Book Reviews

Book Review 1

Title: *Propaganda and Information Warfare in the Twenty-First Century. Altered images and deception operations*. By Scot Macdonald (2007). London and New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group. 206 pages. Bibliography, Index.
ISBN 10: 0-415-77145-5 (hbk), ISBN 10: 0-203-96739-9 (ebk).

Reviewed by: Hans IJsenbout, information architect, IT-eye, Houten, The Netherlands.

Propagandists in politics, diplomacy and war, certainly have an advantage over their predecessors. In the past, photo-manipulations could easily be detected, today; there is little chance of detection. The sophistication of technology and the capability of television and the Internet to rapidly disseminate images around the world, give unlimited possibilities to propagandists.

The thesis of the book that propaganda and deception matter in politics and international relations is convincingly argued with many examples. The first two chapters of the book focus on the deception by way of photography, film and images. Two other chapters describe how psychological operations (psyops) "seek to convey selected information to target audiences to influence their behavior and, through them, government policy". Four other chapters analyze various ways of deception, "to cause to believe what is not true" (Webster's II New College Dictionary, 1999), or in common language, fraud, cheat, or swindle (Oxford Thesaurus, 2006). Tactics or "stratagems" like camouflage, mimicry, dazzle and disinformation are extensively illustrated with more or less successful historical examples dating from Ancient history, the First or Second World War, or later.

One of the most exciting chapters in the book is entitled "The best deceivers: the British in the Second World War" (chapter 8). It describes how, early in the Second World War, the British developed the "London Controlling Section" (LCS) to run British deception operations during the war. The Section became so crucial to victory, that documents related to it were kept secret until 1975 (p. 118). Now we know that this group of British intellectuals met in a conference room in Churchill's underground headquarters beneath Storey's Gate in London. It invented Operation Bodyguard that prepared the deception that made the success of the invasion of Normandy. The operation sought to mask the concentration and movement of an entire army. Churchill was largely responsible for the Bodyguard operation in which only a few select agents supplied the crucial information. The British had more experience using deception than did the Americans, while Britain was military weaker compared to the US and more inclined to rely upon deception rather than force.

Modern media-theory often complains about the over-information of the current information-society that would cause blindness for information. But the book by Macdonald comes up with much older examples. Giving too much open information was deliberately used to disorient "other parties". During the Cold War, both superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union, made the same complaints about the volume of information (p. 107).

In the last three chapters the book finally takes us to the 21st century. The promise of the book title "Propaganda and Information Warfare in the Twenty-First Century" was not entirely kept indeed, but this does not make this book less interesting or important. Chapter 9, "The Easiest Mark: the United States", puts the finger in the wound of the current media system. The media increasingly rely on very few experts in any given field and much less sources than before, even though the range of transmitters of information (television, the Internet, newspapers, magazines and radio) make it seem the other way. There is a decrease in the number of reporters and those that support them in the "quality control of information" process (copy-editors, fact-checkers, proof-readers, editors, printers). Everybody relies on the same sources that have been repeatedly cited elsewhere. In the mass media landscape, families and individuals with hard-news traditions were, in the 1980s, replaced by business corporations that kept the corporate eye on everything, not in the least the cost of stationed foreign correspondents. On top of that, images, especially on television news, now dominate our lives. "Opinions" as surveyed by pollsters, are emotions in response to images, not opinions based on analysis of facts (p. 133). Images evoke emotion, not logic, and the critical skills required to analyze "imaged information" are considerable. And as it is outlined in the tenth chapter, "The Threat: Striking the media culture", terrorism is certainly an area in which altered images can and have already played a significant role (p. 143). The final chapter presents us with the very critical attitude of the author toward democratic governments, that, in various ways, even in peacetime, disseminate far from accurate propaganda (p. 159) and that in a war or conflict allows the military or the intelligence services almost everything, no matter how brutal or immoral (p. 157). The conclusion points out that in democracy image literacy should be included in the educational system. The public, that has the final decision at the ballot box, should develop a better understanding of how images can be altered and their effects (p. 182). Text is no longer dominant, and images are the form by which most people now receive their information. Which brings us back to the first two chapters of the book that analyze in detail, with many examples and in historical perspective, the technology to alter images? The circle is round. We very much recommend this book to anyone interested in contemporary propaganda history. Do not expect too much theory on propaganda as it was already explained to us by the classic authors on the subject (e.g. H.D. Lasswell, A. George), most of whom are missing in the extended bibliography. The originality and the strength of the book on "Propaganda and Information Warfare in the Twenty-First Century" (it should in fact say Twentieth Century) lies in the richness of the uncountable examples, that often give you the feeling watching a very entertaining war movie.

Book Review 2

Title: *The New Media Environment: An Introduction*. By Andrea L.
Press and Bruce A. Williams (2010). West Sussex, United Kingdom:
Wiley – Blackwell.

Reviewed by: Daniel B. German, Appalachian State University, USA.

Tracking the effect of the new media environment on our lives is a necessary and enor-
mously complicated task. A task that is tackled by the authors with academic analysis
which, by and large, is based on media–politics–socialization–culture studies. Sometimes
the studies, while being conceptually interesting, are hampered by being based on non-
random samples with findings which potentially need to be supplemented with randomly
drawn samples in the future.

The main problem with the studies themselves, as with the authors' attempt to chart
the course of where we are headed, is that it's like trying to shoot a moving target where
the movement itself is undergoing constant change. New technological developments use
constantly emerge while old technologies such as these employed in the print media in-
dustry are fading out of existence with amazing speed. In this sense, the authors are akin
to media studies historians. The authors have done an excellent job of tracking develop-
ments with a variety of methodological instruments, but are faced with cataclysmic
changes barely or not at all contemplated today. The effects of current technology are
pursued, but it is impossible to predict future developments which change the whole land-
scape of what researchers are studying[1]. The authors cannot be faulted for not having a
crystal ball and have put together a top-notch portrait of the new media environment.

In chapter 1 the authors state that: "media studies is a distinct discipline to the extent
that it places the media environment at the center of its focus." (p. 10). They boldly state
that: "media are central to the making of culture." (p. 10). In their concluding chapter they
qualify this statement by noting that: "In fact, however, media don't directly 'cause' de-
velopments in society, culture, or even personalities." (p. 196). We live in a more "medi-
ated" society where parents, friends, and other institutions heavily are supplemented by an
increasingly prevalent pressure of media in the form of personal computers, cell phones,
television, radio, and other electronic communications devices. This reviewer believes
that media increasingly convey culture with a bias that intercepts "normality" by focusing
on television that which is non-normal, even bizarre, thereby breaking up the conven-
tional patterns in society. The authors bring up an important point that the electronic me-

dia focus more and more on globalization and the place of minorities/ethnic groups, women, and gays (p. 17). They state: "Alterations in the media environment are influenced by and in turn, influence these broader social, economic, and political dynamics." (p. 17). These themes often become dominant throughout the book.

Perhaps the major development in the media experience is that which the authors refer to as: "The age of the Internet." (p. 19). The authors indicate that websites fragment the audience with web logs (blogs) challenging professional journalists and political elites, chat groups and in essence, many people creating their own message through sites such as YouTube (pp. 20-21). We live in a new mediated environment.

In chapter 2 the authors interestingly discuss ownership and control in today's media environment by what most people today would do if they contemplated a trip to China. They might Google, e.g., "Tiananmen Square" which would take them to Wikipedia, PBS, New York Times, etc. links about the site in Beijing, China. They probably would not go to the bookstore as in older days. Furthermore, if they were in China they could not access the above sites about Tiananmen Square since the government blocks all Western media sources about this famous place where in 1986 student demonstrated against the government.[2]

In China the government owns and controls the media. The salient feature about America is that corporations own the media and content "control" is dictated by advertising concerns. During the age of radio beginning in the 1930's Congress decided that the system would be privately owned (p. 37). This has led to the near exclusion of alternative media systems like the public service model (such as the British or Canadian BBC and CBC) vs. the advertiser driven model.[3] This development along with increasingly concentrated ownerships in the US resulted in a more "entertainment" oriented media (p. 50). The World Wide Web has broken-up this corporate hegemony with billions of web pages with no single or concentrated entity in charge (p. 38). But, "virtually all of those who seek out information use a very small number of sites, most of which are owned by very large media corporations." (p. 41). Google, Yahoo, and AOL account for 94.5 percent of searches (p. 41). While the authors make an interesting point about concentration here, in reality there appears to be very little evidence of corporate control over what goes on these web sites as is the case with television. Nevertheless, the authors conclude that media content in the US is market/consumer driven. The authors question whether or not a diversity of views are represented in a market driven entertainment oriented media (pp. 56-57). Implicitly, they favor more public broadcasting systems such as BBC and CBC.

Their "worry" over a perceived lack of "hard news" vs. entertainment driven media is a quintessential concern of media academic professionals. They feel that democracy is not best served by a "dumbed downed" fare lacking in serious news. It is the citizen getting what they want to hear about with a corporate eye on ratings which affects advertising revenue as opposed to what they might need to hear about.

The authors move to a discussion of media and democracy examining early research on the impact of media on political behavior. They point out that early empirical research showed that "…voting preferences are a function of existing patterns of political socialization that depend on family, friends, coworkers, and other conduits that lie outside the mass media." (p. 77). They claim that television altered this pattern (p. 79). Media moved to center stage setting the agenda, priming attitudes and framing discourse. Television

news content strived to be interesting/entertaining as opposed to be for the public good. However, "…the Internet challenges the underlying tenets of the Age of Broadcast News." Bloggers now divide the attention given to professional journalists to set the agenda (p. 85).

The authors then proceed to detail media concern with class, gender, race and sexuality. Slowly, but surely, and in a cultural tug of war between traditional and "modern" views of these subjects, media changed the subject matter we consume. Programming shifted to discuss topics considered taboo in the past. For example, the authors examine third wave feminism. Not only is the traditional depiction of women as 1) beautiful but quiet moving to 2) break the glass ceiling with women exerting more influence in politics, education leadership and corporate governance, but now is moving to 3) "… women should be free to express their sexuality in both heterosexual and lesbian contexts." (p. 127). The authors are right on the money here. The media have concentrated on civil rights, roles of women and other topics which undoubtedly fuel change in our society. In film the beautiful but statue only Kim Novak has been replaced by Angelina Jolie who is a formidable competitor one on one with evil men. Instead of traditional stereotypes, diversity is now commonplace in the media industry. Whether or not one is for or against these changes, media brought about this focus either by following cultural trends, or perhaps, selecting what they want to portray about the culture. The authors accurately report what the media focus is today. It is this reviewers impression that media in-part focus on these issues because they are non-conventional and emotionally entertaining. Anything conventional does not draw an audience.

Are we entering a seismic change in the media industry? The authors note that we are combining the traditional media (newspapers, radio and television) with the new media (the Internet, etc.). People see something on television, then go "online" to flesh it out with facts and other points of view. A digital divide has emerged with males, upper-middle class, whites (and Asians), youths outdistancing women, low-income, most ethnic and racial minorities and older people in broad-band and high-speed Internet use and skills (p. 173).[4] The author's main conclusion is that, with varying degrees of use, "…their [media] impact is central to the experience of modern life." (p. 187).

The authors conclude that we are living in a mediated age. Are we transformed as people use the interactive social media (Facebook, Twitter, Youtube) and other new technology to communicate with each other? Or, are the new technologies an overlay on existing patterns of communications that already exist without transforming our lives? (p. 194). The authors do not definitively answer these questions, but do conclude that we are entering an increasingly mediated society. By implication we need to monitor the effects of living in a mediated society.

This book is a responsible presentation of important topics by the increased use of media technology globally. They provide a great deal of empirical information relating to this development providing the groundwork not only for the development of media studies education, but for the necessary analysis of media impact in all the social sciences.

Notes

1   The most recent Kaiser Family Foundation study of youth in America shows that the average amount of time young people spend with some media form (including multitasking) is 12 hours and 20 minutes. This is more time than is spent sleeping, eating and non-media school and face-to-face family and peer socialization. See Kaiser Family Foundation. 2010. "Daily Media Use Among Children and Teens Up Dramatically From Five Years Ago." http://www.kff.org/entmedia012010nr. cfm, pp. 1-3. And Victoria Rideout, et al. January 2010. Generation M2: Media In The Lives of 8-18-Year-Olds. A Kaiser Family Foundation Study, pp. 2, 4.

2   This reviewer gave a lecture in 2010 at the China University of Mining and Technology, Xuzhou, China which beforehand was emailed to the host. All web site sources in the attached lecture were blocked or deleted by the government. Yet the lecture included a survey by Fudan University, Shanghai, China which showed that the Chinese people favor government censorship to keep out content such as pornography and violence. But, even the web site reference to this survey was taken out. Former communist countries in Central/Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union made a concerted effort to keep pornography out of circulation.

3   For an excellent discussion of public broadcasting vs. government control (as in the former Soviet Union and in Russia today) or public broadcasting vs. market driven media (as in the United States) see: Julia Rosanova. 2010. "Public service broadcasting as a medium of political socialization." Politics, Culture and Socialization. Vol. 1, Issue 1, pp. 29-48. Americans sometimes confuse public broadcasting with government controlled broadcasting. This is in error for "public broadcasting" is an alternative to market driven advertising funded media and government controlled media.

4   For an in-depth analysis of the digital divide see Daniel B. German and Catlin Lally. 2007. "A Profile of America's Media Use and Political Socialization Effects: television and the Internet's relationship to social connectedness in the USA." Policy Futures in Education (Oxford, United Kingdom). Vol. 5, Number 3, pp. 327-344.

Book Review 3

Title: *Papi. Uno scandalo politico.* By Peter Gomez, Marco Lillo & Marco Travaglio (2009). 331 p. Milano: Chiarelettere. ISBN: 978-8861900639.

Reviewed by: Jurriaan Middelhoff, University of Antwerp, Belgium.

Silvio Berlusconi is a man of many controversies. The latest controversy surrounding him, involves an allegedly underage prostitute, called Ruby (hence the name 'Ruby-gate'), who is claimed to have been intimate with the Italian Prime Minister. This is, however, not the first time Berlusconi is accused. The fact that Berlusconi is being prosecuted in Italy for this affair is a bit peculiar, given the allegations of his sexual escapades that started surfacing in 2009. In particular, when his wife, Veronica Lario publicly announced their divorce and explained in detail how perverse her husband had become, stories about Berlusconi's 'Bunga Bunga' parties reached the international media. However, they never reached the Italian media, or at least not the public attention. The reasons behind this interesting fact and the many escapades and other dubious behaviour of the Italian Prime Minister are discussed extensively in the book 'Papi: Uno scandalo politico' by Italian journalists Peter Gomez, Marco Lillo and Marco Travaglio. It was this book that brought the sexual and dubious escapades of Berlusconi to the public attention in 2009. The three newspaper journalists generally wondered how it could be that Berlusconi's escapades did not reach Italian news, whilst internationally this topic was trending. The book was written to reveal to the Italian public the truth about their first minister and his entourage.

It is clear from the beginning of the book that it bears a left and anti-Berlusconi signature, but if one knows the complexities of bipolar Italian politics, this is something that needs to be taken for granted and kept in mind whilst reading. The claims, accusations and facts presented in the book have to be continuously held against the intentions with which they were written. Having made this disclaimer, one thing that is clear after reading 'Papi' is the fact that apart from the current judicial proceedings against Berlusconi in the Rubygate affair, there are at least five other cases in which Berlusconi's role can be called, at the very least, suspicious.

Italian society is divided in two camps that hold each other hostage: left and right. The consequence of this stranglehold is that this book, with a clear leftist signature is full of strange scoffs and comments that do not contribute to the goal of the book, nor the

readability. The book is full of left-right stereotypes and accusations, thereby mirroring the same phenomenon in the Italian media landscape.

The writers discuss in detail how Berlusconi and his entourage create positions for certain women that they are obliged to, or to invoke a favour. These so-called 'veline' are placed at television shows, theatre plays and even the European parliament. Berlusconi and people surrounding him, go through deep waters to achieve the positions for these women, sometimes even resorting to blackmailing and repercussions.

Likewise, Berlusconi's dubious relationship with 17 year old Noemi is investigated, and the blackmailing and counteracting of a former secret service agent, whose wife was in favour with the Berlusconi camp is also dealt with extensively.

Another phenomenon that is discussed, in particular in the light of the current Ruby-gate accusations faced by Berlusconi, are the many parties, where numerous women are paid to be present (and go even further, as claimed in the book). The authors give a lot of attention to the fact whether or not some of these women were in fact underage.

At first instance, all these events did not receive full coverage in Italian media. Partly, because the Prime Minister's sexual escapades were considered a personal issue and partly because of a sense of national embarrassment. It took the international media and this book, to bring the dubious behaviour of the statesman on the radar of public attention.

The book reads like an Italian conversation: many words, opinions and suggestions that leave it up to the reader to distillate the relevant information. It is necessary to have a good understanding of Italian culture when reading this book. Apart from the slightly ingenuous style and clear haste in which this book was written by three newspaper journalists of leftist signature, are the combined revelations and accusations definitively worth noting. Between a lot of insinuations, elusiveness and semi-truths are a number of accusations, suspicious circumstances and evidence, which demonstrate the deficiencies of the Italian Prime Minister agonisingly, and raises many judicial, constitutional and political questions. It is therefore a pity that the style and form of the book have suffered from a clear surge for sensation and disclosures.

Knowing about the deficiencies of Berlusconi, what is it that makes Italians re-elect this self-made, former cruise ship singer from Milan? To answer this fascinating question one has to know a bit more about Italian (political) culture. In general, there are four main reasons for the continued success of Silvio Berlusconi and his party 'Il Popolo della Libertà'. First, the current opposition, left and centre-left are too splintered to make a fist against the current government. In 2006, they tried under the leadership of statesman Romano Prodi, but due to the fact that his government consisted of a coalition of 12 different parties, his attempt failed in 2008, when Silvio Berlusconi finally managed to drive the coalition apart.

Secondly, and not to be underestimated: Berlusconi's almost complete control over media. His own TV channels when he is not in power and all TV channels when he is. Although some newspapers (including the ones for which the authors write) have a leftist signature, in a country where less than 30 per cent reads a newspaper, we can speak about a significant control of the media by the Berlusconi-camp.

Thirdly, Italians identify themselves less with the capital than they do with their city, region, or even the EU.

Fourthly, the image of self-made man Berlusconi and his extravagant lifestyle is something that attracts a large part of Italian society. This phenomenon, which is deeply rooted in the macho and clientelistic Italian society, the very same in which the mafia can still be existent in certain parts of the country, makes people look up to the biggest macho of them all: Berlusconi.

If only part of the claims made by the authors of the book bear even the slightest resemblance to the truth, this book gives reason to seriously doubt the aptitude of Silvio Berlusconi as Prime Minister. The book also demonstrates how clientelism and in fact mafia-like are present even in the highest of ranks in Italy.

Jurriaan Middelhoff is researcher at the University of Antwerp. He has lived in Rome and published on Italian politics and culture, and most recently on the personality of Silvio Berlusconi.