

NOTES AND DISCUSSION

Rolf Meyersohn

MASS COMMUNICATION:

DILEMMAS FOR SOCIOLOGY

The language of experience is not the language of classification.

JOHN CIARDI ¹

Massenkommunikationsmedien enthalten ... auf Grund ihrer spezifischen Funktion in der Industriegesellschaft, als Instrumente sozialer Standardisierung nämlich, ein Potential der Änderung des Prozesses der Eingliederung in die Gesellschaft und damit der Änderung der Struktur der sozialkulturellen Person, auf welches in der Literatur der Massenkommunikationsforschung bisher noch nicht mit genügender Deutlichkeit verwiesen wurde.

BARBARA FÜLGRAFF ²

I

The relationship between social science and television has been an uncomfortable one. So "conspicuously vulgar," so "manifestly

¹ *How Does a Poem Mean?* (Boston, Houghton Mifflin, 1960), p. 666.

² "Because of their specific function in industrial society, namely as instruments of social standardization, the mass communication media contain a potential for change of the processes of adjustment in society, and thereby of changes in the structure of the socio-cultural person. [This is a problem] which has not been sufficiently emphasised in the literature of mass communications research." *Fernsehen und Familie* (Freiburg, Verlag Rombach, 1965), p. 45.

tempting," so "clearly a waste of time," television's "evil effects" have been pondered by social scientists ever since the first antennas were raised on the rooftops of America and Western Europe.

Sheer quantity provides perhaps the leading cause for the concern. Much as uncontrolled births, "the problem of overpopulation," serves as fulcrum for concern with "underdeveloped" countries and as epitome for the difficulties associated with raising *levels of living*, so uncontrolled television viewing, the problem of over-viewing, serves as fulcrum for concern with modern societies and as epitome for the difficulties associated with improving *styles of life*.³

The study of the social effects of television has so far produced very few results. Significant consequences take a long time in showing themselves; more importantly, since television is a universal habit and part and parcel of the mass culture of Western society, its role as causal agent is very difficult to isolate. A recent compendium of research on effects of television concluded its survey of findings by suggesting that social scientists give up the quest for "simple and direct effects of which mass communication is the sole and sufficient cause."⁴

If the social scientist's efforts to uncover significant effects of television have suffered from the lack of clear-cut findings, his effort to comprehend the place of television in contemporary life generally has suffered from the lack of a sociological perspective.

II

An activity when repeated over time becomes *habit*; when pursued by more than one, *custom*. In the United States and much of Western Europe, television has become habit and custom.

³ The distinction between level of living and style of life derives from Jean Fourastié, *Machinisme et bien-être* (Paris, Editions de Minuit), 1961; trans. Theodore Caplow, *The Causes of Wealth* (Glencoe, Ill., Free Press, 1960). The first refers to the structure of consumer expenditures, whether for necessities or luxuries, the second to the ways in which life is lived. Standard of living can be measured by studying patterns of monetary expenditures, style of life by studying patterns of time expenditures.

⁴ Joseph T. Klapper, *The Effects of Mass Communication* (Glencoe, Ill., Free Press, 1961), p. 257.

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Ultimately, perhaps, habits and customs merit study insofar as they have some effect or make some difference to individuals or groups or societies. Yet the history of science and of man is filled with ideas, devices, and machinery whose consumption, because of its conspicuousness, was at the time considered important. In retrospect, many turned out to be, at best, indicators of the times, of the *Zeitgeist*, with few noticeable effects.

Social scientists have treated the mass media, including television, as distinct entities and reified objects. This has permitted them to set up theoretical schemes which would enable them to look for effects. Yet

Many of the concepts making up the current dictionary of effects reflect the fact that much of the research in mass communication has tended to view persons as "targets" of communications impact rather than as a part of a total communication process.⁵

Although the range and scope of short-range effects of mass communication that have been found in such conceptualizations are indeed impressive (as can be seen in the extensive summaries and compendia that are published from time to time⁶), the separation of the mass media from their human fabricators has seriously handicapped the sociologist. The very structure of the conceptualization, the model of communication into which the study of the effects of communication is fitted, embodies this handicap, for through this structure flow *messages*. Yet the messages of the media are not the quintessential element or the proper unit for sociological analysis.

Message analysis has had a long and interesting history in its failure to explicate the sociological basis of the mass media. Beginning with a simple tracing of the mass media as stimuli and

⁵ Otto N. Larsen, "Social Effects of Mass Communication," *Handbook of Modern Sociology*, ed. by Robert E. L. Faris (Chicago, Rand McNally, 1964), pp. 368-369.

⁶ The most recent summaries include Percy Tannenbaum and Bradley Greenberg, "Mass Communication," *Annual Review of Psychology*, 19 (1968), pp. 351-386; Walter Weiss, "Effects of the Mass Media of Communication," *The Handbook of Social Psychology*, 2nd ed., edited by Gardner Lindzey and Elliot Aronson (Reading, Mass., Addison-Wesley), vol. 5 [in press]; and Larsen, *op. cit.*, pp. 348-381.

its audiences as respondents, social scientists constructed a simple S-R model. Later this model was modified and improved upon, taking into account various "intervening variables" that operated between stimulus and response.⁷ But the message model has remained intact. Even when sociologists have attempted to modify the framework, concern with impact and with what happens to messages remains foremost. For example, perhaps the most interesting effort has been the reversal of the question "what do mass media do to people" to ask "what do people do with the mass media?"⁸ Yet this reformulation still focussed on the impact of messages, even if in mediated and transformed contexts.

By asking about messages, sociologists are kept from seeing the mass media as part and parcel of the social world; instead they are seen as a kind of stimulus-pool which permits the activation of a range of responses. Although such a conception certainly is not false, it is unproductive for a sociological comprehension of the mass media and of the interaction between humans and the mass media.

An analogy helps illustrate this point. In the study of the family it is not sufficient to ask "what do parents do to children?" or "what do children do with their parents?" The parent-child relationship is the essential component and such an analysis begins with that relationship or with the social structure in which the relationship takes place. It does not separate, in S-R model, the two interacting partners.

The misplaced emphasis on S-R is understandable enough. The mass media have been primarily studied in the context of information, of campaigns, and not in the context of symbol structure, reality-shaping, fantasy-projection, nor in the context of entertainment and leisure.⁹ Because of the journalistic organization of most of the mass media (with the notable exception of the

⁷ For a recent discussion of this development, see Melvin De Fleur, *Theories of Mass Communication* (New York, McKay, 1966) esp. pp. 119-140.

⁸ Elihu Katz and Paul F. Lazarsfeld, *Personal Influence* (Glencoe, Ill., Free Press, 1954).

⁹ Two efforts to consider the mass media in the context of entertainment are Harold Mendelsohn, *Mass Entertainment* (New Haven, College and University Press, 1966) and William Stephenson, *The Play Theory of Mass Communication* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1967).

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cinema), they are treated as though they are information-producing. Though they are of course full of information they are, at the same time, a component of reality in a far broader sense.

III

The sociologically relevant dimension for sociologists is not the message system but the institutionalization of knowledge on the part of the mass media. Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann recently wrote that knowledge and “knowers” are a matter of social definition: “Both ‘knowing’ and ‘not knowing’ refer to what is socially defined as reality, and not to some extra-social criteria of cognitive validity.”¹⁰ The mass media have come to be defined as transmitters of knowledge, audiences as recipients. Yet, as Berger and Luckmann would argue, the mass media are defined as the transmitter not because they have the knowledge, but the reverse.

To put this crudely, maternal uncles do not transmit [a] particular stock of knowledge because they know it, but they know it (that is, are defined as knowers) *because* they are maternal uncles.¹¹

In contemporary society, “the maternal uncle,” the transmitter of the stock of traditional knowledge, has been largely replaced by others, including the mass media. This replacement has occurred because the maternal uncle has failed to satisfy the knowledge-needs of the nephew, an interesting problem in social and technological change. When such a replacement occurs, the maternal uncle is deprived of his status, according to Berger and Luckmann.

If an institutionally designated maternal uncle, for particular reasons, turns out to be incapable of transmitting the knowledge in question, he is no longer a maternal uncle

¹⁰ *The Social Construction of Reality* (London, Allen Lane, The Penguin Press, 1967), p. 88.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 88.

in the full sense of the word, and, indeed, institutional recognition of this status may be withdrawn from him.¹²

Sociologists are only beginning to discover the extent to which mass media are becoming defined as “knowers” and thus institutions for transmitting various kinds of knowledge. It is not yet clear to what extent they are considered by their audiences to be more capable than other interacting or communicating partners of transmitting various kinds of knowledge; for some societies the conflict between the “modern” mass media and the “traditional maternal uncle” (or his functional equivalent) has begun to be studied.¹³

Such a framework of inquiry begins by asking not about messages but about processes of institutionalization; it forces the sociologist to consider the component parts of the mass media in terms not of the particular channel, but in terms of the particular kind of knowledge, not in terms of the amount of information delivered but in terms of the kind of institutional context perceived and shared by the audience, not in terms of production and consumption but in terms of the social role of “knower” and “not knower.”

The knowledge transmission apparatus, trivial though its output may often appear (particularly for example in the kind of knowledge dispensed in American commercial television), is *per se*—and not only in its content, its message—a statement of the social order. Viewer and non-viewer alike share this social order, for it is a given in society. The social order shared is one in which the mass media are the institutionalized mechanisms whereby certain kinds of knowledge are represented and certain kinds of experiences (to which everyone contributes, albeit infinitesimally) are recorded. The mass media play back the fantasies and happenings of human beings, and human beings watch themselves and the “record” they are making. This is a closed system, or

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 88.

¹³ This process has been studied in the context of shifting opinion leaders. See W. N. McPhee and R. Meyerson, “New Opinion Leaders in Rural Lebanon,” in Daniel Lerner, *The Passing of Traditional Society* (Glencoe, Ill., Free Press, 1958), pp. 185-196, for an early effort to trace shifts; see Everett M. Rogers *Modernization Among Peasants* (New York, Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1969) for the most recent and thorough examination.

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loop, tempting for model-builders to speculate about "feed-back." The important point is that the mass media are the institutionalization of those norms and activities which provide a basis of cultural life, fantasy, and reality.

In a discussion of mass communications in the context of social institutions the concept of *knowledge* is particularly apt.¹⁴ It places mass communications into the setting in which they can be treated along with other forms, competing or pre-existent, such as education; it allows for mass communication to include such diverse services as printed matter, photography and phonography, stage and cinema, broadcasting, advertising and public relations, telephone, telegraph and postal services; it permits a loose classification of the different kinds of knowledge that are produced and distributed, and for which particular media have become the institutionalized means of production; and finally, it permits an examination of television, in particular as a medium whose knowledge-giving along very special lines has become established, at least in American society, to an unprecedented degree. Knowledge subsumes the worn-out distinction between "education" and "entertainment," is more precise than "message," and more comprehensive than "information."

Clearly different kinds of knowledge are produced and distributed by the different institutionalized sources of knowledge. Fritz Machlup, using as a criterion "the subjective meaning of the known to the *knower*,"¹⁵ distinguishes five types of knowledge:

(1) Practical knowledge: useful in his work, his decisions, and actions...

(2) Intellectual knowledge: satisfying his intellectual curiosity, regarded as part of liberal education, humanistic and scientific learning, general culture; acquired, as a rule, in active concentration with an appreciation of the existence of open problems and cultural values.

¹⁴ This discussion is based on Fritz Machlup, *The Production and Distribution of Knowledge in the United States* (Princeton, N. J., Princeton Univ. Press, 1962).

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

(3) Small talk and pastime knowledge: satisfying the non-intellectual curiosity or his desire for light entertainment and emotional stimulation, including local gossip, news of crimes and accidents, light novels, stories, jokes, games, etc; acquired, as a rule, in passive relaxation from 'serious' pursuits; apt to dull his sensitiveness.

(4) Spiritual knowledge: related to his religious knowledge of God and of the ways to the salvation of the soul.

(5) Unwanted knowledge: outside his interests, usually accidentally acquired, aimlessly retained.¹⁶

Although this knowledge quintet establishes not only the different subjective meanings but also the modes in which the knowledge is acquired (e.g., concentration, passive relaxation), as well as some consequences (e.g., dulling the senses), these two components are not in fact essential to the classificatory scheme, an important reprieve inasmuch as Machlup's assumptions here are dubious. (Pastime knowledge is often acquired with much passion and seriousness, for example). The importance of Machlup's scheme is that it permits "entertainment" to be treated under a broader rubric and along with other forms of knowledge.

Machlup's purpose in devising this scheme was to discuss the knowledge industry from an economist's point of view. Our interest is to consider mass communication, particularly television, in its institutional setting. Table I below provides a rough indication of the allocation in U. S. society of the institutionalization of various types of knowledge among the various mass media. Clearly, television is largely a medium for the transmission of *pastime* knowledge.¹⁷

Although for Machlup and for many others, this observation constitutes a critique of television, no such judgment is intended

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 21-22.

¹⁷ Because of the vast number of hours during which television programs are transmitted, television, despite its large emphasis on pastime knowledge, constitutes a very important medium for the transmission of intellectual knowledge. Using somewhat different criteria, Bernard Berelson [in "In the Presence of Culture," *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 28:1 (Spring, 1964), pp. 1-12] estimates that Americans spend almost one hundred million hours per month watching cultural programs on commercial television; according to him, this constitutes 22% of their cultural intake.

TABLE 1

TYPES OF KNOWLEDGE FOUND IN VARIOUS MEDIA

Type of Knowledge	<i>a</i> Books ¹	<i>b</i> Periodicals ²	<i>c</i> News- papers ³	<i>d</i> Radio Programs ⁴	<i>e</i> Television Programs ⁵
Practical	15.8%	35.3	7.9	10.5	
Intellectual	50.2	22.4	33.4	12.0	9.8
Pastime	23.7	36.5	51.4	65.6	75.2
Spiritual	7.6	5.8	2.0	4.4	
Miscellaneous, unclassified	2.7	—	5.3	7.5 ⁺⁺	15.0
Total per cent	100.0	100.00	100.0	100.0	100.0
Total	14,876	\$ 477,111 ⁺	(130)	(14)	152,320 ⁺⁺

+ in thousands

++ in millions of minutes

¹ New books published in 1959, according to subject matter. Machlup, *op. cit.*, p. 214.

² Receipts from sales and subscriptions, according to major subjects, 1954. *Ibid.*, p. 221.

³ Distribution of space, exclusive of advertising, among various subject matter classes, 1954. *Ibid.*, p. 227.

⁴ Allocation of time to various types of programs, including advertising time, 1957. *Ibid.*, p. 254.

⁵ Distribution of audience receiving time among types of programs, 1960. *Ibid.*, p. 257.

here. It is first and foremost necessary to understand what institutionalized and non-institutional forms for pastime knowledge television has replaced; secondly, to find out where pastime knowledge generally comes from; and finally to dig beneath the designation "pastime knowledge" to comprehend the normative structure of society¹⁸ as it is revealed in the setting of "pastime knowledge."

¹⁸ Such a framework has not yet been developed by sociologists. An effort has been made by Bennett Berger ["The Sociology of Leisure: Some Suggestions,"

John Ciardi's observation that the language of experience is not the language of classification opened this essay. This gap contributes to the difficulty sociologists have in studying mass communication. "Pastime knowledge" vs. "intellectual knowledge" are classificatory terms that approach more closely the experience of audiences than do such terms of "entertainment" vs. "education." Yet they are not free from value judgment; what Simon Lesser wrote about classification of reading matter applies to mass communication generally:

The tendency to assume that by and large the value of reading matter is proportionate to the amount of difficulty it offers... manifests itself frequently in literary criticism and scholarship.¹⁹

Such standards weigh heavily in the sociologist's task to comprehend television, for example, for not only is he himself subject to the values that tend to classify television as less worthwhile than books; he is also restrained from developing new sets of classifications that might either approach more closely the participant's experience or describe the experience abstractly but appropriately.

Attempts such as Machlup's to describe the extent to which different forms of knowledge are available in the U. S. are important, as are the descriptions of the levels of culture that exist.²⁰ Yet they do not answer the question that sociologists ought to answer—what societal norms and values are presented in the interaction between the mass media and the public.

At present very diverse findings and speculations exist. One study, for example, revealed that

Industrial Relations, I:2 (February, 1962), pp. 31-45] to consider leisure (including the mass media) in terms of its moral content and to find out the extent to which these activities are more important than work, are desired for their own sake, are endowed with ethical obligations.

¹⁹ *Fiction and the Unconscious* (New York, Vintage Books, 1962), p. 5.

²⁰ See note 17 above.

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television deals in patterned ways with basic goals and the mechanisms for their achievement... All types of programs present similar models of behavior.... [They] consistently project content in which *socially approved goals are most frequently achieved by methods that are not socially approved.*²¹ (Italics added.)

This finding suggests that pastime knowledge does not merely reflect the state of society in a static way; conformity with societal goals and rejection of accepted means is a combination that Robert Merton²² has identified as "innovation."

The more common conclusion that derives from consideration of the mass communication interaction is one that regards it as part of an established ideology. This conclusion has recently been discussed in detail by Herbert Gans, who identified four major themes:

(1) *The negative character of popular-culture creation.* Popular culture is undesirable because, unlike high culture, it is mass produced by profit-minded entrepreneurs solely for the gratification of a paying audience.

(2) *The negative effect of high culture.* Popular culture borrows from high culture, thus debasing it, and also lures away many potential creators of high culture, thus depleting its reservoir of talent.

(3) *The negative effects on the popular-culture audience.* The consumption of popular-culture content at best produces spurious gratifications, and at worst is emotionally harmful to the audience.

(4) *The negative effects on the society.* The wide distribution of popular culture not only reduces the level of cultural quality—or civilization—of the society, but also encourages totalitarianism by creating a passive audience peculiarly responsive to the techniques of mass persuasion used by demagogues bent on dictatorship.²³

²¹ Larsen, "Social Effects," p. 358.

²² "Social Structure and Anomie," *Social Theory and Social Structure* (Glencoe, Ill., Free Press, 1957), pp. 121-160.

²³ "Popular Culture in America," *Social Problems* edited by Howard S. Becker (New York, Wiley, 1966), p. 552.

Far from enhancing innovation, the mass media, according to the critics studied by Gans, encourage conformity. The link to the structure of society tends not to be made explicitly by most of the critics, however. One notable exception is Herbert Marcuse, who has argued that mass communications represent an invasion of the "private space in which man may become and remain 'himself.'"²⁴

The repressive organization of the instincts seems to be *collective*, and the ego seems to be prematurely socialized by a whole system of extra-familial agents and agencies. As early as the pre-school level, gangs, radio, and television set the pattern for conformity and rebellion; deviations from the pattern are punished not so much within the family as outside and against the family. The experts of the mass media transmit the required values; they offer the perfect training...²⁵

It is important to remember that most pastime knowledge is presented in the form of illusions, of fiction. Although this is recognized by its audiences, this illusionary character of the mass media has had an important role to play in the character of contemporary society. According to Juergen Habermas it has turned both the public realm (*Öffentlichkeit*) as well as the private realm into illusion.

Die durch Massenmedien erzeugte Welt ist Öffentlichkeit nur noch dem Scheine nach; aber auch die Integrität der Privatsphäre... ist illusionär.²⁶

But more than that. The illusions, which have the character of collective wish fulfillments, are built into a conception of reality that rationalizes the perpetuation of the power structure. Extending Freud's discussion in *Die Zukunft einer Illusion*,²⁷ Habermas recently attempted to locate the role of cultural products (of which mass media are a part):

²⁴ *One-Dimensional Man* (Boston, Mass., Beacon Press, 1966), p. 10.

²⁵ *Eros and Civilization* (Boston, Mass., Beacon Press, 1955), p. 97.

²⁶ "The mass-media created world is a public one merely in appearance; but the integrity of the private sphere as well... is illusionary..." *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit* (Neuwied, Luchterhand, 1962), p. 189.

²⁷ *Gesammelte Werke*, XIV Band (London, Imago, 1940), pp. 326-331. Trans. W. D. Robson-Scott, *The Future of an Illusion* (London, Hogarth, 1953), pp. 8-16.

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Die kollektiven Wunschphantasien, die für die Kulturverzichtete entschädigen, werden, da sie nicht privat sind, sondern auf der Ebene öffentlicher Kommunikation selber ein abgespaltenes, nämlich der Kritik entzogenes Dasein führen, zu Interpretationen der Welt ausgebaut und als Rationalisierungen der Herrschaft in Dienst genommen. Das nennt Freud den 'seelischen Besitz der Kultur': religiöse Weltbilder und Riten, Ideale und Wertsysteme, Stilisierungen und Kunstprodukte, die Welt der projektiven Bildungen und des objektiven Scheins, kurz: der 'Illusionen.'²⁸

Yet the designation *illusion* is beginning to lose in its censorious power, as contemporary political and social scientists organize themselves increasingly around "symbolic" representations, and meet illusions with counter-illusions. In present-day sociology, for example, comprehension of reality is strongly informed by a phenomenological perspective that, at least as it realized by its current proponents (such as Berger and Luckmann), suggests that reality is man-made in its significant realms in any event.

Sociologists are re-examining research in which illusions had been documented, as for example, Severyn Brunyn's re-examination²⁹ of a community study carried out a decade ago.³⁰ In that study the authors attempted to show that the residents of a small town lived "in a world they do not control." Yet

by techniques of self-avoidance and self-deception they strive to avoid facing the issues which, if recognized, would threaten the total fabric of their personal and social existence. Instead of facing issues, they make compromises and

²⁸ "Because collective wish-fulfilment phantasies are not private but lead a disembodied existence, removed from criticism, on the level of public communication, they are developed into interpretations of the world and are employed as rationalizations of the power structure. Freud calls this the 'psychical sphere of culture': religious world-images and rites, ideals and value systems, styles and art products, the world of projective representations and of objective appearances; in short, of 'illusions.'" *Erkenntnis und Interesse* (Frankfurt, Suhrkamp, 1968), p. 339.

²⁹ *The Human Perspective in Sociology* (Englewood Cliffs, N. J., Prentice-Hall, 1966), pp. 186-191.

³⁰ By Arthur Vidich and Joseph Bensman, *Small Town in Mass Society* (Garden City, N. Y., Doubleday Anchor Books, 1958).

modify their behavior in some cases and reaffirm their traditional patterns in other cases. They do this, however, without any overt, conscious recognition of *the basic problem*.³¹ (Italics added.)

Whereas Vidich and Bensman, the authors of the study, could write with confidence of "the basic problem," Bruyn suggests that "what is illusion and what is reality must be judged from theoretical or ontological constructs which... explain the difference from separate standpoints."³² The critique of mass culture and mass society as represented by the social scientists discussed by Gans, as well as by Marcuse and Habermas and by Vidich and Bensmann is one which is based on conceptions of society that are grounded in objective reality. The rejoinder made by Bruyn and other sociologists (some of them known as "ethnomethodologists") is that

men-on-the-street create their own versions of their affairs, and these versions exert influence; because they are man-made and can change, they are problematic; because they are problematic, we cannot take them for granted in accounting for social action.³³

The mass media have not been studied in this context, although a central question that is raised among ethnomethodologists deals with the modes of acquisition of common-sense knowledge.³⁴ Clearly, the construction of reality, even of sociologists (particularly radical students, who in France, Germany, and some American universities have tended to be sociology students), is reflected in the mass media, as is everything that constitutes newsworthy and entertaining matter. But more than that, the mass media themselves embody a similar kind of reality, built on illusions concerning the possibility of success without achieve-

³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 319-320.

³² Bruyn, *Human Perspective*, p. 190.

³³ Peter McHugh, *Defining the Situation* (Indianapolis, Bobbs-Merrill, 1968), p. 132.

³⁴ Harold Garfinkel, "Common Sense of Social Structures," *Studies in Ethnomethodology* (Englewood Cliffs, N. J., Prentice-Hall, 1967), pp. 76-115.

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ment, of achievement without work, of work without pain. Television, in particular, itself provides "para-social" relations,³⁵ ready-made phantasies which can be actively or passively shared.

Ironically, as the "real world" is increasingly sociologized and experienced as man-made and illusionary, the phantasy world of the mass media appears to be growing more "real." The separation of illusion and reality has been eliminated both in the blending of news with fiction (televised pictures of American soldiers "really" getting killed is juxtaposed with televised pictures of American actors playing such roles) as well as in the blending, in the theatre, between audience and actor, in the cinema, between fantasy and voyeurism. (At the same time, the widespread use of hallucinatory and psychedelic drugs permit the audience to experiences phantasies no less real but without the stimulus of the mass media.)

v

All this does not mean that television is a Rorschach test, in which the mechanisms of selective exposure, selective perception, selective retention operate to make the whole experience a projection of personal phantasies. Although the "unconscious wish fulfillments" lead to some degree of matching, or taste preferences, between personality and programs on television, and although the social condition and social location of viewers affect this selection process,³⁶ there is a social and institutional basis for the content of television that permits a description and cultural evaluation.

This basis has been explored to some extent, in less detail in studies of interest groups dominating television, in more detail in studies of the types of audiences that are drawn to television. It is clear that from the first, television has been particularly

³⁵ Donald Horton and R. Richard Wohl, "Mass Communication and Para-Social Interaction," *Psychiatry*, 19 (1956) 215-224.

³⁶ Ex., person who are downward in social mobility have been found to watch more 'escapist' programs on television. See Leonard Pearlin, "Social and Personal Stress and Escape Television Viewing," *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 23:2 (Summer, 1959), pp. 225-259.

suiting to these groups in the society for whom traditional culture, as a way of expressing phantasy, has never been important (i.e., who never read books). Television was first accepted and acquired by those who were not well-educated. According to one study, "cultural compatibility" played an important role, and television was found to be more likely to be accepted by those whose behavior was compatible with the "structure of the culture prior to its introduction."³⁷

By now, of course, almost all families have television sets (92% of American families own a set; those that do not are largely persons who cannot afford to acquire a set.) Cultural compatibility continues to operate, however. It might be expected that the amount of time spent with television would vary with the extent to which people's tastes and cultural preferences were compatible with the kinds of programs found on television. This is not altogether true. The effect of the "structure of culture" has been far greater in determining feelings about the act of watching television than it has in determining the amount of television viewed. Members of the "book culture" do not appear to spend significantly less time than others viewing television; they are, however, significantly more uncomfortable about the time they do spend viewing, and have far more stringent standards about how much time is "proper" for spending with television.³⁸

Indeed, on the basis of such a discrepancy it can be argued that in America, and probably in the Western world generally, there are two rather distinct cultures, the television culture and the book culture. The readers are centered around the college-educated; they are more likely to consider reading more worthwhile than television, and though they also spend considerable amounts of time viewing, they are likely to feel that this is

³⁷ Saxon Graham, "Cultural Compatibility in the Adoption of Television," *Social Forces*, 33:2 (December, 1954), pp. 166-170. See also Rolf Meyersohn, "Social Research in Television," *Mass Culture*, ed. by B. Rosenberg and D. M. White (Glencoe, Ill., Free Press, 1957).

³⁸ This discussion is based on a re-analysis of material reported in Gary Steiner, *The People Look at Television* (New York, Knopf, 1963). Cf., Rolf Meyersohn, "Television and the Rest of Leisure," *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 32:1 (Spring, 1968), pp. 102-112; and "Differential Standards in Judging Deprivation and Excess," forthcoming.

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excessive. The television culture consists of at least half the American population and is that section of the public who simply do not read any books at all. Instead their mass media participation is confined largely to television, along with newspapers, popular magazines, and occasional films.

Participants in the book culture also watch television; the reverse is not true. What constitutes fairly harmless and simple entertainment for members of the television culture becomes "stupid," "boring," "meaningless," "irritating," and perhaps downright evil for members of the book culture. Perhaps because the members of the book culture are very familiar with the television culture and its banalities, television becomes one of the great targets for attack. Other forms of leisure are less visible to those who do not share in them. It is possible to go camping or fishing or shopping or dining out without stumbling across the "vulgarity" of others. One might know what kinds of meals are served at a working-class restaurant or what kinds of entertainment is found in a Blackpool or Coney Island; but it is not necessary to share these experiences. Since everyone must share more or less the same TV, however, there is greater fear of the threat of television, great resistance to exposure, greater urgency in censoring children's viewing, and greater need to attempt to restrict one's own.

Harold Lasswell has written of the process of "rejection by partial incorporation" to describe the subtler ways in which certain processes of cultural diffusion are resisted; here is a process that might be considered its inverse, "incorporation by partial rejection." In Lasswell's scheme, there is a portion of acquiescence, at least in the outward forms of certain cultural patterns, but inward resistance; it corresponds to what Simmel, in an article on fashion, describes: one way to remain immune to the total influence of fashion is to conform to its more superficial manifestations.³⁹

In present-day America, and probably the rest of the Western world, a far more dramatic clash appears to be occurring. Television, as a piece of furniture, as a social activity, has invaded everyone's house, has been incorporated at least physically into the decor of every living room. The criticism, the fear of over-viewing, the stringent standards, represent an attempt at rejec-

tion. Yet this object, animated but inanimate, is apparently incorporated by its mere presence.

So far social scientists have failed to treat television as part of the domestic scene and as a significant agent in the construction of reality. By relying on mass communication models and on emphasis on messages and their influence, they have neglected the emergence of this new form which is not merely a channel for transmitting information created elsewhere but “a creative medium in its own right, with a special relationship to society and audiences, special inherent qualities and characteristics and therefore special possibilities in the sphere of culture.”⁴⁰

³⁹ Georg Simmel, “Fashion,” *American Journal of Sociology*, 62:6 (May, 1957), pp. 541-558.

⁴⁰ Stuart Hall, in “The Role of Cultural Programmes on British Television,” Report for UNESCO prepared by Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (Birmingham, England), unpublished.