TEXTS, AUDIENCES AND RELATIONS OF POWER
RESEARCH PARADIGMS IN MEDIA AND CULTURAL STUDIES

This article examines a selected body of knowledge concerned with issues of how media texts influence their audiences and of how audiences read media texts. It draws on Kuhn’s concept of paradigm to structure the analysis of a number of different theoretical perspectives, articulations of key research problems and modes of inquiry that have been most influential in media and cultural studies since the 1930s. The analysis suggests that this relatively diverse research history can be thought of as series of shifts between two major paradigmatic positions: one that is organised around the idea of definitional power of the text, and the other that is essentially concerned with aspects of reading practices. The article concludes by evaluating the explanatory power of some major conceptual constructs produced by these paradigms in an attempt to propose a theoretical framework (inspired by Foucault’s understanding of power and social technology) that would account for a much greater interdependence of the factors operating within the text-audience relationship.

Key words: Media text, definitional power, audiences, reading practices, research paradigm, relations of power.

It has been widely asserted that media texts play an increasingly influential role in our everyday life and society. Apart from this general and rather vague ‘diagnosis’ of the phenomenon, there is not much agreement among commentators, critics, scholars and general public on how exactly that ‘influence’ comes to be exercised. This article outlines the broad parameters that characterise some of the most influential approaches to understanding the relationship between media texts and their audiences within certain academic discourses. It examines a body of knowledge produced by scholars of a variety of disciplinary positions and theoretical persuasions in order to analyse the ways in which this complex set of relations have been problematised. The diversity of focal concerns and modes of investigation can be said to have resulted in proposing different, and often conflicting, understandings of “what the media do to people” as opposed to “what people do with the media” (Moore 1992, 137). This suggests that the research history can well be analysed in terms of series of moves between the positions which have taken media text as its primary site of analysis (emphasising its power over the audience) and the perspectives that have focused on the way audiences consume media texts (emphasising their autonomy and creative abilities). The concluding section of the
article aims at challenging one of the basic theoretical assumptions underlying these two major paradigms of looking at the text-audience relationship.

Kuhn’s concept of paradigm (Kuhn 1962; Glover & Strawbridge 1985; Hamilton 1997) is used here as a suggestive term for analysing a history of the academic effort to understand complex processes and relations within the world of media products and their audiences. The term denotes a cluster of scientific theories, practices and academic cultures that set a framework which defines a particular picture of the world and designs specific scientific programmes according to which certain research questions are worth asking and certain methodological procedures are considered valid. According to Kuhn, once an academic community adopts certain paradigm and starts investigating a range of research questions that stem from that particular stock of conceptual and methodological tools, its work becomes similar to puzzle solving activity. This activity, described as “normal science”, is then carried out, and, for a period of time, seems to be fruitful and relatively stable. This stability of the paradigm is maintained by scientists who passionately stick to the research tradition and academic culture they were socialised into. However, after a certain period of stability, some members of the scientific community are bound to identify some new intriguing problems (anomalies) that cannot easily or adequately be explained or understood within the existing paradigm. Dealing with these anomalies may result in reformulating the observed problem or dismissing it, but it may also lead to modifying certain problematic parts of the theoretical construction. When these anomalies accumulate to a certain extent, the construction of the paradigm begins to show signs of instability and thus enters a state of crisis. A number of scientists then feel challenged to reconsider the very basis of the established perspective. The life cycle of a given paradigm thus approaches its end as an alternative or rival conceptual structure is being promoted, which is usually done by a new scientific community. A brake with the tradition then occurs and the following “paradigm shift” comes to introduce a new philosophy, a different view on what constitutes important focal points for research and adequate tools to deal with them. In the form of university courses, disciplinary programmes, conference papers and lectures the promoters of a new paradigm then tend to codify and give stability to the new rules of the game until another set of destructive puzzles appear or the established paradigm runs out of interesting riddles to solve.

“Effects” research and “uses and gratification” paradigm

The first paradigm to emerge in media studies, financed by Payne Fund, back in the 1930s was influenced by theories of social control in industrialised societies and by behaviourist psychology (Morley 1989, 16; Tudor 1995, 82; Abercrombie & Longhurst 1998, 4–11; Glover 1985, 372). Its starting point was the assumption that mass media communication exercised enormous power over individuals by imposing messages in the form of “hypodermic syringe” upon the defenceless audience. From right-wing perspectives this was seen as a threat to the traditional system of social values and control exercised by the government of sophisticated elite groups. Their leftist opponents, on the other hand, were concerned that mass media would leave the masses even more vulnerable to the manipulation of the elite. It was generally feared that media would exert negative effects on issues like sexual practices, gender definitions, socialisation of children, political life etc. Hence the central research question was formulated in terms of the assumed effects of mass media on individual attitudes and
patterns of behaviour. A range of specific research propositions were derived from this position and experiments (usually following the ‘before and after’ design) were then carried out to test hypotheses about the presumed effect of media messages. The main methodological concern was to maximise the precision of evidence (Tudor 1995, 84–86). It is important to emphasise that this empiricist endeavour relied upon a particular set of largely implicit conceptual models: of audience (as a homogenous mass of more or less isolated individuals who were simply placed in position of receiving or absorbing media messages); of power (as a direct influence of producers of media messages on their consumers’ attitudes); of effects (as uniform and short-term); of the level of effects (atomised individuals in mass society) (see Hall in Abercrombie & Longhurst 1998, 9–11).

This research model soon proved to be oversimplistic, so its further development introduced some conceptual modifications in terms of refining the notion of effects (exploring a set of “mediating factors”, investigating different levels of effects, discerning short-term from long-term effect and cumulative and non-cumulative ones), as well as some methodological improvements (Abercrombie & Longhurst 1998, 6; Tudor 1995, 82). The research results, as many commentators pointed out, were far from being conclusive and during the 1960s serious doubts had been raised whether it is realistic to describe television audience as “glassy-eyed dupes”. In spite of the modifications, it was still difficult to defend the adequacy of the basic explanatory tool — that of passive mass audience exposed to the effects of powerful media — which organised the whole structure of research within the paradigm.

Another perspective was presented by the so-called “uses and gratification” approach. Back in the 1940s some researchers in USA working outside the effects tradition (Tudor 1995, 83) have already pointed to the concept of passive audience as a main obstacle to understanding the process of consuming media messages. As a response, a new term — audience gratification — appeared in their vocabulary, which, three decades later, became a crucial concept used in revising the basic assumption about the role of audience. Katz et al. argued that, instead of being affected by media, audience should be thought of as having certain needs that could be satisfied by consuming various forms of media products that compete with other means of gratification (Tudor 1995, 83; Abercrombie & Longhurst 1998, 7–9; Glover 1985, 377–380). Within the uses and gratification perspective, heavily influenced by functionalist theory, a complex psychological construction of needs was developed together with the view that individuals were able to link the gratification of various needs with the choice of the particular media product. Viewers/readers were conceptualised as extremely goal-directed in what they chose to consume and in the way they used media as part of their everyday life; in other words, they were empowered by a degree of individual agency. The same media text was now seen to serve different functions for different kinds of persons. It is difficult to overemphasise the importance of this argument as it introduced the concept of variability of audience response. This, in turn, led to the revision of the conception of media and, in particular, their presupposed power of exercising efficient, directs and uniform influence over the victimised masses. Furthermore, the social effects of media came to be thought as almost negligible, which is quite the opposite from what the adherents of the ‘effects’ research had suggested.

The reconceptualisation of audience and of what they do with the media initiated an important change in the methodological approach. In order to explore how individuals make their choices and what their motives for gratification are, the researchers had to turn to qualitative methods, namely to audience interviews. Audience
self-reporting was then taken as evidence of differential textual interpretation. The crucial problem was, however, that these differences were treated as an expression of differences in personality and, therefore, explained in terms of individual psychology, neglecting cultural or sociological perspective (Morley 1989, 17; Hall in Abercrombie & Longhurst 1998, 9). This aspect as well as the functionalist style of theorising human needs and functions of media texts have soon become subject to some serious criticism.

As the ‘uses and gratification’ approach emerged as a response to the perceived difficulties of the conceptual framework developed by adherents of classic ‘effects’ research, it is clear that it introduced some innovation which are widely recognised as improvements in audience studies. Still, many analysts argue that these approaches, viewed from a greater conceptual distance, share enough common ground to situate them in the same paradigm. Abercrombie and Longhurst have formulated three main elements. The first one refers to the level of possible effects. Audience was approached on either macro, society-wide level, or on level of an individual, showing no interest for the dynamics of concrete social groups and their differing cultures. Secondly, the content of various media products was thought to be relatively transparent and treated as a stimulus that effects either the audience as society or atomised individuals. The problems related to the analysis of textual structure and meaning, which were later to become an important focus for another paradigm, were almost completely left outside the boundaries of this paradigm. And finally, both ‘effects’ and ‘uses and gratification’ approaches placed strong emphasis on functions of media either on the level of society or the one of individual. These approaches, in S. Hall’s view, belonged to essentially behavioural paradigm, theoretically ignoring the issues of social structure and of power (Hall as cited in Abercrombie & Longhurst 1998, 10–11). They rested on the model of a harmonious society unaffected by structural conflicts and characterised by stable and widely shared consensus of values. Within that framework the function of the media was seen as exclusively expressing that unproblematic value consensus, which the view critics are going to bring under intense scrutiny in years to come.

Cultural studies: encoding/decoding paradigm

The 1970s brought the major paradigm shift. Hall’s famous paper “The Television Discourse — Encoding and Decoding” (see Hall 1980) is taken by many commentators as a seminal piece of theoretical work that signalled a new critical approach towards understanding media communication. The paper was a polemical essay, informed by a range of different disciplines (political sociology, Marxism, semiotics, structuralism, communication theory, socio-linguistics), that attempted to bring into consideration many aspects of structuring the televised text and its reading.

Hall’s central concern was to critically evaluate the established media and audience research traditions in order to develop an overall model that would allow for a range of research questions to be explored (see also Morley 1989, 17). With the ‘effects’ researchers S. Hall shared the view that media do have power, but he did not adopt their simplistic notion of direct influence of A on B’s behaviour (see Abercrombie & Longhurst 1998, 10). He made a decisive brake with this tradition by suggesting a different way of looking at issues concerning the construction/maintenance of social values and the social role of media. The crucial move was to reformulate the notion of ideology with reference to Gramsci’s concept of hegemony so that media could be seen as one of the most important polygons of power struggle between the competing social
forces. His attention was then turned to questions concerning the way media represented and defined ‘reality’ as opposed to the widely accepted view that all media did was to reproduce it. He insisted that everything that was represented in media came as already framed by a set of implicit assumptions about the world that drew upon the dominant system of values. The power of media, in Hall’s opinion, was the power to define issues and provide the audience with cultural categories. The ideological aspect of media was then described in terms of the categories within which they operate in a way that favours the “hegemony of the powerful” rather than in terms of a fixed content of media texts (Abercrombie & Longhurst 1998, 11–14).

So, how are media texts then to be treated? In Hall’s critical approach they cannot be understood by referring to the surface statements that are transmitted in media. Influenced by semiological theories and structuralism, Hall argued that they were signs or symbols which conveyed meanings that were not transparent, but dependent upon the reference supplied by codes. Media products were seen as “framed” in a sense that they were “encoded” by their producers working within the hegemonic order. They were encoded in such a way so as to direct their readers towards what Hall called the ‘preferred meaning’. He allowed for three hypothetical decoding positions: dominant, negotiated and oppositional, depending upon the extent to which readers shared the code structuring the preferred or intended meaning of the message. The novelty was that the differential interpretation of the media text is here grounded in the conceptualisation of the text as semantically multi-layered so that processes of encoding and decoding could be asymmetrical. But it would be wrong to suggest that Hall was concerned only with the matters of textual structure. To the contrary, his emphasis was on cultural and social dimensions of meaning production, on the question of sharing conceptual categories and cultural codes among the segmented audiences. Unlike the ‘uses and gratification’ approach, Hall’s analysis of the variability of interpretation is patterned on the level beyond that of the individual.

Although the key concepts of preferred meaning and of decoding have rightly been criticised by some commentators as not being precise enough (Morley 1989, 8) or in the need of some further work and appropriation (Gray 1999, 27), the encoding/decoding model is acknowledged by many as a suggestive approach that maintains the notion of a structured text while respecting the readers as actively engaged in its interpretation according to their cultural competence. Hall’s paradigmatical paper inspired a range of empirical studies, “Nationwide” carried out by Morley, Hall and Brunson in CCCS in Birmingham being the most influential and methodologically innovative one (see Morley 1980a, 1992). It was designed to use ethnographical methods to investigate differential decoding of a single television text as a practice patterned by different sets of cultural codes the availability of which is determined by social structure (Morley 1992, 10–13; Gray 1999, 27–28; Moores 1992, 142–6). As we shall see later, this study will provide the inspiration for a whole new field of audience reception studies that is going to emerge in the 1980s.

The psychoanalytic approach

In the 1970s a different approach was developed in the field of film studies by contributors to the film journal “Screen” (Mulvey 1999; Moores 1992, 137–142; Morley 1989, 19–22). Influenced by Lacanian psychoanalysis, linguistics, French film theory and Marxism, the Screen writers were concerned with analysis of film as
discourse. The focus was once again firmly placed on the textual analysis. This approach shared with CCCS researchers the view that media products represented a way of seeing the world rather than a reflection of the pre-given reality, but their central argument was essentially a psychoanalytical one. The way images and messages are structured shapes the viewing process according to textual strategies of creating certain positions the spectator was assumed to occupy and thus identify with the viewpoint of camera and of fictional characters. The relation between the textual position and the spectator was theorised in terms of universal and primary psychic mechanisms and processes through which the subject is constituted. Consequently, reading of the text was seen as rooted in reproducing the experience of this primary positioning. It should be made clear that this is only a caricatured description of a very complex theory drawing primarily on the Lacanian understanding of the process of subjectivity formation.

While acknowledging the theoretical sophistication with which text-subject relations have been treated by Screen authors, it is difficult not to agree with the criticism expressed by many researchers working within cultural studies perspective. It focuses on two central theoretical points that are taken as unproblematic by Screen approach. The first one refers to the strong emphasis on universalist and trans-historical explanatory concepts in the psychoanalytic tradition which tends to neglect the specificity of social and cultural context of historical subjects who interpret a film (Morley 1989, 20–21; Moores 1992, 142). This, in a way, leads to the second critical remark that questions the starting assumption about the possibility of deducing the audience response exclusively from the text. In other words, the textual address that positions the reader cannot be a priori taken as matching the response of actual social subjects whose interpreting position is not determined solely by the text, as they come to consume a text as already shaped subjects. Not only cultural studies approach but also textual analyses building on the work of Barthes developed a much more sensitive solution to this problem.

**Audience reception studies: contexts and modes of reading**

It was already mentioned that the famous “Nationwide” study had a tremendous influence, in both theoretical and methodological terms, on many cultural studies scholars eager to pursue empirical analysis of concrete reading practices of various forms and genres of media texts. Clearly, the questions of class and gender occupied a central position in their research agenda. Although the emerging paradigm of research draws heavily on the work of Hall, Morley and others in CCCS, the emphasis has been moved to audiences (reception, reading). Also, two important moves have been made in directions Morley’s early project did not explore (Moores 1993, 7–9; Morley 1989, 28). The attention was diverted from the differential reception of a specific, single text to that of genre, and more specifically, to the patterns of engagement with genres of popular culture. The idea was to explore why certain genres were favoured and found pleasurable by certain segments of audience and how they integrate reading practices into their everyday life. Related to this is another innovative dimension that was brought into research focus: the analysis of social environment in which reading practices normally take place.

I will mention only some of the most important subject areas in the field of qualitative audience research and ethnography of reading practices studied by scholars
largely influenced by feminist theory: popular television entertainment programmes and so called "women genres" (Brunsdon 1997; Modleski 1982; Hobson 1978; Ang 1985; Morley 1980b; Seiter et al. 1989a); the domestic use of video recorders (Gray 1992); romantic fiction (Radway 1984) and women's magazines (Hermes 1995). The common ground of all these studies is their concern with meaning production as social practices, that is, with the way actual members of audience, determined by their social position and biographical experience read the text and create their own negotiated space in reading. Another innovative and remarkably important feature of this research orientation is its political engagement in giving voice to the audiences of the denigrated popular genres who were not here treated as mindless passive viewers, but as "consumers whose gendered abilities and enjoyments have been devalued by those with more legitimate 'cultural capital'" (Moores 1992, 8).

While some commentators regard the empirical work of feminist scholars as the most interesting studies produced on the theme of genre, taste and context of reading, as studies which made the marginalised voices visible (Moores 1993, 8), their positive evaluation of popular reading practices has been the subject of criticism by those who worked within a different paradigm. Corner (1991, 268–9, for instance, criticise the 'popular culture' project as purely theoretically grounded in contrast to what he sees as the "intensively theorised" public knowledge project that focuses on politics of information and definitional power of media. He is also critical of the political aspect of some versions of new audience studies’ emphasis on micro-processes of reading entertainment texts. For him, it is a "form of social quietism" lacking the critical and political judgement. Grey thinks that this kind of criticism is based on misreading the simplified overviews in which mentioned empirical studies are represented out of their historical context and politics. She rightly raises questions about institutional politics of knowledge where academic games tend to contribute to the "gendered division of the field" in reception studies (male scholars study macro-processes and politics of publics of knowledge while female ones are associated with micro-processes and reception of the popular culture) (Gray 1999, 23–25, 33). Inspired by feminist approach, other (male) writers, too, express their concerns with the issues related to the position of the researcher and political nature of knowledge (Seiter et al. 1989, 4).

*  
*  
*  

The amount of critical papers discussing a certain shift of interest in cultural studies from media texts to audiences undoubtedly shows that theoretical, methodological and political debates are far from reaching their conclusion. The tension between the two opposing research paradigms (texts versus audiences) is still strong enough to inspire discussions on a range of conceptual and methodological problems regarding the 'active' role of audiences, the semantic and social dimensions of reading practices, the definition of contexts of reading, the determination of text, the limits of textual polysemy and the power of media. The approach that takes the activity of audience, sometimes readily taken as interpretative resistance, as the most important site of studying media communication processes poses many questions (see Morley 1992, 18–21). Some researchers who express their concerns about the methodological validity of generalisations made in the recent qualitative studies regarding the resistant reading, ask whether it is realistic to interpret audiences response invariably in terms of
opposition or resistance to the intended meaning which tends to 'empower' readers (Livingstone 1998, 202-204). There is also a question as to what exactly is being resisted (Morley 1992, 38) and what effects these supposed resistant readings might have if they managed to find their way beyond the relative privacy of media reception (Jensen 1992, 219); and also: what is the relationship between semiotic fragmentation and techniques of maintaining social order? (see Tetzlaff 1992). Commenting some of the more recent attempts to understand the diversity of popular reading practices and pleasures, especially in contemporary American cultural studies, Morley (1992, 21) and Brunsdon (1989) are concerned with the danger of overstating audience autonomy, while underestimating textual determinacy in the decoding process. A completely different view is expressed by the writers influenced by some strands of postmodern theories, who argue for the abandonment of the separate analytical categories of text and audience in favour of the notions of openness of (television) text and of multiplicity of meanings and pleasures derived (see Fiske 1987).

My reading of these critical remarks puts forward two points. Firstly, researchers should cultivate sensitivity to the immense diversity of media output and, therefore, refrain from making all-encompassing explanations and totalising claims about supposed universal aspects of textual structure, its definitional power or reading practices. Media texts cannot indeed be seen as equally structured in terms of their semantic stability and modes of shaping their actual reading. A move towards specificity, towards focusing on well-defined factors and contexts would be a sensible way of avoiding the temptation to make misleading generalisations. For instance, the reception analysis could be refined by introducing a distinction between logically separable aspects of reading practices such as: motivation, comprehension, awareness of the constructedness of the text, subjective attitude to the perceived textual position and the analyst's evaluation of how readers use their reading to influence their social practices (see Schroder 2000). On the other hand, the concept of text should involve a reference to its genre, which suggests how a specific set of signifying conventions comes to frame the possibilities of audience response to the specifically structured text. Genre is one of the most important factors in directing the audience choice and in offering different positioning of fragmented audiences in relation to a particular topic and a particular way of representing it (Corner 1991, 276). Related to this is the concept of 'modes of address' (Brunsdon 1989, 118) that links different styles and principles of putting the definitional power of text into practice with the variability of reading positions and types of audience engagement. Text and audiences, then, hardly appear as separate sites or categories of analysis. And this leads me to the second point, which I am going to discuss in the next section.

**Texts, audiences and the question of power**

I shall conclude this article with the consideration of an unstated theoretical problem underlying paradigms that emphasise either textual power or audience's creative abilities. These paradigms have not, in my view, run out of puzzling problems to explore; neither did their conceptual tools lose all their explanatory power. However, it seems necessary to problematise a specific theoretical position which they share and which tends to generate much of the problems in approaching the mutually conditioning relations of definitional power of text and of creative power of audiences.
The presented analysis of some of the major works produced in this area of research indicates that the central debate revolves around the questions of ‘what the media do to people’ and ‘what people do with the media’ as though these are separate, or even contradictory, processes. My argument is that this formulation of the problematic is a main obstacle to achieving a deeper insight into the dynamics of ‘social life’ of different forms of media texts, into questions of how they relate subjects to different modes of power through the production of meaning and pleasure (and, consequently, of identity and subjectivity). The implicitly stated assumption about the fundamental text — audience duality is what forms the basis of both paradigms directing the majority of researchers to make ‘either-or’ decisions in choosing their dominant focal point. (Brunsdon, Hall and Morley could be seen as exceptions in that respect.) It seems that this duality reflects the well-known theoretical debates around the issue of intentionality of agents (audiences) versus determination by structures (texts, media institutions) that took place within a wide field of social theory and psychology. In spite of their theoretical sophistication, these debates were all structured in such a way as to allow one to argue for either one or the other position within this dually formulated problem. As either position is prone to be criticised as in some respects theoretically inadequate and/or empirically untenable, I suggest to turn to a radically different theoretical framework. Foucault’s writing (especially his later works) may serve to reframe the issue.

One of the major contributions of Foucault to social theory is that he brought to our attention all the inadequacies of thinking in terms of ‘agents’ and ‘structures’, ‘subjects as individuals’ and ‘society’ as unified, discrete and separate entities that form pre-given objects of analysis. More specifically, it is his conception of power that plays a crucial role in understanding these issues. This is no longer an original argument, but it is still a valid one. As we know, Foucault insisted on reconceptualising the common use of the term power as associated with only restrictive and coercive aspects of social dynamics. Within his theorisation of power, it is not to be understood simply as “a confrontation between two adversaries”, but rather in terms of the government of conduct (Foucault 1982, 220). The notion of government is employed here in its broadest meaning as directing the conduct, while conduct is understood as “a way of behaving within a more or less open field of possibilities” (ibid 221). The exercise of power as government of conduct can thus be said to ‘structure the possible field of action of others’, i.e. to direct the outcome of choosing among several possible ways of behaving. In that way, the effects of power operation can be seen in productive as well as restrictive terms. Foucault also makes a strong argument against the conceptions within which power is assumed to be an attribute possessed by some social structures and understood as a centralised social force operating within a discourse to press subjects into their designated positions. For him, power is exercised in the relation of forces; it is local and unstable and it involves possibility to resist power. Within this perspective it is no longer adequate to give theoretical and/or research primacy to either audience’s creative abilities and autonomy or structural/discursive power of the text. The processes of production and interpretation of media texts appear as mutually conditioning, relational and determined by the exercise of multi-directional and mobile relations of power. These relations are historically and contextually specific as they are created in a particular interaction between discourses, subjects, texts and regimes of reading.

Following this train of thought the analytical category of media text should be conceptualised in terms of both its structure and its relation to reading as relatively unstable and situational process of meaning and pleasure production. The audience
reception studies have rightly questioned the notion of all-powerful text, but it should also be clear that the polysemic nature of text, which allows for differential reading, is neither without its structure nor without its limits (Morley 1992, 21). It would be unreasonable not to acknowledge the definitional power of text as a form of representation structured by certain signifying mechanisms that tend to direct its reading. It is one of the seminal categories for understanding the relations of power. But these relations cannot be fully understood without inquiring into the practices by means of which differently positioned audiences exercise their power/freedom of interpreting and responding to the textual meaning.

I also suggest that we analyse textual/reading practices as a site of the close interaction of technologies of signification, those for governing the conduct of others and those of acting upon the self (see Foucault 1982, 1988a, 1988b, 1992; Rose 1992, 1996a, 1996b). Technologies of signification structure the ways of associating signs with a field of their possible meanings. As rules and mechanisms of signification do not function outside the operation of power that identifies (and at the same time excludes) certain topics as representable and certain ways of referring to them as appropriate, they are also to be studied as technologies of power that direct, shape and guide the conduct of others. It is the form of power that defines "games of truth" (Foucault's 1992, 6) implicated in a certain regime of representation. This regime influences the relations that come to be established in the construction and consumption of representation by excluding/creating certain repertoires of topics and statements that define them and by following certain rules of manipulating signs and reading subject positions. There is a range of mechanisms of signification by means of which forms of media representations address subjects and incite their participation in the meaning production, which has a stabilising effect on textual meaning. It is obvious that the reading process thus comes to be structured, but only to a certain extent, that is, to the variable extent to which different forms and genres of media texts inspire subjects to participate in processes of social communication. Media texts, like other symbolic forms, do not offer messages ready-made for consumption that can simply be accepted or resisted. They invite readers to invest some interpretative work according to their social positioning, cultural competence and personal motivation and abilities. This work is not just a semantic practice performed for its own sake. To the contrary, it involves making, evaluating, testing and appropriating the meaningful connections between the elements of a given text and the wider map of conceptual categories, social values and ethical norms that govern the way subjects organise their understanding of themselves and their world and act accordingly. In other words, the operation of definitional mechanisms/power presuppose reading subjects as active and voluntary participants who are able to choose how to play the 'game of truth' and how to relate the derived meaning to their own experience. If they are not able to exercise their freedom of choice, then, we should talk about the relations of slavery and not those of power (see Foucault 1982, 220–222).

Bibliography


BARTHES ON TEXTUAL PLEASURE


Невена ЋУРЧИЋ

МЕДИЈСКИ ТЕКСТОВИ, ПУБЛИКЕ И ОДНОСИ МОЋИ ИСТРАЖИВАЧКЕ ПАРАДИГМЕ У СТУДИЈАМА МЕДИЈА И КУЛТУРЕ

Кључне речи: медијски текстови, дефиниције моћи, публике, читалачке прахсе, истраживања парадигма, односи моћи.

Иако се са сигурношћу може прихватити тврдња да медији значајно утичу на свакодневни живот друштва и појединца, ипак не постоји сагласност међу коментаторима, критичарима, научницима и публиком о томе како знатно медији утичу на свакодневни живот друштва и појединца. Два најважнија научна питања — како медији утичу на људе и на који начин људи користе оно што им медији пружају, и поред бројних научних објашњења, остала су неразјашњена. Истраживање и историја ове проблематике може да се свлачи из две перспективе: прва перспектива за полазну основу анализе има медијске текстове и њихов утицај на публику; друга перспективи гравира начине на које публика — читачки разумеју и користе текстове. У овом раду се критички разматрају неки од најутискајнијих приступа теоријском разумевању и истраживању узаямног односа и утицаја медијских текстова и публике, тј. читалаца.

Као полазна основа за разматрање историје научних напора да се разуме и образује сложно односе медија и публике користе се Кунов појам парадигме (Kuhn 1962; Glover & Strawbridge 1985; Hamilton 1997). Парадигма је појам под којим се подразумева састав научног знања и апарате. То је скуп научних теорија, облика истраживања и научних култура, који одређују специфичну слику света и формирају народне научне програме, који одређују важност и валидност истраживачких издана и
методолошких процесура. У овом раду је избор парадигми, које се баве истраживањима односна текст-публика, дат на основу процене утицаја и значаја одређене истраживачке школе.

Прва парадигма, настала још 1930. године у студијама медија, била је под утицајем теорија бихејвористичке психологије и теорије друштвене контроле у индустријским друштвима (Morley 1989, 16; Tudor 1995, 82; Abercrombie & Longhurst 1998, 4-11; Glover1985, 372). Основна претпоставка ове парадигме била је да мас-медији имају велики и одлучујући утицај на беспромоћну публику. Из десничарске перспективе — ова појава је посматрана као претња традиционалном систему друштвених вредности и утицаја елите. Левичари су ову појаву посматрали као још једну могућност манипулишења широким народним масама од стране елите. Постојао је страх да медији могу негативно утицати на сексуално понашање, традиционалне мужско-женске улоге, социјализацију дече, политички живот итд. Због тога се најважније истраживање питања улоге медија и њиховог утицаја на ставове и понашање појединца. Спроведена су различита истраживања и тестиране разне хипотезе. Важно је напоменути да су се ова истраживања ослањала на одређене модели: публика, као хомогеног маса више или мање изолованих појединци — пасивних прималаца поруке медија; директна моћ медија над публиком; утицај и више нивоа утицаја (Hall in Abercrombie & Longhurst 1998, 9-11). Добијени резултати су били далеко од комплетних, али истраживачки модели је касније допуњени новим методолошким-теоријским основама. И поред тога, остало је тешко доказати главну тезу ове парадигме: публика се зазна може сматрати пасивним посматрачем моћних медија. Многи истраживачи су под утицајем функционализма сматрали да медији, у ствари, задовољавају одређене потребе публике и да се на тај начин сами медији и поруке које они емитују такмиче са осталим начинима „задовољења потреба“ публике (Tudor 1995, 83; Abercrombie & Longhurst 1998, 7-9; Glover 1985, 377-380). Овај принцип, назван „коришћење и задовољење” потреба, бацира се на сложеном психологском саставу потребе, чије су задовољење појединци — публика могла да повезују са избором одређених медијских производа. Публика, тј. гледаоци и читаоци, цијела оријентисана, а у овом смислу, бира тачно одређене медијске производе и начин на који користи у свакодневном животу. Другим речима, акцент је стављен на индивидуални избор и потпуно исти медијски текстови могу бити различито схваћени и коришћени у зависности од појединца. Овакво схватање публике и њеног утицаја на медије довело је до стварања новог методолошког прилаза. Да би истражили како и зашто појединци бирају одређене произведе, и које се потребе задовољавају на овај начин, истраживачи су се окренули каузалном методама истраживања, тј. упитницима. Они су узимани као доказ да текст или порука могу да се тумаче на више начина. До другачијег и различитог разумевања текста долази због различитости карактера појединца, а те различитости су објашњаване из угла индивидуалне психологије (Morley 1989, 17; Hall in Abercrombie & Longhurst 1998, 9), занемарјући — при том — културну и социјалну перспективу. Овакав став, заједно са функционалистичком основом, уксеро је постао мета критичара.

Велика промена у начину гледања на однос медији-публика настала је седамдесетих година 20. века, највише захвањујући чувеном и утицајном раду Хала (1980), који се бави телевизијом и њеним начином представљања. Хал тврди да медијски текстови садрже у себи значаје или симболе са нејасним кодираним значењима, који су као такви пл грнране публици као „цијела“ значење порука. Хал је такође инсистирао на културној и социјалној димензији тзв. „прожедење значења“, и на понашајући једностраности и културних кодова сложене публике. За разлику од парадигми које се базирају на утицају и задовољењу потреба појединца, Халова анализа различитости у интерпретацији текстова базира се на претпостављеном постојању доминантног система вредности и мере до које публика прихвата или не прихвата идеје и културне категорије.

Следећа, психоаналитичка парадигма је заснована на тумачењу фильма и централизовано место поно званичних текстуалних анализи. Током седамдесетих је група писаца, окупљена око филмског часописа Screen (Mulvey 1999; Moores 1992, 137-142; Morley 1989, 19-22), тврдила да разни производи медија представљају, у ствари, одређено виђење света: начин на који су представе и поруке структуриране обликом гледања или посматрању код публике и утицаја на њега у зависности од страте- гије — поставке текста, која одређује место публике као посматрача и тако омогућава да се сагледају ствари из угла камере или измишљеног карактера на филму.

Парадигма, названа „контекст и начин читања текста“ обухвата разне анализе и емпиријске студије читалачке праксе различитих врста и форми медијских текстова. Под утицајем феноминаизма, пишана класа и пола публике овде заузимају важна места: зашто су одређене врсте текстова попунар- није од других и како друштвено окружење утиче на избор публике. Неке од најважнијих области истраживања су тзв. „женски телевизијски програми“ (Brandson 1997; Modleski 1982; Hobson 1978; Ang 1985; Morley 1980b; Seiter et al. 1989a), употреба кућних видео рекордера (Gray 1992), „лубавне приче Radway 1984) и женски часописи (Hermes 1995). Све ове студије се углавном баве произвођењем зна- чења у друштвеној пракси, начином на који публика, у зависности од друштвених положаја и жи- вотног искуства, тумачи и прилагођава текст.
Преглед литературе и изложених парадигми ясно показује да научно интересовање за тему односа медији–публика није уручио јединственим виђењем проблема о томе како треба посматрати и испитивати дату тему. Историјат истраживања показује да постоје две, више или мање супротстављене истраживачке парадигме: у првој медијски текст се схвата као основни проблем који треба тумачити и који усмерава истраживање ка односу утицаја — моћи текста над публиком; у оквиру друге истраживачке парадигме тежиште истраживања је усмерено на процување начина на који публика чита текст и начина на који публика утиче на медије. Једно од могућих решења било би да се истраживачи уздржке од својих објашњења и општих закључака, који се односе на наводне универзалне аспекте структуре текста или разумевања текста. Текстови у медијима немају исту семантичку структуру или стабилност, те се не могу ни читати на исти начин. Такође, текст и публика — читаоци не представљају одвојене категорије које су подложне анализи.

Решење питања „како медији утичу на људе и на који начин људи користе оно што им медији пружају“, које, у ствари, представља ствари теоријску дилему: „агенс или структура“ и „појединач или друштво“, треба потражити у потпуно другачијој теоријској перспективи коју предлаже Фуко, нарочито у својим касним радовима (Foucault 1982, 1988a, 1988b, 1992; Rose 1992, 1996a, 1996b). Прихваћањем Фукоове дефиниције појма моћ, односа моћи и технологије, могуће је превазићи поменуту истраживачку дилему и развити нови теоријско-методолошки приступ који омогућава истраживање сложених односа и узајамних утицаја између текста и читаљачке публике. Медијски текстови, као и друге симболичке форме, не нуде унапред спремне поруке које се прихваћају или одбацију. Напротив, медијски текстови као да позивају читаоце да их слободно тумаче и интерпретирају, у зависности од њиховог друштвених и културних положаја, личних мотива и могућности. Овај процес укључује текстурање, одређивање вредности и погодности односа текстуалних елемената и идјејских категорија, друштвених вредности и етичких норми које одређују начин на који публика доживљава себе, свој свет и технологију. Другим речима, публика — читаоци су активни и добровољни учесници који могу да изаберу како да играју „игру истице“ и како да повежу изведено значење текста са сопственим искуством. Парадоксализујући Фукоа ако та иста публика нема право на слободан избор, онда треба да разматрамо односе ропства, а не односе моћи (Foucault 1982, 220–222).