

volume is that the answer is not that simple because the bifurcation remains and is becoming increasingly problematic. Accordingly, it continues to contribute to a view that communication is not yet a mature, distinct and coherent scholarly discipline and that credibility of communication theory and research in the social sciences is still stretched.

The editors have definitely achieved the objective they set when compiling this volume in the first place – to generate scholarly interest and challenge theorists and researchers to look at the broader scope of communication study. To this end, their excellent publication will, by all means, bring theorists to work together in formulating a truly grounded approach to communication theory and research, making it a more serious academic discipline in the future.

David Miller and William Dinan, *A Century of Spin: How Public Relations Became the Cutting Edge of Corporate Power*. London: Pluto Press, 2008, £14.99. 232 pp.

William Dinan and David Miller (eds), *Thinker, Faker, Spinner, Spy: Corporate PR and the Assault on Democracy*. London: Pluto Press, 2007. £15.99. 324 pp.

Reviewed by: Sue Curry Jensen, Muhlenberg College

‘Spin’ may be a pejorative and cynicism a stock response to corporate PR, but University of Strathclyde sociologists David Miller and William Dinan maintain that the vast power of the global public relations industry is still largely invisible. They contend that PR ‘thinkers, fakers, spinners and spies’ are not only undermining democracy by manipulating public perceptions, but they are also systematically monitoring and actively working to censor and subvert citizen resistance to their corporate clients’ agendas.

Miller and Dinan are co-founders of Spinwatch (www.spinwatch.org), a non-profit organization that monitors public relations and spin. Modelled after US-based Media and Democracy’s PR Watch (www.prwatch.org), Spinwatch extends coverage to PR activities in the UK, EU and beyond. For that initiative alone, Miller and Dinan deserve accolades from critical media scholars; however, these two volumes take their work to another level by providing historical and theoretical rationales for their activism.

Critical studies of the public relations industry are a tiny stream compared to the Niagara of pro-PR publications; nonetheless, critical work has developed some momentum in recent years. John Stauber and Sheldon Rampton’s *Toxic Sludge is Good for You! Lies, Damn Lies and the Public Relations Industry* (1995), Alex Carey’s *Taking the Risk Out of Democracy: Corporate Propaganda vs. Freedom and Liberty* (1997) and Stuart Ewen’s *PR! A Social History of Spin* (1998) are the best known and most rhetorically charged of these efforts. These authors charted the critical territory; however, Miller and Dinan contribute to an expansive new agenda for critical research that has emerged in the aftermath of WTO Seattle 1999, which is radically reassessing the functions of global PR. This agenda was anticipated in Carey’s prescient work, but is most fully articulated in Sharon Beder’s *Global Spin* (2000 and 2002 revision), *Suiting Themselves* (2005) and *Free Market Missionaries* (2006); it conceives of public relations as part of a broad nexus of ideas, actions, institutions and global networks that advocate for elite financial interests.

For Miller and Dinan, this means recognizing that in the millennial era of capitalist globalization, major public relations firms are 'the cutting edge of corporate power'. The rationale for this expansive view is not just that PR has globalized its reach, but rather that PR itself has changed. The major operatives are no longer just in the public relations business; as a result of mergers and takeovers in communication businesses during the 1980s and 1990s, they are now part of huge 'integrated communication' conglomerates and financial holding companies. These businesses combine public relations, advertising, lobbying, branding, political campaigning and government contracting, including government relations, public diplomacy, nation branding, propaganda and even psychological warfare.¹ Add to this, the proliferation of ancillary organizations such as generously funded partisan think tanks, business roundtables, policy forums, front groups and institutes; subsidized scholars and 'scholarship' commissioned to support and publicize predetermined positions in multiple media venues; conferences, meetings and leisure activities designed to facilitate networking among government and corporate elites, including national media elites; and the revolving doors that allow government officials to move freely between the public and private sectors. It is only when these entities and practices are approached holistically through the lens of political economy, institutional and network analyses that the full significance of the challenges that corporate PR now poses to democracy can be fully grasped. Whatever other merits and flaws Miller and Dinan's books possess, their contribution to reframing of the scope of the problem is a substantial achievement. C. Wright Mills' *The Power Elite* (1956) mapped the overlapping networks of power in mid-20th-century America; Miller and Dinan contribute to the emerging template for mapping 21st-century global power elites.

In *A Century of Spin*, the co-authored volume, Miller and Dinan use the Woody Allen film character Zelig as a kind of synecdoche, to describe PR practitioners. Zelig has the ability to turn into other people when in their company; he is a doctor among doctors, a lawyer among lawyers and so on. According to our authors, the 'Zelig Complex' describes the role of PR operatives in history: 'Always present, often unnoticed or forgotten at important historical events. . . . The Zelig of PR flit from page to page of the history books trying to leave no trace and trying to ensure that the interests of their clients prevail against the interests of humanity and the planet' (p. 12).

Miller and Dinan divide their account of the role of PR in history into distinct waves. The first wave, 1911–30, examines 'the hidden history of corporate propaganda' in Britain, encompassing the emergence of business activism in response to the expansion of suffrage and labour organizing, national propaganda during the First World War and postwar government interest in peacetime propaganda under Lloyd George and the 1925 emergence of the Economic League to counter socialism and ensure the future of capitalism. Miller and Dinan contend that, contrary to the views of many historians, PR is not something that was developed in the US and later exported to the UK, but rather it developed simultaneously in both countries. To support this claim, Miller and Dinan provide detailed profiles of key players in early British PR, Dudley Docker, Reginald Hall and John Baker White.

Conversely, however, Miller and Dinan, maintain that the 'second wave of corporate propaganda', 1936–1950, began in the US well in advance of the UK. It consisted of the National Association of Manufacturers' (NAM) organized resistance to the New Deal.

To support this claim, they extensively examine NAM's Mohawk Valley formula, an effective union busting strategy, and Hill & Knowlton's red-baiting and covert hiring of well-known journalist George Sokolsky to advance anti-labour propaganda. Miller and Dinan contend the techniques used successfully in the US in the 1930s were used 50 years later to break the power of unions in the UK in the 1984–5 miners' strike.

In contrast to the US, where Miller and Dinan claim union power was co-opted early, the second wave took a very different form in the UK where there was mounting public backlash against privilege and pressure to nationalize industry. Corporate interests responded by creating Aims of Industry, which was dedicated to protecting private interests against democratic reform and Keynesian economic policies. Discussion of the British second wave also includes a brief examination of the Mont Pelerin Society, its UK counterpart, the Institute of Economic Affairs, the Mont Pelerin Conference at Oxford in 1959 and the Society's links to Milton Friedman and the Chicago School of free-market economics.

Miller and Dinan regard the influence of the Mont Pelerin Society and its bellwether thinker Friedrich van Hayek as 'extremely significant' in bringing about the third wave of corporate propaganda: 'Within a generation their [Mont Pelerin's] ideas had been adopted by right-wing political movements everywhere and a further 10–15 years later they had also successfully neutralized the remnants of parties founded to represent the common interest' (p. 67).

The third wave swept Thatcher and Reagan into power. Rapid expansion of the corporate lobbying industry on both sides of the Atlantic followed in its wake as did the creation of a global network of free-market think tanks, which now number nearly 500. Contending that 'The shadow of US interests hangs heavy over British politics', Miller and Dinan also demonstrate that the shadow of the US–UK neoliberal revolution now hangs heavily over the world. The concerted Atlanticist corporate lobbying and co-option of government authorities put the global architecture of neoliberalism (WTO, GATT, NAFTA, etc.) in place, and thereby secured 'the power of the unelected'.

Despite the industry's motto, 'the best PR is invisible PR', Miller and Dinan make good use of the limited statistical evidence that is available to support their claims. *A Century of Spin* is especially valuable in tracing the rise of the British PR industry and its meteoric expansion in the last 20 years. Three chapters are devoted to examining how consolidated elite forces have played out in recent British politics from Thatcher's strike breaking, Blair and New Labour's courting of business and the rise of Cameron and the Neo-cons. Miller and Dinan maintain that UK public relations operatives, lobbyists and 'think tankerati' are now integral players in the British political system, using the same tactics that their counterparts on this side of the Atlantic have used to undermine the commonweal.

Dinan and Miller's co-edited volume, *Thinker, Faker, Spinner, Spy*, is divided into four sections. Part I sets the stage with brief tours of the global PR industry (Miller and Dinan), the UK PR industry (Grimshaw) and a tightly reasoned conceptual exercise, which distinguishes between 'generic globalization' and 'capitalist globalization' in order to break through the deeply entrenched view that there are no alternations to neoliberalism (Sklair). Part II offers a series of well-crafted case studies that put meat on the bones of Dinan and Miller's argument: a profile of the powerful, secretive Washington

lobbying firm, DCI (L. Miller); an exposé of the spinning of farmed salmon (D. Miller); Exxon's multifaceted attempts to discredit climate science (Rowell); Biotech (Matthews); arms trade (Lubbers); and efforts to foster neoliberalism in Germany (Mueller). Part III examines subterranean power brokering: US democracy assistance programmes (Sussman); corporate lobbying and EU audiovisual policy (Williams); public relations and the London Stock Exchange (Davis); and New Labour's US connections (Clark). Part IV strikes a hopeful note, exploring ways citizens can resist corporate spin: unmasking PR through resources like Sourcewatch.org (Burton); the creation of Alter-EU with the support of a broad coalition of civil society organizations to promote transparency in the Brussels 'lobbyocracy' (Hoederman); and strategies for exposing Coca Cola's crimes and human rights abuses and organizing for justice (Higginbottom).

Dinan and Miller provide an introduction and conclusion to the volume: their prescriptions for resistance include binding regulation that will promote transparency and openness, outlawing deceptive PR, rolling back corporate power by demanding an end to privileged access of corporations and their lobbyists to domestic and international governing bodies, a massive programme of democratic renewal beginning at the local level with popular works councils and their community equivalents, and by urging sympathetic readers to get involved in the battle for ideas through donations and volunteer work with organizing committed to advancing democracy.

The pages of these books are packed with generative ideas that beg further exploration. For example, Miller and Dean quote PR pioneer Ivy Lee's defence of the Rockefeller family interests after the 1914 Ludlow massacre. Lee spins the murders of miners and their families by lifting the anchor of facticity: Lee asks, 'what is fact? The effort to state an absolute fact is simply an attempt to . . . give you my interpretation of the facts.' In the formative world of PR, Miller and Dinan observe, 'Facts were flexible and minds malleable.' It is generally assumed that PR/Spin is a major contributor to the postmodern epistemological crisis – to what satirist Stephen Colbert refers to as the current state of 'truthiness'. Miller and Dinan identify an important project for a future communication historian: return to primary sources and trace the erosion of truth and evidence in the discourse of the titans of PR. Obvious, perhaps, but ignored by scholars, because, as Miller and Dinan, point out, critical scholars have not taken PR seriously and have thereby allowed it to elude scrutiny.

Miller and Dinan's work contributes to a new synthesis for thinking about public relations *cum* global 'integrated communication' conglomerates, but it is only a first draft of the work that needs to be done. It is widely sourced, but not always deeply sourced. For example, Miller and Dinan repeatedly refer to Walter Lippmann as the US's most important theorist of PR. There is considerable precedent for this, re: Ewen, Chomsky and others, but it is based upon misreadings or partial readings of Lippmann. Lippmann was an ardent critic of propaganda and public relations: both George Creel, head of the infamous US Committee on Public Information during the First World War, and Ivy Lee, PR pioneer, felt the sting of his pen. Moreover, Lippmann, like Miller and Dinan, saw PR, which Lippmann described, as distorting information at its source, as contributing to a crisis of democracy. Edward Bernays, the so-called 'father of public relations' (and Ewen's source), inverted Lippmann's argument and transformed critique into advocacy. Here, and elsewhere, reliance on secondary sources misleads. There are also factual

errors in *A Century of Spin*, for example, they have the Heritage Foundation, founded in 1974, supporting Arthur Page's anti-communist crusade for freedom in the 1950s. Errors may be inevitable in ground-breaking works of encyclopaedic scope, but such lapses raise doubts about Miller and Dinan's other claims and provide easy targets for their critics. Moreover, Miller and Dinan's argument is not as tightly organized as my review may imply or as sociological norms of rigour prescribe. This is not to diminish their considerable accomplishments, but to affirm that there is much more work to be done.

Combining scholarship and social justice activism is always a perilous walk on a tightrope, but most of the time Miller and Dinan and the contributors to their anthology maintain their footing. The sheer weight of the evidence, especially the detailed case studies, has the cumulative effect of making their claims impossible to dismiss. With few exceptions, the jelly sticks to the wall.

Note

1. Only one of the 10 largest global PR firms, Edelman, remains independent. One indicator of the scale of PR involvement in global affairs is the growth in US military contracting for strategic communications. Until recently the battle of ideas was the sole responsibility of the Department of State; however, the Pentagon's budget request in this area has grown from US\$9 million in 2005 to US\$988 million for 2010. To support the Iraqi elections and the aims of the Baghdad government alone, the military has awarded US\$100 million in contracts.

Jesper Strömbäck, Mark Ørsten and Toril Aalberg (eds), *Communicating Politics: Political Communication in the Nordic Countries*. Göteborg: Nordicom, 2008, SEK 280/€30.00. 276 pp.

Reviewed by: James Stanyer, *Loughborough University*

In a field largely dominated by US scholarship, political communication research in the Nordic countries has often been overlooked. *Communicating Politics* seeks to address this shortcoming not only by publicizing the latest Scandinavian research but also challenging some assumptions about Nordic democracies, principally their categorization by Hallin and Mancini as indistinguishable examples of democratic corporatism. The editors rightly observe that while Scandinavian countries share similar traits there are significant differences which deserve to be explored in detail.

With the aim of avoiding naive generalizations, the book provides a comparative examination of the political communication systems of the five main Nordic states. The collection is organized in two parts. Part 1 provides background on Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden, assessing the extent to which the elements of the democratic corporatist model are present. The chapters reveal that unifying features are not as apparent as they maybe were, political parallelism is certainly weaker, press circulation is declining in some countries and state intervention in the media system varies considerably between states, with some countries even exhibiting features of Hallin and Mancini's liberal model. In all, the authors in Part 1 should be congratulated on their succinct yet informative chapters on the political and media systems of the various countries. These provide useful background detail.