

‘Back to the Future: The Uses of Television in the Digital Age’
A written submission to *A Future for Public Service Television:*
Content and Platforms in a Digital World - A Public Inquiry

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The background to our thinking was the realisation that broadcasting will have profound and far-reaching effects; the working assumption must be that television in particular will be a potent factor in influencing the values and the moral standards of our society ... [Hence] there should be presented, for listeners and viewers to choose from, the widest possible range of subject matter, treating as much as possible of the whole scope and variety of human awareness and experience. To do so, the broadcasters must not only reflect society; they must pick out and focus attention on that which is significant—the best, because it is the best; the worst, so that we shall know it for what it is; the new and the challenging, because individual listeners and viewers should not be denied the opportunity of responding to them, and of judging them ... For the future, the objective remains—as always—to realise the purposes of broadcasting.¹

I

Any inquiry into the present-day ecology and future possibilities of British television must necessarily reflect on the historical development of public service broadcasting. Not so as to invoke a nostalgic golden age or a whiggish history of scientific progress; rather, to highlight the democratic purposes that have shaped television as a social technology over the past nine decades. And to also consider how best to reevaluate that tradition in view of the medium’s changing production, distribution and consumption practices in the digital age.

Such an analysis also reveals how and why debates about television are part of a longer inquiry concerning the more extensive relation of culture to society: viz. the articulation between the creative and intellectual capacities of human beings (as expressed in the popular arts, recreation, education, everyday customs and habits of thought), on the one hand, and wider social changes and political forces (industrialisation, urbanisation, enfranchisement, secularisation, welfarism, migration, multiculturalism, neoliberalism), on the other.

It is especially fitting that ‘A Future for Public Service Television’ inquiry, chaired by Lord Putnam, and based at the Media and Communications department of Goldsmiths, University of London, should take its cue from the Pilkington Report on Broadcasting published in 1962. Apart from being the first (not to mention highly influential) committee of inquiry into television, Pilkington was one of the defining moments in the distinguished career

¹ *Report of the Committee on Broadcasting*, Cmnd. 1753 (London: HMSO, 1962), §1055, §1059.

of the late Richard Hoggart, former Warden of Goldsmiths. But more of this later.

II

From its beginnings in the 1920s broadcasting in Britain was established along similar lines to a public utility. This was in part due to the problem of analogue spectrum scarcity and the related question of how best to finance a universally available broadcast service. Additionally, insofar as any mass communications medium has the potential to influence public opinion, broadcasting was deemed to be of great social importance, and was thus mandated to serve the national interest whilst being independent of government interference. That is, to tread carefully on the tightrope of disinterested impartiality.

Hence the eventual constitution of the BBC, incorporated by Royal Charter as a quasi-autonomous public body, funded by income derived from an annual licence fee charged on households possessing a broadcast receiver, and effectively regulated by a state appointed board of trustees. Its mission to inform, educate and entertain, has been variously interpreted over the years: *inter alia* maintaining cultural benchmarks, a commitment to political neutrality, strengthening the democratic process, representing a diversity of social interests, sustaining civil society and an educated citizenry, to amuse and relax.

The early BBC was primarily concerned with radio. Television was an invention of the late 1930s that came of age following the BBC's coverage of Queen Elizabeth II's coronation and the arrival of regional commercial television (ITV) in the 1950s. The introduction of BBC2 in 1964 and improvements in technical standards, such as colour transmission and the move from 405 to 625 lines, further broadened television's appeal. Thereafter, the BBC and ITV functioned as a 'benevolent duopoly' until the late 1970s, an era that is widely seen as the 'golden age' of British television.

The Annan Committee's recommendation that broadcasting be more pluralistic resulted in the creation of Channel 4 as an advertising funded subsidiary of the then Independent Broadcasting Authority. However, unlike the BBC and ITV, Channel 4 was established as a publisher-broadcaster obliged to commission original output from out of house. And indeed, the early years of Channel 4 were a period of innovative experimentation insofar as many of its programmes were aimed at minority audiences and made by independent production companies that were genuinely committed to good broadcasting.

An antagonistic national press, the ascendancy of monetarist policies, and the forced resignation of Alistair Milne notwithstanding, the BBC survived the political climate of the 1980s relatively intact. Contrary to expectations, the Peacock Committee, established by the Tory government of Margaret Thatcher to consider the future financing of the BBC, rejected

the immediate introduction of advertising or sponsorship as an alternative or supplement to the BBC's licence fee. The committee did, however, recommend that British broadcasting move towards a market system based on greater efficiency and consumer sovereignty.

The significance of Peacock's thinking was partially realised in the provisions of the 1990 Broadcasting Act. Although comprehensive privatisation was avoided, Channel 4 was made to sell its own advertising. And a 25 per cent independent production quota was introduced for both the BBC and ITV. On the other hand, the newly established Independent Television Commission (ITC) insisted that applicants tendering for ITV franchises in 1991, and the newly established Channel 5 licence, meet a wide-ranging quality threshold, thereby curbing deliberate overbidding and excessive commercialism.

In spite of the ITC's best efforts to preserve standards and diverse programming, there was a cumulative shift away from public service obligations towards neoliberal deregulation throughout the remainder of the 1990s and early 2000s. New Labour established OfCom as a light-touch regulator in the belief that UK public service obligations were hindering broadcasting's competitiveness in the export market. And though it provides valuable information concerning key developments in the broadcasting sector, OfCom has indeed tended to prioritise a consumerist discourse in its research reports and annual statements.

Perhaps the main calamity in recent years was OfCom's easing of the regulatory obstacles to cross-media ownership and the consolidation of ITV into a single public limited company, which resulted in BSkyB's 2006 acquisition of a 17.9 per cent stake in ITV. And while the Competition Commission subsequently ordered BSkyB to reduce its shareholding to less than 7.5 per cent, the latest state of play is that Liberty Global (which owns Virgin Media) has gradually acquired a 9.9 per cent stake in ITV over the last few years, fuelling speculation that the US cable conglomerate is planning a takeover bid.

Likewise, Richard Desmond's £103m purchase of Channel 5 in 2010 was made possible because OfCom deemed him to have passed the requisite 'public interest' tests. However, Desmond wasted little time modeling the channel on his Express Newspapers group. Unsurprisingly, he then sold the channel to Viacom, another US multinational, for £450m in 2014, prompting Channel 4's chief executive, David Abraham, to warn of 'the gold rush of British Television' with American media companies that are 'eager to stay ahead of each other by internationalising their revenues, priming their distribution pipes and shielding their tax exposure'.

But creeping commercialism does not purely start and end with the for-profit broadcasting sector. John Birt's tenure as BBC Director-General has been widely criticised for shifting the

balance of power in favour of management consultancy. And the introduction of the Public Value Test in 2004 is yet another example of a regulatory instrument that seeks to weaken the BBC's distinguished ties to public service values. That BBC senior management recommended the adoption of this pro-market straightjacket demonstrates just how acquiescent the Corporation has become in recent years.

III

Which brings us to the present day, where UK television has become a highly integrated, internationalised, multichannel market comprised of PSBs (all BBC channels, Channel 3 licensees, Channel 4 Corporation, S4C, Channel 5), commercial cable and satellite companies (including Sky UK, Viacom, Virgin Media), on-demand internet providers (Netflix, Amazon Prime Instant Video), and a rapidly growing independent production sector (for example, HIT Entertainment, RDF Media Group, Hat Trick Productions). Altogether, the industry generated a staggering £13.2bn revenue in 2014.

Alongside the emergence and proliferation of new television services there has been a measured change in UK audience attitudes to broadcast media. For example, recent OfCom data suggests that, compared to 2013, there was an 11-minute decline in overall television viewing per person (aged 4 and above) per day in 2014. Predictably, the drop was especially manifest among children aged 4-15, with a 17-minute fall per day vis-à-vis a 1-minute decline among viewers aged 65 or over. Furthermore, young people tend to prefer watching on-demand and catch-up television using computers and smartphones.

This said, the same OfCom report also implies that television viewing remains a common source of information and entertainment. On average, people (again, aged 4 and above) still watched 220 minutes of television programmes per day in 2014 (85 per cent of which were live broadcasts). And despite evident differences between age groups, Britain's main five PSBs and their secondary channels accounted for nearly 72 per cent of all viewing. Moreover, BBC One remains the most-watched channel with a 21.7 per cent share of the overall audience; by contrast, the combined viewing share for Sky UK was just 8.2 per cent.

And yet, there are clear signs that public service television is facing considerable pressure from a hostile Tory government, powerful commercial interests, and a narrow-minded press. The publication of the *Future of the BBC* report by the Culture, Media and Sport Committee (CMSC) in February 2015, and its demands for the abolishment of the BBC Trust and a long-term alternative to the licence fee, was an early indication of the present government's intention to raise tough questions around the continued relevance of the traditional rationales for socially purposeful media, television in particular.

Other grounds for concern include the appointment of the Thatcherite John Whittingdale, formerly chair of the CMSC, as Culture Secretary; Chancellor George Osborne's cowing of the BBC to cover the £750m cost of providing free television licences for over-75s, and his accusation that the BBC's online provision is 'imperial in its ambitions'; Prime Minister David Cameron's currying of favour with Rupert Murdoch and his media empire; continuing speculation about the privatisation of Channel 4; the further relaxation of public service obligations for ITV and Channel 5; and ongoing pressures to transfer regulatory oversight of the BBC to OfCom.

Above all, whilst recognising that the BBC 'is one of the great institutions of Britain', the government's recently published green paper on the in-progress BBC Charter Review encompasses many of the above-mentioned CMSC report's recommendations. Furthermore, nearly all eight members of the consultation's advisory board have been highly critical of the BBC in the past, prompting widespread concern that the BBC is under unprecedented attack. Indeed, Lord Patten, a former Conservative minister and chairman of the BBC Trust, went as far as to describe the panel of experts as 'a team of assistant gravediggers'.

Apart from proposing the 'replacement of the licence fee with a household levy, and a longer-term possibility of a move to a degree of subscription for BBC services', the discussion document takes a particular interest in the BBC's 'scope and scale'. An overriding concern is that 'the level of public funding gives the BBC an unfair advantage and distorts audience share in a way that undermines commercial business models'. One proposed solution is to scale back the BBC's in-house production capabilities by 'expanding the current quotas for independent production across television, radio and online content'.

The consultation document also raises concerns about the BBC's financial management and editorial shortcomings. Excessive pay-offs for executives, the rise in the number of senior managers, the £100m cost of the failed Digital Media Initiative project, the inordinate £1bn refurbishment of Broadcasting House, and the Jimmy Savile Newsnight controversy, are singled out for particular criticism. And rightly so. As one of the world's most trusted broadcasters, the BBC has a special responsibility when it comes to upholding high standards of public accountability, transparency, and objectivity.

Probably the most damaging criticism, insofar as it attacks what is widely considered to be the BBC's cornerstone, is the green paper's suggestion that the idea of universality has resulted in the Corporation 'chasing ratings rather than delivering distinctive, quality programming that other providers would not'. The BBC's acquisition of the the format for *The Voice* at a cost of £20 million is cited as a prime example of such behaviour and is summarily criticised for

impinging on TV genres and formats that could be served equally well by its commercial competitors, particularly during peak viewing hours.

IV

Certainly, the BBC is not without blame for aggressive scheduling and crony corporatism. On the other hand, to single it out for poor governance and lacking distinctiveness is misleading. And to solicit criticisms from the BBC's commercial rivals is not unlike the pot calling the kettle black. Indeed, it is very telling that much of the current government's thinking about broadcasting pays scant attention to wider trends and market failures in the UK audiovisual sector. To do so would expose the green paper's claims to objectivity and, ultimately, the Tories fervor for economic liberalism.

But Lord Puttnam's concurrent inquiry into the future of television is surely right to insist that 'public service provision is not a sole responsibility of the BBC, but a concern linked to a much broader television ecology'. Such guidance can also help to illustrate the necessary association between freedom and responsibility in a commercial democracy. And this is what I propose to do in the remaining pages. But before setting out what will be mostly a clarion call for creative neutrality and regional broadcasting, it may be useful to cast a fleeting glance at the BBC's past and present achievements.

For a start, the BBC has weathered a number of political storms, and though it has sometimes accommodated reasons of state (recent examples include the 1984/85 miners' strike, the Zircon affair, the Balen report, the Gaza DEC appeal, MI5 vetting, and promoting the careers of useful idiots), equally, the BBC has a strong record of refusing to kowtow to government wishes (as was the case with the Suez crisis, the Falklands conflict, the Libyan bombing, *Real Lives*, the Sinn Féin broadcast ban, and the war on Iraq), thereby asserting its public service commitment to impartiality and editorial autonomy.

Additionally, the BBC has a long history of, to quote Huw Wheldon (former Managing Director, BBC TV), making 'good programmes popular and popular programmes good': *Z-Cars*, *Hancock's Half Hour*, *Civilisation*, *Morecombe & Wise*, *Old Grey Whistle Test*, *Blue Peter*, *Doctor Who*, *Ascent of Man*, *Steptoe & Son*, *Play for Today*, *This is Your Life*, *Arena*, *Parkinson*, *Fawlty Towers*, *Gardeners' World*, *Mastermind*, *Life on Earth*, *Blake's 7*, *Children in Need*, *Blackadder*, *EastEnders*, *Match of the Day*, *Panorama*, *Wolf Hall*, even *The Great British Bake Off*, are just a few instances of television series that are ground-breaking *and* good of their kind.

And in spite of a real-term decrease in its annual budget over the last two charter periods, the BBC continues to cast its bread upon the waters, as seen in the diversification of its portfolio (BBC Three, BBC Four, CBBC, CBeebies, 6 Music, the Asian Network), the pioneering of new

digital services (such as News Online and the iPlayer), and the ongoing investment in genres (the arts, formal education, children's television, documentaries, regional news, religion and science) that purely commercial broadcasters have started to overlook because the removal of programming quotas in the 2003 Communications Act.

Examples of this kind demonstrate that, if carefully managed and inspired by a sense of vocation, broadcasting institutions can help strengthen the democratic process by making power elites accountable to the public; whilst at the same time building a stronger sense of community by connecting audiences through shared experiences and social dialogue. And the occasional lapse notwithstanding, the BBC has played a leading role over the years in providing a touchstone against which principles of objectivity, diversity and quality have been fashioned into regulatory mechanisms and codes of professional conduct.

V

But what of the green paper's complaint that the BBC has a negative impact on the commercial television sector? In actual fact, the licence fee presently accounts for nearly 40 per cent of the annual expenditure on UK-generated programmes. Many of the productions are then distributed by BBC Worldwide, thus promoting derivative sales. And there are plans to further increase 'traffic to and investment in UK original content' by opening BBC iPlayer to other British broadcasters and arts organisations. Finally, the Corporation also acts as a 'traffic generator' for cultural quarters in Salford, Bristol, Cardiff, and Glasgow.

Conversely, though the likes of Netflix and Amazon Prime have increased demand for original, high quality commissions (*Breaking Bad*, *House of Cards*, *Orange Is The New Black*, *The Americans*, *Black Sails*, *The Fall*, *Mad Men*, *Hand of God*, *Vikings*, *Bosch*, for example), the focus has been on US independent companies and content. Furthermore, because US producers can recover their costs from domestic sales alone, they can afford to be extremely competitive in foreign markets, which has wide-ranging consequences for British talent and ideas, particularly if UK PSBs choose ever more American imports over home-grown output.

Most misleading of all, though, is the green paper's suggestion that listeners and viewers would be better served if the BBC was to concentrate on 'particular or underserved audiences'. This is not to say that the BBC could not do more than it already does to represent a wider range of socio-cultural relations and processes. Rather, whereas the Annan Report recommended minority programming in the genuine interests of pluralism, present-day talk of 'increased differentiation' is best understood as euphemistic doublespeak aimed at emasculating the BBC's universal appeal.

Of that, a striking case in point is a DCMS commissioned report that offers an econometric assessment of the BBC's market impact and distinctiveness. Not for nothing does the

consultancy advocate a shrinking of BBC One's primetime entertainment: as well as reducing the channel's audience share, such a policy could benefit ad-funded rivals by £33m to £60m per year by the end of the next ten-year charter period. Even more incredulous is the speculative claim that UK commercial broadcasters 'might well increase their investment in original content in response to a reduction in the size and scope of the BBC'.

However, it is important to remember that most of the BBC's rivals are part of diversified media conglomerates and *already* benefit from multifunctional synergies, such as cross-media promotion and repurposing. And industry metrics would suggest that audio-visual markets are in perfectly good order: for example, total net UK advertising revenue (for multi and PSB channels) increased from £3.7bn in 2013 to £3.8bn in 2014; likewise, online television income rocketed from £95m in 2009 to £793m in 2014, a growth of 38 per cent year-on-year. In short, the BBC is not the monopolistic behemoth that its critics make it out to be.

Besides, of the 192,564 responses to the government's consultation, 60 per cent replied 'No change needed' when asked whether 'the licence fee be modernised?' On the subject of BBC expansion, 68 per cent of respondents thought that 'increased choice justifies expansion in a multi-platform and multi-channel era'. More than four-fifths of responses indicated that the BBC is serving its audiences 'well or very well', and three quarters indicated that the BBC's content is 'sufficiently high quality and distinctive from that of other broadcasters'. Put another way: the majority of the British public consider the BBC to be good value for money.

VI

Of course, the future of television ought not be decided by the findings of market research and public surveys alone. To return to the example of Pilkington, committee member Richard Hoggart noted that one of the reasons the inquiry decided not to commission a related audience study was because it did not want the report to 'restrict itself to collecting and ordering objective evidence' or 'to laying out the social alternatives neutrally': interesting though quantitative research may be, it tends to confine itself to 'outlining a great many useful is's'; rarely does such work 'give a single ought'.

The inference of Hoggart's matter-of-fact remarks is that, whilst recognising that *ex cathedra* opinions can be misleading, the committee wanted evidence from people who were not afraid to offer shrewd opinion: 'We were engaged to the best of our ability in a study in social philosophy. We were asking about the nature of good broadcasting in a democracy. We could not enforce our judgements scientifically; we could only say at the end ... "This is so, is it not?"' And of the various metaphysical considerations expressed during the course of the inquiry, foremost was the concern to realise the purposes of broadcasting.

Hence Pilkington's recommendation that broadcasters ought to recognise that they 'were in a constant and sensitive relationship with the moral condition of society', which many critics took to epitomise the report's patrician tone of voice. However, the committee defended this particular clause on the grounds that it was intended to give broadcasters a 'responsibility difficult to define but not easy to shrug off', which necessarily involved them having to steer a course somewhere between the populist Scylla of 'giving the public what it wants' and the autocratic Charybdis of 'giving the public what they ought to have'.

That is to say, Pilkington was not asserting 'a crudely moralistic relationship' in the sense that 'broadcasters had a responsibility for the direct propagation of the Ten Commandments'. Rather, the report was advocating a vocational sense of professionalism that went beyond either a purely commercial or aesthetic definition of broadcasting: a duty to commission programmes that 'bring before us all the widest range of subject matter, the whole scope and variety of human awareness and experience, the best and the worst, the new and the challenging, the old and familiar, the serious and the light [thus] enriching the lives of every one of us'.

Naturally, mediating between these different positions presents all kinds of dilemmas in terms of what broadcasters should prioritise. But Hoggart reminds us that one of the enduring principles established by Pilkington was that, 'good broadcasting in a free society ... should not hesitate to reflect "the quarrel of society with itself", even though politicians may not like the result'. What is more, if they shoulder this responsibility, broadcasters will end up becoming 'a sort of yeast in society' in the sense that they 'will be active agents of change', sensitive to new possibilities and unforeseen contingencies.

Hoggart's fondness for positive regulation is well known. But contrary to accusations of him promoting censorship, Hoggart was always clear about the difference between enabling forms of broadcasting policy that say 'Thou shalt' as opposed to prohibitive forms of broadcasting legislation that say 'Thou shalt not': 'Good regulations increase freedom, make for good growth, expand and protect the arena, the living space, for good programming'; 'to windows being opened, not knuckles censoriously rapped'. In other words, unfettered consumerism and uncritical populism are the problem, not sex, bad language, and violence.

Commenting on broadcasting policy developments in the early 1990s Hoggart was even more specific. Though never published, *A Broadcasting Charter for Britain* (with Stephen Hearst) remains one of the boldest statements on the duties and rights of listeners, viewers, programme makers, and regulators. With typical candour, the manuscript is prefaced with the following statement: 'It would be more fashionable and more generally acceptable to list first – and perhaps only – Rights. But in a democratic society Rights are inextricably bound up

with Duties; Duties are the foundation of Rights and so prior to them. No Rights without Duties.'

The public have a duty 'to respect other people's tastes' and 'to look at what is available overall before complaining that there's nothing worth watching'. It is the duty of the programme maker 'to his or her self' (that is to say, to their 'conscience'), 'to do justice to his or her subject' and 'to be creative'. Duties of legislators include the duty 'to create structures and methods of financing for broadcasting' which encourage the production of 'good programmes', 'to enable disparate voices to be heard' and, finally, in Jane Austen's words, 'not to assume it is their duty to "screw people into virtue"'.

Of the many rights listed, the one that best summarises Hoggart's thinking was the declaration that listeners and viewers had a right 'not to be got at, politically, commercially, piously'. That is to say, the public have a right to access the fullest means of information and creative expression in the belief that we can learn to value both our common humanity and our best selves. Only then might we fully comprehend how broadcasting might become truly democratic, comprehensive, and socially organic; indeed, the much wider relationship between culture and society generally and, if found wanting, to be in a position to do something about it.

VII

In spite of being sympathetic to the needs of minority communities, Hoggart's claims to represent the broader public interest nevertheless risk excluding those social groups whose cultural tastes and interests are not so easily articulated, much less accommodated, in such prescriptive and general terms. Though he always insisted that 'we should feel members one of another, but also retain all we have of sparky, spikey individuality', there is still a danger that a straightforward Hoggartian analysis could ignore communities of people who have nothing in common with its vision for a common culture.

For example, Hoggart never supported community media initiatives in quite the same way that he supported PSBs such as the BBC or Channel 4. In fact, he actually dismissed the 'small-holding dreams of communications' as at best 'an engaging dream', at worst 'a reversion to parochialism' which will permit 'the ideological toughs and the commercial sharp-shooters' to 'divide and rule'. The subtext of Hoggart's reasoning is that locally oriented media may result in the fragmenting of society into a mass of atomised communities of interest or regional identity, which could put an end to any sense of shared culture and sociality.

Though one can appreciate the cultural and political logic of Hoggart's argument, it is nevertheless his Achilles heel. This is a pity because, whilst broadcasting policy in the United

Kingdom has begun to acknowledge the differing needs and wants of a variety of publics, it has been a long time in the making and still in need of more widespread support. Partly because of the government's refusal to lift restricted access to the airwaves on the grounds of spectrum scarcity. But also because of broadcasting's tendency towards concentration of ownership, economies of scale, formulaic programming, inward-looking professionalism, and managerial bureaucracy.

Consequently, when cable community television finally became a reality in the 1970s, it struggled to take off because of financial and political constraints, much to the annoyance of community media advocates. Similarly, the idea of 'access' television (with the possible exception of *Video Diaries* and the BBC Wales Digital Storytelling project) failed to live up to expectations and was quickly co-opted as new genres of popular, voyeuristic entertainment that range from home video shows (*You've Been Framed*, *Caught in the Act*), to reality television (*Big Brother*, *The Only Way is Essex*), to confessional chat-shows (*Oprah*, *Jeremy Kyle*), and so on.

It is for similar reasons that film and television producer Tony Garnett, though a critical friend, recently criticised the BBC (or what he sardonically refers to as the Central London Broadcasting Corporation) for being too metropolitan and failing to adequately represent Britain's 'other regions, with their own culture, political stance and achievements'. And when people from the provinces do appear on the screen, Garnett angrily notes that their life stories are often 'presented as though they were foreign news', 'patronised by posh southerners who occasionally venture north, like visiting anthropologists, to investigate the habits of the quaint natives'.

Much of Garnett's broadside is aimed at the way television drama is commissioned by the BBC's 'executive apparatchiki', not least their 'totalitarian micro-management' of productions and parasitical feeding off other people's creativity. And he is especially scathing about the BBC's dereliction of its public service remit to make a full range of programmes, such as bespoke single plays or mini series that genuinely document the lived experiences of working people, 'showing them in all their dignity, from their point of view'. In short, British television could do far more to 'reach out to everyone and engage in a truly national conversation'.

Of course, such arguments are well-worn. It was Raymond Williams who suggested, as far back as the 1960s, that new kinds of broadcasting institutions are needed (ones that are truly democratic and accountable) if the public are ever to 'have control of their own means of expression'. Not unlike Jürgen Habermas, Williams believed that the media ought to function as a truly autonomous public sphere in which people can exchange ideas and opinions openly and on equal terms, giving rise to communicative rationality and a collective sense of purpose. The vision is of a cultural democracy in which PSB is extended beyond even paternal broadcasters like the BBC.

Likewise, John Keane and John Thompson have argued for more expansive, non-reductionist models of PSB, ones that are premised upon more complex notions of public service (and a pluralist civil society) in which social movements and community-based citizens' groups can make use of more diffused and localised media networks. And James Curran's advocacy of 'a core public service broadcasting system, encircled by a private, social market, professional and civic media sectors', that is a public service culture based upon a multiplicity of both competing and common interests, is an even more concrete illustration of how the ecology of British television could be further democratised.

VIII

There are many other debates concerning public service television and the future of mass communications more generally. The focus of this submission captures only a small fraction of past and current developments. Suffice to say that the above proposals and comments take inspiration from the resurgent positive interest in the Pilkington inquiry and the related ideas of its best known committee member, Richard Hoggart. Their criticisms of free-market liberalism and light-touch regulation are as relevant today as they were fifty-odd years ago insofar as they still represent a cogent engagement with the idea of PSB as a primary facilitator of educated and deliberative democracy.

To quote Hoggart again (writing shortly before his death), 'the arrival of broadcasting in the last century offered the greatest opportunity to create a clear democratic means of communication, one harnessed neither to the profit-making wagon nor to political power'. Furthermore, 'broadcasting can be the biggest and best arena for exposing false democracy and welcoming its opposite', that is a socio-political system which both encourages and is supported by the endless play of free will and a more civil society. And it is for these primary reasons that broadcasting should keep 'going on going on' with 'public service at its heart', for its sake and ours.

Finally, if British democracy is to overcome the debilitating effects of the ever increasing erosion of public trust in our social and political institutions, the present inquiry should consider the advantages to increasing regionalisation of broadcasting (premiered upon good public debate and genuine methods of representation that draw upon the opinions of a variety of publics, not just those of media proprietors, practitioners, middle-class reformers, organised interest groups, and government bodies – even though these agencies form an integral and inescapable part of our media culture), and whether this might be one of the ways to revitalise public connection to civic responsibility and political participation.

This is particularly important in light of the current political climate where, even with the

ongoing economic crisis, the governmental usage of financial markets and private corporations would seem to be the preferred technique for regulating socio-cultural relations and institutional practices. At the time of writing, things could hardly be worse. We can but hope that to everything there is a season, that the tide will turn again, and that a new age of revived philistine instrumentality will be held off. But we cannot wait passively for that to happen. Though it faces a cacophony of oppositional voices and difficulties, the Putnam inquiry represents a meaningful opportunity to promote that desirable outcome.

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