



# Global villages

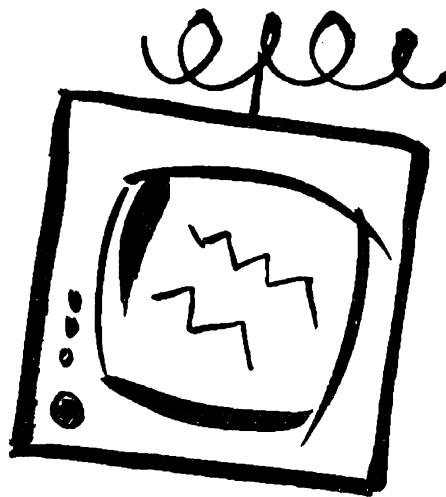
The editors of *New Patterns in Global Television: Peripheral Vision*, seek to offer 'a series of timely overviews of the major regions of television production and distribution beyond the metropolitan centres of the North Atlantic region'. Their book is a series of case studies of very different television systems and cultures - Sinclair on Mexico, Brazil and the Latin World; Manjunath Pendakur, Radha Subramanyam, Manas Ray and Jacka on India; Hussein Amin on Egypt and the Arab World; Joseph Man Chan on Greater China; Paul Attallah on Canada; Cunningham and Jacka on Australia.

They begin with a couple of straw men: on the one hand, the theorists of cultural imperialism - the political economists; on the other, those of post-modernism - the reception analysts, who have 'tended to valorise the fractured cultural meanings of all images and goods and to conflate the actual processes by which they are produced, distributed and consumed'.

In place of these perspectives, the editors propose 'a theory of the middle range'. To speak sensibly about the globalisation of media, they argue, one should not so much reject the old approaches as undertake all of them simultaneously - in this case, by addressing both the structures of major international television trade markets and the dynamics of viewer reception, the latter being governed by the cultural identities of audiences and, according to Silj, the 'sedimentation of other social practices'. This the authors take to include 'the industrial and institutional conditions prevailing prior to any audience seeing any foreign program'.

Of particular interest to the authors are the 'imagined communities of speakers of the same language and

participants in similar cultures which form the geolinguistic regions exploited by media entrepreneurs, especially the diasporic communities of emigres on distant continents'. From their analysis of these communities, a thesis is developed - the 'geolinguistic region hypothesis' - which proposes that 'export markets will develop amongst countries which share a similar language and culture'.



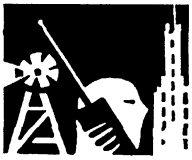
The origins of television in each of the countries analysed gives some hints of the differences in their television systems and cultures. Television came to India as a pilot UNESCO-sponsored educational project; to Mexico with the lobbying of an international pressure group of Latin American radio network owners with US links, founded in Mexico in 1946 to foster the commercial model of broadcasting and to minimise government regulation throughout the region. Television arrived in Canada well before Canada had television: a year before the CBC started broadcasting in 1952, there were 146,000 television Canadian households watching American television. Television came to Australia for the Melbourne Olympics.

One of this book's real fascinations is its exposure not just of what it

regards as 'peripheral' cultures but of peripheries within cultures - India, living in two centuries; dualist Canada, living, in Hugh MacLennan's words, in its 'two solitudes'. The common cultural interests and needs underpinning the 'geolinguistic region hypothesis' are often contested by the diversity of potentially unifying cultures. Hong Kong's capitalist triumph does not plead for integration with the PRC; over 90% of Muslim and Sikh Indians believe the Hindu dominance of Indian television does not adequately reflect their own religions, customs and practices.

In a book which reveals the increasing heterogeneity of world television, an interesting feature is the divergence of views held by the contributing authors about the cultural future of local television systems. For Paul Attallah, 'Right now, Canadian television...has never been better, or luckier'. For Joseph Man Chan, 'if internal competition is allowed to work, television programs made in China will sooner or later measure up to the competitiveness of its neighbours in Hong Kong and Taiwan, and 'the television production of Greater China will be of higher quality and better able to compete with the West'. 'On balance', Hussein Amin thinks, 'international television networks offer great opportunities for political, economic, social and cultural development in the Arab region'.

Yet the editors are more wary. John Sinclair reminds us 'that the economic, political and cultural power attained by the Mexican Televisa and the Brazilian Globo is historical and contingent, and in this most recent stage, it appears that the 'Latin audiovisual space' which they have opened up across the globe is fast filling with new competitors who are not hindered by the same contradictions'.



Cunningham and Jacka worry that 'the international market place of discrete program trade is, unavoidably, a levelling arena, while transborder television has before it the considerable challenge of creatively overcoming "cultural screens" as a central aspect of scheduling and marketing'.

The key oppositions for Australia's cultural policy, they say, are no longer what Dermody and Jacka, in *The Screening of Australia*, called Industry 1 (cultural nationalism, art cinema and social realism, government protection) and Industry 2 (commercialism, international appeal at all costs, Hollywood imitations) oppositions. They are now 'largely between forms of internationalism which advance local cultural development and those which do not'.

Sinclair, Jacka and Cunningham are, for the most part, for those that do. And so, for that matter, is their book. It's a look at the world, from here. The authors of this 'peripheral vision' suggest Australia offers the possibility of 'a more outward-looking and truly international vantage point' than some of the 'self-absorption which currently characterises most communication research in Europe', and the 'traditional insularity of mainstream US work'.

This work is a collection of observations, analyses and approaches about very different places and their television, a very post-modern project that deserves to be read in a very un-post-modern way - from beginning to end. □

***New Patterns in Global Television: Peripheral Vision*; edited John Sinclair, Elizabeth Jacka, Stuart Cunningham; OUP, Oxford, 1996, 238 pp, RRP \$A34.95.**

*This is an edited version of an address given by Jock Given at the launch of the book at the Victorian University of Technology.*

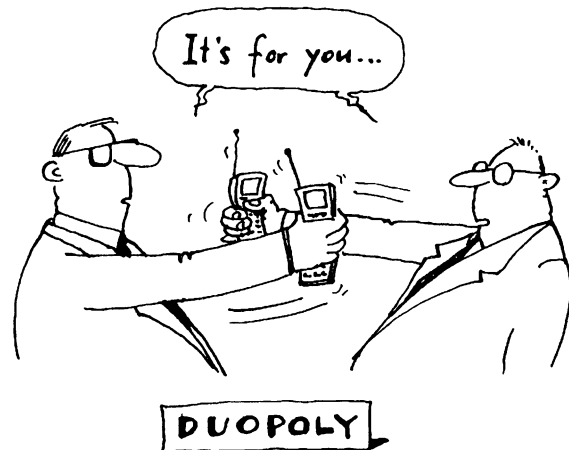
# Magnum Optus

On 27 June 1996 at Darling Harbour in Sydney, the Prime Minister, Mr Howard, launched Optus' local telephony service. The service is the second to be delivered over the cable network, following the introduction of pay television in September 1995. Optus expects to have its network fully installed by the end of 1997.

Mr Howard welcomed Optus to the local telephony market, stating 'the local telephone call is an Australian institution - as Australian as the gum leaf', and participated in the first commercial local call over the network with the first subscriber to the 'New Deal', Mr and Mrs Cox of Gordon. Mr Howard also warned that those opposed to the privatisation of Telstra should take heed of the benefits of competition. The highlight of the launch, however, was the announcement by Optus Vision CEO Geoffrey Cousins that Optus' standard local call charge would be 20 cents.

tional features - voicemail, call waiting, three way call, call divert and speed dial - will effectively pay 90 cents for the first feature (making a package of \$16.00 for the basic service plus one feature), then between \$2.50 and \$3.00 for additional features. A customer selecting the basic service and saying 'yes' to all options will pay a \$26.50 monthly fee.

By comparison, Telstra's standard monthly charge is \$14.15. Call divert is charged at mobile service rates, and the call waiting facility is presently \$3.00 per month but from September will be available free of charge. The standard



handset contains a speed dial facility (up to 10 numbers) at no additional charge. It does not offer voicemail or three way call facilities for residential customers. Telstra's accounts are issued every three months (by default), or every month or two months, if requested.

Although Optus can now offer potential subscribers the attraction of a single account for both local and long distance telephone calls, it was not able to offer number portability - also recognised as an impediment to churn - in time for the launch. Telstra's engineers are apparently hard at work on the problem. In the meantime, callers to the former number of an Optus subscriber will be informed of the new number by a recorded message. □

## The New Deal

All Optus local call customers will receive an Optus 'OneTouch' handset, which they are encouraged to rent. Optus will issue a monthly account with the standard charge of \$15.10 (comprising service charge, telephone rental and wiring maintenance). Customers taking the basic service and wishing to select addi-