note that, at most, two of the 43 contributors to this volume can be regarded as not located in the US. A more positive response would be to resolve that there should be an Australian equivalent and to set about its production. There would, however, be a resource constraint: Australia lacks both sufficient awareness of the posititve sum strategy and the knowledge of the processes of technological change and innovation that now characterise the US. This is not to imply that US research has yielded all the answers and policy guidance needed. It is possible, however, that their present fears will shape research to seek those answers and guidance.

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The Electronic Estate. New Communications Media and Australia *by Trevor Barr*
(Penguin Books Australia, Ringwood Victoria, 1985) pp. 271, $8.95, ISBN 0-14-008006-6.

After a deep, initial silence, a number of books — Ian Reinecke and Julianne Shultz, *The Phone Book* (Penguin, 1983), my own *Clear Across Australia. A History of Telecommunications* (Nelson, 1984, 2nd ed. 1985), Reinecke's *Connecting You: Bridging the Telecommunications Gap* (Penguin 1985) and now Trevor Barr's *Electronic Estate* — have burst upon the scene and provide a fairly substantial cover of telecommunications in Australia.

Within this quartet, Barr's work is an attempt to offer an overall view of Australia's contemporary internal and overseas telecommunications services, to examine the importance of our expanding information economy, and to consider the political and economic complexities of communications media in Australia. His title is well chosen. After the historical 'estates' of parliament, the church, and the people, the 'fourth estate' of the press, and the 'scientific estate' nominated during the period of science euphoria in the fifties, electronic communication and the dynamic, pervasive information society it has generated, can, it would seem, legitimately be elevated to the status of an important new national 'estate'.

Barr, senior lecturer in Media Studies at Swinburne Institute of Technology, Victoria, moves across a broad landscape in Australia which he sets against a selective international scene. His early chapters range over questions of multinational dominance of electronic and telematic industries in Australia, deskilling and the nature of work in telecommunications, decision making for telecommunications by public inquiry, government and party attitudes to telecommunications technology, and the failure of our national technology policy. His later chapters are more cohesive. In these he addresses broadcasting and telecommunications ownership and services, the domestic satellite and its governing AUSSAT, and the emerging new networks of cable television and videotex services. His method is allusive. The book, however, is highly readable, and as I know well, it is extremely difficult to trap and organise information in this dense, complex, and frequently overlapping field.

The particular strength of this book lies in the questions it poses. Centrally Barr is concerned with the nature of policy making for telecommunications in

Australia. He does not see technology as something to which society must, perforce, adapt; but as an innovation that should closely involve democratic social choice. "Effective debate about new technology" he states early, "must be concerned with the power relationships within society and with value judgements about the shape and direction of that society". However, as he points out, a large number of decisions about communications in the past decade have been made by bureaucratic committees of inquiry, often with short time-scales and little chance for the reflective process, and "framed in a way that assumed that the technologies were discrete, separate, compartmentalised entities", rather than converging telecommunications developments that bore significantly on major social change.

No decision of consequence was taken more arbitrarily than that behind the domestic satellite. The driving force was the junior Minister for Post and Telecommunications, Tony Staley, a technological romantic who early won the sobriquet of technological 'gee-whiz' kid and, having been converted to satellite technology on a visit to Canada, pushed national policy for a domestic satellite system, strongly abetted by two committee reports that ignored dissenting financial and technological opinions. Staley claimed that he backed satellite technology for 'the amazing people in the bush'. But these people were largely remote Aborigines and white settlers who ardently desired, not television, but the telephone. As a member of the isolated Yuendumu Community in the Northern Territory wrote to *The Australian* in 1984, "Let's simply discard the ridiculous premise that the new satellite has anything to do with servicing the outback. If that were the case, very different issues would be under discussion and remote Aboriginal people would be directly involved". Barr focusses such issues and, in so doing, provides a useful text for students of telecommunications.

Barr's own conclusions on the decision making process are severe. A prime paradox of public communications policy, he writes, is "that major policy decisions are made in forums which are essentially private and closed, and within institutions able to wrap themselves in secrecy". His answer is for a planned approach to new telecommunications technologies aided by such public participatory and opinion-making bodies as the Commission for the Future and through the establishment of a strategic economic policy authority for Australia similar to Japan's Ministry of International Trade and Industry (MITI) to encourage indigenous industrial innovation in telecommunications and computing fields. By such methods, Barr argues, we might manage to move away from our deficient, *ad hoc* policy making approaches and develop the now rather feeble Commission for the Future as a broadly based technology advisory committee that would have a central role in top-level policy formation. Whether one agrees with the author's detailed analysis of the state of telecommunications and the media in Australia or not, he emerges as a forceful and timely advocate for freeing-up the present system of telecommunications policy making and raising public consiousness on the future of their electronic society.

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