



COMMUNICATION RESEARCH TRENDS

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Television's Influence on Cultures

It is widely assumed by the public, broadcasters and some communication researchers that television has caused major shifts in contemporary world view and values. McLuhan introduced the notion that the form of the medium itself — the simultaneous sound and vision — has brought about a new intuitive, holistic pattern of thinking. For McLuhan, the generation gap is the product of a television generation. Gerbner sees television as the central cultural arm of American society. Like a religion, it is the chief source of repetitive and ritualised symbol systems cultivating the consciousness of mass publics.

Others think that the process is more complex. For them television picks up images and themes from popular culture and reflects these back to an agreeing public.

Does television cause cultural trends or simply mirror them? Disagreements on how television influences culture and how to determine this influence have produced some of the most fiery debates among communication researchers of the last two decades.

This issue outlines four approaches to explaining the role of television in national culture and some of the major points of disagreement among them.

REVIEW ARTICLE

I: The Evolution of Research on The Media

The Influence and Effects of Mass Media, Denis McQuail in *Mass Communication and Society*. Ed. by James Curran, Michael Gurevitch and Janet Woollacott. (London: Edward Arnold Publishers, 1977)

McQuail sees the current tendency to conceive of television's influence in terms of broader cultural change as, in part, a reaction to earlier stages of communication research.

In the first phase, coinciding with the rise of the mass popular press, cinema, and radio roughly from 1850 to the late 1930s, the media were attributed great power to shape opinion and belief, mould behaviour and impose political systems. The use of media power by advertising, public relation experts, government propagandists in the World War I, and the rulers of totalitarian governments fostered concepts of the mass media as the manipulation of isolated individuals in mass society.

The second phase, from 1940 to the early 1960s, was very much influenced by the perfection of statistical survey methods for analysing public opinion and attitudes and by the fascination with psychoanalytic explanations of human behaviour. There was a proliferation of studies of effects of the media on voting, crime, aggression, racial and other attitudes with ever more complex social-psychological models to separate out the specific effects of media from other possible personal or social factors. Klapper, in his landmark book of 1960, summarising this mass of multi-variable studies, deflated the "infinite power" concept of the media with

the simple conclusion: the mass media are not ordinarily a direct cause of change in individual attitudes or a necessary and sufficient cause of crime or other disapproved social behaviour, but, rather, function through a nexus of mediating conditions.

In the third phase, from the early 1960s to the present, there has been a move away from the "hypodermic needle" models toward greater emphasis on the prior audience dispositions and intentions — the "uses and gratifications" model. There has also been less search for short-term individual attitudinal change and greater emphasis on the broader, collective, system-wide effects — especially the media influence on the deeper cognitive, socially constructed perceptions of reality. Marshall McLuhan in the early 1960s popularised the notion of television as influencing not just specific attitudes but as introducing a new cultural epoch radically different from the era of print media. Major theorists such as James Halloran, Raymond Williams and Stuart Hall in Britain and George Gerbner, James Carey and others in the United States have insisted, in different ways, that the media must be analysed in the context of political-economic power structure and that media influence must be conceived of in terms of national cultural development.

II McLuhan: Awareness of Technological Influence on Culture

"McLuhan as Rhetorical Theorist", Bruce E. Gronbeck, *Journal of Communication*, Summer 1981, Vol. 31, No. 3 (Special McLuhan Issue), pp 117-128.

Marshall McLuhan was concerned throughout his intellectual career with the potentially humanising or dehumanising effect of technology, especially communication technology. The human ideal for him was a kind of Renaissance Man: the balanced use of all our senses and faculties with an integrated, holistic consciousness free and open to all possibilities of the human spirit. The narrow, segmented, overly specialised mind is dehumanising.

The great danger, in McLuhan's view, is the belief that technology is a purely neutral, external *instrument* to be used for good or evil. He argued that communication technology is an extension of human consciousness and that each innovation in the media transforms our perception of reality. His central quest was to discover a *method* of cultural interpretation which would enable us to be *aware* of the impact of technology on our consciousness and thereby better able to direct the technological construction of reality. Earlier in his book, *The Mechanical Bride*, he emphasised the possible manipulation in advertising if we are not aware of it. Later, in *Understanding Media* and in his numerous articles and books in the 1970s, he tended to see the worldwide simultaneous information flow of the electronic media as introducing a much more holistic, intuitive, humane pattern of consciousness. In a final article with Bruce Powers applying his method of cultural analysis to the information patterns of the Bell Telephone Corporation, he is concerned that "the operative language of most corporate organisation in the Western World is articulated in balance sheet terms and rarely is the human factor considered".¹

A second basic premise in McLuhan's method of cultural interpretation is that cultural epochs — preliterate, classical Greek, modern — form a seamless whole with a single thematic world view. Drawing on the theories of fellow-Canadian, Harold Innis, he proposed that it is the dominance of a particular communication technology that gives unity and meaning to a cultural period. With the mind of the literary critic, McLuhan took the form of the media — or virtually any other cultural institution — as the metaphor or microcosm giving insight into the meaning of the whole cultural macrocosm.

Early McLuhan: Media as Cause

Bruce Gronbeck sees a major shift in McLuhan's "awareness method" from the 1960s to the 1970s. This corresponds to a general shift in communication studies during the 1970s from earlier behaviourist, "transmissive" theories to post-positivistic, qualitative, "cultural analysis" using methods of hermeneutic and critical theory.

The early McLuhan focused on the *form* of the media as a causal influence, and he advanced his famous formulas of "the media as the message" and "the hot and cold media". In his interpretations of how the media structure patterns of thinking he tended to use the antecedent-consequent language of empirical science. The media, as extensions of the senses, filter the data presented to the senses.

If a particular medium such as print emphasises the visual following of letter sequences across a page, then this focuses our perception toward a visual, spatial, linear sequential pattern of consciousness. This bias in individual perception influences the world view of a whole culture so that the transition from oral (aural

senses) to print (visual senses) to electronic media (simultaneity of information) causes a linear evolution in cultural history. Other communication theorists, increasingly wary of "one factor" explanations, tabbed McLuhan a "technological determinist".

McLuhan protested that, although he spoke of his "laws of the media", he did not mean this in rational scientific terms, but as a metaphorical interpretation to reveal how the form of the media is an analogy for the form of a culture. Indeed, as Levinson points out, McLuhan felt that our scientific theoretical constructs were too much based on the sequential logic of the visual senses and were therefore trapped within the limitations of one cultural paradigm. Only by using outrageous metaphor and paradox such as "media is the message" and "hot and cold media" was it possible to explode our circular reasoning and to arrive at a logic more attuned to the simultaneous information flow of the electronic age.²

The Later McLuhan: Media as Analogy

The method of McLuhan in the 1970s, according to Gronbeck, moved away from a causal model of media influence on consciousness. Rather, McLuhan stressed the individual as actively constructing a balanced pattern of consciousness within the flow of information. The latter McLuhan interpreted the media as "instances" and "exemplars" of a particular ratio of figure and ground in perception. The "background" of consciousness is the context, the structure, the outline of what we perceive while the "figure" is the immediate object of attention.

The metaphorical prime analogy for the figure-ground ratio McLuhan took from the study of hemispheric dominance in brain research: the evidence that the left hemisphere of the brain tends to specialise in "figure" — linear, visual, analytic perceptions — while the right hemisphere specialises more in "ground" — holistic, acoustical, simultaneous perception. Oral cultures tend to be much more "right hemisphere", while Western culture, since the introduction of the alphabet and especially since print media, tends to be more "left hemisphere" with dominance of figure, linear, spatial perception. McLuhan cites oriental, Chinese and Japanese, cultures as examples of balance between figure and ground. The introduction of the electronic media, surrounding us once more with sound and the information flow of the global village, is a formula for chaotic "generation gaps" because it stresses right-hemisphere modalities in a culture still dominated by left-hemisphere logic.³

The critical flaw in the McLuhan method of cultural awareness, according to Raymond Williams, James Carey and other theorists of the influence of communication technology, is the tendency to abstract technology from the historical, material, political-economic context. McLuhan congratulated the new holistic, intuitive imagination that the simultaneity of electric media make possible. But he loses sight of the centralising control that computers and satellites make possible and the tendency toward the concentration of social power at the national and international level.⁴

McLuhan the humanist insisted that men, not machines, make meanings, but his method is less effective in making us aware of the human alienation resulting from the cultural hegemony and social dependency that started with the printing press and continues to be consolidated with the electronic media.

1 Marshall McLuhan and Bruce Powers, "Ma Bell Minus the Nantucket Gam: Or the Impact of High-Speed Data Transmission", *Journal of Communication*, (Summer, 1981, Vol. 31, No. 3, p. 191.

2 Paul Levinson, "McLuhan and Rationality", *Journal of Communication*, Vol. 31, No. 3, pp. 1979-188.

3 Marshall McLuhan, "The Brain and the Media: The 'Western' Hemisphere," *Journal of Communication*, (Autumn, 1978) Vol. 28, No. 4, pp. 54-60.

4 James W. Carey, "McLuhan and Mumford: The Roots of Modern Media Analysis," *Journal of Communication*, Vol. 31, No. 3, pp. 162-178.

II Gerbner: Television as Social Control and Enculturation

"Living With Television: The Violence Profile". George Gerbner and Larry Gross in *Television: The Critical View*, ed. by Horace Newcomb. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), pp. 363-393.

The "Cultural Indicators" project of George Gerbner and his associates is a long-term mapping of the way television portrays American life (especially the social-power relations implicit in TV violence and sexism) and the corresponding study of how heavy TV viewers are "enculturated" into the TV construction of reality.

A basic premise in Gerbner's research is that TV viewing in America absorbs so much leisure time and is so pervasive across educational and income lines that it now provides the symbolic environment and world view of a majority of Americans. A second premise is that the mass-produced, "formula" television in America is so linked with advertising, consumer marketing as well as big finance and the implicit support of the Federal Government that it is now the cultural arm and major agency of social control of the American industrial order. Like the church in the Middle Ages, television systematically cultivates in its viewers a world view and values which support the established power structure. Television content — from sitcoms and news to documentaries — dramatises the "rules of the game" of American social power — who is accorded power, who wins and who loses. A key thesis of Gerbner is that violence is central to television content and that the portrayal of violence serves to "cultivate" a general world view of fear, exaggerated perception of the importance of violence, need for strong authority and acquiescence to the powerful.

The Influence of TV violence

After twelve years of careful coding of violence content and the analysis of the portrayal of social power relations in American TV, Gerber et al. conclude that violence does indeed dominate the plots of TV drama and the reporting of news. More important, violence in the TV world is likely to be perpetrated successfully by those enacting roles of accepted power while the less powerful are the victims. Women are more likely to be victims than men. Older men, married men, lower-class, foreign and non-whites are more likely to get killed than to inflict lethal injury.

Gerbner et al. insist that the influence of television violence cannot be measured in terms of the occasional acts of aggression of the mentally unbalanced or the short-term, "before and after" attitudinal changes of laboratory groups exposed to a specific TV programme, but rather in terms of the broad changes of outlook of the whole American public. Their method is to insert questions derived from measures of deeper psychological alienation or other similar perceptual measures in annual national opinion surveys.

On the basis of statistical analysis of these surveys over ten years, Gerbner finds that when heavy and light TV viewers of similar age, income and education are compared, heavy viewers are consistently more likely to give the "TV answer". Heavy TV viewers perceive the world as more likely to involve them in violence, and they perceive aggression and the presence of law-enforcement workers as far more salient than they are in the real world. Although heavy TV viewers tend to have less education and income and to live in more violent neighbourhoods — factors predisposing them to perceptions of violence — television is at least an additional factor in their outlooks.

Problems with Quantitative Survey Analysis

Recently the conclusions of Gerbner et al. have been sharply challenged in a new round of the classical debate over the use of statistical analysis of quantitative survey data to separate out the influence of media from other factors such as education and socio-economic status. Wober found no evidence of increased fear and distrust among heavy television viewers in Britain.⁵ Doob and McDonald, controlling for the crime rate in respondents' neighbourhoods, reported no overall relationship between television viewing and fear of being a victim of crime.⁶ Hirsch, taking one part of Gerbner's own data and attempting to test the logic that the more TV one watches the more one is likely to hold the TV view of the world, found that heavy TV viewing did not predict increased perception of violence.⁷

After a heated exchange of articles in *Communication Research* over a year, neither Hirsch nor Gerbner changed their opposite conclusions from the same data. This suggests the inherent ambiguity of interpreting TV's deeper cultural influence on the basis of statistical analysis of survey data. Hirsch argues that the social control theory of television is so broad and contains so many untested assumptions about how people perceive television and how television interacts with previous experiences and life situations that it is almost impossible to draw definitive conclusions from statistical correlates of number of hours of TV viewing. Gerbner et al. answer that their theory is a fairly flexible, exploratory guide. When apparent contradictions appear in the data, such as the fact that heavy viewers in violent neighbourhoods perceive less violence than light viewers, a subtheory called "mainstreaming" is introduced which argues that the outlook of people living in extreme social situations is brought back to the normalising, "mainstreaming" television portrayal by their heavy viewing.⁸

A Humanistic Critique of Gerbner's Research

Even if quantitative survey analysis is a valid exploratory method, some students of American popular culture and analysts of television genres with a background in literary criticism characterise as simplistic Gerbner's conception of television as a direct vertical imprint of the power-structure world view. Horace Newcomb argues that there are many conceptions of violence in the American cultural tradition and that these are likely to find many different expressions in different genres of television. Nor can we assume that viewers are passively absorbing a univocal "TV version of reality". In Newcomb's view the error of Gerbner et al. is that "they measure the incidence of violence in television as they have defined it, impute aesthetic and behavioral effects to the incidence so measured and then interpret the world of television in light of that effect".⁹

Observers such as Newcomb and James Carey see the need for a much more nuanced and comprehensive theory of media influence within the complex process of national cultural evolution. Such a theory of national culture would bridge the gap between the broad assertion of television as a dominant cultural influence and the detailed analysis of cultural attributes of violence, sexism or racism.

5 J.M. Wober, "Televised Violence and Paranoid Perception: The View from Great Britain," *Public Opinion Quarterly*, Vol. 42, pp. 315-321.

6 A. Doob and G.E. MacDonald, "Television Viewing and Fear of Victimization: Is the Relationship Causal?" *Journal of Social Psychology and Personality*, Vol. 37, pp. 170-179.

7 Paul Hirsch, article in *Communication Research*, (October, 1980) Vol. 7, No. 4 and (January 1981), Vol. 8, No. 1)

8 George Gerbner, Larry Gross, Michael Morgan and Nancy Signorelli, "The 'Mainstreaming' of America: Violence Profile No. 11," *Journal of Communication*, (Summer, 1980) Vol. 30, No. 3, pp. 10-29.

9 Horace Newcomb, "Assessing the Violence Profile Studies of Gerbner and Gross: A Humanistic Critique and Suggestion," *Communication Research*, (July, 1978) Vol. 5 No. 3, pp. 264-282.

IV Carey: Communications as Cultural Science

"Communication and Culture". J. W. Carey, in *Communication Research*, Vol. 2 No. 2 (April, 1975), pp. 173-191; "Communication and Culture: Humanistic Models in Research". Special Issue of *Communication Research*, ed. by J. W. Carey and P. Hirsch, Vol. 5, No. 3 (July, 1978).

Carey and others of the humanistic school suggest that if we are to understand the role of television and other forms of cultural production within the development of national cultures, then we must move from behavioural science *explanation* to cultural science *interpretation*. Cultural process is the effort of people to make some ordered sense out of their life situation by casting up *subjective meanings* of that situation for them. The behavioural sciences, in the attempt to explain the "causes" of human action in a more value-free, objective manner, reject as valid information the "subjectivity" of meaning and value and the concrete historical context of meaning. The starting point for the behavioural sciences is the explanatory hypothetical sociological-psychological cause-effect model. The data which is gathered has meaning for the scientist in terms of their constructs and operational definitions, but is not necessarily related to the subjective interpretations and patterns of meaning that writers, actors or audiences may have. Carey proposes that if we are to enter into the imaginative universe of the producers of culture, then we must take popular television, journalism, art or other cultural institutions as a *text* to be interpreted with the methods of the humanities and the cultural sciences — anthropology, literary criticism, classical hermeneutics, aesthetics and semiotics.

Carey sees as the root of the problem of cultural interpretation the dominance of American communication research by a "cause-effect", "transportation model" which defines communication as the "transmission of messages for purposes of control". The only source of meaning is the "message sender" (the "cause" in the model); audiences are considered passive receivers of information and behaviour modification ("effects"). This approach has been abetted by the origins of American research in studies of propaganda, advertising, mass campaigns, modernisation of backward areas and other forms of "getting effects" by playing upon the sociological and psychological influences of human action. Although the uses and gratification approach attempts to modify the simplistic and manipulative sender-receiver model by inserting a concern for user intentions, "uses" have generally been interpreted in very "utilitarian" terms — how the information or entertainment serves to maintain the social system or the personality system of the user. The transportation model does not consider communication as an end in itself — the desire for something aesthetically pleasing or simply to construct a meaningful, plausible interpretation of one's life situation.

The Ritual Model

Carey proposes as more adequate a "ritual model" of communication, a process through which a shared culture is created, modified and transformed. All members of the public — not just message senders — are considered to be actors contributing in some way to the pattern of meaning of a nation or region. Most important, "meanings" do not originate with some abstract sender, but are derived from a historical-cultural tradition and a concrete political-economic context. The ritual model views communication as a process of "maintenance of society in time", "the creation, representation, and celebration of shared beliefs", as well as the often dialectical process of public debate, myth-creation and myth-destruction in the search for a more adequate pattern of shared meaning.

The cultural studies emphasis looks for its theoretical underpinning in Max Weber; anthropologist, Clifford Geertz; the literary critic and cultural analyst, Raymond Williams, and the

tradition of popular culture studies in Britain and America. The principal task of communication science is to enter into the subjective meanings that peoples are creating in popular movements, religion, journalism, everyday speech and mass-mediated events in order to interpret these meanings and bring them into a more systematic picture of the world view and ethos of a society. Popular literature, music, film and television is at once an interpretation of the feeling and meanings current in a society and a further reproduction and refining of this. The purpose is not to explain in terms of the psychological roots of our actions but to become conscious of what we *are* as a people and the kind of culture we are creating.

Applying the Ritual Model in Television Studies

"Assessing the Violence Profile Studies of Gerbner and Gross: A Humanistic Critique and Suggestion". Horace Newcombe *Communication Research*, Vol. 5, No. 3 (July 1978), pp. 264-281.

Newcomb emphasises, firstly, that the ideas and symbols in television have not been created there but have a history in American culture. If we intend to study violence in television, then we must begin with an analysis of the various meanings that violence has had in the history of American culture.

Secondly, we must examine how these various meanings of violence come to be expressed in different genres of television, in different forms of characterisation and in different kinds of plots over a period of time in interaction with different "moods" of American history. The expression of violence in the 1980s may not be the same or have the same significance as it had during the Vietnam Conflict in the 1960s or during the innocence of the 1950s.

Thirdly, we must analyse the different interpretations of violence in different segments of a mass audience. Here we need to develop techniques for audience ethnography as well as theories of popular aesthetics and responses to popular entertainment.

The Cultural Exegesis of Mass-Mediated Events.

Mass-Mediated Culture, Michael R. Real. (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1977).

The most comprehensive use of the cultural studies methodology proposed by Carey and Williams is Real's analysis of six sample cases of contemporary mass-mediated culture in America: Disneyland; the football Superbowl; Marcus Welby, a popular television image of the medical profession; Nixon's "Campaign to Re-elect the President"; the evangelical revivalist, Billy Graham; and an Indian fiesta in the Peruvian Andes, to give a cross-cultural perspective. As Newcomb suggests, Real examines the origins and context of the symbols of each "media event" in American culture. He then interprets the "text" of what is being "said" by Billy Graham, Disneyland or the Superbowl using the methods of cultural studies: ethnography; analysis of ritual; exegesis and hermeneutic; the analysis of literary genres, dramatisations and artistic conventions from literary criticism and aesthetics; semiotics; and critical theory from the field of political economy.

The analysis of each case reveals some specific dimensions of the American construction of world view and values: in Disneyland, the ethnocentric American insensitivity to the Third World, the idealisation of the American past and the reinforcement of a North-American capitalistic world view and motivational structure. The

10 James Carey, "The Mass Media: The Critical View." Address to the International Communications Association, May, 1981.

annual football Superbowl is studied in terms of mythic ritual and the identification of millions of spectators with quasi-religious, heroic archetypes exemplifying violent competition for property and monetary rewards.

Real stresses the ideological influence of the American social power structure and shows how "mass-mediated culture primarily serves the interests of the relatively small political-economic elite that sits atop the social pyramid". This book is very much in the critical tradition of media studies and, in the conclusions, applies Enzensberger's schema of the repressive, alienating vs. emancipatory uses of media to American mass-mediated culture.

Studying Television From Audience Perspectives

"The Audience as Critic: A Conceptual Analysis of Television Entertainment". Hilde T. Himmelweit, Betty Swift and Marianne E. Jaeger in *The Entertainment Functions of Television*, ed. by Percy H. Tannenbaum (Hillsdale, N.J.: Erlbaum Publishers, 1980), pp. 67-106.

One rarely finds television research using the "audience ethnography" approach suggested by Newcomb or deriving the categories for judging programme impact from the subjective interpretation and cognitive map of the audience rather than the attributes pre-defined by researchers. However, the study of Himmelweit et al. approaches this in that it is primarily concerned with the audience's subjective judgements about programmes as entertainment and draws on methodologies of analysis from the field of aesthetics. Although respondents were asked to rate programmes according to a list of possible reactions such as "absorbing", "exciting", "funny", "violent", the purpose was not to detect specific programme effects but rather to reconstruct the cognitive, "meaning" world that viewers use to characterise programmes. In general, the study revealed what kind of programme and what stylistic approaches in programmes evoked enjoyment and analyses dimensions of enjoyment. For example, they found that violence contributed relatively little to enjoyment

and the general attractiveness of programmes.

Himmelweit suggests that the study be repeated but with different attributes drawn from the viewers' own suggestions and comparative ratings from producers be used to test the correctness of the producers' image of the public.

The Lack of Social-Power Analysis in Cultural Studies

"Theories of Communication and Theories of Society". Peter Golding and Graham Murdock in *Mass Communication Review Yearbook*, Vol. 1 ed. by G. Cleveland Wilhoit and H. de Bock (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications, 1980).

Golding and Murdock consider the willingness of cultural studies to situate the mass media in the wider socio-cultural process and to treat the media as a form of cultural production to be an improvement on most communication theories. However, they criticise the type of cultural studies which stops at a mapping of the structure of meanings in a culture and only as an afterthought (or not at all) relates cultural production to the social structure and process of exploitation and ideological domination that underly the production and consumption of symbolisation.

Raymond Williams attempted to correct this, initially, by relating textual to social analysis. Later, with an increasing commitment to a more Marxist model of base and superstructure, he became convinced that we must start with an analysis of the material, political-economic conditions of television and other cultural products if we are to understand them. It may be added that James Carey, in his more recent thinking, has also moved to a greater emphasis on the influence of social conflict and the relations of class, status and power on cultural production.¹¹

Golding and Murdock argue that the primary task of mass communication research is not simply to explore the meaning of media messages, but to analyse the social processes through which they are constructed and interpreted and the contexts and pressures that shape and constrain these constructions.

V Stuart Hall: Television as Expression of Ideology

Culture, Media, Language, ed. by Stuart Hall, Dorothy Hobson, Andrew Lowe and Paul Willis. (London: Hutchison & Co., Publishers, 1980).

In an introductory article, Stuart Hall traces the development of the cultural studies perspective in Britain and, specifically, the intellectual influences on the theoretical approaches and research of the centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCS) at the University of Birmingham.

At the outset the CCCS decided not to define communications narrowly as products explicitly for or by the media, but rather as including a wide variety of expressions and ritual forms of everyday life — education, religion, colloquial conversation, sport, etc. The focus has been "lived cultures", especially aspects of working-class culture — youth subcultures, the popular press, the school, work.

Initially, the CCCS adopted as its basic methodology the classic cultural studies approach: the interpretation of the text and context of "lived meanings" and the ethnographic study of the way working-class people perceive and define their situation. But it soon became obvious that, although men and women make history, they do so under conditions that are not of their own making. Working-class consciousness is always infused with elements of an ideology created by the ruling elites. Lived culture can be fully understood only by analysing them within the material conditions and historical process which have generated a political-economic power structure.

In the search for a social theory which does not reduce meaning to individual motivation, the CCCS moved away from the Weberian tradition to an examination of the structuralists, Levi-Strauss and Althusser. However, the CCCS has been most influenced by Gramsci with his theory of the formation of dominant, hegemonic ideologies and the process by which these ideologies are imposed on popular culture in advanced liberal-

capitalistic societies such as Britain. In this view, the ruling coalition of interests in a nation exert their hegemony over the working classes not simply by coercion through the law, the police and the army, but by the production of an ideology — a definition of reality favourable to the interests of the ruling coalition — and by gaining popular consent to this ideology as legitimate through neutral institutions of parliamentary debate, the "objectivity" of the press, the family and the church.

Popular Media as Ideology

"Culture, the Media and the 'Ideological Effect' ". Stuart Hall in *Mass Communication and Society*, ed. by James Curran, Michael Gurevitch and Janet Woollacott. (London: Edward Arnold, Publishers, 1977), pp. 315-348.

In the view of Hall, the mass media are the most important instrument of twentieth-century capitalism for maintaining ideological hegemony because the media provide the framework for perceiving reality. Television, especially, gives the impression of a pluralistic diversity but in fact excludes some social images as deviant and subtly orders representations in news, drama and documentary around the interests of the ruling coalition.

Hall suggests that the cultural influence of television cannot be adequately described in terms of positivistic research on isolated elements — the typical "effects" or "uses and gratifications" methodology — since these methods are themselves framed by ideology and the political-economic context of research. He outlines a method which takes into consideration the ideological influences at the stage of "encoding" or message formulation and the material, socio-economic conditions which explain the variety of audience

“decoding” of messages.

Encoding is the process by which the media locates events — especially new events, troublesome for the status quo — in a perspective and gives meaning to dramatisation of life situations by placing them within the repertoire of dominant ideological contexts. The encoders may not consciously “twist” events, but manage to mask ideology by a professional subideology of objectivity neutrality and impartiality embedded in the procedures of producing news and formats of TV drama. The debate is always within certain limits of dissent.

Hall proposes as a research agenda the study of the conditions under which three hypothetical types of decoding might occur: 1) when the television viewer decodes the message in the same terms of reference in which it is framed; 2) when the viewer accepts the

Current Research on Media and Cultures

CANADA

Barrington Nevitt (2 Clarendon Ave., Apt. 207, Toronto, Ontario M4V 1H9), long-time associate of McLuhan, has several books in progress: *The Communication Ecology* (with Butterworth, Canada for possible publication); *Exo-Technology and Discovery*, organising knowledge for matching the old and ignorance for matching the new; and *Marxism and the New Media*, how economics becomes politics and politics, showbusiness.

GREAT BRITAIN

The Media Research Group at the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (University of Birmingham, P.O. Box 363, Birmingham B15 2TT), Director, **Richard Johnson**, has been focussing on the cultural significance of light entertainment programmes, especially quiz shows, crime series, situation comedies, TV games, etc. and are studying “populism” as a specific television form. Individual projects include: **Dorothy Hobson**, Media and Working Women at Home; **Garry Whannel**, The Representation of Sport in the Media; **Wendy Bradshaw**, Women, Comedy and TV; **Rick Gagola**, Media and the Construction of Pleasure; **David Morley**, Organisation and Control of the Media; **Francis D’Arcy**, Masculinity and Its Visual Representation; **Bob Findlay**, Racism and the Media. Recent emphasis is the media in relation to broader cultural processes in Britain: education policy, the rise of the New Right and “popular memory” of World War II. The CCCS also has cooperative projects with overseas groups in Bremen and Osnabruck in West Germany.

Tony Bennett (The Open University, Walton Hall, Milton Keynes MK7 6AA) in his studies of popular culture is focussing on the influence of dominant ideologies in popular TV and film drama. Forthcoming books include (with **J. Woollacott**) *Fiction, Ideology and Social Process: The Case of James Bond* (Macmillan, 1982/83) and *Popular Fiction* with **J. Woollacott** and **G. Martin** (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983).

Nicolas Garnham (Polytechnic of Central London, School of Communication, 18-22 Riding House Street, London W1P 7PD), Editor of *Media, Culture and Society*, is studying, from the perspective of political-economy, the development of the British cultural industries from 1890 to the present; also, as part of a cross-cultural study of TV as the prototype cultural industry, he is analysing the technological and economic factors influencing the development of British TV since 1950.

Anthony Piepe (Media Research Group, Portsmouth Polytechnic, Portsmouth) is studying the contribution of television to working class concepts of education, life opportunity and aspirations, especially the “value dissonances”, such as the view that education is a waste of time while at the same time believing in the importance of education in the abstract.

INDIA

Gaston Roberge, Director, Chitrabani Centre for Communication Research, (76-77 Rafi Ahmed Kidwai Road, Calcutta 700016) has published *Mediation* (1978, Manohar Book Service, 2 Ansari Road, Daryaganj, New Delhi — 111002) a book on the action of the media in our society. His most recent book (1980) is an analysis of the film, *Eisenstein's Ivan the Terrible* (Manohar Book Service). Current research includes a study of the folk media of the Bauls of West Bengal and the use of low-cost media.

ITALY

Giovanni Cesareo, Director of the Istituto di ricerca Agostino Gemelli, (20129 Milano, Corso Concordia 7) and editor of *Ikon*, a journal of documentation and research on mass communication, has been studying how the logic of cultural production and distribution influence the cultural reality of the media and ultimately the cultural action of the media in society. His most recent work, *Fa notizia (It's News)* (Editori Riuniti, Roma, 1981) applies this model to news production.

message in terms of a “negotiable code”, that is, there is a mixture of adaptation to the dominant ideology at a more general level but opposition in so far as it is applied to the particular situation of the viewer; and 3) an oppositional code in which the viewer takes the information given, but interprets the meaning according to a totally different code. This latter case is likely to occur when viewers are part of an popular opposition movement that has developed its own dymythologising code.

The focus of the CCCS in its studies of working-class culture has been to unmask the dominant ideology and to heighten the awareness of opposition codes present in ordinary manifestations of working-class culture such as popular music. This more politicised understanding of popular culture becomes the basis for more developed political philosophies of popular dissent.

THE NETHERLANDS

Denis McQuail (Universiteit von Amsterdam, Faculteit der Sociale Wetenschappen, Oude Hoogstraat, 1012 CE Amsterdam) is currently studying the concept of diversity/pluriformity of the mass media in relation to socio-cultural as well as political-economic pluriformity.

SWEDEN

The Cultural Indicators Programme directed by **Karl Erik Rosengren** (University of Lund, Dept. of Sociology, Magistratsvägen 55N, S-222 44 Lund) has been mapping major cultural trends in Sweden in the area of domestic politics, foreign policy debate, religion, advertising and literature as revealed in the mass media, especially the press. The Media Panel Programme has published *TV, Family and Society: The Social Origins and Effects of Adolescents' TV Use*.

SPAIN

José-Luis Dader (Facultad de Ciencias de la Información, U. de Navarra, Pamplona) is studying the impact of the changing industrial structure of communication in Spain on the cultural and political institutions.

UNITED STATES

Robert S. Alley (Dept. of English, University of Richmond, VA 23173) is co-authoring with **Horace Newcomb** (University of Texas, Austin 78703) a book on the *Television Producer as Artist* (Oxford University Press, forthcoming) and with **Irby Brown** (University of Richmond) is completing a study of the image of the family in TV over the past thirty years which will appear as a book. Alley and Brown are also beginning a study of the electronic church and the legal-constitutional questions which this presents. Other research includes the images of women on television.

James Carey (Dean, College of Communications, U. of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Urbana, IL. 61801) is studying the increasing dominance of the metaphor of vision over hearing in contemporary epistemology, communication technology and patterns of knowing with a consequent decline of the possibility of public verbal discourse. He is also studying the effect of visual media on scholarship. Forthcoming books include *Free Expression in a Democratic Society* (with Clifford Christians) and the *Communication Revolution: Essays in Theory, Biography and Ideology*.

Robert G. Dunn (California State University, Hayward, CA 94542) is studying the influence of hegemonic ideologies in television entertainment and has a forthcoming publication, *Television, Consumption and Commodity Relations*, a theoretical investigation into TV as commodity and the ideological effects of TV.

George Gerbner and **Larry Gross** with **Michael Morgan**, **Nancy Nignorelli** and others associated with the cultural indicators project at the Annenberg School of Communications (U. of Pennsylvania, 3620 Walnut St. C5, Philadelphia, PA 19104) are currently completing a book which will summarise nearly fifteen years of research and theoretical development on the cultivation effects of television. They are also continuing studies of “mainstreaming”, the tendency of television viewers to be associated with positions and beliefs which are toward the “centre” or the more conservative sides of the ideological spectrum. The emphasis is currently on mainstreaming in political positions and the treatment of sexual minorities, specifically lesbians and gay men. They are also carrying on a major study of religious television broadcasting in America, focussing on evangelical broadcasting.

Lawrence Grossberg (Dept. of Speech Communication, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Urbana, IL. 61801) is continuing research on popular culture (music and youth culture) and, drawing on the philosophical roots of communication action, is developing a critical theory which is not built upon a linguistic-communication model, but upon more historical and structural approaches. Current papers include “The Development of an American Cultural Theory of Communication: A Critique of James Carey and the ‘Illinois School’”

and "Theory, Power and the Political Economy of Information" for a forthcoming book, *The Politics of the Information Age*.

Robert Hawkins and Suzanne Pingree (School of Journalism and Mass Communication, U. of Wisconsin, Madison, WI 53706) are studying the psychological processes underlying the influence of media on individual beliefs and the conditions for different types of learning from TV. Recent publications include "Television's Influence on Constructions of Social Reality" in *Television and Behaviour: Ten Years of Scientific Progress and Implications for the 1980s*.

Paul Hirsch (U. of Chicago Graduate School of Business, 1101 East 58th St., Chicago, IL 60637) is studying issues concerning the economics of broadcasting and the relations of its programmes to popular culture and public opinion. Recent articles include: "A Research Agenda for Approaching the Study of Television", "Television as a Cultural Forum" (with Horace Newcomb), and "Television Viewing as a Dependent Variable".

Randall Miller (St. Joseph's University, 5600 City Ave., Philadelphia, PA 19131) is cooperating in a study of religious values in American mass media.

PERSPECTIVES ON COMMUNICATION RESEARCH

Administrative vs Critical Research

The debate on how to study the role of television in national cultures has been one of the most heated areas of disagreement in communication research for some decades.

McLuhan's argument that the new electronic media are ushering in a unifying global village and a more human, holistic pattern of consciousness met hostile accusations of technological determinism and a naivety regarding the centralising control that electronic media can imply. Gerbner's proposal that television, as the cultural arm of the industrial order, is cultivating a sense of dependency on powerful authorities has been strongly contested by the cultural studies school as a new form of the "transportation model" and a simplistic account of the process of cultural production. The cultural studies approach of mapping the subjective meanings in popular, mass-mediated culture has itself been questioned by proponents of critical theory for not considering sufficiently the unequal social conditions of cultural production and the dominance of cultural content by hegemonic ideologies.

The Roots of the Argument

One of the major factors in this debate is a divergence of views on whether communication studies should focus more on "administrative" or "critical" research. And underlying this is a deeper disagreement on policies for the development of communication systems in our societies. Will the best public communication service develop with unregulated market competition even though this means that there will be increasing centralised control of communication technology by a few powerful multinational corporations? Or is more public intervention and guidance necessary to ensure more equal access, especially the access of less powerful minorities, and to ensure that the media foster a truly pluralistic society, open to the forces of social change and a continual redistribution of social power?

Undoubtedly, this debate on the cultural influence of television is so acrimonious because television viewing occupies so much time and attention of so many people and because the issue of culture touches the question of the kind of society we want. In addition, as McQuail notes, the "facts" are so scarce, open to dispute and often puny in stature that the question is often answered by reference to alternative theories.

The distinction of administrative and critical research is perhaps an oversimplifying construct of ideal types, since rarely is research completely one or the other. However, administrative research tends to be more concerned with testing the effectiveness of the dominant system of communication in a country or seeking some reform within the existing structure. Media executives, government offices or media reformers generally ask researchers to discover whether the message has certain types of effects — good or bad, depending on the point of view of those funding the research. The

research methodology is usually some variant of the sender-receiver model, and the aim is to look for more precise quantitative measures of effects to serve as a defensible basis for administrative decisions.

research methodology is usually some variant of the sender-receiver model, and the aim is to look for more precise quantitative measures of effects to serve as a defensible basis for administrative decisions. Critical research tends to question the existing system or seeks more profound structural changes. Specifically, critical research challenges the tendency toward the centralised control of the media by elites. Critical research is also more likely to use some variant of the cultural science methodology which analyses the media within a broader socio-cultural, historical process and is concerned with the structural influences on cultural production.

Horace Newcomb (Dept. of English, U. of Texas, Austin 78703) with **Paul Hirsch** is developing a new model of TV research that sees TV as a forum for ideas rather than as the presentation of dominant, politically-based messages. Specifically, they are analysing the "rhetorics" surrounding basic cultural themes in a comparative study of samples of prime-time U.S. TV in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s to discover patterns of change in the cultural negotiation process.

Michael Real (Dept. of Telecommunications and Film, San Diego State University, San Diego, CA 92182) is completing a book, *Understanding the Oscars*, treating the Academy Award telecasts as a media event and using a methodology similar to that in his book, *Mass-Mediated Culture*. Over the past four years he has been developing access TV for older adults testing especially "liberating" vs. "repressive" uses of media

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Central Questions Posed by the Critical Research Perspective

It is likely that administrative research with its particular paradigms will continue to form a major part of communication studies if for no other reason than that funding is available for seeking answers to this sort of question.

However, as was noted in the opening section of the Review Article, communication studies are increasingly insisting that the media must be analysed in the context of political-economic power structure. This is bringing a greater emphasis on critical perspectives and the methodologies of cultural studies.

Golding and Murdock have summarised in their 1980 critique of communication studies, cited in the Review Article, some of the key questions raised by the critical research perspective.

The point of departure is the recognition that social relations are radically though variably unequalitarian. This leads to a focus on the relations between the unequal distribution of control over systems of communications and the wider pattern of inequality in the distribution of wealth and power. This focus entails exploring the relations between communication systems and systems of economic and social stratification, especially the class structure and the unequal exchange between advanced and developing nations.

Secondly, research must explore and unmask how communication systems maintain, reproduce and continually legitimate the prevailing structure of advantage and inequality as natural and inevitable.

Thirdly, research must consider the sources of social dissent and political struggle and how communication systems contribute to the dialectical relations between challenge and incorporation of disadvantaged groups within the existing order.

The advantage of this perspective is that it moves beyond the analysis of the media simply as causes and provides a framework for explaining communication systems and the media in terms of social structure and social process. It also provides a basis for studying the content of cultural production (especially television) and national cultural development in terms of social structure. It thus provides a stronger basis for communication policy.

Robert A. White, Editor

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