BOOK REVIEW

Colleen Vietzen

Martin, Brian.
Information liberation. London: Freedom Press, 1998. ISBN 0-900384-93-X

In this slim yet thought-packed volume, Brian Martin brings together a range of concerns related to contemporary information practices, and particularly their social and political impact. He writes from the standpoint of a left-wing, social activist and uncompromisingly deplores oppression and those social forces that undermine the rights and freedom of groups and individuals. The interest of the book lies in its diverse insights into the role of information in reinforcing the power of the powerful and the oppression of the oppressed. Martin's style is accessible and engaging, and readily holds the reader's attention. Despite the diversity of topics, and at first glance seemingly unrelated themes, the book has a unity of purpose which binds its ten chapters firmly together. It consistently challenges the powerful - especially governments and corporations - and suggests alternative, participative ways in which information could be used to empower more people.

The title, *Information liberation*, is challenging in its ambiguity - does it suggest that information liberates people or that information itself needs liberating? The text picks up both nuances. It shows how information has been hijacked by the powerful and needs to claim its right to freedom. It also shows how information itself has the power to liberate (or to oppress). Martin's critique is by no means destructive. He makes counter-proposals for harnessing the power of information for social and individual improvement, acknowledging that his approach is visionary and challenging and might need to be tempered by practical concerns.

The first chapter sets the scene for the whole book. The opening quotation from Lord Acton (1834) is pivotal: "Power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely". Martin contends that the major information tools are in the hands of the powerful or are enabling a few to become powerful. Each chapter deals with an area of information and communication and illustrates how the premise that power corrupts is true for each. In chapter one the author summarizes the resulting themes as follows (p5):

- Mass media are inherently undemocratic because a small number of individuals control what is communicated to a large audience;
- Patents and copyrights give control over the use of information to corporations and individuals. The power is commonly used to benefit the rich and exploit the poor;
- Surveillance, which basically boils down to gathering information about someone else without their knowledge or consent, is a method of social control;
- Employees do not have freedom of speech;
- Defamation law is regularly used to suppress free speech;
- The structure of research organizations, including universities, makes knowledge mainly useful to governments, corporations, professions and researchers themselves;
- Ideas which will be useful for popular understanding and action need to be simple in essence - though not just any simple idea will serve the purpose;
- People need to learn to think for themselves rather than accept the ideas of famous intellectuals.

Chapter one ends with useful definitions of Martin's understanding of three terms which have a bearing on the overall argument:

- **Information** is data that has been processed, organised or classified into categories;
- **Knowledge** is facts and principles believed to be true;
- **Wisdom** is good judgement of what is useful for achieving something worthwhile.

The author elaborates: "Information without knowledge isn't much use, and knowledge without wisdom isn't much use. More information isn't necessarily a good thing without the capacity to interpret, understand and use it. Nevertheless the

focus here is on power to control information, which has consequences for developing knowledge and wisdom" (p6).

It is difficult to select particular themes for elaboration as each chapter has an interest and fascination of its own. However, there is a steady progression from one theme to the next and each chapter is enhanced by arguments that precede it. For example, when examining issues like intellectual property, surveillance and bureaucracy, the reader is inevitably mindful of the power of the mass media so cogently argued in chapter two. Similarly, Martin's encouragement, in chapter two, to participate in the alternative media and harness their power for social action recurs throughout when suggesting ways of undermining institutional strangleholds in other spheres - like research and free speech.

For academics and authors, the chapter on intellectual property is likely to present a threat. Intellectual property includes copyrights, patents, trademarks, trade secrets, design rights and plant breeders' rights. The original intention of copyright was to encourage creative thinking and writing. Martin argues that copyright defeats its own ends and has little effect in curbing plagiarism. In the same way that the property-based free market serves the interests of the powerful, so treating ideas as property to be owned actually inhibits creativity. Martin contends that intellectual products cannot be owned. Using his own book as an example, he suggests that " if asking is not feasible, or the copying is of limited scale, then good judgement should be used ... Negotiation and good judgement will be necessary in any society that moves beyond intellectual property". (p56). It is significant that Martin meticulously acknowledges and footnotes all sources!

The chapter on surveillance is eye-opening and disturbing. The author illustrates how insidiously governments, corporations, banks, workplaces, medical services and other remote organizations invade the privacy of citizens by routinely capturing, storing and using personal information. The scope of surveillance has exploded in the context of computers and telecommunications. "The capacities for collecting data about individuals are epitomised by the computerised database" (p59). "Surveillance is deeply embedded in today's social institutions and is becoming more and more pervasive" (p82). Inevitably surveillance is top-down and much data-analysis is geared towards profit-making. Martin calls for responsibility in using data. It is hoped that managers, marketeers, hospital administrators are responsible people, but there is no guarantee. Some suggested checks on surveillance include encryption, disruption by individuals when submitting data, and, more radically, challenging hierarchical structures.

Two chapters on free speech are revealing and challenging: Free speech versus bureaucracy, and: Defamation law and free speech. In both cases information is usually a tool of the rich and powerful. Librarians will resonate with the strong case against the stifling effects of bureaucracy, as libraries are normally service departments within bureaucratic organizations. "Normally, information about operations is passed up the hierarchy and orders from bosses are passed down... Bureaucratic elites like to collect information about workers, from personal details to comments on job performance. This information can be used to control the workers. On the other hand, information about the elites is not made available to workers" (p86). Avenues for whistleblowing are usually blocked by the hierarchy. Collecting and using information about worker morale, hazards, mismanagement and operations could be an important tool in mobilizing workers to challenge bureaucracies.

In its present form, defamation law encourages power holders to suppress criticism, while the cost of litigation places defamation proceedings beyond the reach of the powerless and poor. The aim should be to foster dialogue and honesty. As argued in chapter two, the mass media should be replaced with interactive media which promote free speech.

Research is shown, in chapter seven, to be self-serving to sponsors and researchers. By contrast, teaching is designed to demystify the disciplines and make knowledge accessible to ordinary people. An alternative vision suggests that community participation would produce a more egalitarian and problem-oriented approach to research. A broad cross-section of people should be involved in decisions about research priorities and interested people at all levels could be engaged in research. To achieve this, social movements should put research on their agendas.

Chapter eight is not as tightly argued as the rest of the book but makes some valid points. Sophisticated theory, with its trickle-down effect, is exclusive. Simple ideas are empowering. Simple does not equate to simplistic. Rather it refers to ideas which are articulated in simple terms and drawn from practical application. Simple ideas

enable power to be ceded to the people and, with associated actions, should be the foundation of theoretical development. Chapter nine encourages people to think for themselves, assess ideas on their own merits, and not worry whether concepts originated with what Martin calls celebrity intellectuals, an attitude which is associated with capitalism as it turns personalities into commodities. In fact, the whole book models the author's belief in independent, evaluative thinking and challenges the reader to engage with ideas in a creative way.

The book concludes with a commendation of information as a agent of liberation. Noting that the phrase freedom of information has already been taken over by legislation which allows citizens access to government documents, Martin encourages the use of information liberation to mean the general project of information to move towards a society free of domination (p172). Four strategies for achieving information liberation are named in the subtitles of the closing chapter:

- Live the alternative;
- Work on the inside and outside;
- Be participatory;
- Change both individuals and social structures.

Information liberation is interesting and provocative. While making suggestions about responsible information policies, it is not dogmatic. It challenges the reader to engage with the issues surrounding modern information practices and encourages grassroots participation in achieving appropriate reform.

has something special to offer: he has spent more than 30 years as a pioneer in understanding the effect of the structure and function of the human vocal tract on anthropology. And it is the author's description of his own journey and his insights that makes the book worth our while.

The human vocal tract is unique in the mammalian world: the larynx is located low in the throat, creating a large chamber above it in which sound can be modified. This is the source of the richness of spoken language. But we pay a price for this useful anatomical arrangement: it means that we can choke if we try to breathe and eat or drink simultaneously. No other mammal faces this hazard. Lieberman tells us of his discovery in the late 1960s that there was little known about the anatomy of the vocal tract of human newborns, which his preliminary investigations indicated were similar to that in monkeys and apes.

'The human vocal tract is unique in the mammalian world. It is the source of the richness of spoken language'

Lieberman's hunch had been right: a human newborn's vocal tract was like that in our primate cousins, and for good reasons: babies need to be able to breathe as they suckle, without the danger of choking. In the first half dozen years of a child's life, the larynx gradually sinks lower and lower in the throat, as the demands of suckling and breathing simultaneously become less, and the need for articulate speech increases.

And there are further disadvantages to the anatomy of modern human skulls. Our jaws are very short, for instance, which means that the tooth row is shorter than in, say, Neanderthals, and our wisdom teeth often become impacted. These days, removal of impacted wisdom teeth might be an uncomfortable nuisance. It used to be life-threatening.

The smaller tooth apparatus also has consequences for survival in marginal times, Lieberman explains: reduced chewing efficiency, leading to reduced absorption of nutrients from the diet. Only a small percentage, perhaps, but enough so that when times are tough it could mean the difference between surviving or not. There's more bad news, says Lieberman. The right-angle bend in the human vocal tract reduces the respiratory efficiency of our upper airways.

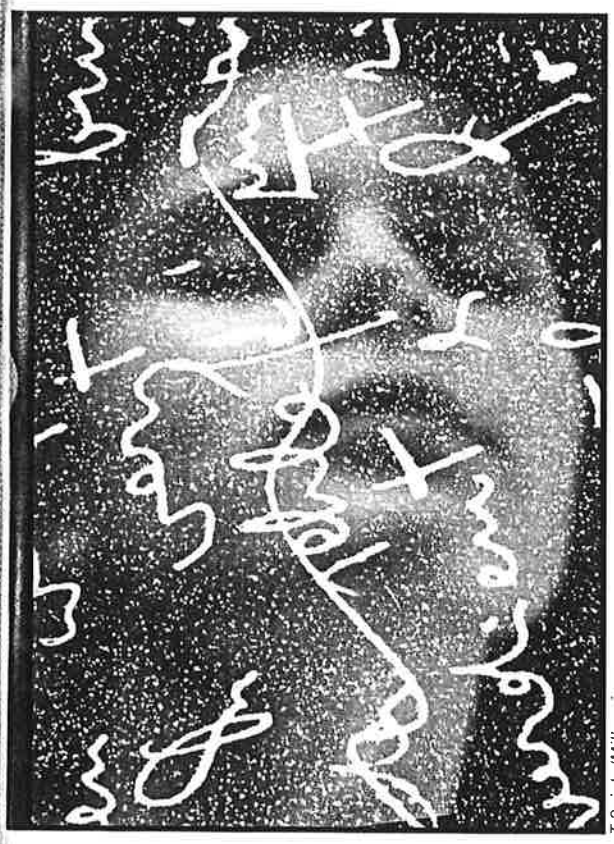
This catalogue of disadvantages shows what a great evolutionary advantage the capacity for speech was, says Lieberman. If it conferred only a minor advantage, we wouldn't be here. And he goes on to argue that this capacity was fully developed in the earliest anatomically modern humans, 150 000 years ago.

Lieberman has long been associated with the "extinction through limited language" explanation of the demise of the Neanderthals. Judging by the inferred structure of their vocal tract, Neanderthals could produce all human vowels, except [i], [u], and [a]; they were also unable to say the consonants [k] and [g] , which would mean that it would have been difficult to disentangle individual words—and meaning—when they were in full flood. Neanderthals would also have sounded distinctly nasal, says Lieberman. It's an arresting thought: Neanderthals sounding as though they came from the Bronx or Birmingham.

Isolated as they would have been by their language differences, argues Lieberman, they would have been prey to any small subsistence disadvantage compared with the newbies on the block, anatomically modern humans. Demographic models, developed by Ezra Zubrow of the State University of New York, Buffalo, and cited by Lieberman, show that a disadvantage of a mere 1 per cent can lead to the extinction of an isolated population of several thousand individuals within a thousand years.

Fast forward to modern humans approaching a new millennium. Gifted as we are with speech, says Lieberman. "[We] must use the gift of speech, language, and thought to act to enhance life and love, to vanquish needless suffering and murderous violence-to achieve a yet higher morality." If we fail, he adds, no other creature will be here to sing a dirge or tell the story of our passing, for we alone can talk.

Roger Lewin



T Spinks/Millennium

Paris disrobed

◆ *Philosopher Bruno Latour and his collaborator Emilie Hermant have produced* Paris Ville Invisible. *It's hard to tell quite what it is: a book? A city map? A tale of hidden people and buildings? Under the photographer's eyes signs, paths—all the systems and processes that make up the sinews of a city—unravel. Nightmarish colours, bleached images—tourist Paris vanishes before your eyes. The huge pages are stuffed full of words from philosophical assertion to accounts from engineers to maintenance workers. The city built of words and images won't look like any Paris you know but it is an account of how the familiar face of the city is constructed. Perhaps this is the philosopher's plot: first deconstruct, then rebuild . . . And it's in French. Published by Institut Synthelabo, 250 francs, ISBN 2843240573.*

Free thinking

◆ *Information is power. As a scientist, you are discovering new information, and hence you are in the "information is power" equation, and possibly into the problems of power. If you haven't thought about the problems, Brian Martin's* Information Liberation *will be a challenge. And if you are already wrestling with the issues—trying to balance intellectual property rights with making the world a better place, the problems of defamation and whistle-blowing—you'll find it invaluable. Published by Freedom Press, £7·95, ISBN 090038493X.*

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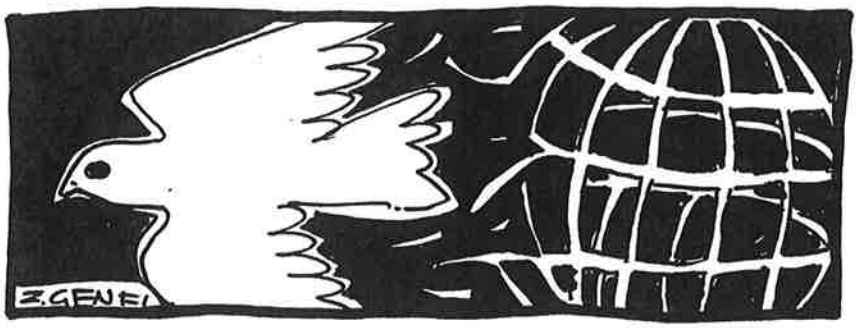
Information Liberation

by Brian Martin, London: Freedom Press, 1998. ISBN 0 90038493 X (Pbk). Distributed in Australia by Anarres Books, P.O. Box 150, East Brunswick, Vic., 3057. $27.90 (post free).



This important and valuable book must be read by anybody concerned about information control in and flows through what is clearly our information dependent and saturated society.

Readers of Brian Martin's earlier books, such as *Uprooting War* (1984) and *Social Defence, Social Change* (1993), also published by Freedom Press, will be familiar with his careful, precise, accessible, and deceptively straightforward presentation of complex issues, arguments, and suggestions for change. *Information Liberation* is another provocative, stimulating, thought provoking, challenging, and empowering contribution by an Australian academic author with, in these educationally economically rationalist times, a rare explicit commitment to radical social criticism and progressive, in its best senses, social change.

The subtitle of *Information Liberation*, 'Challenging the corruptions of information power', flags a continuing theme running throughout the book, derived from Lord Acton's famous aphorism, 'power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely'. The follow–on from this is a detailed analysis, implicitly derived from another aphorism taken from Francis Bacon, further refined by Noccolo Machiavelli, and developed upon by George Orwell, that 'Knowledge is power', and all that flows from that.

The blurb for *Information Liberation* warns that 'most readers will find something to disagree with'. While it is not really germane to Brian's central purpose, and I happen to largely agree with his general analyses of power and its corruptions in our peculiar kind of society, I am uneasy that a crucial practico–ethical issue might be being overlooked here.

To be brutally brief here, under the collective assaults of globalisation, economic rationalism, post modernism, and their several, disparate, and apparently antithetical derivatives, however specifically manifesting in a given social mielu, the essential ethical purchase(s), the social 'hand holds' upon which the kinds of arguments Brian, and many other activists and theorists as well, can find a serious grip are, at best, heavily greased by 'the system' to dissuade or even prevent precisely the kinds of effective criticism and alternatives creation many activists are mounting. There is really nothing new about the dynamics in play now, though the names applied to contemporary forces might be different. In earlier times, dissidents were burned at the stake along with their books. These days, as Brian and authors he cites document, there are far more efficient, subtle, and pervasive means available to monitor and deflect even potentially effective dissent.

I am reminded of Herbert Marcuse's argument, advanced in 1968, about 'repressive tolerance' as a novel means of contemporary social control. In essence, Marcuse argued that, while the forces of oppression had ever more allegedly scientific means of violently controlling or destroying people, at least in so-called civilised societies, dissident ideas, especially cultural dissent manifesting in lifestyle, art, music, and the like, were apparently tolerated while 'the system' sought to incorporate dissenting ideas, minus their criticisms of the status quo, into its cultural reproductions. Last week's radical version of whatever dissident cultural eruption grips some minority on the streets turns up this week in some corporation's franchised record or boutique clothing stores, and will momentarily figure on next week's corporation owned FM commercial radio play lists, in between the ads mostly telling you that you are worthless unless you buy, listen to, use, or wear The Latest Thing. Indeed, as Theodore Roszak has convincingly argued in his excellent The Cult of Information (1994), which Brian Martin must have read though he does not cite it, the fact that, particularly with the rapid spread of the World Wide Web, we are deluged and saturated with mind-numbing amounts of information coming at us via more and more media is necessarily disempowering because this avalanche drowns the processes we ought to use to refine raw information into knowledge which is useful, even beneficial, to us, and distil knowledge into wisdom, which can be defined as reflective knowledge informing prudent, ethical, or wise action.

If turning the TV off, disconnecting from the Web, and concentrating on actually reading a book (how archaic, when a common desktop computer has a speech synthesiser, and a scanner with OCR software) like Information Liberation for long enough to seriously grapple with its content achieves some result, then Brian ought to feel he's achieved something.

Elsewhere in this issue of NvT, I have written about a specific incident to do with journalistic news values applied on a particular day in Brisbane in April, 1999. From the perspective of activists used to being overlooked, ignored, or misrepresented by the mass media, nothing new here. Indeed, such largely routine treatment reinforces Brian's case for information liberation to involve disengaging from mass media and turning to creating and using community-based networked media.

From my perspective, as a sometime media worker, journalist, and media trainer and educator, the second chapter of Information Liberation, 'Beyond Mass Media' is probably the most provocative. I'm not going to pick nits with Brian's explicitly intentional neglect of the vast edifice of professional, scholarly, and informed popular media studies, comment, and critical literature because I share his implicit suspicion of much of it amounting to erudite navel gazing. Indeed, the last chapters deal with the propositions that much academic research is increasingly corrupted by commercial or externally imposed career advancement pressures, over against socially useful, empowering research, or 'knowledge for knowledge's sake', that apparently simple and even wrong ideas can retain or advance much of worth and value, and that so-called 'celebrity intellectuals' - even Noam Chomsky fits here - deserve greater scrutiny than lesser known or currently unfashionable writers.

Mention of Noam Chomsky as a 'celebrity intellectual' in the context of Brian's critique of 'the politics of research' and his all-but explicit endorsement of what amounts to an anarchist critique of information, power, and collective and participatory proposals for change shows how much Brian shares with Noam because both are concerned with how information, specifically in Noam's case, the mass media, is corrupted. Given that Noam Chomsky, and his colleague, Edward S. Herman's, 'propaganda model' of mostly journalistic media output, discussed most extensively in Manufacturing Consent (1988) is now very widely read, studied, and critiqued in tertiary media, journalism, and communications courses, I wonder if *Information Liberation* would attract anything like the same attention. Almost certainly not, because it is not sufficiently 'scholarly', does not cite or obviously draw upon 'the literature' regarded as currently fashionable within this particular academic community, the 'gatekeepers' for their students, and makes explicitly advocacy and activist proposals for change. On my reading of media studies literature and critique, in general, media studies scholars eschew media practice and effective actions for change in favour of ever more esoteric critiques of media output, and each other's ever more esoteric critiques.

A constant dilemma for activists is whether or not to engage in a media strategy as either the point or at least as an important part of an action or a campaign. Greenpeace are probably the masters of combining effective actions with sometimes spectacular media stunts. Other activists avoid media coverage, concentrating on the wrong they are seeking to challenge. If the media picks up on it, such as by monitoring police radio, that's fine, but getting publicity comes second to attempting to stop or slow some perceived injustice, or making a symbolic statement rooted in the activist's beliefs. Ploughshares actions fit in this latter category.

It's vital to always remember that when talking about 'the media' in this context, Brian and I are referring to a rather small but variably though usually influential part of the mass media's output, the news and current affairs part, which is mediated by journalists reporting on stories. Brian quite correctly points out that most journalists are subjected to strong corporate pressures to retain and build their outlet's audience, which is then 'sold' to advertisers, and this often affects the kinds of stories reported and even how they will be reported, even within the constraints of largely acceptable standards of fairness, balance, and ethics. Journalists are also keen to build and retain our audiences. What's the point if comparatively few people use our work and take it seriously as an important source of reliable information about events or issues remote from their everyday experience or knowledge? The picture is extremely uneven, to be sure, and no outlet or individual journalist should not be immune from criticism, or praise, support for quality or worthwhile journalism and trustworthy journalists being as necessary as creative criticism or complaints when we get it wrong.

There are several channels through which media consumers can complain, such as the Press Council, to individual broadcasting stations or the Australian Broadcasting Authority, the journalist's union (Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance - Journalist's Section), and the Australian Consumer's Association has published a good book on how to complain about the media. But, and this applies to his very salutary chapter on the limited effectiveness of whistle blowing and Freedom of Information procedures as well, the effectiveness of these channels varies enormously. Indeed, blowing the whistle inside a large corporation, government department, or a university, or starting a legal action for defamation, could be the worst possible step even the most obviously aggrieved or persecuted person could take because the criticised agency would be expected to stifle the criticism or complaint and exact revenge on the disloyal employee or outside complainant. Even the relatively successful examples of whistle blowing cited here are very much the exception rather than the norm.

Brian does not advocate ignoring the media, particularly its journalistic component, but I fear he may err too much on the side of almost permanently acute suspicion of even those admittedly fairly rare genuinely sincere and trustworthy media workers whom activists ought to cultivate, support from the outside, and whose expertise and skills can be extremely useful in campaign and general media literacy training workshops.

Though not a specific criticism of Information Liberation as such, and here I am focusing on Brian's chapter six on defamation law and free speech, the book must be treated as a basically sound introduction to and discussion of very general principles, and never relied upon as a single-source tactical or strategic 'how to' manual, though several chapters contain useful, and occasionally tested, suggestions for action or change. When dealing with any aspect of the law, such as defamation, it is essential to proceed carefully, do extremely through research, seek out, cultivate, and follow the advice of supportive or sympathetic professionals, and develop a flexible, principled, and realistic strategy informed by and congruent with your group or campaign's principles, goals, and values.

I commend *Information Liberation* to anybody in any way concerned about information power, its uses, corruptions, and realistically thought through proposals for change across a range of areas bound up with a crucial basis, tool, and process in our society.

Dr. Mark Hayes

NVT

and legislative processes established to safeguard individual rights and freedoms against ill-conceived legislation.

If anything, Brennan's proposal looks more like an argument for the continuation of the present status quo, with some tinkering around the edges. A proposal for a touch more formality, to buttress an Australian system which, as he readily admits, already seems to afford a far more effective resolution of moral issues than the U.S. model.

Information Liberation by Brian Martin. Freedom Press, London, 1998. pp181. Paperback, £ 7.95. Available in Australia from Anarres Books (www.anarres.org.au) $27.80 incl. Postage.

Reviewed by Ross Eddington

Martin's work from Freedom Press contributes to the cause of pursuing social alternatives, in particular the possibilities for challenging the corruptions of information power which occur in our society. As such, it is worthy of the attention of readers of this journal. However the reader should be aware that its aim is neither a comprehensive coverage of all the issues it raises, nor the establishment of a comprehensive plan for alternatives. Rather, it outlines how information within our society has been corrupted, and puts forward for consideration alternatives which could be further developed in applicable circumstances. In this sense it is rather like the second volume of Gene Sharp's *The Politics of Nonviolent Action*, acting as a menu of possibilities available. It will be valuable to social activists as a resource book. Its only weakness lies in its sometimes casual and brief rejections of existing arguments or approaches. As a result, while it will most likely be accepted by those already situated within a paradigm of social activism or criticism, because of the brevity of its arguments, it will probably be vulnerable to criticism by those who are opposed to his suggestions. Better rejections of existing approaches and systems may have led to a more convincing argument overall.

The book commences by examining the basic 'evidence' for the corruption of power and the usual strategies for protecting against this, such as codes of conduct, legislation etc. Martin then identifies information as a key source of social power, providing the rationale for the work which is to examine radical alternatives that may contribute to the rectification of information imbalances. This is first examined in relation to the mass media, with claims that it is inherently corrupting and undemocratic. Martin claims that reform can only be of limited use, but does not really elaborate on the reasons for this position. In the course of a following paragraph however, he claims that the only alternative is to achieve more participatory communication systems. He looks at grassroots solutions, and points out that mass media cannot be democratic. In contrast, participatory media is inherently more democratic. Martin talks of information routing groups (like e-mail discussion lists). This is a useful but somewhat of an already superseded observation, and it would have been useful to point out the reality of such systems, for example flooded mailboxes, deterioration of content etc. He then provides alternatives which individuals can follow, such as changing ones own media consumption.

The remainder of the work I found considerably improved on the first two chapters. This was when the work really settled down and served its purpose of providing useful alternatives for social change. In particular, the chapter on 'Against Intellectual Property', deals with the issues of copyright and trademarks, gives arguments against the current status quo, and provides alternatives such as copylet (the permission to copy with the inalienable right to let others copy). I did wonder, however, given his own suggestions, why the copyright symbol appeared on the inside front cover.

The chapter on Anti-surveillance and radical alternatives was most timely and interesting, and Martin acknowledges that the elements of the program he suggests would take time to implement. Similarly, the chapter on 'Free speech vs Bureaucracy', with its focus on whistle blowing, outlines a very useful process in how to be successful in such actions, and is strongly recommended. The chapters on defamation law argues that such laws

lead to a restriction of free speech. The chapter proceeds to provide many good alternatives and strategies which individuals can pursue in relation to defamation cases.

The chapter on the 'Politics of Research' claims that modern research is on the whole controlled by elites and defended according to rigid disciplines. Two final chapters, on the value of simple ideas, and the dangers of celebrity intellectuals, finish off the work. With reference to the final chapter, I hope Martin will excuse my critical comments in regards to his work, given that it is a strategy he suggests when dealing with a well-known authors work. Overall, however, the work is a useful tool for providing alternatives to corrupting and dominant information systems within modern society.

Oxford Australian Feminism: A Companion. Oxford University Press, Oxford, Auckland and New York, 1998. 607pp. ISBN 0 19 553818 8

Reviewed by Susie O'Brien

What did a fiesty young unionist wear to a trade union picnic in 1929? How has the division of suburban space affected the movement, identity and sense of community of generations of Australian women in metropolitan regions? When did the first Australian feminist writing on IVF emerge? What does EMILY'S List stand for?

Answers to these questions and many more are to be found in this mighty and impressive companion to Australian feminism.

Given the preponderance of Australian feminists to bow down at the altar of our overseas feminist sisters, it is refreshing to see an entire volume dedicated to the distinct features and history of Australian feminism. The selective inclusion of some overseas material ensures that the book is never insular and limiting.

It is not an academic text but one which is clearly designed to be accessible to a wider readership. On the whole this goal is successful with the language only occasionally becoming a little too obscure or ladened down with jargon or post(mod)//ern(is)m.

The organisation of the book deserves comment. The first half consists of forty-nine interpretive essays, each dealing with an issue of particular interest throughout the history of Australian feminism. An alphabetical set of entries follows, each of which consists of shorter pieces on specific women, organisations and individual topics. This format, which is easy to understand, appears to work well. Most useful is the use of cross-references and a long and detailed index, enabling the book to be easily used as a reference text.

The interpretive essays are, on the whole, crisp and insightful, offering a variety of well-argued perspectives on issues such as political institutions, education, motherhood and lesbian identities. I found this subjective approach to be more meaningful than the utterly useless pretence of objectivity to which some similar volumes aspire.

Many of the interpretive essays are written by those who are leading commentators in the subject area: I was pleased to see, for example, Barbara Sullivan writing on prostitution, Marian Sawer on political institutions, Lyn Yates on education and Regina Graycar and Jenny Morgan on legal thoery. Many of the readers of this volume will be aware of the work of such authors and will thus see the interpretive essays as part of a wider on-going academic and public debates about the issues.

Fascinating illustrations and photos are scattered throughout the text, often containing photos from private collections and manuscripts, posters, pamphlets and letters from archives. Such material adds much to the formal text. One instance is the inclusion of a photo of a woman in the section on lesbian identities. Arms open wide, she is proudly displaying her t-shirt which bears the slogan "NOBODY KNOWS I'M A LESBIAN WOMAN". As I read it, the photo well captures the ways in which lesbian women have long had to formulate their identities from positions outside the white Anglo heterosexual social norm. As the t-shirt suggests, this process is often fraught with both pleasure and ambivalence.

One aspect of the book puzzled me somewhat: why was the editorial group not more diverse in terms of age, geographical location and cultural background? Given the eminence of the panel, I

Information Liberation:
Challenging the Corruptions of Information Power

Brian Martin

Freedom Press 1998

Starting with Acton's dictum that power corrupts, *Information Liberation* explores the corruptions and abuses of information power — and some of the ways of opposing and preventing them. Largely independent chapters cover topics ranging from the mass media to celebrity intellectuals, via defamation, copyright, and privacy, among others. (The only major topic not covered is direct censorship.)

Martin begins by arguing that the concentrations of power produced by mass media are inherently corrupting. He urges a withdrawal from them in favour of alternative participatory media, and campaigns to undermine the influence of mass media by changing attitudes. This is followed by an extended argument, in the longest of the chapters, for the abolition of intellectual property. In a chapter titled "anti-surveillance" rather than "privacy", Martin connects privacy concerns with power inequalities and advocates, as an alternative to relying on governments for protection, technical counter-measures (such as encryption), active surveillance disruption, and working to change institutions.

A chapter on whistleblowing explores the ways in which free-speaking employees can undermine and challenge bureaucratic power, and the opposition they face. And a chapter on defamation laws argues that they serve to help the powerful silence criticisms rather than to protect reputations: "more speech and more writing" is a better way to do that. Here Martin restricts himself to examples from Australia, which (like the United Kingdom) has particularly bad defamation laws.

Three chapters then cover issues in the production and evaluation of information. The first looks at the politics of research, arguing for the involvement of a wider range of people both in deciding research priorities and in carrying out research itself. The second argues for the value of simple ideas, suggesting that complex and abstract theories are often much less important to activists than simpler models and ideas, though the latter have their own dangers. And the third criticises the cult of celebrity

intellectuals (especially those of the left).

Martin's political stance is explicitly anarchist, which may perturb some: he occasionally suggests that the ultimate solution to a problem is the abolition of the state, while his focus on power inequalities won't endear him to most right libertarians. But as he himself stresses, overarching theories often matter less than practical guidelines and proposals — and most of what he writes isn't dependent on commitment to any narrow political position.

July 2000

Information Liberation

Information Liberation
by Brian Martin
published by Freedom Press, £7.95 (post free inland, add 15% p&p to overseas orders).

Brian Martin's book opens with Lord Acton's oft-quoted aphorism, "Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely". His agenda is to examine absolute power as it manifests itself in control of mass media, and explore means of opposing and undermining its effects; "the corruptions of power can be minimised by equalising power and opposing social and technological control systems that foster power inequalities."

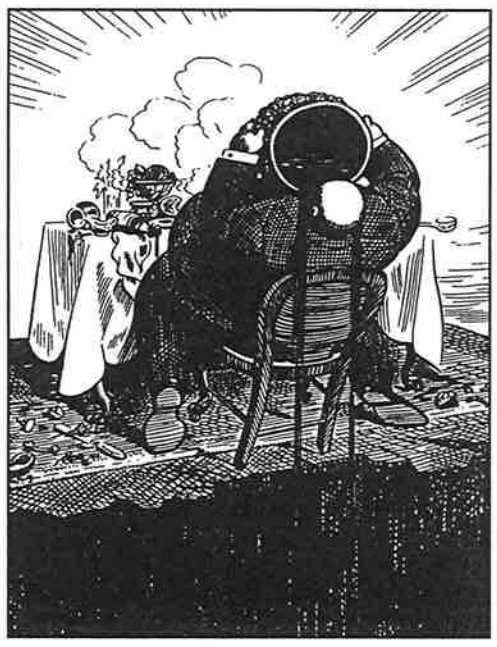
Martin's dissections of the exploitation of the propaganda opportunities provided by control of the communications media are rigorous and well argued. There are particularly fascinating chapters on defamation law, the politics of research and intellectual property. One of the book's strengths is the inclusion of clear examples of the way democratic processes are undermined by the control of information technologies by those with most to lose from the extension of an active democracy. Thus:

"The neem tree is used in India in the areas of medicine, toiletries, contraception, timber, fuel and agriculture. Its uses have been developed over many centuries but never patented. Since the mid-1980s US and Japanese corporations have taken over a dozen patents on neem-based materials. In this way collective local knowledge developed by Indian researchers and villagers has been expropriated by outsiders who have added very little to the process."

Education for hire?

From the point of view of the classical ideals of higher education, which can be summarised by the phrase 'the pursuit of truth', modern higher education has many failings.

- Knowledge is treated as a commodity, passively accepted and absorbed by student consumers.
- Classroom experience is organised around the premise that learning results only from being taught by experts.
- Knowledge is divided into narrow disciplinary boxes.
- Original, unorthodox thoughts by students, and non-conventional choices of subjects and learning methods, are strongly discouraged.
- Competition prevails over co-operation.
- Knowledge and learning are divorced from social problems or channelled into professional approaches.
- Credentials, the supposed symbols of learning, are sought more than learning itself.
- Performance in research takes precedence over commitment to teaching.
- Most research is narrow, uninspired and mediocre, useful only to other experts or vested interests.
- Scholarly openness and co-operation take second place to the academic rat race and power struggle which involves toadying, backstabbing, aggrandisement of resources and suppression of dissidents.
- Original or unconventional thoughts by staff, or action on social issues, are penalised, while narrow conformist thoughts by staff, or action on social issues are rewarded.



'Rupert Murdoch's TV Dinner'

"In 1985 Avon Lovell published a book entitled *The Mickelberg Stitch*. It argued that the prosecution case against Ray, Peter and Brian Mickelberg – sentenced to prison for swindling gold from the Perth Mint – was based on questionable evidence. The Police Union introduced a levy on members' pay cheques to fund dozens of legal actions against Lovell and the book's distributors and retailers. The defamation threats and actions effectively suppressed any general availability of the book."

Martin is weaker, though, on the means by which control of information can be challenged. The best tactical suggestions reflect their author's background as an activist in the radical science, peace and environmental movements, but, too often, what is offered up amounts to little more than a consumer boycott of information technology. The chapter on 'mass media' is weakest in this regard. Martin suggests that activists should change their own media consumption patterns – "action must begin at home". The notion of television as addiction is proposed, and we are told that "changes in individual behaviour serve several important purposes; they change the perspectives of individuals, they reinforce concern about the issue, and they provide an example (of consistency) to others." This amounts to little more than a moral opposition to monopoly capital, a reducing of political strategy to boycotting the licence fee. People consume television uncritically only to the extent that they participate in any aspect of life uncritically. When material conditions and political fractures combine to bring people to struggle against the state over the determination of their everyday lives, they cease to buy in to the myths built up to hold them in place. In short, people buy into a received history less, the more they are involved in making history themselves. In April 1989, 95 Liverpool supporters died in the Hillsborough Stadium disaster, because a multi-million pound industry was prepared to leave its supporters to flounder in what the Taylor Report called the "shabby squalor" of Hillsborough stadium, and because of the contempt of the police who ignored them and actively contained them as they were crushed to death.

The Sun ran a series of headlines claiming that fans picked victims' pockets, urinated on corpses, and attacked the emergency services – all untrue. Newsagents in Merseyside began a boycott. Workers at Ford's in Halewood banned the paper from the plant. Copies were burned in the street. Sales of the paper on Merseyside fell by 38.9%. The media's capacity to dictate the terms of our conceptions of everyday life is more fragile than they think.

The book contains no analysis of the role, or potential power, of media workers themselves in relation to the images and ideas they produce. There is little discussion of the possibility of subversion of the media, or of the capacity of workers as workers to pull the plug on the whole sorry business. *The Sun*, again, can serve as an example of what can be done. In May 1984, during the Miners' Strike, print workers refused to print an article about NUM leader Arthur Scargill entitled 'Mine Fuhrer'. The paper was distributed with a blank front page. In September of the same year four issues of *The Sun* were lost over a battle with the NGA over an editorial which described miners as "Scum of the Earth".

Martin is much better looking at possibilities for developing alternative media, and the use of the Internet as a space for free debate, including setting up 'defamation' havens on the Net. *Information Liberation* should be read – it is incisive in exposing the extent to which the information we use to plot the course of our lives is edited by media bureaucracies, and its message, that "social structures are not fixed", is supported by a wide ranging, if flawed, discussion of means by which significant change can be brought about.

Nick S.

Intellectual property gives the appearance of stopping unfair appropriation of ideas although the reality is quite different. If intellectual property is to be challenged, people need to be reassured that misappropriation of ideas will not become a big problem.

More fundamentally, it needs to be recognised that intellectual work is inevitably a collective process. No one has totally original ideas: ideas are always built on the earlier contributions of others. (That's especially true of this chapter!) Furthermore, culture – which makes ideas possible – is built not just on intellectual contributions but also on practical and material contributions, including the rearing of families and construction of buildings. Intellectual property is theft, sometimes in part from an individual creator but always from society as a whole.

In a more co-operative society, credit for ideas would not be such a contentious matter. Today, there are vicious disputes between scientists over who should gain credit for a discovery. This is because scientists' careers and, more importantly, their reputations, depend on credit for ideas. In a society with less hierarchy and greater equality, intrinsic motivation and satisfaction would be the main returns from contributing to intellectual developments. This is quite compatible with everything that is known about human nature. The system of ownership encourages groups to put special interests above general interests. Sharing information is undoubtedly the most efficient way to allocate productive resources. The less there is to gain from credit for ideas, the more likely people are to share ideas rather than worry about who deserves credit for them.

For most book publishers, publishing an argument against intellectual property raises a dilemma. If the work is copyrighted as usual this clashes with the argument against copyright. On the other hand if the work is not copyrighted, then unrestrained copying might undermine sales. It's worth reflecting on this dilemma as it applies to this book.

It is important to keep in mind the wider goal of challenging the corruptions of information power. Governments and large corporations are particularly susceptible to these corruptions. They should be the first targets in developing a strategy against intellectual property.

Freedom Press is not a typical publisher. It has been publishing anarchist writings since 1886, including books, magazines, pamphlets and leaflets. Remarkably, neither authors nor editors have ever been paid for their work. Freedom Press is concerned with social issues and social change, not with material returns to anyone involved in the enterprise.

Because it is a small publisher, Freedom Press would be hard pressed to enforce its claims to copyright even if it wanted to. Those who sympathise with the aims of Freedom Press and who would like to reproduce some of its publications therefore should consider practical rather than legal issues. Would the copying be on such a scale as to undermine Freedom Press's limited sales? Does the copying give sufficient credit to Freedom Press so as to encourage further sales? Is the copying for commercial or non-commercial purposes?

In answering such questions, it makes sense to ask Freedom Press. This applies whether the work is copyright or not. If asking is not feasible, or the copying is of limited scale, then good judgement should be used. In my opinion, using one chapter – especially this chapter! – for non-profit purposes should normally be okay.

So in the case of Freedom Press, the approach should be to negotiate in good faith and to use good judgement in minor or urgent cases. Negotiation and good judgement of this sort will be necessary in any society that moves beyond intellectual property.

The two extracts (above and left) taken from our new book by Brian Martin are intended to be controversial. The editors welcome correspondence on the topics covered.

Notes and References

1. *Journal of Evolutionary Economics* (Springer Verlag).
2. See, for example, K. Boulding, *Evolutionary Economics*, Sage, Beverley Hills, CA, 1981; G. M. Hodgson, *Economics and Evolution*, U.K. Polity Press, Cambridge, UK, 1993; U. Witt, *Evolutionary Economics*, Edward Elgar, Aldershot, Hants, 1993; L. Magnussen and J. Ottosson, *Evolutionary Economics and Path Dependence*, Edward Elgar, Aldershot, Hants, 1997.
3. J. Robinson, 'History versus equilibrium', in J. Robinson, *Collected Economic Papers*, Vol. 5, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1979.
4. E. L. Khalil, 'The Janus hypothesis', *Journal of Post Keynesian Economics*, 21, 2, 1998/9, pp. 315–41 (335).
5. R. R. Nelson and S. G. Winter, *An Evolutionary Theory of Economic Change*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 1982.
6. T. B. Veblen, 'Why is economics not an evolutionary science?', *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 12, 1898, pp. 374–97.
7. A. Marshall, *Industry and Trade*, Macmillan, London, 1919.
8. Perhaps, though, the distinction between Darwinism and Lamarckism is not so clear cut in human social evolution. For example, Darwinian natural selection can be seen to operate on 'varieties' of economic behaviour, however generated. See John Nightingale's chapter in J. Laurent and J. Nightingale (eds), *Darwinism and Evolutionary Economics*, Edward Elgar, Cheltenham, UK, forthcoming.

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Information Liberation

Brian Martin

London, Freedom Press, 1998, 181 pp., AU$27.90, ISBN 0-900384-93-X

Information Liberation sets out to examine the relationship between information, information producers and information media. In particular, it focuses on the informational dimensions that establish and maintain empowered and disempowered social groups in their opposing positions. In exploring this dimension of information, Martin maintains that information is power. More to the point, and following in the footsteps of Lord Acton, Martin states that power (and thus, information) tends to corrupt. However, unlike Acton, he argues that grass-roots responses can allow those who are activists for social justice and equity to achieve their goals. Specifically, he states that; 'Challenging information-related systems of power is one avenue for social change' (p. 5). This route to social change is placed as another 'third way' option that provides an alternative to market economies and centralized state control.

The contribution that this book makes is not easy to place in the academic landscape. Martin makes no academic pretensions; rather, his contribution is in relation to activist needs. Indeed, the academic literature is characterized in *Information Liberation* as being frequently superfluous to the needs of activist social reformers. Evidence is provided to show that the complex outputs of Academe are, on some occasions, useful to activists despite being misunderstood and despite sometimes being wrong. Yet even when they are accurate—but impenetrable to the lay reader—they are often of little use. Furthermore, it is not only the research that academics publish but the institutions and research processes surrounding them that are inhibitors to their usefulness in social change. The

restricting demands of bureaucratized job performance and the lack of community participation in the identification of research questions and the conduct of the research are pin-pointed as problems. Here Martin is suggesting that research is often done to enhance the career prospects of the researcher rather than for the social good. He is also suggesting that academic researchers are removed from the problems and worries of most people. *Information Liberation* is, therefore, not heavy with theory and models but is something of a 'cook book' for social action.

Looking beyond the generalities of the book, there is a rather broad scope of discussion of issues related to information and power to be assessed. The opening chapter deals with power and its tendency to corrupt. Although the topic of power is one for which much literature exists, Martin moves through, not unexpectedly, with speed and relative simplicity. The remaining chapters all address specific sites of information politics: mass media, intellectual property, surveillance, free speech and bureaucracy, the politics of research, the value of simple ideas, and celebrity intellectuals. Once again, there is the characteristic 'cook book' approach. The real questions, for Martin at least, are not those relating to the political economy of information and power (although those kinds of questions underpin them and are to some degree directly engaged in them) but what it is that an activist needs to know to make change happen.

Martin's argument that grass-roots activism can counteract the corrupting influences of information power is the core of the book and never far from his reach. This argument is an interesting derivation of the idea of fighting fire with fire, except in this case it is fighting information with information, or rather, fighting one kind of information infrastructure with a different kind of information infrastructure. Firmly in Martin's critical sights are the elite technical, economic and social information infrastructures that have high barriers to entry. The tools for struggling against these elite infrastructures are the information infrastructures available to the non-elites.

Leaflet drops, e-mail campaigns, web sites, word of mouth, communicating ideas in simple terms and so on count among the many vehicles available for the grass-roots campaigner in this kind of information skirmish. It is argued and demonstrated that many of these rather unspectacular communication media can allow individuals and groups to disseminate relevant information to large numbers of interested people. Thus, information power is not only a function of the information itself but of the ability to disseminate information favourable to your cause widely enough to make a difference. Non-elites can, in fact, achieve rather wide dissemination of information through non-mass media channels.

At the heart of Martin's stance is his observation that 'information seems like the basis for a co-operative society. It can be made available to everyone at low cost, and a person can give away information and still retain the use of it' (p. 172). He is not arguing that low dissemination cost is an ineffable characteristic of all information but that low cost is achievable to poorly resourced community groups and the like if they think carefully. Of course, the world is not to be turned on its head through these skirmishes, but change can be initiated through these processes. So, just as information can be used by the powerful to entrench their positions, so can it be used by the disempowered to strike back.

Assessing the success of Martin's approach is difficult if not challenging. Just as he argues that simple ideas are more accessible (even if they are incomplete or wrong) to activists than dense and complex intellectual treatises, so he has written this book. There is a pervading simplicity of style and expression in *Information Liberation*. The academic mind is sure to find this book unfulfilling on an intellectual level but challenging on the level of reflection about the role of academics in social change. Might it be possible that

such a simple book is more socially useful than the next freshly minted Ph.D. thesis by a student fired with passion and commitment to changing the world?

The old style political economy and anarchist flavour of this book, with its tendency to imply conspiracy, make it seem out of date and just a little tired. It also makes for arguments that will find much disagreement among the academic audience. Despite this, it is worth the read for its timely wake-up call that questions the primacy of the academic approach—the high theory, the rigorous analytical approach, the dense and exacting argument—to dealing with one of the major issues of our time; for its relevance to being able to fight information with information.

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Workplaces of the Future

Paul Thompson and Chris Warhurst (Eds)

London, Macmillan, 1998, xi + 230pp., £16.99 (pbk), ISBN 0-333-72800-9 (pbk), ISBN 0-333-72799-1 (hbk)

This book is part of the Macmillan Business series titled 'Critical Perspectives on Work and Organisations' originating out of the Annual International Labour Process Conference. The editors claim in the Preface that the International Labour Process Conference has always had the aim of providing empirically informed theoretical analysis. Readers are left to guess about this presumably UK based Conference as little more information is provided.

The editors also claim that the series needed a book that 'returned to save the "classical" roots of labour process writings' focussing on 'some of the core themes of changes in the nature of work itself' (p. vi). This they claim is necessary to counter the current period where 'popular discourse is deluged with futuristic babble' (p. vi). The book consists of 11 chapters from 18 contributing authors. The majority come from Scotland and England, two from the US and two from Austria. The main contributors include Ruth Milkman, Andy Danford, Steve Taylor, Joan Greenbaum, Kate Mulholland and Mike Dent.

The contents of the chapters are diverse. Topics include the sick building syndrome; the impact of computer information systems on the design of work organisation; discussion of the labour process in terms of producing and operating software; reaction to examples of devolution of responsibility at the workplace; discussion on the trend in the medical industry in Europe in following the US market driven model; an account of a case study on the changing role of managers in a large government utility undergoing privatisation; and a bottom line response to the path of the 'high road' in the US: the move toward a high wage, high skill economy.

In the introductory chapter, the editors set the tone of the selection of contributions by using the title, 'Hands Hearts and Minds: Changing Work and Workers at the End of the Century' (p. 1) thus giving emphasis to the human dimension. They link the recent past—by reference to the 'old Taylorist and Fordist forms' (p. 19)—to the present, when they say 'managers have sought to develop a variety of coping mechanisms in the form of cross-functional and on-line teams, thus creating a shadow of the division of labour' (p. 19). They refer to this as the 'new workplace' and conclude that despite this change

The book's weakest point lay here, in its analysis of the media's role. Clearly, the media is complicit, but Lieberman offers few clues as to why the press allows itself to be manipulated. Content to blame "stenographic journalism" and "media inattention," she gives too little weight to the institutional pressures which inform the practice of reporting, or to the interests of the media's corporate owners. Lieberman does mention the demand for journalists to crank out stories, citing the Winston-Salem Journal's recommendation "that a reporter should use a press release and/or one or two 'cooperative resources,' take no more than 0.9 hours to do each story, and produce forty such stories in a week" (10). And she explains how superficial standards of "objectivity" discourage journalists from providing context and can even limit basic fact checking, as reporters learn to simply relay the allegations of the contesting parties. There is also a brief discussion of journalistic self-censorship and editorial bias. But only two of *Slant's* 208 pages are devoted to the implications of corporate media ownership.

The book's suggested antidotes to right-wing dominance are also disappointingly thin. Lieberman urges journalists to start doing their homework, and recommends that activists learn to write better press releases. But these cannot possibly be enough: no amount of research and spin control could have propelled globalization into the public debate in quite the way demonstrations against the WTO, IMF, and World Bank have done.

The Left cannot simply copy the Right's media strategy for the obvious reason that the ends they pursue differ. The means themselves are not neutral. Lieberman quotes the Cato Institute's Edward Hudgins, saying that "if you affect the ideas of opinion leaders and policy people, it will bring about permanent change" (86–7). This hints at a deep problem for democracy, implying that only the views of elites really matter. If democracy is the goal, then a strategy based on appeals to "opinion leaders and policy people" is certain to fail. Such appeals may help win reforms, but they cannot fundamentally alter the relations of power. Sadly, Lieberman leaves this question entirely unexplored. While she addresses the problems conservative media campaigns create for democracy, she gives no attention to the pre-existing problems which allow them to succeed. A

Slanting The Story: The Forces that Shape the News, by Trudy Lieberman. The New Press: New York. 2000, 208 pp. $21.95.

2000

Brian Martin
Information Liberation

Reviewer: Meredith Curtis

"Knowledge isn't power all by itself, but it can be a means for obtaining power, wealth and status." This is Brian Martin's contention, but he has other ideas in mind for what knowledge can do—promote community-oriented information systems that consciously undermine hierarchy. Control over the information that forms the basis of knowledge is often caught up in hierarchal structures that manipulate and limit information to maintain and reinforce their power. Martin contends that since power is inherently corrupting, society's limited outlets for information—whether academia or increasingly consolidated media empires - serve to place the power over knowledge in the hands of a necessarily self-interested few.

But it need not be this way. People can work to take control over the information that shapes their reality. Martin is careful to point out that it is the hierarchal systems themselves, not "bad" people, that are the root of the problem. He stresses this point because so many of those who have begun working in the media or entered academia with intention of reforming the system from the inside have been corrupted or exiled. Although created by people, hierarchal power structures themselves are anonymous and oppressive to the will of people. They are much like what Martin terms "biased technology." He says, "Some technologies, such as cluster bombs, are biased towards bad uses; others, such as straw hats and solar hot water collectors, are biased towards benign uses." Martin's program is to aid the creation of information systems that are biased towards benign or beneficial uses and based on community control and cooperation.

His book is like a how-to manual. He defines the problem—such as mass media, intellectual property, limits to free speech, the politics of research or celebrity intellectuals—and then he makes suggestions to alleviate the problem. What he does not do is try to prescribe across-the-board solutions. Rather, his goal is to stimulate discussions about how to undermine hierarchies, encouraging people to take control over the ideas that influence them. He thus avoids the pitfall of exerting his own power as an intellectual by imposing standard solutions. As he says, "There's no single best strategy, because what a person can do depends on their own situation."

One of Martin's main points is that information is often unnecessarily complex. One reason for this is that it is in the interests of intellectuals to present ideas in a complex way—even if they are essentially simple ideas—because the systems of academia and mass media are built on status, a hierarchal structure which legitimizes the voices of a few "celebrity intellectuals." While acknowledging the problems with using simplistic or degraded ideas, Martin maintains that "the goal should be to develop effective actions and simple, effective ideas to go along with them." He stresses the need for ideas to be useful. "Rather than judging ideas according to sophisticated theory, we should judge sophisticated theory according to whether it builds on and contributes to simple ideas that are helpful in practice for achieving the things we value." Control and coordination of information should be in the hands of communities, who can make up their own minds as to its use-value.

Martin points out that it is often hard to envision non-hierarchal alternatives to many of the information systems dominant in society. For instance, he advocates doing away with intellectual property laws because they reinforce the concentration of power and limit the circulation of ideas. "Intellectual property is an attempt to create an artificial scarcity in order to give rewards to a few at the expense of the many. Intellectual property aggravates inequality...[and] fosters competitiveness over information and ideas, whereas cooperation makes much more sense." Quite literally, with intellectual property laws speech is not free. Information is available through a "marketplace of ideas," and the capitalist marketplace fosters inequality. Martin contends that the argument for intellectual property "is built on a contradiction, namely that in order to promote the development of ideas, it is necessary to reduce people's freedom to use them." In addition, he stresses that innovation is a "collective process" and that "patents, which put information into the market and raise information costs, actually slow the innovative process."

The problem is that the alternative he recommends, "a society with less hierarchy and greater equality" in which "intrinsic motivation and satisfaction would be the main returns from contributing to intellectual developments," is far from where we are today. As previously stated, he eschews making prescriptive solutions to the problem of hierarchal information systems because he feels they must

be worked out by various communities according to their own values and through coordination with other communities for their mutual benefit. In place of mass media, he advocates setting up media networks between communities so that more people can contribute their ideas and so productive relationships can develop between groups.

In addition, Martin promotes the idea of "copyleft," which is a legal instrument that requires those who pass on a computer program that is provided for free to include "the rights to use, modify, and redistribute the code." However, while this idea is intriguing, it seems to cause the same problem brought up in addressing mass media. Martin says that, "in a way, media criticism is a form of loyal opposition." In the same way, copyleft can be seen as a validation of intellectual property and the laws that restrict the free flow of ideas for the benefit of the few rather than the many.

While criticisms of the current system can be valid and useful, it is perhaps more important to heed Martin's ultimate recommendation: "One powerful way to move towards an alternative is to begin behaving as if it already exists." An example of this is the recent upsurge of independent media that are using the Internet to disseminate their own versions, uncensored, of protests, ideas and movements around the world. And before the Democratic Convention in Los Angeles, a group of anarchists held a news conference that was carried by C-Span about an event they were holding and refused to hear from corporate media until they answered all the questions of the independent media. This activity reinforces the idea that Martin promotes of using methods to achieve the goal of a non-hierarchal society that mirror the goal itself. If information largely defines reality, than reality can be redefined by taking back control of information. A

Information Liberation, by Brian Martin. London: Freedom Press, 1998, 182 pp. $17.00.