A CRITICAL ASSESSMENT OF MEDIA STUDIES

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Sociological theory has played an important role in the develop-
ment of mass communications studies but until recently sociologists
have not shown much commitment to media-related inquiries. The
dismissal of mass media studies to the marginal areas of the socio-
logical enterprise is unfortunate. Sociology can make an important
contribution in the codification of empirical findings about the
media within its theoretical foundations. While this strategy has
been advocated by both traditional and contemporary thinkers, from
Max Weber to Robert Merton, few have made serious attempts at a
synthesis of theory and media research, or, more precisely, at
reconciling to some degree what is said about the media with what
is known about its societal impact. This paper outlines some of
the reasons for this hiatus, points out the existing but largely
ignored links between sociological theory and media research, and
concludes with a modest suggestion for the integration of media
research within the paradigms of political sociology and stratification.

I. What We Say: Conflicting Conceptions of the Development of Mass
    Media Studies

    A. The Nature of the Critique of Media Studies

    Mass media studies were among the principal irritants precipitating
C. Wright Mills' charge that some brands of sociological inquiry are
little more than sterile exercises in abstracted empiricism. In
reviewing the many critiques of mass communications studies, a perennial

theme is the allegation of theoretical and conceptual immaturity. One popular form of this attack argues that media researchers, especially the North American variety, have spent their time refining sophisticated methodologies and statistical techniques while paying scant attention to the theoretical implications of their work. One recent assessment of American studies charges that the obsession with methods is "...symptomatic of a theoretical vacuum in which the paucity of ideas is masked by a dazzling display of empirical ingenuity" (Golding and Murdock, 1978). This criticism is hardly of recent vintage. Exactly two decades ago, Berelson delivered what was regarded by many as a eulogy for media studies, charging among other things that the field was troubled not so much by its paucity of theory than by a paucity of theorists. The state of communication research, in Berelson's play on words, was "withering away" as its founding fathers, men like Hovland, Lasswell, Lazarsfeld and Lewin, moved on to other areas (Berelson, 1959).

The lack of a theoretical foundation has sometimes been attributed to the pragmatic research orientations of the discipline's pioneers. Major determinants for the directions pursued by these early researchers included (1) the research monies offered by the U.S.'s infant broadcasting industry to map out its existing and potential audiences and (2) the pressing war-time demand by the U.S. military for propaganda studies. The administrative needs of these sponsors did much to set the agenda for the next three decades of communication research,

resulting finally in a preponderance of practically-oriented manipulation, effects and personal influence studies. While these efforts contain something of a theoretical base, especially at the level of social psychology, they are most often viewed as forming part of the areas of policy analysis or political science rather than sociology proper. In general, however, studies from this first generation of media research in the social sciences were concerned with the elaboration of quantitative techniques for the measurement of effects at the expense of theoretical formulations. (An account of this period and its implications for sociology can be found in Gans, 1972).

The reputation of mass media studies has been discredited by the persistent charge of theoretical vacuity. The accusation has been made with such enthusiasm and frequency that seldom is the charge itself subject to evaluation. An overview of the sociological analysis of mass media suggests that the criticism is unduly severe. The history of the sociology of media does reveal at least implicit theoretical strains. They do not emerge sequentially nor do they reveal a linear progression of development but conform more to a multiple paradigmatic view of sociology, revealing a set of contending theoretical perspectives, or, perhaps more accurately, alternative conceptual frameworks, some of which are more fruitful than others. The study of media emerges not as an atheoretical activity but perhaps as one hindered by too much of it. What follows is a brief sketch of the most prominent of these perspectives.

B.   Sociological Theory in the Study of Mass Communications

   1.   Early Sociological Approaches

   While an extensive analysis of the press and other forms of popular

media did not assume a central role in the nineteenth and early

twentieth century development of sociology, the media were at least

acknowledged as a peculiar feature of modern and increasingly differ-

entiated societies. For example, the nature and power of a modern

and rationalized press attracted the attention of Max Weber, particu-

larly the phenomenon of an increasingly bureaucratized process of

newsgathering. That the questions and research program he proposed

six decades ago still constitute a relatively unexplored area is

an indication of the current state of underdevelopment in media

sociology. Specifically, Weber was concerned with what gets "pub-

licized" and what does not, corresponding to the quite recent work

on the mechanisms of gatekeeping and agenda-setting. Weber's

interest in media ownership and control is even more indicative of

his vision, especially when viewed in relation to recent critical

queries into the monopolistic tendencies of media industries and

the ways this translates into legitimating systems of ideology

through media content. Weber's media sociology focused on the

            ...power relations which create publicity,
            particularly the conditions of economic power...
            How does the press get its material? What is
            the position of the great news bureaus and
            how are they internationally related to each
            other? What is the position of the creative
            journalist in this intrinsically rationalized
            system of the modern press? (Weber in Mayer,
            1946)

The media's role in achieving and maintaining cohesion in modern

complex societies was given some attention in the early years of American

sociology by members of the Chicago School. The press was viewed as

an emerging and necessary social institution for the integration of

diverse immigrant groups and rural migrants into the mainstream of

urban American life. This approach introduced the now familiar

notion that, in modern industrial societies, mass media provide

the lost sense of community associated with less industrial, village-

based social groupings. The concern with media displayed by the

Chicago School sociologists was to a large extent a byproduct

of their broader based inquiries in human ecology and ethnic

relations in community settings. Because of this primary orientation,

their writings on the press ·ever made much impact on media research

nor did they elicit much response from the North American sociological

community.

2.   Consensus Theories

The emergence of functionalism as the dominant paradigm in

sociology by the mid-twentieth century has important implications

for this generation of mass communications research. Functionalism

in postwar North America became a theory cum ideology of stable and

egalitarian democracy. Functionalist-inspired research focused on

stabilizing and integrating relationships among society's institutions..

In the form of pluralism, functionalist studies analyzed mechanisms of

checks and balances among contending sources of power. Functionalist

approaches also depict mass media as an information and entertainment organ, operating independently of society's interest groups. Within this general framework, mass media are said to perform certain objective and systematic socialization and integration functions for the social system. Most representative of this approach is the work of C.R. Wright (1960; 1975) whose influential textbook on mass communication asserts that the "...transmission of culture focuses on the communication of information values and social norms from one generation to another"(Wright, 1960:16). Taking his cue from Merton's reformulation of functionalism as a mode of analysis and middle range theoretical strategy, Wright has provided his own reformulation of a general sociological framework for the analysis of mass media. This approach is built upon the following question:

> What are the intended and unintended functions and
> dysfunctions of mass communicated surveillance,
> correlation, cultural transmission and entertainment
> for society, subgroups, the individual and the
> cultural system? (1960).

Despite the more critical intentions of this reformulation, media researchers who have adopted this perspective continue to focus on the role of media systems in promoting integration and consensus. In these renditions, media emerge more often as agents of socialization rather than of social control (e.g., Janowitz, 1952; Katz, et. al., 1973; Singer, 1975; Allen, 1976).

Although the functionalist paradigm is no longer in its ascendancy, its application to empirical media research continues to have considerable impact. One specific approach which has attracted a number of adherents is a kind of synthesis of functionalism and behaviourism,

the "uses and gratifications" approach (see, e.g., the Blumler and Katz reader, 1975). This literature tries to specify the links among the individual, media and society. An individual, in response to his social environment (determined by his social position, socialization, etc.), develops certain functional requisites or needs (for information, entertainment, contact, security, etc.) which are met by different varieties of media content. This basic paradigm has given rise to an entire catalogue of social effects and individual functions in a manner similar to the earlier Lasswell-Lazarsfeld-Merton tradition. Thus mass media are shown to provide information, advice, companionship, escape, entertainment and, implicitly, a core system of values. Criticisms lodged against this approach reflect those which have been directed at functionalism in general. The "uses and gratifications" literature has added little to our existing understanding of media's impact on society or individuals. The approach can be viewed as an extreme form of psychological reductionism because of the more or less explicit assumption that the explanations of media functions for total societies can be found in uncovering their functions for individuals. The approach has attempted to redefine "social effects" by starting with a rather problematic "given" --- an integrated, non-stratified, homeostatic society --- and then proceeds to question how the media have contributed to this result.

The excessively descriptive bent inherent in the functionalist tradition has led some theorists to look for more general and

explanatory frameworks in the fields of information and systems theory.
These perspectives still retain elements of structural-functionalism
in that they tend to incorporate the notion of a social system, however
defined, as the level of analysis. An assumption of equilibrium among
system parts is also common to both approaches. Information and
systems theories of communication generally have met with more
favour from communications specialists who view media vehicles
primarily in technological terms than from media sociologists.
The principal deficiency of such perspectives from the vantage point
of theoretical sociology is their lack of attention to societal impact
and change.

3. Conflict Theories

The functionalist-based consensus model of society and media
views mass communications vehicles as integrative mechanisms providing
functional substitutes for traditional forms of order, cohesion and
community. An alternative perspective, drawn from variants of elite,
Marxist and critical orientations, casts the mass media in the role
of legitimating agents of social control in complex industrial
societies. Such approaches, until recently, have had less impact
than the consensus model in media sociology. At the most general
level, sociological conflict approaches view the emergence and
current functions of mass communications as an historical outgrowth
of the structuration of economic or power relations between dominant
and subordinant social groups. In pluralist accounts of the rise of
modern media systems, one focal point is the autonomy of privately-
owned media industries from state and political control. In contrast,

the conflict approaches not only acknowledge the importance of tracing the media's formal and informal links to authority but are also more centrally concerned with investigating the media as an agency of legitimation in relation to the structure and unequal distribution of social resources. In particular, this emphasis has prompted the elite or instrumentalist perspective's concern with the ideological implications of monopoly control over media industries. Putting aside for the time being the results of empirical analyses of media ownership and control, at a purely theoretical level, proponents of the instrumentalist perspective view the modern media as the major ideological apparatus in the hands of the capitalist class. In Miliband's framework (1969), for example, the media take on an instrumental role in Western industrial society. They are characterized not only by their "bourgeois" ideology, transmitted through advertising and program content, but also by monopoly control and by collusion of state and economic interests over management's decisions. Western media systems, because of their organizational peculiarities, perform a crucial ideological function in perpetuating a global capitalist system.

Another variant of the conflict perspective comes out of the Frankfurt School's critical theory tradition. While critical sociology rejects the notion that the institutional incorporation of the working class has been accomplished, it questions the role of media content and other forms of popular culture in creating and maintaining the working class's false consciousness. In this view, workers and large segments of the middle class are merely receivers and consumers

of media-sanctioned ideas and material goods. The media, under the control of capitalist interests, aim for the widest common denominator and are commercial rather than public-interest oriented. These traits, according to the Frankfurt School's formulation, debase the audience and lower average levels of literacy and culture (see, e.g., Adorno and Horkheimer, 1977). In recent years, the Frankfurt School, under the direction of Habermas, has embraced a "self-liberating" ideology of praxis. This literature advocates the establishment of an alternative media system, open to expression of diverse opinions and cultures and operated independently of commercial pressures. The major point of contention between the critical theorists and the functionalists is that the former argue that changes in media systems should originate with interest groups outside the industry rather than from media professionals as advocated by the pluralists who largely embrace a "free press" and social responsibility model of media organization.

One variant of neo-Marxist sociology which quite recently has begun to apply a "theory of ideology" to the analysis of mass media draws its theoretical base from German idealism, structuralism and semiotics. This "cultural studies" approach, as it is termed, places media systems and content in the context of culture as a whole. The key concept "culture" is vaguely defined as the set of relationships between a society's social order and the totality of symbolic forms through which meanings are transmitted (Hall, 1977). Within this broad conception of culture are placed not only the media but also art, literature, religion, non-verbal and verbal

interpersonal communication, clothing, and other expressions of life-
style. This approach begins with the assumption that all cultural
items, in the form of media content and social artifacts, contain
elements of the processes and ideologies inherent in their creation,
which, when apprehended by the analyst, can serve as interpretive
tools. Mass media artifacts are viewed as "texts" and are analyzed
by "reading off" their multiple levels of social meanings and placing
these meanings in the general context of societal relations and
organization. These descriptions of core assumptions and appropriate
methods are vexingly vague and proponents of the cultural studies
approach have written little in a less idiosyncratic vocabulary which
might enlighten those outside the paradigm. This kind of interpre-
tation is based on a naive leap of faith that makes an analogy
between contemporary cultural products and class structure in
capitalist society. Stuart Hall (1977), the principal adherent
to the cultural studies approach, borrows the concept of 'hegemony'
from Gramsci to convey a similar argument that cultural and media
products are part of the ideological superstructure resting on
society's economic base. Hegemony represents an artificially imposed
social order based on moral and intellectual justifications diffused
throughout all classes to conceal domination and shape all aspects
of social life. In Hall's statement, hegemony is said to exist when
the ruling class not only exercises the power to coerce but also
wins the consent of the other classes. Thus hegemony is created
and maintained through both force and consent. In a liberal capitalist

104

state, consent is usually the predominant mode of hegemonic relations but it is said to operate as well behind an "armour of coercion". Hegemony is therefore not simply an outcome of economic relations but involves the organization of superstructural relations in the state and polity and, in the form of ideological influence, in the mass media. The obvious issue which this approach is attached to but never directly addresses is the conditions under which super-structural relations, especially ideological domination through the media, are determined by class relations. The various proponents of this "theory of ideology" invoke but never go beyond Marx's famous dictum that "the ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas", never demonstrating how ideological domination by the capitalist class is created and sustained. This is not an explanation; rather it is a question to be investigated. At the empirical level, it is necessary to find evidence of how hegemoney is actually reproduced through the decisions of media personnel, through media content, and through consumer and political behaviour. Interpretive analysis from cultural texts, no matter how ingenious or suggestive, are no substitute for this kind of systematic inquiry. Another crucial problem in employing this approach in mass media studies is the irreconcilability of textual and empirical sociological methodologies.

However tenuous one finds the above positions, they raise, in one form or another, the major issues in the contemporary critique of modern media. Yet these positions do not yield much in the way of sociological insight, for devoid of an empirical base they tell us

nothing of the conditions under which the mass media have been organized, why the range of content offerings is so predictable, and what specific effects , if any, the media have on social structure. In isolation, without empirical substantiation, these positions have litte relevance as the foundations for an informed sociological theory of mass communications. They must be integrated into and assessed in terms of what is known about mass media in modern life. With that aim in mind, the following section will discuss the most prominent research areas in mass communications studies, the social effects tradition and the inquiries into media ownership and control, and, finally, the more recent linking of power and stratification studies with media analysis.

II . What We Know: Some Major Themes in the Empirical Tradition

    A.   The Context of Evidence About Media's Societal Impact

      The various theoretical approaches have all asserted in one form or another the power of the mass media over their audiences. The question now is whether this argument can be substantiated empirically. Indeed, the findings while vast are also conflicting as a number of excellent summaries of social effects research reveals (see, e.g., McQuail, 1976; Halloran, 1970; Hovland, 1954; Klapper, 1960). As a point of departure, it should be kept in mind that the assumption of media determinism has enjoyed a long historical primacy. Long before scientific techniques were applied to questions of media's societal impact, it was generally taken as axiomatic that the emerging mass press and infant film and broadcast industries would be as

politically and socially powerful as any historical forms of persuasion.
Because of this widespread belief, the earliest research efforts on
modern media's effects were formulated and conducted with high expecta-
tions of the media's impact which were not always borne out. This
accounts for what McQuail observes as an evolving sequence of thinking
"...in which the media have been viewed first as highly effective
and irresistible, subsequently relatively powerless and latterly
re-evaluated as having a   real potential for achieving effects".
(McQuail, 1976:58). In fact, the post-war generation of media effects
studies can be labelled the "no-effects" view. The Lazarsfeld et. al.
classic inquiry into the media and voting behaviour (1948), for example,
concluded that few people changed their opinions of candidates during
an election and, rather than media coverage, discussion with others
was the primary cause of this change. More recent studies of election
campaigns are believed to confirm this view that the media, especially
the press, make little impact on forming voting behaviour or instiga-
ting political change (Berelson, et. al., 1954; Lang and Lang, 1959;
1968a, b). Klapper's influential summary of this first generation of
effects literature modifies the finding of "no effects" to that of
"partial effects", concluding that the media seldom convert or overtly
manipulate audiences but certainly reinforce and confirm their
existing opinions and beliefs. Klapper's conclusion, while influential,
has been misleadingly interpreted. Reviewers have tended to overgen-
eralize media's indeterminancy and ignored the specific conditions

under which significant media effects can be isolated. In returning
to this literature, it is possible to draw out a series of confirmed
propositions about media effects which can lead to further inquiries.
This core body of findings, however suggestive, is in need of codifica-
tion and considerable refinement. Unfortunately the social effects
tradition has often ignored the early foundation. Consequently,
contemporary research has not added measureably to our understand-
ing of media's societal impact.

A good deal of the more recent research on press effectiveness
falls within the same functionalist-behaviourist tradition discussed
above and is subject to the same difficulties. The primary foci of
the contemporary inquiries are personal influence and the media,
political effects and the information and agenda-setting functions.
Although this research on press effects is extensive, some specific
features of the press have been left unexplored. This approach
because of its disinterest in content analysis and in questions
of ownership and control largely ignores the partisan positions
adopted by newspapers and broadcast stations and their impact on
political behaviour. Also, the role of non-news entertainment
content in providing definitions of political situations has seldom
been subjected to rigorous empirical scrutiny. The field seems
stagnated by the narrow definition of political activity as
"voting behaviour". Only a few among the recent studies have examined
the media's role in shaping definitions of broader political situa-
tions. All in all, the recent contributions to press effects research

seem to suggest that news media do play a significant role in shaping political behaviour. This is by no means the whole picture of media's societal impact nor does it indicate the state of effects research in general.

Sixty percent of all the studies dealing with media and human behaviour address the nature and effects of children's exposure to the entertainment content of television. Most of these studies draw their theoretical foundations from the various modelling, social learning and interactionist perspectives. This body of literature has tried to establish a causal connection between television exposure and aggressive behaviour. Taken as a whole, it is suggestive and may contribute to the erosion of the prevailing "no-effects conclusion on the issue of media and societal impact. However, the many inconsistencies in the literature cannot be overlooked. A variety of theoretical and methodological difficulties can be identified including design errors and unfounded or over-enthusiastic inferences from the individual to the societal level as well as researcher and experimenter bias.

As it stands, the social effects research, whether it addresses political behaviour or the broad issues of socialization, has not resulted in an accumulation of knowledge about the societal impact of media content. The major deficiencies stem from methodological and theoretical oversights. First, the literature is flawed by a lack of clear definitions or by restricted definitions for key

variables. For example, political behaviour is most often conceptualized as party affiliation or voting behaviour, ignoring media portrayal of non-electoral but politically salient issues such as labour unrest, race relations, economic matters and so on. Also, the research preoccupation with children and anti-social behaviour has done surprisingly little to clarify the operationalization of key terms like violent behaviour, aggression and heavy viewing. Secondly, the relationship between media effects and stratification has not been adequately explored. Again this is a direct result of mainstream sociology's neglect of mass communication research. Further investigations are needed to determine the extent to which racial, cultural, sex and class differences are related to differences first in patterns of media exposure and second in social behavioural outcomes. Another area of concern is the extent to which the socialization agents of family, school, workplace, peer groups, etc., affect the perception of media images, in news as well as entertainment content. More attention needs to be directed toward the extent of differential effectiveness of newspapers over broadcast media. Finally, the social effects literature suffers from an extreme abstracted empiricism. Despite the current theoretical emphasis on legitimation, integration, social control and the like in theoretical sociology, the social effects studies remain glued to the narrow concerns of voting and aggressive behaviour. The effects tradition provides us with the most striking example of the gap between theory and research in media analyses.

B.   The Context of Evidence About Onwership and Control of Media

The inquiry into media ownership and control is possibly the one empirical tradition in mass media studies that is explictly related to a theoretical tradition in sociology. This tradition is within the confines of the sociology of power and stratification and tends to characterize the media's position of power in industrial societies in terms of pluralist or elite frameworks. In   very recent years, a trend toward more explicitly Marxist analyses can be traced (e.g., Murdock and Golding. 1973; 1977) but relatively few empirical studies can rightly claim a Marxist pedigree. When applied to mass media, the power and stratification frameworks shift the focus from the individual level of analysis of the behavioural effects tradition to a more macroscopic concern with the place of mass media in the social structure, especially their role in the organization of social, political and economic relations.

The pluralist approach posits the existence of socially respon- sible yet privately-owned and autonomous media industries. The argu- ment is often suggested that the "free press" model does not imply freedom to be objective but simply freedom from any outside influence. In this most basic formulation, the model is closest to a pure laissez- faire interpretation of the function of the media. An autonomous media system sets up an open and competitive free market of ideas. The more diversity and competition among media vehicles, it is argued, the more likely the best and most accurate information and ideas will be the most widely assimilated and accepted.

The interpretation based on elite theories rejects the pluralist assumptions of media responsibility and autonomy. Instead, it posits that competing sets of elites attempt to legitimate their power through increasing concentration of control over society's major institutions, including mass media. Indeed, the media are viewed as one of the most powerful tools for maintaining and legitimating the existing structure of social relations. Although a problematic inferential leap is made from the analysis of elite control of media to the allegation of specific ideological consequences, the actual empirical inquiries in the elite tradition are usually concerned with the patterns of media ownership, whether economic and informal contacts link media personnel with government or other business elites (see, e.g., Porter, 1965; Clement, 1973; Fournier, 1976; Nixon, 1966; Baer et. al., 1974).

The pluralist and elite approaches have been applied to the empirical analysis of media ownership and control in several nations. Much of the literature is flawed by the assumption that the organizational and economic contexts in which the media operate also imply broad ideological effects on the societal level. The empirical research reveals little relationship between concentration of ownership and media content slant, regardless of the economic and political organization of the nations under study. In the U.S., for example, the research disagrees over the extent of monopoly ownership as well as over the effect of concentration on the media professionals' social responsibility ethic. With regard to the issue of concentration, one student of this trend finds a tendency toward increasing monopolistic

112

control of the local daily press as well as increasing evidence of cross-media ownership (radio-TV-press) (Nixon, 1955; Nixon and Hahn, 1971). Little evidence is given, however, to establish the relationship between concentration and owner influence over content. In fact, one study reports little publisher interference under monopolistic conditions (Bowers, 1967). A recent report, in spite of its critical orientation, concluded that owner influence was probably more likely in small independent media since control over the content of chain-owned media is usually less directly exercised (Murphy, 1974). A comprehensive review of the current state of knowledge on the rela-tionship between concentration of ownership of American media and content finds almost no evidence of owner influence over the coverage of issues or editorial slant nor any difference between competitive and monopoloy media sectors. In fact, among the U.S. studies, the only evidence of the existence of hegemonic control is Stempel's observa-tion that residents in media monopoly towns are less well informed than residents in media competitive regions (Stempel, 1973).

The Canadian literature on ownership and control is also marred by the problematic inference of ideological effects through owner and managerial collusion. Porter, for example, whose own theoretical position derives from both pluralist as well as elite perspec-tives, argues that the upper class backgrounds of the media elite pro-vide evidence of this group's ability to use media content to legitimate existing class relations and political structures:

> ...the unifying of value themes is achieved
> through the control of media of communication
> and therefore the structure of the ideological
> system becomes articulated with other systems
> of power. The ideological system must provide
> the justification for the economic system,
> the political system, and so forth, and this
> it does by attempting to show that the existing
> arrangements conform with the traditional
> value system (Porter, 1965:460).

However, at the empirical level, Porter's method of examining social

origins of media personnel is hardly appropriate to his radical

assumption of ideological hegemony. Although his findings indicate

largely upper class British origins of media management, ownership

of the media industry is firmly in Canadian hands. This leads to

further conjecture:

> ...The absence of foreign control... would suggest
> that they are not sufficiently profitable to be
> taken over by foreign investors. It might also
> suggest a reluctance on the part of Canadian owners
> to sell these properties because they are viewed,
> not primarily as economic instruments, but as
> institutions which have a public responsibility
> (1965:482).

In essence, Porter's conclusion falls back on an assumption of autonomous

and socially responsible media, which is a much different position from

the one he began with. Clement's attempt to update Porter's analysis

of Canadian media and to recast it in a more explicitly critical

perspective has also been only moderately successful in empirically

demonstrating the relationship between media ownership and manipu-

lation (Clement, 1973). In addition, his analysis has been criticized

for its naive economic determinism, its lack of fit between theory

and data, and, recently, from within the critical tradition, for its

inattention to non-economic, political and structural factors (see

Baldwin, 1977). The problematic assumptions of the ownership and

114

control literature on Canada are even more suspect when juxtaposed with the results of the empirical research on political coverage by the Canadian press. A content analysis of seven newspapers with highly-concentrated ownership established no hint of editorial collusion on the choice of issues, extent of coverage or editorial endorsements (Wagenberg and Soderlund, 1975).

Although both the Marxist and the elite perspectives are concerned in varying degrees with the power of the ruling elite to create and maintain ideological hegemony, the latter approach is concerned with the amalgamation and maintenance of bureaucratic power while the former is occupied with the analysis of class relations as they shape the distribution of power in all aspects of social life. When applied to mass media, the Marxist, or class model, assumes that both the structure and content of the press and other media are determined by the historically-specific positions of power maintained by different classes. The media are part of the ideological super-structure which rests on the economy's material base. In modern capitalism, the media are the bourgeoisie's principal tools for hegemonic control over the working class. At the empirical level, adherents to the Marxist approach do not concern themselves with the type of network analyses of media ownership which typifies the elite orientation. Instead, they argue that the functions of the media are determined by the structured patterns of relations between classes rather than by individuals who occupy decision-making positions. Because of this distinction, Marxist media analyses

115

tend to avoid the problematic assumption of conspiratorial personal
intervention and manipulation which detracts from even the most
elegant studies in the elite tradition. The Marxist model instead
attempts to demonstrate media's role in creating and sustaining
ideological hegemony through purely structural features. Consequently,
their analyses are historical and focus on horizontal and vertical
integration, diversification, the nature of control and the conversion
of information into a marketable commodity as well as the ideological
and technological transfer from capitalist to peripheral third world
countries (see, e.g., Murdock and Golding, 1973; 1977; Golding, 1977;
Boyd-Barrett, 1977; Westergaard, 1977; Janus,1977). These pioneering
works are suggestive and worthy of wider attention among sociologists
operating in a critical tradition.

Both the social effects and the ownership and control literature,
despite uneven evidence, rest on the axiomatic premise of media's
broad societal impact, an assumption which has characterized the
discipline since the first generation of media research. As the
above overview suggests, this position has coloured not only the
way in which theoretical questions are posed but also the way in
which research is carried out. Consequently, the accumulation of
knowledge about the media's actual effects has been retarded. Of
course, there is probably more than some truth to the persistent
belief that media programming contributes to a wide range of
social behaviour in both children and adults and that the struc-
ture of media organizations influences the nature of this content.
However, the methods used to investigate these concerns have not

proven appropriate to the task. This is precisely where the body of
sociological knowledge in such relatively well-developed areas as
power and stratification can be of help.

III. What Lies Ahead: Towards a Sociology of Mass Media

Mass communication, as a social institution, must be viewed in
relation to what is known in sociology about the distribution of power
and other social resources. In the area of social effects, for
example, this strategy would round out the few exploratory attempts
to trace media's treatment and impact on minorities and social
classes by providing an incorporating framework from the various
literatures on socialization, stratification and political behaviour.
In the area of ownership and control, the task involves both theoreti-
cal and methodological efforts. The arguments that either competi-
tive or monopoly ownership promotes consensus or favours dominant
interests cannot be confirmed through the analysis of social origins
or through studies of content in isolation. Such arguments are
based instead on a thesis of "general omission" (see Breed, 1958) and
would be better approached through an understanding of what is left
out of mass media content as well as the economic, legal, political,
technological and production constraints on media organizations
in relation to the structural features of industrial market economies.
Analyses of the technological and organizational features of media
production (Donohew et. al., 1972; Janowitz, 1975; Tunstall, 1971;
Tuchman, 1973) have a place in the general empirical tradition of the
sociology of work and, indeed, remembering Weber's concern with the

117

rationalization of an increasingly bureaucratic modern press, such
inquiries make an important contribution to the literature on the
labour process. Concern with economic and non-economic structures
shaping mass media is relatively undeveloped as a research area
but   is precipitating some theoretical interest, especially
from the neo-Marxist writers. This structural orientation is one of
central importance to the study of Canadian media because it goes
beyond the analysis of the functions qua effects of media in a market
economy directing needed attention to Canada's international economic
and political position as well as to the role of federal regulation and
the question of public ownership.

Recent neo-Marxist work on the nature of the capitalist state pro-
vides the basis for a suitable theoretical framework for such an
analysis, especially discussions of the state's "mandate" to create
and maintain the conditions of capital accumulation. The relevance
of this orientation is in its spelling out of the state's legitima-
tion functions through the analysis of symbols and sources of
public support (see, e.g., representative readings in Lindberg, et.
al., 1975). An ideal candidate for such an inquiry is the question
of jurisdiction over the cable communications system in Canada.
A macroscopic, structural orientation would necessarily examine
U.S.-Canadian political and economic links as well as Canadian _
federal and provincial relations and the role of federal regulatory
agencies. Such an approach conceptualizes the media not simply as
a tool of economic and political interests but as an auxilliary of

either the economy or the state, depending on historically specific circumstances. In the case of Canadian development, at times the economy has influenced the nature of media regulation, as in the case for the creation of the privately-owned television networks, and, at other times, the state in its political legitimacy function has intervened with clear opposition from economic interests, as in the case of establishing Canadian content and ownership regulations. This type of orientation breaks out of the "media determinism" which characterizes so much of the discipline and acknowledges that the media, as "mediators", are more acted upon than they are actors. In addition, this approach by focusing on actual relations and policy decisions helps bridge the inferential gap from the structure of media to the ideological superstructure. This problem, as we have seen, flaws a great deal of the research, whether it be the behaviour-al approach to media's societal effects, content analysis or inquiries into the social origins and socialization of media management and personnel.

The framework for the establishment of media sociology within the boundaries of the power and stratification tradition is hinted at in the work of Marx, Weber, and more recently, in statements by Miliband, Westergaard and most forcibly by Murdock and Golding:

> ...the sociological study of mass communications
> should not be seen as a self·contained professional
> specialism, and still less as one element in a
> grand multi-disciplinary approach to "communications",
> but as a part of an overall study of social and
> cultural reproduction which has traditionally
> occupied the heartland of sociological analysis.

In the case of advanced capitalist societies of
North America and Western Europe with which
we are specifically concerned here, this
means that the sociology of mass communications
should derive from, and feed into, the
continuing debate on the nature and per-
sistence of class stratification. More
particularly, media sociology should
address itself to the central problem of
explaining how radical inequalities in the
distribution of rewards come to be presented
as natural and inevitable and are understood
as such by those who benefit least from this
distribution. In short, our argument is
that media studies should be incorporated
into the wider study of stratification and
legitimation (Murdock and Golding, 1977: 12).

What constitutes the basic assumptions of such an orientation

and where does it lead the sociologist? The obvious point of

departure is the realization that inequality in the distribution

of social resources is a fundamental yet variable feature of

modern societies. A media sociology would necessarily focus on

the relationship between the unequal distribution of control

over mass communications, at the levels of ownership and

production of content, and the wider societal patterns of inequality.

At the national level, this would center on the media's relation-

ship to both the economy and the state, especially the media's

functions in the market system and the process of legitimation

through which structures of inequality are maintained and reproduced.

At the international level, this form of media sociology would address

the transfer of technology and programming between industrialized

and developing countries as an indication of unequal exchange between

center and periphery in a system of global stratification.

The advantage of this orientation lies in its attempt to link theoretically what has only been implicit in traditional approaches, the connection between media as an industry and as a transmitter of ideology. This synthesis is never achieved in the prevailing Lasswellian paradigm which compartmentalizes source, channel and receiver effects. As an industry, the media in modern market systems are subject to a variety of economic, political and legal constraints, not the least of which is the maximization of profit subject to strict government regulation. As a transmitter of values, the media serve as mediators and translators among social groups as well as agents of legitimation for the existing social order. When viewed in relation to stratification and class structure, the material base and the ideological functions of the media merge. Although this link between mass·communications and social class has been the focus of recent inquiries, these isolated empirical findings on sex role portrayal, media use by the urban poor and ethnic stereotyping await integration into an holistic perspective. A power and stratification orientation not only shifts attention from the fruitless search after short-term media effects but directly links communications systems with the other social institutions and agencies which channel social groups through the stratification system. This orientation calls for a new focus on the roles assumed by the family, the educational and the occupational agencies in the distribution of social knowledge and resources and the acquisition of cultural and social skills through the mass media. Finally, the theoretical concern with legitimation would inevitably lead to queries of the nature of the relationship between media and the fostering or curbing of social dissent and political movements.

Contrary to the popular verdict, mass media studies suffer neither from a paucity of theory nor from empirical overkill. They are flawed primarily because of their lack of direction and a unifying theme. Thus this essay concludes with a call to bring mass media back into the mainstream of sociological inquiry. This central focus of sociology is the study of power and stratification. The specification of the nature of the link between media systems and the distribution of power and social resources may finally provide the appropriate entrée for situating the study of mass communications in sociology proper. This is not a novel strategy. Indeed, similar approaches are currently advocated for the incorporation of schooling research and studies of deviance. This orientation poses important yet relatively unexplored questions, the most general of which include defining media as a system of production, the analysis of its specialized occupations and internal power structure as well as its relation to class structure through its ideological and cultural functions. By focusing on these features of media in society we may at last develop a sociology of mass communications, one that provides the missing links between what we "say", in the form of our theorizing about the media, and what we "know", in the form of the enormous body of empirical findings on the nature and role of mass communication in contemporary society.

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