Mass Media Studies and the Question of Ideology

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On the face of it, radical understanding of the mass media has to count as one of the great success stories of the post-'60s political and academic culture. Without attempting anything like a historical survey, it is unquestionably the case that whole new fields and new enterprises of investigation have been developed; and - even more importantly - the concerns of most of those who have developed the fields have been at least broadly 'oppositional', in the sense that they have wanted to investigate the media from the perspective of power relations. This doesn't mean they have been necessarily socialist, but they have been 'critical' in a general sense. And that has meant a close concern with questions of ideology.

To list but a few of the developments, we have seen:

(1) the growth of critical studies of news, led obviously by the work of the Glasgow University Media Group (GUMG);

(2) intense investigation into and argument about the presentation of women in our culture, growing out of the rebirth of the women's movement;

(3) the same intense activity over the regeneration and transmission of racist ideas;

(4) surgical probings of a host of forms of popular culture - soap operas, light entertainment, women's and girls' magazines, etc.;

(5) delvings into media hardly thought about before, but now regarded as having real importance, for example photography.

All these investigations have powered, and been powered by, parallel theoretical developments: film theory, semiology, narrative analysis, reader theory, 'pleasure' theory, post-structuralist deconstructionism - all of them, as I say, motivated to a considerable extent by the desire to unpack ideology. Each of them, in other words, has had the fairly self-conscious intent of helping us to grasp the ways media 'texts' may have power to reproduce their messages within their audience; and that includes us. I mention 'us', especially, because if media studies are very much a Child of 1968, one of the ways in which they are so is in their peculiarly self-conscious attitudes.

With great fear of caricature, I would summarise some of these attitudes as follows: after '68, a kind of cultural politics grew up which tended to incorporate, first cultural suspicion; second cultural guilt; and third assertion of the authenticity of resistances. First, media studies developed within an atmosphere of looking around, and worrying what if anything could be considered 'safe'. I confess that I find the nadir of this within the gross suspicions of so many forms of pleasure that grew out of 'pleasure theory'. Were not, the implication was, our enjoyings of almost everything marked by domination/subordination?

The consequence of this was, as I have called it, cultural guilt: a feeling that we ourselves are tainted, and a tendency to probe inside for signs of sexism, racism, etc., to the point even that failure to admit to so doing was itself a mark of being both tainted and unreformed.

And thirdly, there has been the tendency to look on forms of cultural resistance by those whom we judge oppressed or exploited, as largely beyond criticism. Who are we, the tainted ones, to comment on their forms of resistance? These three tendencies I feel have been very much the mark of post-'68 cultural politics; but often their power has been not to make people agree, but to be experienced as a pressure, to have to distance oneself from them. I may not agree with these three, but I feel the need to explain why and how I disagree. That, to me, is as great a sign of their reality as would be their general agreement.

In themselves these positions are neither obviously good nor bad. But I want to try to show through this article that in fact they have been associated with other views which are decidedly problematic. And in particular I want to show that they are coupled with certain views about the nature of ideology which I want to call into question.

What is a theory of ideology in relation to the media? It is a theory about how ideas, images, attitudes or other contents of the media are both able to reside within media 'texts', and are able to reproduce themselves in us. It is, in other words, a theory about the power of the media to affect us. Of course there will then be important arguments about the nature of the influence: is it the relatively superficial capacity to insert particular beliefs ('Guinness is good for you!'); is it a tendency to create preferred structures of concepts for understanding the world; or is it the wholesale construction of personality, 'subjectivity', that is involved? These are particular arguments within the domain. But any theory of ideology that relates itself to the media must make theoretical commitments on how the processes are thought to take place. Therefore any such theory requires us to answer certain questions, even if we do so only implicitly. (1) What is it about human beings that makes them prone to being influenced by certain kinds of message from the media, and in what aspect of their minds are they affected? (2) What forms of communication, or what relations of communication are judged capable of having that power? (3) What 'mechanisms' are there which work to enable the messages to be transmitted, powerfully?

The first clearly requires an epistemological answer. It will raise issues about how humans learn, the conditions under which they can be influenced, and so on. The second must lead to methods for investigating the media, in order to disentangle the significant from the insignificant. It will indicate how we should track down the significant

messages within the media that may be transferred to an audience. The third is more problematic. It introduces what I would call 'bridge-concepts', that is, ways of conceiving how messages within the text are actually transferred, how it is that our minds are made vulnerable to them. And I want immediately to note the odd fact that, although (as I shall show) media theorists and investigators have regularly made assumptions about this, it is the least acknowledged or recognised aspect of the whole.

In this article I want to illustrate what I see as the troublesome answers media analysts have given to these three questions, by discussing three examples. These are: the work of the Glasgow University Media Group; Angela McRobbie's important study of Jackie; and Stuart Hall et al's work on the creation of the 'mugger' [1]. I freely acknowledge the dangers of selecting three disparate studies in this way, but I think that nonetheless some general lessons can be learnt from looking closely at these. If there are other studies to which my strictures don't apply, bully for them. But I'd like the chance to look and see.

To examples, then: first, the Glasgow group. I don't share the recent tendency to devalue their achievements. It is some kind of measure of their importance that they have provoked such intense dislike and hostility (but never in the form of coherent replies) from BBC and ITV. (It would be interesting to compare the tenor of the TV companies' response to GUMG with that given to Tebbit's assault.) Nor am I prepared to follow Raymond Williams, at last year's Association of Cultural Studies conference, in equating political importance with theoretical acuity. I remain convinced of both the empirical power and the political importance of their work. Nevertheless, there is a problem with their theorisation of 'ideology' in news which has remained, perhaps surprisingly, unnoticed.

Take their conclusion to their compilation book Really Bad News:

> A new definition of the aims of broadcasting should be established which recognises the conflicts of interests between groups and lays down a duty on broadcasters to represent these differences fairly and accurately. Broadcasters should have a duty to produce programmes from the different perspectives within society. At the same time there should be positive moves within broadcasting to combat racism and sexism. We do not believe that broadcasting 'freedom' should extend to those groups who harm others on the basis of their sex or colour of skin [2].

These conclusions arise naturally from GUMG's combined theoretical enquiry and empirical work. They are therefore very revealing of the problems of their work. It would be tempting to tackle them by noting the apparent contradiction between, on the one hand, the supposedly scientific investigations of news content which reveal them to be 'biassed' (and therefore in need of 'balancing'), and on the other hand, the obviously political demand for the removal of racist and sexist content from news. But that does not reveal the key assumptions at work. It is more important to tease out the implications inside their notion of 'balance'.

These come to the surface in an example of one of the best pieces of empirical work GUMG have done, in my opinion: their study of the way women were presented and used in news coverage of the Falklands War. They noted very acutely how news tended to restrict them to being carriers of emotions, expressers of feelings - very often without even the chance to speak for themselves. Instead, there would be voices-over lingering shots of worried-looking women with children. But this is how they then connect this significant discovery with their general themes:

> It is very unusual for married women in the home to appear on the news. An underlying assumption is that serious news stories should be about public events - government proposals, stock market movements etc. The lives of women at home are taken as a sort of steady background, only 'newsworthy' in this case because the men are absent, and because the men are making news. Having selected 'ordinary' married women's thoughts and lives as an issue in these extraordinary circumstances, the TV journalists present them in a traditional women's role, which does not include expressing dissident views. Reports on the relatives are approached as 'human interest' items, 'soft' news stories where the issue at stake is how wives and mothers, sitting at home with emotions rather than political opinions, cope with the waiting. Given the rare chance of reports from naval housing estates, to present an area of life that the news normally neglects, the TV journalists find themselves falling back on the old-fashioned stereotypes of women's role and family life.
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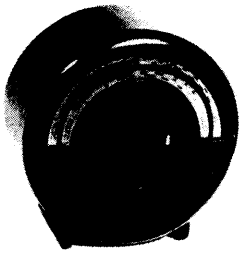
> According to the 1980 General Household Survey, conventional family units - couples living with children - make up only 31% of households. Households where the woman is dependent on the man and stays at home to look after the children are only 13%. Altogether two thirds of married women have paid jobs outside the home. This is not to cast doubt on the genuine warmth, security and family solidarity that the TV cameras captured, or the depth of joy and relief felt in reunions with survivors after the war. The point is that the TV news portrait of the war was selective, and that it selected images of unity and families, concealing much of the real conflict and true attitudes within the country [3].

I have quoted this at length to show how they have moved from a revealing empirical account to a framework for understanding that is most odd. To reveal its oddity, imagine a composite news item in which we did try to obey their injunction to 'balance' this ('undoubtedly true') warmth of feelings etc. among the women at home, with other perspectives.



The item must, I feel, open with the conventional account. The camera can slowly pan across and zoom in on a group of mothers with very young children, looking a little worried. Follow with a close-up of an emotion-filled expressive woman's face - all this with voice-over about their feelings, perhaps (in order to assess them) a question to one of them about how concerned she is for her husband/boyfriend (the latter, of course, only if there is no child!). We have to have this for, after all, it is a legitimate point of view, isn't it? But now 'balance' can begin to enter. So: cut to tight interview with women discussing whether their men should have gone. Is it worth the sacrifice of lives? But we can't stop here, if 'balance' is truly to operate. So: next, cut to a woman showing bruises to the camera. She's bloody glad her husband is gone for a few weeks - he used to beat her up. Perhaps follow this with an interview with a radical feminist, who will argue that war is a problem of male aggression anyway (this is important, because we must make sure that the battered woman is not seen as an isolated case; to 'balance' the dominant account, it needs an explanatory framework) [4]. To close our news item, in all fairness, we should return to the lingering emotional shots. After all, it is probably still the majority view.

In their works, GUMG argue that the goal of news must be to 'help explain, and clarify events'. Does my imaginary balanced item do this? My suspicion is that (aside of course from the inevitable outrage it would cause) it would produce a response somewhere between hilarity and confusion - because it doesn't make sense to think of different views like this as simply alternatives, which can be set against each other. But equally it reveals the difficulty of actually operating with their criterion of exclusion on sexist attitudes. For it could be argued with considerable force that the 'stereotyped' view of women as emotional bearers, as expressers of feelings, is precisely one of the most oppressive and sexist attitudes - hence one that ought to be banned from news?

Behind all this, though, lies the crucial assumption: an epistemological assumption that, other things being equal, people's understanding of the world is a construct of the balance of information that flows to them. If 'unbalanced' news would make no difference to likely audience views, why worry? The implication is that insofar as news is influential, 'unbalanced' news will result in unbalanced audiences. In saying this is an assumption of theirs. I am of course not denying that censorship of information can be very important to the possibilities of people understanding the world effectively. But the GUMG perspective goes further; and this comes to the surface particularly in another paper from the Glasgow Sociology Department, which has the same conclusions although from different hands. Ditton and Duffy, in an occasional paper analysing patterns of crime reporting in Scottish newspapers, point out (comparably to GUMG) the gross imbalances between actual crimes reported and cases going before the courts, on the one hand, and those that feature at all in newspapers. For example, violent and sexual crimes were far more represented in their Press sample than would have been warranted by police or court statistics. They then construct a model of newspaper audiences to give significance to this:

> Our hypothetical newspaper purchaser might buy a Daily Record on Tuesday and thus receive the impression that of reportable crime, only 17.7% took place in Scotland. Alternatively, he might buy an Evening Times on Friday, and receive the much more alarming impression that 71.4% of reportable crime was Scottish-based. To put it another way, a regular reader of the Sunday Post (67.6% of crime coverage Scottish-based) should rationally be twice as apprehensive about safely walking the streets as a regular reader of the Scotsman [8].

The assumptions in this are deeply empiricist. A rational understanding of the world on this model is a compilation of influences, an accumulation of separate pieces which assemble into their own conceptual understanding of the world. In no sense would it be a sufficient avoidance of this empiricism to add that 'Of course there are other influences' or 'Of course some people may read the news in different (deviant) ways.' It is the underlying model of what constitutes a rational reading of that 'unbalanced' news that is empiricist.

What is wrong with it? Many things. Not least that audiences approach newspapers (or TV news) with expectations as to the range of covering they will find. So, a reader of a regional newspaper will hardly conclude from the fact that very little crime seems to be going on in the Sudan, Haiti or Billericay, that therefore these are crime-free havens for the nervous. To put it this way is to particularise an objection which I shall return to in more general form; and that is that GUMG, and Ditton and Duffy, take the relation of influence between media and audiences to be essentially non-social. I shall explain more fully what I mean by this later on, but I put it this way here because I want to show that, although GUMG hold this assumption in a particular form, it is in fact an assumption found in more subtle forms in my other examples. Here, the problem expresses itself in their assumption (which they know to be absurd, once it is drawn out) that readers approach their newspapers without expectations, with no prior relationship to the papers they might be influenced by.

It may of course be felt that in choosing the Glasgow Group as my first target, I am choosing a most unrepresentative case. In many respects, they are outside the mainstream of media studies. I would accept that. But they constitute a very good example of how epistemological assumptions can lurk inside media analyses, unrecognised but playing a very crucial organising role. They organise both how the texts are examined for significant contents, and then how these contents are read for likely ideological import. These general considerations remain valid in my second case, even though it is a very different study.

McRobbie's study of Jackie is something of a classic of semiological investigations, much-cited, and several times reproduced. In it, she does a thorough job of dissecting what she sees as a coherent and powerful ideology which is being offered, very seductively, to young girls: an ideology of adolescent femininity which sells to them the notion that 'boys' are virtually all that matter in their lives. Forming romantic relationships, and doing all the necessary hard word to prepare themselves for this, through make-up, fashion, developing the right personality: this is the sum-total of the magazine, which embroiders this message through stories, through advice pages, through the kind of interest the girls are offered in pop, and so on. It is a powerful, and powerfully-argued, analysis.

My prime interest is in McRobbie's account of mechanism; that is, how it is thought Jackie manages to have its influence. McRobbie clearly believes that the magazine is capable of considerable power: 'Jackie constitutes an ideological bloc of mammoth proportions' [6]. This powerful bloc traps young girls into a false sisterhood, one based on jealousy and competitiveness.

McRobbie's semiological account sets itself consciously against other approaches. She contrasts it with an (empiricist) content analysis, with an (elitist) high/low culture opposition, and a (sociological) culture-as-lived-relations approach. Semiology is a method, for her, which can reveal the powerful ideological structures in the text, without making moralising assumptions. Perhaps the key concept in semiology is that of 'form'. 'Form' in this approach is the internal structuring of oppositions and relations that constitute Jackie as a 'whole'. If something is part of the form of Jackie, then it is part of the system of meanings which is capable of being transferred from text to audience. This methodological presumption, however, leads McRobbie to class just about every aspect of the magazine as part of the 'form'. Thus: colour vs black & white in the printing, print vs pictures, the use of layouts, the title (connoting informality and 'unambiguously designating the category of the subject'), and page-organisation all take their place alongside her four main codes, of fashion, pop, romance and personal life. And they have equivalent importance. So we are told that the organisation of contents is important, with Cathy and Claire put at the end of the magazine to 'rekindle our fading interest', set in sombre black and white to indicate its 'serious' nature. Thus is reality reestablished after the fictional elements.

Now the simple fact is that in Jackie's twenty-two year history, Cathy & Claire have frequently moved their position in the magazine - from near the beginning, to the middle, to the end (where McRobbie found them), back to the middle and so on. It would be sheer folly to build a thesis on such shifting sands, and I don't suppose for one moment that McRobbie wants to. But the fact is that the theory she is using doesn't enable us to discriminate important from unimportant bits of 'form'. The theory, via the method it prescribes, requires us to search for

structuring forms - and then assumes that these 'forms' transfer to us by a process of inserting themselves into us, structuring us into their shapes (unless of course we are able to resist - but that is the get-out caveat which I insist does nothing to alter the basic model). Then a second assumption comes into play, leading to a most peculiar comment from McRobbie about what she sees as the 'lightness of tone' of the magazine. In her account, this is understood as a form of disguise. That is, the message (the structuring forms) is serious, but the lightness of tone or non-urgency conceals this seriousness and aids its insertion into the young girls.

Note the assumptions at work in this, because they are so germane to my argument. On such an account, a media 'text' can be divided into two separate elements: the 'message', or the part which will be reproduced in our heads if the media are successful; and the devices the media employ to aid the process of transfer, to help capture and penetrate the audience. And note again that 'vulnerability' is an epistemological category; it relates to ways in which our minds (I almost feel the need to apologise for using such a term, instead of fashionable alternatives like 'subjectivities') are laid open to influence. What is vital to note here is that it is assumed once again that such a process of influence bypasses cognitive understanding. The cognitive, if it is referred to at all, is seen on an analogy with a carrier-wave, conveying a cargo of messages but hiding the manifest.

This leads to a very particular account of the nature of ideology, and once again it is one I have found commonly taken-for-granted in a great deal of recent work on the media. This sees 'ideology' as essentially a non-cognitive construct. It may look like a conceptual account of the world, but in reality it is motivated by emotions, feelings, affects. I will illustrate this through my third example, once more a study I admire enormously for its empirical range. Hall et al studied the creation in the early 1970s of the image of 'the mugger', who became the embodiment of all that was threatening British society. He was alien, dangerous, lurking around every corner, and he was black. Using a wide variety of sources, Hall et al quite brilliantly show how this was constructed as a crucial element in the renewed law-and-order campaign of that period.

Central to their theoretical account of it is Stanley Cohen's concept of a 'moral panic'. Cohen had used the concept to help make sense of public reactions in the mid-1960s to the skirmishes and beach-fights of the Mods and Rockers in places like Southend and Margate. With real skill, Cohen had shown how melodramatic accounts by the press in particular created a vast gulf between the usually quite minor scuffles, and occasional broken windows, and the image of vast scheming hordes of hooligans invading sleepy seaside resorts. (My favourite example of this is Cohen's account of the journalist who reported having heard a Mod, being arrested, call to his friends: 'Carry on with The Plan').

> Cohen had defined a 'moral panic' as
> a period of moral spasm. A condition, episode, person or group of persons emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests, its nature is presented in a stylised and stereotypical fashion by the mass media, the moral barricades are manned by editors, bishops, politicians and other right-thinking people... [7].

We should pause over the language of this: 'societal values', 'societal reaction', 'symbolic crusade', 'moral enterprise', 'mass hysteria', 'delusion and panic`. From the perspective of 1960s interactionism, this is not surprising. 'Society' was conceived as a conflict of meanings. It is more surprising to find that these ways of conceiving the nature of media ideologies survives into the apparently more political account of Hall et al.

In taking over Cohen's conceptualisation, Hall et al do alter it significantly. They now take 'moral panics' to be the surface expression of much deeper ideological crises, rather like the relation between an earthquake and the epicentre of disturbances:

> (This) helps us to identify the 'moral panic' as one of the principal surface manifestations of the crisis, ... the displacement of a conjunctural crisis into the popular form of a 'moral panic' [8].

Note straightaway the sense of 'no ownership'. It is as though an ideology has a 'life of its own', independent of the people who hold it. This view is reinforced at another point in the book when they comment on the role of the police: '... though they are crucial actors in the drama of the "moral panic", they, too, are acting out a script which they do not write' [9]. It is as though ideological forms produce themselves - a conception which owes a lot to the Althusserian influence on Hall. They are not to be understood as strategic, policy-directed initiatives. They simply occur, as a function of the state of class forces. But it is also more than this. For it is part of the tendency to see ideological developments as like moods, or climates. They 'come upon us', they do not become accepted for reasons, though they may get rationalised afterwards. This insistent reading makes them interpret major incidents of their period in a strange way. This shows, for me, particularly well in their discussion of that most important figure of 1968, Enoch Powell. Recall that in April, May and November '68, Powell had made three speeches on the topic of immigration and race relations which had the effect of pulling the whole public domain of race discourse very sharply to the Right. Politically, they were events of major importance in giving respectability to resurgent racism. Here is the entire discussion of Powell and Powellism as it occurs in their book:

> On 20 April on the eve of the Race Relations Bill, Mr Powell delivered his 'rivers of blood' speech in Birmingham. 'Those whom the gods wish to destroy they first make mad. We must be mad, literally mad, as a nation to be permitting the annual inflow of some 15,000 dependants.... It is like watching a nation busily engaged in heaping up its own funeral pyre.' Discrimination, Mr Powell continued, was being experienced, not by blacks, but by whites - 'those among whom they have come'. This invocation - direct to the experience of unsettlement in a settled life, to the fear of change - is the great emergent theme of Mr Powell's speech [10].

A few sentences later, in the only other reference to those speeches or their impact, we are told of his appeal to 'more subliminal nationalist sentiments and passions'.

'Fears', 'passions', 'sentiments' - curiously, the very language in which Powell presented his own interpretation of white reactions to immigration - a language (shared by Hall et al) which makes it hard to conceptualise that reaction as racist. I don't want to deny the emotional charge that Powell's speeches carried, nor the rhetorical element in them. But in this account there is no space for the strategic thrust or conceptual reorganisation for which many others, including myself, have found evidence. It is not that Hall et al have found no evidence of such cognitive aspects; it is that their theorisation of 'moral panics' has no space for such an account. This connects with the job which they have brought the concept in to do, about which they are quite explicit. The concept of a moral panic has to explain how the working class has been made quiescent - they have been 'injected' successfully with fears, quaked by a moral crisis:

> One of the effects of retaining the notion of a 'moral crisis' is the penetration it provides into the otherwise extremely obscure means by which the working classes are drawn into processes which are occurring in large measure 'behind their backs', and led to experience and respond to contradictory

developments in ways which make the operation of state power legitimate, credible and consensual. To put it crudely, the 'moral panic' appears to us to be one of the principal forms of ideological consciousness by means of which a 'silent majority' is won over to the support of increasingly coercive measures on the part of the state [11].

Note that this is known in advance of any evidence that the working class did absorb the lessons of the 'panic', that they did generalise from a resurgence of racism to an acceptance of increased state power in general. It is not that they have the evidence and then theorise it; in this account the concept of a 'moral panic' does away with the need for evidence. And if indeed there is any evidence of either absorption of the panic, or generalisation from it, then that evidence is already read into a certain mode: it is not rational understanding, it is not even truly cognitive, instead it is 'moral' in the sense of being motivated by passions and sentiments. And, as I have already suggested, the powerful component of racism in responses to Powell gets distinctly marginalised in all this.

Three cases, then, which to me are indicative of general tendencies in thinking in recent work about the media and ideology. For all the differences between them, there are significant assumptions in common. The three most important (though there may well be others) are these.

(a) Ideology is not properly cognitive either in its content, or in the process whereby it is got into the mind by the media. By 'not properly cognitive', I mean that in each case the authors appear to be arguing that, although ideology may take the form of beliefs, arguments and other forms of rationalised opinion, in reality they are accepted and adhered to for non-rational reasons. People may say that they are convinced by and agree with the arguments of Powell, but in reality he has appealed to their fears and that is what has produced this epicentric moral panic. 'Deeper forces' than beliefs are at work.

It may seem that I am here tending to set up a false opposition between the rational and the non-rational, as if I am saying that either people accept ideas for rational reasons, or they adhere to them for emotional reasons. I am definitely not saying anything of the sort. On the contrary, I am arguing that these studies are the ones prone to do this. For they set up an opposition. On the one hand, there are 'beliefs' which are inserted by ideological, non-rational processes.

(b) These are conveyed into us, if we do not succeed resisting the process, by devices in the media which hook onto us and aid the transfer of media messages. Even in such a sophisticated and ground-breaking study as David Morley's The Nationwide Audience, one of the few sophisticated attempts to theorise and investigate the nature of audiences, we find that he still advises the seeking out of such 'devices', the 'points of identification within the message which transmit the preferred reading to the audience' [12]. (This concept of identification has a long history which I cannot go into here, except to note that as far back as the mid-nineteenth century in the campaign against the Penny Dreadfuls the same concepts were at work, even without this label, and they were even then distinguishing within the texts between the messages, and the devices which implant them into us.)

The irony however is that while on the one hand devaluing the grounds on which audiences might come to agree with ideas offered by the media, at the same time studies like these then present an overrationalistic picture of how media influence might be combatted. At the point where ideology is effective, it exerts influence over us in non-rational ways. But if we resist it, we do so by somehow maintaining our distance from it; inserting, as it were, cognitive space between us and its devices. Whether they think it or not, our authors are working very close to a conception of demystification. If only we can awaken audiences to the devices and traps set for them, then we will create protective barriers between them and the messages. And this shows in another opposition which is at work within these studies.

(c) At the moment of influence, our relation with the media is seen as non-social. Now these studies are part of that whole reevaluation of the media which took as its starting point a rejection of the very psychologistic character of most 'effects' studies, where audiences were seen as decontextualised, isolated individuals whose response to the images and messages presented was seen purely as a function of frequency of presentation, and individual personality. Drawing on the battery of sociological criticisms, post-1960s studies took it for granted that media audiences are socially located and active. But what we have in fact seen is that they have retained one vital component of the old effects model. It may be the case that our 'reading' of the media is very much a function of our class/race/gender relations. But if, as it were, we fail to 'read' the messages in negotiated or oppositional ways, then at the moment of influence we are desocialised. So what we have to do is to encourage audiences to hang onto their social location. This is very much an argument that people can be socially taught to resist the power of the media; it is the old and problematic notion that if only we are not taken in, we will not be influenced.

I do not believe that I am caricaturing the studies I have used as examples. Though these assumptions that I have been unpicking are not there on the surface, I believe I have shown they are there, constructing evidence, and marshalling concepts. Their viability and acceptability is of course still another matter, and it is not possible to undertake a full critique of them here. I want only to indicate some areas of problems, which I believe that an alternative formulation would have to solve.

First to note is the way this view presents an invert mirror-image of a view well criticised by David Bloor. Bloor, in a study of the ways knowledge may be thought to be socially influenced, comments on what he takes to be a 'standard' view of this within philosophical discussions:

> When men behave rationally or logically it is tempting to say that their actions are governed by the requirements of reasonableness or logic. The explanation of why a man draws the conclusion he does from a set of premises may appear to reside in the principles of logical inference themselves. Logic, it may seem, constitutes a set of connections between premises and conclusions and men's minds can trace out these connections. As long as they are being reasonable then the connections themselves would seem to provide the best explanation for the beliefs of the reasoner. Like an engine on rails, the rails themselves dictate where it will go. ...
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> Of course, when men make mistakes in their reasoning then logic itself is no explanation. A lapse or deviation may be due to a whole variety of factors. ... As when a train goes off the rails, a cause for the accident can surely be found. But we neither have, nor need, commissions of enquiry into why accidents do not happen. ...
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> The general structure of these explanations stands out clearly. They all divide behaviour into two types: right and wrong, true or false, rational or irrational. They then invoke causes to explain the negative side of the division. Causes explain error, limitation and deviation. The positive side of the evaluative divide is quite different. Here logic, rationality and truth appear to be their own explanation. Here causes do not need to be invoked [13].

The inversion that the radical critics have introduced is this: that instead of truth being that which 'needs no commission of enquiry', now it is 'resistance to influence'. It is being-influenced, being-persuaded that now needs a special separate mode and method of investigation.

I believe that Bloor is right to suggest that this kind of explanatory dualism is untenable. Like classic dualisms (such as a Cartesian body/soul interactionism), it is very hard to conceive how, where and why a point of interaction occurs. Indeed, it is relevant to note, I feel, that in the work of these writers, there is a tendency for the moment of influence to recede into a never-to-be-observed end-point. It plays the necessary role of saying what would be the influence, if it could be found; but in reality when any particular audience is looked at, all that are found are negotiated readings. The difficulty then becomes to provide anything other than purely speculative justifications for the particular interpretations of the texts and their messages that the authors claim to have isolated, or even justifications for the notion of influence itself. And that would be a very ironic outcome for a programme of investigation for which that has been one of the primary assumptions.

One consequence of this dualistic account of our relations with the media is that, if a genuinely 'influenced' person is found, it has to be concluded that they hold their beliefs in different ways from the rest of us. Whatever they may say about themselves, having been 'influenced' in the way indicated, their mode of holding those beliefs which are the result of media influence is non-cognitive and non-rational. Now there are cases where we might want to query the grounds for someone holding a belief; there certainly are individual cases where people are greatly moved by emotional or other non-cognitive processes to believe things for which they do not have rational grounds that would convince anyone else. But that is not quite the case here. It has to be asserted that even if such a person was able to give reasons for his or her beliefs, if it was judged to be a case of media-influence, the belief could not be being held on rational grounds. Of course, the get-out in such a case would be to say that there was simply here a parallelism of beliefs. This person happened to believe the same as was being presented by the media, but was not influenced by the media into holding the beliefs. The danger here is a retreat into absolute unfalsifiability, where we will only ascribe media influence where we have other grounds for believing that a set of beliefs is being held without rational grounds.

A rather interesting moral view would also seem to follow from this account; and that is that in alerting people to the ways the media are 'getting at them', we are in some sense making them more whole. A person who is influenced is, as it were, cut in two. They hold some beliefs, no doubt, on arguably rational grounds; but those which are media-induced are not so. A person who is rescued from this is a more integrated human, whose rational and affective capacities are more satisfactorily related. Not only is this a slightly odd view of human beings but, in the context of media theories which have sought to 'deconstruct the concept of the Subject', it is rather ironic.

The other main worry I would put down for consideration is this. However much the authors of such works may want to reject such a notion, it seems to me undeniable that the implicit politics of their approach is that of demystification. In other words, the implication of their work is that the way to rid ourselves of the influence of the media is to expose their subtle messages, and thus to encourage more negotiated or oppositional readings. Of course, there is worth in working with groups such as trade unionists, black people or whoever to help clarify just how the media are presenting them. But a house built on such examples will prove to be on sand; for these are groups already moving into some form of opposition, and seeking clarification. The experience on the other hand of working, for example, with white racists, and trying to 'demystify' them by revealing the sources of their ideas, has frequently been that their ideas have been clarified for them, reinforced and strengthened by the exposure.

This implication to the politics of demystification flows directly from the distinction I have pointed to between asocial and precognitive influences, and social and cognitive-affective negotiated readings. Of course, the best of such studies have their greatest and most interesting complexity in their exploration of the way different kinds of social location related to different kinds of negotiated readings. And from such work it will be relevant to consider how, and in what sorts of groups, using what sorts of pedagogy and building on what sorts of interests, teaching the media might undermine their influence [14]. Still, even within these best studies, there remains that core of idealism (in both moral and philosophical senses), that people can be 'saved' from media influence by having it properly drawn to their attention.

I have chosen these three studies as some of the very best examples we have of analyses of the media's ideological role. I am trying to show the need for closer analysis of the implicit epistemologies in work on ideology. I think I have shown that those epistemologies have powerful implications for our methods, our theorisation of ideology, and indeed our political strategies. The problem is conceiving an alternative account. Here, I would say only that if, as I suspect the prime source in the end for most work on media-influence is the structuralist presence of Ferdinand de Saussure, then the alternative will begin from Saussure's most brilliant critic, Valentin Volosinov. Volosinov, one of the intellectuals in the last flowering of Russian marxist thought before the (literally) deadening hand of Stalinism destroyed the remnants of critical thought, provided a devastating critique of just the simplistic notions of influence I have been attacking. This was in course of developing an account of the ideological nature of language (or 'speech', as he usually prefers to call it, insisting on its active dimension). That account stresses three factors. First, that language is dialogical, in the sense that all communications take place between people within already-existing social relationships. Second, that people do not use language; they speak to each other in forms of language, or 'little speech genres' as Volosinov terms them. And thirdly (and in my reading of Volosinov, this is the most important step in his argument), that in receiving any communication (be it from the media or anywhere else), we understand it in the first instance by acknowledging the 'answering role' that is being defined for us. This is what Volosinov means, I would argue, by his account of 'laying down a set of answering words' in understanding a message [15].

Volosinov's argument is complex and frequently misunderstood. Its implications for a theory and method for studying the media have never been developed, so far as I know. That, I would argue, is the task that now faces media and cultural studies, if it is to escape the perennially returning tradition I have been unpacking.

Notes

1 Glasgow University Media Group, Bad News, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1976; More Bad News, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980; and Really Bad News, Writers & Readers, 1982; also War and Peace News, Open University Press, 1984. Angela McRobbie, 'Jackie': an ideology of adolescent femininity, Occasional Paper, CCCS, University of Birmingham, 1977; Stuart Hall et al, Policing the Crisis, Macmillan, 1978.

2 GUMG, Really Bad News, p. 154.

3 GUMG, War and Peace News, pp. 99-100. I am quite convinced that there is a strange set of assumptions underpinning the use of the word 'old-fashioned' to refer to stereotypes. It is extremely common, and seems at the least to imply that 'once these might have been true, or acceptable, but now that is no longer so'.

4 This is by no means inconceivable as an intervention. In the Guardian today (10 November 1986) there is a report that a group of women

spray-painted the Bristol cenotaph with the slogan 'Dead Men Don't Rape'; the logic of this associated with Remembrance Day is that such things as rape and war are specifically a problem of Men. It is a view, according to GUMG it should be represented.

5 J. Ditton and J. Duffy, Bias in Newspaper Crime Reports, University of Glasgow Department of Sociology: Occasional Paper, 1982.

6 Angela McRobbie, 'Jackie' ..., p. 6. Though it has to be said that she is one of the worst offenders against my rule that one can't duck the epistemological implications of one's analysis by entering caveats that perhaps they aren't that much affected, or perhaps they will 'read' it differently. McRobbie gaily adds that she doesn't know how readers 'read' it, and that there is the possibility that they use it for deviant purposes. But the very notion of deviant purposes acknowledges still that there is an assumed 'natural' reading.

7 Stanley Cohen, Folk Devils and Moral Panics, Paladin, 1973.

8 Stuart Hall et al., Policing the Crisis, p. 221.

9 Op. cit., p. 54.

10 Op. cit., p. 246.

11 Op. cit., p. 221.

12 David Morley, The Nationwide Audience, BFI, 1980.

13 David Bloor, Knowledge and Social Imagery, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1976, pp. 5-6.

14 I am again thinking in particular of David Morley's study.

15 Valentin Volosinov, Marxism and the Philosophy of Language, Seminar Press, 1973; originally published in 1929.