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Communication And Power: The State Of Research

Biswajit Das

Centre For Culture , Media & Governance
Jamia Millia Islamia
New Delhi

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Introduction

Communication studies of late witnessed a broadened debate for understanding the theoretical contributions in the field. A host of scholars in their discussions have offered a set of typologies (see Curan, Gurevitch and Woolacott, 1982; and Slack and Allor, 1983) and propose that a distinction ought to be made within communication studies on the basis of different conceptions of power. The need for such a distinction arises because the theoretical and methodological distinctions are inadequate and fallacious. Yet some other scholars are of the view that the distinction is not real, rather an identification on the basis of method alone.[3] On the contrary, there is no inherent incompatibility between empirical methods and theory. The empirical tradition is as much European as American and stemmed much from broad social, political and intellectual interests in the West. Besides the differences in methodology and procedure, profound differences remain in theoretical perspective and political calculations. As Hall (1982) suggests, this shift is essentially from a behavioural to an ideological one.

Given the increasingly confusing proliferation of models for communication research, it would be useful to document some of the differences that exist. There are a number of ways to divide the terrain; the framework constitutes as well as describes the differences. Positions are necessarily misrepresented they respond to different issues. The framework I propose focuses on the way power is construed and analysed within the debates and discussions on communication rather than any theory per se.

[3] Scholars like Lazarefeld and Blumler (1970) label it as 'critical'/'administrative'. Gurevitch (1982) classifies it as 'Marxist'/'liberal pluralist', Carey (1977) categorises it as 'interpretative'/'positivistic' and Merton (1957), while discussing sociology of knowledge, proposes a two-fold typology on the role of ideas in society, He identifies corresponding tendencies to embrace different methodological strategies in two different continents. Thus, he equates American communication research to "positivist empiricist epistemology" and European communication research as "dialectical philosophical approach."

I would like to discuss various positions organised into two larger categories or approaches (namely, 'Pluralist' and 'Critical'). These positions have been developed in response to historical conditions and events as well as through theoretical arguments. The positions presented here could be described in different frameworks, although the result could be, to different degrees, not entirely equivalent.

The Pluralist Approach

Under this heading I would like to discuss two different positions sharing a number of assumptions: effect research and Functionalism. Both the positions assume that power is visible, while the critical approach assumes that power is multidimensional, rarely transparent to us in any direct, full sense, and, in fact, is often invisible. This substantive distinction on the basis of how power is defined (implicitly or explicitly), also helps to explain as to why scholars cling more closely to positivist scientific methods (if power is visible, then it is observable and can be documented and quantified). Besides positivist orientation, scholars also prefer more interpretative analytic methods that attempt to reach into several layers of decreasing visibility simultaneously where power cannot always be observed.

Pluralist approach, then broadly refers to a structure of society based on the equilibrium of forces, with complex layers of checks and balances for social control. For maintaining social order this approach builds up with an assumption of consensual unity and reduces complex social and political issues of power and authority to an examination and legitimation of the dominant social system.[4] Since the pluralist theses have provided the dominant working assumptions of mainstream social sciences in the past decades, communication studies have also shared the basic tenets of the prevailing paradigms (the belief that the world is knowable through the application of scientific techniques and objectivity of observations and the power of empirical explanations).

[4] The idea of maintenance of "social order" id derived from the 19th century European social thought and was appropriated in American social science which further threw light on the development of academic disciplines and their social concerns. Further, the influence of pragmatism rising through the 1920s social reform movement backed by 1940s and 1950s social research, had considerable influence and changed the climate of 1960s and guided the expressions of social sciences in 1970s. For detailed analysis, see Hanno Hardt (1986).

Blumler (1978) points out that as a theoretical perspective and research, there appears to be a limited scope for the range of pluralist studies of communication. McQuail (1983), however, attempts to identify and isolate some of the key features of the pluralist approach in communication. In his view, pluralists tend to approach communication production as creative, free and original. Such a view of communication can be derived from the notion and model of power it adopts which is paradigmatically empiricist and its main focus and formulation centre on the individual.

Effect Research

Effect research tradition can be assessed from the communication studies which are concerned with the application of cybernetics[5] to society. Through the application of cybernetics and information theory, the attempt was to study the effects of communication on behaviour, emotions, attitudes and knowledgeability. This research tradition grew up along with twentieth century social sciences. To a larger extent, this tradition shared social science's particular vision of scientific enquiry based on the interconnection of theory, hypothesis and experiment.

The central argument in such discussions is to project that communication has effects, and these effects show up empirically in terms of a direct influence on individuals. Consequently, the individual registers a switch of behaviour. Pluralists view individuals to be a free and creative participant in the social and political life of the community. Communication studies in this paradigm presuppose the values of individualism and operate on the strength of efficiency and instrumental value. Most scholars make distinctions between the structure of processes of human social systems from the structure created strictly by humans (i.e. technology). Scholars (Thayer, 1972; Berlo, 1960; Klapper, 1960; Lasswell, 1971) have endeavoured diagrammatically to demonstrate these complications. The skeleton provided by the original model is S-R (Source/Receiver). It

[5] While tracing the roots of communication theory, one observes that the ideas borrowed from cybernetics became the spine of communication theory. Two major developments in the late 40s and 50s had a lasting effect on the discipline of communication theory, both Norbert Weiner's cybernetics (1948) and Shannon and Weaver's (1949) information theory. Both had their roots in physical/mathematical paradigms and the original, practical application was in the interest of mechanical and tele-communicative or computerised systems approach, the cybernetics and information theory models were soon extended to the investigation of biological and social systems.

was used further by Behavioural Psychology as Stimulus-response: both cases, involved an assumption that human social behaviour ca be adequately explained in terms of independent, environmentally isolated discrete social chains. In fact, more conceptual components have been added to the original assumptions. Thus, the S-R (Stimulus-Response) model has enjoyed a quasi-hegemonic existence.

Since communication is treated as a series of specific & isolated social phenomena, what results is a narrow understanding of communication. Such studies fail to appreciate the importance of the historical environment.

The growing interest in socialisation and construction of a social reality provides another significant challenge in the static behavioural model of pluralism. One of the major concerns about the role that communication has in structuring thoughts, ideas and pictures of the world is found in the focus on comprehension and interpretation of reality, i.e., communication content, a focus that is found primarily in studies of children and media. Unlike the explicit, behavioural decision making model of pluralism, the focus on comprehension also draws attention to non-behavioural processes and outcomes. This general area of interest also assumes a more complex dynamic model than does the static pluralist formation as it considers media effects within a developmental framework (Christianson and Roberts, 1983; Collins, 1983). Finally, this view considers the effects of communication to be largely interaction effects. Further, studies in social identity extend the concern with the construction of social reality to include more of the external influences found in the social structure, make an explicit attempt to tie together internal and external processes at different levels of analysis. Most of these scholars explicate socialisation as a process of integrating individuals into larger legitimate social structures; legitimation – a way of explaining and justifying a given actual structure and ideas that support it – helps to reify that role structure by preventing people from recognising the conventional (i.e., not natural) basis of such a social creation. There is, however, a tendency to seek actual evidence for the exercise of power in more manifest forms of conflict, as is evidenced in individual level or aggregated outcomes.

Consequently, communication research delves into relationship among individual (interpersonal), investigates questions of social identity, and broadly speaking, raises some doubts about the stability of individuals in their social relations. At the same time,

however, there is a marked absence of investigating the structure of society, the location of authority and the distribution and transmission of power, as well as a lack of articulation of larger, more fundamental questions about the failure of the liberal-pluralist vision of the social whole, including the failure of its own theoretical and conceptual foundation. Although reform minded, in the sense of understanding itself as contributing to the betterment of the society, communication research remains committees to a traditionally conservative approach to the study of social and cultural phenomena in which instrumental values merge and identify with moral values.

This position tends to consider mediated, conditioned, effect variables to be more information than overt decision making behaviours. Also non-decision making, or the exercise of power through the suppression of interests as in 'gatekeeping', is important in itself. It extends he concept of power to include less visible forms. Usually operating at the individual level of social analysis, this position tends to seek most of its evidence in observable (directly, or indirectly) conflict and behaviour.

Critics of behaviourism have not only argued that behaviourism's research methods are unscientific, but that the very use of these methods impose overtly simplistic and narrow ways of thinking about the relation between the environment and the individual. On the one hand, communication's effects are formulated in psycho-behavioural terms in ways which belie the complexity of human experience, on the other, communication, as part of the environment, is treated in isolation and in terms of stimulus properties, which again distort its complexity. The dynamic interpretations of need, motivation, intent, values, interest and so on, relevant to the interpretation of experience, must figure in any attempt to understand Power, communication exercises over people.

The methods of behaviourism are unable to grasp the more complex communication – people-society relationships, and it is primarily for this reason that scholars of communication turn towards critical theory for a more adequate understanding of communication and power.[6]

[6] Gitlin (1978), while situating the behaviourist assumptions and damaged findings, outlines five assumptions. The first one refers to (1) commensurability of the modes of influence, (2) power as distinct occasions, (3) the commensurability of buying and politics, (4) attitude change as the dependent variables, finally (I) the fifth assumption: followers as "opinion leaders."

What is peculiar to behaviourist research on effects of communication is not so much the particular kind of effects studied but the scientific methods and related techniques used. Researchers employing these methods are convinced that they are producing hard evidence about the consequences of communication. The conviction is based upon the assumption that only scientific research methods and techniques are capable of discovering realities about communication and power, which include the politics within communication as also the politics of communication. The evidence comes in a scientific mantle which belies unscientific manner in which it has been produced. At each stage in the production of scientific knowledge, via the methods of behaviourist psychology, the researcher draws objective inferences. The observed differences between experimental and control groups are made by means of psychological and behavioural measures. These measures actually measure the relevant psychological variable in question.

The inference which are routinely structured into behaviouristic methods, and which are intended to produce scientific evidence, are the product of an underlying theoretical behaviourism itself.[7] Further, evidence obtained is used to give scientific credibility to the researcher's theoretical ideas, thus raising the status of these ideas above mere speculation.

At the broader level, communication is held to be largely reflective or expressive of an achieved consensus. It raises questions concerning the social role and responsibility of media, where the media simply reproduce those very definitions of the situation which favour and legitimise the existing structure of things.

What seems at first as merely a reinforcing role has now to be reconceptualised in terms of communication's role in the process of consensus formation. The inhuman quest for neutral objectivity in the study of social beings is a corollary of the scientific approach to social affairs. And an analytic reductionism necessarily taken place in the process of this positivist approach. Such scientific studies propose that man should be manipulated in the

[7] Gitlin (1978) discusses that because of intellectual, ideological and institutional commitments, sociologists have put critical questions; that behind the idea of the relative unimportance of mass media lies a skewed, faulty concept of importance, similar to the faulty concept of power also maintained by political sociologists, specially those of the pluralist persuasion, during the same period, and that, like pluralism, the dominant sociology of mass, fundamental feature of its subject. It has observed them scanted them at times defined them out of existence.

service of a system which treats them mechanically (Dallas W. Smythe, 1971). As a result, most of the contemporary mainstream work in communication are critiqued for continuing to cling uncritically to Lazarsfeld's "limited effects" thesis. This thesis implicitly assigns ultimate responsibility for individual political behaviour to the individual, since communication merely reinforces predispositions to behave (see Gitlin's 1978 detailed critique of the dominant paradigm of limited effects).

Functionalism

A host of studies assume the apriori existence of open, rarional, informed debate and tend to prefer a vision o power consistent with the ideals of participatory democracy.

The scholars working with such a vision, are concerned with the integrative functions of media (Defleur and Ball Rokeah, 1982; Lasswell 1971; Lazarsfeld and Merton, 1948; Wright, 1959). This integrative orientation in the functional approach is particularly evident in uses and gratification research which has remained a popular approach over the years in communication studies (McQuail, 1983). Such research uses communication to help explain connections between individuals and social environment. Further, the emphasis on rational, informed decisions, particularly consumer-like buying or adopting behavioural decisions, also guided traditional development, diffusion and campaign research (Rogers, 1976; Rogers, 1983).

In general the emphasis has been on individual behaviour rather than social relationships and relationships of power therein. For instance, Development communication has traditionally preferred a democratic, pluralist political structure as an essential corollary to modernisation. (Lerner, 1958).[8] The model of power and influence employed in such research is paradigmatically empiricist and pluralistic. Its primary focus is the atomised individual. It theorises power in terms of the different influence of 'A' and 'B's behaviour, and is pre-occupied with the process of decision-making. Its ideal

[8] The dominant paradigm in field since World War II has been clearly the cluster of ideas, methods and findings associated with Paul F. Lazarsfeld and his school: the search for specific, measurable, short term individual, attitudinal and behavioural effects of media content and conclusion that media are not very important in the formation of public opinion. Within this whole configuration the most influential single theory has been most likely, two step flow of communications: the idea that media message reach people not so much directly as through the selective partisan, complicating interpolation of "opinion leaders."

experimental test is the before/after one: its ideal model of influence is that of a campaign.

Often, criticisms of such study come from within its own bounds when questions are reconsidered as historical and ideological in character and content. Scholars working within the discipline have also discussed the limitation of their past approaches. Rogers (1976, 1983), for instance, notes the passing of the older persuasion behaviour paradigm with its built-in assumption that development results in the equitable distribution of resources. In its place, a growing concern with inequitable gaps in knowledge and effects has emerged. The simple unilinear effect models in development communication are being replaced by more complex integrated theoretical models of effectivity. The old science of communication has embraced new modalities and needs.

One of the most significant examples is the evolution of the theory of 'diffusionism'. Also the new model of 'convergence', whereby 'communication' is defined as a process of information exchange two or more people who try to give a common meaning to symbolic events, thereby fitting in unilateral communication into the old model of development. The 'convergence' model better fits the theoretical conception of development as perceived by participation, self-fulfilment and justice. Such studies proclaim that social efficacy and technical efficiency of dialogic communication, as well as the installation of participatory communication, ought to enable more producers and local groups to determine their needs and formulate their demands for techniques and technologies themselves. These studies forge the new concept of 'feed-forward', to indicate that messages must be elaborated on the basis of the needs expressed by peasants and producers with an emphasis on self-management and self-maintenance (Mattelart, 1979).

As small media re soft and decentralising technologies, these small media therefore can only give birth to decentralised networks and social relations which escape from the authoritarian heaviness and constraint of large media. There is no question power, neither by mediators, or as materialised by the whole of the social structures in which they operate. By abstaining from questioning the political context of their interventions, and studying the necessary relation between decentralised communication and the decentralised network of social organisations, small media reduce to nothing the original

notion of self-reliance, a notion of indissociable from that of political mobilisation (Mattelart, 1979).

However, the scholars continue to resort to the motivations and the methods of imposition of market studies and marketing campaigns to bring out the needs of local populations and serve them up again as the authentic, expression of their speech and identity. Seen in this perspective, the new legitimising discourses which rely on the demand for participation and dialogue cannot hide the fact that what is new is not the promotion of self-management and self-development but rather the promotion of self-exploitation. Further more, these new forms of exploitation of people by other people are perfectly in keeping with the low-profile strategies of trans-national capital, which is also obliged to maintain a decentralising participative and localist discourse. (Mattelart, 1979).

Similarly, Goode (1973) criticises the functionalist perspective for its conservative view that forces are static, and for ignoring the extent to which the larger social system of alternatives and opportunities has actually inhibited or prevented people from behaving as they otherwise might.

In the end, this restriction of opportunity tends to maintain and reproduce the existing structure of power and functionalism is not able to provide a critique of existing power structures within society. In general, the functionalist perspective is criticised for neglecting process, historical change and conflict. It prefers rather one-sided, optimistic view of society as an exclusively positive force with its individual elements working autonomously but cooperatively for the benefit and enhancement of the system.

Further, functionalism is criticised for its lack of theoretical explanation in its common use as a descriptive analytic tool. Functionalist sociology has made us too accustomed to viewing the study of effects within a therapeutic and operational context because any disfunctioning of a means of communication is established according to the existing institution's schemes. It is characterised by its potential danger to the balance of the existing social forces, and never by any dynamic qualities which might engender another system. Another difficulty with such analysis is that it does not perceive the possibility of rupture within the system. Thomas (1982) argues that the functional perspective entails technical and mechanical reasoning in its presumption of system stability or the trend

toward the maintenance of system equilibrium. There is an emphasis on functional unity and activism within the system which is seen as functional equivalence. Eliott (1974) notes similar problems in uses and gratifications research, arguing that it has all the problems associated with functionalism, and more because it is highly individualistic version of social theory. The "uses and gratifications" approach treats communication as an isolated process, somehow autonomous from the larger social context. It considers how media gratifies basic human needs (or functions for society as a whole) while considering neither the source of those needs nor the differential distribution of power and social opportunity. Since needs develop within the existing social structure, the "uses and gratifications" approach based on identifying and describing needs inevitably tends to support the existing structure. This approach assumes as aware and active an audience that cannot only make and report its choices, but also identify its reasons for those choices. Politically, such an assumption could provide justification for an existing system as neither communication content nor its production need be questioned or subjected to critical policy decisions – after all the audience can take care of itself.

In general, the pluralist thesis, with its assumption of diffuse, visible power exercised by the individual decision-making process, ultimately places the responsibility for every individual's lot in society in his or her own hands. It thus obscures the roles of power played out through organisational, institutional and social arrangements which help to define and limit the parameters within which individuals are able to make conscious choices.

Critical approach

Within this approach we will discuss a number of positions which are based on a complex conceptualisation of social power operating as invisible forms of domination.[9] Most of the theoretical constructs within this approach emerge from the continuing intellectual exchange of social and political ideas located within the Marxist perspective[10] which has emerged within the specific historical context of the failure of proletarian revolutions in Western Europe during the 1920s and 1930s and the totalitarian nature of Stalinism. Further, the continuing political and direct confrontation between Pluralism and 'Marxism' as the two competing theories reflected on the quality and intensity of the intellectual commitment to study social power.

Communication research has immensely benefited from these ongoing polemics. The prominence of these ideas resulted in a rigorous introspection within Western European Marxism, French Structuralism, Gramscian Marxism and Althusserian Structuralism. Their scholarly contributions served as the intellectual and theoretical resource for alternative, political response to the problems of society including production, distribution and transmission of economic and political power through and within the determinant domains of communication. A critical approach can indeed initiate a number of significant changes in he definition of society, social problems and the role of communication as well. These changes are rooted in radical ideas, and are innovative in their creation of appropriate methodologies and theoretical propositions.

In spite of their differences, the Critical approach is premised on conflicting class interest at a social level of analysis. In general, Marx and Engels' view of domination has endured in some form or the other, through various theoretical formulations within critical communication research.

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[9] Halloran (1981:168) observes that the 'critical' umbrella covers a variety of approaches and in fact, there are those who would suggest that some of the more extreme ideological positions should not really be classified as social scientific research.

[10] As Swingwood (1977) points out a sense of "economic determinism" and "historical fatalism" were unable to grasp the capitalist culture. Neither capitalism declined and collapsed as "historical necessity" nor the capitalist economy degenerated to a point of "barbaric meaninglessness." Instead the capitalist economy reached a point of digital height and augmented the society through its mediating influence. The various institutions and complex forces brought a delicate balance in the civil society.

> The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling class, i.e., the class which is the ruling material force of society, is at the same time its ruling intellectual force. The class which has the means of material production at its disposal, has control at the same time over the means of mental production, so that thereby, generally speaking the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it. The ruling ideas are nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant material relationships grasped as ideas hence of the relationship which make the one class the ruling one, therefore the ideas of its dominance.
> (Marx and Engels, 1970:69)

According to the critical review, power is exercised at several levels, including the often opaque and unconscious level of ideas, producing and reproducing relations of material and symbolic production. And this realm of ideas is conditioned by material base, the economic structure of the society. The emphasis on political structures, however, assumes different forms and locations depending upon the specific theoretical perspective employed. Despite variations in the overall theoretical models adopted by critical approach, common to all is the implicit conception of power as located not on the surface of the society' s structure but as deeply woven into a complex contextual social web.

Political Economy

In communication studies, this position emphasises and asserts that modes of communication and cultural expression are determined by the structure of social relations and power relations. The underlying power structure and its impact on the communication media, as also the production of power within communication, are primary focus of the politic-economic approach. The material influences and imperatives are not necessarily direct but rather complex and hidden, taking the form of a multiplicity of pressures and limits that structure power relationships of domination and subordination (Graham, 1983; Murdoch and Golding, 1977). Golding and Murdock points out:

> The task of mass communication research is not to explore the meanings of media messages, but to analyse the social process through which they are constructed and interpreted and the contexts and pressures that shape and constrain these constructions.

They view "social process" as essentially involved in economic practices which guarantee production and reproduction of social life. Communication, as an institution of that broader social process, is directly involved in economic practices. Further, it secures a relationship between the modes of economic forces and the relations between systems of production and distribution (1977; Murdock, 1978).

Communication as an apparatus is integrally linked to the practice of class domination for determining the social structure and the social conditions in which people live. Some works from the Frankfurt school's project address the relationship between such mass productions and the domain of consciousness, imagination and thought. Communication becomes a conduit through which practices of production determines practices of consumption. (Adorno, 1941). Economic and technological practices not only determine the cultural superstructure but also insert them into pre-existing social relations of power (Murdoch, 1978). Works of Dorfman and Mattelart (1975) and Gitlin (1981) also talk of this when they refer to the relationship which exists between the producer and the text, implying that consumers are not always aware and conscious of the ways in which messages act upon them and impinge upon their consciousness.

Such a multi-layered relationship between the practices of production and assumption can be theoretically traced to Marx's earlier humanistic writings. Capitalism, according to Marx, created false needs so that he modern experience is primarily built upon standardisation, the sensationalisation of every day life, dehumanisation, escapism and a fragmented, if not false, understanding of the world. Both economic interests and processes of production are projected as hidden.

Contemporary critiques of political economy represent one major category of critical approach, and echo an ongoing critique of orthodox Marxist positions or economic determinist positions as simplistic and crude. Instead, they prefer theoretic models that consider complex mediating processes and interdependent relationships. The emphasis throughout these works is weighed heavily towards economic pressures (both direct and indirect), rather than toward a cultural or ideological domination of power.

Garnham (1983) establishes the political-economic approach to communications very aptly when he says that it provides a more direct explanation of the dynamics behind the production of ideas, as opposed to explaining only their content or effects.

We can outline certain characteristics of this approach to social power. It identifies the determining moment of social life with economic forces and relations. This approach establishes a correspondence between production and power. Culture is not considered as the site of struggle for power unless there exist radically alternative and competing political and economic systems of media production. The medium, however, is never questioned. It is assumed to be transparent or a conduit through which a relationship is established between producer and consumers of the message.

Such types of analyses assume that he consumers are passive and unaware of the ways in which act upon them. Thus, communication becomes a process of self-colonisation of the individual. Here, cultural production operates as an ideological mystification in the service of the existing structures of power.

Ideology

Keeping in view the inadequacy of the political-economic approach, scholars have explored the area of 'ideology'. Such position assumes that cultural practices play a very active but ideological role in the construction of power relations. This approach is guided by two central questions: (1) How does the ideological process work and what are its mechanisms? (2) How is the 'ideological' to be conceived in relation to other practices within a social formation?

The main thrust in this position is to examine in detail the media messages, and to justify the media as a part of the historical dialectical process. An analysis of such an aspect could further throw light on the dominant social interests represented within the state, and the various forces responsible for shaping the class consensus.

However, such an analysis entails an eclectic mixture of different traditions. Most of these have close ties to the humanities rather than social sciences, including linguistics, semiotic theory, film semiotics, and structural anthropology. Cultural studies also draw

upon and retain the Frankfurt School's emphasis on culture, incorporating in addition Gramsci's (1971) concept of ideological hegemony and Althusser's structural Marxism.

Hall (1982) argues that this integrated cultural perspective combines two views of culture: culture as a symbolic form and culture as a productive force (i.e., social relation). Although Hall's attempt to theorise on ideology is stimulating, the questions poised by him cannot be resolved within existing theoretical frameworks. Hence media is represented as a "key terrain where a contest is won or lost." In other formulations, they are conceived of as signifying a crisis which has already occurred both in economic and political terms.

This position, while emphasising media and ideology, exaggerates the power of the media in shaping the society. Murdoch and Golding (1977) comment that the proposition "modes of communication" determine the "modes of society" is a kind of media centeredness with the sole concern of studying the impact of communication on society through content or effects.

Social power is also viewed through the mediating structures of social experiences, defined and determined in the last instance by class position (Grossberg, 1982, 1983, 1979, 1977; Williams, 1961, 1974, 1980; Hall and Jefferson, 1960). This position assumes for communication a role of mediation between culture and social reality. Cultural messages operate in complex ways to produce, transform and shape meaning of structures. It is not only the social structure that is reshaped by the cultural superstructure but society itself which is mediated through signifying practices.

A major criticism levelled against this position is that, it develops a binary relation between the message (text) and experience, and slides the social into cultural space. Ideology does not merely produce a system of meaning, it works as a practice. The issue of ideology is, therefore, not merely the conflict between the competing systems of meaning but rather the power of a particular system to represent its own representations as a direct reflection of the real, i.e., to produce its own meanings as experience.

Experience is not something pre-given. It is inherently implicated within structures of power. Power is no longer outside culture (the social), but within the very structures of

signifying practices. Ideological effect in this context refers to the "meaning or meanings produced." It is the cultural practices themselves which define identities for their producers and consumers by inserting them into the fabric of their discursive spaces. Here the issue is not so much the particular knowledge of reality (true or false, mystified or utopian) which is made available, but the way in which the individual is given access to that knowledge and consequently empowered or disempowered. Althusser (1966, 1971) argues for an abstract conception of ideology. He argues that the individual as a subject becomes complications within his or her own insertion into the ideological production of an imaginary but lived reality. Elaborating on Marx's 'mature' writings, he argues for a social model in which the economic, political and ideological spheres are relatively autonomous but determined in the last instance by the economic. They are yet independent within a complex, reciprocal system of determination whose purpose is to reproduce the essential social relations of production. Althusser argues that the question of ideology is how particular significations appear as the natural representations of reality, so that individuals accede and consent to their explicit organisations of reality and their implicit structures of power and communication. For him, power is effected through an unconscious subjection to ideology whereby social members are located within the social structure.

The approach conceives of power as invisible domination, which is logical considering the stress given to the abstract, unconscious nature of ideology. It has drawn criticism for its tendency to subordinate historical and political reality, and ironically, for its functionalist caste, despite its class-conflict orientation. This position tends to leave us with a view of the individual as being thoroughly ideologically duped by media. This position is clearly and influentially exhibited in the journal " Screen" in the seventies (Heath, 1981).

While acknowledging the real, Hall argues that the effects of such practices are always articulated within the cultural regime of signification. But the problematic is how a particular network practice – signifying or social – is located in a network of other practices, at a particular point, in particular relations. Hall (1979) turns to Gramsci's (1971) theory of hegemony as it operates in the broad terrain of social and cultural life. Hegemony is question of leadership rather than explicit domination and control, containment rather than incorporation. It involves the colonisation of popular

consciousness or common sense through the articulation of specific social practices and positions within ideological codes or chains of connotational significance. So, articulations cannot be assigned to pre-constituted structures or categories of power. Neither can ideological moments be reduced to a single contradiction within the real. Rather, such effects are determined by a multiplicity of power relations which can only be identified within the particular context of the articulation.

Gramsci's (1971) conception of ideological hegemony considers both the individual and social levels in its attempt to reconcile personal and collective consciousness. Further, Gramscian and neo-Gramscian formulations rather than drawing sharp distinctions between base and superstructure, in order to locate the role of ideology and thus of invisible power, instead situate the hegemonic dynamic and crisis within both. It is not the separation of superstructures from structure that Gramsci stresses but the dialectical relation between them. In addition to accounting for consensus and latent conflict as invisible forms of the exercise of the power, this perspective also considers ways in which more visible forms of conflict actually become domesticated by being absorbed into the system. Scholars (Hall, 1979; McRobbie, 1982) attempt to describe the ways in which this particular construction participated in the production of a hegemonic formation. This position locates within its own analysis a relationship between culture and power. For, corresponding to the struggle for hegemony, the struggle against it must involve the struggle to disarticulate the ideological inflections which are produced on a broad number of issues and social identities. Here the question of encoding and decoding are only artificial moments within the struggle for and resistance to hegemony. Nonetheless, because it locates social reality or power within culture, this position continues to see power in terms that escapes signification and the differences it constitutes (e.g., in various social and economic positions of domination). Contrary to this, Foucault reverses this by collapsing the cultural into the social space. Foucault (1979) locates power in a multiplicity of interacting planes. He refuses to define questions of culture and power around the central issue of subjectivity or identity as the primary sites or vehicles for the production of power effects. Foucault argues that power can neither be located entirely within this plane, nor entirely outside of it (as if merely the reproduction of external relations of power upon the organisation of meaning). For Foucault, this dilemma embodies Marxism's inability to confront the reality of power as the very microstructure of effects or relations. The dilemma, by recreating the duality of culture and society,

always locates power as something outside of an event, something brought into it (intentions or interest) or something taken away from it (hegemonic consent). Power is, instead, the intricacies of particular network in which events make possible other events. Thus, for him power is always located in apparatuses which are built upon technologies, programmings of behaviour (Foucault, 1981). This apparatus not only emerges at a particular site, it is also located within or excluded from regimes of jurisdiction and verification.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we can reiterate that in the pluralist conception of power, power is first assumed to be structurally diffused and equitably dispersed through society. Secondly, power is assumed to be transparent to all parties – in other words, overt and observable. Conflict represents competing interests and conflict is examined in terms of overt tensions which ultimately motivate the self regulating system as a whole towards a state of stability, equilibrium, integrity and homeostasis via converging individual behaviours. Decision-making power is assumed to be a positive force, evident in the long-lived spirit of reformist found in "common good" conceptions of power. It is considered rational, and individual behaviour is assumed to be the form that the exercise of power takes.

Most criticisms of the pluralist thesis focus on its conservative bias. Such criticisms challenge the pluralist assumption that society is composed of wide variety of equally powerful groups reflecting the interests of most people so that in society pluralism exists, while, in political reality this is so only among the most powerful business-related social groups. That is, the ideal abstract conception of power in the pluralist perspective does not match up with the more concrete current historical and material moment. The pluralist thesis obscures the a-symmetrical distribution of power in society and tends to support inequitable distribution. On the contrary, the underlying assumptions about power shared by the diversity of critical positions discussed above are numerous. First, power is viewed as a relationship of domination and related subordination within the class struggle perspective. Secondly, power is assumed to take a relatively invisible form, either as hegemony or complex conflict relationships manifest and latent within a complex, highly contextual model of effectivity. Because of the traditionally shared concern with class struggle, critical approach generally views power as a dynamic relationship. Finally, this approach takes multiple levels of analysis and the interrelationships among those levels.

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