiated from ordinary life by virtue of its being 'not serious' (that is, not instrumental in purpose) but at the same time absorbing the player utterly and intensely. No material profit or interest derives from play, which proceeds within its own boundaries of time and space according to rules fixed in advance (Toles, 1985, p. 211; see Caillois, 1979;
Huizinga, 1950).

This view should be differentiated from the concept of disalienation of the early Marx, which seems to be predicated on a notion of making instrumental work itself satisfying. It is closer to the notion of the realm of freedom of the later Marx (when he realized that true freedom lies outside of the realm of necessity rather than in its transformation into a disalienated process). (Marx, 1975, pp. 322-334; 1959, p. 820.)

Since the 1960s, the oil crisis, unemployment and the resurgence of the Right have conspired to resuscitate instrumental rationality (together with the performance and reality principles) and to marginalize issues of pleasure and play, reinforcing once more a (masculine) work ethic which was fleetingly questioned in the Sixties. This reinstatement was regardless of the glaring ideological fissures in the work ethic itself: work is supposed to be a good thing, yet you have to be paid to do it and you’re supposed to be glad when you retire. On the other hand, nothing is supposed to be worse than unemployment. (And to make sure that’s the case, life is made as difficult as possible for the unemployed.) The stigma of unemployment — whereby even socially and ecologically damaging work is considered better than doing nothing — arguably derives in great part from the guilt and masochism inherited from Puritanism. The work ethic expresses a culture of domination.

The contemporary reinforcement of the work ethic may be traced also to a combination of enhanced female involvement in the work force and the replacement of human labour by technology, a dual phenomenon which — since traditional work and welfare structures based on the concept of full (male) employment and the ‘family wage’ have been retained — has greatly increased job insecurity for almost everyone. (‘No collar workers’ may enjoy a culture indistinguishable from that of young college nerds, but if they work twice as many hours a week as people who wear collars it’s not a bad trade-off for the employer.) Contemporary capitalism has consistently resisted any radical proposals for the reduction of the working week to reflect a more balanced gender structure in the work-force, despite the pressures placed on family life by two parents working full time. Similarly, it has insisted on the retention of the old welfare structures, in spite of the absurdity of requiring the unemployed to be available for jobs that in many cases does not exist.

This is not to mention the associated though tacit downgrading of domestic work — the feminist movement has placed such a low priority on the rights of ‘homemakers’ that the employment/income monopoly has not been seriously questioned, notwithstanding the many absurdities and poverty traps to which it gives rise. In the industrial sphere the feminist movement has in many ways helped to shore up rather than undermine the culture of domination — just as the censorious and humourless dogmatism of some branches of academic feminism mirrors the authoritarian, patriarchal culture of domination that the movement supposedly critiques. (In some ways, it might be said, half a revolution is worse than no revolution at all.)

On the face of it, cybernetic developments seem to offer a means of undermining industrial solemnity and re-inserting play into social reality (the informality of e-mail, the anarchic nature of the Web, the growth of video/computer games, virtual reality and interactive art installations). In one reading, this might be seen as undermining the culture of Puritan seriousness, domination and instrumental rationality — in short, the work ethic — which has hitherto characterized industrial society.

When we look at the burgeoning of games, however, whether of
the arcade, home video or home computer variety—there is a considerable overlap between the issues involved in the various kinds of games—the situation seems more problematic. For McLuhan:

Games...are extensions of social man and of the body politic, as technologies are extensions of the animal organism. Both games and technologies are counter-irritants or ways of adjusting to the stress of the specialized actions that occur in any social group... Games are a sort of artificial paradise like Disneyland, or some Utopian vision by which we interpret and complete the meaning of our daily lives (McLuhan quoted in Provenza, 1991, pp. 28-30).

The question at issue is the effect that the convergence of games with technology has on games — and by extension on the play principle, which arguably becomes integrated into the performance principle as a means of reinforcing the culture of 'necessity' and instrumentality.

Another way of looking at the situation is to see contemporary cybernetic developments — exemplified in the image of the cyborg which represents the integration of humanity with the machine rather than the subordination of the machine to the service of humanity — as a sham mode of liberation to disguise the new forms of unfreedom in contemporary society. In this view, computer games might be seen as a means of reinforcing structures of male bonding and domination in patriarchal, industrial society. Just as play has been transformed into regimented 'sport' in the twentieth century, so it has also been transformed into controlled and delineated 'games'. Suggesting that children are trapped in micro-worlds created by programmers, Provenza notes that children he interviewed wanted to be able to define the characters in the games they played, to shape their power and construct their settings. He argues that video games such as Nintendo, characterized by pre-programmed characters as well as media-saturated images, present little opportunity to experiment or toy with ideas: 'the child has almost no potential to reshape the game and its instrumental logic' (Provenza, pp. 48, 95, 137).

On the other hand, it should be noted that the makers of a contemporary computer game, 'Quake', have released its programming language, Quake C, to the public as a means of allowing players to intervene in the structure of the game. The field of interactive art, as well as opening up wide areas of enquiry of a philosophical and sociological nature, and bringing to the fore (in new ways) old issues of identity and relationship, also seems to offer enhanced possibilities for participation in the art work whereby the hitherto-passive 'spectator' becomes part of a co-operative process of discovery with the artist. At the same time, the artist is freed from the constraints of the traditional gallery system by the prospects opened up for self-publication on the Net. On the negative side, electronic art suffers from a tendency towards formalism and the loss of creativity in technical complexity (see O'Brien, 1995 and 1996).

Some critics cite the violence and machismo of the man/machine 'interface' — particularly manifest in computer/video games and the preponderance of virtual tanks, fighter aircraft, martial arts and other macho phenomena in arcade games — as merely an adaptation of the culture of domination (scopophilia and 'dominant specularity') in a new technological form. Video games in the view of Martin Klein largely focus around 'oral sadomasochistic fantasies of the fear of engulfment' (Klein paraphrased by Provenza, p. 56). Citing the distinction between stimulation and catharsis theory in regard to television (see Dominick, 1994, p. 138), Provenza notes that results from research suggest that, at least on a short-term basis, video games increase the aggressive...
behaviour of their players (Provenza, pp. 65-70).

On the other hand, psychologists such as Bettelheim argue that children have a need to exorcise their aggressions through symbolic play (Provenza, p. 89). Greenfield believes that the most harmful aspect of violent video games may be the fact that they are solitary in nature. Video games in her view are valuable in that they teach important life skills such as learning to deal with multiple interacting variables (1984, p. 93, 103). Other observers note the teaching of eye-hand co-ordination, the introduction to necessary computer skills, stress-relief and perhaps catharsis in a release of hostile feelings (Toles, 1985, p. 209).

Malone distinguishes toys from tools in that toys — for example computer games — are systems used for their own sake with no external goals and should be difficult, while tools — for example, programming languages — are systems used to achieve external goals and should be as easy as possible to use (Malone, 1981, p. 268). One might correlate this with the freedom/necessity dichotomy mentioned already, although Haddon points out that early computer magazines presented games playing as an acceptable activity — a source of relaxation in the midst of programming (Haddon, 1988, p. 59).

Thus, far from representing a realm of freedom outside of the dictates of necessity, games in this view might be seen as simply reinforcing the culture of ‘necessity’ and domination.

On the negative side, Toles notes that use of video games helps to embed into our consciousness their assumptions on such issues as xenophobia, the evilness of the enemy, and the preference for destruction — without responsibility — over diplomacy (Toles, 1985, pp. 221-222). Some research suggests that girls go to video arcades as guests whose main function is to admire the performance of their boyfriends:

In an informal survey of a video arcade located in a suburban Pittsburgh shopping mall, Kiesler and colleagues counted 175 players of which only 30 were girls. While girls occasionally played together in groups, the remainder was with boys. No girls were reported as playing the games by themselves (Provenza, pp. 61-62; see Kiesler et al., 1983, p. 42).

In a survey of the top ten video games of the time (Nintendo Power, 1989, p. 82), six of the games involved women being rescued (Provenza, pp. 77, 96). When asked what he thought of the character April in the game ‘Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles’, a six-year old boy described her as being ‘pretty boring. She doesn’t do that much. All she does is get kidnapped’ (Provenza, p. 115). More recent games include active female characters in an effort to get around charges of gender-stereotyping, but incorporating female characters in violent roles raises the same kinds of issues as have been recently raised by the incorporation of female soldiers in US army training. A recent (1996) catalogue advertises a game for PlayStation called ‘Tomb Raider’, featuring on the cover a stereotypical female with large breasts and tiny shorts — but brandishing guns in both hands. The catalogue also advertises a PlayStation game ‘Return Fire’ with the admonition to ‘Demolish, devastate and destroy — it’s a wipe out!’ Regarding ‘Tunnel B1’, the player is told: ‘Your mission is to destroy the crazed tyrant who possesses the ultimate terror weapon — and the madness to use it.’ The PC CD game ‘MAX’ is advertised as: ‘Ultimate control, total customization, advanced battlefield strategy,...’ (Game, 1996, pp. 7, 14, 23). The TV show Gamesmaster (with an associated Web site) promotes macho-nerdism in ‘tongue-in-cheek’ fashion: Gamesmaster: The Official Book describes the action game ‘Body Blows’ as the ‘best beat-em-up on the Amiga’ (Diamond, 1993, p. 10).

In the negative view that cites the sexism and machismo of
video games, they are seen as encouraging violent action and tending to foster a 'de-individuated' state whereby responsibility may be lessened — a state that is functional for military purposes. Indeed, the US armed services use video games bearing some similarity to arcade games to help soldiers refine their battle skills and military obedience: 'the contemporary emphasis on computer simulation and technologically mediated warfare increases the opportunities for soldiers of all ranks to deny any personal responsibility for their actions' (Provenza, pp. 215-219, 221).

The line between play and war seems to become thinner all the time. Robbins and Levidow in their article 'Soldier, Cyborg, Citizen' call the Gulf War of the early 1990s the 'Nintendo war' — a war which involved home audiences in an often compulsive way. At the same time, computer simulation facilitated the detachment of seeing from feeling on the part of the military. They point out that in the development of interactive simulation technology, some innovators alternate between the design of military and entertainment versions (Robins and Levidow, 1995, pp. 106-109).

The Gulf massacre brought home to us the role of high-tech systems in mass psychopathology... electronic systems constituted a paranoiac environment: mediating an omnipotence phantasy, they converted internal threats into thing-like enemies, symbolizing rage at our bodily limitations (pp. 111-112).

While Baghdad may have replaced Moscow as the devil's home in the American view, the paranoid process is the same. Toles describes an eighties' game called 'Communist Mutants from Space':

As swarms of Marxists from the planet Rooskie attack the Earth, the player is enjoined to keep the planet safe for democracy and the free enterprise system. Commie mutants, hatched from a Mother Creature filled with irradiated vodka, try to enslave the planet as the player fights them off (Toles, 1985, pp. 210-211; see Freedberg, 1983, p. 7).

The traditional critique of the filmic audience's 'gaze' focussed on the 'look' of the active (male) figure at the passive (female) figure on the screen. Nichols, however, argues that masculine fascination with the (ultimately illusory) control of simulated interactions has replaced masculine voyeurism. Engagement with process, rather than representations, becomes the fetish object. The fascination lies in the subordination of volition to the constraints of the system, a system that however has strictly limited parameters (Nichols, 1988, pp. 31-32). In an analysis of arcade games, Toles notes that since the machine provides a fixed programme and pace whereby a limited degree of initiative is allowed on the player's part, conformity to the programme is necessary in order to achieve a large score (Toles, 1985, p. 208). This raises the issue whether the 'sadistic' look has been replaced by 'masochistic' subordination in cybernetic culture (but perhaps masochism is itself really the basic issue — see, e.g. Silverman, 1979).

In her account of the image of the cyborg in contemporary culture, Springer cites the argument of Klaus Theweleit that fascist males have never developed an identity, and thus devote all their energy to keeping up an edifice of selfhood. In order to protect themselves from women who represent the weakness they despise in themselves, they 'encase themselves in body armour, both literally and figuratively. The machine body becomes the ideal tool for ego maintenance' (Springer, 1991, p. 317; see Theweleit, 1987, 1989). The Gulf War with its tanks,
planes and precision missiles was fought essentially to maintain oil supplies and thereby preserve the pre-eminence of the most powerful fetish in western culture — the automobile — which simultaneously operates as male body armour, womb, feminized technology, phallic symbol and sexual facilitator. If — as is sometimes argued — the computer is replacing the car as primary fetish, this may not be the liberation from a polluting and wasteful automobile culture that one might imagine. Rather it may represent a tightening of masculine control in ‘real life’ warfare — where women happily participate — in which burning and burying the enemy alive are seen as normal, and where computer games prepare people for the robotic desensitization necessary for modern warfare and the dominance of western industrialism (every bit as effectively as the fascist-style training of the American military).

In this view, new technology may be seen not as a mode of liberation from patriarchal hierarchy and gender limitations but as a means of reinforcing masculine domination and control. Toys which come alive — harmlessly in the computer-animated film Toy Story and horrifically in any number of science fiction films about ‘the revolt of the machine’, represent the threat of a technology which seems to take on a life which in some subtle way it is draining from ourselves. (In a recent ‘real life’ evocation of such paranoia, there were reports from the US of ‘cabbage patch’ dolls which, programmed to consume plastic food, end up eating the hair of their child owners.) (‘Voracious Doll’, 1997.)

Less harmfully, Naoka Tosa’s 3-D computer-animated digital puppet Neurobaby reacts with virtual emotions to the sound of a person’s voice (Graves, 1993, p. 39). (Unlike a real baby, it has the advantage that you can turn it off when you want to go out.) Japanese workers apparently greet their robotic colleagues, without tongue in cheek, with a routine ‘good morning’. On playing with Benny, a virtual dog some friends had recently ‘adopted’ from the ‘Oogz’ package, I was scolded for having teased it — I had repeatedly pulled its virtual food-bowl away before it could eat its dinner — and warned that I would be to blame if its behaviour deteriorated. The Enlightenment view of animals as machines is reversed — computer programmes become our pets. In some strange way the emotions that digital puppets like Neurobaby and Benny evoke seem every bit as valid as the feelings evinced by ‘real’ children and animals.

It is widely agreed that the urbanization and technologization of society have led to a loss of affect in human relations (personally, I find some old Hollywood films almost unwatchable due to the cliched emotional intensity of the characters). In contemporary culture, where Gates and Spielberg reign supreme, affect has been replaced by effect. We have been ‘bored’ — and it is kind of fun. We channel our libido into work rather than relationships, and are comforted by the illusion of socialization offered by drink, drugs and games. (Turkle argues that for many people, what is being pursued in the video game is an altered state, a ‘second self rather than just a score — Turkle quoted in Provenza, 1991, p. 22.)

Virtual relationships, the only relationships we can really have, are in an ultimate sense auto-erotic. (But perhaps all relationships are auto-erotic in the end.) The prospect of social utopia has been replaced by a controlled, illusory and exploitative substitute where ecstasy — release from ego-bondage — is sold like any other commodity. The only ‘real’ emotional relationships we have are with toys — machines and their virtual contents. Social autism, with the ultimate promise of teledildonics or techno-onanism, is perhaps the final twist of the screw of commodity fetishism — we relate to things as if they were people and people as if they were things. The promise of technology to subvert hierarchies, gender limitations and role playing, and ‘dominator culture’ in general, has been largely forgotten in the invisible (to adults) world of video and computer games — a situation which only a truly radical questioning of the role of technology in capitalist industrial society can ever begin.
to shift.

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Introduction

This paper employs the Irish language media to argue for a normative ideal of public access using the concept 'public sphere'. Public sphere as an ideal type contains a democratic potential which allows for universal participation in the formation of public opinion. Two problems exist with the public sphere as a concept in so far as the ideal does not correspond to the reality. On the one hand, it can be argued that the market dominates the public sphere and hampers the democratic, spontaneous and autonomous formation of public opinion. On the other, it can also be argued that the individual is a consumer, resulting in a citizenry which fails to engage in rational-critical discourse which is central to democracy.

The Public Sphere

The concept of the public sphere originates in Habermas's *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit* (1962), a postdoctoral thesis which was not published in English until 1989 (as *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*). For Habermas the public sphere is not a space (social or physical), it is dialogue (but, the public sphere can involve space - dialogue often occurs in the same or similar space). 'By "the public sphere" we mean first of all a realm of our social life in which something approaching public opinion can be formed. Access is guaranteed to all citizens. A portion of the public sphere comes into being in every conversation in which private individuals assemble to form a public body.' (Habermas 1974: 49). Peter Hohendahl added (as a footnote) that the public sphere is not the crowd or the public but the institution which comes into existence through participation.1

Habermas’s concept of the public sphere has its origins in early capitalism. His critique showed the emancipatory potential of bourgeois society as well as the tensions which led to its structural transformation. The attempt here is to show that although the public sphere is structurally transformed the emancipatory potential remains. This normative goal was explained by Dahlgren (1987: 35):

While the knowledge which critique generates points to conditions which set limits, it also points to conditions of possibility, namely of human intervention in a social world whose human origins are often not recognizable. Critique strives to scramble existing demarcations between the
manifest and latent, the taken for granted and the problematic, appearance and reality, in such a way that these lines might be redrawn in a way that will take us closer to the good society.

Relatively, McCarthy (1989: xii) asked: ‘can the public sphere be effectively reconstituted under radically different socio-economic, political and cultural conditions? In short, is democracy possible?’

In the bourgeois public sphere the independent construction of public opinion was possible. The bourgeoisie were propertied, educated and independent of the upper classes. They met at coffee houses, discussed issues of interest to them and these discussions were further extended by the newspapers of the day. The opinions which resulted from such discussions were a dynamic in the democratization of the state. From the bourgeois public sphere came the supposition of the universal 'man' - that all 'men' are equal.

As the bourgeois ideal became institutionalized in the state, the expanded public sphere (expanded as a result of universal suffrage) began to include demands for state intervention to establish the egalitarian ideal. The principle of the state had been laissez-faire, however, public demands for economic redistribution led to a Welfare State which intervened in the economy. This intervention of the state, while attempting a requisite redistribution, resulted in a state-dominated public sphere - the state became involved in the negotiation between capital and labour as well as in the provision of public services. Habermas argued that a dialectic has emerged in which freedom (of speech, of association, of assembly, private property etc.) depends on a Gestaltungsgarantie of active promotion and intervention by the state. ‘For under the conditions of an industrial society constituted as a social-welfare state the securing of these legal provisions cannot be accomplished by defensive and exemptive measures, or rather can be attained only if these in turn are supported by participatory rights, by guaranteed claims to benefit’ (Habermas 1989: 229).

The problem with this state-domination is that the public sphere is no longer a sphere between civil society and the state. The state introduces competition, negotiation and power to this sphere and ousts Habermas’s ideal of universal and equal discussion. The public sphere becomes 'inhabited by politicians, reporters, pollsters, and the occasional academic' (Peters and Cmiel 1991: 211). The sphere where public opinion was formed becomes a sphere where public opinion is either considered to pre-exist without the need for it to be formed through discussion or the state attempts to create public opinion through public relations experts. Either way, the social relations between the individual and the state is reified in so far as the individual has no power to alter that relationship or to play an active role. The result is a feeling of alienation for the individual. The only activity left for the individual in the public sphere is consumption - to consume the PR-produced 'opinions' of the state.

Habermas (1976, 36-7) argued that the structural alteration of the bourgeois public realm [Öffentlichkeit] provides for application of institutions and procedures that are democratic in form, while the citizenry, in the midst of an objectively [an sich] political society, enjoy the status of passive citizens with only the right to withhold acclamation.

The individual has a choice of products in the shop, of programmes and channels on television and of candidates in elections, but this is the extent of democratic 'participation'. The acceptance of the individual as actor in the political sphere is perceived to contain a risk for the state 'Habermas interprets the depoliticization of the population as the inner logic of a
system in which a politically active citizenry is no longer desirable.' (Hohendahl 1979: 112).

Although state intervention is perceived as a moment in the disintegration of the public sphere, there is an earlier moment: the presupposition that we are all equal and that we are, therefore, all the same. Originally the bourgeoisie public sphere included educated, property men who had very much the same interests. They wanted to participate in the ruling of the state. They postulated that all men are equal and therefore that the ruling class had no justification for excluding the bourgeoisie. However, once the wheel of democracy was set in motion there was no further justification for excluding unpropertied men and later women. As the public sphere expanded people with different interests entered the public sphere resulting in conflicts of interest and demands for state intervention.2

Briefly, the ideal of the public sphere is that the public opinion which it forms has the task of criticism and control of the state. This is an important democratic role. However, Habermas (1989: 201) argued that "[t]oday... the public sphere has to be "made," it is not "there" anymore."

The historical moment on which the ideal is founded (the bourgeois public sphere) was exclusive, its universal man was exactly that - a man - and was property-owning and educated. Moreover, it also involved questions of interest, prestige and power (see Eley 1993: 307 and Habermas 1974: 54). None the less, the ideal remains even if its historical moment does not.

Today because of the size of the public sphere its media are the so-called mass-media (see Habermas 1974: 49). It is usually accepted without question that the mass media today are the public sphere. None the less the mass media are blamed for the deterioration of the public sphere (Carpignano et al. 1980: 33). Today the public sphere theoretically includes the whole society. The mass media are essential for expanding public space beyond the physical to potentially enable universal participation. However, Habermas (1989: 169 and 164) argued that the public sphere of the mass media has become a sphere of consumerism 'by serving up the material as a ready-made convenience, patterned and pre-digested', and that even 'the conversation about what you had read, heard, and seen... is administered.' Moreover, Habermas (1989: 170-1) argued that there is a tendency to present a substitute more palatable for consumption and more likely to give rise to an impersonal indulgence in stimulating relaxation than to a public use of reason. Radio, film, and television by degrees reduce to a minimum the distance that a reader is forced to maintain toward the printed letter... the new media curtail the reactions of their recipients in a peculiar way. They draw the eyes and ears of the public under their spell but at the same time, by taking away its distance, place it under 'tutelage', which is to say they deprive it of the opportunity to say something and to disagree. The critical discussion of a reading public tends to give way to 'exchanges about taste and preferences' between consumers - even the talk about what is consumed, 'the examination of tastes', becomes a part of consumption itself. The world fashioned by the mass media is a public sphere in appearance only.

The ideal public sphere does not involve competition or negotiation among the 'powerful', it involves universal and equal participation in dialogue. Dahlgren (1987: 27) outlines an ideally functioning public sphere in which the use of the mass media is implicit:
The marketplace would make available politically relevant information in the form of news, ideas, discussions, policy debates, and so on. The output would originate from among the citizens themselves, since access was seen as integral to the liberal ideal. The public, on encountering the output, would reflect on it through discussions. This would give rise to opinion and the formation of political will. Finally, the arrived-at views would become articulated throughout the public sphere, preparatory to political action through the official mechanisms, and the next phase of the societal dialogue.

Habermas's normative proposition is that the whole society united in one single public sphere is more democratic. However, in the Irish context the Green Paper on Broadcasting asked:

Should there be a single, generalised public sphere in any state or is it more useful, in countries incorporating ethnic and/or linguistic communities, rather than the single language nation state, to think of a minority public sphere existing inside or alongside the dominant one?

(Department of Arts, Culture and the Gaeltacht 1995: 203)

Fraser (1993: 122), a prominent critic of the concept of public sphere, also supported multiple public spheres, considering a single public sphere to be unjust as it functions to the advantage of dominant groups, she contended that 'arrangements that accommodate contestation among a plurality of competing publics better promote the ideal of participatory parity than does a single, comprehensive, overarching public'. Also, Habermas (1993) was not averse to competing publics, and considered that perhaps it is a more democratic alternative, as long as these 'publics' are internally democratic.

The Gaeltacht/Gaeilgeoir Public Sphere

Irish speakers do not exist as a public in the 'national' public sphere. A public sphere demands a certain homogeneity. Although, it includes a diversity of private individuals, they ideally engage in rational-critical discourse as individuals to form an endogenous public opinion and the issues discussed are expected to be of interest to the whole public. Irish speakers, however, form a minority, they speak a language which is not universally understood and their particular issues are marginal. They can exist only as private individuals in the 'national' public sphere if they conform by speaking English and only discussing issues which are on the agenda. Irish language media allow Irish speakers to 'exist', by mediating them to one another through Irish.

The Gaeltacht and Gaeilgeoir (Irish speaking) community's own public sphere, mediated by newspaper, radio and television provides it with the opportunity for dialogue on issues that are relevant to itself. It is democratic to have a separate public sphere because Gaeltacht and Gaeilgeoir issues are rarely relevant to the 'national' public sphere and their voices are drowned in the cacophony. However, for some there is the fear of ghettoizing the Irish language.

From the description of the public sphere above it is expected that if individual Irish speakers gather together to form a public body, a public sphere of Irish speakers comes into existence. This happens regularly, especially considering the number of Irish language organizations that exist. Both the meetings of these organizations as well as the conversations that take place in the clubs and pubs their members frequent and the discussions in Gaeltacht pubs become the public sphere. Also, Raidió na Gaeltachta has contributed to this public sphere, particularly within the Gaeltacht, as has Raidió na Life, in Dublin,
and *Foinse*, however, television has more widespread and frequent use. TnAG has the potential to increase the number of ‘participants’ in the public sphere.

An examination of the narrative of efforts to improve the situation of the Irish language on television provides an illuminating insight into the functioning of the Gaeilgeoir/Gaeltacht public sphere. Demands for a separate Irish language television channel were made regularly and range back as far as the late 1950s, when Gael Linn proposed to establish and operate Ireland’s television channel. By the end of the 1960s Doolan, Dowling and Quinn (1969), who had been working in RTÉ, suggested having a Gaeltacht television channel. In the early 1980s Bord na Gaeilge published a plan for improving the situation of Irish in which they recommended that an Irish language television service for the Gaeltacht be established (Bord na Gaeilge 1983: 5).

The strength of the demands for a separate Irish language channel continued to increase throughout the 1980s. In 1980 ‘Coiste ar son Teilifis Gaeltachta’ was instituted by Irish language activists such as Ciarán Ó Finneada, Séoseamh Ó Cuagha, Sean Ó Drisceoil and Donncha Ó hÉallaithé. They started by setting up a pirate station, but unfortunately a technician died suddenly and the project ended. Subsequently, in 1986, Ó hÉallaithé and others who had been involved in the Gaeltacht civil rights movement felt that there were not enough programmes in Irish on RTÉ and

chonaic muid an dream a bhi faoi mhi-bhuntaiste, seo iad pobal na Gaeltachta a raibh an cultúr áitbúil cineál préamhainthe go hulie agus go hmílan in nGaeilge go leanúnach leis na ceadta blian agus go raibh sé ag teacht ag an bpointe nach raibh ag éiri leis an bpoibal sin an teanga a chur [chun cinn] mar bhí paisti ag diúltú. Bhí reaction (sic) uafasach ó pháisti nua hochtódh in aghaidh na Gaeilge, just bhiodar ag diúltú, chomh luath agus a d’fhoghlaímidh Béarla dhiúltóidís Gaeilge a labhair (Ó hÉallaithé 1997).

They felt that campaigning for an increase in Irish language programmes on RTÉ would be fruitless, because, as Ó hÉallaithé (1997) said, ‘níl ansin ach seaféid’, ‘ní bhfaighidh muid sin go deo, tá sé triallta sách minic’. They decided to attempt a trial broadcast as a Gaeltacht channel. Donncha Ó hÉallaithé, Ruairí Ó Tuairisc and Pádraig de Bhailraitht went to visit a station in the Faroe Islands which broadcasts at low cost and from what they learned they were able to broadcast eighteen hours of pre-recorded and live material illegally from Rós Muc, County Galway on 2-5 November 1987. Ó hÉallaithé (1997) tells the story thus:

Ar an mbéalach ar ais (...) dhúinn chas an triúr againn le Bob Quinn ar an traen annus ó Bhleá Cliath (...) agus chuair sé ceist simplí orm ‘an gceapann sibh gur féidir é a dheárnann i gConamara?’ agus dúirt mise is cinnte gur féidir ‘OK’, dúirt sé, ‘deanfaidh muid é’. So (...) chuaigh mé ar ais abhaile agus rinne mé dearmad air agus an chéad rud eile (...), thart ar (...), mí Lúnasa, fuair mé glaoch guthán ó Bob Quinn ag rá go raibh duine aimsithe aige a bhí sásta transmitters a thógáil agus go gcosnóidh sé ceithre mhillte punt agus dúirt sé ‘an féidir leat ceithre mhillte punt a bhailiú taobh istigh de choicís?’ (...) What do you do with a challenge like that? You can’t say I can’t collect the money. So (...) bhailiomar cúig mhillte, ‘s tógáidh na transmitters agus Mi Dheireadh Fómhair ansin chuireamar an stáisiún bradach seo ar an aer mar deireadh seachtaini i Ros Muc le linn Oireachtas na nGael agus i ndáirfíre is craisadh beo den chuid is mó a
They called themselves Meitheal Oibre Theilifis na Gaeltachta and made more broadcasts in December 1988, when there was a pirate broadcasting amnesty. The following year Meitheal Oibre Theilifis na Gaeltachta got together with other individuals and organizations to form FNT (Feachtas Náisiúnta Theilifise).

FNT was a national campaign and they occasionally gained access to the national media; however, their interventions failed to produce a dialogue. While there were a number of public meetings to discuss TnAG after the publication of the Green Paper on Broadcasting (1995) there were numerous complaints that there was a lack of public debate in the media. On the other hand, the shift from a Gaeltacht to a national campaign, while it seemed to bring more tangible results, shifted the goal from a Gaeltacht television channel to a national Irish language channel.3

In Government, the Minister for the Gaeltacht and Taoiseach Charles Haughey, in late 1987, promised IRE500,000 from the National Lottery to go towards a separate Irish language channel, even though a report which he had commissioned (Working Group on Irish Language Broadcasting 1987) concluded that the establishment of a separate channel for Irish was inadvisable at that time. However, the money was never assigned to this project and four years later the Minister for Finance Albert Reynolds claimed that due to cut-backs this money still could not be assigned (even though it was not to originate in Government funds). Late in 1988 Haughey commissioned Udarás na Gaeltachta to undertake a feasibility study and in July 1989 he said that the establishment of an Irish language service was one of the top priorities of the new Government. At the Fianna Fáil Party Ard Fheis (convention), on 9 March 1991 Haughey said in his Presidential Address that the television service would be established the following year. However, the National Lottery funds which Haughey had vaguely ‘earmarked’ for the Irish language television service were directed to the state coffers. Later that year (1991) Haughey said on Raidió na Gaeltachta that due to financial constraints he was uncertain as to whether or not the television station would be established. Soon afterwards Haughey ‘fell from power’.

Haughey’s successor as Minister for Communications, Máire Geoghegan-Quinn (1992-3), put TnAG on the agenda for the Department of Communications, met with FNT and hired Pádraic Ó Ciardha (from RTE - currently Information Editor for TnAG) as her adviser on the matter. Roughly a year later a new coalition emerged and the Programme for Partnership Government negotiated between the Labour Party and the Fianna Fáil Party contained a promise to undertake the establishment of Teilifis na Gaeilge.

Responsibility for the establishment of TnAG then rested with the Minister for Arts, Culture and the Gaeltacht, Michael D. Higgins (1993-7). He appointed the Coiste Bunaithe (Establishing Committee) during the summer of 1993. Membership of the committee consisted of independent producers from various Gaeltacht areas and representatives of the social partners, under the chairmanship of Gearóid Ó Tuathaigh from UCG (University College Galway). The Coiste Bunaithe was replaced by Comhairle Theilifis na Gaeilge (a temporary authority) on 11 March 1994 and the reappointment
of Comhairle Theilifis na Gaeilge was announced on TnaG news on 22 April 1997. Legally TnaG is part of RTE, however, currently the relationship between RTE and TnaG is tentative in anticipation of a restructuring of broadcasting in the Broadcasting Act anticipated by the Green Paper on Broadcasting (1995).

The link between the activities in the Gaeltacht/Gaeilgeoir public sphere and the actions taken by Government Ministers is the subject of this research. So far it is unclear to what degree the establishment of TnaG was the result of a healthy and vigorous Gaeltacht/Gaeilgeoir public sphere, initiative from individual ministers or a combination.

Individual in the Public Sphere

Habermas does not focus on the ontological level of agency in his discussion of the public sphere and yet the individual is central. It is individuals coming together that forms a public sphere. Habermas (1989: 161) argued that the public sphere has been fragmented 'into acts of individuated reception' and while this fragmentation and consumerization restricts rational-critical discourse, Habermas seems to imply that the individual no longer possesses rational-critical thought. However, because the individual does not have access to the media and therefore cannot participate through rational-critical debate the individual's freedom rests in rational-critical thought. In this section, the two concepts of 'polysemy' and 'mythic domain' are employed. These can, to some extent, illustrate a limited freedom within the transformed public sphere.

Many authors have discussed the issue of rational-critical thought, and the emancipatory potential is often seen to exist at the level of decoding or making sense of media texts. For example, Jensen (1990) argued that the power of the audience is in the polysemy of reception. 'The argument is that several interpretations coexist as potentials in any one text, and may be actualized or decoded differently by different audiences, depending on their interpretive conventions and cultural backgrounds.' (Jensen 1990: 57-8). This may be so, however, Streeter (1989) argued that ideology can be polysemous as well. Consequently, polysemy would not always contain an emancipatory potential, because it is possible that sometimes the complete range of meanings can be ideological. None the less, Streeter (1989: 97) points out 'that forms of social resistance and change can emerge from the centre of the very consumerist social system that Horkheimer and Adorno saw as so hopelessly closed'.

While Jensen regarded the power of the audience as coming from the polysemy of reception, both Jensen and Streeter seem to limit the range of meanings to the meanings within the text. Although most people, most of the time take a meaning from within the text both because these are the predominant meanings in society and because the text influences the meanings people make of it, none the less, people have the capacity to take a meaning which is contrary to the apparent meanings in the text or to reject a text completely (see Hall 1980). Polysemy exists in both the text and the audience interpretation of the text.

The concept of polysemy is also central in the Green Paper on Broadcasting and TnaG's structure. In the case of the Green Paper, polysemy is reflected in the suggestion that moving the production base of one of the two RTE channels outside Dublin would maximize 'the opportunity for developing diversity in programming styles' (Department of Arts, Culture and the Gaeltacht 1995: 171). Within TnaG itself, polysemy is reflected in its commissioner/broadcaster role which it is hoped will produce a polysemy of texts.
However, where topics are non-issues in the public sphere (e.g. Irish language issues) and are excluded, resistance is precluded. None the less, the individual can resist because dialogue exists where people associate (e.g. within the family, the community etc.). Although this dialogue does not always form a 'public' body it is instrumental in the formation of opinion.

On the other hand, it is often presumed that the individual is informed through factual information from news and current affairs. Nevertheless, firstly, viewers remember very few facts from news and current affairs, which makes it hard to use such programmes as an information resource for individuals, therefore, perhaps it would make more sense to speak of the mythic domain of meaning production (Dahlgren 1987: 41). The mythic domain primarily involves emotions and the collective messages rather than cognition and specific facts. Secondly, citizens can make no social use of the news, beyond being informed, because there is no 'point of access' (Jensen 1990: 67). Thirdly, the division between news-type programmes and entertainment-type programmes is becoming blurred (Carpignano et al 1990). All television viewers, therefore, seem to be more consumer than citizen, even when it comes to factual programmes. Nevertheless, according to Jensen, television can also be 'a source of social identity or self-legitimation, providing a sense of belonging to a community, (sub)culture or political order.' (1990: 60). (See Calhoun 1993: 6; Dahlgren 1987: 41; Jensen 1990: 68; Peters 1993: 566). Also, Habermas (1989: 162) argued that

The deprivitized province of interiority was hollowed out by the mass media, a pseudo-public sphere of a no longer literary public was patched together to create a sort of superfamilial zone of familiarity.

A sense of belongingness is important for Irish speakers. Although individual Irish speakers already feel that, to an extent, they are part of a wider Irish speaking community, there is a feeling of being alienated within this fragmented community and that this community has little relevance for their lives. The strength of this feeling varies according to individual circumstances. However, to have a common experience, to be informed through a common language and to have common interests discussed on television can strengthen the feeling of being part of a wider community and form the basis of a sense of common identity. However, without participating in the public sphere the common experiences presented on television remain beyond the control of the individual.

While the public sphere, as the normative ideal suggested by Habermas, does not exist, none the less, TnaG provides the Gaeilgeoir/Gaeltacht community with a 'superfamilial zone' in which Irish speakers can consume Irish language television. Although TnaG does not provide Irish speakers with the opportunity to engage in rational-critical discourse in the formation of a Gaeilgeoir/Gaeltacht public opinion, it does provide an important sociolinguistic dynamic as a mythic domain. Moreover, perhaps Heller et al (1994: 169-70) are correct when they claim that a public sphere is necessary for identity construction, they argue that identities are not supplied by immediate experience or feelings, and the themes are not present in the experience and memories of the participants as an immediate reflection of events and encounters. They need to be elaborated, transformed, and legitimated through public communication, taking into account existing themes and identities and working upon them with resources available to the participants. More importantly, all this must happen publicly, the 'grammar'
of public communication having characteristics
significantly different from those of private
communication.

If this statement is correct TnaG, in expanding the public sphere
for the Gaeilgeoir/Gaeltacht community, plays a vital role in the
construction of identity. Without identity, who are we?

Access: the Crux of the Normative Ideal

According to Hohendahl (1993: 102) 'the difference between the
empirically existing public sphere(s) and the idea of a just and
equitable democratic society cannot easily be bridged by
Habermas’s theory'. Moreover, while Habermas points to the
transformed public sphere as being a sphere of consumption
and consensus management, this at least is a positive step for
the Gaeltacht/Gaeilgeoir community. It allows Irish speakers to
exist as consumers, if not as citizens, to consume in Irish, to
establish a mythic domain and construct identity.

Habermas’s definition of the public sphere, quoted at the
beginning of this paper, claims that in a public sphere ‘access is
guaranteed to all citizens’. Access is a crucial precondition for
the democratic function of a public sphere and Habermas, in his
more recent work, has built his theory of emancipation on a
model of communication (not production).

With the publication of the Green Paper on Broadcasting (1995)
and during the establishment of TnaG it seemed that perhaps
efforts would be made to construct a normatively functioning
public sphere. Chapter three of the Green Paper (actually
entitled ‘Media and the Public Sphere’) argued that

The ultimate goal of a healthy production sector in
Ireland, particularly in broadcasting... is the cultivation of
a healthy democratic public sphere. By this is meant that
domain of our social life in which such a thing as public
opinion can be formed, access to which is in principle
open to all citizens. (Department of Arts, Culture and the
Gaeltacht 1995: 143)

In their unpublished response to the Green Paper, TnaG argued
that one of the main points on which their philosophy is based is
‘tuiscint nua ar fhéiniléacht tré guth a thabhairt don phobal’ and
‘is cuid dlílis de bhunfealsúnacht an Pháipéir Ghaliais gurb é an
saoránach tóin, an gníomhachaitóir craolacháin an tse is mó a
bhfuil gá leis an cheart a chosaint go lár leis fúinnt réi
gníomhach a thabhairt do saotharachtaí croílacháin’ and that
although they oppose the idea of a ‘Super Authority’
(Department of Arts, Culture and the Gaeltacht 1995: 50, 92,
166 and 207) there should be representatives from the general
public on such an Authority.

Before TnaG began broadcasting they organized a series of
public meetings throughout the country. These meetings were
open to the public to discuss any issues relevant to TnaG and
represented an interesting development in public access to
public broadcasting. Moreover, the structure of TnaG, as a
commissioning body, was expected to provide the public with
programmes produced by a variety of independent producers
with different perspectives. Although this does not constitute
public access, the philosophy behind it is that by offering a range
of different producers access to broadcasting, the public is
presented with a variety of viewpoints, thus taking a step in the
direction of averting consensus management.

Access is at the centre of the normative function of the public
sphere. However, since TnaG began broadcasting on 31
October 1996 there has been no serious attempt to realize this.
Access to the public sphere of public broadcasting appears to be confined mainly to media professionals rather than 'all citizens'. The democratization of Irish public broadcasting appears to be founded on polysemy rather than the democratic structure of the public sphere.

Conclusion

Theoretically, the function of the public sphere is to produce public opinion autogenously. This public opinion then acts as critique to balance the function of government and to democratize the relationship between citizen and state. The mass media have succeed in expanding the public sphere and appear to support the ideal public sphere. However, Habermas (1989) argued that the commercial nature of the mass media has led to a transformation of the public sphere. The mass media became a sphere of consumption in which the public was no longer free to participate in the formation of public opinion but, rather, was fragmented into individuated acts of consumption.

None the less, Habermas (1993: 438) later admitted that his diagnosis of a unilinear development from a politically active public to one withdrawn into a bad privacy, from a 'culture-debating to a culture-consuming public', is too simplistic. At the time, I was too pessimistic about the resisting power and above all the critical potential of a pluralistic, internally much differentiated mass public whose cultural usages have begun to shake off the constraints of class.

Moreover, the vitality of the movement to establish an Irish language television channel, both in terms of the Gaeltacht action-based approach and the Gaeilgeoir interest group approach, augurs well for the existence of a number of activists who form a vigorous Gaeltacht/Gaeilgeoir public sphere.

Finally, the concepts of polysemy and mythic domain point to a certain resistance within the transformed public sphere. The mere existence of TnaG adds to the polysemy of media texts — the public has another channel to choose from. The role of TnaG as commissioner rather than producer adds to the polysemy of production within TnaG. Also, the 'resisting power' which Habermas finally admitted to and the 'polysemy of reception' Jensen discussed suggest that rational-critical thought exists to some extent. Therefore, employing the old Shannon-Weaver (1949) model, the sender, the message and the receiver are polysemous, resulting in a certain amount of freedom for the individual as consumer, limited by the constraints of a public sphere structured by the market. On the other hand, the mass media, according to Dahlgren, produce a mythic domain, and, according to Habermas (1989: 162), a 'sort of superfamilial zone of familiarity' in which, according to many authors (e.g. Dahlgren, Jensen, Heller et al, Calhoun etc.), a 'myth' is formed, which is shared by a group of people and produces a sense of belongingness and identity. The role TnaG from this perspective is to produce a myth, a sense of belongingness and identity.

Although it has been argued here that there is a vitality in the Gaeltacht/Gaeilgeoir public sphere, that there is a certain element of resistance within the consumerized public sphere and that TnaG plays a critical role providing consumer products in Irish, a consumer is not a citizen. Active participation in the public sphere cannot be equated with the 'right to withhold acclamation' or with a polysemy of consumer products. The democratization of the public sphere depends on a normative restructuring of the relationship between the individual and the mass media based on the principle of equal access.
Notes

One can imagine the relationship between individuals and the public sphere to be similar to the relationship between individuals and society. The public sphere is no more the sum of the individuals than society is. This concept, in which the public sphere is seen to emerge from conversation, can be regarded as influenced by the linguistic turn which was first encountered by many sociologists, in ethnomethodology and now influences not only the work of Habermas but also Giddens's structuration theory and post-modernism in general.

The achievements of the Welfare State should be remembered. Also that interests, negotiation, conflict etc. are endogenous to the social structure (they emerge from social conflict between apparently incompatible group interests) rather than being exogenously imposed by state intervention, i.e. they exist prior to and initiated state intervention.

This is 'research in progress'. A more detailed account of the shift from Teilifis na Gaeltachta to Teilifis na Gaeilge will be forthcoming. However, see Watson 1996 and 1997 for a discussion of TnaG and national ideology and for a history of Irish language broadcasting.

References


Educa*onal Books.


QUALITY ASSESSMENT OF TELEVISION

Reviewed by: Adrian Moynes

If we want to look forward to good television in the years to come, then we need clear thinking about standards of value and how to secure them. As a contribution to the debate in Ireland and other countries about the future of broadcasting, this book is timely, comprehensive and occasionally exasperating.

The twelve papers offered here amount to a progress report on international research which began in 1990 under the sponsorship of Japan's NHK Broadcasting Culture Research Institute. They are presented in three sections: one surveys research into quality assessment in Canada, Japan, the UK and the Nordic countries; one looks at quality from the perspectives of broadcasting professionals and the public; and the final section, entitled 'Public Service idea and diversity in assessing television quality', comprises research, experience and arguments from around the world.

For its bibliographies, its statistical tables, its cosmopolitan approach, its critiques and comparisons of research methods, this is an invaluable collection.

The researchers share the aim of establishing a yardstick of quality in broadcasting - a daunting enterprise given the diverse systems of broadcasting in myriad cultures on the planet, and one which has produced some dauntingly difficult reading. It's a pity that some of the least engaging prose in this book is to be found in chapter one. Persevere: this is ultimately a rewarding survey of a quarter century of Nordic research and it draws the conclusion that quality is best understood when 'assessed against standards anchored in values and norms'. This relational concept of quality is fundamental to research approaches described throughout this volume and it is offered - with modest understatement - to the international media research community as 'something of value'.

Something else of value is the book's achievement as a ground-clearing exercise. The contributors test research methods and seek out clarity of definition and discrimination. There cannot be a single criterion or consideration of quality that is ignored or unexamined in these papers. In part, this very comprehensiveness accounts for some of the frustration experienced by this reader. There are times when it seems that the mountain has laboured to bring forth a mouse. Almost thirty pages and twelve tables are devoted to 'Measuring diversity in US television programming: New evidence'. The result is a conclusion of staggering banality.
In the United States, the unique combination of commercial broadcast television, public television, cable, premium pay and pay per view make for a smorgasbord assortment of programming (both greater depth and breadth), even if it is tilted towards some popular categories. With an adequate amount of discretionary time and income, the American consumer can access this vast array of programming, not all of which is represented in this study, and employ telecommunication devices such as VCRs (or visit video stores) to obtain as much diversity as desired...

Now who'd have imagined that? To be fair, the same chapter has an appendix containing a useful insight into the deficiencies of various approaches to categorising programmes. It is a consolation to anyone who has wrestled with what is an especially difficult and pressing problem for broadcasters as well as for researchers.

With a background in production and programming, I particularly enjoyed the papers in section two in which writers, producers and broadcasters teased out such questions as the nuances of what makes a serious programme. If viewers associate quality with 'seriousness' in programmes, what is meant by 'seriousness'? Put like that, it sounds high-minded and Victorian in a Matthew Arnold sort of way, but the comments reported here make for a lively and an enlightening debate among some of the most creative English-speaking programme-makers on both sides of the Atlantic. While the book is a gathering of research reports, this section whets an appetite for more polemic and dialectic about such fundamental concepts as public service broadcasting, diversity, production values, etc...

'Quality is important. But if no one watches it, it may be irrelevant,' says Elizabeth Richter of WTTW in Chicago, in a crisp formulation that is related, but not identical, to one of the most significant themes in this collection, one expressed in the final chapter ('Towards a New Ethical Environment for public service broadcasting') as the challenge of 'reinserting the public into the broadcasting system...'

This essay by Prof. Marc Raboy of the University of Montreal includes a case study of regulatory intervention in Canada on behalf of the public interest and argues that regulation is essential to the health of broadcasting in a democracy. It is an eloquent argument on behalf of the public regarded not as clients, customers or columns of statistics, but as citizens whose public service environment includes the media of mass communication. Raboy's conclusion is that '...the provision of mechanisms for meaningful [public] participation at the points of decision-making, remains the greatest challenge to the process of media democratization'.

It's a view that resonates with the conviction expressed by Timothy Leggatt. Reviewing fifteen years of British research, he notes that 'there is ample evidence that television viewers can readily make judgements of quality and identify what they mean by them; they can certainly distinguish their judgements of quality from their expressions of interest or enjoyment...' He concludes, 'What cannot be too strongly urged on any country seeking to assess quality - if action is to follow from its assessment - is that public opinion should be constantly tested'.

The editor is to be commended for creating a ground of interest on which broadcasting professionals, media researchers, legislators and the public can meet and find both stimulus and correctives for their debates on the future of broadcasting.
In the beginning was the agenda, and the agenda was with the powerful. But it was not until 1972 that McCombs and Shaw came up with a sufficiently catchy name for the game. And thus began the continuing attempt to provide empirical, quantitative evidence for what Walter Lippmann drew attention to in 1922 and David Hume in 1758.

In *Agenda-Setting*, James W Dearing (Associate Professor of Communication at Michigan State University) and Everett M Rogers (Professor and Chair, Department of Communications and Journalism at the University of New Mexico) categorise, draw distinctions, and summarise research into the media, public and policy agendas. They bring order to a field that needed it.

Judged on internal criteria, the book is 'on the whole' a good summary of agenda-setting research. Judged on external criteria, it is seriously inadequate.

The main theme of the book, the authors point out, is the "broadening of scholarly research in recent years from hierarchy studies to include investigations of a single issue (or a small interacting number of issues), either studied over time in a sociological approach or studied experimentally in a psychological approach". (p88)

They conclude with a brief critique of agenda-setting studies, suggest topics for future examination and call for more multi-method research to increase the validity of conclusions and allow study of new aspects of agenda-setting.

There are interesting examples of research, not least the authors' own study of why the AIDS issue did not get firmly on to the media agenda in the US until about 5,000 people had died from the disease. (One problem with social science research is the crudity of measurement; however, the authors' net was finely meshed enough to include the fact that coverage of AIDS by the *New York Times* was delayed because its key medical writer broke his leg.)

Other examples are banal. Illustrating how the policy agenda
can influence the public agenda, the authors refer to a Canadian study which discovered: "People who had curbside recycling in their community (a public policy in place) and who had pro-environmental attitudes engaged in recycling behaviors. People who did not have curbside recycling in their community (no policy enacted), even those who had pro-environmental attitudes, tended not to recycle." (p75) The mountain of hard labour produces a mouse. Such research could itself be recycled.

Scientific paraphernalia and jargon can give the illusion that something important is being said when it is blindingly banal. As regards jargon, the book is described on the back cover as a "reader-friendly volume". The following passage indicates that the authors are, if not reader-hostile, reader-indifferent, unless the reader happens to be equally at home in barbarous jargon: "The introduction of experimentation marked another methodological move toward disaggregation in agenda-setting research, and a focus on the micro-level behavior involved in the consequences of issue salience." (p63) Further on, "Derksen and Gartrell (1993) demonstrate the importance of conceptualizing and operationalizing recursivity in a study of the social context of recycling behavior in Canada." (p75)

Any activity can become an isolated game. Specialists especially risk setting up a screen of abstraction, euphemism and jargon between themselves and reality, looking at the cardiogram instead of the heart. But there is more going on in this book than specialist semi-detachment. Although the authors appear to be liberally concerned about bad things, they seem oddly insulated from the realities of power, from a world where Henry Kissinger can be awarded a peace prize.

They describe agenda-setting as "a process of social construction" -this in a country where a handful of corporations control the media, where, in the interests of balance, Tweedledum is allowed to debate an issue with Tweedledee. They appear to believe that the US is a healthily pluralist society where competing powers check and balance each other in all matters. They admit that the White House - along with the NYT and spectacular trigger events - plays "a dominant role in putting an issue on the US media agenda". 'Put on' is a quaint phrase to describe what the White House and its agents did to the media agenda during the Gulf War.

Addressing the question, "Does the public agenda influence the policy agenda?", the authors reply: "Research evidence is less strong." (p92). In a country where two-thirds of federal revenue goes to war, do we really need a ten-year quantitative study to answer that one? A NYT poll on the eve of the Gulf War showed that 56pc of Americans backed an international peace conference being set up, while 37pc did not. But President Bush was not reading the lips of the 56pc majority. When it comes to the crunch and it can get away with it, the White House ignores the public agenda.

There's no great mystery about agenda-setting. And, insofar as power controls the media, the media are servile and mechanical.

In their conclusion, the authors suggest some questions for future research, such as: "What keeps an issue on the national agenda over a lengthy period of time?"; "Is the media agenda-setting process limited to news issues?", and "How does one issue compete for salience with another issue?" I would suggest some additional topics. What is the role of advertisers in silencing the agenda of the poor, the old and the marginalised? What part is played in agenda-setting by new technology, by the high salaries of certain media stars, by television rules under which an in-depth interview lasts around 180 seconds; by internalised ideology, by indifference (which is the violence of the comfortable and complacent), by racism?

In the authors' critique of agenda-setting they examine research
methods, but they do not 'critique' agenda-setting research itself. An attempt to reproduce the rigour and precision of science in an area of human nuance and complexity has its limits.

Imagine a substantial, multi-method study of agenda-setting during the Gulf War. It might not reveal anything we do not already suspect, although it would provide solid evidence to back up observation, intuition or common sense. But now imagine a book about the same topic written by a first-class journalist, historian, political scientist or communications expert, giving a rich, multi-dimensional account of the many factors involved in agenda-setting during the war: manipulation of news, censorship (by Iraq, of course – the West provided "reporting guidelines"), self-censorship, careerism, personality, broadcasting technology, Pentagon jargon, the portrayal of war as Nintendo game, the focus on dead cormorants instead of dead civilians, the role of a servile media and of spurious notions of journalistic objectivity leading to a TV commentary parade of so-called experts (retired colonels, a former CIA director, conservative thinktanks); the trivialisation and silencing of dissenting voices; the part played by an all-American NBC loyalist in preventing pool-passless Robert Fisk from playing his part in agenda-setting. Smart bombs and stupid journalists. Et cetera.

We do not need scientific methodologies to spotlight what was revealed by one journalist who, referring to Saddam Hussein, asked a US general: "How long is it going to take us to lick this guy?"

Another issue, therefore, for agenda-setting researchers to ask themselves is: what are the limitations of agenda-setting research? It introduces scientific criteria to a field where unfounded opinion and prejudice can run riot, and it has come up with useful and occasionally fascinating evidence. But researchers should occasionally remind themselves of its limitations, particularly those of quantitative methods where these are inadequate. And some should also, from the point of view of the powerless, take a close look at the agenda of the powerful. Researchers who, like Dearing and Rogers, blind themselves to the pervasive, insidious workings of what Edmund Said has called "coercive orthodoxy" may illuminate certain issues in their detail, but their treatment of agenda-setting at the macro level will be skewed and superficial.

A final question. Why do the authors fail to mention one prominent researcher into the manufacturing of consent? Why is Chomsky not on their agenda?
News on a knife-edge: Gemini journalism and a global agenda.
ISBN 1 86020 524 0

Reviewed by: David Quinn

News on a knife-edge by Richard Bourne (University of Luton Press, 1996) is also a book about agendas. Its sub-title is: Gemini journalism and a global agenda. It is a lively account of the London-based Gemini News Service which since 1967 has been trying to put on the agenda the kind of news which the news agencies of the West (or North) have excluded. It also happily includes a varied selection of stories published by Gemini.

The key person behind Gemini was Derek Ingram, formerly deputy editor of the London Daily Mail. He was passionate about the Commonwealth - not, as the author points out, as "just a fag-end of the British Empire" but as "a living, growing association" (p185) - and in the late 1960s Gemini was seen primarily as a Commonwealth news features agency.

By the late 1980s, however, it had developed into a world news service, though one of a unique kind. It sought to promote development in the Third World and used indigenous rather than parachute journalists.

The book portrays Gemini as a pioneer in recruiting indigenous journalists, reporting matters of interest to developing countries; in providing new types of journalism, and in the kind of specialist training it provided for journalists. And as well as reporting development and Commonwealth issues, it covered global trends and events in developing countries, as well as scientific, health, rural and environmental issues worldwide.

Ingram has objected to Gemini being categorised as a Third World or alternative news service. He wanted it to be regarded as a "mainstream source of copy", "to be seen by the big boys (Toronto Star, Melbourne Herald, Straits Times etc) as a bona fide news agency, small of course, but nevertheless a competitor to the big agencies". (p63)

Gemini was kept going on a shoestring and went through three major crises. It survived thanks to the commitment of its tiny staff as well as timely grants and, at times, the patience of creditors. In 1988, income from grants outstripped that from the sale of news features. The lack of cash in the London office no doubt ensured that staff did not become insulated from the realities of the Third World.

Given the increasing commercialisation of journalism, it is good to read about a news service driven by the idealism of those whom bottom-line hacks call bleeding hearts. And it is refreshing to read about journalists who do not regard news as an end in itself, who realise that there is a real world beyond the engulfing
horizon of the cliché-world of self-absorbed journalism.

One example of the Gemini spirit is the Village Reporting project: Gemini obtained finance for a scheme under which local reporters were paid for up to three months to live in a village. "More than 15 reporters in almost a dozen countries, ranging from India and Sri Lanka to Fiji and Lesotho, took part. Shyamala Nataraj, an Indian who spent two months in a village in Tamil Nadu, found it 'one of the most rewarding experiences I've ever had'." Apart from enjoying himself tremendously, he learned "much about my country and my people that I would have been totally blind to otherwise".

I know from my own experience the satisfaction of working for a journalistic operation, however shoe-string, that is led by people with extra-commercial commitment, so I will not echo the Buenos Aires Herald by describing Gemini's story as heroic. But it is, I think, relatively speaking, exemplary.
This page lists the books which the Irish Communications Review have received during the year.


Contributors to the ICR Volume 7

The contributors to this volume of the ICR are from varied backgrounds. We have listing them here with a short biographical note on each author with a link to their contributions.

Lance Pettit (pettitl@mailnt.smuc.ac.uk) is Director of the Centre for Irish Studies at St. Mary’s College, London. Article - Ireland's Alternative Press: Writing from the Margins.

Paschal Preston (paschal.preston@dcu.ie) is a Senior Lecturer in the School of Communications and founder/director of the COMTEC research centre at Dublin City University. Article - 'Content' Matters: The Media and Cultural Industries In Ireland’s National Information Strategy.

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