

## Editorial

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Political economists of communication inhabit a world of unfolding technological innovations, global interconnectedness, and unexpected futures. It is thus difficult to sustain the relevance of traditional normative standpoints centered around democracy and the public sphere.

This is Robert Hassan's diagnosis of the contemporary internet. In our first article, he observes that inter-capitalist competition across electronic networks fuels and naturalizes temporal acceleration. In economic, political, social and cultural realms it seems that 'faster is always better'. Against this mantra, Hassan argues that the developmental trajectory of the internet must be bought under social democratic control. This will require, first, an understanding of temporality as a lived experience and as a technologically produced rhythm and, second, an appreciation of temporal sovereignty as a resource for individual and social agency. Under these principles, Hassan advocates a bi-cameral, two channel internet which separates the speed of commercial transactions from the slower temporal rhythms of everyday life and civil society.

Tarek Cherkaoui's article reveals how geopolitical interconnectedness can have unexpected repercussions for transnational media institutions. In this case, the present predicament of Qatar's Al Jazeera Arabic television network would not have been anticipated by its founders. In the early years, the network's professional expertise, journalistic balance and general adherence to Pan-Arabic public sphere principles were exemplary. The Qatari government's eschewal of editorial interference enhanced its geopolitical strategy of projecting soft power in contradistinction to Saudi Arabia. Following the 2011 Arab Spring, however, circumstances changed radically. The Qatari leadership changed its foreign policy outlook from that of an independent soft power mediator to that of a tactical hard power player. In a clear deviation from the principle of journalistic balance, Al Jazeera ignored some Arab Spring activists (as in Bahrain and Oman) while taking the side of others (in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, and Syria). In the latter cases, Al Jazeera's line favoured the Muslim Brotherhood and its Pan-Islamist perspective, at the expense of other opposition currents. This has antagonized Saudi Arabia and affected the Qatari leaderships' decision making on media policy. At the time of writing they are launching a new, London based, Arab language network as a counterweight to Al Jazeera.

In Central Europe after the fall of communism, the expectation was that Western capital, expertise and journalistic professionalism would foster democratic media institutions. Public sphere principles would supplant totalitarian rule. However, as Angelika Wyka-Podkowska points out in her consideration of Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic, most state institutions were privatized and major news media organizations were purchased by outside corporations. The emergent media landscape became pervaded by relentless advertising, infotainment and tabloid style reportage. Journalists in general lacked professional autonomy and collective solidarity. Since the 2008

financial crisis, foreign media capital has contracted and media organizations have fallen into the hands of local business interests with no commitment to journalistic culture or public sphere principles.

The difficulty of instilling public sphere principles into regulatory frameworks is the primary theme of our commentary section. From Australia, Tim Dwyer outlines the convergent interests of News Corporation and the Abbott government in relation to press regulation. They, and their supporters, have successfully mobilized a press freedom discourse to ward off the introduction of more rigorous regulatory standards for the print media. This discourse is designed to deflect attention from the agenda setting power of media corporates by depicting proponents of regulation as agents of state tyranny. The vehemence of this latter claim, Dwyer argues, indirectly reveals the commercial plight of Australia's mass media enterprises. In a mediascape dominated by broadband internet and the corporate power of Google, Facebook, Apple, Amazon and eBay, Australia's traditional media owners are precariously placed.

From Argentina, Martin Becerra and Guillermo Mastrini evaluate recent legal regulation of the audiovisual sector within a media system characterized by concentrations of ownership, technological convergence and geographical centralization of content production. The dominant player, Grupo Clarin has holdings in print, television, radio, news agencies, film production and the internet sector. Their major competition comes from major telecom companies with broadband internet investments. In this context, Becerra and Mastrini detail the introduction of, and opposition to, the 2009 Audiovisual Communications Services Law. This initiative set limits on media ownership concentration and market dominance, opened up spectrum allocation and explicitly recognized the importance of not-for-profit independent broadcasters (especially those from indigenous communities). Implementation of these reforms has been challenged, and weakened by Grupo Clarin and its telecommunication rivals. The authors conclude that, outside laws and regulations, the economic and social conditionings that configure the structuring of media systems should not be understated.

Peter Thompson's commentary forensically examines the European Broadcasting Union's recent Vision 2020 report on the future of public service media. The document outlines the economic, political, social, and technological challenges facing such institutions, and identifies certain key imperatives. These include understanding of the audience, becoming a trusted information source, relevance to youth, and a transformed culture and leadership style. From a critical political-economy perspective, Thompson broadly concurs with such imperatives, but criticizes their lack of context. Macro-economic settings, the interplay among dominant institutions, and government amenability to neo-liberal ideology will ultimately determine the efficacy of public service media.