

## Cultural Studies: Eclecticism and Orthodoxy

Qualitative audience research in media studies reflects eclecticism deriving from its connections with British Cultural Studies, which in turn resists disciplinary status 1. If cultural studies is defined at all, it is as an open field of inquiry where anyone interested in any aspect of culture can come on down. Resistant to theoretical or methodological dogma, Cultural Studies fancies itself as the hip-hop of academia, "poaching" ideas from wherever it pleases. Echoing this catholicism, critical audience research prefers to focus on theory over method, refusing to be bracketed by orthodoxy. *Notes?*

So it is difficult to draw up a definitive list of authors whose work is central to critical audience research. Having said this, few would consider the inclusion of George Gerbner. John Lent's review of five major figures in mass communication 2 acknowledges the difficulty of positioning Gerbner vis-à-vis critical research. Interviewed for Lent's collection, James Halloran 3 displays an equivocal stance toward cultivation analysis, which he sees as being both connected to but also different from a flawed North American mass communication tradition. His confusion is understandable, given that aspects of Gerbner's work seem shadowed by effects. The centrality of content analysis directed at enumerating levels of TV violence to the Cultural Indicators Project, combined with the conclusion that the medium creates common social attitudes, regardless of the differences between members of the audience, makes Gerbner sound like everything which cultural studies distances itself from. TV violence throws down a red flag, connecting Gerbner's work with the maligned effects tradition 4. Additionally the focus on the production of attitudinal uniformity among socially diverse audiences seems incompatible with the recognition of polysemy and active interpretation that nowadays is the starting point for cultural studies audience research. The fact that Gerbner's first "Violence Profiles" were funded by the US Surgeon General's office does not help, connecting his work to a project of social engineering often articulated with the religious right. Cultivation Analysis thus appears as both empiricist and administrative. It suffers from an

oversimplified view of the communicative process, and worse still, produces knowledge, which is primarily useful to those in power.

In fairness, Gerbner has contributed toward this viewpoint in a refusal to explicitly engage with developments in critical theory and audience research. His belief that formal qualities of specific texts are irrelevant to the reception of messages effectively dismisses textual analysis and focus group work. Indeed, a general refusal to acknowledge the importance of micro processes creates difficulties in arguing for a compatibility with the critical project. Perhaps these blind spots represent objects for further analysis rather than insurmountable obstacles, especially in light of the problems of delimiting the text in an increasingly inter-textual world (Gerbner's thesis being that different texts contain consistent meanings).

But other barriers might be easier to overcome. Gerbner's work also suffers from a cosmetic problem: The use of numbers. Justin Lewis <sup>6</sup> has recently suggested that quantitative research might be of use in certain critical areas, and Pierre Bourdieu's Distinction <sup>7</sup> provides an example of how numbers can be used imaginatively, but it is still fair to say that statistical research is not generally accepted within the corpus of critical media audience research. Some of the reasons for this are political and theoretical, based on the Critiques made by Blumer <sup>8</sup> and Bourdieu <sup>9</sup> on the limitations of survey research. Stemming from the critique of the effects tradition <sup>10</sup>, surveys are seen as blunt objects bludgeoning heterogeneity out of audiences and rendering them amenable to the control of politicians and marketing executives. Additionally, quantification has little to do with the actual experience of culture <sup>11</sup>. The Cultural Indicators Project's use of survey data collected by the National Opinion Research Centre (NORC) in Michigan as its primary research tool is thus problematic. This is all the more so with the emergent realisation that for all its aspirations toward multi-disciplinarity, cultural studies needs to police its borders to prevent the intrusion of politically incompatible research options <sup>12</sup>.

These factors converge to make it very tempting to dismiss quantitative research out of hand, a temptation supported by pragmatic concerns. Despite the aforementioned

calls for a reconsideration of statistical research, practically speaking the organisation of media studies degrees in the UK, New Zealand and Australia make it very difficult to do so: Students are offered little if anything in the area of quantitative methods classes, and encounter little of the history of mass communication research. The situation is no better at postgraduate level, meaning that even if many scholars might like to think about and use quantitative research, they are ill equipped to do so. As a result, major critical journals such as Critical Studies in Mass Communication, Media, Culture and Society and Cultural Studies feature few articles that even mention quantitative research in non-pejorative terms, much less actually using them. The "science wars" being fought in Social Text probably do little to effect such a rapprochement.

We are faced, then, with a general suturing of quantitative methods and administrative interests, a connection, which this paper will attempt to denaturalise by closely examining the theoretical foundation of cultivation analysis. In doing so, I hope to it demonstrate how Gerbner's ideas and methods can be used critically through a study of connections between media use and attitudes toward foreign policy in the US, as described in a series of surveys collected by the Chicago Council on Foreign Relations in 1982, 1986 and 1990.

### **Cultivation Analysis. Qualitative Quantification.**

By the late eighties, cultivation analysis had established itself as a central part of North American communication research. Ensnared within the wealthy Annenberg School of Communication at the University of Pennsylvania, George Gerbner and his colleagues (Larry Gross, Michael Morgan and Nancy Signorelli) had built up a considerable research profile consisting of content analyses of primetime TV and survey research assessing the attitudinal impact of the medium. Yet despite the vast amount of work conducted by the team, it appeared that the whole cultivation project could be summarised through a single concept: Mainstreaming. This word describes TV's power to homogenise social attitudes. Simply put, TV cultivates broadly similar ways of seeing the world among heavy viewers 13.

Phrased this way, mainstreaming seems to suffer from terminal positivism. Ien Ang 14 sees quantitative methods as dealing in meaningless abstraction; surveys bash the complexity out of audiences so that they can articulate generalisations that have little to do with the actual social position and function of TV. How can cultivation analysis speak of homogenised attitudes in a world so replete with difference? Pierre Bourdieu's critique of survey research 15 lends weight to Ang's position. Funded by institutional sources and under intense pressure to produce simple answers to complex questions, pollsters are little more than statistical magicians, pulling facts out of thin air by measuring a "public opinion" that exists nowhere other than their own minds, or more accurately their methodologies. Bourdieu also argues that because they are produced exclusively by institutional demands for information, surveys are incapable of acting critically, being used to question the logic and legitimacy of these institutions:

...(the survey) will measure nothing but the effect exercised by the measuring instrument. This is the case every time the pollster imposes upon those polled a problematic which isn't theirs...thus eliminating the only interesting problem, the question of the economic and cultural determinants of the capacity for broaching the problem as such. 16.

If this is true, then data such as that collected by NORC could not possibly be used to critique the media industry.

Some of these criticisms, however, can also be levelled at qualitative research forms. Louis Althusser's concept of interpellation 17, which formed the backbone of high screen theory, assumed social homogeneity in describing the ideology's absolute power in subject formation. The reference to *Screen* is not casual, since Cultivation Analysis had by the early seventies adopted an essentially structuralist conceptualisation of the relationship between TV and society. For the Annenberg team, TV's impact could be neither imagined nor measured in behaviourist terms. Violence may have been a notable feature of the televisual environment, but as the content analyses were compiled, it became clear that these depictions of violent acts conveyed much more information than how to efficiently shoot, stab or sucker punch other people. The interesting thing about violence was less what was done, as who performed these acts

and who was victimised. The Cultural Indicators Project found that some social types were more likely to be victimised than others. Women, the elderly and people of colour were far more likely to find themselves on the receiving end of blows, bullets and blades than were middle-aged, middle class and wealthy white men **18**.

Gerbner et al. concluded from this that the interesting question about TV violence was not what such images made people do, as it was what they made people think about the world that they lived in. Violence was couched within the broader themes of representation and socialisation. TV, Gerbner tells us, is a central agent of socialisation in today's world. It tells us about "reality" through repeatedly telling us the same story vis a vis social types and their position in social power relations **19**. Such an argument stands closer to structuralism than positivism. Audiences are interpellated through patterned representations of difference crossing all TV genres. We cannot, as a result, lump Cultivation Analysis in with effects research, since it is anti-behaviourist.

But the Althusserian nature of this position does not tell us much about how Cultivation Analysis might apply to Cultural Studies today. So it is important to note that when Cultivation Analysis speaks of a process of homogenisation, it does not argue that TV produces uniformity. Mainstreaming refers to a reduction of difference, which is very different to the idea of the direct effect. It is not an empiricist concept, but rather an idea that can be used to think about both power and evasion. We can see this in the alternative "resonance" thesis. Gerbner et al. have also argued that TV can increase attitudinal differences between audiences through "resonant" representations. Televised messages will be particularly powerful when they reflect the social experience of the viewer **20**. Take for example, the "Scary World" hypothesis developed by the Annenberg team **21**. The televisual world is far more violent than the real world. The Cultural Indicators Project found that heavy TV viewers are far more likely than light viewers to overestimate their chances of being crime victims. But this is especially true for people who live in high crime areas. TV tells us that we live in a violent society

where we are all targets, but it is easier to accept this message as true if the house next door was burgled last night.

Mainstreaming and resonance cannot co-exist within a positivist paradigm. To Hughes 22 and Hirsch 23, who launched a sustained attack on the Annenberg team's from within mainstream communication research, the simultaneous mobilisation of these concepts is simply equivocation. Cultivation Analysis ends up arguing that TV both increases and decreases divergent viewpoints, and it cannot do both.

Unless, of course, you acknowledge the uneven terrain of social communication. Hughes and Hirsch's dismissal of Cultivation Analysis due to the disappearance of mainstreaming under multiple controls means that they, apparently, do not. In their view, either TV has power or it does not. As a result, they find themselves in the same sort of position as the effects researchers of the late fifties; shunted toward uses and gratifications research by a failure to provide concrete evidence of mass persuasion. Cultural Studies resists this trend by replacing the effects model of communication with a more complex, semiotic view of the concept. This complexity is required because communicative effects do not declare their presence unambiguously. Not coincidentally, Cultivation Analysis has its origins in the same period, and it too has a more sophisticated view of communication than that offered by effects researchers. It follows that to fully understand the Cultural Indicators Project's view of TV's social role, we have to understand the model of communication it operationalizes.

If Cultivation Analysis is positivist, then it must view communication as a transparent process, where the desires of the TV industry are forced upon passive audiences. Anyone who has read Gerbner's early theoretical work knows this is not the case. In fact, Gerbner has explicitly rejected this model based on his belief that communication is a fundamental human process whose primary significance lies not in the ability to produce attitudinal and behavioural shifts, but rather to preserve the stability of a given social order. Hence communication is defined as "interaction

through messages bearing (hu)man's notions of existence, priorities, values and relationships" 24.

Moreover, Gerbner's model acknowledges polysemy. An event occurs in the material world. That event is witnessed by media professionals, who manifest their perceptions of that event into textual form. This perception, however, represents a way of seeing which is open to reinterpretation. Thus media texts do not simply "represent" the material world, but actively work to make meaning in a particular way 25.

Nevertheless the audience stands in relation to the text in much the same way as the media professionals stood vis-à-vis the original event. The meaning of the text is thus ambiguous, even if certain readings are encouraged by explicit and implicit assumptions made in the productive process 26. In this sense, Gerbner's model is similar to Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding model 27, the starting point for the "active audience" thesis. Gerbner's work is thus theoretically incompatible with a stimulus-response, direct effects-style approach.

In fact, Gerbner's model implies that effects can never be direct, since meaning is always contextual. Because communication involves the creation of meaning, both on the behalf of the media and the audience, every attempt to communicate has an impact in provoking some form of discursive activity on the behalf of the receiver. That is, whenever we are addressed by another person, or by a mediated text, we draw some meaning from that interaction. The problem is that because we are dealing with a process that is contaminated by ambiguity, we can neither predict nor control what the effect of a specific communicative act will be. Here again, it is possible to note intersections between Gerbner's work and models which have been developed within cultural studies. In this instance, cultivation theory reflects the shift Carey 28 advocates from a transmission to a ritual model of communication, from a view of communication as more than the passive transmission of information to an active process that creates images of social reality.

So to criticise the cultural indicators project for failing to locate a main effect for TV resistant to multiple controls is to misunderstand the concept of communication that

is at stake. In viewing communication as a process characterised by dislocations between intentions and perceptions, Gerbner clearly suggests that the same message will have different effects, depending on who the receiver is. Hence the notion that the main effect, if rigidly applied as the production of uniformity, becomes problematic if not redundant. For this reason, one of the responses extended by the Annenberg team to Hirsch was that they had never claimed that TV had the type of global effect they are accused of searching for **29**.

But mainstreaming still implies that TV has a distinct and identifiable influence on the way that people think. It still, therefore, deals at a level of abstraction that researchers such as Ang find problematic. It is important to note, however, that not everyone within cultural studies is as wary of generalisation as Ang. In his discussion with researchers at the University of Massachusetts, Stuart Hall **30** defends the encoding/decoding model on the grounds that any analysis of power needs the concept of generalizability. Hall is unwilling to completely dismiss the determining power of the text, for fear of dismissing power imbalances in social relations. Hall still credits the media with the power to position diverse audiences in similar positions within the text. Similarly, Gerbner casts TV's power in agenda setting style. We, as an audience, "do not have to accept (TV's) message, but (we) can't help having to deal with (them)" **31**. Hall and Gerbner share the idea that the mass media are relatively successful in directing public consciousness. Any cultural analysis of the mass media must bear this in mind, since the very notion of culture depends on the relative coherence of meaning within a given society. Williams **32** recognised this in his work on the "structure of feeling", defined as a general ideological climate confining that scope of debate occurring within a society. Difference is an important part of any sophisticated piece of audience research, but so too is the recognition that the possibilities for difference are not boundless.

Accepting this point means rethinking the nature and importance of specificity in audience research. Specificity is a crucial to social science research, standing at the centre of the debate on the relative merits of statistics versus case studies that divided

US sociology in the 1920s and 1930s **33**. Cultural Studies' focus on the intricacies of the reception process can be seen as an important counter balance to a bulk of statistical communication research. At the same time, even as staunch a critic of quantification as Herbert Blumer acknowledged that surveys can suggest:

...possible significant factors in the complex processes which social psychology is seeking to unravel...In suggesting a relation...(statistics)make it possible to come back to the individual cases within the aggregate and study them within the suggested relation **34**.

Ironically, then, the emphasis on the context of reception actually runs the risk of missing the whole picture. If viewing is a social activity, it must be linked with macro social processes, the "structure of feeling" surrounding the micro differences of actual viewers. Missing this connection means missing the truly social nature of viewing. It has long since been recognised that ideology functions as metonym, representing slivers of reality as reality itself. Qualitative audience research risks a similar form of tunnel vision, wherein the complexities of social systems are reduced to living room interactions. A political critique of viewing requires this information, but as Hall's defence of encoding/decoding indicates, this cannot be all we need to know.

For their part, Gerbner et al. have attempted to describe of the "structure of feeling" that has characterised the US since the seventies, charting certain regularities framing major ideological differences. TV is examined because it represents the dominant form of publication in contemporary society. Publication, in Gerbner's terms, refers to "a general social process...the creation of shared ways of selecting and viewing aspects of life" **35**. Connected to a dominant economic and political order and run by commercial interests, TV repeatedly shows a heterogeneous audience the values anchoring a specific culture.

Nevertheless, the simultaneous occupation of different subject positions is recognised. For example, while heavy TV viewers in the US tend toward a conservative "mainstream" with respect to issues such as law and order and taxation, they also tend to want more government expenditure on social programs **36**. Thus TV cultivates predispositions which do not always cohere. Cultivation analysis presents us with

“findings” that are themselves textual; pieces of information needing active interpretation. The co-existence of these preferences, for example, can be explained by an overarching desire to simply have more of everything, a desire promoted by the consumerist logic of the medium.

I am not arguing that we should all become cultivation analysts. All research paradigms have their faults and blind spots, and the Cultural Indicators Project is no exception. Perhaps most obviously, the focus on TV is a little short-sighted given the intertextuality of media reception; can information gained from TV really be isolated from what we hear and read on radio, newspapers and the internet? At the same time, if the refusal to include the Annenberg team’s approach in the critical canon is produced by the general rejection of quantification, then it must be pointed out that many of the critiques of positivism simply do not apply here. Communication is not viewed as a simple process of information transference, the audiences are not comprised of cultural dupes, and the results of survey analysis are not self-evident. In fact, as Michael Morgan has tirelessly emphasised in his quantitative research methods class at the University of Massachusetts, quantitative research is an entirely qualitative enterprise, premised on all kinds of assumptions that need to be considered when one is analysing data. Quantitative research, in this instance, has as much to do with interpreting as it does measuring. The disarticulation from positivism means that the claims of cultivation analysis become at once more modest but also more compatible with critical research. Grossberg 37 sees the role of audience research not as grasping the truth of audiences, but simply arriving at a better understanding of viewing. Surely this is enhanced by drawing perspectives from a wide a field as possible.

But how exactly can cultivation techniques be used to explain audience behaviour and the mechanics of ideology? I have explored this question through an analysis of the 1990 survey conducted by the Chicago Council on Foreign Relations regarding attitudes toward foreign policy, as they relate to media use. Respondents to these surveys (numbering 750), were asked for their opinions on a number of international issues and policies concerning the US. In addition, they were also asked a number of questions

concerning their level of interest in both local and international news. I attempted to illustrate a cultivation style method by constructing a number of indices measuring dispositions on a number of foreign policy issues (attitudes toward the US' World leadership role, foreign military aid, foreign economic aid and direct military intervention) as they relate to levels of interest in the news. The media variable used means that strictly speaking, this is not a piece of cultivation analysis, since it does not focus on TV. Secondly, because of the limitations of using databases collected by other people, I have substituted "interest" for "cumulative exposure" variables, the assumption being that people who are more interested in the news also tend to see, read and hear more news. On a positive note, these media variables do acknowledge the intertextuality of media experience in a way that questions on cumulative exposure to TV do not.

Foreign policy was selected as a topic because of the apparent absence of any clear preferred meanings on the US global role. Popular wisdom mourns the passing Cold War consensus, with its clearly identifiable geography of "them" and "us". The US used to be able to invade South East Asia at the drop of a hat; but in the nineties, it can barely decide what to do about a tiny Caribbean nation like Haiti.

But culture simply cannot exist without some type of preferred meaning, some set of core beliefs that define a particular place and time. These preferred meanings may be hard to find, and when we find them they may be riddled with all kinds of contradictions, but without them, we cannot speak of national identity.

National identity as an idea demands caution. The concept of identity as a whole (pun intended) has come under a sustained onslaught since the nineteenth century, as Marxism, psychoanalysis, structuralism and postmodernism have all chipped away at the Cartesian notion of the rational subject **38**. Identity emerges as a neurotic construct that must resist dissolution. Identities are in constant flux. How, then, can we speak of a collective national identity when even the individual occupies different subject positions?

The crisis of national identity is illustrated by the title of a recent anthology on the subject, Homi Bhaba's Nation and Narration **39**. Bhaba's anthology suggests that "nation" cannot exist without "narration". Wallerstein **40** concurs, arguing that the

national sense of place depends on the ability to tell a coherent story about who we, as a nation, "are". At the same time, it has to be recognised that Barthes' hermeneutic code 41 portrays narrative closure, like identity, as something to be fought for. Stories end in particular ways, disguising in the process that they could be told alternatively. Narratives of national identity are no different. In fact, it is only recently that the concept of nation has become available as a category we can use to think ourselves into the world, standing in opposition to alternative spatial organisations (city states, federations) and ethnically based identities. With the strengthening of both global and local political, economic and cultural ways of living, national narratives appear as historically contingent forms of closure that may be ripped open once again.

So it seems that those who mourn the passing of Cold War national consensus in the US stand on sophisticated theoretical grounds. One can hardly speak of America, firstly because the name is that of a continent, not the US, but secondly because even within the second formation it is impossible to talk about collective identity in such a diverse place. In the wake of Anita Hill, Rodney King and O.J. Simpson, it is easy to say the National Consciousness, if it ever existed, has dissolved.

If domestic politics in the US underline the deconstruction of the Cartesian subject as self and other merge, the same cannot be said of international affairs. For example, US media publics have been bombarded with images of Islam portraying Muslims as violent, irrational zealots bent on the overthrow of western virtues through a sustained campaign of international terror 42. Perhaps this is why so few voices have been raised against the repeated US bombing of Iraq in the post Gulf War period. It almost certainly explains the arrest of a completely innocent Jordanian in the immediate aftermath of the Oklahoma City bombing; it was easier for people to believe that the attack was carried out by a Mid-Easterner than a Midwesterner.

The connection between mediated images of the Middle East and public reactions to conflict between the US and certain sectors of the Islamic world suggests the presence of preferred meanings based on a degree of narrative closure. If the Islam that actually exists is as diverse and fractured as the West 43, this is not the Islam US audiences meet

in the media. This fiction of the essential other allows a kind of collective identity. "We" know who "we" through the identification of who, or what, we are not 44.

The connections between narrative and identity dovetail with the theoretical premises of cultivation analysis. Gerbner et al. argue that TV positions us as subjects by telling us the same set of stories time after time. Nothing here contradicts the sort of qualitative work on depictions of Islam. Shaheen suggests that the media consistently tell us that the Muslim world represents a constant threat. His conclusion is supported by Lewis 45, who describes how western news viewers tend to see coverage of non-western trouble spots as evidence of a general irrationalism.

There can be no such thing as an essential identity; being and context are co-dependent. But it is important to remember that this conclusion has been reached by an intellectual project whose goal was to reject Enlightenment notions of rationality and authorship underwriting liberal pluralism. Arguing for multiple subject positions is not the same thing as believing that we can be what we want to be. National identity remains a force, if only because it is something which we must all deal with.

So recent work on multiple subjectivities, and accordingly active audiences, do not dismiss the idea of some sort of fundamental consciousness, the generation of a generally accepted set of beliefs limiting the diversity of a given culture. Culture could not exist without these parameters. This raises the question of whether the disagreements over recent US foreign policy may disguise a deeper set of beliefs that are relatively common. I will examine these by looking at the 1990 data from the Chicago surveys.

### **US Foreign Policy and Preferred Meanings**

If we look at controversies surrounding the US invasion of Haiti in 1994, we find on one level some deep divisions in elite government circles. President Clinton forged his policy in the absence of bipartisan support, with many prominent Republicans publicly denouncing his decision to introduce troops. Witkopf 46 and Holsti and Rosenau 47 contend that all Presidents have faced this situation since the Vietnam War, as the US' political, economic and cultural elite have divided themselves into

internationalist and isolationist camps. If this is true, then we can hardly expect to find public consensus on US foreign policy. Stuart Hall's continued defence of the encoding/decoding model argues that the media still hold determining power due in part to the relative ideological unity of elite circles who have a vested interest in leading public opinion. If this unity does not exist, then Hall must be wrong.

The problem with this argument is that it ignores the Gramscian position which argues that ideology functions to contain rather than eradicate difference. Manifest disagreements are often premised on a latent set of agreements **48**. Returning to Haiti, the public debate on whether or not the US should invade assumed that the US has the right to conduct such actions. No one asked if the US Army had the moral and political right to act as the world's police force; the only question was whether Haiti was the right place to exercise this power. This absence suggests a structure of feeling supporting US imperialism in principle.

### **The Chicago Data**

The first index I constructed from the Chicago data was designed to detect this structure of feeling among the public. The index is comprised of four questions measuring approval of efforts to foster democracy and civil rights throughout the world:

For each one (of the following questions) please say whether you think it should be 1. a very important foreign policy goal 2. a somewhat important foreign policy goal or 3. not an important goal at all?

1. Protecting weaker nations against foreign aggression.
2. Promoting and defending human rights in other countries.
3. Helping to bring a democratic form of government to other nations.
4. Helping to improve the standard of living of less developed nations.

This index was designed to measure the potential predisposition toward supporting an interventionist, policing role for the US. Although the questions are ambiguous, in the sense that they are consistent with both altruism and militarism, the intention is to measure the presence of attitudes that can be potentially connected to such ventures.

Other indices asked more specific questions. A "military intervention" index was made from the following questions:

There has been some discussion about the circumstances that might justify using US troops in other parts of the world. Would you favour or oppose the use of US troops:

1. If Japan were invaded by the Soviet Union?
2. If North Korea invaded South Korea?
3. If Arab forces invaded Israel?
4. If Soviet troops invaded Western Europe?.

This index was constructed to test the hypothesis that the post-Vietnam era has witnessed a significant resurgence of isolationism, testing as it does the willingness to commit US troops to prevent significant changes in the global geopolitical structure.

Finally, the 1990 data contain questions measuring the degree to which respondents approve of actual foreign policy actions taken by the administrations of the day. 1990 respondents were asked for their opinions on:

1. Overall foreign policy.
2. The US response to the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait.
3. The US intervention in Panama.
4. The US response to the Chinese Government's crackdown on pro-democracy demonstrators.

These questions and indices were all coded so that higher scores indicate greater support for the variable in question.

## Results

### INSERT TABLE 1 HERE

Looking at the World leadership index, the first item of note is the generally high acceptance of the interventionist principle, regardless of media use. The index was coded so that scores ranged from 4, representing the lowest possible level of support, to a highpoint of 12. The mean score of 9 reveals a general tendency to believe that the US should take a leading role in world politics. At the same time, while this tendency exists independently of the media variables used in the index, this is not to say that it is free of media coercion. Kottak 49 points out that the division between light, medium and heavy viewing levels does not really make much sense in a country where, in absolute terms, everyone consumes enormous amounts of media information.

Having said this, it does appear that interest in the news sharpens the internationalist tendency. Table one shows that higher levels of interest correlate with significantly higher index scores for almost every subgroup. The only groups which do not demonstrate such a relationship on either of the media variables is the "other" racial group (a fact that might be explained by the fact that there are only 48 respondents in this group) and conservatives. In a cultivation style interpretation, this lends weight to those critical researchers who criticise the media for representing the non-western world as a cauldron of dangerous anarchy. Cumulatively, news stories encourage the belief that the world is in need of a firm hand. Patterns emerging from the subsequent analysis must be subsumed beneath this belief.

At the same time, one must acknowledge the ambiguity of the internationalist sentiment. Interventionist policies can take the form of armoured tanks, but they can also manifest themselves as water tanks to be used in irrigation projects. The "Troop Deployment" index (Table 2) measures correlations between media use and the tendency to support the use of force.

**INSERT TABLE 2 HERE**

Again, on a scale that ranges from 0 to 4, a mean of 2 means that we cannot locate a consistent refusal to support the deployment of US troops. Moreover, we see that once again, media usage correlates with an increased support for such measures among all of the subgroups on at least one of the media variables, with the exception of the Race Other group.

Finally, similar patterns emerge on the index measuring approval of George Bush's foreign policy.

**INSERT TABLE 3 HERE**

Only the highly educated and liberals do not show increased tendencies toward approval in accordance with higher scores on the media variables.

## Cultivation and Critical Research

The analysis of the previous section is fairly straightforward. Presenting data such as this, I am constantly aware of a temptation to slip into cause-and-effect language. But these tables are not as simple as they might appear. For a start, they substantially debunk the belief that Post-Vietnam US is an ideological shell of its former self, guilt-ridden about its past, uncertain of its future. If events such as Haiti suggest this picture, then we should also remember the public certainties surrounding recent actions in the Gulf. General support for, or at least the absence of coherent, active opposition to both the Gulf War and the continued bombing of Iraq is possible because the majority of the US public believe in the principle of US imperialism, even if they do not always approve of the precise form it takes.

These tables also lend empirical weight to arguments presented by scholars such as Said and Amin. This is important, since the quantitative and qualitative camps are united by David Morley's belief audiences must be studied empirically 50. Critical media research is premised on the assumption that the media have considerable, but not absolute, power to position the audience. The only way of seeing power as both significant but also not comprehensive is to define it as the ability to limit and reduce difference. This is why cultivation analysis becomes useful. Dealing with audiences rather than texts, cultivation analysis and the concept of mainstreaming provide a way of thinking about both power and difference. We can see this in the preceding tables.

I have described how these tables suggest a relationship between media use and attitudes that supports the argument that the media support an active world role for the US. What we also see is evidence of a mainstreaming function, whereas attitudinal differences between subgroups of people who are not particularly interested in the news are less significant among the more media vigilant. Taking a look at the "Leadership Index", we see on the International News variable a 0.6 point difference between low and high levels of education among those showing low levels of interest. The difference is only 0.3 among the same groups of the highly interested. The same can be said for sex (0.1 to 0) and race (0.8 to 0.5). Mainstreaming is also evident on the "Troop" and

“Approval” indices. On the former, differences in levels of support among the less interested are reduced with increased interest among the education and sex subgroups on the NI measure, and the education, sex, and race groups on the IN. On approval of foreign policy, this same trend is seen in the Education, sex, and race groups on NI, and education and race on IN.

Media power is not absolute, if we look at approval of George Bush’s foreign policy, we see that higher levels of interest in the media do not produce significantly greater levels of support, although the trend is upward. In the terms of encoding/decoding, we might read this as evidence of oppositional activity in this part of the audience. Liberals were not necessarily persuaded of Bush’s success to the same degree as others. The same is true of liberals on the NI measure of the troop deployment index.

But these are minor victories at best. The overwhelming impression created by these tables is that people still tend to believe that the US has the right and even the duty to mould the world in its own image, an impression which the media appears to cultivate. The significance of this analysis is that it contradicts the myth of the “liberal media” that has permeated US public discourse since Vietnam. Herman and Chomsky 51 describe the general impression among government elites that the news media are somehow un-American, being the prime agents behind the erosion of public will that ended the Vietnam War. Although this has escalated into a belief that the media in general are anti-conservative (witness the Dan Quayle/Murphy Brown fiasco), Herman and Chomsky argue that the liberal media myth disguises a profound conservatism on the part of the news. The preceding tables concur.

If you want to follow Bourdieu in arguing that quantitative methods create as many problems as solutions, it would be hard to disagree. If you also wanted to say that surveys produce data that is not simply found, but is given determinate shape by the methods of their measurement, then again, I couldn’t really say you were wrong. But I would also say that these same criticisms could be levelled at qualitative methods. Welcome to the messy, infuriating world of audience research. When Morley says that

the problem of the audience is principally empirical, he recognises that audience research require us to reach out into the world that real audiences actually inhabit. We cannot use the problem of methodology to conclude that audiences do not exist. Like it or not, we have to use empirical methods, since audiences cannot be theorised into or out of existence.

This being the case, it might be worth considering if quantitative research offers something to critical audience research. Not only is it true that some criticisms levelled at survey research can be levelled at all forms of social research, but the case of cultivation analysis suggests that Bourdieu's synthesis of statistical and institutional methods and goals is misplaced. In the US, Gerbner et al. have stood as some of the most vocal opponents to the free market media forces that are growing ever more powerful on a global scale, demonstrating time and time again the ideological power of TV. Moreover, a cultivation style analysis of the Chicago data illustrates how surveys can contextualize qualitative audience research in a way the prevents the concept of active audiences from lapsing into the liberal pluralism of uses and gratification research.

Table 1: US World Leadership: 1990.

NEWS	EDUCATION			SEX		RACE			IDEOLOGY		
	LOW	MED	HI	M	F	W	B	O	CON	MOD	LIB
NI											
LOW	9.0	9.3	9.3	9.3	9.2	9.3	9.0	9.2	9.3	9.3	9.1
MED	9.5	9.7	9.6	9.6	9.7	9.6	10.0	9.1	9.6	9.6	9.9
HIG	9.5	9.8*	9.7*	9.8*	9.7*	9.7*	10.0*	8.5	9.6	9.8*	9.9*
H											
IN											
LOW	8.8	9.4	9.4	9.2	9.3	9.3	9.2	8.5	9.4	9.3	9.1
MED	9.4	9.6	9.5	9.6	9.5	9.6	9.5	8.8	9.5	9.5	9.7
HIG	9.9*	9.9*	9.6	9.8*	9.8*	9.7*	10.3*	9.8	9.6	9.9*	9.9*
H											

GRAND MEAN: 9.5  
 STANDARD ERROR: 0.04  
 STANDARD DEVIATION: 1.7  
 ALPHA: 0.61

Table 2: Public Support For Troop Deployment, 1990.

NEWS	EDUCATION			SEX		RACE			IDEOLOGY		
	LOW	MED	HI	M	F	W	B	O	CON	MOD	LIB
NI											
LOW	1.4	1.6	2.1	2.0	1.5	1.8	1.0	2.0	1.7	1.8	1.7
MED	1.7	2.1	2.3	2.3	1.9	2.2	1.5	2.4	2.4	2.0	1.8
HIG	1.9*	2.2*	2.2	2.4*	2.0*	2.2*	1.6	2.0	2.4*	2.2*	1.7
H											
IN											
LOW	1.2	1.5	1.8	1.8	1.3	1.6	1.0	2.3	1.6	1.6	1.4
MED	1.7	2.1	2.1	2.3	1.9	2.1	1.4	1.4	2.2	2.1	1.8
HIG	2.4*	2.3*	2.4*	2.5*	2.2*	2.4	1.9*	2.5	2.6	2.3*	2.0*
H											

GRAND MEAN: 1.99  
 STANDARD ERROR: 0.03  
 STANDARD DEV: 1.4  
 ALPHA: 0.67

Table 3: Approval of Foreign Policy, 1990.

NEWS	EDUCATION			SEX		RACE			IDEOLOGY		
	LOW	MED	HI	M	FEM	W	B	O	CON	MOD	LIB
LOW	1.1	1.7	1.9	1.7	1.5	1.7	1.0	2.1	1.9	1.7	1.2
MED	1.5	2.0	1.9	1.9	1.8	2.0	1.0	1.9	2.2	1.8	1.4
HIG	1.8*	2.0*	2.0	2.0*	1.9*	2.0*	2.0	1.8	2.3*	1.9	1.4
H											
IN											
LOW	1.0	1.5	1.7	1.4	1.4	1.5	0.8	1.6	1.6	1.5	1.1
MED	1.5	2.1	1.9	2.1	1.8	2.0	1.1	2.1	2.2	1.9	1.5
HIG	1.9*	2.2*	1.9	2.0*	2.0*	2.0*	1.6*	2.2	2.5*	1.9*	1.3
H											

GRAND MEAN: 1.8  
STANDARD ERROR: 0.03  
STANDARD DEV: 1.37  
ALPHA: 0.7

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