



Extract of Acrimed | Action Critique Médias

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Challenging the media

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You will find below the English translation of an article that was originally published in 2010 on our website (translations in other languages to come soon). It focuses on the grounds and goals of the kind of critique Acrimed tries to promote - focusing on how the media (mal)functions and how information is (mis)carried.

The different forms of media critique are neither identical nor equivalent. Here is a broad outline of the type of critique we are trying to develop.

Since our association was founded in 1996, media critique has spread in the media themselves. Too often, but not always, this type of critique has become a media product like any other.

Media critique, as we see it, not only has to explain, but must also go to the root of things ; it has to be both uncompromising and unyielding ; and it has to be political.

Radical, explanatory critique

Media critique as practised by journalists is generally limited to pinpointing breaches of professional ethics. It describes journalistic practices and denounces professional misconduct without showing up the forces that lie behind them. It condemns economic and political "pressures" without taking time to explore what makes them possible and effective. It combats visible censorship, but neglects invisible censorship. It admits that propaganda sometimes goes too far, but accepts the way the market works. It advocates minor corrections, without questioning the established media order. This type of critique is inadequate, especially when it claims to be self-sufficient.

The type of critique we advocate endeavours to show up what is invisible or only partly visible. But it refuses to attribute the twisting of the news we receive and the deforming of the public domain to just a few media figures. In many ways, they themselves are but symptoms of the problem. Our critique targets the forms of media ownership, the economic and social rules that govern them, the ensuing merchandization of information and culture. They don't explain everything, but nothing can be explained without them. So as not to be limited to short-sighted economics, our critique takes into account the social and political conditions in which journalists exercise their profession - thus considering the relations of competition and domination prevalent in the media, as well as how the media are subject to the way the authorities organise them and to people in power.

It may be necessary to underline the fact that not all journalists are corrupt. As simple cogs in a machine they are unaware of, they sometimes think of themselves as independent, but in fact most of them are just doing what they're told, as in many other professions, especially at a junior level. They are not responsible for the social factors behind their dependence. That is why our critique tries to make a clear distinction between the owners and rulers of the media on the one hand, and the behind-the-scenes news writers on the other hand. If the latter misinform us, they don't always do it on purpose : they have simply assimilated as professional skills the constraints of their profession, such as audience ratings, editions, formats. This type of critique distinguishes between docile, accommodating subordinates, happy to be mere cogs in the machine, and unruly, unwilling cogs, who sometimes resign themselves to doing what they are told, just because they have to earn a living, and who sometimes manage to put a few grains of sand in the gears.

However, this type of critique is not directed towards journalists in the first place, or more generally to media

professionals. It is addressed to both the actors and the users of news and culture. It aims at educating people in media awareness and beyond, because democracy is at stake : the media must be challenged on more than academic grounds.

An uncompromising political critique

Acrimed is an association that is independent of every economic, media or political power. It is a member of no political party, it represents no school or pressure group, it is not financed by private capital. That is why it can defend its views completely independently, without compromising its values and analyses, and is engaged in a critique that is not subservient to the media order and its guardians.

Our critique may meet opposition from the media executives, editorial potentates and the experts they have set up, because it communicates factually, with no prudishness. No matter ! We won't be intimidated by their might. Their power - just like the media's "power"- is also and perhaps above all the power given to them by those they dominate. The "authority" of the media's leading figures - and particularly that of the media experts - is first and foremost the power that comes from their omnipresence. This "power" and "authority" is embodied in particular people. Why should we keep their names secret, if those names represent positions of power - which other "names" could occupy ? With the same results, if there is no change.

If this type of critique can result in reforms, so much the better ! But it won't reach its goal if its cutting edge is blunted. And if that is incompatible with the standards of media correctness imposed by those who control access to the mainstream media, that's just too bad.

Such a critique is neither an outlet for anger nor entertainment for dilettantes, though. It tries to make people aware of the urgent need to transform the media and thus to formulate and to defend appropriate proposals which meet that need. It is therefore bound to be a political critique.

But since we defend pluralism, this kind of political critique is not, or not primarily, a one-sided critique of bias in the media, or in some media. By revealing their one-sided propaganda, we don't want to turn our critical observation into mere counter-propaganda, or to challenge an editorial bias just to formulate an alternative political viewpoint. If our critique is a political critique, it's because of its foundations and objectives.

How we ground our critique will have consequences. How could it be otherwise ? Media ownership, the financial forces at play, media response to competition and the power struggle in its own small world determine editorial orientation, the lack of freedom for journalists and a disregard for pluralism.

The political aims of our critique are consistent with its radical nature. They are necessarily targeted at the effects of economic liberalism, and at specific forms of social and political domination. This critique of the existing media order, its role and the social and political conditions which enable it to develop is a political critique which generates fresh alternatives.

That being the case, it is not surprising that we call for a left-wing of the left - associations, trade unions, political parties, whatever their shape and internal differences - to see the problem of news and culture as essential to democracy and politics, and as a result to challenge, put forward ideas and mobilise, at last and once more.

If another world is possible, so are other media.