BEYOND GOVERNANCE: THE TRIUMPH OF POPULISM AND PAROCHIALISM IN THE 21ST CENTURY

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Summative Preamble

I sense that there is out there — in the common rooms of the academy, the better gentlemen's clubs of London, Amsterdam, York, and Tokyo, the smoke-filled bars still visited by the remnants of the left — a feeling, a charming nostalgia that a formula can be found that will protect, support, preserve the institution of public service broadcasting into the 21st century. My own reluctant conclusion is that the process will be more akin to the preservation of primeval bugs in amber than the continuance of any vibrant cultural species.

Public service broadcasting was very much an idea constructed within one moment in time, the early part of the 20th century; constructed on patrician and governmental principles from another, the 19th century. As we approach the 21st century, it becomes clear that the sets of principles through which the idea of public service broadcasting were articulated have a precarious social, political, economic and cultural location.

One can in fact begin to suggest what now constitutes basic truisms about the future of audio-visual culture:

- there will be more — much more — of it;
- it will be produced in response to the most basic desires and wishes, but not needs, of the audience, rather than those of traditional elites;
- some of that television will be domestically produced, but much of it will originate elsewhere;
- the notion of paying for television from the public treasury will become increasingly rare, replaced by commercial funding and direct payment;

- audiences will continue to fragment with, as a consequence, an accelerated deconstruction of concepts of a public citizenry;
- the ability of governments to regulate the content of audio-visual culture will be diminished, partly because the implicit patricianism has come to be seen as passé and partly as an act of self-withdrawal in the interest of encouraging new communication technologies;
- the ability of broadcasters to reach large audiences with informative and educational material, as well as entertainment, will be hugely diminished.
- while it is overwhelmingly clear that a market model now dominates, the language which is associated with that — for example the term 'choice' as in 'increased choice' — fundamentally misconstrues the character of culture constructed by the market. If we take the United States as the location of the most profound articulation of the market model, it is totally clear that the operation of the market tends to produce a culture that is crass, trivial, shallow, exploitative, and fundamentally distorting of the long established human desire to construct cultural, social and political practices which are rational, informed and enriching of the human experience. One must therefore conclude, at the prescriptive level, that if the US is the model for a market system for producing culture then a health-warning should be placed against that model.
- at the analytical level, however, one must conclude and recognise that the market model is triumphant, is the future.
- that triumph — a term that I use in the same way in which one might have said that the Wehrmacht, the German army, was triumphant in 1940 in Europe, i.e. something which I recognise, but do not applaud — translates into a set of consequences which are widespread and profound. Translated specifically into societal terms it is likely that the greater use of the market principle will inevitably have deleterious i.e. negative impacts on the prevailing character of culture traditional and modern. The dilemma which traditional and developing societies will face is that the felt need to continue to be modern and economically successful will force the rejection of those values and sentiments which are felt in the heart. The social, psychological and emotional consequences will be substantial and disturbing. In short, in importing the US economic model they will also import the social neuroses which lurk in that deeply troubled society. That I think is sad.

Introduction

The paper will explore the ways in which the key fact of life for those concerned with broadcasting policy in the 21st century will lie in the increasing inability to make such policy. The most obvious characteristic of broadcasting in the 20th century was the willingness, even desire, of governments to regulate it. The manner in which this was done, the forms of regulation and funding of broadcasting, varied from place to place, but there was a general consensus that actively shaping the output of broadcasting in pursuit of publicly defined goals was a "good thing" More cynically, it was often argued that such regulation was a "necessary" thing in that it was a particularly effective instrument of social and political control.

The latter part of the century saw a series of developments, ideological, technological and structural, which taken together undermine the very ability of govern-

ments to have the same hands-on influence over the direction of broadcasting. The paper will look at those developments and suggest the ways in which they come together to construct for the next century a very different culture of broadcasting than that of the 20th. In particular, the paper will consider the way in which there is a symmetry and synergy between a market system that views the audience as consumers, and technologies which are "narrow" in their casting. The paper will also argue that there is in many countries, particularly noticeable in Asia, a deep contradiction between the desire to employ new technologies of communication as part of a broad based effort at modernisation and a residual desire to maintain certain traditional values and moral systems. In here will be a key issue for the next century, with the likelihood that the modernising tendency will marginalise the traditionalist tendency.

The most immediate fact of life for the public sector, and a major source of its compromised condition, is the sheer growth of the commercial communication industrial sector. By the beginning of this decade there were 354 national broadcasting organisations in the leading [i.e., economically] developed 100 countries in the world. The number of national **channels** increased by 46% between 1987 and 1991, from 354 to 521. In addition, there were at least 650 local and regional channels— and these figures did not include the U.S. Of all these organisations, 47% still have a license fee; 32% have some direct government financing; 27% rely wholly on advertising. In addition, 125 new television services started around the world — outside North America — in the decade after 1981, and were still in operation in 1991. These new services offered 145 new channels. Of the 125, 29 operate 24 hours a day; 62 are advertising-supported; 39 are wholly subscription-based — and 33 are aimed at international markets.[1] Seventy-five per cent of these new services rely on imports to fill at least half of their screen time. By 1995 there were something like 2,000 satellite delivered TV channels available in Asia. In Europe non-industrial television services, in 1995, reached 35%, with expectations of 51% penetration by 2005. Last year 33 new satellite delivered channels were launched in Europe, bringing the total to 186, delivered by 28 satellites. Pay-TV revenues in Europe in 1995 were $3.8 billion, with projections of $9.3 billion in 2000 and $14.8 billion in 2005. In 1995, $18.9 billion was spent on TV advertising, with almost $30 billion predicted for 2005. Against this one must place the revenue realities of European public broadcasters, and in which public funding is stagnant in or in decline, and had revenues from advertising fall from 44% to 28% between 1990 and 1994.[2]

Perhaps, however, the most powerful figures on the growth of the commercial communication industrial sector come from the United States. In 1995 cable industries revenues were $22 billion; video purchase and rental $168 billion; TV advertising $27 billion; movie tickets $5 billion. The most important statistics are those for the telephone industry, whose total gross revenues in 1994 were in the region of $180 billion, considerably larger than the economies of most countries.

The recent telecommunications law in the United States, passed by Congress and signed into law by President Clinton on February 8, 1996, by deregulating the communication industries even further, unlocks a huge amount of capital. It appears inevitable that not only will the communication sector in the United States be considerably re-configured, that sector will have, because it has to have, even more aggressive global ambitions.

The Decline of Tradition

Traditionally, the public regulation of broadcasting rested on a central logic: a paternalistic or patrician relationship with the audience. I do not mean paternalistic in a Reithian sense, in which the ambition of the cultural elite is to elevate the "masses" to a higher level of attainment, but rather in the sense that the very nature of "old" communication technologies effectively disenfranchised the audience, preventing them from having a significant say in what would be produced for them. In no way do I want to suggest that this was a necessarily patronising relationship, though there were and are moments that are a kind of priestly offering of the host to the congregation.

The emerging logic of communication fundamentally deconstructs this traditional way of doing things. In the first instance the logic is about consumers in the marketplace, not citizens in the nation. The development which is key, technologically and conceptually, is that of **interactivity**. The ability of the audience member to interact with the TV set and the multiplicity of offerings which are made available is not just some new gizmo, but a profound shift in how one thinks about the relationship between the communicator and the audience.

The brute truth is that in an interactive communications system, the construction of which necessarily presupposes a significant increase in the amount of potential communications that are available, it is difficult, probably impossible, to have a patrician relationship with the audience. The relationship becomes one of providing the market with whatever the consumer might decide he or she needs. From the standpoint of democratic rhetoric there is much which is compelling within this argument; who, after all, wants to be seen to be paternalistic in an egalitarian age. The reality, of course, is that there is a hidden paternalism in market dominated systems as commercial providers offer what **they** interpret as the things that the public wants/needs. The result is, on the whole, a populism without intelligence.

The development of communication technology is, however, part of an inevitable strategy by all major industrial societies to alter radically the means by which they produce wealth. There is no way in the medium to long term that any economy of any size or with any ambition, will be able to avoid the further development of communications technologies. The pursuit of the information society, based on an architecture of broad band cable, non-wired technology, satellite and computers, thus becomes not just a likely but an inevitable part of economic strategy and at the heart of that will lie interactive communications, since **it is inevitable that it will be seen as being in the national, regional and local economic interests that such developments should continue to be encouraged.**

The Techno-Ideology of Change

Any developed understanding of the future of television in the 21st century has to begin with a sense of the political, social, cultural, technical and economic geography of the later 20th and early 21st centuries. How did we come to be where we are? In answering that question we will begin to have a much better sense of where we might be going since events in the latter part of the 20th century are highly determinative of the intellectual and institutional character of communications in the 21st.

The post-war "settlement," to use Hall and Jacques[3] phrase, of western industrial society was based on a conception of the world being a place of full employment, stable currencies, perpetual growth, coherent nation states, a fearful global stability

based on the nuclear terror of the Cold war and a commitment to the provision of welfare services to working populations. It was an order which from within the confines of the nation necessarily presupposed a significant sense of the collective, the shared, the group. Labour unions had been an important part of the construction of that collectivist ethic by their persistent argument that everyone should share in the fruits of a surging capitalism. One-nation, benignly paternalistic conservative parties easily shared the same legislative chambers with mildly reformist social democratic parties. Long before the end of history was declared the end of ideology was declaimed. And nestling easily within this post-world war order were the mixed systems of communication: the public broadcasting institutions, the obvious and most efficient articulators of the national order paid for out of a public purse which could afford the indulgence; the commercial broadcasters plying their advertising supported goods; the world of print and the largely publicly controlled telephone companies.

The 1970's were to see erupting to the surface tensions and immanence within the settlement which would inevitably challenge its contours, shifting the landscape of the time. Stagflation, oil crises, under-investment, competition from the third world, a working class which enjoyed its new-found pleasures and wanted, if anything, more of the same, all these and more were forces which shook the structure of post-war life and cracked a facade which had seemed so solid. The settlement no longer was able to work in its own terms and capital had to seek new ways to guarantee its continued well being, even if that meant dismantling the key institutions of the post-war settlement.

Something else had, however, been taking place that flowed from earlier humiliations of the political right. This was the construction of an ideological order which would provide the language to justify the process of deconstruction of the post-war order. There is always a danger in attempting an overly precise pinpointing of moments of historical change, particularly at the level of the mental reconstruction of a given order. However, ideas do not just happen, nor are they deposited on earth by some celestial wind like so much galactic dust. Ideas, beliefs, intellect, ideology, all are made and sometimes the process of manufacture is opaque, sometimes remarkably clear. The ideas which came to replace the post-war settlement are one such example of the latter. Two moments stand out: 1964 and the humiliation of Barry Goldwater in the Presidential election won by LBJ; 1974 and the humiliation and downfall of the British Conservative Party and the Prime Minister Edward Heath. Both events were followed by the cold determination of a number of well-placed and well financed "rightists" to reverse what they took to be these historic wrongs and errors. Sidney Blumenthal's ***The Rise of the Counterestablishment*** brilliantly portrays the intellectual creation of what became known as Reaganism. And any examination of the rise of Thatcherism would need to disinter the flow of influence from the likes of Airey Neeve, Keith Joseph and Alfred Sherman? From both camps flowed a key argument, drawing succour from the economics of Friedman and his Chicago Valkyries that the crisis of economy and society which bedevilled the 70's lay not in the structural contradictions of capital but from the collectivist and statist orthodoxy of a post-war settlement which crowded and smothered the inherent potential of "the individual" and "the market."

The challenge posed to the very idea of public culture, or in its minimalist form the public interest, became widespread and strident, emanating from the proposition that social good flows not so much from collective activity organised from the top down,

but from myriad individual decisions organised from the bottom up. There were two opposed models of social and political order involving different conceptions of democratic rights and freedoms, different ideas of the relationship between culture and economics. Applied to broadcasting, one model suggested that to sustain the general well being of society the body politic had not just a right but a duty to make strategic interventions and decisions through nominated institutions. Public broadcasting had historically been one such institution. Those interventions were to guarantee a range, depth, quality and independence of program output which other arrangements would simply not support.

Here was also an institution which could be adopted, for example by left intellectuals of various hues, as a bulwark against the immanent inadequacies and inanities of Kapital. One had only to point the finger at the condition of American television, or so it seemed, to render mute any counterargument to the virtues of public service broadcasting.

This was, to say the least, a curious alliance. An institution founded in the image and likeness of a patrician class reared on a sentiment of obligation to those less fortunate than oneself, and intellectuals to whom class was anathema. The profound irony then was that one could only serve the public broadcasting sector by encouraging the caring, bourgeois democratic element within capitalism. What was to become clear as the 1980's unfolded was that there is no contest as between the need to reorganise radically a tottering economic order and a lingering noblesse oblige.

Against the idea of public service broadcasting was the theory which had come to underpin the growth of the multi-channel environment, that such "public" interventions and regulated culture are neither necessary nor proper. In this model what matters is consumer sovereignty, the marriage of the individual as economic actor **and** the possessor of basic democratic rights. From the late 1970s the new technologies provided the rationale, the argument that while there once may have been a case for regulating the spectrum as a scarce national resource in the public interest, developments in the technical capacity to communicate obviated that position.

No institution of the old settlement could remain untouched. There could be no geological remnants on this new terrain, and if the winds of change didn't reduce them to rubble then political dynamite would do the job, destroying careers, changing the nature of organisations as an act of political will, privileging the commercial, supporting accommodatory neo-fascist and authoritarian regimes, smashing organised labour, spawning a new breed of econo-bureaucrats through a kind of colossal social in vitro program. Once these intellectual constructs had taken hold, sanctified by the election of numerous right-wing governments, then on the political dais could be placed the individual-as-consumer and the needs and interests of "the corporation." And buried deep beneath the rubble of the old order were such concepts as public good, public interest, community, public culture, citizenship, governance and, increasingly, the nation-state. The decay of the latter in particular suggested the real extent of the triumph of the corporatist ethic. There remained few if any national markets that could satisfy the needs of companies. The terms "global markets" and "globalisation" were chanted with incessant fervour and ever greater volume, and nothing was to be more globalised than communications. Indeed, the very nature of evolving communication technologies — with their sheer capacity to allow the individual to construct his or her own communications — placed them in powerful lockstep with the new and domi-

nant discourse of the late 20th century, that of the culture of the market, an enclosing system of values, assumptions, and social practices from which it is difficult, even impossible, to escape.

These processes have connected with other significant economic, political and structural developments, which at the very least will be seen to undermine the integrity of regulated public culture. In particular, one might characterise these as: the shift to the global, the decline of the public sphere and the fragmentation of social order. If we look at daily life around the globe there are all kinds of currents, contradictions, disillusions, reactions, disintegrations. Despite the often heard notion of the homogenising impacts of globalism, it remains perfectly clear that there is no singularity in the social and intellectual, as opposed to the economic, practices of the planet. Indeed, there are massive collisions and differences, though it remains unclear as to whether these represent a pattern of social order which is likely to persist or the birth pangs of a new, pluralistic order, more able in the long run to satisfy human aspirations. Whichever of these scenarios defines the next century the consequences are potentially profound, a profundity amplified by the character of communication technologies which will certainly be part of that future. For any one concerned with the direction of society and culture there is a fearful symmetry between the character of those technologies and the character of the emerging age. Difference and diversity may be socially formed, but they are helped along the way by new systems of communication, developed in the past two decades which are profoundly individualistic and definitely not collective, public, shared, or coherent.

The importance of this can easily be seen if one considers that in almost every country with a public sector infrastructure of broadcasting a central and common part of the lexicon of justification for the public sphere is the power of the shared moment, when the broadcasting organisation becomes the national theatre, schoolroom, debating chamber, chapel, spectacle. It is in those moments, the canon holds, that broadcasting transforms us as a social species into a community infused with, and animated by, shared values and morality.

If we live in an age in which coherent and stable social relationships are in doubt, we also live in one in which the idea of coherent, stable, objectively valid, belief systems are equally questioned and uncertain. The public regulation of broadcasting really requires the persistence of both, since in its inner-most beliefs it assumed that there were coherent populations to which it could speak, and recognisable hierarchies of value within which that speech could be formed. Incoherence and a relativity of values thus become fundamentally destabilising for the public broadcaster, and yet both are immanent within the crudely, but forcefully defined democratic cultural practice known as the market.

Much of this is known to the point of cliché. What seems to be less clear is the way in which a real dilemma, even profound contradiction, is now embedded in the public policy regimes of the world. On the one hand, there is residual support for a public sector in broadcasting. On the other, there is eager support for nurturing new systems of communication whose very nature calls into question the stability of the public system. There is, however, nowhere, no society large or small, that is not harbouring, to greater or lesser extent, the ambitions of post-industrialism, and thus digital communications technologies and thus of more television accessed in different ways.

There is also something else about this new television which is profoundly signifi-

cant. Several phases of the history and future of television can be defined and projected: (1) 1930-1975: limited terrestrial TV; (2) 1975-2000: multi-channel TV; (3) 2000-2020: digital, HDTV, interactive TV; (4) 2020-2050: full interactivity; (5) 2050 +: video holography and virtual reality. As we track across these phases, two tendencies can be seen: the de-institutionalisation of the media; the shift to communications as essentially about easy pleasure and sensory experience. There are clear implications here for the premises which undergird the use of traditional notions of television, particularly in its public forms. I am referring here not just to the massive amplification of the amount of simple, even trivial, pleasure which characterises commercialised television, nor even the manifestly non-linear expressive forms of MTV culture. I am also referring to the fundamentally irrational process of grazing across multiple channels, viewing several channels at once, the amplified visuality of HDTV (reason doesn't really need 1125 lines) and the emergence of interactive systems, most notably virtual reality systems. This is not, I believe, to overprivilege technology. What I am suggesting is that technologies clearly have a powerful capacity to bring to the surface tendencies, dispositions, desires that have lain dormant and unrealised. Neither is it to fail to recognise that there are all kinds of social forces which shift and cajole forms of thought and behaviour. A retribalisation, for example, of the modern world is clearly something with more than mere rhetorical or metaphorical force. People, not all but many, find comfort in associations founded in gender, ethnicity, generation, music, lifestyle, sexual practice, memory, significations of difference, the multifaceted drawing of lines between self and the other. Whether this constitutes a retribalisation is a moot point, but whatever it is, whatever the social tectonics that have fashioned it the result seems to constitute not something which is benign, munificent, rather something which is troubled, unstable, alienated, and definitely not communal or caring.

Broadband Culture

A conclusion then can be drawn about the new communications. Their very nature constitutes a fundamental taking apart of that sense of the collective which is a precondition for the continuity of any public definition and determination of communicated culture. However, we delude ourselves if we do not acknowledge that such a process could not happen if the individuals who constitute "the public" were not complicit. Power and institutional dynamics come into play in shaping culture, but two hands must work at shaping the clay, and the other is provided by what Adorno called "the congealed results of public preference." One further tendency, then, which needs to be considered and which inevitably affects the performance of visual communication is captured by a phrase which gained, appropriately, currency in the United States in the early 1990's, "dumbing down." It is a concept which is perhaps better "felt" than articulated, a sense of the corrosive influence of the main currents of popular culture: linguistic poverty and therefore a mental and moral poverty, daytime soaps, tabloid television and the trivialisation of public discourse, an evangelism of the ephemeral, the celebration of the insignificant and the marginalisation of the important, cults of empty celebrity.

A broad band culture can and will do nothing but encourage these tendencies. The idealistic rhetoric of broad band culture is that it is liberatory, that it constitutes the architecture for a new Jeffersonian plebiscitary democracy; that it offers, through the ability to communicate in "cyberspace," new harmonies, new but nevertheless authentic

virtual communities and relationships formed along paths of new ways of speaking to each other; access to unbounded sources of information; new forms of political praxis; unlimited sources of entertainment. The relationship between the rhetoric and reality, however, remains problematic, and certainly begs a set of questions about concepts of public interest, public good and public culture which have not yet been properly addressed. In fact it is not clear given the character of the various developments, whether one can even have a public policy on communications in which society through its nominated institutions has some capacity to guide its own evolution, and in which the new "television," born out of economic strategy, is nevertheless cocooned within a civic ethic, touched with a sense of the whole as well as the parts, possessing a sense of responsibility to a public as well as a private interest. **That** is the fundamental crisis of public communication and public culture.

If there is any plausibility at all to these arguments then it suggests that within the next two decades the landscape of communications, and thus society, will be drastically altered, and new technologies, new services, new markets, new audiences will predominate. It is the fallout from these developments which can be detected in public service broadcasting organisations the world over, and which have been translated into a number of interior changes. It is, for example, this larger context, and the challenges which have been thrown up in most national, public broadcasting organisations, that have translated into the search for new definitions of mission; organisational and structural change; a new policy environment; new proposals for the funding of public broadcasting, important shifts in program philosophy and in particular into an examination of the crucial question of social "location," much talk of streamlining new working methods, productivity targets, greater efficiency and accountability. Should the public broadcaster be up-stream, mainstream or downstream, popular or elite, lowbrow or high brow, universalistic or particularistic? The fact that these questions are even being raised is indicative of the erosion of traditional definitions of the relationship between regulated audio-visual culture and the implementation of new, profoundly different ones.

In this vein it is interesting to look at the dilemmas and contradictions of broadcasting in developing societies throughout Asia. From Singapore to Malaysia to China to India to Indonesia governments have sought to "modernise." Television is no exception, through, for example, involvements in cable, international satellites, the offerings of Star TV, and the development of their own domestic and regional satellites. At the same time those governments have all sought to **limit** access to new program services which have not been approved by government authorities. Islamic sensibility is a particularly important issue here, as is the clash over Western forms of liberal democracy. Again, what all this suggests is that there is a basic indecisiveness about what kinds of societies they wish to be: secular and consumerist or theocratic and controlled. They cannot be both.

Similarly the impasse in developing coherent policy for broadcasting in the new democracies of Central Europe, such as Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia, was not just, or primarily, a consequence of the intransigence of an old order which had not quite died, or of the stalling tactics of the nomenclature in new guise. The problem was fundamentally one of deciding what kinds of societies, polities and economies they want to be. If a society has not decided its own preferred character in a broad sense, it will find it exceedingly difficult to determine its character in the particular

sense of its broadcasting.

The endemic sense of instability which now affects the public sphere is a function of technology and government policy fed by ideology. But it cannot only be that. It is aided and abetted by the growth of huge corporations that dwarf the "ordinary individual" and by a deregulated, commercially driven, multimediated world that is fundamentally divisive of the human species as a social species. It is coarsened further by sheer mediocrity, the flight from excellence and the enthronement of the trivial, the superficial, the ghoulism, voyeurism, and **Schadenfraude** in much market-driven television. These factors are all definably part of the condition of modern culture constructed from the ground up. Governments have been receiving succour, a kind of silent applause, from viewers and listeners, consumers, who think from within the self rather than with any developed sense of the collective, for whom the easy and the accessible are more important than the difficult and the subtle.

If adjustment is the key motif of the times, the matter is complicated in that the character of the 1990s, its intellectual parameters, are unclear, and certainly much less clear than say the period 1945-1975 or the decade of the 1980s. We all know that for good or ill the 1980s were about the market, just as the earlier period was anchored to a more collectivist concept of public culture. The sense of the need for change in public broadcasting rests on assumptions about the failure of the earlier period and the importance of market values in all human affairs, including broadcasting. But the 1980s and their crude use of market forces have at least rhetorically been somewhat discredited, even if the actual practice of public and private life remains in the values of self, consumption and the market. So we find ourselves between two worlds, two different sets of expectations, trying to bend with the wind when it is blowing from more than one direction. A certain confusion and uncertainty is perhaps understandable.

Conclusion

The conclusions are obvious, if bleak. Whatever the bravery and wisdom of those who articulate serious principles about the place of mediated culture within an embracing system of democratic practice and who keep the faith in difficult circumstances, in the end it is not possible to have a viable social institution which is out of step with the prevailing sociological realities, any more than it is feasible to have a philosophy of broadcasting which runs ahead of a larger philosophy of society. It is at this point that one can begin to see that the crisis of public regulation of broadcasting is a reflection of a more basic crisis of traditional forms of governance. Those have assumed publics which were roughly co-equal with the architecture of the nation-state; politics which governed such publics and which was sometimes constructed by those publics; and economies which were discrete, influenced by and coterminous with, more or less, the national polity. Even as one puts the words on the page their problematic condition becomes obvious. The "national" increasingly is made irrelevant by the supranational [political-economic unions such as the EU, NAFTA, GATT] and the sub-national [video, the net, cable].

The seriousness of the struggle with which public policy making in communications is faced is thus readily apparent. It is not clear that any government will be able to make such policy, or at least make policy which is relevant and effective. I do not mean "able" only in some formalistic sense of government acquiescence — important though that is — but also in the sense of whether the nature of the moment, its deep

rhythms, will **permit** public policy to survive. The brute truth is that the sets of choices that have been made, in country after country, over the past decade or more — on geopolitical systems, technological innovations and economic modernisation — allied with other more subterranean socio-cultural tensions — have wreaked havoc with all facets of public culture.

If one maintains a broad focus on the changes in the contours of human and social geography it is not difficult to put a name to all that has been described, to all that is happening and will continue to happen. What we are witnessing is the triumph of populism: it may be intelligent populism or corrupted populism, but it is populism nevertheless. We are accustomed to living in a world of borders, literal and metaphorical delineation's of difference. The nation-state has for the past couple of centuries been the most obvious articulation of this social phenomenon. Part of the strength of the idea of the nation is that it provided something which is clearly an important aspect of the social psychology of the species, the need to belong, the need to feel the comforts of friends as well as strangers, to be embedded in ways of seeing and feeling and doing which are familiar, which feel "right." Nationalism and jingoism are obvious expressions of this, but so are the family wedding, the street gang, the conversation around the drinking fountain, the journey to Mecca or home at Thanksgiving or Christmas or Hannukah. Beneath the articulation of the nation-state were these other ways of belonging defined by kinship, friendship, location, gender, generation, education and happenstance. In other words, and wherever we are, we remain a sociology, as within our "self" are lodged these in effect objective characteristics.

This social condition does not go away simply because television started to flow across borders, nor will it as that flow continues and as the technology amplifies by a power of ten or twenty, or whatever it might eventually be, the amount of communication available. What we can begin to see appearing, however, as the clouds of change break up a little, is the manner in which the technology, working with the social grain, gets even closer to the details of that social condition. So, for example, the old public broadcasters such as the BBC or NHK worked at one level because they did personify certain broad-based commonalities, expressions of what it was to be British or Japanese. That is why there was truth to the cliché that at moments of national crisis the public would turn to them for "information." They were successful because they worked with, not against, the grain of the society. That sharing, nevertheless, was extraordinarily superficial. As the amount and form of television increases, what is happening is that other, perhaps more fundamental defining characteristics are not only becoming apparent but also serviceable, along those lines of characteristics of which I have spoken. The comforts of the familiar and the parochial are becoming ever more available, and there is nothing anyone can do about it, any more than one can stop a season of tides.

Notes:

1. *Screen Digest,* February 1992 [I might add that all of these figures are of the "last time I looked" kind. One of the more obvious characteristics of audio-visual and tele-communications is the sheer pace of change.]

2. Figures for 1995, from *TV in Europe to 2005*, Zenith Media, London, 1996.

3. Stuart Hall and Martin Jacques (eds.), *New Times: The Changing Face of Politics in the 1990s.* Verso, New York, 1990.