Yugoslavia offers a fascinating field of inquiry for anyone interested in the question of a free media beyond the banal cliches of private ownership. This concerns relation of the media to the culture and history of the state and matters of ownership, control and decision-making. There is finally the crunch question of truth-value and fairness in that media's picture of the world. For students of communication and mass media there is the added incentive in this study that a country's media system might reveal itself to be a model system or at least closer to an ideal information system.

In a paper delivered to the Canadian Broadcasting League conference in Halifax in 1976, T.A. Howe outlined what he called "the stone tablets" in communication which he suggested constituted the never changing values for assessing policies and systems. These ideals included universal access, privacy when required, one way sending-receiving and choice of message content. When systems measure up to these criteria they should produce freedom, creativity and variety of messages. Others have other criteria for what produces a free system and truth in content. They cover such concepts as plurality of viewpoint, free flow, accountability to the public, social responsibility, freedom of information, news coverage for all participation, education and training of media practitioners and financing free of influence.

Gertrude Robinson, associate professor of sociology at McGill University, in her book Tito's Maverick Media, published late last year, is not attempting primarily to design a paradigm of Universal Freedom of the press but to present a study of communication as a form of exchange that takes place in a particular setting. It is a theory that posits interdependence between people and their environments, natural and social. The media of Yugoslavia proved particularly fruitful because that country abandoned a centrally planned for a mixed market economy, developed its own brand of Marxism, revamped the functions of the Communist party, instituted worker participation in media development and decentralized its government. All this followed after it was expelled from the Cominform and ended Russian hegemony.

Yugoslavia has been a vast laboratory on the world stage: it has economic levels that range from per capita income on a par with Italy in one area to a par with underdeveloped Thailand in another. The Federated Socialist Republic consists of six republics, five nationalities, four languages, three religions, two scripts and, overall, 21 million people. Its president is the aging Josip Broz, known as "Tito." Besides being multinational, Yugoslavia is multilingual, with the four languages being official and 16 unofficial.
Robinson chose Yugoslavia because of its "unique media system" which had never been extensively studied by an outsider. She chose it also for "broader empirical and normative" questions, that is in relation to the ideal or abstract values previously mentioned.

To strike the climax at the beginning, the question may be asked, "has this unique media system worked out in a way that would be instructive to the rest of the world?" Gertrude Robinson sums up her perceptions in an Epilogue which we have reprinted in this issue. In trying to summarize and evaluate her complex study, she wonders:

How to recapitulate Yugoslavia's movement from a centralized to a regional media organization in the past thirty years? How to explain the changeover from an overtly political to a professional management in newspaper, radio stations and the national news agency? How to sketch the changes in media content resulting from the substitution of audience for government financing? How, in addition, to highlighting the essential characteristics of the country's journalism corps and the changing role of the audience?

She says at least four groups have power to articulate their opinions and check policy making:

In descending order of influence these are official bureaucracies such as the military, security and economic managers. Their proximity to the leadership helps them articulate their opinions. Then there are the legislative, judicial, mass media, and cultural organizations. These include the intellectuals who are also strong contributors to public opinion formation. Last in order of influence come the workers and peasants who have bargaining power only as producers.

The underlining is mine. These words hardly express a worker's paradise - at least as far as the ideological articulation wing of Titoism is concerned. Robinson carries her study up to the year 1975 when another media reorganization was underway. But she says under the surface of apparent change in 30 years the political power over media has remained virtually static, merely shifting from national to local party hierarchies and back again. "Instead of solving the incongruities between the democratic self-management principles and party needs, new organization forms were devised not to affect the power base."

She says what is touted as the right to public access through the "delegate system" turns out to be a subtle means for neutralizing the expression of public opinion. Under a new media law public representation will take three forms: parity on publishers' councils and two new supervisory councils - the editorial council and the "local information" council; the former to provide critical appraisal of media output; the latter to function as intermediaries between broadcasters and their audiences.

But Robinson concludes, "Still excluded from participation are private indi-
viduals of all sorts, as well as rank and file workers who are the backbone of Yugoslavia’s self-management system.” She quotes Antun Zvan, writing in Praxis (Zabreb) Spring-Summer, 1970 (“Ecstasy and Hangover of a Revolution”) on the gap between words and deeds in democratization of the state, “It is not the associated workers who decide the existential issues of their own state, but it is the other way around - the state decides about these issues.”

She compares the Yugoslav media system to that of the United States. “...our study shows that the balancing of media roles is primarily determined by political ideology in the former and by market values in the latter. In the United States it is generally accepted that the balancing is left to chance or to the interplay of various governmental groupings and market pressures. The upshot is that the Yugoslav press and broadcasting must tone down sensationalism and the reporting of "soft" news in the name of social responsibility." American chains and networks on the other hand are not guided by what is "good" for the public but what sells.

But this comparison ignores the decision-making at the top of American media and the lack of competitive dailies. The audience in America is not supreme by any means; business factors intervene in the selection of material and its play. Audiences in Yugoslavia wanted and got more entertaining content in print and broadcast media she points out, yet in the 1970's such audience preferences have once again been called frivolous.

The author describes the tightrope that journalists walk between party values and responsible reporting. In times of national crisis particularly "both publishers' councils and party colleagues urge the communicator to become a spokesman for the local party outlook..."

Some intellectuals are troubled because the potentialities of Yugoslavia's "unique participatory principles" have never been truly tested. Self-management, they argue, has become obsolete before maturing from market values into a humanistic system. While the principles offer great potential for the press and broadcasting, the author feels, as an outside observer, "both elated and sad" that its potentials have been only partly explored. Yugoslav media are nonetheless much more responsible to their varied audiences than in other socialist systems. "In spite of this, Yugoslav regulatory changes have up to now failed to integrate community groups into media governance...Media professionals still view themselves as rightful custodians of public knowledge, rather than as facilitators of public debate."

That, at least, is a position that professionals have not even arrived at in Canada and the western nations where the final shots on policy, hiring and budget are called by business men. And yet this self-management by the Yugoslav media does not guarantee high principles or concern for the ideal. Robinson tells how "more stringent political information filtering (screening or censoring process) and increased attack on students, intellectuals and artists are causing widespread concern at home and abroad." Both of these reinforce the disconcerting use of self-management principles to subvert cultural freedom of
expression through self-censorship. Why ban Dusan Makavejev's film 'WR: or The Mystery of the Organism' which spoofs Soviet and the United States and Yugoslav ideologies, she asks. Why close three university student papers in 1974 and why insist on the administrative removal of Marxist faculty from Belgrade University?"

Before those conclusions and rhetorical questions are reached in the last chapter, the author has ten chapters representing 10 years of work on the Yugoslav communications scene. She first went to the country of the South Slavs with her three sons in 1964 on a Yugoslav doctoral research award. On subsequent visits between 1968 and 1973 she travelled to all six republics to visit major media institutes and other centres. The study embraced the 30 years between 1945 and 1975 when Yugoslavia struck out on its own "road to socialism" and was reborn as an independent Marxist state.

The book is valuable, not only for the economic, political and social study it provides vis a vis the mass media, but for its communication theory. First, it provides an analysis of the organization and functioning of the media of Yugoslavia, then identifies the power relationships between groups involved in the mass communication process and thirdly, investigates the way in which the mass media define, shape and interpret social reality for the citizen. For the Westerner, the study of east European mass media has been hindered by a "totalitarian theory" which viewed them primarily as political instruments. Robinson says, "Such an outlook overstressed the organizational intermingling between the party and information hierarchies as well as the propagandistic functions of the Leninist press."

The interdependence between human beings and their social and natural environments is a unique one because the human organism selectively perceives and responds. In human communication, individuals do not respond to the raw data of existence, but to digested information about their world. In their symbolic interactions with the environment, people evolve and are continuously altered. What someone says to an individual will affect the way in which he perceives his "reality." That, of course, is the author's version of what has been called selective perception and the "gatekeeper theory" - selection, summary and interpretation of experience and information by others, some of them "professionals." Our picture of the world formed by gatekeepers in the media and the valuations made face-to-face depend, among other things, on who is communicating or who owns and controls the channels. Robinson notes that "consequently there is a marked difference in communication content between countries where the channels are privately or publicly owned."

All communication occurs in a historical setting and therefore her symbolic interaction theory stresses that a historical perspective is necessary.

In Yugoslavia's post-war years three major crises changed the country's socio-political setting, requiring media adaptation: the 1948 expulsion from the Cominform which isolated Yugoslavia from Stalinism, the change from a command economy to one with market influence in the 60's and the Croatian secession
crisis in the first years of the 70's which threatened the country's unity and existence. Titoism today combines private enterprise and collective ownership. It is socialist, having no private ownership of industry, except in small enterprises such as restaurants and some stores. But there is no state ownership and all enterprises, including the media, are collectively managed. They become the "social property" of those who work in them. They compete with each other in a relatively free market, workers' councils deciding on what and how much to produce at what price. There is no general plan on the Soviet model but the Yugoslav government provides guideline orientation for future development.

Local scholars and the author divide Yugoslavia's media growth into four periods. To summarize from a Table which is already a summary: (1) 1945-50 consisted of the Leninist line with financing from the government and control by the government hierarchy, centralized decision-making and top personnel being appointed by the government and the product being primarily official speeches with little individualized reporting. (2) 1951-61 Transition Media Period. The line was then "Leninist with questions," financing was by subscriptions and license fees; semi-autonomous cooperatives regionally organized with management by modified workers' councils, a management board and appointed director. This Transition period introduced audience appeal material with entertainment features. Jazz, abstract art, Joyce, Proust and "bourgeois" culture appeared with pretty girls and sexier content. Nudes on the newsstand. There was a rapid growth of radio and TV. (3) 1963-70 A Decentralizing Period introduced what is called Titoist Social Responsibility. Financial support is by subscriptions, license fees are charged for radio and TV and advertising is permitted. The media are organized into autonomous cooperatives, with workers' self-management and workers' councils plus a management board and elected director. There is local and regional autonomy developing with bitter arguments over national identity versus regional autonomy. The content is a balanced mix of information and entertainment; there is individualized reporting, specialization and competition. TV grows fastest; print innovates evening papers and special interest journals. The 1963 Constitution provides a "right to be informed" and to have access to state documents, freedom of all media guaranteed. Media power arrives with right to elect top management, to plan and finance production of media and to organize into six regional rather than one central network. Journalists replaced politicians in the 60's. (4) And, finally, what the author calls the "Uncertain Present" from 1971 to 1975 with media theory described as "New political responsibility augmented in political action." Financing is the same as in the previous period, organization is by autonomous cooperatives supervised by the Socialist Alliance; management is "social management, plus workers' self-management" and the product or content of media includes "increased politicization" plus interest in entertainment. TV continues to grow rapidly, radio levels off and print declines.

The author sums up: "A comparison of Yugoslavia's four information periods, each dominated by its own press law, shows that the amount of subject matter that censorship practices are applicable to has drastically declined in the past thirty years and that the right to censor has been transferred from the govern-
ment to the courts...pre-censorship has been abolished.

In that respect it would be in advance of Canadian practice where pre-censorship was used in the Toronto lead pollution story, in the recent seizure by police of a periodical before it was published and certainly the October, 1970 FLQ Crisis in Quebec under the War Measures Act.

Internal political realities in Yugoslavia are more important barriers to political views than diplomatic ones. Local journalists and others criticize these vigorously however and are trying to change the laws. One Slovenian critic put it, "though socialist democracy considers a free, autonomous and self-governing public as a prerequisite for...pluralism in politics...the media are not yet open forums for all type of discussion in Yugoslavia. Pluralism is to date more freely expressed in the sphere of social self-government than in that of politics. Unfortunately the existing structure of the Socialist Alliance are not assuring the articulation of differing opinions, views and interests, and thus inhibit the actual confrontations of alternative political concepts."

Another scholar notes that an "open" communication system, along lines discussed at the beginning of this article, pre-supposes four things: the free flow and exchange of information in all channels, open sources, availability of all subject matter necessary for self-managing decision-making; and publicity of work of all social and government organizations.

Robinson adds: "Many of these are not yet realized in contemporary Yugoslavia...Journalists and others have incorporated access to news sources and the open working of deliberative bodies into the new press laws and pressed for equal representation on their supervisory publishers councils to counterbalance the information monopoly of the government..."

It seems that the media there are approaching the ideals in a terribly complex way with some small steps forward for mankind and a few steps backward. An account of Tanjug the Yugoslav news agency which has sought to become a "third world" news agency, and is eighth among world news services, constitutes Chapter four - a book within a book. Like the other media, Tanjug is run by an elected workers council of 34 which in turn appoints both the managing board of eleven and the director. This, and chapters on how Tanjug portrays the world by selection of news, emphasis of news and mode of presentation plus a comparison with Associated Press coverage, round out a relatively short book of 250 pages. But, all in all, it is a culturally challenging and instructive one.