

## 4 *The Culture Industry, Ideology and Power*

Functionalist sociology viewed the media – the new tools of modern democracy – as playing a decisive role in regulating society and hence could only advocate a theory in which they reproduced the social system's dominant values – in other words, the status quo. Schools of critical thought began in turn to question the consequences of the development of these new means of cultural production and transmission, refusing to take for granted that democracy would necessarily benefit from these technical innovations. While communication media had been described and accepted by functional analysis as mechanisms of adjustment, they came to be suspected by critical sociology of symbolic violence and seen as instruments of power and domination.

Inspired by an unorthodox variety of Marxist theory, the philosophers of the Frankfurt School, living in exile in the United States, were concerned in the 1940s about the direction that culture was taking. Twenty-odd years later, the structuralist movement that arose in France countered the empirical method

with a new emphasis on ideology. In Great Britain, also during the 1960s, the Birmingham group founded cultural studies.

## 1 Critical theory

### *The question of method*

Under the Weimar Republic, a few intellectuals, including philosopher Max Horkheimer and economist Friedrich Pollock, founded the 'Institute for Social Research', affiliated with the University of Frankfurt. It was the first research institution in Germany with an avowedly Marxist orientation. Its early studies dealt with the capitalist economy and the history of the labour movement. In 1930, Horkheimer (1895–1973), who had just been offered the chair of social philosophy at the university, became head of the Institute and imparted a new direction to its research programme. The Institute undertook a critique of the political practices of the two German labour parties (the Communists and the Social Democrats), paying particular attention to their 'economistic' perspective. The Marxist method of interpreting history was modified by using tools borrowed from the philosophy of culture, ethics, psycho-sociology and 'depth psychology'. The aim of the project was to establish the relation between Marx and Freud.

During the same period, the Austrian psychoanalyst Wilhelm Reich, working in isolation, developed his research on the mass psychology of fascism, which constituted the first Freudian-Marxist approach to the mechanisms of manipulation through symbols in authoritarian regimes (Reich, 1933). His theses were rejected by the international Communist movement and Reich was expelled from the German Communist Party.

When Hitler came to power, Max Horkheimer was dismissed

along with all the other Jewish founding members of the Institute. The Institute itself survived, since it had been financed from the beginning by businessmen from the Jewish community, and its collections were transferred to the Netherlands. Annexes were set up in Geneva, London and Paris, but the sole institution destined to provide a stable location for the exiled members was New York's Columbia University, which gave them a building where Max Horkheimer, Leo Löwenthal and, starting in 1938, Theodor Adorno (1903–69) were able to continue their research.

Adorno, who was as much a musicologist as a philosopher, accepted the invitation of Paul Lazarsfeld to collaborate on a research project dealing with the cultural effects of radio music programmes, under the aegis of the Princeton Office of Radio Research, one of the first institutions for ongoing analysis of communication media. This project, the Institute's first in the United States, was financed by the Rockefeller Foundation. Lazarsfeld hoped that this collaborative effort would result in 'a convergence between European theory and American empiricism'. He expected critical research to 'revitalise' administrative research. His hopes were frustrated when the joint project ended in 1939. The opposition between the two men's mentalities proved to be insurmountable. Adorno refused to limit himself to the list of questions proposed by the project sponsor because, he claimed, it confined the object of research to the commercial radio system existing at the time in the United States, thereby preventing the 'analysis of this system, its cultural and sociological consequences and social and economic presuppositions'. In short, the questions deliberately ignored the 'who', the 'how' and the 'why'. Later on, Adorno recalled: 'When I was confronted with the demand to "measure culture", I reflected that culture might be precisely that condition that excludes a mentality capable of measuring it' (Adorno, 1969).

Horkheimer shared Adorno's feeling of profound incompatibility in terms of epistemology: 'The need to limit oneself to absolutely certain data, the tendency to discredit any research on the essence of phenomena as "metaphysics", may force empirical social research to restrict itself to the non-essential in the name of that which cannot be a source of controversy. All too often the objects of research are imposed by the methods available, whereas the methods should be adapted to the object' (Horkheimer, 1972).

### *The culture industry*

In his study on radio music programmes, Adorno criticised the position of music, reduced to the status of ornamenting everyday life, and denounced what he called the 'fraudulent happiness of affirmative art', that is, art integrated into the system. His analyses of jazz symbolised a position which some critics saw as extreme, detecting in it a blatant European ethnocentricity. Rejecting all purely aesthetic analysis in favour of psycho-sociological criticism, Adorno scornfully brushed aside any claim on the part of jazz to be an expression of liberation. In his view, the primary social function of jazz was to reduce the distance separating the alienated individual from the affirmative culture. In other words, jazz belonged to a culture that did not encourage resistance, as it should, but rather integration into the status quo.

In the 1940s, Adorno and Horkheimer created the concept of the culture industry. They analysed the industrial production of cultural goods as a global movement producing culture as a commodity. Cultural products – films, radio programmes and magazines, etc. – all manifested the same technological rationality, the same organisational schemes and managed planning as the mass production of automobiles or urban renewal projects. 'Something has been planned for everyone so that nobody can

escape from it,' they wrote. All sectors of production were standardised and this was also true for each sector in relation to the others. Contemporary civilisation made everything look alike. In every instance, the culture industry supplied standardised goods to satisfy myriad demands that were identified as distinctions which production standards had to meet. From industrial production there resulted a mass culture made up of a series of objects obviously bearing the stamp of the culture industry: serialised production, standardisation and the division of labour. This situation was the result not of a law of technological evolution as such, but rather of technology's function in the modern economy. 'In our times, technical rationality is domination itself. The basis on which technology acquires power over society is the power of those whose economic hold over society is greatest . . .' (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1944). Technological rationality is the 'coercive character' of alienated society.

The culture industry inevitably brought about the bankruptcy of culture, reducing it to a mere commodity. Putting a price-tag on a cultural act abolished its critical power and dissolved any trace of authentic experience it might possess. Industrial production made unavoidable the deterioration of the philosophical and existential role of culture.

However incisive Adorno and Horkheimer may have been in analysing cultural phenomena, they seem to have perceived only one aspect – albeit a fundamental one – of the conjunction between art and technology. Their overestimation of art as the source of revolutionary ferment kept them from perceiving other, very different aspects of this conjunction. This becomes obvious in the essay by another member of the Frankfurt School, Walter Benjamin (1892–1940), entitled 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', written in 1933, some ten years before that of Adorno and Horkheimer. In this work, Benjamin demonstrated

why the cinema could only exist in an era of mechanical reproduction as opposed to simple production of unique works. In his view, the very principle of mechanical reproduction rendered the old conception of what he calls 'auratic' art obsolete. Adorno and Horkheimer may also have stigmatised mass culture because the process of manufacturing it undermined a certain notion of art as sacred. Indeed, it is difficult not to see their writing as a vigorous protest of learned men against the intrusion of technology into the world of culture. The stumbling block indeed appears to be the 'reproducibility' of cultural objects by technological means as discussed by Benjamin. The industrial mode of cultural production threatened to result in standardisation in the name of economic profitability and social control. This legitimate criticism of the cultural industry was nevertheless too closely linked to their nostalgia for cultural experience free from any relation to technology.

Despite Adorno's entreaties, Walter Benjamin could not bring himself to leave Europe. He spent most of his exile in Paris before going to Spain, where, hunted down by the French police, he finally committed suicide. He remains an original thinker within the Frankfurt School. While Adorno and Horkheimer left their mark on several generations of intellectuals through their analysis of culture and technological civilisation, by the end of the 1970s their influence had waned. Benjamin's writings, on the other hand, became the subject of renewed interest in the 1980s, particularly the huge unfinished work he was writing during his Parisian exile, *Das Passagen-Werk*, in which Paris is portrayed as 'the capital of the nineteenth century'. Benjamin was fascinated by the century as well as the city because in them there appeared – charged with meaning like the glass-roofed galleries allowing strollers to move from one street to another – the material forms of industrial culture: wrought-iron architecture, universal exhibitions and serialised novels. Like Siegfried Kracauer (1889–1966), whose

intellectual itinerary coincided with or preceded his, Benjamin concentrated on observing details, fragments, the 'refuse of history', in order to reconstruct a lost whole. In this respect, both were influenced by Husserl's phenomenology and by the methodological premises of Georg Simmel, in particular their attention to surface manifestations as a means of grasping the essence of an historical period (Kracauer, 1922–25).

After the war, Adorno and Horkheimer returned to Germany and reopened the Institute in 1950. Leo Löwenthal and Herbert Marcuse, two other famous members of the Frankfurt School, remained in the United States, where they enjoyed quite different destinies. Löwenthal distinguished himself in the analysis of mass culture with a study on biographies in popular magazines (1944) that has become a classic. From 1949 to 1954, he was in charge of the 'radio program evaluation' sector of the International Broadcasting Service, under the authority of the State Department. In this position he became involved in studies on the Voice of America during the Cold War period (see Chapter 2.2).

#### *Technological rationality*

The philosopher Herbert Marcuse (1898–1979) was without doubt the most renowned figure in the Frankfurt School during the 1960s, so much so that during the Parisian student rebellion in May 1968 young people referred to the '3 Ms': Marx, Mao and Marcuse.

*One-Dimensional Man*, first published in 1964, had a direct influence on the ideological struggles of the time. An unyielding critic of bourgeois culture and civilisation as well as historic working-class organisations, Marcuse, a professor at Brandeis University and later at the University of California at San Diego, sought to reveal the new forms of political domination. Beneath the apparent rationality

of a world increasingly shaped by technology and science, he perceived the irrationality of a model of social organisation which, instead of freeing individuals, actually condemned them to servitude. Technological rationality or instrumental reason had reduced speech and thought to a single dimension, establishing a congruence between the thing and its function, reality and appearance, essence and existence. This 'one-dimensional society' had abolished the distance required for critical thought. One of the most incisive chapters of Marcuse's book discusses 'one-dimensional language' and frequently refers to media discourse.

Adorno and Horkheimer's book *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, which contains a chapter on industrial production of cultural goods, and Marcuse's *One-Dimensional Man* together demonstrate the profound coherence of a school of thought that spoke out against a world in which the instrumentalisation of things had turned into that of individuals.

Jürgen Habermas (born in 1929), a German philosopher and heir to this current of critical thought, developed his own theory of technological rationality in answer to Marcuse in *Technik und Wissenschaft als Ideologie (Technology and Science as Ideology)* (1968). Six years earlier, he had written *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit* (translated into English much later, in 1989, as *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*), which provided the necessary background for his theses on 'rationalisation'.

In *Transformation of the Public Sphere*, Habermas pursued the work begun by the Frankfurt School in philosophy and to a lesser extent in sociology (theory of mass culture, studies on the authoritarian personality) by describing the historical framework in which the public sphere began its decline following the constitution of 'public opinion' in England at the end of the seventeenth century and a hundred years later in France. This public sphere

was characterised as a mediating space between the state and society, allowing public discussion in which both sides recognised the power of reason and the richness derived from the exchange of arguments between individuals, the confrontation of ideas and enlightened opinion (*Aufklärung*). The principle of publicity was defined as placing information at the disposal of public opinion in the general interest. The development of market laws and their intrusion into the sphere of cultural production replaced reason, that is, the principle of publicity and public communication (*Publizität*), with forms of communication increasingly inspired by a commercial model of 'manufacturing of opinion'. Habermas viewed this process as a 'refeudalisation' of society. In the process, he adopted the arguments of Adorno and Horkheimer on the manipulation of opinion and standardisation, massification and atomisation of the public. In his analysis, the citizen tends to become a consumer characterised by emotional and acclamatory behaviour while public communication dissolves into 'attitudes, stereotyped as always, of isolated reception'.

Marcuse and the Frankfurt School formulated their analyses of the rise of instrumental reason in abstract philosophical terms. For Marcuse, the question of a possible alternative to the totalising of the life-world by technological rationality or a reconciliation between *Aufklärung* and science could be envisaged only if science and technology were completely revolutionised. In analysing the institutional forms taken by the rationalisation process, Habermas placed the problem of science in the same socio-political context. For Marcuse, as for Adorno and Horkheimer, the full emancipating potential of science and technology served no other purpose than to help reproduce the system of domination and servitude. Habermas, for his part, reflected on an alternative to the degeneration of politics promoted by the state-subject, which reduced problems solely to their technological aspects requiring

rational management. In his view, the solution lay in restoring the plurality of forms of communication within a public sphere broadened to include the whole of society. It was from this same perspective that he took an interest, while working on *Technology and Science as 'Ideology'*, in the student movement in California and the role played by its forms of communication in reconquering individual autonomy. Moreover, in *Transformation of the Public Sphere*, he discussed, however allusively, the rapidly expanding consumer movements in the United States.

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#### The 'Apocalyptic' and the 'Integrated'

In the 1950s and early 1960s, a few American authors left their mark on the discussion concerning the question of the culture industry, mass culture and mass society. Among them were Dwight MacDonald, Edward Shils and Daniel Bell. *Apocalliti e Integrati* (1964) is the title of a book by Umberto Eco which summarised the split between partisans and opponents of mass culture. This work was an important contribution, even if the Italian semiologist did oversimplify the issues. The 'Apocalyptic' were those who saw this new phenomenon as threatening to bring about a crisis of culture and democracy. The 'Integrated' were those who took delight in the democratised access to leisure culture for the 'millions'.

MacDonald, a former Trotskyist, inspired by the contraction 'Proletkult', coined the terms 'Masscult' and 'Midcult' to criticise mass culture and the intellectual vulgarity of its consumers, seeing no other way out than to elevate literary taste (MacDonald, 1944, 1963). At the opposite end of the spectrum, Edward Shils considered the arrival of this new culture as a guarantee of progress. Out of this controversy arose a tripartite conception of

culture shared by the various authors, even though they defined the terms in different ways.

In his discussion of aesthetic, intellectual and moral criteria, Shils drew a distinction between 'superior' or 'refined' culture, 'mediocre' culture and 'coarse' or 'brutal' culture. The first level was characterised by the serious subjects and important problems with which it dealt, as well as its penetrating, coherent and subtle way of expressing the range of human emotions. The second was less original and more imitative, borrowing genres from superior culture while possessing its own, such as musical comedy. Brutal culture was the type with the least symbolic content and very little originality.

Unlike MacDonald, who thought that high culture had already been swept away in the tide of the other two, Shils noted that there was constant mixing among the three levels and that brutal culture had not undermined the foundations of the world of superior culture. On the contrary, he noted, superior culture was attracting more and more followers, and, along with it, the high intelligentsia: 'the oldest stratum of Western society, with a set of continuous traditions, [...] despite changes in society, in the modes of financial support and in the organisation of intellectual life, is consistently reproducing and increasing' (Shils, 1960).

The debate between the 'apocalyptic' MacDonald and the 'integrated' Shils in fact overshadowed a deeper one. The discussion of mass culture was intimately related to the question of mass society, which, from the point of view of 'integrated' intellectuals, was tantamount to the end of class society and class struggle. In the 1970s, Shils, a political scientist, moved away from the debate on the nature of mass society, embodied by Western industrial democracy, well-being and growth, towards a debate on the end of ideology and the twilight of committed intellectuals (Shils, 1972).

Of the three sociologists, Daniel Bell remained most consistently in line with end-of-ideology thinking. He was among the first to combat the radical critics of the time, like MacDonald, whose Trotskyist convictions he had shared in his youth, pointing out the ineluctable contradiction facing them: they were condemned to rage against the manifestations of mass culture and society while at the same time being forced, by the very structure of the system in which they were living, to work for the culture industry. In 1962, Bell published *The End of Ideology*. Before the decade was out, he had launched the concept of 'post-industrial society', signifying the advent of a new society built on intelligence technologies and the industry of information, the raw material of the future.

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## 2 Structuralism

### *A linguistic theory*

Structuralism extends the application of the theories of a school of linguistics to other disciplines in the human and social sciences (anthropology, history, literature, psychoanalysis).

The three courses on linguistics given by Ferdinand de Saussure (1857–1913) between 1906 and 1911 at the University of Geneva are recognised as having laid the foundations for the methods used by this theory. According to Saussure, language is a 'social institution', whereas speech is an individual act. As a social institution, language is an organised system of signs expressing ideas; it represents the codified aspect of language. The task of linguistics is to study the rules governing the organised system that

enables it to produce meaning. Since language can be broken down into segments, it can therefore be analysed. This involves revealing the underlying oppositions and differences which allow it to operate and have meaning.

Saussure (1915) dreamed of a general science of all languages (both spoken and non-spoken) and social signs. 'A science that studies the life of signs within society is conceivable,' he wrote. 'I shall call it semiology (from the Greek *semeion*, sign). Semiology would show us what constitutes signs, what laws govern them.'

Roland Barthes (1915–80) was the one who finally took up Saussure's challenge. In an article/manifesto entitled 'Elements of Semiology' (1964) which sketched the outlines of the project, he offered this definition: 'The object of semiology is any system of signs, regardless of its substance or limits: images, gestures, melodic sounds, objects, and the compounds of these substances that can be found in rites, protocols or spectacles constitute, if not "languages", at least systems of meaning.' He organised the fundamental elements of this project, valid for both linguistics and for the sciences based on them, under four headings: (1) *langue* (system of linguistic conventions) and *parole* (actual speech); (2) signifier and signified; (3) system and syntagm; (4) denotation and connotation.

Two of these pairs proved to be particularly important for the study of media discourse: signified–signifier and denotation–connotation. Language is an organised system of signs. Each sign has two aspects: one is perceptible and audible: the signifier; the other, contained in and carried by the first, is the signified. The two elements are linked to each other by a relation of meaning. The distinction between denotation and connotation was taken up in different, 'practical-mythical' terms by the Lithuanian-born linguist Algirdas-Julien Greimas (1917–92). For Greimas, the distinction is crucial when structural analysis attempts to delimit

and systematise all the facts that transcend 'primary' or basic language (Greimas, 1966). All forms of ideology rely on the 'second' language of connotation, which is 'disconnected' from the first language of denotation. The focus of semiologists on the signified and connotation as well as their interest in the system that underlies appearances shows how far removed the semiological project of describing signification was from functionalist analysis of 'manifest content'.

In 1957, in a work entitled *Mythologies*, Barthes stressed the widespread 'development of advertising, the mainstream press, radio and illustrated magazines, not to mention the vestiges of an infinite number of communication rites (rites of social appearance) [that] make the constitution of a semiotic science an even more urgent task'. In the theoretical section of this work ('Myth Today'), he outlined a semiotic theory of 'contemporary myths' found in the forms of mass communication, which he defined as connotated languages. He analysed the workings of these connotations and their ideological implications in chronicles (published separately in the press before being included in the book) entitled 'The Face of Garbo', 'The Blue Guide', 'The New Citroën' or 'The Iconography of Abbé Pierre'. This was Barthes's first attempt at a formal presentation of semiotics. It explained how myth appears to make use of everyday language in order to make secondary, parasitic values (the ones characterising the petty bourgeoisie, which he called 'a sort of monster') appear 'natural' and 'self-evident'.

#### *A French school*

In 1960, the CECMAS (Centre for the Study of Mass Communication) was set up within the École Pratique des Hautes Études in Paris. Founded on the initiative of the French sociologist Georges Friedmann (1902–78), the centre represented the first

serious attempt to provide an environment and a conceptual framework for research in communication. The programme consisted in analysing the 'relationship between society at large and the mass communications functionally embedded in it'. Friedmann's goal was to bridge the gap in French research in an area largely dominated by American functional analysis and to overcome the lack of an interdisciplinary perspective.

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#### **From linguistics to structural anthropology**

Claude Lévi-Strauss (born in 1908) stood out among those promoting the transposition of the linguistics model to other disciplines. He explained his model in *Anthropologie structurale* (*Structural Anthropology*) (1958 and 1973) after testing it in his thesis in 1949, *Structures élémentaires de la parenté*. His analysis concerned myths as a form of language. Although many and varied, myths can nevertheless be reduced to variations of universal structures. Particular myths, called 'mythemes' (based on the model of phonemes, the vowels and consonants making up the basic units of language), have meaning only when combined. The rules governing these combinations form a sort of grammar that makes it possible to go beyond the surface of language to the underlying system of relations or logic that constitutes the 'meaning' of the myth. The focus on relations also serves to explore totemic systems or kinship relations, which become 'communication networks' or codes enabling the transmission of messages.

Lévi-Strauss acknowledged the decisive importance of his 1942 encounter with linguist Roman Jakobson (1896–1982), whose courses he took while in exile in New York. Jakobson, born in Russia, was the first linguist, along with his countrymen Karcevsky and Troubetsky, to use the term 'structure', at the

conference of Slavic philologists held in Prague in 1920 (Saussure had been content to use the term 'system'). Language is a system which knows only its own order; by respecting this principle of immanence, crucial for structural analysis, Jakobson revealed and systematised the rules governing the workings of language. His schema for all communication contains six constitutive elements and corresponds to six functions: the speaker determines the expressive function; the destination determines the conative function (which can only be defined tautologically: the function of language as aimed at a receiver); the message determines the poetic function (which includes all the major figures of rhetoric); the context determines the referential function; the contact determines the phatic function, which tends to verify that the listening of the receiver is still established; and the code determines the metalinguistic function, which is concerned with language as an object (through it, the speaker and the receiver verify that they are using the same vocabulary and grammar) (Jakobson, 1962).

The model of communication formulated by Jakobson was an outgrowth of the mathematical theory of information (see Chapter 3.1). Generalising the heuristic value of the concepts of code, encoding, decoding, redundancy, message and information, Jakobson suggested that anthropology apply the same schema to kinship systems.

In the early 1970s, pursuing his project to give linguistics a scientific status, Jakobson drew inspiration from discoveries of molecular biologists who had recently uncovered the laws of heredity based on DNA (deoxyribonucleic acid) and mobilised information theory to explain genetic inheritance in terms of 'programmes', codes and information. The Russian linguist went so far as to establish structural similarities between these two information systems, the genetic code and the linguistic code, that is, between a chemical message contained in the architecture of

the cell that transmits 'orders of life' and a linguistic message. In both cases, the message contained in the temporal coding-decoding sequence is strictly linear; it is possible to reduce the relations between elements – phonemes or chemical bases – to a system of binary opposition.

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Edgar Morin and Roland Barthes came to work alongside Georges Friedmann. Each represented his own particular field and research orientation. Only Barthes claimed an affiliation to structuralism. He directed a research group on the symbolic status of cultural phenomena and continued working on his project to develop 'a genuine science of culture based on semiotics' (CECMAS, 1966). Friedmann's studies on work and technology led him to concentrate on the problems of technological civilisation and its 'mass phenomena': mass production and consumption, mass audience, the appearance of leisure time and the development of leisure activities. As for Edgar Morin (born in 1921), he was the first to present the concept of culture industry in France, through *Le Cinéma ou l'homme imaginaire* (*The Cinema or Imaginary Man*) (1956), *Les Stars* (*The Stars*) (1957) and *L'Esprit du temps* (*The Spirit of the Times*) (1962). He was among the first to reflect on the importance of the media and question the values of the new culture. He defined his research at the CECMAS as a 'sociology of the present' focusing on events as sources of sociological information. Personalities as different as Julia Kristeva, Christian Metz, Abraham Moles, Violette Morin, André Glucksmann, Pierre Fresnault-Deruelle, Jules Gritti, Eliseo Veron and A.J. Greimas gravitated around the centre, along with researchers linked to the advertising industry such as Jacques Durand and Georges Péninou, who studied ways of putting the

rhetorical machine to creative use. The journal *Communications*, founded in 1961, was one of their privileged organs.

During the same period, a comparable research centre, known as the A-Gemelli Institute, was set up in Milan and operated as a foundation independent of the university. It, too, was born in reaction to the supremacy of American sociology of the media. The Italians devoted themselves more systematically than French semiologists to research on communication phenomena and mass culture, as the work of Umberto Eco, Paolo Fabbri, Gianfranco Bettetini and, more recently, Francesco Casetti amply demonstrates.

In *Le Système de la mode (The Fashion System)* (1967), Barthes applied his schema of semiotic analysis to fashion magazines, though in an extremely rigid way, as he later acknowledged. His interest in the expressions of mass culture proved to be less intense than his desire to renovate the methods of literary criticism. By the time of his death in 1980, the CECMAS had changed its name twice: in 1974, it became the CETSAS (Centre for Interdisciplinary Studies in Sociology, Anthropology and Semiotics) and in 1979 it was re-christened the CETSAP (with Politics replacing Semiotics).

Since the 1970s, Edgar Morin's research has been increasingly directed towards cybernetics, systems theory and the cognitive sciences. Throughout these years, two research teams continued working along the lines of the initial project: George Friedmann's group and, in the area of film analysis and theory, the group directed by Christian Metz until his death in 1993.

#### *State ideological apparatuses and social reproduction*

One of the major tendencies in structuralism involved a re-reading of the basic texts of Marxism. The French philosopher Louis Althusser (1918–90) was the most important figure in this domain. A teacher

at the École Normale Supérieure of Paris, he published *Lire le Capital (Reading Capital)* (1965) with a group of his students, including Pierre Macherey, Étienne Balibar, Jacques Rancière and Roger Establet. Together, they launched an attack on vulgarised Marxism and on insipid interpretations of Marxism which had fallen into the trap of 'humanism', one of whose eminent representatives at the time was Roger Garaudy. The other major target was Sartrean Marxism. Starting from a critique of the notion of alienation, Althusser tried to show that this notion belonged to a pre-Marxist conceptual framework and was linked to a humanistic conception of society that saw freedom as a problem of consciousness and not as a problem of class and social relations. Thus, the bourgeoisie and idealist philosophy found their myth in the sovereign individual, pure and untouched by any form of determinism.

Althusser emphasised what he saw as the epistemological break between the early texts of Marx and *Capital*; he and his disciples detected in the latter work the basic founding concepts for a genuine science of 'social formations' (based on the concepts of structure, superstructure, relations of production and over-determination). In the 'organic totality' of the capitalist system, the individual has no more control over history than over relations of kinship. Individuals are mere points through which history passes, offering a medium for structures; through their behaviour and attitudes, individuals take part in the process of reproducing social relations within a social formation or historically determined society.

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#### **The society of spectacle**

*La Société du spectacle (The Society of the Spectacle)*, written by Guy Debord (1931–94) and published in 1967, marks the most extreme criticism of the affluent society. In 1957, the author was

one of the founders of the International Situationist movement, which engaged in agitation not only in France but also in Germany, Great Britain and Italy. Its theses found their way to campuses in revolt in the United States. In May 1968, a high point for active criticism of the supremacy of the media, Debord was one of the leading figures of the protest movement. The following four passages (numbers 4, 5, 57 and 59) are taken from this book, which has generated a veritable cult:

The spectacle is not a set of images, but a social relation among persons through the mediation of the spectacle.

The spectacle cannot be understood as the abuse of a world of vision, the product of techniques of mass dissemination of images. It is rather a *Weltanschauung* which has become effective, converted into material form. It is a world view that has become objectified.

The society which is carrier of the spectacle dominates underdeveloped regions not only through economic hegemony. It dominates them as a society of spectacle. Wherever the material base is still absent, modern society has already invaded in spectacular fashion the social surface of each continent.

The levelling tendency which, beneath the glistening diversions of the spectacle, dominates society on a worldwide scale, also dominates wherever expanded consumption of commodities has in appearance multiplied the roles and objects to be chosen. What survives of religion and the family – the latter being the principal form of the legacy of class power – and thus the moral repression it exercises, may combine as if in unity with the redundant affirmation of delight in *this world* – this world being produced as only the pseudo-delight which maintains repression within itself. To the blissful acceptance of what exists may be joined, as if in unity, a purely spectacular revolt, which expresses the simple fact that discontent itself has become a commodity, wherever

economic abundance has found itself capable of extending its production to include the treatment of that raw material.

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Althusser's article in the journal *La Pensée* entitled 'Idéologie et appareils idéologiques d'état' ('Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses') (1970) had a profound impact on the critical theory of communication, both inside and outside France. In this text, he drew a distinction between the repressive instruments of the state, such as the army and the police, which exercise direct coercion, and the apparatuses that perform ideological functions, referred to as 'ideological state apparatuses'. The role of these signifying apparatuses (school, church, the media, the family, etc.) was to ensure, guarantee and perpetuate the monopoly on symbolic violence exercised in the field of representation while dissimulating the arbitrary nature of that violence under the mask of allegedly natural legitimacy. It was through the mediation of these apparatuses that ideological domination took concrete, active form, that is, the class in power (political society) exercised its influence over the other classes (civil society).

During the same period, Pierre Bourdieu was also reflecting on the question of hidden violence, but without restricting himself to structuralist principles. His analysis of cultural attitudes and practices was based on the notion of *habitus*, a term designating the stable system of dispositions to perceive and act that contribute to the reproduction of an established social order and its inequalities (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1970). Society or the 'social formation' is defined as a system of relationships of power and meaning among groups or classes. Analysing, for example, the social uses of photography, Bourdieu showed how a leisure activity that was seemingly free from the codes of dominant representation and

apparently offered an opportunity for free individual expression actually reinforced social codes and conventions (Bourdieu, 1965).

*The mechanisms of surveillance*

Michel Foucault's book *Les Mots et les choses (The Order of Things)*, published in 1966, marked a high point in structuralist thinking. Foucault (1926–84) proposed in this work to undertake an 'archaeology' of the human sciences – not a history of the increasing perfection of knowledge and its progress towards objectivity, but rather a history of its conditions of possibility and the configurations or mechanisms that engender it. He unveiled the successive, clear-cut *epistemes* that had defined systems of thought in the formation of Western culture from the classical age to the present.

Published in 1975, *Surveiller et punir (Discipline and Punish)* radically renewed the analysis of modes of exercising power. In this book, Foucault distinguished between two forms of social control: 'discipline-blockade', made up of prohibitions, bans, barriers, hierarchies and separations and breaks in communication, and 'discipline-mechanism', made up of multiple, intersecting surveillance techniques, flexible procedures of control, and systems or apparatuses that exercise discipline by causing individuals to internalise their constant exposure to a watchful eye. From the notion of power as the preserve of macro-subjects, for example the state, social classes and the dominant ideology, Foucault shifted towards a relational conception of power. Power cannot be held or transferred like a thing. 'This power is not exercised simply as an obligation or a prohibitive on those who "do not have it"; it invests them, is transmitted by and through them; it exerts pressure on them, just as they themselves, in their struggle against it, resist the grip it has on them.' The effects of power should no longer be described in negative terms (exclusion, censorship, repression,

masking, hiding, etc.): 'In fact, power produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth.'

Althusser spoke of apparatuses and an abstract state; Foucault referred to 'mechanisms' or 'arrangements' (*dispositifs*) and to 'governmentality'. The term 'arrangement' refers to the idea of organisation and network. It designates a heterogeneous whole encompassing speech, institutions, architectures, regulatory decisions, administrative laws and measures, and scientific statements, as well as philosophical, moral and philanthropic propositions.

Foucault's theses made it possible to identify power-communication configurations (*dispositifs*) in their organisational form. The 'Panopticon' model of organisation, a social utopia, is used as a way of characterising the mode of control exercised by the system of television: it is a way of organising space, controlling time, continually keeping watch over the individual and ensuring the positive production of certain types of behaviour. The 'Panopticon', which Foucault borrowed from the utilitarian philosopher Jeremy Bentham (1748–1832), can be characterised as an architectonic figure of a certain type of power. In concrete terms, it is an apparatus of surveillance, located in a central tower and offering full visibility of an entire circle of buildings divided into cells in which those under surveillance, housed in individual cells separated from each other, can be seen without seeing. When the panoptic model is applied to the characteristics of television, it reverses the direction of vision, allowing those under surveillance to see without being seen and no longer operates solely through disciplinary control but rather by fascination and attraction. To account for television as an 'organising machine', the philosopher Étienne Allemand, in *Pouvoir et télévision (Power and Television)* (1980), referred to it as a 'reverse Panopticon'.

As for the notion of 'governmentality', it contradicts both the idea of the state as a 'political universal' and the theory of a 'state

essence', that is, a model of the state engraved in stone. Refuting this conception of a single, rigorously functioning apparatus that had long dominated critical thinking, Foucault examined the everyday functioning of the state, its means of adaptation, its offensive and defensive practices, its irregularities and improvisations – in short, the 'general tactics of governmentality' – in order to reveal other forms of coherence and regularity.

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### Are the media anti-mediators?

#### *The Enzensberger–Baudrillard controversy*

In the 1970s, the German writer and philosopher Hans Magnus Enzensberger published an article in the *New Left Review* entitled 'Constituents of a Theory of the Media'. He criticised the inability of the left in the West to understand the dimensions of the challenge posed to traditional forms of political action and organisation by the electronic media, and more generally by the development of what he called the 'consciousness industry'. The left, he contended, had no strategy with regard to the media, for they were nothing more than an 'empty category' in left-wing theory. The left had not moved beyond the culture of newspapers and writing. As for the New Left that arose in the 1960s, it had 'reduced the development of the media to a single concept – that of manipulation'.

Enzensberger urged the left to surmount this historic handicap 'by releasing the emancipating potential inherent in the new media, a potential that capitalism, just as surely as Soviet revisionism, has to sabotage, since it threatens the law governing both systems'. Contrasting this repressive use of the media to a use that would restore their emancipating potential, he compared the

two models of communication point by point: centrally controlled programme vs decentralised programme; one transmitter with many receivers vs each receiver a potential transmitter; immobilisation of isolated individuals vs mobilisation of the masses; passive consumer behaviour vs interaction of those involved and feedback; depolitisation vs a political learning process; production by specialists vs collective production; control by private owners or the bureaucracy vs social control by self-organisation. At a time when state monopolies were coming under fire, the struggle to free the airwaves and the search for 'alternative', 'community' media found a charter for their programme in Enzensberger's appeal.

Since the article was not translated into French, Enzensberger's arguments came to be known in France through the controversy initiated by Jean Baudrillard in 'Requiem pour les média', a chapter in his book *Pour une critique de l'économie politique du signe* (1972). In reply to Enzensberger, who claimed that only revolutionary action could release the media's potential for democratic exchange, Baudrillard maintained: 'It is not as a vehicle of content that the media give rise to a social relationship, but rather in their very form and operation, and this relationship is not one of exploitation but rather of abstraction, separation and abolition of exchange. The media are not coefficients but effectors of ideology. Not only are they not revolutionary in their aim; they are not even neutral or non-ideological in other areas or virtually (the fantasy of their "technical" status or their "social use value") [. . .]. What characterises the mass media is the fact that they are anti-mediators or intransitive. They manufacture non-communication – if we accept the definition of communication as exchange, as a reciprocal space in which there is speech and response, and therefore responsibility – not a psychological and moral responsibility but rather a personal correlation of one to

the other in the exchange [...]. Nowadays, the entire structure of the media is based on this last definition: they are that which forever prohibits a response, that which makes any process of exchange impossible (except in the form of simulated answers that are integrated into the process of transmission and in no way alter the unilateral nature of the communication). That is where their real abstraction lies, and in that abstraction is grounded the system of social control and power.'

#### *The reification of structure*

Structuralism, and in particular Althusser's theories, was promptly criticised for reducing the functioning of society to a mechanical process or a theatre without players. He was reproached for overindulging in the analysis of invariants and determinisms and for tending to obliterate the action of subjects. By remaining locked inside the text, structural linguistics had reduced the context to 'code', and in the process, to use Jakobson's classification, the 'referential function' had become blurred while the 'metalinguistic function' had won out. 'Verbal context had replaced references to action and feeling in such a way that language was no longer concerned with anything except itself through recurrence or redundancy,' as Henri Lefebvre had noted as early as 1967, in his criticism of structuralism in a book entitled *Position: Contre les technocrates (Position: Against Technocrats)*. In his view, the structural approach had succumbed to 'taxonomy fever' and yielded to the 'supreme abstraction, the perfect mental construct, tautology mistaken for fullness', eliminating from its reality anything 'deviant', all 'lived experience', all 'decoding through daily life', thereby reinforcing the idea of the

inevitability of constraint and control and preparing the advent of 'cyberanthropes' and technocrats.

Althusser indeed had a tendency to reduce the ideological apparatus of information to a monolithic system under the control of a state totality from which civil society was excluded. The apparatus was defined once and for all. It was of little importance, in this perspective, whether the apparatus obeyed the logic of public service or commercial interest. The terms he used to characterise communication's inherent mission suggested the thesis of vertical manipulation.

When the structural theory of social relations entered into crisis at the end of the 1970s, along with all the other great explanatory systems, criticism of it revolved around the central question of mediations and the role of the subject, the social actor and the audience.

### 3 Cultural Studies

#### *The poor man's culture*

Early on, British intellectuals had concerned themselves with the appearance of a hierarchy in cultural forms. A version of the three-fold division of culture (refined, mediocre and rough) first appeared, in fact, under the pen of Matthew Arnold (1822-88) in his essay *Culture and Anarchy*, published in 1869; a second edition was released by Cambridge University in 1935, a significant date.

The current which arose in the 1960s and 1970s under the name of cultural studies was distantly related to the studies in literary criticism by Frank Raymond Leavis (1895-1978), published during the 1930s. *Mass Civilisation and Minority Culture* (1930) was a plea to protect schoolchildren from commercial culture. Leavis

thought that the expansion of industrial capitalism and its cultural expressions (which, at the time, meant primarily the cinema) had a pernicious effect on the various forms of traditional culture, both that of the common people and that of the elite. Leavis and the group associated with the journal *Scrutiny*, founded in 1932, sought to use schools to propagate an understanding of literary values. Although he was moved by nostalgia for superior culture and the great literary tradition, which he believed to epitomise the 'superior' values of the pre-industrial age, Leavis nevertheless broke away from the conservative position taken by the literary critics of his time. He was the first theoretician of English literature of modest origins to break into the aristocratic bastions of Oxford and Cambridge. He was openly opposed to industrial capitalism as a system and to the increasingly important role the media played in its expansion in Great Britain. As literary theoretician Terry Eagleton notes: '*Scrutiny* was not just a journal, but the focus of a moral and cultural crusade: its adherents would go out to schools to do battle there, nurturing through the study of literature the kind of rich, complex, mature, discriminating, morally serious responses (all key *Scrutiny* terms) which would equip individuals to survive in a mechanized society of trashy romances, alienated labour, banal advertisements and vulgarizing mass media' (Eagleton, 1983).

Along with its educational concerns, the Leavis tradition left to posterity an approach to the various forms of literary production based on textual analysis and the search for meaning and socio-cultural values, in clear opposition to the methods of the functionalist school. The tradition was appropriated, when the school system was being expanded in the 1950s, by a pedagogical movement in which an entire generation of secondary-school teachers, also of modest social origins, attached great value to the tastes of working-class pupils, in contrast to Leavis's elitist theory.

Richard Hoggart (born in 1918), a professor of modern English literature, published *The Uses of Literacy* in 1957. In this work, he described the profound changes that had altered every aspect of working-class life (work, sexual life, family, leisure). Published in the same year that commercial television first appeared and hence before it reached working people, Hoggart's work was both a paean to the traditional forms of life in working-class communities of which he was a product, in its resistance against commercial culture, and a severe critique of the same. Only a year later, Raymond Williams (1921–88), then a teacher in a training institute for workers, published *Culture and Society: 1780–1950*, in which he criticised the all-too-frequent dissociation between culture and society.

In 1964, *The Popular Arts*, a work by Stuart Hall and Paddy Whannel, brought to a close this period in which cultural critics wrote to satisfy a demand from school teachers and educators.

#### *The Birmingham Centre*

In the same year of 1964, the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) was founded at the University of Birmingham, a centre for doctoral-level studies on 'cultural forms, practices and institutions and their relations to society and social change'. Richard Hoggart was the Centre's first director. In 1968, when he became deputy director general of Unesco, he was replaced by Stuart Hall (born in 1932 in Jamaica). The centre reached its high point of recognition during this period, which coincided with the rise of the New Left. In 1972, it began publishing a series entitled *Working Papers in Cultural Studies (WPCS)*.

The Birmingham Centre acknowledged as the creators of its founding ideas such authors as Hoggart, Raymond Williams and historian Edward P. Thompson (1924–93).

Williams's book *The Long Revolution* (1965) marked a two-fold break from tradition. First, in contrast to a literary tradition that placed culture outside society, the author defined culture in anthropological terms, as a global process through which meanings are socially and historically constructed; literature and art are forms of social communication among many others. Secondly, it marked a break from reductionist varieties of Marxism. Williams advocated a complex Marxism that would allow for the study of culture in its relations with other social practices. He challenged historical materialism's thesis concerning the primacy of the base over the superstructure, which in his judgement resulted in a reductive view of culture, submitted to the control of social and economic determinations. In this respect his thinking reflected a movement of ideas that concerned the entire left-wing intelligentsia in Europe, of which the philosophers of the Frankfurt School were the precursors. Early in his works, Williams criticised technological determinism. In all his works in this field, he studied the concrete historical forms taken by media institutions, television, the press and advertising (Williams, 1960, 1974, 1981).

In *The Making of the English Working Class* (1968), E.P. Thompson engaged in a controversy with Williams over *The Long Revolution*. He reproached him for remaining too dependent on the evolutionist literary tradition, which always referred to culture in the singular, whereas historians had shown that cultures exist in the plural and that history is made up of struggles, tensions and conflicts between cultures and ways of living – conflicts closely linked to class cultures and processes of class formation.

The Centre's conceptual matrix was enriched by many influences. The first of these was social interactionism from the Chicago School, which responded to the desire of some researchers at the Centre to work at the ethnographic level, analysing values and lived meanings, the behaviour of diverse

group cultures with respect to the dominant culture, and the ways in which social actors define their own situations and life conditions. This interactionist tradition converged with the British ethnographic tradition, which had changed the way history was written by starting from 'below', setting up oral history workshops and joining in the work of feminists on the history of women.

In search of a heterodox Marxism, they reread the literary history studies of the Hungarian thinker Georg Lukács and the philosophical work of his youth, *History and Class Consciousness* (1923), and the works of the Russian philosopher and literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin on Marxism and the philosophy of language (1929), as well as his historical analyses of expressions used in popular culture. They translated Walter Benjamin; discovered *Le Dieu caché: étude sur la vision tragique dans les 'Pensées' de Pascal et dans le théâtre de Racine (The Hidden God)* (1959), by the sociologist of literature Lucien Goldmann, and 'Questions de méthode' (*The Problem of Method*) by Jean-Paul Sartre, written in 1957 and published in 1960. They shared Louis Althusser's questions about the nature of ideology, no longer conceived as the mere 'reflection' of the material base, but as playing an active role in social reproduction. With Roland Barthes, they became interested in the specific features of the cultural and adopted a methodology based on linguistic theory to deal with a problem that was crucial at the time: 'ideological readings'. The analysis of women's magazines, television fiction and news programmes and the discourses of the press made up the core of the Centre's research programme.

The work of Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci, who died in prison under the fascist regime in 1937, had a greater influence on the Centre than on comparable groups in France. Gramsci's contribution lay above all in his conception of hegemony as the capacity of a social group to exercise intellectual and moral direction over society and to build a new system of social alliances or

'historical bloc' to support its aims. The notion of hegemony took the place of the notion of the dominant class whose power lay entirely in the ability to control the sources of economic power. In the analysis of power, the notion of hegemony introduced the necessity of considering negotiations, compromises and mediations. Gramsci's concept of hegemony manifested his early refusal to consider cultural and ideological questions mechanically in terms of class and the economic base and brought to the fore the question of civil society as distinct from the state.

The Birmingham Centre appropriated all these influences in a critical fashion. The originality of its approach consisted in setting up study groups to focus on various areas of research, for example ethnography, media studies, theories of language and subjectivity, literature and society, and in linking its work to the issues raised by social movements, particularly feminism. The Centre soon began studies on representations of women and the ideology of femininity. This research, conducted in 1968 and 1969, revealed the Centre's interest in Lévi-Strauss's studies on myth and the early work of Barthes. Despite the significant influence of French thinkers on the methodologies and conceptual framework of cultural studies, no organic link was established at the time across the two sides of the Channel.

#### *Towards the study of reception*

Stuart Hall's work on the ideological role of the media and the nature of ideology represents a significant step in forging a theory capable of refuting the postulates of North American functional analysis and laying the foundations for a new form of critical research on the media.

In his article 'Encoding/Decoding' (written circa 1973), Hall divided the television communication process into four distinct

phases – production, circulation, distribution/consumption and reproduction – each having its own procedures and its own forms and conditions of existence, yet connected with the others and determined by institutional power relations. The audience is at once the receiver and the source of the message, since the schemata of production – the encoding phase – correspond to the image the television institution has of the audience, as well as to professional codes. On the audience side, Hall defined three types of decoding: dominant, oppositional and negotiated. The first corresponds to the hegemonic points of view, which appear as natural, legitimate and inevitable – the common sense of the social order and the professional world. The second interprets the message in another frame of reference, that of a contrary vision of the world (e.g., by translating 'national interest' into 'class interest'). The negotiated code is a mixture of elements of opposition and adaptation – a mixture of contradictory logics, adhering partially to dominant meanings and values but also deriving arguments from lived situations, for example the interests of specific social categories, in order to refute widely held definitions. This article set the direction for much of the research on television at the Centre.

*Everyday Television: Nationwide* (1978) by Charlotte Brunson and David Morley, the result of research financed by the British Film Institute (BFI), marked a turning point in media studies. After analysing general news programmes and current affairs programmes conceived for an elite audience, they went on to examine so-called 'political communication' programmes, intended for a wider, more heterogeneous audience in terms of class and gender, such as the programme *Nationwide*. This was the starting point for the study of popular genres such as situation comedies, sports presentations, variety shows, soap operas and detective series. *Everyday Television* sought to explore the way these mass entertainment programmes handled the contradictions in the lives of

men and women from a broad range of social groups and took part in building a popular common sense. At the core of this research orientation was the study of representations of masculine and feminine genders, social classes and ethnic groups.

The next stage (see Chapter 6.2) represented an even more pronounced shift from the study of texts to the study of audiences.

## 5 *Political Economy*

The political economy of communication began developing in the 1960s. It first took the form of a questioning about the unbalanced flows of information and cultural products between countries located on opposite sides of the line of demarcation of 'development'.

Beginning in 1975, the political economy approach started making headway by changing the focus of thought from the 'cultural industry' to 'cultural industries'. The shift from the singular to the plural reflects the abandonment of an overly generic vision of systems of communication. At a time when governmental policies of cultural democratisation and the ideas of public service and public monopolies began confronting commercial logic in an increasingly international market, this approach made it possible to delve into the complexity of these various industries in order to grasp the growing process by which cultural activities became objects of valorisation by capital.