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global television is extremely restricted and confined to elite groups.

And in metropolitan centres of the west, various groups (women, blacks, gays for example) are challenging the power of the media to define them, order their experience, and discipline their behaviour. We describe groups we do not understand in ways which maintain their distance from us. Edward Said has described this process at work in Western reporting of events in the rest of the world, with its resort to terms like 'terrorism' and 'fundamentalism' (key terms of the 1980s) 'derived entirely from the concerns and intellectual factories in metropolitan centres like Washington and London'.

The ability of 'the West' to enforce a particular meaning and set of values as universal is being increasingly challenged from within and without.

## News/Entertainment Blurring

There is a trend to news as drama, news as chat show - 'infotainment'. More news hours are produced and they travel further to bigger audiences, but it is very doubtful whether better news is the result, and whether people globally are better informed.

The avalanche of reporting from Bosnia over the last year shed almost no light on what is actually happening there, or why. The intense preoccupation with personal stories ('triviality') may be related to the 'decline of the West' and to scepticism about over-arching accounts of how the world works, as well as helplessness in the face of global conflicts which viewers do not understand and over which they have no control.

Rather than using terms like 'trivialisation', media professionals and policy makers should consider that people may be trying to find an ordered moral and personal universe in these programs.

Critics have argued that there is an inverse relation between the technological sophistication and speed of transmission of global news production, and its comprehensibility. News becomes story or fable, entertainment becomes news, and the confusion between fiction and reality becomes complete.

The essence of the situation is contradiction - a situation where a tendency to globalisation produces, often in unpredictable ways, opposite, indigenising consequences; where the ability to link people globally and instantaneously produces less rather than more enlightenment. The implications for media news professionals are profound and will take some time to work out. □

# CIRCIT Bids for New Cultural Body

**In a move which caught many people by surprise, CIRCIT (the Centre for International Research on Communication and Information Technologies) announced at a seminar in early December that it had formally applied to become the home of the Government's proposed Foundation for Australian Cultural Development (FACD).**

This Foundation was announced in the ALP's pre-election arts policy statement, *Distinctly Australian*, under the heading 'Heritage and Cultural Development'. In that document, its broad aim was stated as being 'to stimulate public intellectual life and allow greater engagement of the community in the leadup to the 2001 celebrations', and this would be achieved by working with organisations such as local government, universities and museums.

The FACD is to be based in Melbourne, presumably to counteract longstanding resentment in Melbourne at the location of other key cultural authorities in Sydney. A detailed statement of the proposed role of this foundation is expected to be issued by the Minister soon.

The FACD is to be funded by transferring \$2m from the Australia Council's community cultural development budget and by an additional allocation of \$5.5m, over four years. There has been some concern in the arts community

about the ill-defined role of this new and separate organisation, and the precedent set by hiving off funds from the Australia Council.

In recent years CIRCIT has issued occasional papers on aspects of culture, and late last year held a seminar on *Cultural Industries: National Policies and Global Markets*, but cultural policy is not an area with which it is perceived as having been strongly associated. Its objectives focus on the 'economic and social aspects of information and communications technologies'.

CIRCIT's latest newsletter (5 [9] Nov/Dec 1993) states in its introduction that the issue includes more original analysis than some past newsletters because of the current intensive process of formulation of cultural policy towards a major Federal government statement in March.

CIRCIT's Marcus Breen raises some questions about the FACD which reflect concerns being expressed in the arts community, such as how it will actually differ from existing institutions, and whether there are creators and intellectuals whose interests are not currently being met. Breen concludes that the FACD, while a 'profound policy risk' for the Government, reflects its bold initiative on cultural policy and is a risk worth taking. □