

uration of the public sphere. In conclusion, the book turns to the history and theory of radical mass media criticism and explores important questions relating to the role and function of advertising in relation to power, politics, and audiences. It is my hope that the topics covered, arguments made and taken up, and ideas presented within this book will inspire renewed debate and critical engagement concerning the relationship between media and power.

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Introduction

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The relation between media and power remains the key reason for examining the media of communication and their role in society. Too much of the work currently ongoing in the discipline appears to have lost sight of this, but this collection is a welcome sign of the re-emergence of the classic and most important issues. The question of the media and power is not, however, straightforward. It is not simply a question of media performance or bias. It is not simply a question of whether we can understand the media in terms of the “propaganda model” as outlined by Herman and Chomsky. This is because it is a model of media performance and not a model of the role of the media in the power structure or in the reproduction of capitalist social relations. It is this latter question which is at the heart of concerns about the media and power, but it is a question which has not routinely been treated in its fullest sense.

To understand the multiple and complex roles of even the news media (as opposed to entertainment media including comics, film, TV drama, etc.) requires the analysis of a series of steps in the communication process from the advertising, PR and propaganda strategies adopted by social interests, through media production processes, the content of the output of the media, the use made of media information and its formative impacts on public opinion, belief and action, its direct role in relation to power structures and, lastly, how this feeds back into outcomes, and then communication strategy planning and public relations.

All of this “circuit” of communication needs to be understood and studied. And the circuit has any number of feedback loops which can evade elements of the circuit described above. This is why the propaganda model – a model predicting media performance – needs to be supplemented by other sorts of theories and models examining other elements of the circuits of communication and power.

Staying with the model for a second, we can state that because the model is one of media performance it does arguably neglect the importance of PR and propaganda, though these are incorporated as part of the five filters. In this respect Ed Herman acknowledges that more could be written about the role of the PR industry. But in terms of the wider questions about the role of propaganda and PR in legitimation, some of this would go beyond the question of media performance.

In addition, strictly speaking the model does not have anything to say about the impact of the media. Herman and Chomsky have noted that they would be surprised to find that the overwhelming dominance of official views in the mainstream media had no or little effect. However, it is also clear that this is one of the most penetrating critiques of the model, which is that Herman and Chomsky suggest that this is only a model of media performance and yet use phrases like “manufacturing consent”, “opinion control” etc. If we follow the model strictly this is unwarranted, but given the rest of the writings of both authors we can see that there is a context for some of these assumptions in their understanding of the wider process of the manufacture of consent.

Seeing communication in a wider frame than just in relation to mainstream media suggests that propaganda is not just about the manipulation of the media but has other functions too such as ruling-class unity and intra-elite communications. Strategic communications are undertaken in order to manipulate the media with the intention of managing public opinion, as well as to communicate via the media with other elites (e.g. shareholders, political elites, other business groups etc.) and to manage and influence political and business decision making by direct communication (i.e. by lobbying, policy planning groups etc.).

The propaganda model does not predict media impacts on public belief and opinion, though it clearly implies system-sustaining effects. The empirical evidence on the effectiveness of media and propaganda show that the media can significantly affect public opinion. The media do influence opinions and views, sometimes in ways that benefit the powerful and are against the interests of citizens. However, misinformation is no guarantee. A recent PIPA study shows that 14% of those who believed three key misperceptions about the conflict in Iraq did not support the war. So even if propaganda is successful in managing perceptions, people do not necessarily draw the conclusions favoured by the liars who invented the lies.¹ In addition, opinion polls continue to show that in the US and UK (and more so in less neoliberal nations) opinion on most issues of domestic

policy is far to the left of the mainstream pro-corporate parties. On private profit versus public services, on healthcare, on education, significant differences remain between public preferences and policy.²

This suggests that we need a model which understands that propaganda may be effective in the sense of managing perceptions but not necessarily in outcomes. In addition we might pay attention to the implication that public opinion is not necessarily the dominant power in the land in the era of neoliberalism. In other words we need to think a little more about how power is exercised in society.

This takes us to concepts like power and hegemony. The assumption in much writing on hegemony is that advanced capitalist democracies have moved from rule by coercion to rule by consent. However, the decisive break between consent and coercion outlined by many writers on hegemony is misleading. The notion of hegemony as consent misses the meaning of leadership attached to the term (i.e. including coercion). We can consider the extent to which lies, manipulation and propaganda are in fact coercive forms of communication which problematise the easy coupling of force = coercion and communication = consent.

The third dimension of power, in the famous thesis of Steven Lukes, implies that power can be exercised via ideas. Thick and thin notions of hegemony imply ruling-class propaganda accepted or complied with. But the notion that hegemony (in the sense of consent rather than leadership) is all there is to dominance is mistaken. The easy contrast between coercion and consent is a simplification. Bourdieu understood this, writing that “the only way to understand” some forms of domination “is to move beyond the forced choice between constraint (by forces) and consent (to reasons), between mechanical coercion and voluntary, free, deliberate, even calculated, submission”.³ Moreover, the “power to mislead” must be central to any proper account of propaganda and media.⁴

As a result we are in a position to advance a wider model of the manufacture of consent – or as it should probably be called – the manufacture of compliance. Four key dimensions of this phenomenon can be suggested:

1. *Ruling class unity (ruling class circuits of communication, policy planning groups, lobbying)*. In the argument outlined here the manufacture of compliance also involves coercion and the power to mislead. But it crucially also requires relative unity amongst the ruling class. Leadership of allied class fractions is essential and perhaps one of the greatest effects of ideological warfare. Ruling class unity results not just in “ruling ideas” but ruling practices and this in turn implies that these are able to constrain or minimize oppositional ideas and practice.
2. *Fear and resignation (threats or coercion e.g. police and military, hierarchical institutions, dull compulsion of the economic)*. People reject the lies, but out

of fear, lack of confidence, threats, strong socialization of hierarchical institutions or exhaustion they do not act. For example, it is perfectly plain that public opinion in the US, in Canada and in the UK is far to the left of the mainstream parties on most issues of domestic and foreign policy.

3. *Manipulation and misinformation (propaganda, lies, censorship, misinformation)*. Propaganda misleads about the nature of contemporary problems and their solutions. Information needed for adequate decision making does not reach people.
4. *Persuasion (rational argument, spin and presentation, self interest, ideology)*. Persuasion is used in alliance with the other techniques. As Thomas Friedman famously put it,

For globalization to work, America can't be afraid to act like the almighty superpower that it is. The hidden hand of the market will never work without a hidden fist. McDonald's cannot flourish without McDonnell Douglas, the designer of the F-15, and the hidden fist that keeps the world safe for Silicon Valley's technology is called the U.S. Army, Air Force, Navy and Marine Corps.⁵

This collection then is pitched at the intersection of politics and power, centred on the role of the media in public culture and critical public pedagogy. It is a very timely book as the global financial crisis deepens: this crisis has profoundly disrupted the neoliberal free trade narrative and many of the truths and common-sense assumptions that have dominated public discourse in Western liberal democracies over the past 30 years. The nostrums and policies of the free trade social movement are under threat. But this moment also highlights the need for a coherent critique in, and of, our public culture. This volume is predicated on the assumption that social solidarity and a progressive politics require a reformed media system and critical public communication. Jeffery Klaehn has assembled a fascinating collection of essays and arguments that engage with these issues, addressing access to, and the exercise of, communicative power.

This book represents a welcome return to centre stage of debates about ideology and social interests, after a period of distraction across media and cultural studies with the displacement of power on to individualised consumption promoted by the cultural turn. The collected discussion of power in the opening chapter neatly sets the scene for a wide-ranging exploration of the centrality and complexity of analysing the interrelationships between power and the media. A theme that unifies the approach of many of the scholars contributing to this volume is the urgent necessity of critical scrutiny of power and how to make the exercise of power, first, more transparent and, second, more accountable.

The range of studies and arguments in this book usefully delineate some priorities for those interested in critical public pedagogy: an overarching theme is the intellectual and educational effort to denaturalise the exercise of power by political and corporate elites. The media are a key site for this kind of project in public education. Klaehn and his contributors argue forcefully for an empirical and engaged media studies, reviving the political economy tradition (for example the chapters by Jensen and Mullen reappraising the propaganda model and reflecting on its reception in academic circles) and extending critical inquiry into the roles and activities of powerful actors and institutions (the source studies by Winter and Keeble are but two examples of this approach.).

A unifying feature of the contributions to this volume is their focus on connecting ideas and action, a positioning that can often be seen as problematic in academic circles, where a rigid isolation of values and avoidance of commitment is often mistaken as a proper form of objectivity. These authors show that the best of academic work can and does combine critical analysis with a commitment to a vision of a more participative, transparent and empowered democratic system. Such an orientation has rarely been more urgently required: what follows is a road map to such work in media and communication studies.

NOTES

1. "Misperceptions, the Media and the Iraq War: Study Finds Widespread Misperceptions on Iraq Highly Related to Support for War" http://www.worldpublicopinion.org/pipa/articles/international_security_bt/102.php?nid=&id=&pnt=102&db=brusc
2. Justin Lewis, *Constructing Public Opinion*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2001.
3. Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*. Trans. R. Nice. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press. p. 70 cited in S.Lukes, *Power: A Radical View*. Second edition. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005. p. 138.
4. Lukes is correct to argue that the power to mislead "takes many forms": "from straightforward censorship and disinformation to the various institutionalised and personal ways there are of infantilizing judgement, and the promotion and sustenance of all kinds of failures of rationality and illusory thinking, among them the "naturalization" of what could be otherwise and the misrecognition of the sources of desire and belief", (*Power*, 149).
5. Thomas Friedman in March 28, 1998, *New York Times* magazine cited in Paul D'Amato "Imperialism and the State: Why McDonald's Needs McDonnell Douglas" *International Socialist Review*, 17, April-May 2001. http://www.isreview.org/issues/17/state_and_imperialism.shtml