

A Critical Historical Overview of Media Approaches

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SUMMARY

The article offers an overview of the main approaches to the media and introduces the reader to the most influential media theories. It deals with the historical development of the relationship of media, culture, society, and the public. It traces the development of different notions of culture, their impacts on the media, and their relationships to various conceptions of "the public". It draws on this history to explore current debates about the influences of the media and society on public life. In the first part, the paper deals with some issues of the relation between theories of communication and theories of society. It grounds the study of the media and communication in the classical social theory and in the context of liberal pragmatism (Chicago School). It tries to answer the questions such as how Dewey, Lippman, Mead, et al. conceptualize the media and communications and what theoretical assumptions underlie liberal pragmatism. Further, it seeks to explore the differences between Mass Communication research (Media Effects Tradition) and Critical Theory (the Frankfurt School). The main question in this section is how the ideas of thinkers associated with the "critical" tradition compare with those of the "liberal" and "media effects" traditions. The article also focuses on the differences between British Cultural Studies and the American version of cultural studies. Lastly, it reviews the debate in Feminist and Audience approaches to the media.

Ključne riječi: medijske teorije, javnost, utjecaj medija, masovne komunikacije, pristup medijima

The goal of this article is to offer an overview of the main mass media approaches. The ultimate purpose of this paper is to approach social theory's role in larger under-

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standings of the media as a set of economic, social, cultural and political practices and to critically engage with the literature and the ideas of media scholars.

Any debate on the major theoretical perspectives in the field of media studies is going to be somehow incomplete –different discussions usually offer only some fundamental approaches to the media that are generally divided as following: *Classical Social Theory*; *Mass Communication Research (media effects) theories*; *The Liberal Tradition (Pragmatism, the Chicago School and the Symbolic Interactionism)*; *Mass Society/Mass Culture theories*; *The Public Sphere theories*; *Feminist theories*; *Communication Policy*; *Media Audience Research*; *Structuralism and Semiotics*; *Post-structuralism and Postmodernism*; *International Communication and Globalization theories*. In this article, I will focus on the approaches that I see as the ones associated with **macro-questions of media-society relation**: *Classical Social Theory and Political economy theories*, *The Liberal Tradition*, *Critical Tradition* (in relation with *Administrative research*), and *Cultural Studies*. At the end, general *Feminist* and *Audience research* arguments are also presented.

The following overview provides only some aspects of the terrain of media, cultural and/or social analysis, whether in terms of different theoretical perspectives, and paradigms, or objects of study. This article is meant to offer a summary of the main theoretical media approaches. I believe that without an underlying theory of society, any research program will fragment into pieces – media are a reflection of political-economic forces. Mass media are social institutions, working in a society, with their own distinctive set of norms and practices but with the scope of their activities subject to definition by the wider society. Theory of the media can be little more than a specific application of broader social theory. As Czitrom argues (1982: 142), “social totality must be taken into accounts in any analysis of one of its aspects”. According to McQuail (1984) and Garnham (1989), one of the main general differences of perspectives in relation to the mass media and society is the one that separates “media centric” from “society centric” approaches. The first approach attributes much more autonomy and influence to the media and concentrates on the media’s own sphere of activity (such as Media effects tradition); the latter takes a view of the media as so much a reflection of political and economic forces that theory of the media can be little more than a special application of broader social theory.

We as media scholars, should be more than interested in the so-called “integrated approach” argument – we should go beyond the dominant paradigms by which the media are theorized and at the same time we should draw attention to this important intellectual project of “building a bridge” between the micro- and macro- approaches, i.e. *textual*, *audience research*, *reception theory* (scholars focus here on the “active audience” notion, the construction of meaning, decoding process, interpretation of media texts, generally, on the consumption process) and *political economy approaches* of mass media. It is necessary to provide explanations of social and cultural phenomena and the determinations which produce these phenomena through theory – and that theory requires some notion of totality which can enable the understanding of the specificity of social phenomena as the effects of that totality.

So, I am going to take the opportunity of this question to emphasize the role of different social theories in critical approaches to the study of the mass media. I do want to qualify that emphasis, however, with the important observation that the political economic approach is just part of what I see as a more comprehensive set of concerns. I do not see political economy as excluding either poststructuralist, feminist or audience research, rather I believe that these approaches with disparate emphases can complement each other.

This paper is an inquiry and investigation of the main (media/social) theoretical discourses. My arguments are organized historically and conceptually in accordance with what is considered to be the central concerns of media studies. The first part will introduce the foundations of media studies in **Classic social theory and political economy arguments**. The argument of **political economy**, that media are seen as a channel for the flow of messages from society's dominant institutions, will be presented.¹ The second part will briefly address the communication studies in the context of American **liberal pragmatism and Chicago School**. Third section will focus on the comparison of **administrative vs. critical media research**. I will present Mass communication research as an example of the narrow specialism of the mass communication discipline, which has created a media centric approach in which attention has been devoted to instrumental techniques. On the other hand, the Frankfurt school of 'critical' theory is important in the media theory for offering the first Marxist attempt to theorize about the media. Next section will introduce some important descriptions of **American and British cultural studies** (developed in the 1960's and 1970's), as they represent an important response to mainstream mass communication debates on media effects and audience behavior change. Also, I follow here Williams and his conception of "culture" that invokes symbolic and material domains, and his argument that the study of culture requires investigating the relations between the two. The last two sections briefly present the **Feminist** and '**Active audience**' approaches, as examples of interpretative resistance arguments, where audiences are seen as actively interpreting media texts.

The classical social theorists (Weber, Marx, Durkheim, Simmel, and Tonnies) were attempting to understand and explain the nature of the emerging "modern" society in relationship to the social order it was replacing. So, to ground the study of mass media and communication, one has to establish a context of classical social theory and modernization through the approach of political economy.

(Media) Political Economy Approach

Marx's theory offers contemporary media scholars a potentially useful framework for theorizing both production and consumption of the mass media. Following Marx, the scholars discuss the role that the media play in helping to construct and reinforce a dominant ideology. They see access to the means of production of ideology as monopolized by elite groups. They note that the basis of the dominant ideology is to justify the dominant social relations between classes. This justification of social relations allows the dominant groups to continue their economic exploitation of non-ruling

members, by idealizing the relationships and convincing these individuals that the social relations are the best ones possible. The focus in this tradition is on the corporate structure of the mass media in countries such as the United States that demonstrates that the production of ideology remains a form of production like any other, and often operates in connection with other forms of production. Major corporations which own media outlets often own companies involved in other industries (consider Berlusconi in Italy!). Production of news and entertainment is just one more form of production and follows a similar logic. That is to say, it participates in the reproduction of the social relations upon which it is based. Even more significantly, it reproduces contradictions which characterize those social relations.

Media political scholars see the rise of media going in parallel with the process of commodification (Mosco, 1996). Media products are made under conditions of wage labor for sale in the market. The audience of mainly commercial, private media becomes created as commodities for sale to advertisers (Smythe). According to media political economy perspective, media are seen as part of an ideological arena in which various class views are fought out, although within the context of the dominance of certain classes, and in the processes of digitalization, consolidation, deregulation, globalization (Hamelink), commodification, spatialization, structuration (Mosco, 1996), ultimate control is concentrated in monopoly of the capital.

Mass media field did incorporate Marx's model of base and superstructure in analyzing the existing social order: this set of arguments interprets "the media industries" in terms of their economic determination. According to this argument, the media programs, the media contents, the meanings in the media messages are mostly determined by the economic base of the media organizations. So, for example, private media organizations must satisfy the needs of owners, advertisers... in order to maximize the audience... and profit.

In classical Marxist terms, the mass media are seen as "means of production" which in capitalist society are in the ownership of the dominant class. The mass media function to produce "false consciousness" in the working class. This leads to the extreme situation whereby media products are seen as monolithic expressions of dominant class values, which ignores any diversity of values within the media and the possibility of meaning making (Carey, 1977). However, as Garnham (1990) himself points out, such a position neglects the specific effects of cultural production and consumption. Hall presents the "culturalist's" stand, while rejecting economism, but emphasizing the actual experience of subgroups in society and contextualizing the media within a society which is seen as a "a complex expressive totality". For Hall, the mass media do tend to reproduce interpretations which serve the interests of the dominant class, but they are also "a field of ideological struggle".

The different media sectors cannot be studied in isolation. Political economy looks at processes of consolidation, diversification, commercialization, internationalization, the working of the profit motive in the hunt for audiences and/or for advertising, and its consequences for media practices and media content. According to Mosco (1996) political economy in its narrow sense is the study of the social relations that constitute the production, distribution, and consumption of resources, including communications.

In the next section, I will locate the communication studies in the context of liberal pragmatism and Chicago School of sociology, while providing the historical origins and basic tenets of liberalism as a political philosophy, and how they are manifested in the ideas of thinkers associated with the “liberal tradition” in communication studies: Dewey, Lippmann, Mead, and Blumer. I will address this question of how does liberalism shape their views about society, individual, and media.

Liberalism and its Consequences in the Mass Media Discipline

An important debate in the Mass Media field is devoted to capitalism and liberalism. Liberalism and capitalism have won, we are told, and the (also media) market is seen as fulfilling the requirements of the abstract individual almost everywhere in the world.

Liberalism

Classical liberal thought emerged out of the Reformation (16th century) and the 17th century protestant/puritan view that the individual himself and alone was responsible to God for the conduct of his own soul. Liberalism placed the individual as the main actor in economic, political, cultural spheres. Liberalism was born from a political struggle, at the rise of modernity (and bourgeoisie!) to escape from the political authority exercised by the Monarch and Church. The rise of liberalism goes hand in hand with the rise of middle-class, capitalism, nationalism, individualism and mass communication. In liberalism, civil liberties, individualism, capitalism, self-determinism and freedom were prior to anything else. The source of the ideas of classical liberalism can be traced to Descartes, Hobbes, Locke. There are a broad set of criteria to determine classical liberalism, as introduced by Siebert, Peterson and Schramm (1956), Thompson (1991), Kramnick (1990), Holton (1996), Bramson (1961), Durham-Peters (1989), and Harvey (1989):

1. An emphasis is on the (rational) individual;
2. The primacy of the right of private property, a free-market system;
3. The desire for a limited government;
4. Liberalism is an abstract theory, claiming the rule of law, which applies equally to all;
5. The idea of liberty and equal opportunity to compete on the market-place;
6. The universal applicability of described characteristics.

The strength of liberalism was that it claimed to replace the old traditional, feudal order with a new process of liberalization and democratization of society. However, the liberal ideal of equality of opportunity, Kramnick argues (12), “legitimizes a system in which some people have more than others,” and further “equality of opportunity is a theory, not really of quality but of justified and morally acceptable inequality”. Liberalism sets its reliance on science, empiricism, and competition/race idea, and this is reflected in free-market economic theory and American social theory. Liberalism and free-market economy allow the changes inside society, within the context of the system itself. This is further reflected in American social theory which addresses changes inside the system, in the micro-cosmos of society. According to Bramson (1961: 50), inside the American context, sociology of conservation (occupied

with social problems such as alcoholism, divorce, criminality...) evolved, resting on liberty, equality and natural law, maintaining American norms and status-quo. "It was the absence of a prior feudal tradition in America which accounted for the failure of the appearance of a powerful socialist movement (50)".

And here one enters the understanding of Chicago school and their views on existing political and economic systems as the proper spheres within which it is possible, so they claim, to solve any social problems. The problem for these scholars is not the system itself, but that some domains in society are not perfected (education, communication...). If only perfected, we can achieve Dewey's "Great Community". Pragmatists saw the centrality of communication in their theories. They've viewed society as an aggregate of individuals and they emphasized communication as means for these individuals to create a "perfect" society. That individuals would share the same meaning among themselves could happen through the media. Park (1923: 280) argues that "Through the newspapers, the whole country was enabled to participate in the discussions by which issues were framed and legislation was enacted". Pragmatists believed strongly in the power of education, communication and technology as means to help the social system itself. Chicago school believed that in society consensus should be the main end in order to achieve and preserve commitment to the liberal ideals.

Chicago School: Addressing Social Issues, while Protecting 'the Individual'

Dewey, Lippmann, Park, Mead, Blumer did incorporate main characteristics of classical liberalism, namely, the primacy of individual and the ideal of equality of opportunity. They tried to understand, how "perfect society" could be achieved. According to Hardt (1992: 35) "American pragmatism intended to explore the conditions and meanings under which people interact as enterprising, moral individuals who share the possibility of change or improvement".

Those pragmatists' deep beliefs in improving communication and in the power of communication are seen in Park's writing, when writing that "if the newspapers are to be improved, it will come through education of the people and the organization of political information and intelligence". Following, if there are problems within society, they can be addressed by improving education and communication process. Not revolution, not changing the existing structures, but believing that with evolution, conflicting issues will be solved. Lippmann and Dewey both believe that one cannot expect that citizens would act and participate in public affairs as well-informed public. They both claim that the absence of creative political debate among those who participate in the public sphere is the consequence of the "circus game", to divert attention from public matters. But they both reflect a belief in existing system. Lippmann (1922), for example, wanted to solve the problem of communication with "experts" – his principal argument was that democratic theory asked far too much of ordinary citizens. They could not be expected to be active and involved in all the important public issues of the day. Part of the problem, in Lippmann's estimation, was the public's general inattention and lack of concern about political affairs (Lippmann: 13-29). The political world is "out of reach, out of sight, out of mind (Lippmann: 29)". There is no such thing as informed public opinion. Lippmann concludes that the common interest

in life largely eludes public opinion entirely and can be managed only by a **specialized class of experts**. He envisioned a network of intelligence-gathering agencies with independent sources of funding, and unrestricted “access to the facts”, to accomplish those tasks.

Dewey claimed that a public constitutes itself in the process of communication, in a process that becomes an action. Dewey believed that the problem was not incompetence on the part of the public but rather a lack of sufficient methods for public communication. Dewey claims that “in spite of attained integration, or rather perhaps because of its nature, the Public seems to be lost; it is certainly bewildered (116-117)”. But the essential need seems to be the improvement of the methods and conditions of debate, discussion and persuasion and education. That is the problem “of the public”.

Dewey does not deny that “big business” can dominate and rule, but this is because the public is confused about its role and uncertain as to what to do. In addition, people have too many other things to do besides politics. Political and social issues can hardly compete with the multitude of personal distractions. People wish for community, but they feel unable to effect the changes necessary to realize these values, Dewey argues. Dewey (1954) in the following paragraph describes clearly his trust in communicating (142): “... We have the physical tools of communication as never before. The thoughts and aspirations congruous with them are not communicated and hence are not common. Without such communication the public will remain shadowy and formless, seeking spasmodically for itself, but seizing and holding its shadow rather than its substance. Till the Great Society is converted into a Great Community, the Public will remain in eclipse. Communication can alone create a Great Community”.

Chicago school in general had no room to address issues of power, conflict, class relations, and social practices. They coped with practical questions such as “How the media might improve American life? (Czitrom: 93)” while trying to improve the existing social order... To conclude, liberalism resulted in a conservative sociology of Pragmatists that tried to address the problematic issues and their solutions inside the social system/order, and not question social system/order itself.

In the following section, I am going to compare and evaluate critical *vs.* administrative research approaches. Namely, in the history of the field of mass communication, two different strands oppose each other: administrative *vs.* critical one. The one which saw problems of media and society in technological terms, analyzing short-term and measurable research questions with empirical methodology *vs.* the one which analyses ideology of modern capitalist societies and adopts a holistic approach with a methodology of imminent critique of society as totality.

Administrative *vs.* Critical Media Theories

One of the father figures of administrative research, Lazarsfeld (1941), has introduced his ideas on differences between administrative and critical research in the article “*Remarks on Administrative and Critical Communication Research*”, where he claimed that critical theory is to meet the broader needs of social progress which might not be approved by establishment. Lazarsfeld was sympathetic toward critical theory,

but misunderstood and ignored the role of culture in explaining the media sphere. Not surprisingly, the views of Lazarsfeld and the Frankfurt school have never coincided. Administrative research was taking for granted the liberal, pluralist, capitalist values in society and was serving the interest of industry with its research. Frankfurt school was on the other hand more than clear in recognizing and considering the social and economic context in which administrative research operates. Critical theory presents strong criticism of the culture industry and the consumer society. Overall, critical theorists attempted to develop a substantive social theory that dealt with a variety of social practices in contrast with traditional, empirical communication research.

Theories of Media Effects/Administrative Research

One sees the rise of Mass Communication Research in the 1930's, 1940's and 1950's in USA. The intellectual base rests on the sociology of pragmatism and Chicago school. That means that their research focuses on the individual, who is a unit of the research. Society is seen as a conglomerate, an aggregate of the individuals, and not as a whole, as constructed by social classes. Lazarsfeld's, Katz's, Laswell's, Klapper's interests in marketing, political propaganda, audience measurement meant that effects, influence, persuasion, attitude change were the major themes in administrative research.

The empirical research whose intensive development had started already at the beginning of the 20th century had an important yet contradictory impact on all social sciences, also media studies. With innovative ideas developing in the social sciences which started to be realized through empirical research, social sciences were finally acquiring a more important position in universities and a more generous financial support, while the visionary imagination, so typical for the development of theory in centuries gone by, was about to be lost. Positivism, as the elementary principle of the cognition theory, that stressed the principle of empirical "validation" based on the theory of derived hypotheses, inspired optimism of some people that social sciences may finally become "scientific", too. The development of mathematical models in economic science and of experimental psychology was followed by systematic, quantitative research of human behavior/attitude and mind/opinion/thought. The empirical research often exaggerated in stressing the importance of operational definitions of notions as well as their measurability as to solving practical problems while neglecting theoretical definitions and critical role of theory in directing the development of society.

The characteristic of these studies was the interest in the effects of mass media on the individual's behavior and in distinctive one-sided inclination towards the use of quantitative methods in empirical research. The research of mass communication followed the principle of value-free neutral research, in which the understanding of 'communication' as interaction was reduced to a simplified comprehension of communication as a transmission. The mass communication research, at the initial stage of which Theodor Adorno, the critical theoretician from the Frankfurt group, took part in it, too, is often regarded as the beginning of market research and as an example of "administrative" research – the research oriented to measurable short-term, individual,

behavioral characteristics as well as characteristics of opinion and especially of the effects of (mass) communication which subordinates to the administrative ideology. According to it the researchers consider their tasks to be of merely technical nature and themselves to be the scientists, while ignoring the values, which gave rise to the problem, or the social consequences of the results. Lazarsfeld himself defined his research as “administrative”, yet not in the sense of being limited by the administrative ideology, which his critics, Theodor Adorno as the first, defined as the fundamental (conservative!) characteristic feature of the administrative research.

The rise of empirical research lies in the context of social and political needs for knowledge on the power of information and its role in controlling society. The critique of mass media research usually stresses that they offer no interpretation and no theoretical involvement in the debate over social system as a whole. They base their research on two assumptions: 1. All cultural phenomena are measurable; 2. One can ask questions only inside the system (which is a commercial one!). According to Hardt (1992: 96), “Mass communication research had no apparent theoretical framework for a critical assessment of the role of the media in American society”.

All of the above is also rooted in social engineering model, which is based on the assumption that people can be shaped, affected, controlled. It believes that when one has data, one can predict a correlation between variables while using objective, true methods. Social engineering idea (one can do into a message a kind of a construction, which will effect the message to be more effective) assesses that you can use media messages to socially engineer society.

The following is a short overview of the most important studies/scholars of Media effects tradition (powerful (‘The Hypodermic Needle model’) and limited media effects):

LAZARFELD&ASSOCIATES/FOLLOWERS (1955 (Personal Influence); 1968 (The People’s Choice)):

Lazarsfeld and his associates pose a research question on the effects of mass media in society, and further, the effects that media have on the audience. They argue for a “two-step flow of influence”.

CULTIVATION THEORY:

Gerbner (1973) tried to prove that the image of reality shapes (cultivates) the conception of real reality for the audience. Gerbner et. al. claim that media affect the social construction of reality. Those members of the audience with a high exposure to the media perceive the “real world” in television terminology. Cultivation research based on analysis of violence on the television, has found a high correlation between the amount of viewing television and the level of violence people attribute to the outside world.

USES AND GRATIFICATIONS:

The researchers ask a question what we do with the media. Uses and gratifications “derives from a conviction that what is central for mass communication is not message-making or sending and not even the messages themselves, but the choice, reception and manner of response of the audience (Mcquail, 131). As a method they use surveys. Underlying assumptions of the research is that media have a function and people have needs and try to fulfill them. Uses and gratifications studies ask the question: “What do people do with the mass media?” rather than the one asked by media effects: “What do media do to people?” Uses and gratifications research only asks a question WHY people like what they get (within the existing commercial media structure) and would not pose questions like WHAT ELSE would people like.

AGENDA SETTING:

The researchers of Agenda-Setting argue that the mass media focus our attention on certain topics of life, and in doing so, they set agenda for us. Mass media tell us what themes to think about (Maxwell, McCombs, Shaw, 1972: 182).

To recap, the Mass Communication research “was not a critique of the political-economic system or a challenge of positivism as a foundation of media research at that time, nor was it an attempt to impose a new vision of a social democratic society (Hardt, 110).”

Critical Theory – Basic Characteristics

A totally opposite position of Frankfurt School was developed in 1940s, with a close affiliation to Marxism. Critical theory is a particular version of Marxism, because it attempts to get away from the emphasis placed on the economy as the major way of explaining how societies work. They turned their attention to the ideological processes and they understood social theory as a form of social practice that must be aware of the ways in which it is linked with other social practices.

The methodology of critical theory seeks to overcome traditional boundaries between disciplines such as psychology, literary theory, art history, philosophy, social sciences, and musicology. Such boundaries, they argued, reflected the specialization of industrial capitalism and shifted away attention from the understanding of systemic relations that shaped society. In attempting to grasp the society as a whole, the critical tradition shifted focus away from the individual and toward the social determinants within which individuals live.

They see the potential for social control made possible by scientific rationality, in which their critique of the Enlightenment is identified. School argues that the modern state employed rational and pervasive forms of social control – especially through mass culture and mass media. Critical theory analyses the relations in society and places them within their historical settings. It attempts to provide understanding of the historical and economic pressures that shape the existing social structures and some of them even offer theories that go beyond a mere explanation of how the system was created and continues to operate. They theorize about how it can be transformed. However, for Horkheimer, the goal of social theory is “to conceptualize and struggle

to eliminate social and historical causes of suffering (Kellner, 1990: 12).” The need to transform comes from oppression of monopoly capitalism and its alienating individuals.

“*Dialectic of Enlightenment (1987)*”, and especially the chapter “*The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception*” puts forward a general view of the cultural industry (mass media!) in society. The dialectic approach uncovers the positive and negative consequences of the application of reason. As Enlightenment had promised that the power of reason will lead to emancipation, progress, and prosperity, Adorno and Horkheimer argue that there are other, negative outcomes: exploitation of nature, exploitation of people. Even culture (and space!) is organized according to capitalist rules. The emphasis on the media as part of a capitalist industrialization, commodification and fetishization which leads toward capitalism’s domination of social order has been the main argument of the Frankfurt School. Frankfurt School was engaged in a critique of the Enlightenment and tried to uncover the belief in scientific and rational progress which promised human freedom. Their attack on the domination of culture industry and the attack on Hollywood’s commodified products resulted from living and dealing with the manipulation of consciousness by the fascist regimes... and this is the consequence of their idea that administrative and instrumental world is the outcome of the Enlightenment project. Especially Adorno expresses pessimism about the relationship between theory and practice... but the Critical theory remained radical in theory itself – of culture. However, theory itself is a strong form of resistance to governmental or commercial pressures of capitalism. The School steps outside empirical, instrumental capitalist world and criticizes this “one-dimensional world (Marcuse)”.

In the following paragraph, Adorno and Horkheimer point to similarities between industrial and cultural production and also stress the homogenization of cultural industry (123): “The ruthless unity in the culture industry is evidence of what will happen in politics. Marked differentiations such as those of A and B films, or of stories in magazines in different price ranges, depend not so much on subject matter as on classifying, organizing, and labeling consumers. Something is provided for all so that none may escape; the distinctions are emphasized and extended. The public is catered for with a hierarchical range of mass-produced products of varying quality, thus advancing the rule of complete quantification. Everybody must behave (as if spontaneously) in accordance with his previously determined and indexed level, and choose the category of mass product turned out for his type. Consumers appear as statistics on research organization charts, and are divided by income groups into red, green, and blue areas; the technique is that used for any type of propaganda”.

Both, the optimistic and pessimistic lines of critical theory are evident particularly in its attitude towards the study of mass communications. For Horkheimer and Adorno, the media shape and create the mass produced consciousness that goes parallel with monopolistic modes of production in industrial capitalism. “The might of industrial society is lodged in men’s minds... The culture industry as a whole has molded men as a type unfailingly reproduced in every product (Horkheimer and Adorno, 127)”. What is of high importance here is this view that economic system

provides an 'illusionary' choice between the various, functionally identical products of mass production, but by shaping specific consciousness in which this choice is 'naturalized' as freedom. In their words (166-167), "all are free to dance and enjoy themselves, just as they have been free, since the historical neutralization of religion, to join any of the innumerable sects. But freedom to choose an ideology – since the ideology always reflects economic coercion – everywhere proves to be freedom to choose what is always the same".

To end, critical theory creates an entire philosophical system, while administrative research uses as its methodology the scientific method. In this sense, in its understanding of social theory as social practice, critical theory attempts at the same time to engage in such practice and to theorize about it.

The next section will briefly re-consider the essential characteristics of "cultural studies" in Britain and United States and assess the intellectual roots and their definitions of the role of the media – media as cultural institutions (British tradition) and media as texts (American tradition). The following section is reflecting the thinking and belief that the explanation of everything by economic causes alone is never exhaustive in any sense – one finds most compelling the arguments made by Williams that provide a new conceptual language for thinking about culture, media and power that go beyond this simple base-structure model. Namely, Williams attempts to address the issue of dynamics and processes of power as manifested in the relations between economic, political and cultural forms and structures. He recognizes structures within the text and material structures and institutions that create and frame cultural production within society. He sees culture as both product of and produced by society. Culture is not the passive reflection of its mode of production, nor does it offer an unlimited scale of meanings through which humans can construct their own realities.

Cultural Studies

Cultural studies theorists, coming from mainly literary studies, re-focus their research questions on the wider **cultural** environment. They start theorizing popular culture as a whole, which was before regarded as an ideological machine by the Frankfurt school. This approach understood that the media as a part of a society do have important effects, but these were not direct and short-term, but were the contribution of media to consciousness through the cultural codes in which the media framed the reality – but not as neutral, objective organization serving the public interest, but as institutions working inside the specific social relations, serving to reproduce them.

British Cultural studies started by Hoggart (1957) and Hall (1980) at Birmingham Center. The main concern of cultural studies is that culture must be studied within the social relations and the system in which culture is produced and consumed. The study of politics and economics is seen as the most important step in understanding culture itself. Cultural studies offer analysis of media/popular culture – through different readings of the texts; through considering the sphere of leisure; through opening the space for meaning construction and the term "active audience", through legitimizing popular culture, preserving working-class culture, while at the same time not neglect-

ing the notions of power, ideology, hegemony... They are occupied with questions of HOW our daily lives are constructed, and how culture forms/creates its subjects. Hoggart, for example, in *"The Uses of Literacy"* calls for interconnection and understanding of mass culture/popular culture, working class culture, and structures of individuals' everyday life.

In British Cultural studies, for the first time in media studies, serious emphasis has been put on "the human agency" itself – on the active production and active consumption of cultural products by positioning a reader/viewer. The theorists do open culture as a field of different forms and practices – and in this way carry Frankfurt school tradition: they focus on culture and ideology, they see culture as a mode of ideological reproduction and hegemony, where cultural forms shape the modes of thought. But they also see culture as a form of resistance to capitalism. Hoggart is committed to working-class culture, but while arguing that "larger part of population is reduced to a condition of receptive passivity", he recognizes that working class has had a strong natural ability to survive change by adopting what they want in the sphere of culture.

There is a debate in the British tradition about the extent to which media are directly determined by the dominant elite and the extent to which media represent spaces of resistance. Much of the work in this tradition deals with subordinate groups and their "way of life (Williams)"- working-class, women, youth... Cultural studies understood society as made up of a number of competing cultures – the question raised was the one about the degree to which media reflect and "impose" a dominant version of culture, through which the world appears as a "natural order" beyond the questioning... and without a possibility of legitimizing other possible versions, visions of the world. The question posed is how such processes of cultural domination through the media are made possible? In British cultural studies one clearly sees this "turn to Gramsci" and his concept of hegemony. Williams (110) argues that "hegemony is then not only the articulate upper level of 'ideology', nor are its forms of control only those ordinarily seen as 'manipulation' or 'indoctrination'. It is a whole body of practices and expectations, over the whole of living – it thus constitutes a sense of reality for most people in the society, a sense of absolute because experienced reality beyond which it is very difficult for most members of the society to move".

Culture

Raymond Williams defined culture as a particular way of life shaped by values, traditions, beliefs, material objects, and territory. He claims that culture is the way social life is experienced, the meaning and values which inform the human action... basically, culture is the context. It's how we talk and dress, the food we eat, how we divide time and space. So, he further defines the theory of culture as the study of relationship between elements in a whole way of life. The analysis of culture is the attempt to discover the nature of the organization of these relationships. A key notion, in such analysis, is "a structure of feeling" – shared set of ways of thinking and feeling in a specific cultural setting. He turned his attention from high culture to culture as a way of life and argued that one has to read this specific "structure of feeling"... for example, through the documentary record of culture/poems/dresses...

One of the developments, which have encouraged cultural studies is the tendency to view more and more domains of human activity precisely as “culture”. This is no doubt a part of the larger trend toward reflexivity. The “culture” in cultural studies points to the sociologically and anthropologically based concerns with the practices and products of human activity. Meaning is seen as socially constructed, and cultural studies are very much directed toward analyzing how it is structured, articulated and circulated in various settings. However, Williams distinguishes three levels of culture, even in its most general definition. There is *the lived culture* of a particular time and place, fully accessible to those living in that time and place, there is *the recorded culture*, of every kind, from art to the most everyday facts: the culture of a specific period. There is also, as the factor connecting lived culture and period cultures, *the culture of the selective tradition*. Williams points out that culture is a key category in understanding a social totality – he connects literary analysis and social inquiry. Again, he does not see culture as simply a part of superstructure – he argues one should examine the processes that integrate the base and superstructure.

What Williams is interested in is a lived culture – the patterns of the social order as experienced by human beings, and how they shape and create social reality. We cannot understand anything in isolation... everything exists in a specific context and within wider networks. Through this understanding of culture, he acknowledges the role that human agency plays in the process. Culture was a process – and if culture was a created product of human agents, then the potential was established to form a culture in the collective public interest. His issue was the need to understand the role of the culture in its relations to structures of power and to stress the role that culture played in politics. The notion that culture was merely a reflection of economy was challenged. Culture was seen as an active creation of collectives, it was a way of life.

American Version of Cultural Studies

The American version of cultural studies adopted some research questions of British Cultural studies, while mostly neglecting political concerns. In the British cultural studies, culture and within it the media are understood as the domain of ideological struggle/as a site for class and labor struggle. In American version, the media are seen as a public forum that provides a mechanism for expressing collective values and the therapeutic self-experiencing of the world/reality.

While thinking about major differences between the two,² the question asked is “why are these two theoretical approaches classified together as “cultural studies”? I guess part of the answer lies in Careys’ (1977) critique of “transmission model” and his own argument that his ritual model is based on European critical theory. With his “ritual model”, Carey critiqued the existing “effects tradition”, so strongly dominating the Mass Communication field. Carey (412) himself states that “American studies are grounded in a transmission view of communication – they see communication as a process of transmitting messages at a distance for the purpose of control. In European studies, communication is viewed as a process through which a shared culture is created, modified, transformed – that is ritual model”.

But all that Carey's model did was to suggest to American scholars to take a wider approach in understanding the existing social order and cultural practices. American scholars started to study popular culture/music... from different points of view, while moving away from direct, behavioral effects. However, as O'Connor (1989: 405) states, "Carey makes a case for a 'ritual' perspective in which communication is understood as part of the creation and transformation of a shared culture...but interpretative approach for which he calls does not address the issue of its own political intentions. It is presented as a humanities subject in the university, beyond politics".

British cultural studies had, on the other hand, a strong political agenda – through Williams' and Halls' writing and their application of Marx and Gramsci. The purpose of Hall's analysis is to realize the ideological forces inside society and to create a space for resistance. On the other hand, what Carey continues to hold is exactly the ideas of American pragmatists and their belief in shared values/community/consensus/inside society itself. Carey clearly pushes ideology and politics out from the center of the research – in order to examine the collective, shared beliefs in the community, in order to understand multiple realities 'out there' (424): "The task remains: to seize upon the interpretations people place on existence and to systematize them so they are more readily available to us (Carey)".

So, Carey (1973), and Payne (1989), end up with interpreting culture for the sake of interpretation itself. Read Payne when he argues that Hollywood ("*Wizard of Oz*") provides necessary therapy for the viewers, but at the same time he does not offer any analysis of WHY is necessary to have these therapeutic experiences/to whom do they serve/whose interests are being served/who creates the moral order.... "...the slipper, as found in Cinderella and more obscure tales represents the vagina. In fairy tales about young women, Bettelheim finds 'red' representing menstrual blood. The slippers bring surprising and unexpected power to Dorothy. The wicked witch, who has lost sexual innocence, power, and vibrancy makes Dorothy the object of envy and threat (Payne)".

Newcomb (1994) presents a more text-oriented version which points to the multiple meanings in television and other mass media, but he does not put attention to the political/economic structure of society (O'Connor, 406). "In its role as central cultural medium television presents a multiplicity of meanings rather than a monolithic dominant point of view. It often focuses on our most prevalent concerns, our deepest dilemmas... almost any version of the TV text functions as a forum in which important cultural topics may be considered (Newcomb, 506,507)".

Most scholars write that media are "re-affirming" collective values and morality. The question WHY this interpretation/stories are important remains unanswered.

What is interesting, then, is the adoption of Halls' notions of negotiated/preferred readings to argue that since people make their own meanings, the marketplace of ideas is really free and democratic. Hall has developed a theory of text which allows the degree of "negotiated" or "oppositional" readings of the text by audience. This means that audiences/readers don't 'just' watch TV passively, accepting the meaning intended by ... producers. Instead, they negotiate meaning in the media text. Depending on their cultural backgrounds, some people might accept most of the media text's mes-

sage, and others reject it almost entirely. To explain this further, Hall proposed a model of encoding-decoding of media discourses. In this model, the meaning of the text, which is located somewhere between its producer and the reader, is encoded by producer in a specific way, and the reader decodes the text's message differently.

However, there are some compelling arguments to be found inside the American Cultural studies. Carey defends his positions while arguing that looking through the narrow lens of political economy we might well end up taking a one-dimensional approach. This causes us to overlook various ways in which media not only propagate a particular view of the world, but serve as means of uniting some groups and dividing others – of shaping and propagating the rituals that characterize not only the economic aspects of our lives, but also realms that transcend material existence: that of the symbolism, arts, of culture, and sociability. He argues that the study of communication needs to be more than the one dimensional exploration of exploitation. It ought to focus on the miracle of social reproduction, on rituals – which makes possible not just the extraction of surplus value, but the possibility and hope of resistance.

The differences between Carey and Hall – between British and American cultural studies – have historical dimensions. British cultural studies, as argued, have their roots in a class-based society. American cultural studies have their roots in liberal pragmatism of Dewey and his optimism in the power of communication. O'Connor (1989: 407) sees the cause of difference between British and American cultural studies in relative isolation of cultural studies scholars in USA... and the relative absence of a Left intellectual tradition. One could divided American mass communication research tradition and European mass communication research tradition as administrative *vs.* critical research, specialist *vs.* holistic, quantitative *vs.* qualitative approaches, the micro *vs.* macro, the applied *vs.* the theoretic...

In the last two sections, two other important approaches to the media are going to be presented, Feminist and Audience studies of the media.

Feminist Studies of the Media

Feminist studies are rooted in political action and strategies for change, whether challenging sexism in everyday life, the use of sexist language, or levels of representation of women in decision making.

In this brief presentation of the main (media) feminist perspectives, I want to point out that this specific concern with women and the media already emerged in the early 1970s. One can divide the area of feminist research into several spheres of interest: liberal feminism, poststructuralist, radical, Marxist and social one. The questions of media feminist writers relate to the key issues of representation, which has been of central concern inside media studies, but also to the issues of the place of women in the media institutions and women as audience. Steeves (1993), for example, analyzed the themes and characters on prime-time network TV from 1955-1986 and argues that "Female characters are less in evidence than males and, in many ways, are portrayed as the weaker sex. They are less likely to be mature adults, and are less well educated..."

The approaches pay attention to women's feelings, experiences and ideas about the media. Feminist's emphasis on ethnography and women's own "readings" of media texts has been one of the most fruitful ones. Authors like Andrea Press, Ien Ang, Mary Ellen Brown, Leslie Steeves, Michele Mattelart, Annete Kuhn, Paula Treichler and Ellen Wartella, Ann Kaplan, Elizabeth Long provide studies that are one of the most dynamic and diverse areas of research in media studies. The focus on "active female audience" and this notion of "polysemy" that leaves the room for the female audience to construct meanings and create "resistance" identity is an important one. These studies came up with many important arguments, such as that many women enjoy watching series such as *Cagney&Lacey*, and because that it is likely that at least part of their pleasure is related to the 'positive' representations of women that this series offer. Also, some of the analyses on soap-operas offer an important and constructive site for understanding how and why soap-opera as a text becomes a vital part of the ideological construct which naturalizes 'women's place' in the home.

A classic example of "decoding" media texts by female audience is Radway's "*Reading Romance*" research (1984) – to summarize, women in her research talked about the reading of romances in terms of their taking time for themselves within a context of family demands. Radway finds regularities in the meanings that her readers took from texts, and associates these with her subject's situation and feelings as wives and mothers within patriarchal marriage. She explores the relationship between reading, reading strategies, social competencies, and pleasure and she sees romance reading as a form of individual resistance to patriarchy and capitalism.

One more work is worth mentioning here, and it can serve as a bridge to the next section, the section on the audience research and its focus on different ways that the audience interprets media texts. Press's (1991) research "*Women Watching Television*" focuses on the relationship between social structure and audience interpretation. She interviewed middle-class and working class women and their television viewing preferences. The class plays the most important role here in determining the meaning. "Working-class women are particularly vulnerable to televisions' presentation of the material counterments of middle-class life as the definition of what is normal in society (138)". Why I see Press's work important is that she makes a broader connection between production, class, media content, and audience interpretation – the elements of media-society model.

Audience Research

Audience analysis belongs to a long and extended tradition within mass communication research. Study of the audience is also central to any understanding of the role of the media in contemporary society. In order to understand its origins and its role, it is necessary to mention some theoretical models which have contributed to the shift from the consideration of the receivers as passive to active in their interaction with mass media. These are Morley's "*The Nationwide Audience*" and Fiske's "*Television Culture*". In addition, selected ethnographic studies are presented to discuss the

issues related to people's uses and interpretations of television, and how people are active agents in their uses of the media of communication.

Morley's "*The Nationwide Audience (1980)*" is one of the crucial works here, in which Morley analyzed the specific media text to determine the "preferred" meaning of the text and he interviewed viewers from different social backgrounds to understand how specific social position and meaning-making are connected. There is a strong concern for empirical investigation (mostly ethnography) of this process of 'decoding' the texts. Morley uses Hall's "encoding-decoding" model here to investigate how and why people read the preferred meaning in the text, but how are they also able to develop "negotiated" meaning, or how they construct "oppositional" reading.

There are important questions about the factors which influence how and in what ways people come to texts in the first place. The process of 'reading', in other words, is influenced by a range of factors that includes the structure of the text itself, the social context, within which the text is read, the cultural characteristics of readers and the ways in which cultural factors affect their reading.

Morley's interviews with the different families, raise important questions about the effects of gender, also in terms of power and control over remote-control, program choice, viewing style, amounts of viewing, television-related discussions, program and channel type preference, national versus local news programming. As he explains, the men and women offer different accounts of their viewing habits-in terms of their differential power to choose what they view, how much they view, their viewing styles... He also notes that women seem to show much less reluctance to "admit" that they talk about television to their friends.

John Fiske's "*Television Culture*" is also centered around the topic of audiences' interpretations of television texts constructed to convey a preferred meaning that reflects the ideas and values of the dominant ideology. The process of interpretation of television programs is determined by the 'discursive practice' used by a particular individual. According to Fiske, whether we interpret a television program or a social experience, we rely on our base of discourses made available by the society we live in. Therefore, if a critical analysis of a television program can identify the discourses which have produced it, it can not predict the discourses that the viewer will use when interpreting and transforming it in a text. In particular, Fiske argues that the acts of making meanings and receiving pleasure out of texts are strictly related to the readers' cultural capital (Bourdieu) and competence.

The 'active audience' approach offers a valuable re-conceptualization of the 'passive recipients' understanding. It pays attention to the consumption process of media texts, and sees people as actively involved not just in meaning-making process, but in constructing their reality. However, not a sufficient thinking has been paid here to the large body of recent research in audience studies. Since I anticipate that my other exam questions will explore some aspects of construction and discourse theories..., I will conclude and offer some of my final thoughts in the conclusions.

Conclusions

Have contemporary Western societies moved beyond capitalism towards some postmodern mode of (dis)organization which makes any critique irrelevant, because it is based on so-called meta-narratives? Is subjectivity effect of discursively mediated experience, or of the organization of production and reproduction? Now, what is interesting, regarding the changes inside Academy, are the contradictions of these changes in the mode of knowledge production that have to be understood within the framework of 'late capitalism'. Postmodern assault on "meta-narratives" ("theory") has responded to Marxism/or classical social theories in a conservative political environment by "re-defining" politics to mean resistance of the individual subject to modes of domination located in the discursive forms which constitute the subject. Have media studies, generally speaking, accommodated themselves to these practices? How to address the problematic relationship between structure and agency that poses one of the "central problems" in modern social, media theory? Does "modernity" as a theoretical category, still offer us a space to analyze particular modes of producing the types of subjects required for the prevailing relations of production?

The role is to contribute to the struggle to re-establish the usefulness of the theoretical framework for emancipatory **political project**, while not neglecting the 'superstructure' and irresponsibly dismissing some important postmodern contributions. What kind of cultural politics is necessary today – and necessary for what?

I follow Williams's arguments that the social transformation is not only a consequence of the changes in the material world, but also a consequence of the changes in the realm of ideas and symbols. The social transformations are the consequence of complex relationship between the two spheres. Williams' ideas provide a new conceptual language for thinking about the culture and power.

To end, the discussion about media field is today necessary as ever – Theoretical arguments of the role of the media should belong to the discussions about the relationship between state, civil society and economy as three (theoretically) autonomous areas of modern complex societies. Mass media, as the area for public representation of ideas and interests and free discussion, are an essential and basic condition for the constitution of the civil society. Also, as I presented, the development of media links up with many of the leading issues of Western society, social science and the political sphere in the 20th century – issues concerning a categorical differentiation between the state and the market and a third realm, the public sphere, which is mediating between the two. The questions regarding the balance between the role of technology, economics and public opinion in determining social developments; the mechanisms of political democracy and the role of public debate; questions of national integration and culture; issues of social order and control; and the relative weight given to private vs. public ownership in capitalist societies, all should come together in the study of the media. Media present a "mediated public sphere" and the basic question in media theory concerns the potential for the media to contribute to the public sphere.

ENDNOTES:

- ¹ The main scholars coming from the (media) political economy approach are: Garnham N., Schiller H., Smythe D., Mosco V., Murdock G., Golding P., Keane J., Bennett W.L., McChesney R..
- ² I should emphasize, however, that this distinction between the British and American cultural studies that I am outlining, is not as clear as it seems it is. For example, in the American tradition, Grossberg seems to be more concerned with the notion of power... than Carey's students are. But for the sake of the argument, I am going to adopt this clear distinction between British cultural studies coming from Hall and the version of American cultural studies coming from Carey and his "ritual model of mass communication".
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Zala Volčič

Povijesno kritički pregled pristupa medijima

SAŽETAK

Članak daje pregled glavnih medijskih pristupa i upoznaje nas s najutjecajnijim medijskim teorijama. Bavi se povijesnim razvojem odnosa između medija, kulture, društva i javnosti te prati razvoj raznih poimanja kulture, njihovih utjecaja na medije i njihov odnos prema raznim koncepcijama pojma "javnost". Oslanjajući se na povijest, članak također istražuje novije rasprave o utjecaju medija i društva na javni život. U prvom dijelu, bavi se nekim pitanjima povezanosti teorija komunikacije i teorija društva, pri čemu se temelji na istraživanju medija i komunikacije u klasičnoj socijalnoj teoriji i u kontekstu liberalnog pragmatizma (Čikaška škola). U članku se nastoji dati odgovor na pitanja kako Dewey, Lippman, Mead i drugi, konceptualiziraju medije i komunikacije i na kojim se teorijskim pretpostavkama temelji liberalni pragmatizam. Nadalje, članak pokušava istražiti razlike između istraživanja masovne komunikacije (tradicija učinaka medija) i kritičke teorije (frankfurtska škola). Glavno pitanje u tom dijelu je odnos između ideja mislilaca povezanih s "kritičkom" tradicijom te sljedbenika "liberalne" tradicije i tradicije "medijskih učinaka"... Članak također obrađuje razlike između Britanskih kulturnih studija i Američke verzije kulturnih studija. Konačno, razmatra feministički i receptivni pristup medijima.