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The contemporary understanding of press freedom includes the concept of access, which, as Thelma McCormack has written, means the right of the public "to encounter a broad spectrum of ideas." But how is this kind of access to be achieved when the mass media are locked into the status quo values of big business and big government?

This is the problem Marc Raboy addresses in this short, thought-provoking book about media and radical politics in Quebec. He begins his analysis with the Quiet Revolution of the early 1960s, which, he says, quickly revealed itself to be nothing more than the attempt to enter the capitalist mainstream of North American society. For many Quebeckers, especially the intellectuals and those in the unions, who had aspired to a more radical realignment of society, this was tantamount to a betrayal.

Throughout the '60s and '70s, as a result, a myriad of opposition movements were formed to resist the dominant trend and to counter the official ideology with alternative social constructions of reality. It is on the communications practices of these opposition groups that
Raboy focuses, for as he rightly observes, it is through media of all kinds that the limits of public debate are defined.

Essentially, the book is a synthesis of existing theoretical and empirical studies with perhaps a too strong emphasis on linear narrative; but, by virtue of his refreshingly engaged perspective and astute analysis of the links between theory and praxis, Raboy has made a valuable contribution to our understanding of communication in the context of radical social action.

He distinguishes between the two main kinds of opposition movements: those, including the unions and far left-wing groups, for whom communication was a mainspring of overall strategy; and those, including most community and popular groups, who had no conscious communication policy. The limitations of the latter groups, which were reduced to seeking the favor of the mass media to get their messages to the public, are fairly obvious. Much more interesting is his analysis of the more media-conscious groups which, he concludes, were never wholly successful because of a pronounced tendency to subordinate information to propaganda. This, he says, resulted in a rhetoric of liberation that merely masked the reproduction of patterns of domination that were supposedly being opposed. In the extreme case, such practices led eventually to the "liquidation" or destruction, in the name of ideological consistency and purity, of several of the most active groups. Clearly, Raboy's bias is on the side of those movements and practices that seek to break not only with exploitation, but authoritarianism of any stripe.
Between these extremes, Raboy locates three other types of communication practices: alternative media, such as the immensely influential *Parti pris*, which took their chances in the marketplace; demystification and critiques of the mainstream media; and direct action, an example of which would be the FLQ strategy during the October Crisis of imposing their messages on the mass media.

The limitations of these tactics are pointed out, but the analysis on a few occasions peters out into rhetorical questions: "The FLQ cells had used the official information system for their own ends, but at what price?"..."Was the launching of a parallel information network anything more than a pipe dream?"...

It is in delineating the cultural successes, as opposed to the political failures, of the alternative media that Raboy is most perspicacious. Despite the litter of failed attempts throughout the 1970s to create political alternatives, these media did help to "create and make flourish a new collective memory, a feeling of solidarity, new ideologies based on new values -- short, a new culture."

Nevertheless, Raboy, who has been a long-time observer of and participant in this new culture, devotes only a few pages to his insights into the cultural approach to analysis and strategy. Rather disingenuously he excuses the lack of theorizing about a coherent communication strategy for social revolution by suggesting that the Quebec experience in this respect has been too sparse.
He would rather have his study serve as a starting point for an ongoing debate on a communication strategy grounded in the search for an anti-authoritarian form of socialism, and to this end in the final chapter provides a number of useful tentative suggestions.

One might wish that Raboy had himself explored these suggestions at greater length, but ultimately this failing detracts only marginally from the value of the book. As he says, the task for activists is to find "the proper form for each particular circumstances." By pointing out the pitfalls of the Quebec experience, he has perhaps made that task a little easier.