I

ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE FIELD OF STUDY
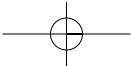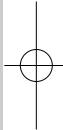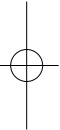
general introduction

EARLY BEGINNINGS

The concept of mass communication first appeared during the 1930s to capture the essence of the dominant means of public communication of the early twentieth century, especially the 'new media' of the day. Although the newspaper press already had a long history, it was only towards the end of the nineteenth century that newspapers escaped from the constraints of localism, elitism or sectionalism (political or religious) and became a medium 'for the masses', although these were still mainly large urban populations. The formal study of the newspaper has its main roots in German universities early in the twentieth century under the heading of *zeitungswissenschaft* (Hardt, 1979; Rosengren, 2000).

Theorists of society on both sides of the Atlantic (including, in America, William Sumner, Albion Small and Robert Park, and, in Europe, Ferdinand Tonnies, Georg Simmel, Gabriel Tarde, Max Weber and Albert Schaffle, among others) emphasized the intimate connection between the development and functioning of modern industrial societies and the newspaper press. The latter was found indispensable to modern democratic politics, economic life and the formation of public opinion. We can say that the impulse towards theorizing about mass media had its origins in a consciousness of the changed character of society. The particular function of the press was to provide the 'social cement' and the 'nervous system' of society (Hardt, 1979) that compensated for the decline of communal ties and the socially disruptive consequences of migration (across frontiers and into cities).

The newspaper press and the 'mass media' that supplemented it (film, radio, phonograph and, later, television) were, however, not primary topics for sociology when it developed as an independent social science and became institutionalized in university teaching and research from the 1940s onwards. The reasons for this marginal position are not obvious, although part of the explanation may be that the 'mass media' did not offer a sufficiently 'serious' subject matter to justify special attention. Sociology focused mainly on social 'problems' such as crime, deviance, poverty, race relations, and social and family dislocation.

The near global catastrophe of two global wars separated by the Great Depression also interrupted the flow of thought about the media, especially in Europe (although it also introduced new themes for theory). By comparison, the 'problems' presented by 'mass media' did not seem very significant. At worst, the media were viewed as an obstacle to cultural and educational advance, a potentially bad influence on children and young people and a source of misleading propaganda. When a theoretical interest in mass communication was revived (in Europe at least) after the Second World War, it tended to be driven either by a critical and normative spirit or by a fascination with the effects of communication technology.

Despite the relative neglect of theorizing in the first era of media expansion and innovation, a small core of theorists (including Paul Lazarsfeld, Harold Lasswell, Carl Hovland and Wilbur Schramm), mainly working in the United States, put together an essential body of theory about 'mass communication' that served the first generation of post-war research and teaching. The key ideas were encapsulated in the ideal-type concept of *mass communication*. This referred to the simultaneous

transmission from a single or centralized (and organized) sender to all or most of a population of a recurring and standardized set of messages (news, information, fiction, entertainment and spectacle), without there being much possibility of responding or answering back.

The concept invokes associations with industrial mass production and the idea of a factory: assembly lines making standardized products and a disciplined workforce that might fancifully extend to include the audience. Mass communication enabled the symbolic and informational dominance of a whole society by those with control of the means of dissemination. It offered to individuals the means of sharing (mentally at least) in the collective life of society while retaining autonomy in the sphere of private behaviour. Mass communication brings about or facilitates the existence of mass audiences, consensus on opinions and beliefs, mass consumer behaviour, mass politics and other features of the so-called mass society. This depiction of a theory of mass communication for purposes of initial presentation has been relatively neutral, simply extrapolating certain logical consequences arising from the operation of a system of public communication with the given characteristics.

The further story of mass communication theory makes it clear that the view outlined is far from an agreed one and may never have been agreed. It rests on a number of questionable (and questioned) assumptions, especially concerning the centralization of control at the source, the uniformity of content as sent and received, the power to influence, and the passivity and 'atomization' of audiences. The concept of *mass communication* is no more than an ideal type of some value in directing inquiry, but departing in greater or less degree from the reality as much then as now. As a paradigm for theory and research about public communication, it has largely been replaced by new ideas, although not by any single, overarching alternative concept.

However, the *system* of communication media that initially gave rise to the concept is, in many respects, as much with us today as it was a century ago, albeit in more highly developed forms. The number of media channels has multiplied, their reach is greater and more effective, and the scale of media operations has transcended national societies to realize global communication. For the most part, the new technical possibilities for 'feedback' (interactive media) and for avoiding the whole system (via personalized information and entertainment supply) have not made much difference to the overall pattern of public communication. For these reasons, it is still worthwhile to follow the sometimes complex twists and turns of the theory of 'mass media' and to continue to apply earlier ideas to contemporary and future developments, even if the notion of 'mass communication' may have a diminished specific resonance and relevance.

SCHOOLS AND APPROACHES

The absence of a fixed disciplinary base during much of the history of mass communication theory has held back the development of a body of substantive theory, but it has promote change and diversity of theoretical approaches. Not surprisingly, however, these largely reflected the currents of thought and the conflicts affecting the social sciences

more generally. Rosengren (1983) mapped out the main types of media theory according to a classification originally developed for schools of sociological theory. For this purpose, the main dimensions were two polarities, one relating to assumptions about science, and the other to assumptions about the nature of society. The first dimension contrasted a 'subjective' with an 'objective' approach; the second distinguished 'radical change' from 'regulation'. When cross-classified, this gives rise to four types or 'paradigms' (of sociology and also communication theory): 'functionalist' (objective-regulation), 'interpretive' (subjective-regulation), radical humanist (subjective-radical change), and 'radical structural' (objective-radical change).

This scheme is equally helpful in mapping out the main alternative approaches to media theory and research, which have been seriously divided by their chosen method-ologies and priorities, as well as by their degree of commitment to radical change. The equivalent communication science 'paradigms' (if such they really are) to the four indi-cated above are as follows. Firstly, there is a 'functionalist' approach which emphasizes the 'positive' contribution of media to the existing social order and favours empirical, quantitative research. This has sometimes been called the 'dominant paradigm' (see Chapter 1 by Gitlin in Part II). Secondly, there is an approach that focuses on cultural issues (of quality and meaning in content) and uses mainly qualitative methods. Thirdly, there is a critical-cultural approach that uses interpretative methods to expose the ideo-logical working of mass media or to explore the implications for dissident groups in society, based on class, race, gender, etc. Fourthly, media are also examined critically as a material (mainly political-economic) force in society, open to objective analysis.

Underlying this set of divisions is a more basic division between 'media-centric' and 'socio-centric' theories. Media-centric theory not only attributes a strong causative role to each medium as a particular vehicle or carrier of meaning, but also places more emphasis on culture (of media as well as the society) and on texts and meanings. By contrast, socio-centric theory views technology and culture as dependent on more fundamental social forces.

Theoretical assessments of the significance of the mass media vary widely, and it is not helpful to describe media theory only in terms of these various paradigms, espe-cially since actual schools of theory or research draw elements from more than one. The fuller picture of media theory is more complex because there are cross-currents from other disciplines and other streams of thought. These include alternative ideas about democracy, technological determinism in one form or another, feminism, various branches of cultural theory, and information theory. These remarks are intended to emphasize the separate identity (from sociology) of contemporary theorizing about mass media, despite shared intellectual origins.

THE 'DOMINANT PARADIGM': FUNCTIONALIST AND EMPIRICAL

The term 'dominant paradigm' is generally associated with a critique of what it refers to (cf. Gitlin, 1978; Hall, 1989). The key features, whether favoured or not, are as follows: some version of functionalist theory, in which recurring processes and phenomena are

taken to have some essential purpose for 'society'; an assumption that communication works in a more or less linear or transmission mode to deliver meaning 'as sent'; and a set of research methodologies and techniques that are believed to yield the best chance of reliable answers to questions asked. Arguably, the 'dominant paradigm' also involves a fundamental assumption (essentially an ideology) that the apparently successful forms of society (capitalist, liberal, secular and democratic by their own definition) are the best forms available at the current stage of social evolution (even if not perfect).

Research within this theoretical framework has lent support to the view that mass media tend to facilitate existing social organizations and goals, and thus the prevailing structures of power and social relations. They contribute to the work of other social institutions, including politics and the economy, by providing channels of communication, motivation and mobilization along with information about events and social circumstances. Their primary effects could be seen as promoting social cohesion and harmony, and distributing symbolic rewards and punishments according to prevailing social norms and defusing conflict. There was also scope for considering certain 'dysfunctional' aspects of mass media (e.g. the possible harmful effects of portrayals of sex and violence). However, the broad line of theorizing attributed 'positive' outcomes to the various uses and satisfactions derived from media by their audiences by way of their voluntary acts of choice. On the whole, the 'dominant paradigm' supported a view of society as voluntaristic and self-directed, rather than being manipulated or controlled by the media.

The 'paradigm' has been assaulted from all sides during the last 50 years. The functionalist sociology current during the 1950s was largely rejected because of fundamental theoretical vacuity, inconsistency with the new critical spirit of the 1960s and the subsequent appeal of new theories. Nevertheless, the underlying vague assumption that in many ways the mass media contribute (by their 'effects') to this or that 'positive' (functional) or 'negative' (dysfunctional) outcome for 'society' is still widely found in research into mass media, and there is even a revival of system theory, given support by information-technocratic thinking, that explicitly refers to the 'functions' of mass media (e.g. Luhmann, 2000). Meeting the demand for the useful information needed by the burgeoning communication industries (media, advertising, public opinion, public relations, information management) sits quite comfortably with functionalist and system thinking. The typical methods and research results (data) most adapted to the same needs are essentially those of the original 'dominant paradigm'. Within the institutions of social scientific research, status and funds are still routinely (perhaps more than ever) inclined to follow and lead the kind of research (and thus theorizing) that belongs to this tradition.

These remarks reflect something of the 'critique', as noted above. It does need to be acknowledged, even so, that the survival (even good health) of certain components of the 'dominant paradigm', long after its deconstruction and exposure, is due not only to the support of commercial and material interests. A belief in powerful 'effects' (or consequences) from media communication is still widespread, albeit more diversely and less crudely conceived than in early 'transmission' formulations. Without such a belief there would be little reason to take the media seriously, to distinguish between better and worse media systems and conduct, to trouble about media ethics, policy and regulation, or to care who owns or controls the media. Theoretical ideas still need to be tested according to principles that embody assumptions about an observable reality and the possibly of finding empirical answers to some questions at least.

EARLY CRITICAL THEORY

Critical views of the influence of mass media are as old as the media themselves, and the grounds of complaint have not changed very much. Much criticism has related either to consequences that might be unintentionally harmful to society (such as diverting children from homework, misleading advertising, 'teaching' techniques of crime, or presenting a 'distorted' view of reality) or to intrinsic lack of cultural or moral quality in the content distributed. A more fundamental critique has, from the earliest days, focused on the relation between media and the power structure of society. In the 'new democracies' of the early twentieth century, based on universal suffrage and still riven by conflicts between capital and labour, the mass media were largely interpreted by social critics as weapons in the hands of the ruling (capitalist) class, employed either to control and guide the masses by propaganda or to narcotize and divert them from effective opposition by escapist fantasies and consumerist dreams.

Marxist theory provided a clear theoretical statement to this effect, and Marxist cultural theorists of the Frankfurt school became eloquent critics of the insidious working of mass media and the 'cultural industries' (see, for instance, Adorno and Horkheimer, 1947; Marcuse, 1964). In post-war America, C. Wright Mills (Chapter 5 in Part III) expounded a theory of 'mass society' which echoed much contemporary thinking about the discontents of a 'modern industrial society' which dehumanized and disempowered the citizen, reducing him or her to a cog in the machine run by and for the new 'power elite' of the military-industrial complex. The media were assigned a special role ('function' perhaps) as the mechanism of persuading individuals voluntarily to suspend their true interest and identity (see also Marcuse, 1964) and lose their autonomy.

To some degree, this is a reverse image of the dominant paradigm described above, depicting a dystopian vision of modern society, held together by subtle means of compulsion, and drawing on some shared assumptions about the power of the media and shared formulations about how societies work. The examples of totalitarian societies of the first half of the twentieth century, especially Nazi Germany and the Stalinist Soviet Union, where the mass media were consciously and expertly used for control for the ends of the state, helped to give credibility to the fears of mass society theorists, despite the relative tolerance of the liberal-democratic regimes. Gramsci's (1971) notion of 'hegemony' rather than total control was helpful in bridging the gap between the two very different forms of 'mass society'.

LATER CRITICAL THEORY

From the 1960s onwards, the appeal of both classical Marxism and mass society theory waned, but the critical spirit was renewed under new banners and with new aspirations. It was promoted by new movements and new causes, especially opposition to war and militaristic policy (nuclear weapons), anti-imperialism, and feminism, as well as by a demand for greater individual freedom and diversity within all the institutions of social life. Capitalism remained the enemy, but a socialist revolution was not seen

by many as the answer. Criticism of the media focused on their subservience and service to the established 'authorities', on their stifling conformity, and on their centralization and regulation, as much by public bureaucracy as by capitalist owners. The demand was for free, diverse and subversive media, using the growing number of new technologies as well as liberating the old ones (Enzensberger, 1970). The elite cultural assumptions of some media controllers, as well as the crass commercialism of others, were under attack.

It is difficult to summarize 'later critical theory' by any single term or according to agreed central features. The spirit was vaguely 'neo-Marxist', but also 'liberal' in its search for 'liberation' from what was perceived as an outdated political and social order in Western society as well as in the Communist East. In its working out in research, this version of critical theory involved a number of practices. These included a concerted attempt to expose the way in which media organizations routinely operate to perpetuate a very limited view of 'social reality', not for some conscious 'ideological' purpose but for pursuit of their own organizational (and ultimately economic) goals and as an expression of their professional ideology (especially that of journalistic 'objectivity'). Many works of the 1970s referred to news in particular as being 'manufactured', 'made' or artificially 'constructed'. The media were depicted as operating according to their own 'logic', subordinating the intentions of other would-be communicators to the consequences of this logic. On the whole, the pursuit by the media of their own goals was seen as a contribution to maintaining the 'status quo' rather than helping to promote social change. In addition, critical theory focused on the struggle over media meanings, not only in the textual practices but also in the encounter between 'reader' and 'text' at the point of reception. New critical theory favoured the view that all meaning has to be negotiated and that any 'text' is open to multiple and even opposed readings, depending on the circumstances and perception of the 'reader'. Critical theory cannot be fully appreciated independently of other theoretical advances, some aspects of which are described in this Introduction.

POLITICAL ECONOMY THEORY

This has much the same origins as Marxist theory of media and shares some of the same assumptions, although not that of historical determinism. It is, even so, a materialist theory, and its basic premise is that between them the economics of the media and the economic base of social power largely account for the main features of mass media development and the essential character of mass media systems and their content. The media are a form of property and an industry operating in several different markets in pursuit of profit. These facts of the case account for the recruitment of mass audiences and the mechanisms used to manage them (research, marketing, publicity). They are the fundamental cause of the particular way in which new communication technology is developed (as opposed to social and cultural explanations). They are the reason why the media develop monopoly tendencies, nationally and globally. They account for the skewed selection and standardization of media content and audience behaviour. In

short, it is the logic of capitalistic economic and political forces, as exercised by owners and controllers, that accounts for the main features of mass communication perhaps better than does technology or the 'logic of media culture' itself.

There are alternative lines of analysis stemming from this broad perspective that can be applied to phenomena beyond actual structure and organization. For instance, the contents of the media can be understood as 'commodities' to be sold to consumers rather than forms of cultural expression. The hegemonic ideological tendencies attributed by critics to much media content can be explained by the logic of the market that finds it unprofitable to appeal to minority or deviant views, thus accentuating consensus and marginalizing opposition. Even audiences can be considered as products of the media, harvested by the appeal of popular commodities and sold to advertisers by the thousand according to their purchasing power. In the same vein, audiences can be viewed as 'working' for advertisers when they watch their 'free' television (Smythe, 1977). In general, the explanatory power of market forces in relation to the growing and increasingly commercialized media cultural industries seems quite strong.

The political-economic approach seems well suited as a framework for analysing the operation of global media, and especially those involving the new information technologies that, because of their immense economic and industrial potential, cannot be left to the vagaries of cultural preference. It is already apparent that the Internet is being powerfully shaped more by the possibilities for economic exploitation than by the intrinsic capacities of the net or the dreams of its founders. Even so, the elevation of political-economic explanations, however powerful, can lead to neglect of cultural analysis and overestimation of the significance of the forms of financing of media phenomena, as against their significance to their 'consumers'.

TEXTUAL AND LINGUISTIC THEORY

A new impetus was given to theory from the late 1960s by scholars mainly in the critical tradition and applying initially the concepts and methods of linguistic analysis derived from structuralism and semiology. Theoretical origins may be found in the work of Ogden and Richards (1923) and Peirce (1933–5) and de Saussure (1915/1960), but specific applications to the texts of mass media were first made by Continental theorists (including Roland Barthes, A.J. Greimas, Violette Morin, and Umberto Eco). Initially, the main contribution to theory was to explicate the way in which media 'texts' (the symbolic content in physical form) work by way of meanings 'encoded' in linguistic and pictorial 'sign-systems'. This provided tools for uncovering 'latent' as well as 'overt', or surface, meanings, tools which made it possible to describe the underlying 'ideology' of media content (both in news and fiction) as well as to expose the processes by which advertising works. These developments were especially useful to theorists critical of the mass media.

The influence of linguistic ideas was much more extensive than this. When media texts are analysed in this way, their recurring patterns and structures strongly support the view that the mass media tend to offer us a 'preferred' reading of 'social reality'

along with inbuilt cultural assumptions that are related to the distribution of power in economic, cultural, ethnic and gender terms. The media can be said to 'construct' social reality. This awareness makes it possible to contest such 'readings' and opens the potential for challenge to media hegemony. In the work of Hall (1989) and others, a central theoretical formulation suggests that our cultural and social circumstances impel us towards either accepting or rejecting dominant or consensual meanings. Alternative readings, leading to resistance and change, are always possible. This view of the hegemonic condition of society is both enlightening and more optimistic than the dystopian vision of early critical theory. Where resistance and the impetus to alternative reading will come from is an open question. Earlier critics of society saw it in education and political action. The new school of cultural theorists were more likely to see it in the liberating potential of popular culture and the undermining of hegemony by this route (see below).

The linguistic 'turn' of theory began by emphasizing the power of the 'text' as 'encoded', assuming its meaning to be more or less fixed according to the operation of objective sign-systems. However, it ended by advancing and reinforcing the view that the creation of meaning lies at least equally if not more with the manner of 'decoding', under the influence of experience, circumstances, desires and perceptions. Meaning and thus the basis for individual and social action are both constructed and (differentially) decoded, according to a complex process of 'negotiation' in which 'messages' are chosen to be interpreted according to the perspective of the receiver. During the 1970s and later, there emerged in media theory a more or less consensual coming together of linguistic theory and phenomenology, a school of sociology that emphasized voluntary action by individuals responding to their environment, making choices and solving problems in an active (and meaning-giving way).

This emerging consensus on the 'interactivity' and 'intersubjectivity' of media use and processes of influence found expression especially in 'reception theory', which strongly emphasized the 'role of the reader' (see Eco, 1977). In contrast with traditional audience research, which confined itself largely to describing audience 'choice behaviour' according to conventional industry-derived and fixed categories of content, reception research sought to understand in depth the personal and cultural significance of particular genres for particularly situated sets of audience members that could be characterized as 'interpretative communities'. This expression implies some shared view of the meaning and value of media experience as well as shared circumstances and outlook. Research in this theoretical mode often develops a common discourse to give an account of audience experience and media 'content'. It is more or less axiomatic that a 'media text' is complete only when it includes 'decoded' meanings as well as those 'encoded' (Fiske, 1987).

MEDIA CULTURAL THEORY

Some of the ideas already presented belong under this heading, but its specific purpose is to draw attention to the parallel and overlapping development of cultural

and mass media theory. In this context, the origins of 'cultural theory' lie mainly in aesthetic, moral and normative judgements about cultural value. As applied to the mass media, these judgements were initially inclined to damn the 'culture of the media' as inferior in quality, degrading in tendency or politically exploitative in encouraging a docile labour force at a low price (see above). Other early strands of cultural theory supported not only the traditional 'high culture' of the cultivated classes but also the 'authentic' cultures of the 'folk', especially those with regional or (sub-) national identifications.

The critique of 'mass culture' gradually gave way from the 1960s onwards, under the liberating influences described above, to re-evaluations of popular culture, especially in the form of the new musical forms and genres enjoyed by youth and the multiple cultural inventions developed for television and other new media. Even entrenched cultural critics of the traditional school found it hard to locate much of the new audiovisual culture of the mass media within the framework of conventional judgemental views. Many observers and theorists of the luxuriant fauna and flora of the media cultural landscape simply abandoned old perspectives as irrelevant and useless, and sought to make sense of cultural production and experience in their own terms, in general by linking media experience with the life experience of young people (mainly) in many sub-cultural contexts.

One school of critical theory (cf. McGuigan, 1992) adopted a cultural populism according to which new popular culture could be interpreted as a valid expression of 'resistance' to the dominant order (whether racial, patriarchal or class), even a 'revolt of the masses'. Popular culture was valued and celebrated for its own intrinsic meanings and values for its creators, performers and audiences. This approach to popular culture fitted very well with theories of 'postmodernism' when these became current during the 1980s. Postmodernism abstains from and undermines all absolutist theories of aesthetic or ethical value and treats all expressions of the human spirit and creative urge as equal. It celebrates the ludic and the ephemeral, making a definitive break with the early beginnings of 'cultural theory' as depicted above.

An important break with the functionalist-empirical tradition was signalled by the rejection of the linear 'transmission' model of communication that lent itself to the quantitative study of media effects in favour of an alternative 'cultural model' (see Carey [1975], Chapter 2, Part II). The basis for this view already existed in literary theory and in symbolic interactionism, and at its essence was a view of communication as 'expression' or 'ritual'. Much human communication is not utilitarian or practical and has no measurable outcome. It is engaged in for its own sake, as an expression or act of belonging to a particular 'community', or to mark some special occasion, such as celebration or mourning. The early study of mass communication was too often appropriated for commercial, educational or propagandist interests, in effect diverting attention from the essence of many forms of mass communication, including much 'entertainment'. The seeming 'purposelessness' of much communication was baffling to those who sought to measure 'effects' and 'effectiveness', and new approaches and methods were needed to take account of ritual and expressive communication uses.

This is not the whole story of cultural theory as far as the mass media have been concerned. Several strands of theory did not abandon the 'modernistic' approach that allocates differential value to various forms of cultural practice and experience. A prominent exception is the critique of 'cultural imperialism' and of 'globalization' (see Tomlinson, Chapter 19, Part VI). It is hard to escape the fact that much, if not most, media popular culture is 'Western' in origin and expression and also one of the main products of the global media industrial complex that has a dominant influence in world media systems and performance. It is not easy to reconcile the celebration of Western popular culture as a socially liberating and subversive force with a reasoned critique of global media industries, the exploitation of economically underdeveloped societies and the unrestrained export of a global consumer culture. These cultural phenomena do not seem compatible with the autonomous growth of cultural values and forms that are true to the traditions and experience of other societies.

The inconsistency cannot simply be dismissed, although there are some defences, aside from the argument that Western cultural forms may indeed be liberating in a certain sense if they undermine the hold of regimes and ideologies that are repressive and reactionary in Western eyes. More convincing is the pragmatic (rather than theoretical) view that exported cultures do not simply replace and destroy existing cultures when they 'invade'. They may simply have no great significance or effect, or where they do, they are also subject to the process of negotiation of meanings mentioned above, whereby they acquire quite a different significance for other cultures. The pre-existing cultures are not simply 'traded in' for novel forms, but the latter are added to the repertoire of cultural possibilities. In addition, there is much evidence of adaptation and the formation of hybrid cultural forms combining native with imported elements. In a minor way, these tendencies have been observed to occur in the many different national cultures of Europe, in the face of a supposed wave of 'Americanizing' media cultural influences.

A footnote to this section is called for in order to recognize the development of what can be called a specific 'media culture'. The mass media are probably now the most productive cultural institution, and what they produce reflects the imperatives, working assumptions and practices of the media institution (and its workforce), exhibiting some common features worldwide. The main imperative on the media institution, stemming mainly from commercial motives, is for each channel to maximize the attention it receives under conditions of relentless competition (for audience and advertising income). The working assumption of media is that attention is best gained by appealing to sensation and human interest. The grooming of media 'stars' and 'personalities', on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the intense focus on prominent human beings and dramatic or exciting events and spectacles are the agreed means to gain attention. This can be expressed in terms of a more or less universal 'media logic' that is applied to all genres and topics of media content. The global character of media operation leads to continuous imitation and borrowing and the reinforcement of similar occupational ideologies and codes of professional practice. It is arguable that significant 'effects' from mass media stem not from 'mass persuasion' but from the fact that many key public communicative transactions are mediated through a distorting prism of media-centric ideas and routine practices.

MEDIA TECHNOLOGY AND ITS EFFECTS

It could be argued that the very essence of mass communication theory is a simple but all-embracing expression of technological determinism, since the essential features depend on what certain technologies have made possible, especially the following: communication at a distance, the multiplication and simultaneous distribution of diverse 'messages', the enormous capacity and speed of carriers, and the limitations on response. There is no escaping the implication that public communication as practised in modern societies is profoundly shaped by these general features. The question remains, even so, as to whether particular technological means, as applied, have particular tendencies of influence that can be observed. It is of particular pertinence at a moment in the development of the media when new telecommunication and computer-based means of communication are being applied to the purposes previously dominated by print and broadcasting, changing the potential for diversity of forms, speed, capacity, access and interactivity.

The first theories relating to the influence of media technology were formulated by Harold Innis (1950, 1951), tracing a long history from early empires and forms of inscription to radio, and finding a logical correspondence between social formations and dominant means of communication. More specifically, theory then focused on the effects of printing, as introduced in Europe in the mid-fifteenth century. Again, many aspects of the rise of modern society and culture have been found to depend in some degree on the uses made of printing (McLuhan, 1962; Febvre and Martin, 1984; Eisenstein, 1978; Johns, 1999). When it came to television, imaginative speculation about its supposed effects by McLuhan (1964) and more reasoned analysis by Meyrowitz (1985: Chapter 8 in Part III) supported the general idea that we are in an era much influenced by the form of the 'dominant' means of communication.

At specific moments in history, a single technology does seem to have had a major direct and specific influence, such as those of the electric telegraph in the mid-nineteenth century, which led to world news agencies, and the telephone somewhat later, which facilitated new architectural and work-organizational forms. In our own time, the computer is still having an even wider and deeper impact. More comprehensive assessments of communication technology developments (e.g. by Beniger [1986] and Winston [1986]) have stressed the extent to which technology is developed according to the needs of the dominant social order, suppressing more revolutionary potential for change, and reinforcing order.

These various theoretical efforts have all been largely vitiated by the enormous complexity of the questions being tackled and by the fact that the uses of any technology (and the technology itself) continually change and also vary between one society and another, despite some common 'media-cultural' features, as noted above. A theoretical analysis by Thompson (1995) avoids distinguishing between different technologies, and instead focuses on the significance in general of the mediation of experience and interaction of communication technologies, as opposed to face-to-face interaction or direct experience.

This is more promising intellectually and it offers a better grip on assessing the potential influence of new, more interactive means of communication, but there is no real escape from the fact that technologies are subordinate to cultural meanings, social definitions, actual uses and many other influences, making it impossible to isolate them as an 'independent variable'. We cannot go much further than more or less convincing interpretations applied to more or less specific situations. The effects of any technology are in the first instance their uses, and these uses often have observable effects as a matter of historical fact. The implication may be that we need histories of technology (effects) rather more than theories. Even so, it is unlikely that the appeal of following the technology trail will diminish.

FEMINIST MEDIA THEORY

Since the 1970s, in line with the general development of women's studies and feminist theory generally, a flourishing and independent body of knowledge has been accumulated about the relation between the media and women (and gender more widely). The significance of the media for women was initially seen to lie in the socializing role of the media for all young people (and adults), especially through the repetitive depiction of different gender roles and reinforcement stereotypes. Media representation was believed (and usually found) to emphasize the place of women in the home and their subordination generally in nearly all spheres of life.

As the scope of feminist theory widened, so feminist media theory also extended to embrace the view that female experience in society, historically, culturally and actually, is sufficiently different to suppose that women have fundamentally different interests and capacities. Their making of the media is or would be different, and similarly their experiencing and understanding of the media, even though the reality of media systems is such that most media can be observed to be controlled by men, produced by men and directed predominantly at men, or, if not, at audiences of women as largely envisaged by men.

This basic point has fundamental implications for following up the insights of other theories, for imagining effects and for working towards alternatives. It is not sufficient simply to identify 'women' as a demographic category more systematically in theory and research. Each branch of research, directed variously at the structures and control of the media, advertising and marketing, news and entertainment production, the selection and meaning of content, the interpretations and choices of audiences and many kinds of 'effects', has to be in principle reconsidered, probably, although not exclusively, by women theorists. Not all outcomes or reformulated theories will necessarily be different, but the priorities for theory and research and the specific infilling are likely to change under the influence of feminist theory. So far, most of the influence of feminist media theory can be observed in relation to studies of media culture and media reception, but the range is extending.

NORMATIVE MEDIA THEORY

Normative media theory refers to systematically worked-out sets of ideas about how the media *ought* to operate if they are to fulfil a wide range of expectations about their contribution to society. Most media in modern democratic states are free from positive obligations to provide particular services (there are exceptions, as in public broad-casting), and otherwise have much the same rights, freedoms and obligations as any citizen. At the same time, they often operate according to certain ethical and norma-tive principles formally by their own choice but also in response to requests and pres-sures and by agreement with agents of other social institutions. The democratic political system is the prime example, since its communication needs can only be fully meet in cooperation with the mass media. There are historical precedents and long-established conventions that enable the media and political institutions to work together without compromising essential media freedoms.

Most formulations of normative media theory in fact turn on the tension between, on the one hand, media claims to freedom of publication that have their roots in early struggles for freedom and democracy and, on the other hand, various claims that the media ought also to serve the public interest and accept responsibility for their actions. Normative theory thus supports the idea of public policy for the media and for media regulation, and offers guidance for the forms such policy might take. The impulse to propose obligations for the media is rooted in a widely held belief that public communication is too important to be left to chance or the market, and that the operation of the media always touches on matters that are politically, morally or ethically sensitive, and that are also matters for public opinion. Resistance to policy and regulation is usually based on libertarian or free market theory. The driving force for theory development on behalf of either control or freedom is continually renewed by changes in the nature of media technology and also by changes in the socio-cultural climate and political culture.

META-THEMES OF THEORY

Despite their differences, the schools and approaches described have all in their distinctive ways dealt with many of the same themes of mass communication, and it is worthwhile summarizing these, if only to restore some sense of the common origin and interconnection of the approaches. This commonality derives from the basic assump-tions about the character of mass media systems outlined at the start.

It is logical to start with the theme of *medium* theory, encompassing all ideas about the consequences of different communication technologies and especially the complete technological system that allows the few to distribute messages to the many with such apparrent efficiency. Medium theory has often concentrated on the particular forms of the separate media that constitute the mass media (print, film, music, radio, television,

multimedia, etc.) rather than on the 'mass media as such', but the logic of theorizing is much the same in each case. The main elements of the underlying logic are that newly invented communication technologies make possible more efficient production and distribution of symbolic content, and that the application of the technologies (including the forms of organization involved) inevitably leads to new uses and forms of communication as well as to more communication. This also changes the relations between 'senders' and 'receivers'. Those who are predominantly 'receivers' of communication also experience a change in the balance and content of information they possess. New media mean new kinds of sense experience and media use behaviours. Just as important, new media change the power relations between different 'communicators' and between them and other agents of power in the society. These propositions are all significant in respect of consequences and are quite plausible, even difficult to reject at some level of validity. As a result, they continue to provide fertile soil for speculation and enquiry in an age of 'information technology'.

The theme of *dominance through mass media* is in some respects dependent on 'medium theory', since it arises because of the alleged consequences of a society-wide form of communication which came to expose all members of a society to much the same degree and type of 'centrally' provided content. Centralization was a matter of both national and 'metropolitan' control, but also of the concentration of production and distribution information and culture in the hands of a few large, bureaucratic-industrial units. It is arguable whether the technology of mass communication has driven the emergence of the 'system' and its uses, or whether a centralized and nationalistic form of society adapted the technology to its purposes. In the case of the more recent innovations of communication technology, especially distribution by satellite and telecommunications, all based on computers, the pressure of technology (really from industrial and governmental backers) is clearly very strong.

For the further theoretical working out of the consequences for human society, it may not matter which came first. The central issue is the degree to which the flow of communication in society is unitary or diverse and the degree to which members of society are either *dependent* on this flow or susceptible to its influence on their own outlook and actions. Especially at issue is whether there is some dominant ideology or coherent portrayal of an alleged 'social reality' that is purveyed with or without some coherent plan. Within the scope of this theme are to be found lines of theory that reject the basic premise of subordination through mass communication, advancing arguments on behalf of the human capacity to resist unwanted or useless ideas and to render 'propaganda' counter-productive. The very notion of one-way communication can well be regarded as an expression of communication 'illiteracy', given the essentially interactive and intersubjective character of human communication. There is also a sociological illiteracy in the belief that flows of 'messages' determine the most important patterns of human social interaction.

A third theme that has some independence from the foregoing concerns aspects of *social and cultural identity and cohesion*. It arises initially not from a consideration of mass media but from ideas about social life. One aspect has to do with the essential conditions for desirable forms of society under conditions of freedom and social justice that promise a tolerated diversity of values and ways of life as well as cooperation for common ends of the society and those of the global community. The part played

by communication is important in these matters, and that of 'mass communication' is
of especial importance in ensuring the framework of wider coexistence, the sharing of
some common concerns, and the interconnection of diverse microsocial and cultural
environments, and in enabling an awareness of shared global interests.

Theoretical propositions have been advanced to argue that the mass media (univer-
sally shared channels and some 'content') are an essential support for a sense of
common identity (national or cultural), although critical views of the media have long
expressed the view that the more massive (and commercial) the media, the more they
undermine the non-media (social and cultural) basis for social integration, and the more
debilitating they are for active social participation. These ideas are connected with the
predominantly pessimistic early theory of mass society and (perennially renewed) moral
panics about the harmful and desocializing effects of mass media on children.

On balance, attention in mass communication theory has shifted to a concern with
the potential subordination or marginalization of cultural and social minorities and the
opportunities for communication multiplicity. In this respect, it is generally recognized
that the limits of what can be achieved by way of the mass media (and they are quite
restricted) have probably been reached, and that the long-heralded 'decline of the mass
media' offers more hope for communication freedom and diversity.

The fourth main theme of theory can be summarized under the heading of *public
interest*, bringing together all kinds of political, normative and ethical concerns
arising from the development of a new social institution that is both essential to
meeting the needs of society and also to a large extent outside direct public control
in liberal-capitalist states. Here, as with other themes of theory, a certain degree of
'Western' bias is evident, and not all societies are restricted by their ideology from
directing their media to fulfil their own version of the good of society. There are also
differences within the 'liberal-democratic' category of nations. At the most basic level,
there is a permanent debate in most countries about the potential social benefit or
harm that can be obtained or expected from the mass media, and about how to achieve
the one and avoid the other by policy, regulation or skilful planning and bargaining.

The question of what constitutes the public interest in the way a mass media system
operates sometimes problematizes the very notion of identifying a 'public interest'.
Either this turns out to be the sectional interest of those with power to impose a defi-
nition, or it leads to a suppression of the forces for change in society and in the media.
Social change calls for a continuous redefinition of what is for the general good. At
worst, the pursuit of a public interest is seen as a device for suppressing freedom.

The disputed character of the idea, let alone its institutional expression, has not
suppressed or even diminished calls for the media to respond to their alleged
responsibilities, and they have nowhere escaped all forms of accountability, ranging
from legal and regulatory restrictions to some degree of direct public control, as in
some broadcasting systems. For the most part, normative theory draws on ideas
about the mass media that have already been presented, calling for limits on any
monopoly of ownership and control, whether private or public, and for diversity and
quality of content. Aside from law, public pressure from outside and professional
aspirations within the mass media work towards greater public accountability. In the
global arena, shared threats from armed conflict and ecological or economic disaster
operate in the same direction. Normative concerns are often expressed positively, in

terms of the more universal availability of communication systems and the opening of channels to greater access of all kinds. Anxieties about the media, aside from the issues of alleged harmful effects already mentioned, often include a reference to the supposed 'digital divide', once known as the 'information gap', that opens up between the 'information rich' and the 'information poor'. The cultural and informational benefits of communication technology are not universally available but are differentially distributed according to wealth and skills, leading to a more unequal society and a more divided world.

THE FUTURE OF MASS COMMUNICATION THEORY

The future of theory will clearly depend on the future of mass communication itself. Although 'new media theory' (represented in some degree in Part V) does open the way for the decline or end of mass communication, it has not really introduced any fundamentally new issues of communication theory. Unless there is a sudden and unexpected end to the mass press, television music and related industries, the continuing changes in the media and their use will continue to be examined within existing frameworks, using many of the concepts and associated methods that are represented in this collection of papers that spans the last 50 years.

REFERENCES

Adorno, T. and Horkheimer, M. (1947/1972) *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*. New York: Herder and Herder.

Beniger, J.R. (1986) *The Control Revolution*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Eco, U. (1977) *The Role of the Reader*. Bloomington, IN: University of Indiana Press.

Eisenstein, E. (1978) *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Enzensberger, H.M. (1970) 'Constituents of a theory of the media', *New Left Review*, 64: 13–36.

Fiske, J. (1987) *Television Culture*. London: Methuen.

Febvre, L. and Martin, H.J. (1984) *The Coming of the Book*. London: Verso.

Gitlin, T. (1978) 'Media Sociology: the dominant paradigm', *Theory and Society*, 6: 205–53.

Gramsci, A. (1971) *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*. London: Lawrence and Wishart.

Hall, S. (1989) 'Ideology and communication theory', in B. Dervin, L. Grossberg, B.J. O'Keefe and E. Wartella. (eds), *Rethinking Communication*. Vol. 1. Newbury Park, CA: Sage. pp. 40–52.

Hardt, H. (1979) *Social Theories of the Press*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

Innis, H. (1950) *Empire and Communication*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Innis, H. (1951) *The Bias of Communication*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Johns, A. (1999) *The Nature of the Book*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.

Luhmann, N. *The Reality of the Mass Media*. Cambridge: Polity.

McGuigan, J. (1992) *Cultural Populism*. London: Routledge.

McLuhan, M. (1962) *The Gutenberg Galaxy*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

McLuhan, M. (1964) *Understanding Media*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Marcuse, H. (1964) *One-Dimensional Man*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Meyrowitz, J. (1985) *No Sense of Place*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Ogden, C.K. and Richards, I.A. (1923) *The Meaning of Meaning*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Peirce, C.S. (1931–5) *Collected Papers*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Rosengren, K.E. (1983) 'Communication research: one paradigm or four?' *Journal of Communication*, 33 (3): 187–207.

Rosengren, K.E. (2000) *Communication: an Introduction*. London: Sage.

Smythe, D.W. (1977) 'Communications blindspot of western marxism', *Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory*, 1: 120–27.

Saussure, F. de (1915/1960) *Course on General Linguistics*. London: Peter Owen.

Thompson, J.B. (1995) *The Media and Modernity*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Winston, B. (1986) *Misunderstanding Media*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.