

Critical Book Review

The United States, seen and transformed by a TV channel

HILMES, M. (ed.) *NBC: America's Network*. 1st ed. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007, 364 p.

ISBN 978-0-520-25081-9

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It is very significant that the first letter in the name of the NBC channel (the National Broadcasting Company) should refer to the concept of nation. The idea of grouping together radio stations from one end of the United States to the other to broadcast in a chain (and thereby constitute a network) was one of the key mechanisms in structuring a still young country, wrapped up in local issues and, at that time, with a certain tendency towards isolationism. The NBC, which was a radio channel when it was founded in 1919 and, as from the forties, a television channel, would reflect the country's tribulations during the convulsive decades to come. If we also add the channel's dominance over TV programming and the fact that, until recently, it has always been associated with the most prestigious products, it seems fully justified for Michele Hilmes to have chosen NBC as the institution that allows us to best examine the history of broadcasting in the United States. Michele Hilmes is a lecturer at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and has emerged over the last two decades as one of the essential authors writing about the history of mass communication. Among her publications, particularly of note are the following: *Hollywood and Broadcasting: From Radio to Cable* (1990) and *Only Connect: A Cultural History of US Broadcasting* (2001), as well as the edition of *The Television History Book* (2003) for the British Film Institute.

NBC: America's Network is along the lines of other research that has adopted an institutional point of view to trace the development of the TV industry, but this book's most relevant contribution is that it focuses on a single company. The main risk of this choice – offering a biased view of a complex industrial fabric – is overcome thanks to two elements. Firstly, due to the representative nature of NBC's contribution to the history of broadcasting in the United States. In this way, establishing an albeit partial identification between both is useful in order to verify that the key to success in US television has been to build stable structures that, by themselves, have driven renewal based on creativity. Secondly, the different essays that go to make up this collective and multidisciplinary work aim to investigate highly diverse aspects of the areas of industry, technology, society, culture and scheduling, but in no case is the aim to establish a traditional history. The milestones, significant exceptions and processes of change that have characterised NBC's history form the main interest of this book.

This analysis is carried out via eighteen essays divided into four chronological stages: the birth of broadcasting between 1919 and 1938, the transitional decades from radio to television between 1938 and 1960, the consolidation of the large network system between 1960 and 1985, and the digital age, from 1985 to the present day. Of particular note in the first section is the contribution by Michele Hilmes herself, dealing with the founding of the channel from the perspective of North American capitalism's particular notion of public service. At this time, the broadcasting of commercial radio programmes was not considered to be incompatible with the production of cultural and civic-based pieces that would bring prestige on the channel and the brands advertising on it. The essays that go to make up this first section analyse NBC's relations with the trade unions

and corporations within the context of the Great Depression, the competition with its rival CBS and the controversial public interest programme *America's Town Meeting of the Air*. Approaches of an institutional nature predominate in the second section of the book, with texts dedicated to governmental actions to control the channel's monopolistic tendencies, relations with advertising agencies, the development of new production models with Hollywood and policies to encourage the integration of Afro-American workers. The most revealing contribution is by David Weinstein, who analyses how NBC ignored the genocide of the Jews in Hitler's Germany with the approval of the channel's president, David Sarnoff, a Jewish émigré. Even after the country had entered the Second World War, the desire to protect the channel from political debate led to content denouncing anti-Semitism being very rare.

The third section of *NBC: America's Network* chooses to look at the representative TV genres, with case studies on the documentary within the context of the Cold War, political satire and children's programming, as well as a look at the gestation of the significant science fiction series *Star Trek*. Within the context of the new social trends in the seventies, in her essay Elana Levine describes NBC's failure to handle the inclusion of women in work, homosexuality and teenage sexuality in its fictional programmes in an adult way. The channel's decline in this period became the perfect context for the Amanda Lotz's essay that starts the last section of the book, on the famous programming strategy of the former producer Grant Tinker with whom NBC, thanks to programmes such as *Hill Street Blues*, became the leading exponent of quality television in the eighties. After other chapters on NBC's position as a leading conglomerate in North American media and the new programming strategies given the challenges of new technologies, Michele Hilmes and Shawn VanCour conclude by highlighting the difficulties of writing the history of the mass media and the possibilities offered for outlining the cultural history of the United States. Without doubt, this last aspect serves as the ideology to the book itself in terms of its content, which analyses the evolution of a country from the point of view of two media, radio and television; media which must necessarily be a reflection of this evolution.

An analysis of television in Spain from the private sector

CENTRO INTERNACIONAL DE LAS EMPRESAS DE COMUNICACIÓN (COORD.). *La televisión en España: informe 2007*. (Television in Spain: 2007 report) Barcelona: Ediciones Deusto, 2007. 283 p.

ISBN: 9788423426072

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From four years ago up to 2007, the Union of Associated Commercial Television Companies (UTECA in Spanish) used to publish two annual reports on the private television sector in Spain. One of a legal nature, directed by professor Santiago Muñoz Machado, and another economic, by Luis Jiménez, partner in Deloitte and in charge of the media industry in Spain and Europe.

The novelty of the work we are reviewing lies not only in the fact that it unifies these two studies but also extends and frames them within the coordinates with which we must judge the *status quaestionis* of a medium or of any economic situation, i.e. the television market, demand, advertising, content or positioning strategies.

This is not a market or audience study in vogue, nor merely a monograph defending the interests of the UTECA audiovisual industries, but rather both these objectives are exceeded thanks to the scientific and editorial direction of the International Centre of Communication Companies (CIEC in Spanish), an initiative of IESE Business School and of the Communication Faculty of Navarre.

The perspective proposed by CIEC and the report's coordinators (Juan Pablo Artero, José Ignacio Bel, Alfonso Sánchez-Tabernero and Juan Manuel de Toro) is, as stated by Ignacio Bel in the introduction, "the need to analyse the situation further and, based on this, to establish proposals for the future that allow us to rationalise this activity as far as possible, in which the co-existence of the public and the private is required, based on mutual respect and especially on the subsidiary function of the state in a free market society such as that of our Constitution" (page 7).

Without doubt, this book contains the claims of associated private television companies (the six free national channels: Antena 3 TV, Telecinco, Cuatro, Veo TV, Net TV and laSex-

ta) and defends the elimination of barriers to advertising competition in the implementation of TDT and within the legal framework. All without losing sight of private television's main rival in terms of audience and particularly advertising: public television. Not only RTVE's two public channels but also the public channels of the autonomous regions, which in 2006 totalled 38% of the audience share.

The main aim of this book is to provide a study of the economics and content of open and free private television. It also provides a legal analysis of the regulation of private television in Spain in 2007, and particularly focuses on the evolution of legislation and the functioning of bills, as well as the implementation of legislation affecting this sector, and is completed with a series of articles and reports on positioning strategies, audience fragmentation and new types of television business.

The first two chapters analyse the current types of television channels, of note being the figures for the main TV landmarks in Spain, as well as a study of digital television platforms: satellite, cable, TDT, ADSL and mobile TDT. The television offered by telecom operators (Jazztel TV, Imagenio and Orange) adds a new business model that "telecos" are fighting to extend within the sphere of mobility, i.e. the idea of an operator that also distributes content.

Opposing this is the radio broadcasting model, which is the "media" model in which the media rather than operators prevail, and is the option chosen by the Impulse plan to promote the implementation of TDT, with the approval of the television companies.

Television consumption is also studied in depth with data cross-referenced from different sources (TN Sofres, Carat, INE) which the authors used to obtain the profile of age groups and timebands for television. The main observations are: the consumption of generalist TV accounts for almost 50% of the whole audience, two points more than in 1997. TVE is the television company that has lost the most ground, together with La 2, benefitting new operators (laSexta, Cuatro and others). Another clear idea that seems to denote a trend: the only target age group that is falling and leaving television is young people; children from 4 to 12 by 12% and those aged from 13 to 24 by 9%.

As a complement, in this book there are also two chapters by renowned authors in the area of information law (such as Leopoldo Abad), audiovisual ethics (such as Mónica

Codina), and experts in the news business. Of all these, I should like to highlight that of lecturers Mercedes Medina and Mónica Herrero, who introduce the strategic challenges for leadership in the audiovisual industry. For them “the initiative for content seems to continue to lie with the channels, which have found in mobiles and the internet another medium in which to disseminate their programmes while there is no other content provider to take over this leadership. There are possibilities to exploit the same content from the conventional programming grid on other media. This successful content coincides with content that triumphs on commercial channels. However, the internet, mobiles or other media allow value added content to be developed that is received only on these media and not on television” (page 265).

This context of the immediate future of television (with a place for IPTV, DVR and web TV) is also that used by the European Commission in the directive that was finally passed on 29 November 2007, after this report was published. That day in Strasbourg, the new directive was passed that has replaced the one from 1997. Its classic name of Television without Frontiers has become the Audiovisual Media Services Directive. ‘Audiovisual’ and not ‘Television’, so that non-linear services, i.e. those that don’t “broadcast” or “push” content to viewers, have now become a part of the audiovisual panorama.

As indicated at the beginning by the coordinators, this book does not take the place of other, long-standing and high quality industry reports produced in Spain but certainly, from my point of view, there is no other as complete from the point of view of private television, especially when there are only two years to go before the digital switchover.

Communications theories in Spain

GARCÍA JIMÉNEZ, L. *Las teorías de la comunicación en España: un mapa sobre el territorio de nuestra investigación (1980-2006)*. (Communication theories in Spain: a map of the territory of our research). Madrid: Editorial Tecnos, 2007. 311 p.

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By Miquel Rodrigo Alsina, professor of Communication Theory at the Pompeu Fabra University.

A little over a quarter of a century ago, communication studies achieved university rank in Spain, specifically in the 1971-1972 academic year. Since then, and especially as from the nineties, doctoral theses and specialist publications have proliferated spectacularly, especially in university centres. That's why, today, we can state that there is enough critical mass for communication research to start to demand to be included within social sciences and humanities. When we talk of critical mass, perhaps it would be clearer to employ a metaphor other than the usual one, different from that of physics, as it is not a question of achieving a nuclear chain reaction. Critical mass might be the demonstrations held by cyclists in order to claim a greater presence of bicycles in towns and cities (social sciences and humanities). In view of the dominance on the road of motor vehicles (sociology, history, economics, etc.), cyclists band together to take over the streets. This sense of critical mass was coined in the nineties by the North American George Bliss, to name a phenomenon he had observed in China. There, at crossroads without any traffic lights, cyclists gradually gather until there are enough of them to cross without risk. In this respect, the volume of research per se is significant, and perhaps the time has come for communication researchers to unite and act in order to take over the streets from social sciences and humanities.

So, beyond the mistrust that can still be seen today in other social sciences, communication sciences in Spain have reached adulthood. However, to acquire public visibility, these lists of major events need some milestones. The work of Dr. Leonarda García Jiménez *Las teorías de la comunicación en España: un mapa sobre el territorio de nuestra investigación (1980-2006)* undoubtedly fulfils this function in the history of Spanish research, because it holds

up a mirror to us and makes us aware of who we are and what we are like. This detailed and in-depth research is an undeniable opportunity.

Any reader who wishes to know the status of communication research in Spain can find their answer in this book. One of its key characteristics, as you will observe, is the thoroughness of the author's work. So the first part of the book, entitled "Epistemological and contextual keys to communication theories" presents to the reader, exhaustively, all the steps necessary to define the discipline. In the first chapter, which corresponds to this part, the object of study of communication research is defined, already is a considerable ontological challenge in itself. In the second chapter, the author provides her epistemological choice, in favour of communicology. Although this concept is not defended in the book (which, we must say in passing, has not had the success it deserves), the disciplinary order of communication theories is proposed. To end this first part, the third chapter contextualises communication within the characteristics of today's society. I would like to focus briefly on this chapter, because I believe it is of singular importance. The contextualisation of the social reality in which research is framed is fundamental, which basically gives meaning to communication studies. The importance of communication and information has never been as widely accepted as it is today. As highlighted in this chapter, the centrality of media communication in our society is unquestionable. There is great social consensus that we live in a society of communication and information. But the importance of this reality does not have, as its logical correlation, the prioritisation in research programmes to develop and innovate this object of study. This contradiction is one of the difficulties that communication research must face.

In the second part of this book, the question of "Communication theories in Spain: who we are, where we come from and where we are going" is tackled. The title cannot be more explicit. In this part, first I would like to highlight the large amount of information the author has processed, ordered and systemised. Secondly, we must recognise that this classification provides us with a highly complete map of Spanish research. This proposed classification is minutely detailed in the fourth chapter. Chapter five explains the results of the aforementioned classification: an X-ray of Spanish research, the most exact that has been carried out

to date. So we discover not only the main trends but also the most notorious weaknesses, such as the little international presence of Spanish research. The last chapter in this second part has the added value of asking the authors of Spanish research about their perception of the state of affairs for their own activity. So, via the Delphi method, a selection of researchers are consulted concerning the situation of Spanish research. This self-recognition is fundamental in order for the discipline to achieve scientific recognition. There seems to be agreement that communication studies have become institutionalised and that this has consolidated the field of research. The existence of communication faculties, a large number of research studies, plus publication of work on the subject, etc. leads us to think that enough critical mass has been produced to demand greater recognition among social sciences and humanities. Although we must accept that, for this reason, we must continue working and at an even better standard, and particularly publish in those media with greater international impact. Undoubtedly it is not a question of propitiating a confrontation between disciplines, but rather of claiming a space next to other disciplines of social sciences, such as political science, sociology, etc. and human sciences (history, anthropology, etc.).

To do so, two of the endogenous problems of the discipline in Spain must be overcome: the lack of a well-defined identity and little reflection on the current state of affairs. The first task (which, as I have pointed, is also tackled by this book) makes consensus necessary of the epistemic community of communication sciences, while the second already has an inevitable milestone in the work by Dr. Leonarda García Jiménez. So, the first step has already been taken: it's a question of continuing to encourage high quality research and to continue critically analysing such production. Another of the milestones that must be taken into account is the setting up of the Spanish Association of Communication Researchers at a recent congress at the start of 2008. So the epistemic community is starting to organise itself.

It is very probable that, if communication sciences manage to overcome their own internal deficiencies (definition of identity, more exchange, encouraging collective efforts, etc.) they will be able to project the results obtained. In other words, by overcoming their own limitations, they will be recognised by other disciplines. There is no doubt that this

last step must be preceded by dialogue with the rest of the social sciences, which is a new challenge that communication sciences must conquer. One last note concerning this aspect: the recognition of communication as a science is not for the sake of purely vain self-admiration but the conviction underlying this initiative, namely that the advancement of scientific knowledge is accumulative and that this advancement comes about by confronting old and new contributions. And the history of science has shown us that these initiatives to accumulate, to confront, to exchange, principally occur via shared platforms, via a common space that, in our case, is personified in communication theories. That is why we need to know where we are starting from and what we are like, and hence the importance of this book.

A global focus for the history, present and future of the advertising industry

TUNGATE, M. *Adland: A Global History Of Advertising*. London, Philadelphia: Kogan Page, 2007, 278 p. ISBN: 978-0749448370

By Francisco J. Pérez Latre, lecturer at the Faculty of Communication of University of Navarra

With *Adland: A Global History of Advertising*, Mark Tungate has written a necessary book that follows the line of two books that are now a classic but a little old: *The Mirror Makers* by Stephen Fox (1984) and *Madison Avenue USA* by Mayer (1958). Fox and Mayer wrote the history of the advertising profession and its advances up to the sixties. But the history needed to be updated and also extended. Tungate is the author of important books such as *Fashion Brands: Branding Style from Armani to Zara* (2005) and *Media Monoliths: How Great Media Brands Thrive and Survive* (2004). This time, he converses with the key names of advertising business and identifies, with excellent prose, the stages, patterns and processes of the industry.

As the author explains, the advertising profession has become global. New York and London continue to be emblematic cities but we should also note the advances made by places such as Paris and Milan, or emerging creative centres such as Brazil. This is an important value in the work by Tungate: given the predominantly Anglo-Saxon nature of the best books in this field, *Adland* explores how the profession has developed in a truly international way, as corresponds the profile of a Brit living in Paris.

The book takes us from New York and London, capitals *par excellence* of the profession, not only to Paris, Milan and Brazil but also to Argentina, Japan, China, South Africa and Spain, among others. Pages 219 and 220 explain, for example, that the Argentinians value advertising very highly. In that country, fans sing advertising slogans in their football stadiums and TV sitcoms include words from the most popular ads of the time. With observations of this nature, Tungate gradually introduces the reader to the impact of advertising on different cultures.

It couldn't have been published at a better time. The fragmentation of advertising and the digital paradigm, with the changes caused in TV audiences, threatens the con-

ventions of advertising business and raises numerous questions among academics and professionals. Moreover, we are living within a general context of economic crisis that in 2008 and particularly in 2009 will become, according to the experts, an advertising crisis. In such a setting, it is valuable to look at the past and to analyse the distinctive features of a business that has undergone other crises and has gradually established itself until becoming an industry that, as told by Tungate, has a world turnover of around 400,000 million dollars.

The book embarks upon its subject by presenting the slightly excessive party atmosphere of a worldwide agency at the Cannes advertising festival, which allows us to ask a classic question: is advertising show business? From here, it goes on to explain the problems of effectiveness in advertising and mentions, quite rightly, the book by Briggs and Stuart (*What Sticks*), which estimates the percentage of advertising spend that is completely wasted at 37%. Apart from the tendency towards frivolity, arbitrariness and squandering that may exist in the business, Tungate realises that the best professionals have always kept an eye on effectiveness, following a tradition that perhaps has its most valuable landmarks in the great advertising figures of Claude Hopkins and, some decades later, David Ogilvy and Rosser Reeves, with their 'unique selling proposition'. In this way, the reader is introduced to the debate (classic in advertising) between hard and soft sell, between effectiveness and intuition, sales and brand image as predominant considerations.

Although the book's main value is perhaps the interviews with professionals as outstanding as Jean-Marie Dru, Maurice Lévy, Phil Dusenberry, John Hegarty and Martin Sorrell, Tungate explores subjects that will interest researchers of the profession, such as the creative climate of Manhattan in the fifties or London in the eighties, with the creative explosion of Saatchi and Saatchi; the relevant contribution of advertising to popular culture, the wave of acquisitions and mergers of agencies that revolutionised the industry as from the eighties, and the influence of the internet crisis of 2000 on advertising business. Tungate also focuses on the apogee of media buying firms, and dedicates a chapter to the advertising agency of the future.

Tungate presents the great creative names and attempts to introduce the reader to a business and an art based on

talent, the source of creativity, impact and also of many headaches. Tungate perfectly understands the creative personality that means the business has been marked by what is called “creative revolutionaries” such as Bill Bernbach (probably the most influential of all) and George Lois.

The author also draws a valuable map of the five large global companies in the industry and their owners as from page 164. His description of Omnicom, WPP, Interpublic, Publicis and Havas is particularly useful in explaining the recent development of firms that we define as “mega advertising groups”. Dentsu and Hakuhodo, the two large Japanese agencies, are also the object of an analysis that provides insight into the advertising environment of Japan, the second largest advertising market in the world.

This is a book of great interest for academics and professionals from the industry, with space even for the battle for creative supremacy between Barcelona and Madrid (pages 225 onwards). It has a journalistic focus in the noblest sense of the term and the author displays a most praiseworthy precision. The book boasts an agile, flowing style and that is why researchers will find, among these lines, clues to be able to investigate various issues. *Adland* will be a vital starting point for analysing the evolution and future of the advertising industry.

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