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## **D. Butler *The Trouble With Reporting Northern Ireland***

Aldershot: Avebury, 1995. 170pp. stg£32.50  
ISBN 1 85628 909 5

**Catherine Curran**

In this book, David Butler takes issue with what he sees as some of the prevailing left-liberal orthodoxies concerning British media reporting on Northern Ireland. The stated purpose of the book is to explain how and why British reporting has privileged certain interpretations of the civil unrest in the North. Therefore the research is situated within the body of critical analysis which has sought to interpret the relationship between the state and the media in the context of the ongoing crisis of legitimacy of the state in Northern Ireland. The author is specifically concerned to highlight the inadequacies of an instrumentalist view of the state in Northern Ireland. In particular he rejects the implicit premises of standard texts such as Curtis's (1984): *Ireland: The Propaganda War*. This is faulted on grounds of its partisanship and its ultimate reliance on a form of conspiracy theory.

In place of such inflexible models, Butler prefers to consider the relationship between the state and the media as mediated by a variety of filters. The state is not a monolithic entity, but is itself a site of contestation. It does not stand above the social formation, but is itself implicated in the contradictions of that formation. In the terms outlined by Held (1989), the state is the site of historic compromise between conflicting interests within the forcefield which comprises the state ensemble. The role of broadcasting is analogous to that of the state; within the cultural sphere, it acts as an 'organiser of consent' where the values of ruling groups can be universalised and validated. This analysis paves the way for a concrete and specific analysis of the evolution of British broadcasting in Northern Ireland. It permits us to view the various policy shifts on broadcasting in Northern Ireland in terms of the widening or narrowing of the 'aperture of consensus' occasioned by the changing nature of the conflict.

The concept of the 'aperture of consensus' is critical in permitting us to understand the changing circumstances surrounding the production of non-fiction texts by British media in the North. Yet it is also critical to the author's more fundamental thesis, which is that the operationalization by the media of a liberal-democratic model of consensus broadcasting has been implicit in the failure to give adequate expression to the conflict in Northern Ireland.

This fundamental institutional inadequacy is linked to the wider failure to address the question of the political culture of Northern Ireland. Thus we find that as far back as the 1920s, broadcasters ignored both nationalist and unionist sensibilities at a cultural level. This is attributed to 'a patent inability to understand the bases of local relations (1995:39)'.

In the interwar period as a whole local management's approach mixed patrician ignorance, bemusement, kowtowing timidity, and – in largest measure – disdain. Preferring to avoid political controversy, so far as they could detect it, balance in these dissensual conditions added up to a policy of disregarding political and cultural divisions (1995:40).

This analysis is developed in terms of the norms of broadcasting institutions and how these serve to exclude views and positions deemed hostile or contrary to the premises of liberal democracy. In the context of this study, the real problem with reporting the troubles is that there exists no recognition within the British broadcasting institutions of societies based on conflict rather than consensus. The practices of the broadcast media in Northern Ireland have tended to filter content through the mesh of a myth of harmony and consensus. This leads to a misrepresentation of the situation on

the ground on the one hand, and an exclusion of those whose opinions fall outside the boundaries of the consensus on the other. Thus for example:

In the run up to October 1968 the local broadcast media persisted with a bizarrely optimistic account of O'Neill's command of a fictive centre ground. This phantasy was only sustainable by ignoring the iniquities of sectarianism, projecting instead a hygienic image of a culture of similarity (1995:47).

Locating the problem of definition and representation of the conflict at the level of institutional practices, has the effect of reducing questions of distortion and misrepresentation to a series of institutional shortcomings. Here, the routinized institutional procedures of orthodox journalistic understanding are at the heart of the failure to make sense of the situation as it unfolds.

In this formulation, there is no intentional bias in the news, merely a failure to comprehend reality in the terms of the society in question. This leads to the argument that a policy of balanced sectarianism, concomitant with the wider phenomenon of 'Ulsterization' was preferable to the policy of consensus to the extent that it included a wider range of opinions (e.g. loyalist paramilitaries) and was therefore more representative of the actual situation. It seems that the factors which prevent the emergence of 'alternative' representations of the situation in Northern Ireland are identical to those operating elsewhere within the sphere of bourgeois democracy – the commitment to consensus and moderation within the institutions of the media. The role, and the significance, of the apparatus of the state within the Six Counties is consistently downplayed.

In the opinion of this writer, the thesis that the failure of broadcasting in Northern Ireland is a failure of perception, of comprehension, or of analysis on the part of the broadcasters is seriously flawed. Bias and distortion in media representations of Northern Ireland are rooted in the dysfunctional nature of the state, which finds its reflection in a dysfunctional media.

## References

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## K. Tester *Media Culture and Morality*

London: Routledge, 1994. 138pp. stg £37.50, stg £10.99 (pbk.)  
ISBN 0415 0983 6X ISBN 0415 098351

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### Eoin Devereux

As a lecturer and researcher, my work on mass communications exists on the cusp of both sociology and cultural studies. I have, to date, found both disciplines to have almost equal amounts of advantages and disadvantages. It was in this context that I approached the latest text by Keith Tester with particular interest. *Media, Culture and Morality* is a provocative, if uneven, collection of five interrelated essays, which has the expressed intention of being a critique of cultural studies, and an attempt to explain the moral dysfunctions of the media.

In his first essay, Tester launches an attack on the discipline of cultural studies. Using a phrase which is typical of his lively style of writing, he asserts that 'cultural studies is a discipline that is morally cretinous because it is the bastard child of the

media it claims to expose.' In a tone which has echoes of the short-lived optimism of 1960s sociology, Tester argues that a truly critical analysis of the media is possible only through the use of the sociological imagination. He does not however, explain fully how cultural studies has managed with obvious success to, in his terms, 'appropriate' the study of the media away from sociology.

Cultural studies has benefited from sociology's theoretical and methodological tools, but has ended up in the cul-de-sac of popular culture. The discipline, has, Tester asserts, become a victim of its subject matter and is incapable of addressing moral questions. Tester is striking a blow for contemporary media sociology, and as such, is attempting to reclaim some of the ground which sociology has lost to cultural studies. It is here that I part, at least some of the way, with Tester, in that, I feel that both disciplines can and should complement each other. Students of the media should understand the dynamics of a media text, be it a Coca Cola advert or a news report from Africa, as well as the institutional and cultural contexts which have shaped that text. Taken in isolation, neither a society centred nor a media centred approach can adequately attempt a comprehensive analysis of the media.

In the book's following two essays, Tester displays some of the wares which sociology has on offer. He discusses the work of Adorno and Horkheimer and asserts that their work provided a refreshing antidote to the sterile and narrow theoretical approach of cultural studies. Drawing upon their work, Tester explores how Adorno and Horkheimer view the media audience. Although he himself admits that the latter discussion is not by any means exhaustive, it does nevertheless set the scene adequately for the book's remaining chapters.

Chapter four is arguably the book's most important chapter. Here, Tester argues that the media, and especially television, is an important source of moral knowledge. The media can alert us to the horrors of famine, wars and poverty, but to what end? He asks whether audience members are simply voyeurs or passive recipients of these images and messages? In the end, Tester concludes that the media is responsible for inculcating passivity into its audience. Although he uses *Live-Aid* as an example, Tester fails to address the continued existence of Telethon television as an example of at least some audience members springing into action on an almost annual basis. While Telethon television is in itself riddled with contradictions, it does nevertheless allow for a degree of audience action rather than passivity.

The book's final chapter continues with Tester's exploration of audience passivity. Ironically, in spite of the author's scathing criticisms of the subject matter of cultural studies in preceding chapters, he himself falls into the same trap in chapter five, leaning heavily as it does on an analysis of a series of paintings of Jackie Onassis by Andy Warhol. Tester's most basic argument therefore has imploded before the conclusion of his own text. This is an interesting book which owes more to moral philosophy than to sociology. In the final analysis, the book failed to convince me that cultural studies should be abandoned in favour of sociology. A complex phenomena like the media needs analysis which is heterogeneous and critical, and is multifaceted in disciplinary terms.

## B. Gunter J. Sancho-Aldridge and P. Winston *Television - The Public's View 1993*

London: John Libbey, 1994. stg £16.00  
ISBN 086196 4020

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### Amanda Dunne

The Independent Television Commission (ITC) tenders for audience research from a variety of sources in order to fulfil requirements placed upon it by the 1990 Broadcasting Act. It must ascertain the state of public opinion concerning programmes included in its licensed services; to determine any effects of such programmes on the attitudes and behaviour of persons who watch them; and to have knowledge of the types of programmes that members of the public would like to be included in licensed services. As part of this function, an annual survey of public opinion is carried out concerning a wide range of broadcasting-related topics. This book is the report of the 1993 survey.

The survey, which has been carried out since 1970, has traditionally focused mainly on consumer protection requirements while investigating, to some degree, the public's attitude towards more general programme quality and standards. In keeping with changing issues and concerns in broadcasting, questions are added or altered from year to year. The 1993 survey included questions on the teletext services and new satellite stations, for example. A quota sample of the general population – approximately 1,000 adults over sixteen years of age – are interviewed at home. There are quotas set in terms of age, sex and employment status in order to accurately reflect the known population profile of the adult population.

In the current broadcasting environment in Britain where consumerist dogma holds sway and competition has intensified dramatically, this survey and report may be of more crucial importance than ever in guaranteeing that the requirements of the public remain paramount in the minds of broadcasters.

The book is divided into two sections, the first entitled 'The Use of Television'. This section comprises two chapters that examine some fundamental features of viewing behaviour. The survey revealed an increase in the ownership of home entertainment equipment – more television sets per person, more videos and more teletext. The video was identified as a means of greater control over what and when to watch. Interestingly, there was no significant growth of interest in new satellite and cable channels among non-subscribers but there was an accompanying drop in strong objection of paying for additional channels. More people are undecided about subscription services than previously.

In terms of viewing, cable and satellite subscribers allotted a substantial share of their viewing time to non-terrestrial channels. The most popular programme choices are national news, recent film releases and wildlife/nature programmes; however substantial potential minority interest markets were identified for less popular genres of programming. Unsurprisingly, respondents generally watched television for enjoyment. Television is important but not crucial, according to those surveyed.

The second, and more substantial part of the book deals with 'Opinions about Television'. It presents the report concerning public opinion on programme content and regulation of television. The authors recognize the difficulty of defining 'quality' programmes while asserting that the survey provides insights into general public feeling about programme standards. The majority of people are happy that standards have been maintained and subscribers to cable and satellite channels feel that they have improved. The greatest criticism of the terrestrial channels was their increased number of repeats.

As always, news featured strongly in the report. Television news remains the most important source for world news. The great majority of respondents indicated that



television offered the most complete, accurate, fair and quickest national and international news coverage. Working class respondents were more likely to hold this view than their middle class counterparts. Most British people perceive television coverage of issues and society to be fair and unbiased – a small minority remain sceptical. There was some concern expressed that the BBC was in some way government controlled whereas few people raised commercial interests as a reason for political bias on ITV.

Television apparently is less offensive to the public than the Mary Whitehouses of this world would have us believe: the usual offenders of sex, violence and bad language are cited in the report. Satellite and cable viewers are less likely to take offence at programmes featuring violence, etc. and among terrestrial stations ITV and Channel 4 broadcast the most 'dubious' content.

The final chapter of the book deals with regulation. Respondents felt that there was greater regulation of terrestrial channels than satellite and cable channels. Most of those surveyed were aware of the 'watershed', but there is little awareness of parental control devices.

To its credit, I felt that this book was well constructed and clearly laid out. The methodology is excellent and the sampling is rigorous in reflecting accurately the general population. However, the book reads like the gospel according to the Great British Public. While I am aware that it is predominantly a report of the findings of the ITC survey, surely with three authors there could be some attempt to extrapolate major themes and interesting trends uncovered by the research. I was struck by the marked differences in attitudes to and perceptions of broadcasting between viewers of terrestrial stations and those with satellite and cable channels. It was among viewers of terrestrial stations that greater concern regarding quality was voiced – in my view, these concerns are more applicable to channels such as Sky 1 and its ilk.

While this is a very worthy report of the findings of the ITC survey of public opinion, a greater degree of critical analysis of the findings and trends of the research would better serve both the Independent Television Commission and the British viewing public.

Desmond Fisher,  
former Head of Current  
Affairs in RTE.

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**R. Winsbury and S. Fazal (eds.) *Vision and Hindsight: The first 25 Years of the International Institute of Communications***

London: John Libbey, 1994. 256pp, stg £35.00, stg £15.00 (pbk.)  
ISBN 086 1964675 ISBN 086 1964497

**Desmond Fisher**

Readers of the *Irish Communications Review* are aware of the importance of the communications revolution which is accelerating year by year for the past thirty or so years. The explosive developments in computerology, fibre optics, satellites and the older media of radio and television – and, even more, in the fusion of all these technologies – are rapidly transforming all sections of the communications industry and the regulatory environment in which it operates.

What will be the outcome? Does it all add up to genuine progress? Will the runaway development of communications technologies widen the already existing gap between the information-rich and the information-poor nations? Can public service broadcasting survive in an era when communications developments make it impossible for national controls to be operated? Are the technological marvels of our time helping or hindering

the achievement of the individual's right to communicate? Will better communications ensure better communication and better community. These are the sorts of themes with which the International Institute of Communications (IIC) has been concerning itself since it was established some twenty-five years ago. And, given the nature and scope of communications developments, they are among the most important questions facing society today.

Since its foundation, the IIC has developed until it is now probably the most influential forum dedicated to bringing about a better understanding of the issues facing communicators everywhere. It is a reflection on Irish media people – practitioners, academics, communications experts and senior civil servants – that only two Irish organizations (RTE and Telecom Eireann) feature among the IIC's 100 corporate and institutional members and only seven Irish names are included among the thousand or so in the individual membership list.

As the editors write in the preface (p.3):

The unique qualities of the IIC are that it is global in membership and in outlook; that it spans all forms of mass communications; that it is neither the spokesman nor the lackey of any vested interest or paymasters; and that it operates at the interface between technology, society and politics, at the international level.

It is a fair claim.

The editors were asked to mark the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the organization's foundation (variously reckoned by contributors as 1967 and 1969) with a suitable publication and *Vision and Hindsight* is the result. It is a collection of essays by sixteen of the leading personalities of the intervening years in the IIC, formerly the International Broadcasting Institute, and, like all collections of its kind, suffers from the need to claim editorially an overall unity of purpose and coherence of treatment which are simply not there. The editors have, therefore, divided the essays into five parts – the first three dealing with the history of the organization, the fourth describing particular aspects of the IIC's work, and the fifth being a long essay by Michael Tracey, Director of the Centre for Mass Media Research at the University of Colorado, setting out a view of the future of communications and suggesting 'performance criteria' by which the IIC can judge its success in the future.

In the introduction, Rex Winsbury recalls the IIC's founding fathers were mainly American and at one time the organization was accused (wrongly, according to an article by a former General Manager of Reuters) of being CIA-funded. But American support for it fell drastically when it seemed to be promoting Unesco's 'New World Information and Communication Order', with its perceived emphasis on socialist communications policies and Third World bias. Ironically, at the same time, a former Director-General of the BBC was accusing the IIC of being a Trojan horse for American media imperialism. One of the main casualties of the internal dissension was the IIC's efforts to have a new 'right to communicate' enshrined in the UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights. As Winsbury writes: 'The right to communicate (was)... arguably the grandest and most ambitious cause that the IIC had ever embraced... and its most noble failure (so far, anyway).'

The concept of such a fundamental human right, which would belong to each individual, was the brain-child of Baron Jean D'Arcy, an outstanding French civil servant and thinker, and one of the founders of the IIC. The last article he wrote on the subject is reprinted here as is also one from Sean McBride. Both appeared originally in a book I edited with Professor L.S. Harms of Hawaii: *The Right to Communicate; a New Human Right*, (Dublin: Boole Press, 1982). The cold war hindered further work on this subject. Now, perhaps, it could find new champions.

The twenty-two essays in the book are as varied in their themes as they are uneven in their writing. The historical accounts and the eulogies on IIC personalities like Arthur Morse, Eddi Ploman, Jean D'Arcy, Sig Mickelson, Asa Briggs, Yoshinori Maeda, Gerald

Long, etc. serve their purpose in this commemorative volume. But readers unaware of the work of the IIC will find more valuable material in the general articles.

Professor James Halloran of the University of Leicester writes about his team's study of the television news processes in three countries - Sweden, Nigeria and Ireland. This study, published in book form (P. Golding, and P. Elliot, *Making the News* London: Longman, 1979) is still required reading for journalists. Shehina Fazal recalls how the IIC tackled the question of the future of public service broadcasting, a subject which is likely to become significant in Ireland as the future funding of broadcasting is disputed.

Ireland's leading figure in the IIC has been Dr. T.P. Hardiman, former Director-General of RTE and now chairman of IBM Ireland. He was President of the IIC from 1984 to 1987 and is currently chairman of its Telecommunications Forum. In an article on the Forum's work, he writes about the difficulty some strong industries with adequate resources and high skills have in coping with and taking advantage of the opportunities afforded by rapid technological change.

Regulatory processes operated in the public interest have less possibility of staying ahead of rapid technology change and of shaping the social means of its control. The virtually limitless scope of some of the communications technologies now emerging poses questions regarding the need or indeed the advisability of attempting their regulation.

Dr. Hardiman here raises critical issues. His message may not be the one he was preaching when he was fighting RTE's corner against the legislation of commercial broadcasting in Ireland. But his observation is a measure both of the immense challenges posed by rapid changes in communications technology and of his own ability to recognize those changes for what they are. Which brings us back to the beginning of this review.

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## **R. Silverstone *Television and Everyday Life***

London: Routledge, 1994. 272pp. stg£37.50, stg £12.99 (pbk.)

ISBN 0415 016460 ISBN 0415 016479

**Richard Fitzsimons**

Don't be misled by the deceptively simple title. Roger Silverstone's latest book takes the reader on a difficult journey through the complex relationship between television, its audience. It is, particularly, this question of integration which surfaces throughout the book, and though the author acknowledges that the production of an all-embracing theory to explain it lies beyond the scope of this (or any other) text he does, however, attempt to clarify the processes which lie at its core. By so doing, he opens up the cultural debate about the interweaving of television and everyday life.

Central to Silverstone's thesis is his strongly held belief that the power and influence of television and their subsequent analysis cannot adequately be dealt with in isolation. Rather, he argues they are heavily impacted upon by external cultural trends and social pressures. In this way, television is presented as just one of a multiplicity of discourses which impact on our daily lives. Drawing on a wide range of disciplines from cultural studies to psychoanalysis, he constructs an intricate theoretical lattice through which these complex interrelationships are examined.

Much of the book focuses on those who watch television, the conditions in which this takes place and the impact of the experience on the public sphere. It acknowledges from the outset the extraordinary degree to which television has woven itself into our daily



lives. Television here is accepted as a phenomenological, ontological reality. Its integration is, in Silverstone's view, complete and is the underlying motivation behind the book. As the centrality of television to our everyday life experience becomes more apparent, so must we redouble our efforts to understand the medium and the complex relationships which surround it.

Throughout the book, the breadth of theoretical research which Silverstone draws upon is impressive. A particularly striking example can be seen in his chapter dealing specifically with audiences. Here, he clearly and eruditely takes us on a theoretical journey which uses mediation theory as its starting point. By expertly unwrapping layer upon layer of argument and placing them carefully one upon the other, we are presented with an ever more complex theoretical confection which is topped off with an analysis of the relative merits and demerits of reception theory (not forgetting, of course, the ideological theory which provides the filling for this particular sandwich).

The virtues and limitations of each of these approaches are clearly and sharply presented. This journey takes us to a point where we may perceive audiences as active rather than passive. Thus the problematics of audience analysis are exposed; the fundamental questions which emerge are not one of audience activity or passivity, but rather whether this activity should be perceived as significant in any way. Silverstone himself believes that 'television audiences live in different, overlapping but always undetermining spaces and times'. This is undoubtedly true, but Silverstone's acknowledgement of the fact does nothing to advance our understanding of this particularly complex and contested area of research other than suggesting that what is required is a theory which places at its fulcrum 'the dynamics of the place of television in everyday life'.

This brings me to the fundamental problem with the book. Its methodological framework is rooted firmly in qualitative research which, by its very nature, tends to act as the motor which powers the development of theory. As the author points out in the preface, 'the book can only be a provisional statement of an emerging position, but that should not necessarily invalidate it'. Unfortunately this leaves the reader in a somewhat difficult position; intrigued and challenged by the ambitions of the book and the theoretical overview which it contains, while simultaneously disappointed and dissatisfied with the feeling of incompleteness which permeates its pages. We are presented with more questions than answers, more problems to be solved than solutions found. Perhaps it would have been useful to delay publication until such time as the author's ongoing research had reached a more advanced stage. A strategy of this nature would undoubtedly have imbued the book with a greater sense of equilibrium while also making it more user-friendly to students of the media.

Hopefully a subsequent volume will redress some of these criticisms while also exploring the changing role of television in everyday life, particularly in the light of recent advances in the provision of alternative media experiences in the domestic sphere (Internet, multimedia etc). *Television and Everyday Life* should be viewed as valuable work in progress. It demonstrates 20/20 vision in its analysis of past research on the subject and occasionally, blurred, exotic mirages of the media landscape of the future may be glimpsed through the teasing tantalizing pages.

Ian Fox music critic,  
of the *Sunday Tribune*,  
author and broadcaster  
and Director of the  
Institute of Advertising  
Practitioners in Ireland.

## J. Tambling *A Night in at the Opera*

London John Libbey in association with the Arts Council of England, 1994.  
310pp. stg £17.50 (pbk.)  
ISBN 086196 4667

Ian Fox

Dorothy Parker once remarked about a certain book that it should not so much be picked but rather hurled across the room. Much of this pompous, alarmingly ungrammatical and poorly-proofed publication could well take the same route and continue on out the window. It is supposed to be about watching operas on television; the subtitle tells us this: 'media representations of opera' and the Preface reinforces the thesis as looking 'at opera in film, video and television – opera in the electronic media, perhaps its most decisive form today'. In fact, the poor reader pays seventeen pounds fifty for thirteen essays containing some of the most spectacular verbiage imaginable in a series of essays the majority of which are often far from the book's declared brief.

For example there is a lengthy analysis of the 1933 Hollywood film of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* with reproductions of many stills; it seems to have been included for no better reason than the fact that Erich Korngold, who had been a successful Viennese opera composer before going to Hollywood, arranged Mendelssohn's music for the film. It hasn't the tiniest semi-quaver to do with opera. Another entire chapter is devoted to 'homeoerotic desire', not a major opera-video issue I would have thought anyhow; this piece of nonsense proves to be an analysis of mainly visual aspects of Visconti's film of *Death in Venice*. Its inclusion is justified by the crazed logic that Benjamin Britten wrote a totally different opera on the same topic which has nothing at all to do with Visconti's movie. Nowhere is the Britten discussed nor are his other relevant operas like *Turn of the Screw* or *Billy Budd* even mentioned. The writers seem unaware of Tippett's *Knot Garden* (1970), the first opera with openly gay characters, Ginastera's *Bomarzo* or Schnittke's *Life with an Idiot*. Poor stuff.

So it goes on: we learn much of Lawrence Kramer's concern about penis envy in a Freudian essay on the Marx Brothers' *A Night at the Opera* (had you noticed it?), interesting stuff for a medical magazine but nothing to do with the film's relevance to the electronic media. Indeed, no contributor deals properly with the problems faced in transferring opera, essentially a large-scale theatrical experience, to the tiny environs of home TV. Even the significant differences between opera in the cinema, on the big screen with hi-fi sound, versus the squeezed-down versions witnessed in the confines of the living room are largely ignored.

Seven of the thirteen essays seem to have little to do with the chosen subject or refer to it only incidentally, and two articles are extremely brief, though composer Judith Weir has more to say about the topic in her four pages than other contributors manage in twenty. The writers are mainly distinguished academics, often from the literary world; the information we gather concerns their hang-ups over Nazism and fascism, their erotic problems, their flabby verbosity and their poor grasp of syntax. We are told little of how we might approach the subject, which films or videos are worth seeing and what the problems are, technically and artistically, for the director when trying to make the leap from the opera house to the TV set.

There are a few good pieces. Jennifer Barnes provides a useful list of operas commissioned for television. There is a commendable, though long-winded study of Beecham's delightful film of *The Tales of Hoffman*, a beautifully stylized creation by Powell and Pressburger (no first names provided) from 1951. Though the essay never gives the date. The uninitiated might unfortunately be put off the film when confronted by such unattractive and unintelligible phrases in this essay as 'generally scopophilic', 'meta-cinematic references', 'kinetic contrast' and other pomposities. Do not fear, it is a charming, stylized film and well worth seeing, ignore all the superfluous clichés. Some

essays simply do not address the subject but dally in detailed, over-wordy analysis of the filmic qualities of the movies themselves. Lesley Caldwell, a lecturer in Italian sociology, devotes thirty pages to Bertolucci's use of opera in his films without even mentioning electronic media or *A Night in at the Opera* at all.

It is a pity that the opportunity to provide a worthwhile guide to the topic of opera as video has been so consistently missed in this expensively produced volume. Help is needed: operas often take three hours to play; I have shelves full of taped operatic broadcasts that I never seem to have the time to view. Rather than add to the clutter, I have simply given up recording them. Which ones would be worth dusting down to view and why? This volume is of little assistance. So, if you want to explore the world of opera on video, your seventeen pounds fifty would be better spent renting some tapes and simply enjoying them at home. Unless of course – to paraphrase editor Jeremy Tambling – you want to 'recontextualize the digestic space for your self-referentiality and bricolage in a fetishizing way'. If you can understand that verbiage maybe you should be writing books for the Arts Council of England yourself.

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### **S. Moores, *Interpreting Audiences, An Ethnography of Media Consumption***

London: Sage, 1993. 208pp, stg £37.50, stg £11.95 (pbk.)  
ISBN 08039 8446-4 ISBN 08039 8447-X

Mary Kelly, Lecturer in  
sociology, University  
College, Dublin.

### **S. Livingstone and P. Lunt *Talk on Television, Audience Participation and Public Debate***

London: Routledge, 1994. 208pp, stg £37.50, stg £12.99 (pbk.)  
ISBN 0415 077389 ISBN 0415 077370

#### **Mary Kelly**

Both these books are of considerable interest in their attempt to place research on the television audience within broader theoretical and sociological debates. These debates are different but complementary, one on subjectivity, identity, taste cultures and social constraint, the other on the role of the media in reproducing political and economic power.

*Interpreting Audiences* draws on the first of these theoretical debates. It is to be welcomed for its excellent review of the now considerable body of research within cultural studies, feminist and ethnographic perspectives. It is clear, precise and eminently usable as an undergraduate or postgraduate text. It concentrates mainly on the use and response of audiences to television and to new media technologies, and while not exclusively drawing on British research, is biased in its favour. Dave Morley's work is central here, and Moores' review moves, as did Morley, from his early research on the audience decoding of TV texts, to the gendered use of the media within the politics of the family sitting room, and later to the consumption of new media technologies. A wide range of other research is reviewed and critiqued within this framework.

In theoretical terms, Moores is less interested in placing his review of audience research within a Marxist or Gramscian perspective than in analysing the contribution of this research to an ethnography of taste and pleasure. Here he draws on Bourdieu's and De Certeau's work on the sociology of taste and consumption, and on the social construction of subjectivity and pleasure. It is thus an attempt to contribute to the development of an ethnography of media consumption – who likes what, why do they like it and how is this consumption socially and culturally valued.

In answering the latter question Moores draws in particular on Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital – how, for example, consumption of particular TV programmes may be part of one's claim to cultural distinction and hence a part of one's symbolic currency in the struggle for status and power. He is also interested in Bourdieu's analysis of the cultural construction of class-based dispositions or subjectivities, or in Bourdieu's language: habitus. Habitus provides basic conceptual categories and action frames through which people think about and respond to the social world. Bourdieu's thesis would suggest that the consumption of television, or indeed any material or cultural goods, will be framed by one's class based habitus or cultural dispositions.

But Moores would not fully accept what he sees as Bourdieu's deterministic interrelating of class, habitus and cultural tastes. Within this perspective class constraint outweighs cultural creativity. To critique Bourdieu he examines, inter alia, research findings on youth subcultures. This research has examined how adolescent groups living in complex and exploitative contemporary society, negotiate their social and cultural identities through creating and adapting symbolic and expressive forms, including for example popular music. These symbolic forms may both resist and comply with various complex and ambiguous aspects of contemporary culture and society. Moores would want to retain the concepts of constraint and creativity, of resistance and compliance in future research. It is the role of research to explore and specify in what particular socio-cultural contexts constraint and compliance rather than resistance and creativity occur, and to explore the symbolic consumption codes and patterns whereby we negotiate and express our identity and life world.

The second book, *Talk on Television* examines audience participation programmes. Its authors are particularly interested in raising the Habermasian question as to their potential role in contributing to greater participation in the public sphere and to the development of citizenship.

The programmes analysed include *Kilroy*, *Donohue* and *The Oprah Winfrey Show*. The research was undertaken between 1989-1992, when most of the shows were transmitted on British television in the morning. While the 'available' TV audience at this time constituted forty per cent of the population, seven per cent actively watched 'talk television' and three per cent as a sole activity. Thus *Kilroy* (at two per cent of viewers) had about one million viewers. Particularly frequent viewers were the unemployed and housewives.

The research included textual analysis as well as audience research. The latter was undertaken by analysing the responses of twelve focus groups subsequent to the showing of an episode of a talks show, sixteen in-depth interviews with viewers and programme participants and a survey questionnaire of some 500 respondents. The authors explore the extent to which audience discussion programmes may contribute to the development of the public sphere by the access given to a range of diverse audience voices not normally heard on television. An opportunity is thus given to 'ordinary people' to offer their own 'authentic' experiences and feelings, their common sense attitudes and advice, and to question the 'experts'. They argue that the programmes may contribute to the public sphere not so much through the social construction of consensus, nor through the elaboration of a debate among expert professionals, nor indeed by offering any form of conclusion or closure, but rather by offering a media space for the display and interrogation of oppositions.

These oppositions include:

Public	v	Private
Expert Opinion	v	Ordinary Experience
The Debate	v	Story Telling
Critical Discussion	v	Authenticity, Emotion
Consensus	v	Diversity
Closure	v	Openness
System World	v	Life World



The talk show, while privileging the private and experiential, nonetheless, through its interrogation of the public representative and the expert, moves between both discourses, the ubiquitous host mobilizing a range of performative and rhetorical modes to do so.

Does this giving of access to 'ordinary people' to appear and speak about 'everyday experience' help to orchestrate 'common sense' into critical opinion, contribute to the construction of viewer as citizen with influence on public policy, or allow the expression of a diversity of public voices which may 'challenge established power to recognize the complexities of everyday life' (p.35)?

The audience research findings were not entirely positive on these counts. The viewers certainly found pleasure in listening to what they perceived as 'ordinary people' talking about personal issues which were also of relevance to their own lives. Nonetheless, they did not necessarily judge the programmes as offering a better public forum than, for example, documentary programmes. Those favouring documentaries did so on the basis that they offered order, conclusiveness, expertise and serious argument. Those favouring audience discussion programmes drew on the criteria of access and openness, involvement and spontaneity, ordinary experience and confrontation. When asked to judge the arguments offered on talk shows, the majority of viewers were again negative, noting the omissions, irrelevancies, unequal participation and lack of conclusions. They judged the rationality and truthfulness of the various arguments according to whether the participants' experiences accorded with their own, and the extent to which the participants managed, in both performative and rhetorical terms, to construct on the programme an identity which appeared truthful and the extent to which he/she complied with the rules of participation on the show.

How successful then are talk shows in meeting Habermas' ideal of creating a public space in which the ordinary 'life world' can meet, question and make more accountable the official 'system world' dominated by political and economic power? The authors conclude that they are more successful in offering a public space within which the oppositions between these two worlds may become visible than in offering any resolution. Making visible, however, is in itself in the public interest. Rather more negatively, they also note Habermas' fear of the systematic colonization of the life world by political and economic power. They question whether talk shows may be part of this colonization process, reducing participation to PR.

Both of these books, by placing their central questions within some of the main theoretical debates and interests in mainstream contemporary sociology, have enriched both sociology and media studies. They contribute to clarifying the theoretical debate and raising appropriate research questions for the future.

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## **J. Martin-Barbero *Communication, Culture and Hegemony***

London: Sage, 1993. 272pp. stg £37.50, stg£13.95 (pbk.)  
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**Helena Sheehan**

On initial impact, this book strikes an engaging note. The author begins with an intimation of a journey:

I came from the field of philosophy, and moved along the paths of linguistic studies until finally I met up with communication. Coming down from the Heideggerian contemplation of being, I now found myself in the slum shacks of man, built of clay and reeds, but nevertheless with a radio and television set...

I diverted my journey through sociolinguistics and semiotics to find tools for an ideological analysis of texts and cultural practices... a conception of the media process which left room for nothing but the stratagems of domination, a process defined simply as a few powerful message senders controlling passive receivers without the slightest indication of seduction or resistance.

The thrust of this book is a reconsideration or refutation of this conception of the media process.

Much of the book travels through familiar territory, familiar at least to those involved in European and American communication studies, and the intellectual history in which it is embedded. He traces a trajectory from the enlightenment through the romantic movement through anarchism and marxism to behaviourism, structuralism and critical theory. He focuses this search on the concept of popular culture. It also travels through what is not-so-familiar territory to European and North American readers, that is, the course taken by these theoretical debates in the intellectual life of Latin America. This book is a valuable resource for anyone wanting a map of the terrain of Latin American media studies. It is one of those books which is put forward as sweeping away all the old orthodoxies and putting a new superior paradigm in their place. My problems with it are: (1) that I do not accept his characterization of all the old orthodoxies and (2) that I do not find his paradigm to be either new or superior.

Along the way, Martin-Barbero rehearses some of the standard caricatures of marxism, which seem to be compulsory these days if marxism is to be mentioned at all. He does admit that Zhdanov (the translators have it as Jdanov) is not the same as Lukacs or Gramsci, but nevertheless claims that marxism cannot escape the restrictive logic of class struggle to see the complexity and specificity of cultures. I would argue that it does have the capacity to analyse both relations of production and constitution of meaning. Moreover, I believe it has a capacity to synthesize the two that is superior to any of the alternatives.

The author is particularly reacting against 'the obsession with ideology', ideology being 'the backbone of a mass discourse whose function was to make the poor dream the same dreams as the rich'. I have to declare then that I am one of those who are obsessed with it, although I did not come to it by way of sociolinguistics, semiology or structuralism.

I do agree with the author that it is necessary to emphasize that neither the producers nor the audiences of mass media are homogeneous. It is true that there are internal conflicts and contradictions in the production of these texts. It is also true that there are complex strategies of assimilation and resistance in their reception. On one level, it is a matter of emphasis: how much weight to put on hegemonic texts and how much weight to put on alternative or subversive or even oppositional readings of these texts.

On another level, it seems to be something more: the unravelling of more powerful explanatory concepts, such as the media imperialism thesis in its more sophisticated versions, into pluralistic dissipation of mediations and off-the-top-of-the-head remarks made in focus groups. I do think that ethnography of audience reception and analysis of variable readings have an important role to play in media studies, but it can veer toward the old 'uses and gratifications' studies, masking relations of power. Some empirical studies conducted under this banner come up with results, which may be anecdotally valid, but cannot bear the weight of the claims they make. Meanwhile, they undercut the use of concepts which yield a more penetrating analysis of what is happening in the production and reception of media in our time.

I'll stick with the idea of ideology. It would take more than this book to convince me to do otherwise.

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## Books Received

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Frachon, C. and M. Vargaftig *European Television: Immigrants and Ethnic Minorities*  
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IDEA 95/96 *International Directory of Electronic Arts* London: John Libbey, 1995.

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## NOTES

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