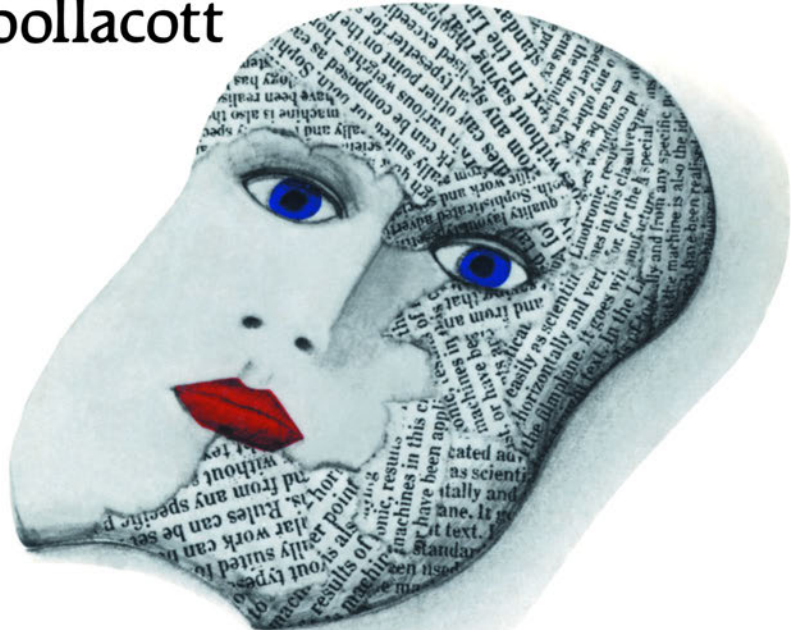# CULTURE, SOCIETY AND THE MEDIA

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and Janet Woollacott

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MICHAEL GUREVITCH, TONY BENNETT, JAMES CURRAN AND JANET WOOLLACOTT

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Acknowledgements

Preface

The writers of the Open University course on 'Mass Communication and Society', from which this book is substantially derived, saw the understanding of various differences and conflicts between theoretical perspectives on the mass media as an important and desirable object of study for students taking the course. Rather than aiming to show 'how the media work', the course attempted to indicate that there were a number of alternative and sometimes competing theoretical accounts of how the media work. In particular, the course focused on the division and opposition between liberal-pluralist and Marxist views of the media. As part of the pedagogic strategy of the course, students were actively encouraged to follow the history of debates between Marxists and liberal pluralists over the media and to question the assumptions of both sides. This opposition was set up and, to a certain extent, simplified for students as in the following comparison of pluralist and Marxist views.

> The pluralists see society as a complex of competing groups and interests, none of them predominant all of the time. Media organisations are seen as bounded organisational systems, enjoying an important degree of autonomy from the state, political parties and institutionalised pressure groups. Control of the media is said to be in the hands of an autonomous managerial elite who allow a considerable degree of flexibility to media professionals. A basic symmetry is seen to exist between media institutions and their audiences, since in McQuail's words the 'relationship is generally entered into voluntarily and on apparently equal terms' (McQuail, 1977, p. 91): and audiences are seen as capable of manipulating the media in an infinite variety of ways according to their prior needs and dispositions, and as having access to what Halloran calls 'the plural values of society' enabling them to 'conform, accommodate, challenge or reject'. Marxists view capitalist society as being one of class domination; the media are seen as part of an ideological arena in which various class views are fought out, although within the context of the dominance of certain classes; ultimate control is increasingly concentrated in monopoly capital; media professionals, while enjoying the illusion of autonomy, are socialised into and internalise the norms of the dominant culture; the media taken as a

whole, relay interpretive frameworks consonant with the interests of the dominant classes, and media audiences, while sometimes negotiating and contesting these frameworks, lack ready access to alternative meaning systems that would enable them to reject the definitions offered by the media in favour of consistently oppositional definitions. (*Mass Communication and Society,* Block 3, Introduction, p. 5)

The articulation of this kind of meta-theoretical conflict had the positive advantage of allowing students to construct and order quite disparate contributions to the field of mass communications.

However, it was not the intention of the course team to produce a course formed by the credo of news broadcasting of 'balance, neutrality and objectivity'. As reviews of the course have pointed out, the liberal pluralist/ Marxist divisions make their present felt in an unequal manner.

The course is throughout an exercise in radical analysis with the liberal pluralist view serving largely as a counter-point. It counterpoints by toning the more extreme claims of the opposition and by allowing the introduction of aspects of the subject that fit awkwardly if at all into a marxist framework. By my estimate, the division of labour is about 80–20 between these orientations but drinking the course as a whole is to imbibe pretty strictly of certain versions of modern Marxism. (Carey, 1979, p. 314)

The 'unequal' weighting of Marxist and liberal pluralist views within the course stemmed largely from the task undertaken. On the one hand, we attempted a critical assessment of past developments in the field of mass communications research. On the other hand, we also sought to indicate central and pertinent contemporary theoretical developments. Increasingly, important issues and conflicts in the analysis of the mass media have been generated within and in relation to a Marxist framework.

In revising and changing the contents of the course for this reader, we have attempted to maintain the contrast between pluralist and Marxist views of the media because this contrast has been important to the history and development of mass media studies and because it remains a source of distinctive differences in the conceptualization of the media and of society generally. At the same time, the reader also makes clear significant differences within the Marxist tradition of media analysis, between, for example, those approaches which take as a starting point the base/superstructure metaphor and emphasize, as a result, the economic infra-structure of the media industries, and those approaches which are concerned to re-think a Marxist theory of ideology outside the parameters of a hierarchy of determinations, dependent always in the last analysis upon the economic. The presence of structuralism, of a linguistic paradigm, in contemporary mass communications research, with its consequent focus on the

specificity and autonomy of media systems of signification and representation and the impact it has had on both Marxist and pluralist perspectives is also registered.

The reader is organized in three sections. The first, 'Class, ideology and the media, presents a series of accounts of the major theoretical traditions which have influenced the development of media theory in the past and in the present, and indicates the different foci of interest and the crucial issues around which disagreements and debates about the media could be said to be organized. The second section examines the role of media institutions: their ownership and control; the internal organization of media industries and media professionals; and the role of media institutions in the Third World. The final section of the reader focuses on the power of the media in different areas: in terms of control of communications systems within society; in the political effects of mass communications; in the signification and reporting of race. It also reviews the theoretical issues raised by the media's apparent representation—rather than signification—of reality.

Although we have attempted to identify different theoretical perspectives on the media and the key areas in which they clash or mark strategic absences, we would not wish to suggest that the articles here provide an 'objective' map of recent mass communications research, but rather that they seek to select 'shared' theoretical problems within the field of media research and to suggest ways, albeit different ones, of thinking through those problems.

We would like to express our gratitude to all members of the 'Mass Communication and Society' course team, whose work in creating the course, and then adapting and updating it, made this book possible. We would also like to acknowledge the sterling efforts of Valerie Byrne and Deirdre Smith in helping prepare the typescript. Finally, we would like to thank the Open University for allowing us to adapt and re-use Open University course material.

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I

CLASS, IDEOLOGY AND THE MEDIA

Introduction

Few areas of inquiry have expanded as rapidly as the study of the media over the last twenty years. Dominated in the late 1950s by the positivist canons of American social science, the settled view of the media which then obtained has since been profoundly challenged by a series of successive theoretical influences derived, in the main, from deviance theory, linguistics, structuralism and semiology, discourse theory (especially of late) and, perhaps most critically, from the debates in and around the area of ideology that have taken place within Marxism over the same period. Not all of these influences, however, have pulled in the same direction so that, whilst many of the orthodoxies of earlier stages in the history of mass communications research have been well and truly buried (well, nearly), no clearly articulated new orthodoxy has taken their place. Whilst some options may have been closed by means of both theoretical and empirical critique, there none the less remains a sufficient diversity of contending perspectives to guarantee a lively and productive climate of debate for some time to come.

The readings collected in this section offer a series of different but related overviews of these developments and are intended to give both students and teachers a comprehensive grasp of the key controversies which currently characterize media studies.

In Theories of the media: an introduction', James Curran, Michael Gurevitch and Janet Woollacott review the relationships between liberalpluralist and Marxist approaches to the study of the media. In doing so, they dispute the conventionally held view that the liberal-pluralist approach can be characterized as theoretically cautious and empirically hard-nosed, in contrast to the supposedly more speculative, 'grand theoretical' and assertive character of Marxist approaches. Both approaches, they contend, are informed by theoretical conceptions of society and of the role of the media within it, even if these conceptions are more explicitly and selfconsciously theorized in the Marxist tradition. Moreover, they argue, the empirical findings of the two traditions are not so far opposed as is usually supposed; both agree about the nature and degree of power that can be attributed to the media, albeit that they express this in different terms. Having cleared the air in relation to what has been an important

source of misunderstanding in the history of media debate, Curran, Gurevitch and Woollacott go on to argue that, in recent years, the most productive controversies have been located *within* Marxism rather than *between* the Marxist and liberal-pluralist approaches, and survey the contending paradigms—the 'structuralist', 'political economy' and 'culturalist' approaches—which currently define the main theoretical orientations within Marxist media research.

In Theories of the media, theories of society', Tony Bennett outlines the relationships between the more important schools of media theory and the broader concerns of the traditions of social theory on which they depend in a way that makes clear the connections between particular empirical concerns and their supporting theoretical foundations. Focusing on mass society theories, liberal-pluralism, the critical theory of the Frankfurt School and on more recent developments within the Marxist theory of ideology, Bennett places each of these in their political context and traces the historical connections between them. Entirely dominated, in its early phases, by mass society theory—a pessimistic philosophy which led to the development of the media being viewed apprehensively—opposing theoretical approaches have been developed, at least in part, by means of an engagement with and critique of the mass society position. Bennett thus shows how, from the 1930s through to the 1950s, the liberal-pluralist perspective was developed, in America, by means of a detailed empirical refutation of the mass society supposition that media audiences could be regarded as largely undifferentiated, passive and inert masses. Similarly, in the case of the Frankfurt School—the first Marxist attempt to engage theoretically with the media—he shows how the critique of the 'culture industry' contained in the writings of Theodor Adorno and Herbert Marcuse consisted of an uneasy alliance of Marxist and mass society elements. His essay concludes with a consideration of more recent developments in the Marxist theory of ideology, particularly as represented by Louis Althusser, and outlines the way in which contemporary Marxist debates about the social role and power of the media connect with the broader problems involved in the analysis of the reproduction processes of advanced capitalism.

In The rediscovery of "ideology": return of the repressed in media studies', Stuart Hall's central concern is with the diverse theoretical sources that have contributed to the formation of the 'critical paradigm' in media studies since the early 1960s. He prefaces this, however, with a synoptic survey of the development of media theory prior to the 1960s and, in a swingeing critique of the liberal-pluralist perspective, traces the connection between American positivist and behaviourist social science and the ideology of American pluralism in the late 1950s. To the extent that the media were viewed as reflecting an achieved consensus and, thereby, as strengthening the core value system which was alleged to hold American society together in spite of the diverse and plural groups of which it was composed, American media sociology, Hall argues, 'underwrote "pluralism"'. By contrast, during the last ten years or so, the media have been viewed 'no longer as the institutions which merely reflected and

sustained the consensus, but as the institutions which *produced* consensus, "manufactured consent"'. In the main body of his essay, Hall considers those theoretical developments which ruptured the liberal-pluralist paradigm from within together with those 'outside' influences which, in founding the critical paradigm, have contributed to this change—indeed, reversal—of perspectives. In an impressive survey which takes in the contributions of deviance theory, the general perspectives of structuralism as instanced by Claude Lévi-Strauss and Roland Barthes, the psychoanalytic theories of Jacques Lacan, the work of Louis Althusser, Gramsci's concept of hegemony and its subsequent elaboration in the work of Ernesto Laclau, Hall outlines the major theoretical developments which have successively undercut and displaced the earlier analogical thinking whereby the media were said to mirror or reflect reality.

Throughout his analysis, Hall is careful to relate theoretical developments to political ones. If, as he contends, the 'critical paradigm' has been characterized by its 'rediscovery' of ideology, exiled from the heartland of American sociology, this has been closely related to the fact that ideological struggle, once optimistically thought to be over, has become more pronounced and visible. If the media are no longer viewed as reflecting an achieved consensus but as being engaged in the business of producing consent, this is due, in no small part, to the fact that there is no longer a consensus to be reflected with the result that, as the economy has plunged deeper and deeper into crisis, the need to produce consent has become more imperative yet, at the same time, increasingly difficult.

In his critique of the American social science of the 1950s, Stuart Hall argues that *'conceptually,* the media-message, as a symbolic sign-vehicle or a structured discourse, with its own internal structuration and complexity, remained theoretically wholly undeveloped' within the liberal-pluralist tradition. There can be little doubt that the centrality currently accorded such questions consitutes the most visibly distinctive feature of contemporary media theory. In the intervening period, the aggregate techniques of content analysis have been forced into the background by a veritable explosion of new methods—chiefly derived from linguistics, semiology and psychoanalysis—aimed at unlocking the structure of media messages and analysing their effects. In 'Messages and meanings', Janet Woollacott outlines some of the more important of these methods, illustrates the uses to which they have been put and considers some of the difficulties associated with them. In a discussion which ranges across the work of Lévi-Strauss, Barthes and Umberto Eco, the critical project of the film journal *Screen,* Colin MacCabe's work on the 'classic realist text' and the use of the Gramscian concept of hegemony in *Policing the Crisis,* she draws out the implications which such developments have had for traditional Marxist formulations of the concept of ideology. The general difficulty she points to has been that of reconciling semiological perspectives, with their stress on signification as an active process of the production of meaning, with 'any theory of ideology which conceives of the media as essentially reflecting the "real"'.

Viewed collectively, the readings comprising this section offer a commanding insight into the historical development of media studies together with an informed appraisal of the connections between the new developments, debates and controversies which typify recent work in this area. Albeit necessarily more cautiously and conjecturally, they also identify the directions in which future research might be expected to develop. The overall result is a useful synoptic perspective on where media studies has been, where it is now and where it is likely to be going.

1

The study of the media: theoretical approaches

JAMES CURRAN, MICHAEL GUREVITCH AND JANET WOOLLACOTT

In this chapter we do not attempt to chart systematically all the different approaches to the study of the mass media, each set in their different intellectual, social and historical contexts. Instead we have chosen to examine selectively the way in which different researchers have perceived the *power* of the mass media and to point to the different theoretical conceptions and empirical enquiries that have informed some of those perceptions. In particular, we have focused on the clashes and common ground between different accounts of the power of the media in three areas; in the distinctions between liberal-pluralist and Marxist approaches, often conceived of in terms of a distinction between empiricism and theory; in different approaches to the analysis of media institutions and finally in the different accounts of media power located in contemporary Marxist studies of the media.

THE POWER OF THE MEDIA: THEORY AND EMPIRICISM

To a remarkable extent, there was a broad consensus during the inter-war period —to which many researchers, writing from a 'right' as well as a 'left' perspective subscribed—that the mass media exercised a powerful and persuasive influence. Underlying this consensus was (1) the creation of mass audiences on a scale that was unprecedented through the application of new technology—the rotary press, film and radio—to the mass production of communications; (2) a fashionable though not unchallenged view, that urbanization and industrialization had created a society that was volatile, unstable, rootless, alienated and inherently susceptible to manipulation; (3) linked to a view of urbanized man as being relatively defenceless, an easy prey to mass communication since he was no longer anchored in the network of social relations and stable, inherited values that characterized settled, rural communities; (4) anecdotal but seemingly persuasive evidence that the mass media had brainwashed people during World War 1, and engineered the rise of fascism in Europe between the wars.

This encouraged a relatively uncomplicated view of the media as all powerful propaganda agencies brainwashing a susceptible and defenceless public. The

media propelled 'word bullets' that penetrated deep into its inert and passive victims. All that needed to be done was to measure the depth and size of penetration through modern scientific techniques.

A reassessment of the impact of the mass media during the late 1940s, 1950s and 1960s gave rise to a new academic orthodoxy—that the mass media have only a very limited influence. This view was succinctly stated by Klapper (1960) in a classic summary of more than a decade's empirical research. 'Mass communications', he concludes, 'ordinarily do not serve as a necessary and sufficient cause of audience effects' (p. 8). Underlying this new orthodoxy, was a reassessment of man's susceptibility to influence. A succession of empirical enquiries, using experimental laboratory and social survey techniques, demonstrated that people tended to expose themselves to, understand and remember communications selectively, according to prior dispositions. People, it was argued, manipulated—rather than were manipulated by—the mass media. The empirical demonstration of selective audience behaviour was further reinforced by a number of uses and gratifications studies which argued that audience members are active rather than passive and bring to the media a variety of different needs and uses that influence their response to the media.

Underpinning this reassuring conclusion about the lack of media influence was a repudiation of the mass society thesis on which the presumption of media power had been based. The view of society as being composed of isolated and anomic individuals gave way to a view of society as a honeycomb of small groups bound by a rich web of personal ties and dependences. Stable group pressures, it was concluded, helped to shield the individual from media influence. This stress on the salience of small groups as a buffer against media influence was often linked to a diffusionist model of power. In particular it was stressed by a number of leading empirical researchers that the social mediation of media messages was not a hierarchical process. 'Some individuals of high social status apparently wield little independent influence', wrote Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955), 'and some of low status have considerable personal influence'. Wealth and power, it seemed, did not shape public opinion in the leading Western democracy.

Even the image of man as a natural prey to suggestion and influence was challenged by a number of persuasive theories of personality formation that apparently explained selective audience behaviour. In particular cognitive dissonance theory, which postulated that people seek to minimize the psychological discomfort of having incompatible values and beliefs, seemed to explain people's deliberate avoidance and unconscious decoding of uncongenial media messages.

In short, the conventional belief in the power of the media seemed to be demolished. A popular view based on flimsy anecdotal evidence had been confounded by systematic empirical enquiry. Even the assumptions about the nature of man and the structure of society on which the belief in media power had rested, had been 'revealed' as bankrupt and misguided.

During the late 1960s and the 1970s, the new orthodoxy was challenged from two quite different, indeed opposed, directions. Those working within the empirical effects tradition initiated what Jay Blumler has called the 'new look' in mass communications research. This has consisted partly of looking again at the small print of the pioneering studies into media effects obscured by the often polemically worded dismissals of media influence that are regularly cited in summary overviews of the literature. For although leading researchers like Katz, Lazarsfeld and Klapper reacted strongly against the conventional view of the omnipotent media in sometimes extravagantly worded generalizations, they were careful to qualify what they said by allowing a number of cases when the media may be or has been persuasive: when audience attention is casual, when information rather than attitude or opinion is involved, when the media source is prestigious, trusted or liked, when monopoly conditions are more complete, when the issue at stake is remote from the receiver's experience or concern, when personal contacts are not opposed to the direction of the message or when the recipient of the message is cross-pressured. More recently a number of scholars have also re-examined the empirical data presented in the early classic 'effects' studies and argued that they do not fully support the negative conclusions about media influence that were derived from them (Becker, McCombs and McLeod, 1975; Gitlin, 1978). Furthermore, it has been argued, social changes such as the decline of stable political allegiances and the development of a new mass medium in television require the conclusions derived from older empirical studies to be reassessed. A succinct statement of this 'new look' is presented by Michael Gurevitch and Jay Blumler later in this book.

The limited model of media influence was also attacked by scholars in the Marxist and neo-Marxist critical tradition that became a growing influence on mass communication research during the 1970s. The initial response of many Marxist and critical writers was to dismiss out of hand empirical communications research as being uniformly uninteresting. The media, they argued, were ideological agencies that played a central role in maintaining class domination: research studies that denied media influence were so disabled in their theoretical approach as to be scarcely worth confronting (or indeed, even reading).

Some empirical researchers responded with evident exasperation to this sweeping dismissal by arguing that disciplined, rigorous empirical research had revealed the inadequacy of unsubstantiated theorizing about the mass media (e.g. Blumler, 1977). Indeed, a casual reader of exchanges between these two traditions might be forgiven for thinking that a new engagement had developed in which a view of the mass media as having only limited influence, grounded in empirical research within a liberal tradition, was pitted against an alternative conception of the mass media as powerful agencies, informed by an exclusively theoretical Marxist/critical perspective.

But while the two research traditions are, in some ways, fundamentally and irreconcilably opposed, they are not divided primarily by the differences

highlighted in this debate. In fact, the classical empirical studies did not demonstrate that the mass media had very little influence: on the contrary, they revealed the central role of the media in consolidating and fortifying the values and attitudes of audience members. This tended to be presented in a negative way only because the preceding orthodoxy they were attacking had defined the influence of omnipotent media in terms of changing attitudes and beliefs. The absence of media *conversion* consequently tended to be equated with the absence of influence.

Ironically, Marxist and critical commentators have also argued that the mass media play a strategic role in reinforcing dominant social norms and values that legitimize the social system. There is thus no inconsistency, at an empirical level, in the two approaches. Indeed, as Marcuse has suggested, 'the objection that we overrate greatly the indoctrinating power of the "media"…misses the point. The preconditioning does not start with the mass production of radio and television and the centralization of their control. The people entered this stage as preconditioned receptacles of long standing…' (Marcuse, 1972). He could have added with justification, that a generation of empirical research from a different tradition had provided corroboration of the reinforcement 'effect' he was attributing to the media.

Differences between the pluralist and critical schools about the power of the mass media, at the level of effectiveness, are to a certain extent based on mutual misunderstanding (notably, an over-literal acceptance by some Marxist commentators of polemical generalizations about the lack of media influence advanced by some empirical researchers). This misunderstanding has been perpetuated by the tendency for researchers in the two different traditions to examine the impact of the mass media in different contexts as a consequence of their divergent ideological and theoretical preoccupations.

Consider, for instance, the vexed issue of media portrayals of violence. Most researchers in the Marxist tradition in Britain have approached this question in terms of whether media portrayals of violence have served to legitimize the forces of law and order, build consent for the extension of coercive state regulation and de-legitimize outsiders and dissidents (Hall, 1974; Cohen, 1973; Murdock, 1973; Chibnall, 1977; Whannel, 1979). They have thus examined the impact of the mass media in situations where mediated communications are powerfully supported by other institutions such as the police, judiciary and schools, and sustained by already widely diffused attitudes favourable towards law enforcement agencies and generally unfavourable towards groups like youth gangs, student radicals, trade union militants and football hooligans. The power of the media is thus portrayed as that of renewing, amplifying and extending the existing predispositions that constitute the dominant culture, not in creating them. In contrast, empirical researchers in the liberal tradition have tended to examine media portrayals of violence in terms of whether they promote and encourage violence in everyday life. They have consequently defined the potential influence of these portrayals of violence in a form that is opposed to deeply engrained

moral norms supported and maintained by a network of social relationships and powerful institutions actively opposed to 'antisocial behaviour'. That a 'limited effects' model of media influence emerged from such studies should come as no surprise: it was inherent in the way in which media influence was defined in the first place.

The same pattern of difference can be illustrated in relation to the question of voting. Some Marxist commentators have contended that media portrayals of elections constitute dramatized rituals that legitimize the power structure in liberal democracies; voting is seen as an ideological practice that helps to sustain the myth of representative democracy, political equality and collective self-determination. The impact of election coverage is thus conceived in terms of reinforcing political values that are widely shared in Western democracies and are actively endorsed by the education system, the principal political organizations and the apparatus of the state. In contrast, pioneering studies into the effects of the media on voting behaviour by Lazarsfeld *et al.* (1948), Berelson *et al.* (1954) and Trenaman and McQuail (1961) concluded that the media had only marginal influence in changing the way in which people voted. Their negative conclusions were based on an analysis of media influence in a form that was strongly opposed by powerful group norms, at a time when partisan allegiances were stable. Significantly, their conclusions have been modified as these contingent influences have weakened.

The alleged dichotomy between the 'grand-theoretical' and 'atheoretical' approaches to media study represented by the two opposed traditions of Marxism and liberalism is also a little misleading. The liberal tradition in mass communications research has been characterized by a greater attention to empirical investigation. But it does not constitute an 'atheoretical' approach: on the contrary, empirical communications research is based upon theoretical models of society even if these are often unexamined and unstated.

Indeed, the conventional characterization of liberal and Marxist traditions in mass communications research as constituting two opposed schools tends to obscure both the internal differences within each of these traditions and the reciprocal influence which each has exerted upon the other. The shift from a perception of the media as a stupefying, totally subduing force expressed, for example, by Marcuse (1972), to a more cautious assessment in which dominant meaning systems are moulded and relayed by the media, are adapted by audiences and integrated into classbased or 'situated' meaning systems articulated by McCron (1976), is characteristic of a significant shift within Marxist research that has been influenced, in part at least, by empirical communications studies. This has been accompanied by increasing interest within the Marxist tradition in empirical survey-based research into audience adaptation of media-relayed ideologies, exemplified recently for instance by Hartman (1979) and Morley (1980). At the same time, Marxist critiques have contributed to a growing recognition within empirical communications research that more attention needs to be paid to the influence of the media on the

ideological categories and frames of reference through which people understand the world. Evolving from the relatively limited conception of media 'agenda-setting' (the ranking of issues, in terms of their perceived importance) in election studies, a new interest has developed in the wider 'cognitive effects' of the media that reflects a nearly universal dissatisfaction amongst researchers with the narrow conceptualization of media influence afforded by the classic effects studies.

MEDIA INSTITUTIONS

Shifting paradigms of the power of the media have had important implications for enquiry into media organizations. Clearly, recognition of the power of the media raises questions as to how and by whom this power is wielded. Answers to these questions have been sought through the investigation and analysis of the structures and practices of media organizations.

Concern with the study of media institutions, their work practices and their relationship with their socio-political environment, emerged as a mainstream feature of mass communication research only in the last two decades. Inasmuch as the early history of this field of research has been characterized by a preoccupation with the study of the effects of the media on their audiences, this new concern constituted a major shift of interest in the field. The reasons for this shift have been varied: in part it was prompted by some disillusionment with the capacity of 'effects research' to fully explain the power of the media. At the same time it also reflected an awareness of the relative neglect of media institutions as objects of study. But the more important stimuli came from theoretical developments outside the narrow confines of media research. At least three different sources of influence should be identified here: first, developments in the sociological study of large scale, formal organizations yielded theories of organizational structure and behaviour, as well as analytic tools, which were seen to be applicable to the study of media organizations and of their work practices and production processes. Secondly, the increasing influence of Marxist theorizing, with its challenge to pluralist models of power in society, prompted a reappraisal of the role of the media in society, and focused attention on the structure and the organization of the media. The media came to be seen, in this perspective, not as an autonomous organizational system, but as a set of institutions closely linked to the dominant power structure through ownership, legal regulation, the values implicit in the professional ideologies in the media, and the structures and ideological consequences of prevailing modes of newsgathering. Thirdly, increasing attention to the study of the role of the mass media in politics indicated the importance of examining the relationship between media institutions and the political institutions of society, and the ways in which political communication emerges as a subtly composite product of the interaction between these two sets of institutions.

These different influences resulted inevitably, not in a unified set of interests, but in examinations of different aspects of the institutions of the media. Having come to the study of these institutions from different perspectives and under different influences, researchers working in this field have developed at least four different foci of study, reflecting their interests in different aspects of these institutions. The four strands of interest discernible in the literature can be grouped under the following headings:

1. Institutional structures and role relationships;
2. The political economy of media institutions;
3. Professional ideologies and work practices;
4. Interaction of media institutions with the socio-political environment.

In spite of their different foci, the basic issue which underlines all four strands of study is the process of the shaping of media messages. Researchers working in this area share the assumption that an examination of the political, organizational and professional factors which impinge on the process of message production could shed considerable light on the question of the power of the media. Because different factors are selected for examination within each strand of studies, together they complement each other. When pulled together they provide a comprehensive view of the ways in which media messages are produced and shaped, and offer insights into the ways in which different influences on this process are combined in a single composite product.

Institutional structures and role relationships

This strand of studies draws its inspiration primarily from work on formal organizations. Media organizations are seen as possessing the same attributes which characterize other large-scale industrial organizations. These include: hierarchical structures; an internal division of labour and role differentiation; clearly specified and accepted institutional goals, translated into specific policies and organizational practices; clear lines of communication and accountability which generally follow and represent the hierarchical structure; modes of peer and of superior-subordinate relationships which regulate the interaction between incumbents in different roles. Most of the emphasis of this approach is thus placed on intra-organizational structures and behaviour, although some recognition is given to extraorganizational factors which impinge on the organization, such as 'shareholders', 'clients', 'sources' etc.

The various 'gatekeeper' studies, which examined the flow of news materials through the stages of the selection and editing process, as well as studies of formal and peer control in media organizations are the clearest representatives of this approach.

These studies explained the products of the media as outcomes of the interaction amongst different members of media organizations. But

the interaction is not random, nor is power equally distributed amongst the occupants of different organizational positions. Rather, power and control are structured along the lines of the organizational hierarchy. But according to these studies, control in media organizations was not exerted directly or crudely. It depended on social control via informal channels more than on direct control via formal channels. The mechanisms of social control were embedded in the provision (or withholding) of organizational and professional rewards to members of the organization. They ensured the consistency of media outputs and, more important, they produced conformity by media personnel to the overall goals, policies and 'editorial lines' of the organizations for which they worked. Control, thus, is exerted from the organizational top downwards, both through formal and informal channels. It functions, however, not in a coercive fashion, but through the acceptance by occupants of the lower echelons of the legitimacy of the authority of those occupying the top positions in the organization. The conclusion which these studies reach then, is that the power of the media is located at the top of the hierarchy of media organizations.

The political economy of media institutions

Resembling the preceding strand in its focus of interest, but diametrically opposed to it, is the perspective which searches for the answers to the question of the power of the media in the analysis of their structures of ownership and control. Adopting a fundamentalist-Marxist approach, studies conducted in this vein have been based on the assumption that the dynamics of the 'culture-producing industries' can be understood primarily in terms of their economic determination (Murdock and Golding, 1977; Curran and Seaton, 1981). Thus, the contents of the media and the meanings carried by their messages are according to this view primarily determined by the economic base of the organizations in which they are produced. Commercial media organizations must cater to the needs of advertisers and produce audience-maximizing products (hence the heavy doses of sex-and-violence content) while those media institutions whose revenues are controlled by the dominant political institutions or by the state gravitate towards a middle ground, or towards the heartland of the prevailing consensus (Elliott, 1977).

The precise mechanisms and processes whereby ownership of the media or control of their economics are translated into controls over the message are, according to the proponents of this approach, rather complex and often problematic. (See Murdock's article in this book). The workings of these controls are not easy to demonstrate—or to examine empirically. The evidence quite often is circumstantial and is derived from the 'fit' between the ideology implicit in the message and the interests of those in control. The links between the economic determinants of the media on the one hand and the contents of the media on the other must, according to this analysis, be sought in the professional ideologies and the work practices of media professionals, since these are the only

channel through which organizational controls can be brought to bear on the output of the media. Studies of the political economy of media organizations must therefore be closely related to, and supplemented by, analyses of the professional ideologies and practices found in these organizations.

Professional ideologies and work practices

Studies of the beliefs, values and work procedures of media professionals have their theoretical roots in the sociology of the professions. Early studies of professionalism in the media raised the question whether those employed in the media deserved the accolade of being described as a profession. The search for an answer was based on examining whether media occupations possessed the attributes of professionalism, which have defined the classic professions, such as medicine and the law. One of the attributes of professionalism has been the development of a professional ethos or ideology which defined the beliefs and values of the profession, laid down guidelines for accepted and proper professional behaviour and served to legitimate the profession's sources of control and its insistence on the right to regulate and control itself and its members. Examinations of professionalism in media occupations, particularly in journalism, identified a strong claim for professional autonomy, derived from the democratic tenets of freedom of expression and 'the public's right to know'. In addition, media professional ideology developed a commitment to values such as objectivity, impartiality, and fairness.

Academic discussions of the ideologies of media professionals reveal the diametrically opposed conclusions which might be reached when the same body of evidence is looked at from competing theoretical perspectives. A strict pluralist interpretation would accept that media professionals' claims to autonomy and their commitment to the principles of objectivity and impartiality indeed operate as guidelines for their work practices and as regulators of their professional conduct. It would, therefore, see ultimate control of the production process in the media as resting in the hands of the professionals responsible for it, in spite of the variety of pressures and influences to which they may be subjected. Some Marxist interpretations, on the other hand, challenge the validity of the claims by media personnel and dismiss the notions of objective and impartial work practices as, at best, limited and societal, masking the professionals' subservience to the dominant ideology. Control of the production process by media professionals is confined, in this view, to the production of messages whose meanings are primarily determined elsewhere within the dominant culture.

The polarity of these interpretations allows ample space for intermediate positions. Thus some proponents of the pluralist approach acknowledge the limitations on the autonomy of media professionals, and concede that the prevailing socio-political consensus defines the boundaries and constrains the space within which media professionals can be impartial. Similarly, some

Marxist interpretations stress the relative autonomy of the mass media—both in the sphere of professional organization and of signification.

Some observers of these trends have suggested that as further empirical evidence is gathered, pluralist and Marxist analyses of professionalism in the media will continue to influence each other, and to discover some areas of agreement. Thus, for example researchers from both camps now share the view that powerful institutions and groups in society do have privileged access to the media, because they are regarded by media professionals as more credible and trustworthy, and because they have the resources to process information and to offer the media their views in a usable and attractive form, tailor-made to fit the requirements of the media. They also agree that the commitment of media professionals to the canons of objectivity and impartiality, however genuinely held, also serves to protect them from criticism of their performance as professionals, by partly removing their responsibility for the output of the media and placing it on their 'sources'. And they accept the analysis that this professional ideology also provides a basis for the profession's self-respect, and lays claim for respect from the public. We may tentatively conclude from this evidence of common denominators in the thinking of both schools that this strand of studies offers possibilities of further mutual influence and agreement, without necessarily leading to a convergence of the different perspectives.

Interaction of media institutions with the socio-political environment

A fourth direction which some studies of media institutions have followed has an extra-organizational focus, and examines the relationship between the media and the institutional structures and interests in their environment. This area of interest is somewhat akin to the domain of the 'political economy' approach, inasmuch as both strands of research examine the relationship between media institutions and the political and economic institutions of society. However, the macro-level at which the 'political economy' analysis is conducted leaves some micro-aspects of this relationship unexplored. In particular, questions concerning the interaction between media professionals and their 'sources' in political and state institutions appear to be crucial for understanding the production process in the media. Media organizations exist in a symbiotic relationship with their environment, drawing on it not only for their economic sustenance but also for the 'raw materials' of which their contents are made. The generation and shaping of these materials through interaction between media professionals and their sources of information, inspiration and support outside their own institutions take place at the 'interface' between the media and these institutions (Gurevitch and Blumler, 1977). Contacts at the interface, therefore, constitute a critical part of the production process, and an important area for investigating the ways in which external inputs into the production process are managed.

Here, too, it is interesting to note the differences between the pluralist and the Marxist analysis of this relationship. Pluralist analyses tend to emphasize the *mutual dependence* between media professionals and the representatives or spokesmen for other institutions. They argue that while the media are dependent on the central institutions of society for their raw material, these institutions are at the same time dependent on the media to communicate their viewpoints to the public. The capacity of the media to 'deliver' large audiences provides them, according to this analysis, with at least a semi-independent power base *vis-à-vis* other power centres in society. The implication is not that an *equality* of power obtains between the media and other powerful institutions, but rather that some measure of independent power enters into the dealings of the media with these institutions. Marxist analyses, on the other hand, regard media institutions as at best 'relatively' and marginally autonomous. The media are regarded as being locked into the power structure, and consequently as acting largely in tandem with the dominant institutions in society. The media thus reproduce the viewpoints of dominant institutions not as one among a number of alternative perspectives, but as the central and 'obvious' or 'natural' perspective.

Thus, again, competing interpretations are provided by rival perspectives, although the evidence deployed by both is similar. Questions about the power of media institutions are, therefore, less likely to be resolved empirically, than to generate further theoretical and ideological argument.

CHANGING PERSPECTIVES OF SOCIAL THEORY

In the preceding discussion, we have indicated some past shifts in the focus of interest in media studies, from a primary concern with effects to a concern with consequences which the operations of the media have for the shaping of the message. In both these areas different questions have been raised and different conclusions emerge when different theoretical frameworks are deployed. Such is the case when attempts are made to describe and define, for example, the media's relationship to their contents. One of the key issues here revolves around the degree to which the media are regarded as passive transmitters or active interveners in the shaping of the message. Probably the most familiar of the 'passive transmitter' theories is the one which employs the metaphor of the mirror to describe the role of the media in society. The notion that the media are a 'mirror to reality' could be traced to different sources. On the one hand, it is a reflection of the neutral stance implied in the concepts of objectivity and impartiality embedded in the dominant professional ideology in the media. At the same time it is rooted in a pluralist view of society, in which the media are seen to provide a forum for contending social and political positions to parade their wares and vie for public support. The media are thus expected to *reflect* a multifaceted reality, as truthfully and objectively as possible, free from any bias, especially the biases of the professionals engaged in recording and reporting events in the outside world. This view is based on the notion that facts

may be separated from opinions and hence, that while comment is free, facts are sacred. Ironically, in view of this obvious source for the 'mirror of reality' image of the media, metaphors of reflection have been almost equally influential within the Marxist tradition, if in an inverted form. Here images and definitions provided by the media have been seen to be distorted or 'false' accounts of an objective reality which are biased because they are moulded by ruling political and economic groups. Media journalism is made to appear, in Connell's phrase, as a 'kind of megaphone' by which ruling-class ideas are amplified and generalized across society (Connell, 1979).

Increasingly, however, the last decade has seen some basic shifts away from this view of the media. Essentially classical Marxism conceived of the media in terms of the metaphor of base and superstructure and little attention was paid to the specific autonomy of the mass media and to the area of its effectivity. The power of the media was simply the power of contemporary ruling classes utilizing modern communications systems to pursue their interests in line with the much quoted description of ruling-class ideology, taken from *The German Ideology.*

> The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas: i.e. the class which is the ruling *material* force in society is at the same time its ruling *intellectual* force. The class which has the means of material production at its disposal has control at the same time over the means of mental production, so that thereby, generally speaking, the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it' (Marx and Engels, 1970, p. 64).

The effects of the mass media, in early forms of Marxist analysis were not seen as discrete and measurable but were important in the dissemination of ideologies opposed to the interests of working-class groups and the production of false consciousness in such groups. Changes in this view of the media arose in part because of internal developments in Marxism but also because of the influence of other theoretical traditions.

One of the most important shifts generally in more recent mass communications research, be it Marxist or pluralist, has been the redirection of attention to the formal qualities of media discourse. The influence of semiology and linguistics on the direction of mass communications research has been important not simply as an addition to existing studies of political effects, ownership and control and the internal workings of media organizations, but also because of the re-thinking of existing and often recognizably unsatisfactory accounts of media power which it brought about. It is worth examining the impact of structuralism on Marxist accounts of the media because, in a sense, it is around this area of theoretical convergence and contradiction that it is possible to plot some of the distinctive changes which have characterized media studies in the last few years.

A comparison of the field of media research, say, in the 1940s, with that of the present day, is instructive, not only in terms of following the see sawing estimates of media power referred to earlier but also in terms of the dominance of certain theoretical views. As we have already suggested, a simple conflict of liberal-pluralist versus Marxist approaches, conceived of in terms of the empiricism of the former and the theoreticism of the latter, does not provide an entirely adequate picture of the development of mass communications research, although it may provide an illuminating route through certain moments in the history of that research. One problem here is that the Marxism and liberal-pluralism of yesterday are not the same as those of today. During the forties the mass society theories of the Frankfurt School might have been said to represent a Marxist general theory which ran counter to the empiricist studies of attitude-change prevalent in contemporary American sociology and social psychology. The clash between the critical theorists' view of mass society and a pluralist-inspired tradition focusing on the effects of the mass media involved a major theoretical confrontation. However, the case is different now and not simply because Marxists have moved beyond the monumental pessimism incorporated within the Frankfurt School's critique of mass society. To put it bluntly, the work of the Frankfurt School was relatively marginal in developing and generating research in mass communications, in providing a theoretical paradigm within which media studies could proceed.

Recent developments in Marxist theory, in Britain for example through the 'cultural' traditions of Williams and Hall and through the importations of European 'structuralisms' (the theories of Lévi-Strauss, Althusser, Lacan and Gramsci), have meant that many of the important questions about the mass media and about 'culture' more generally are now posed within Marxism rather than between Marxism and other accounts (Johnson, 1979). Within contemporary Marxist studies of the media there are a number of different inflections in the conceptualization of the power of the media. Marxist theorists vary in their accounts of the determination of the mass media and in their accounts of the nature and power of mass media ideologies. Structuralism has played an important part in producing and illuminating distinctive differences in Marxist views of the media. The theoretical differences within Marxism have been variously described as 'three problematics' (Johnson, 1979) or the 'two paradigms' (Hall, 1980). The three different approaches which we identify here not only characterize the power of the media in different and sometimes contradictory ways but also, between them, provide the type of arena for disagreement and debate, which in the past has been a consistent feature of the differences between the pluralist and the Marxist tradition.

Structuralist studies of the media

Structuralist accounts of the media have incorporated many diverse contributions, including Saussurean linguistics, the structural anthropology of Lévi-Strauss, the

semiotics of Roland Barthes and Lacan's reworking of psychoanalysis. The central and substantive concern has been with the systems and processes of signification and representation, the key to which has been seen to lie in the analysis of 'texts'; films, photographs, television programmes, literary texts and so forth. Structuralist studies in this area have been closely linked with some crucial reformulations of Marxist theories of ideology which, although bitterly attacked by those who have wished to remain on more traditional Marxist terrain, have played a positive part in by-passing and moving beyond certain impasses within Marxist accounts of the media associated with the idea of ideology as a reflection of the economic basis of media industries and society.

Althusser's reformulation of a theory of ideology, for example, clearly indicated an important shift in Marxist thinking. Althusser's view of ideology as a representation of the imaginary relationship of individuals with the real conditions of their existence moved the notion of ideology away from 'ideas' which constituted a distorted reflection of reality. Althusser's work stressed that ideology expressed the themes and representations through which men relate to the real world. For Althusser ideology always had a material existence. It is inscribed within an apparatus and its practices. Ideology operates here to interpellate individuals as subjects, 'hailing' individuals through the apparently obvious and normal rituals of everyday living. Ideology, rather than being imposed from above and being, therefore, implicitly dispensable, is the medium through which all people experience the world. Although Althusser retains both the overall form of the base/superstructure metaphor and the notion of determination in the last instance by the economic he also emphasizes the irreducibility and materiality of ideology. Determination in the last instance by the economic is a necessary but not sufficient explanation of the nature and existence of the ideological superstructures. The media within an Althusserian framework operate predominantly through ideology: they are ideological state apparatuses as opposed to more classically repressive state apparatuses. Thus the effectivity of the media lies not in an imposed false consciousness, nor in changing attitudes, but in the unconscious categories through which conditions are represented and experienced.

The combination of Althusserian Marxism and semiotics provided the initial impetus for sustained work on media texts. By largely suspending the traditional Marxist concern with the external social and economic determinants of ideology, in favour of a focus on the internal relations of signifying practices, such as film or television, structuralist media research formed the theoretical space within which to carry out detailed textual analysis. The early projects of *Screen,* for example, which examined the classic narrative cinema of Hollywood, *avant-garde* films and televisual forms, were, whatever their limitations, a very positive advance over approaches to media content which stressed 'reflection' whether in Marxist or pluralist terms. At the very least, such work showed a continuing concern to establish the autonomy and effectiveness of particular film and

television forms, taking as a basis the idea that the ideology embodied in film and television is an important and necessary area of ideological struggle.

Structuralist studies have, however, moved beyond an Althusserian problematic in a number of ways. First, through attempting to combine the analysis of media-signifying practices with psychoanalysis, there has been an attempt to theorize the relationship of texts to subjects. The subject, constituted in language, in Lacanian terminology, is not the unified subject of the Althusserian formulation and traditional Marxist view, but a contradictory, de-centred subject displaced across the range of discourses in which he or she participates. Although this is a relatively undeveloped area in Marxist studies of the media and in Marxism generally, this line of development indicates some crucial absences both in Marxism and in earlier structuralist studies. A second movement within structuralism has involved a rejection of the base/superstructure model for a focus on the articulation of autonomous discourses. Hirst, for example, suggests that the idea of the 'relative autonomy' of ideology and the linked notion of representation is inherently unstable in its juxtaposition of ideas (the relative autonomy of the ideological and the determination of ideology by the economic base) which are logically opposed to one another. In this view there can be no middle ground between the autonomy of ideological practices such as the mass media and straightforward economic determinism.

'Political economy'

If the structuralist paradigm has directed attention at and conceived the power of the media as ideological, there have been consistent attempts to reverse the structuralist view of ideology in favour of a 'political economy' of the media. This well-established tradition in media research, which we have already touched on in relation to the analysis of media organizations, has heavily criticized structuralist accounts of the media for their overconcentration on ideological elements.

> Instead of starting from a concrete analysis of economic relations and the ways in which they structure both the processes and results of cultural production, they start by analysing the form and content of cultural artefacts and then working backwards to describe their economic base. The characteristic outcome is a top-heavy analysis in which an elaborate autonomy of cultural forms balances insecurely on a schematic account of economic forces shaping their production. (Murdock and Golding, 1977, p. 17)

Similarly, Garnham characterizes the post-Althusserian position 'popular within film studies' as 'an evacuation of the field of historical materialism' for determination in the last instance by the 'unconscious as theorized within an essentially idealist' problematic (Garnham, 1979, pp. 131–2)

Of course, 'idealism' and 'economism' are terms which are readily exchanged in arguments between Marxists, each protagonist invoking the name of the master and the spirit of historical materialism. The 'political economy' account of the media is well represented by Murdock's article later in the reader, which argues for the location of media power in the economic processes and structures of media production. In a return to the base/superstructure metaphor, 'political economists' conceive of ideology both as less important than, and determined by the economic base. Ideology is returned to the confines of 'false consciousness' and denied autonomous effectiveness. Also, since the fundamental nature of class struggle is grounded in economic antagonisms, the role of the media is that of concealing and misrepresenting these fundamental antagonisms. Ideology becomes the route through which struggle is obliterated rather than the site of struggle. Murdock and Golding contend that the pressure to maximize audiences and revenues produces a consistent tendency to avoid the 'unpopular and tendentious and draw instead on the values and assumptions which are most familiar and most widely legitimated' (Murdock and Golding, 1977, p. 37). The role of the media here is that of legitimation through the production of false consciousness, in the interests of a class which owns and controls the media. The main concern of this form of media research is, therefore, the increasing monopolization of the culture industry, through concentration and diversification.

Valuable though such research may be in summarizing the evidence on the ownership of the media, there are problems with this return to the classic model of base and superstructure. As Hall suggests, the advocates of 'political economy' 'conceive the economic level as not only a "necessary" but a "sufficient" explanation of cultural and ideological effects' (Hall, 1980, p. 15). Yet the focus on general economic forms of capitalism dissipates distinctions between different media practices and allows little in the way of specific historical analysis beyond the bare bones of ownership. There is obviously some justification in the arguments by political economists that ideology has been given priority at the expense of serious consideration of the economic determinants of the mass media. Yet political economy, in its present state of development, would return us to the view of the media as a distorting mirror, a window on reality, which misrepresents reality. This view of the media, combined with a predilection for empirical analysis in the area of ownership and media organizations, frequently seems to give political economy more in common with pluralist accounts of the media than with other Marxist accounts.

'Culturalist' studies of the media

Culturalist studies of the media could be said to stand in an uneasy and ambiguous position in relation to the theoretical concerns of structuralism and political economy. On the one hand the indigenous British tradition of cultural studies, initiated through the work of Williams, Thompson and Hoggart has

always been opposed to economic reductionism. This position has been effectively summarized by Hall:

> It (cultural studies) stands opposed to the residual and merely reflective role assigned to the 'cultural'. In its different ways it conceptualises culture as inter-woven with all social practices; and those practices, in turn, as a common form of human activity; sensuous human praxis, the activity through which men and women make history. It is opposed to the base superstructure way of formulating the relationship between ideal and material forces, especially, where the base is defined by the determination by the 'economic' in any simple sense. It prefers the wider formulation— the dialectic between social being and social consciousness…. It defines 'culture' as both the means and values which arise amongst distinctive social groups and classes, on the basis of their given historical conditions and relationships, through which they 'handle' and respond to the conditions of existence: *and* as the lived traditions and practices through which those 'understandings' are expressed and in which they are embodied. (Hall, 1980, p. 63)

On the other hand, cultural studies incorporate a stress on experience as the 'authenticating' position and a humanist emphasis on the creative, which is very much at odds with the structuralist position outlined earlier. Where structuralism had focused on the autonomy and articulation of media discourses, culturalist studies seek to place the media and other practices within a society conceived of as a complex expressive totality.

This view of media power is present in recent work which attempts a combining of culturalist and structuralist views. *Policing the Crisis* (Hall *et al.,* 1978), for example, although theoretically eclectic in its bold, if not entirely successful, compound of a theory of hegemony derived from Gramsci, a sociology of 'moral panics', and an account of the social production of news, retains a view of society as an expressive totality. The crisis in hegemony which the authors identify has its basis in the decline of the British economy after the post-war boom but is resonated in the production of popular consent through the signification of a crisis in law and order in which the mass media play the key role. The media play their part in combination with other primary institutional definers (politicians, the police, the courts) in 'representing' this crisis. In the area of news, however, media definitions are 'secondary'. The media are not the primary definers of news events but their structured relationship to powerful primary definers has the effect of giving them a crucial role in reproducing the definitions of those who have privileged access to the media as 'accredited sources' (Hall *et al.,* 1978). They are partners in the signification spiral through which distinct and local problems, such as youth cultures, student protests and industrial action, are pulled together as part of a crisis in law and order. The framework again emphasizes the expressive interconnections of the culturalist

position. There are, of course, some unresolved problems in this approach, not least of which is the unevenness of the theoretical synthesis achieved. Hence, while the media are represented as a 'key terrain where consent is won or lost', they are also in other formulations conceived of as signifying a crisis which has already occurred, both in economic and political terms (Hall *et al.,* 1978).

The conceptual difficulties and problems registered in *Policing the Crisis* are, however, paradoxically part of its positive advance, in the sense that the thesis put forward, although emerging from a culturalist perspective, involves thinking through categories which cannot be neatly placed solely in the culturalist tradition. Moreover, the writers of *Policing the Crisis* make very clear their theoretical concerns. It may well be that this theoretical concern constitutes the most important shift in this and other recent research on the mass media. The most obvious heritage of structuralism, the argument that thought does not reflect reality but works upon and appropriates it, involves a commitment to theoretical reflection which marks all three of the approaches discussed here and the interchanges between them.

The theoretical perspectives on the mass media contained within Marxism share a general agreement that the power of the media is *ideological* but there are distinct differences in the conceptualization of ideology, ranging from the focus on the internal articulation of the signifying systems of the media within structuralist analysis, through to the focus on the determination of ideology in 'political economy' perspectives and to a culturalist view of the media as a powerful shaper of public consciousness and popular consent. Although disagreements about the role of the media as an ideological force within these approaches may be similar in their intensity to earlier debates on the nature of the power of the media, these are in no sense simple repetitions of earlier debates. The theoretical ground has shifted. Increasingly, work on the media has focused on a related series of issues: the establishment of the autonomy, or relative autonomy of the media and its specific effectiveness; tracing the articulation between the media and other ideological practices; and attempting to rethink the complex unity which such practices constitute together. The way in which questions in these areas have been posed does vary in relation to diferent Marxist and other perspectives, but it is in relation to these issues within Marxism that intellectual work on the nature of media power proceeds at present.

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