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ABSTRACT

Broadcasting has become a powerful symbol of a collision of ideas over how Western society should be organized. The roots of that clash lay in two powerful forces that seem to have nurtured a certain intellectual bleakness about public culture. The first such force was a belief in the imminent emergence of a multi-channel society in which cable and satellite systems stood everywhere as a spectral presence over the national public broadcasters. The second force was the ideological prominence of the idea of the market in broadcasting, an idea in conflict with the belief underlying public broadcasting that it can and must be used to nuture society as a nominated public service institution. This conflict has given rise to many questions, including: What is the place of "the public entity" in the world of "the private?" Why is public broadcasting necessary? What is its mission, tomorrow as well as today? Eight principles define public broadcasting and demonstrate that it is a vital part of culture: (1) universal availability; (2) universal appeal; (3) provision for minorities; (4) public service; (5) commitment to public education; (6) the need to distance public broadcasting from all vested interests; (7) the need to structure broadcasting to encourage competition in good programming rather than competition for numbers; and (8) the desire for rules that liberate program makers. Observations from ongoing global research concerning public broadcasting are beginning to emerge. Among these are the perception that a concept of the free market has shaken public broadcasting's self-confidence. In addition, the possibility of multiple channels casts doubt on the reality of a shared public culture. National public broadcasters find it increasingly difficult to define themselves at a time when the world is exploding to the global and imploding to the tribal. However, cause for optimism for the future has also been found where public broadcasting has been examined, especially in the calibre and intelligence of a number of leading public broadcasting figures now working in a range of countries throughout the world. (SG)

# *GLOBAL POLITICS OF PUBLIC SERVICE BROADCASTING IN THE EARLY 1990S*



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A Prologue

John Boyd is a rather dour Scot, a right-wing, working class trade union official. He also happens to be a Governor of the BBC. Jeremy Isaacs is a program-maker who became one of the most prominent television executives in Britain. His documentary series, "The World at War," is definitive. He was Director of Programs at Thames Television, the largest of the ITV companies. And, his greatest claim to fame, he was the founding Chief Executive of Channel Four. He is a somewhat florid personality, oozing with ideas, definitely iconoclastic, perhaps even charismatic.

In 1987 Isaacs applied to become Director General of the BBC, still the single most prestigious post in broadcasting though less so than in previous decades. The vacancy had been caused by the summary dismissal of Alasdair Milne by the BBC's governors. An air of crisis surrounded the Corporation -- political pressure for alleged bias; serious errors of programming judgment, including a costly case of libel; confrontation with the security services; uncertainties over the licence fee; a feeling that cable and satellite were the future of television; a growing gulf between the governors and senior executives, including Milne; and an increasingly strong feeling that they were all passengers on the Titanic.

The sacking of Milne -- an unprecedented event in the history of the BBC -- and the search for his replacement thus took on considerable significance. And so it was that John Boyd and Jeremy Isaacs came face to face. During the course of Isaacs' interview, Boyd leaned forward and observed, "You don't seem to be a man who

respects authority." A smile crossed Isaacs' face, a scowl that of Boyd, who noted that there were those in the room who thought this no laughing matter.

Jeremy Isaacs, an outstanding program maker, widely recognized on account of his work at Channel Four as a visionary, received not a single vote from the twelve governors. The appointment went to Michael Checkland, an accountant with no experience as a producer or program controller. In that moment the age seemed to be writ small -- the ascendency of fiscal accountability and a greater respect for "authority." The significance of this experience lay in the fact that the quintessential public broadcaster, who had offered himself for appointment to the highest office of his calling, had not just been rejected, but sent into exile. And looking around, the landscape seemed littered with other well-known public broadcasters -- Milne, Brian Wenham, Tony Smith, Colin Shaw, Kenneth Lamb, Stephen Hearst. Here was the Paschendale of public broadcasting, and happening at a time when the government was also known to be contemplating the wholesale destruction of the ITV system.

Nor was the apparent devastation limited to Britain. The chatter of broadcasting from around the world contained similar stories of a laying waste to a whole generation of public broadcasters. The question that loomed was whether or not the Isaacs episode and all those like it were suggestive of a profound shift in the nature of broadcasting, one that would leave the institution transformed and unrecognizable, and whether there was therefore to be a fundamental shift in the quality and character of the central experience of culture and society.

Background: The Problems Facing Public Broadcasting in the 1990s

The conditions that lay behind the Issacs experience were no accident, rather a result of a confluence of economic, political and sociological forces. Public broadcasting was everywhere being forced to reexamine its purpose, its nature, its mission. The previous decade had seen a widespread assault on the importance, even legitimacy, of public service broadcasting in the major industrialized democracies. From the close of the Second World War until the late 1970s, public broadcasting organizations had stood in powerful, resilient opposition to commercial systems, and they dominated the cultural geology of the societies from which they had been formed. (The only major exception to this pattern was in the United States, where public broadcasting had been much slower to develop and had far fewer resources.) Political problems faced even the strongest of these institutions, but as an intellectual, cultural, and creative construction, the edifice of public service broadcasting had seemed permanent and inherently stable.

By the closing years of the 1980s that edifice was widely seen to be crumbling. Public broadcasting institutions and the notion of cultural and political discourse that undergird them seemed everywhere to be under serious attack. Indeed in the shift from the 1970s to the 1990s, broadcasting became a potent symbol of a collision of ideas over how Western society should be organized, not just economically, but also culturally, creatively, morally. The roots of that clash lay in two powerful forces which had seemed to have nurtured a certain intellectual bleakness about public culture.

The first such force was the emergence of the multi-channel society, or the belief that such a society was in the process of being created. The fact of the matter was that in many different societies cable and satellite systems were either non-existent or only marginally existent, but the industrial and political rhetoric suggested that they were imminent. They stood everywhere as a spectral presence over the national public broadcasters.

The second force was the ideological prominence of the idea of the market in broadcasting. This notion had spread across the globe not so much as a ripple, more like a Tsunami. During the previous two decades the challenge to the very idea of public culture, or in its minimalist form the public interest, had become widespread and strident. The challenge emanated from the proposition that social good flows not so much from collective activity organized from the top down, but from myriad individual decisions organized from the bottom up. The collision had been over 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. Against this was the theory which had come to underpin the growth of the multi-channel environment: that such "public" interventions are neither necessary nor proper. In this model what matters is consumer sovereignty, the marriage of the individual economic actor and the individual possessor of basic democratic rights.

In light of these conditions and the apparent effect they were having on emerging policies for broadcasting in society after society, a series of questions began to suggest themselves about the contemporary problems facing public service broadcasting as it approaches the 21st century: What is the proper and necessary mission of public service broadcasting in a world which is and will continue to be so different from that in which public broadcasting was born? How does the public broadcasting community meet the challenge of the bonding of new technology and dominant ideology captured in the multi-channel market-place concept? What is the appropriate social architecture which will allow public broadcasting organizations most effectively to fulfill that mission?

What is the place of "the public entity" in a world of "the private?" How does, or could, the public broadcasting and public telecommunications community articulate its purpose in a context in which the dominant philosophical language provides little space for any sense of the legitimacy of a public culture carried by public institutions? Historically it has been that concept of, and commitment to, a public culture which has provided such a powerful argument for the provision of programming through a public broadcasting system.

Just what is the place and purpose of public broadcasting in national and global life as we move towards the next century? Why is public broadcasting necessary? What is its mission, tomorrow as well as today? What do those who constitute its flesh and blood think its mission is and will be? Is its institutional character, in a broad sense, such as to allow it to achieve that mission? How does it fit into the general pattern of broadcasting and telecommunications, and in

particular to a structure within which cable, VCRs, and satellite technologies are increasingly influential? In what sense is public broadcasting part of the evolving societies of the advanced industrial and developing worlds? And what do these societies perceive and desire of public broadcasting? How does it fit into the character and dynamics of what appear to be an emergent transnational, global culture? If the architecture of public broadcasting is being transformed, how is the idea behind public broadcasting evolving?

These were the questions that occurred to us as being the most salient and that drove our thinking toward the current research project.

## Principles

Our principal task in the research is to consider these questions and their implications for public service broadcasting. However to do so we must have a sense of the institution we are studying, and particularly its values and purposes. To understand the extent to which it is being deflected from its purposes it is clearly necessary to define just what its values and purposes look like, to articulate the conceptual substance within the institutional infrastructure.

For guidance on this matter we draw from C. Wright Mills who made the following observation in his 1959 essay The Cultural Apparatives:

> The first rule for understanding the human condition is that men live in second-hand worlds. They are aware of much more than they have personally experienced; and their own experience is always indirect. The quality of their lives is determined by meaning they have received from others.

At the heart of public broadcasting has been a notion that those "others" are important precisely because they act not on behalf of this politician or that businessman, but for the public-as-citizen, someone who needs to be informed, entertained and educated through superior means.

Public Broadcasting in National and Global Life

In a public system, television producers acquire money to make programs. In a commercial system they make programs to acquire money. However simple, this little epithet articulates the divergence of basic principles, the different philosophical assumptions, on which broadcasting is built. History and experience fashioned inside public broadcasting a definable canon, a set of principles and practices which constitute its purpose. They are the core theses around which the institution has been formed and shaped, which have guided its performance, and which powerfully suggest its potential worth.

There is no suggestion here that these principles exist perfectly formed in some heavenly fashion. What is being suggested is that to the unprejudiced eye they are clearly to be seen as the intellectual and creative lattice-work which have informed a good deal of public broadcasting. The institutional structures and forms of funding may be nuanced. But public broadcasting, certainly in all the cases we have looked at, is above all else a belief that the sheer presence of broadcasting within all our lives can and must be used to nurture society, to proffer the opportunity that society and its inhabitants can be better served than by systems which primarily seek consumers for advertisers, or apostles for political leadership.

By looking at the issue of public broadcasting in this way -- by positioning it concretely in relation to its past -- one can illuminate its potential for the future, not as pie-in-the-sky idealism but as a vital part of the whole cultural ecology of society as it moves towards the 21st century.

There is some irony in the fact that in many instances the public broadcasting community has never really fully defined its purpose, working within such canons as "educate," "inform," "entertain," employing somewhat stilted, cliched or vague argumentation, or, worse, asserting a kind of divine right to be and thus in no need of the sustaining breath of articulated purpose. One of the most powerful articulators of the social purpose of broadcasting which lies so much at the heart of public broadcasting, was someone who spent his whole life in the belly of the beast, in the commercial system. Speaking to the annual conference of the Radio and TV News Directors in 1958 Edward R. Murrow observed:

> To a very considerable extent the media of mass communication in a given society reflect the political, economic and social climate in which they flourish. . . . We are currently wealthy, fat, comfortable and complacent. We have currently a built-in allergy to unpleasant or disturbing information -- our mass media reflect this. I would like to see it reflect occasionally the hard, unyielding realities of the world in which we live. . . . This instrument can teach; it can illuminate; yes, it can even inspire. But it can only do so to the extent that humans are determined to use it to those ends. Otherwise, it is merely wires and lights in a box.

With this background in mind, with this sense of something important missing, along with colleagues in the UK and the U.S. we have set about the task of defining precisely what we understand public broadcasting to be about. We have identified eight principles which to us suggest that, more than any other part of the electronic media system, public broadcasting can lay true claim to being more than

mere wires and lights, to being a vital part of the culture and society of the nations in which it is present, well able to teach, to illuminate, to inspire.[1]

1. Universality of Availability

Public broadcasting has historically sought to ensure that its signals are available to all. It is axiomatic to the public broadcasting community that no one should be disenfranchised by distance, by where they live, by accident of geography. The imperative which guides this principle is not that of maximizing customers in a market but of serving citizens in a democracy. It is an imperative which then recognizes that if one defines one's audience as the citizens of a country who need to be served, then logically one has to reach them all. To a remarkable extent in country after country this principle has been made real.

2. Universality of Appeal

Public broadcasting seeks to provide programs which cater to the many different tastes and interests which constitute a society's life. The public broadcasting community understands that each of us, at different moments, is part of a majority and a minority. In seeking to provide programs for a wide-range of tastes and interests, public broadcasting does so with an eye cocked to the need to ensure that whether the program is pitched at the many or the few it is done so with real quality. Public broadcasting does not expect that it can please all the people all of the time -- indeed it sees in that approach precisely the kind of populism which

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[1] As we have suggested, there are many finger-prints on this exercise in definition. The original model for this exercise was a publication of the Broadcasting Research Unit in London. The Public Service Idea in British Broadcasting.

nurtures cultural mediocrity, as quality is sacrificed on the altar of maximizing the audience size. Public broadcasting does, however, believe that well produced programs can please a lot of the people a lot of the time, and everybody some of the time. Public broadcasting is thus driven by the desire to make good programs popular and popular programs good; it understands that serving the national diversity of a society is not the same as "giving people what they want."

The principle of serving the diverse interests of the public is the basis then to the presence in the schedule of programs which serve the young as well as the elderly, those interested in local affairs as well as the national political canvass, members of diverse subcultures as well as those in the mainstream. There are numerous examples of programs dealing with the history, geology and ecology of particular regions, just as there are programs whose focus is the whole planet. There is programming for those who love opera, as well as those who follow country and western. The person who is an avid gardener is served as well as the dog fanatic. There is news in nature, as well as regional, national and global coverage of political events. Programs on consumer affairs rub shoulders with those dealing with the world of business. Those with a taste for the wit of comedy are provided for, but so is the person who seeks classical drama.

It is an important element of this principle that public broadcasting serves not only tastes and interests which are readily apparent, but also those which are dormant and latent -- that may be part of the potential we all possess but which circumstance may not have allowed us to develop. Public broadcasting understands that television must go beyond just catering to existing tastes; that it should open us up to the new - to new tastes, new interests, new potentialities. The late Michael Rice put this idea well when he observed that public television's greatest value

exists for those "who may not ever know what they are missing until they discover it, perhaps just stumble on it, in broadcasts, that reach them in the least intimidating way . . . ." There are innumerable examples in most public systems of significant success in this goal.

3. Provision for Minorities, Especially Those Disadvantaged by Physical or Social Circumstance.

It is commonplace to characterize the medium of television as essentially serving "the mass." Certainly public broadcasting understands the vast capability of one medium to reach enormous numbers of people. It sets its face, however, against the logic of commercial systems to see people as no more than statistics in skins, with a definable value captured in the most desirable rates, demographic buys, and cost per thousand. As suggested in Principle #2, public broadcasting views the public as a rich tapestry of tastes and interests each of which, insofar as possible, should be served.

There are whole subcultures of minority social experiences crying out for attention. People of different colors, language groups and religious preferences all have vital needs for expression in the political and social discourse of the nation. Public broadcasting is dedicated to a dual role here -- on the one hand to give access to such groups, to provide them with the opportunities to speak to one another and to voice the issues as they see them, and on the other to provide coverage of their histories, interests, and concerns for the public at large.

In this third principle, which clearly overlaps with the second, public broadcasting speaks to its recognition that some audiences have other very specific

characteristics, very specific needs. The point has been eloquently put by Richard Hoggart:

> There are [some minorities] who do not necessarily have either great purchasing power or much political clout. They [are] minorities not of taste but of the accidents of nature: the disabled, the blind, the deaf, the immigrants, the very old and very young, the indigent. To broadcasters whose eyes are on maximizing profits such people and groups will not seem worth the wooing. Yet manifestly their needs are at least as great, and the comfort they may draw from broadcasting even greater, than those of the hale and prosperous. Public service broadcasting recognizes them as special cases with special needs.

4. Serving the Public Sphere

Some television programs are successful because they get a fair-sized audience, make some money, and sometimes even exemplify the craft of popular television. Some programs are successful because they reach out and touch a small, particular but powerful audience. Some programs are successful because the craft of the program maker is used to speak to us all. They touch us, move us, make us laugh and cry and cheer. They speak to us because they speak for us. Like all great art, they help us make sense out of life, they help us see and understand things with a fresh eye, not however as a singular experience but with a burning sense of the collective, of belonging to the nation-as-community. In the United States, The Civil War was recently one such experience. It flooded the attic of the nation's mind with new, brilliant light. These programs are powerful not just because they are wonderful examples of their art, but because they bind us together, however momentarily.

The English writer, Richard Hoggart, observed about public broadcasting that one of its benefits "is exactly that it allows a nation speak to itself . . . ." It is an increasingly vital principle of the work of public broadcasting that it recognizes its special relationship to a sense of national identity and broad community. Any nation is a patchwork of localities and regions, but it also, just that, a nation, heterogeneous and homogeneous to a remarkable degree at one and the same time. The brilliance of The Civil War lay not just in its artistic creativity, its attention to detail while never losing sight of the wider canvas, its sheer comprehensiveness. Its real genius lay in its speaking to an extraordinary range of Americans, of saying to them and for them, this is how you as a nation were formed. In the United Kingdom, the mid-'80s drama series, Boys from the Blackstuff was one example of programming which spoke to a whole society, which said in a painfully brilliant and moving way, this is who we are today. Most public broadcasting organizations can point to such moments. These programs, and their ilk, are alike in saying to us all, this is who you are. And that is an important, even vital function of television, because the health of any society lies in its understanding of individual impulses and its formation as a community with collective impulses and needs. Public broadcasting's very nature is then to nurture the public sphere as a means of serving the public good. It does so because it understands that while within civil society individuals pursue their own private, self interests, it is within the public sphere that they function as citizens. It is a fundamental principle then that public broadcasting must motivate the viewers as citizens possessing duties as well as rights, rather than as individual consumers possessing wallets and credit cards.

There is a particular importance in this principle given the contemporary, and apparently, rapid evolution of the television audience in general. One way of interpreting the demise of the old single or dual systems is to see this as a necessary

corollary of the "modernizing" dynamism of the "new media." As more channels become available so the audience fragments. Erik Svendsen's research in Denmark and much similar research elsewhere points to the remarkable persistence of attention to the national broadcasting system There are, however, implications of a multichannel environment which need to be considered. For example, a way of interpreting the death-dance of the U.S. networks, whose executives are now looking to no more than a 50% share of the viewing audience by 1995, is to point to the proliferation of cable channels, their presence in 60% of American homes, the growth of small independent stations, the likely establishment of direct broadcast satellite services well before the end of the decade, each of which could offer well over 100 channels, the extensive use of remote control devices, the spread of VCR's and the massive growth of video rental. From within such a context, it is not unreasonable to conclude that, whatever the merits or otherwise of the programming, what we are witnessing as both cause and effect is the increasing Balkanization of the national mind alongside, and somewhat paradoxically, its immersion in an emergent global culture.

The very logic of television economics makes this inevitable. On the one hand is the creation of niche audiences which can be profitably served. On the other are the increasing fiscal difficulties leading television companies to seek and produce for ever-wider audiences defined not by national boundary and therefore culture, but by the exigencies of economics and certain universalities in popular television. Anyone who reads the trade press will see therein a tale of structural globalization, the making of "product" which will sell in more than one market, the increasing importance of co-production and co-financing, the air of desperation which now hangs over the industry.

There is a great temptation for public broadcasting to participate in this process of transnational production and distribution. And from certain standpoints of economic efficiency and the recognition of common, globally appealing topics, there is a need for such activity. But, as with the commercial world, the tendency can be overextended, undercutting this flower of a public broadcasting service rising out of and speaking for a particular national culture. Only a well-funded public service system can resist the full force of this temptation and thereby stand against its consequences, as a voice for a public as against a private good.

5. A Commitment to the Education of the Public

The most outstanding example of public broadcasting's commitment to the audience-as-citizen is the long-time provision in almost all systems of educational programming at all levels. Public broadcasting knows that political and social literacy, as well as of course literal literacy, is an essential prerequisite to the healthy working of a democratic order. Above all else, the commitment to this principle requires that it treat its audience as mature, rational beings capable of learning and growing in many ways. Thus much of public broadcasting has retained its commitment to institutional services. Daytime school broadcasting and formal learning services of all kinds continue to play a role in most national services.

Meanwhile, however, major challenges to that role have appeared from other, more commercial sectors. If the United States is any model for the future, what is clear is that the new commercial sector based in cable and satellite will, as it matures, seek to purchase a level of respectability by offering educational services which were previously solely within the domain of the public broadcasting community. The Whittle experiment with advertising-based Channel One, the

Jones efforts through Mind Extension University, and the work of the Cable Alliance for Education (CAFE) all reflect tendencies to provide instructional services through new technologies and funding mechanisms.

6. Public Broadcasting Should be Distanced from All Vested Interests

It is a simple but key principle of public broadcasting that its programs can best serve the public with excellence and diversity when they are produced from within a structure of independence. Programs funded by advertising necessarily have their character influenced in some shape or form by the demand to maximize the garnering of consumers. Programs directly funded by the government, and with no intervening structural heat shield, inevitably tend to utter the tones of their master's voice.

The whole history of public broadcasting has been dominated by the commitment to the idea that it can best serve the nation when it remains distanced from any particular commitment to any particular power structure inside the nation. Of particular importance to this principle is the ability of public broadcasting to support a cadre of independent-minded program makers, who are thus well able to speak with authentic tones and to offer that singularity of vision allied to creativity and passion which has traditionally produced some of public television's finest moments. It follows that the political and economic architecture of this principle is such as to support the making of programs which are good in their own terms, whatever their intended audience, however wide or narrowly the net is cast. In the making of programs for public broadcasting, there should be no ulterior purpose or motive. It is axiomatic to this principle that the funding of public

broadcasting should be such, in total amount and in the absence of any strings attached, as to encourage rather than negate the independence enjoyed.

7. Broadcasting Should Be So Structured as to Encourage Competition in Good Programming Rather Than Competition for Numbers

This principle is central to public service broadcasting and essentially involves a commitment to making programs which, whatever their intended audience, are good in their own terms. The overwhelming brunt of the evidence leads to the inevitable conclusion that the most important aspect of such structuring relates to the forms of finance. Where commercial sources of revenue are dominant, or even present, or where there is direct subvention from government, the program maker's eye is almost inevitably diverted away from what should be the main focus, the inherent quality of the program he or she is making.

8. The Rules of Broadcasting Should Liberate Rather Than Restrict the Program Maker

While all broadcasting will inevitably be governed by certain prescriptions -- "educate, inform, entertain," "balance," "objectivity" -- and certain broadly drawn restrictions -- obscenity, national security -- the essence of the legislative foundation by which it is empowered should sustain a liberal function for the program maker. The legislation should "create secure living space arena for action, for broadcasters with all kinds of interests in possible programs and possible varieties of audience, rather than leaving the field to those who are interested chiefly in delivering maximum audiences most of the time." The legislation should also ensure that the higher echelons of broadcasting contain executives and governors who understand

its potential and who themselves care for the importance of the creative work of their staff, and who understand that, as Hugh Greene of the BBC once observed, that there should always be a place for the dissenting radical. Part of that understanding would, therefore, necessarily be of the need for experiment and innovation in broadcasting, the need to provide a focus for a society's quarrel with itself, the recognition that mistakes will be made but as such may signify the health of the system rather than something troublesome with which "they" will need to deal.

Perhaps above all else, such leadership should be helped to understand that experiment, innovation, quarrel and mistake are likely to come from the younger program makers, without whom the system is in danger of institutional arteriosclerosis.

## The Current Research

It is from this perspective -- from this framework of overarching principles that help define the goals of public service broadcasting -- that we can begin to assess the extent to which the structure is being dismantled. Global research we have underway will, we hope, offer a detailed insight into the process of the deconstruction of public broadcasting, or in some cases perhaps its reconstruction.

We have hundreds of pages of transcripts of interviews we have conducted in the past year in the UK, Ireland, Denmark, Poland, Czechoslovakia, the USA, Japan, Hong Kong, Singapore, Malaysia, Australia, and New Zealand. The fieldwork is continuing and has as yet to be carried out in Canada, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and Sweden. At this point we are consumed with finishing that work

and then beginning to digest the material we are gathering. As a result, we are not yet in a position to offer an interpretation of all the data.

While we cannot here relate all the details we are finding in each of the country case studies, nor even yet be confident that we see the overall picture clearly, we can offer a series of observations that are beginning to emerge:

1. The collapse of the post-war consensus with its emphasis upon "the collective" and "public good," and its replacement with a concept of the free-market has undoubtedly at least shaken, and possibly shattered, the self-confidence and self-esteem of the public broadcasting community. The roots of the challenge for the public sector clearly lie in the rescue of the capitalist economy of the West, especially after the oil crises of the early 1970s. The discarding of public institutions -- however inconsequential they might be for economic activity -- was a price that Western ruling elites were willing to pay.

2. The potentiality of the technologies of cable and satellite, goaded by a rampant private sector and applauded by star-struck governments, unquestionably destroyed the technical rationale for public broadcasting. The scarcity of the radio spectrum -- which therefore needed to be marshalled in the public interest -- was a useful myth. It is less and less relevant or plausible in a world in which the capacity to communicate is vastly expanded.

3. The possibility of multiple channels has also pointed to the possible flaw in another mythology of public broadcasting: that a shared public culture was "real," rather than a useful reification of what in reality was a sociologically fractured and fragmented society.

4. The past decade has seen the rise to office in many different public broadcasting organizations of a new generation of technocrats and accountants for whom survival is more important than purpose. This is a major concern because it is something that, unlike other factors here, may be more under the control of the public broadcasting organizations themselves. One of the questions we now have about it is whether the process is so far advanced as to be as total or final as we, and others, had imagined.

5. The desire and ability to pursue excellence in production and nurture creative staff have diminished. There is also, as David Plowright put it, "less and less time to think." There is therefore less time to think in sophisticated terms about the goals of broadcasting and its relationship to the whole of national cultures.

6. *National* public broadcasters find it less than easy to position and define themselves -- to say who they are -- at a moment when history seems to be exploding to the global, and imploding to the tribal. Again, however, we are beginning to wonder whether both of these forces are as potent as is sometimes held to be the case, and we are exploring whether the continuing vitality of the nation state suggests a continued role for the national broadcaster.

7. The genres of public television programs are being homogenized, as such important elements as the single play and the innovative documentary are allotted fewer and fewer resources.

8. National public broadcasters more often than not confront the visceral hostility of national politicians. This has always been a major problem. But at a time when other forums are so powerful and are undermining the self-confidence of public broadcasters, we wonder if it is having more telling effects now. If so, is there anything the public broadcasters can do about it, or are they reduced only to having the occasional stiff drink?

9. The "educational" function of public broadcasting will continue to be important. The crucial question is whether this will merely contribute to a reconstitution of public television as a series of rump services, or whether it will be part of a wider concept and overall role in public telecommunications.

10. Public broadcasting organizations will be smaller, organized along more efficient lines. The pressures for cost savings are immense, and perhaps even justified. But the question is whether the resources will be reinvested in public service programming, or saved for the National Treasury.

## An Epilogue

This list of preliminary findings can appear to be overwhelmingly negative. Yet we might observe at this stage that things are never quite as bad as at first sight they appear. In every country so far we have come across some of the things we had expected: governments seeking the benefits of high-tech communication, and sacrificing public service values to the economic imperative of reindustrialization; governmental policies also regularly tinged with sheer dislike of broadcasters; public broadcasting organizations searching their souls and accounts to see how they might

be better, and then running into the simple problem that one person's "better" is someone else's "worse;" public broadcasters grappling with profound questions of "self" and the need to find a language.

But then we also may have found a new breed of optimist, well able to articulate a sense of purpose and hope. In several sites we have found the likes of a Bob Collins at RTE, a Damansky of Polish Television, an Ingolf with Danmarks Radio, a Steve Maharey with the New Zealand opposition, who seem to have sized up the situation with intelligence and understanding and yet have managed to avoid despair and have not succumbed to the worst implications of their situation. Is public television troubled? Certainly. But to borrow a cliche, it ain't over till it's over and it ain't over yet.