A CRITICAL ASSESSMENT OF MEDIA STUDIES
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Sociological theory has played an important role in the development 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 sociological 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 broadcast-
ing 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 differentiated societies. For example, the nature and power of a modern and rationalized press attracted the attention of Max Weber, particularly 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 "publicized" 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 lifestyle. 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 interpretation 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
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 superstructural 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 hegemony 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 little 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 expectations 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 instigating 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 overgeneralize 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 codification and considerable refinement. Unfortunately the social effects tradition has often ignored the early foundation. Consequently, contemporary research has not added measureably to our understanding 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 situations. 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 Ownership and Control of Media

The inquiry into media ownership and control is possibly the one empirical tradition in mass media studies that is explicitly 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 responsible yet privately-owned and autonomous media industries. The argument 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 legitimize 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
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 relationship 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 monopoly media sectors. In fact, among the U.S. studies, the only evidence of the existence of hegemonic control is Stempel's observation 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 perspectives, argues that the upper class backgrounds of the media elite provide 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 manipulation (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...
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 superstructure 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
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 theoretical and methodological efforts. The arguments that either competitive 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
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 provides 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 legitimation 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 behavioural 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 persistence 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 relationship 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 Lass-
wellian 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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