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Director J. D. Halloran

JDH/AMH

7th May 1974

Dear George,

Thank you for your letter of April 29th and for sending the proposals and draft report on Cultural Indicators.

I shall certainly keep you posted.

Regards,

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'JDH', written over a large, faint circular stamp or watermark.

Professor George Gerbner,
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MASS MEDIA
AND SOCIETY
THE CHALLENGE OF
RESEARCH

AN INAUGURAL LECTURE

by

JAMES D. HALLORAN



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Squad reference

MASS MEDIA
AND SOCIETY
The challenge of research

An Inaugural Lecture
delivered in the University of Leicester
25 October 1973

by

James D. Halloran

Professor and Director

of the Centre for Mass Communication Research



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The Problems We Face

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The director of England's leading
Centre for Mass Communication
Research explores the
tasks, risks and limitations

From an inaugural lecture delivered
in the University of Leicester

Palawan

~~MASS MEDIA AND SOCIETY~~

RECENTLY, I attended a meeting in Paris at the headquarters of Unesco. The main task of this meeting was to discuss and hopefully eventually ratify a series of proposals for AN INTERNATIONAL PROGRAMME OF MASS COMMUNICATION RESEARCH. As an introduction I would like to look both at some of the assumptions on which these proposals were based, and at some of the items which were included in the agenda. I think it is worth doing this, for these proposals from Unesco give a good idea of what may legitimately be called a new approach to mass communication research. It is an approach with clear policy implications which seems to be gaining favour over older, more conventional approaches – albeit rather slowly – and one which has quite a lot in common with our own research interests at the Centre.

The basic assumptions underlying these Unesco proposals (in fact the assumptions underlying the whole of Unesco policy) are that the mass media and mass communication are matters of vital significance and public concern, yet decisions about the media which impinge on the lives of millions of people are being taken, and policies formulated, by those who have little knowledge about the nature of the communication process and who, apart from their own vested interests, do not normally think in terms of the capacities, the potential, or the social consequences of even their own communication systems. ~~The architects of the Unesco programme recognized that decisions about the media tend to be taken not in terms of public needs or interests – however these may be defined – but in terms of private profit, political expediency, and the need to preserve existing media institutions.~~

The Unesco proposals contain many references to communication policies, a term which is rarely used in this country – perhaps it smacks too much of central planning and bureaucratic control. But in a sense communication policies exist in every society, although they are frequently latent and disjointed rather than clearly articulated and integrated. Policy decisions about

the media may be formulated in different ministries and agencies. A telecommunications agency may handle the important subject of radio frequency allocation, for example. Broadcasting can be the province of a completely autonomous government department, or it could be part of a Ministry of Information and Broadcasting which might also have publishing responsibilities. Ministries of Education and Culture are sometimes involved and the judicial branch may deal with problems of copyright, slander and libel. Ministries of Science and Technology, as well as Ministries which are concerned with the development of commerce and industry, take decisions about the 'hardware' – the technical basis of the media. The Foreign Ministry may be involved in the international exchange of news and programme materials. In many instances, the military branches of government, by the sheer complexity and size of their communications requirements, exert a significant influence on national communications structures. At the same time, there are numerous non-governmental communication enterprises (newspapers, motion picture companies, commercial broadcasting organizations, magazine publishers and record companies) which have their own policies and take their own decisions. In some countries, although these decisions may be taken within the framework of official policies, it is the non-governmental commercial agencies that really matter.

This is one way of illustrating the breadth and complexity of the communication picture and, at the same time, it gives some indication of the nature and scope of our terms of reference at the Centre for Mass Communication Research. ~~According to Unesco, such is the nature and scope of the problem "that we need the knowledge that only research can provide before we can develop adequate communication policies". It is not my intention here to argue a case for or against national communication policies, or for associated research policies. I refer to this document and these proposals in order to give a rough idea of the multi-faceted nature of our operation. I feel that it is necessary to do this for so often mass communication research and our own activities in particular have been associated with the lofty concerns of Mary Whitehouse, Malcolm Muggeridge, the Festival of Light and other grass-root moralizers. Perhaps this~~

is not surprising for, after all, in a manner of speaking we had our origins in sex and violence. I think most of you know that the Centre for Mass Communication Research is a child not only of the University of Leicester, but also of the Home Office Television Research Committee, whose main concern was with the influence of television on young people.

But we have broadened our terms of reference since those early days and today our research, although not ignoring questions about the effects of the media, goes much wider and deeper. For example, we are interested in the factors that govern or influence what the media make available, as well as the factors that govern or influence what use is made of what is made available. It is necessary to study the production side – the media industries – for from everything that could possibly be created or presented, only certain things are produced and offered to the public, and what is offered is not a matter of chance. This means that we must study the history and development of media institutions (and their relationship to other institutions, including government). We must ask questions about organization and structure, and about ownership, control, resources and technology – as well as about the import of media material from other countries. The professional values and the day-to-day operations of those working in the media must also be studied. This comprehensive approach enables us to set the media within the appropriate national, political, and economic contexts. Moreover, as the media serve many 'non-communicative functions', any conflict that exists between these different functions (e.g. the conflict between profit-making and creativity) is yet another area which might be investigated. The question 'What interests are being served by the media?' needs to be asked on the production side as well as on the use or consumption side. In addition we are interested in feedback from the audience to those who communicate, and in public access, and the degree of public participation in media production and policy. These aspects are relevant to the democratization of media operations, which is one of our wider interests.

As far as the use or the influence of the media is concerned, we know that different people use what is made available in different ways in accordance with their positions in society.

What is made available by the media, and consequently what helps to shape attitudes and values, will be influenced by a whole series of economic, legal, political, professional and technological considerations. In addition, how people use and are influenced by what is produced will also depend on a wide variety of non-media factors such as those associated with the family, school, social class, neighbourhood, and so on. In brief then, if we are to understand the part played by the media in our society, we must study the whole communication process in these appropriate contexts.

So much, then, for a wide general idea of the sort of problems we have to deal with, and how we might deal with them. But specific projects have to be thought out, designed, submitted for approval and support – and several factors guide our decisions in this connection. One of these is ‘social relevance’. Whether or not this should be one of the main criteria for research in the social sciences, is a question I know that is still debated; but for me it is axiomatic. In our research we should not be morally indifferent about society or about the role of the media in our society. We adopt a critical stance and recognize its implications, difficulties and dangers. I shall return to some of the implications of this stance later, but for the time being I shall ask you to accept that there is no basic reason why theoretical sophistication, conceptual refinement, methodological rigour, social relevance (and, for that matter, social commitment) should not live and flourish side by side.

What then in our particular field appears to be socially relevant at the present time? A glance at the media themselves, even allowing for the fact that they tend to pay too much attention to themselves, should give us a rough idea of the range of media-related topics which at least editors, politicians, pressure groups and a few others seem to think are important in some way or other. Articles on pornography, the portrayal of violence on both the large and small screens, the effects of the media on young children, and general complaints about tastes and standards, figure quite prominently – and rarely a week goes by without some reference to the political bias of the media. However, it would probably be a wider concern about developments in communication technology and about the future of broadcasting

and the other media institutions which would figure most prominently, at least in the so-called serious papers. ~~In recent months, the allocation of a fourth television channel seems to have attracted most attention and questions about ownership, control, access, participation, the rights of minority groups, and the development of alternative systems of broadcasting are covered. Developments in local radio (commercial and non-commercial) as well as the possibilities of local community cable television, would also be discussed. We could also find references to 'the continuing troubles of the British press', and we could read of government subsidies to the press in Italy, Scandinavia, and France (something unheard of in this country). The film industry would be seen to have its troubles, and the film, electronic and record sides of multi-media business groups would be quite extensively reported - as also would the affairs of the advertising world. We could even read about 'media imperialism' and 'cultural contamination' in developing nations, brought about by foreign-produced media material and - very occasionally - we might even be taken for a trip into the future to have a look at the multi-media two-way communication home of the wired city, with its video telephone and electronic mail and press deliveries.~~

The important thing to realize is that the topics just listed all illustrate ways in which the media might impinge on our lives. They are all socially relevant, and they are all problematic. We cannot tackle all of these - we have to make our choices - but they are all areas in which we require much more information than we have at present.

The general questions involved are not new ones. The media have discussed the ownership, control, organization, production, content and impact of mass media systems before today - and it is not the first time that speculations on the possible impact of developments in communication technology have led to expressions of both hope and concern. Unfortunately, it is also true that this is not the first time that media planning and policy, as well as journalistic speculation and prediction, have stemmed more from ignorance, prejudice and narrow vested interests than from knowledge, reason and concern about the public interest. This is what we are really concerned about.

One of our tasks is to translate these broad areas of concern into more concrete and specific questions, and I would now like to put before you a list of questions which emerged from a recent communication workshop where we tried to do this, and map out areas of possible research.

1. In what way, to what extent, and over what time-period will the new developments in media technology render existing communication technology obsolete?
2. Does the 'communications revolution' represent an entirely new factor in the socialization process and, if so, how?
3. Does the new technology demand an entirely new institutional and organizational structure, or can existing structures be suitably adapted?
4. How should one decide between
 - (a) private interests and public control?
 - (b) public accountability and freedom of speech?
5. Many decisions in media policy are made in the name of 'the public good' and 'the national interest'. But what do these terms really mean, and who decides what is good?
6. Granted existing structures of newsgathering, selection, and presentation, is it not inevitable that the 'free flow of information' will work to the advantage of those who possess the information and the means to disseminate it?
7. Is it not time that the media were demystified, and that we began to question the restrictions and the possible tyranny of professionalism? Must we always have the few talking about the many to the many?
8. Will the multiplicity of channels made possible by the new technology lead to cultural diversity and better opportunities for minority interests? In any case, who will control the software, the input, or the programmes?
9. Is public monopoly the only real guarantee of diversity?
10. Granted existing systems of ownership and control and the prevalence of western news values, are the media ever

likely to provide the amount and quality of information necessary for people to act intelligently in a participatory democracy?

11. Is there not a grave risk that we shall become paralysed by an overload of information? How much can we tolerate? How much can we understand?
12. Internationally, will the 'communications revolution' lead to an increase or a decrease in the gap between the haves and the have-nots?
13. As far as the developing countries are concerned, is not the main, perhaps even the sole, concern - how to use the media in the interests of national identity and development? Never mind objectivity, impartiality, or balance. How can one harness the new technology to national as distinct from sectional objectives?
14. How can we guard against the possible homogenizing influence of the new technology as traditional cultures may become swamped by the commercial off-loading of cheap alien material?
15. What do we know about the processes of media influence?

Now these questions, and more could be listed, really do present a challenge. ~~The title of this lecture speaks of the challenge of research but, so far, I have done little but indicate the challenge to research; and, I regret to say, both with regard to research ideas and research structures - that we are not very well placed to meet this challenge. In a lecture such as this it would be impossible to give a full explanation of why this is so, for mass communication research, in addition to suffering from its own peculiar faults and inadequacies, also reflects the weaknesses of its contributory streams, such as sociology and psychology. The most I can do here is to give a brief account of some of the main reasons as I see them.~~

Generally, in mass communication research, ~~theory~~ theory has failed to keep pace with techniques, doing has prevailed over thinking, and the tendency to do research (almost like American tourists 'do' Paris or London) has led to the collection of data before the

problems have been adequately formulated. This tendency is not unconnected with the fact that a great deal of mass communication research has been motivated by administrative, service, or commercial requirements. In this country, millions of pounds are spent by media organizations on research every year. It is still not always realized that research is not uninfluenced by outside factors. As far as administrative and commercial research is concerned, the main requirements have been a narrowly-defined efficiency and practicality. And these requirements have undoubtedly influenced the research effort. This type of work – much of which is never published or made available – tends to be atheoretical, and hypotheses are rarely formulated or tested. It is usually more concerned with sampling than with conceptualization, and with description rather than with analysis. The approach is piecemeal, and there is little integration or emphasis on continuity. Irrespective of the nature of the social phenomenon under investigation, the final research report is usually confined to quantitative statements about amenable but relatively superficial aspects of a complex issue. The main aim is to serve the institution concerned.

Things are changing, but the prevalence of this type of research in the past has had several unfortunate consequences. First, it has led to an under-estimation of the potential of research. Consequently, those responsible for media output, already predisposed by their position to be suspicious about independent enquiries into the nature of their operations, have had their position reinforced. Their inadequate expectations about the nature and possibilities of research have been maintained, and this – in turn – has influenced their policy towards funding research and towards the granting of research facilities.

Journalists claim the right to probe into all areas of society, but they are not very keen to submit their own operations to scrutiny. Clarification and understanding may be needed, but it is not wanted. Some 'creative' people consider their work as being beyond research, and they attack critical research for its irrelevance, its lack of application, and for being too remote and theoretical. In many ways this attitude is not surprising, for we know that some of those who are responsible for our media are not very familiar with the needs, potentialities, and reactions

Start here

of their audience. These unco-operative attitudes may present us with problems but we ought not to be surprised, for media institutions – like other institutions (including universities) – are not likely to support enquiries which may question their basic assumptions, or threaten their vested interests.

Secondly, this lack of theory ~~(and I accept that multi-faceted and so-called interdisciplinary approaches do not easily lend themselves to theoretical development, and I am not an advocate of a grand theory of mass communication)~~ has led to an imbalance in the overall research approach. Mass communication has not been thought of as a process; the production side, the media industries, have not been adequately studied and – even when research has been carried out in this area – it has usually been at a relatively low level of the operation. ~~As our late colleague, Roger Brown, pointed out some years ago there have been few systematic attempts to study the mass communicator as a professional who reflects the values of his profession, occupies a sensitive central position in a social network, rejects and selects information in response to a variety of pressures – all within a given social system. In brief, the communicator has not been systematically studied at the several levels of his operation, and we have still to develop a theory which allows for the systematic analysis of communicator decision.~~

Thirdly, even in that part of the communication process on which much time, money and effort have been spent, we are still paying heavily for the way in which the work was allowed to develop. The inadequacies of our theories and models have meant that we have accepted a very limited and restricted approach to the study of the use, the influence, and the effects of the media. For example, 'effects' has often been confused with 'effectiveness', and we appear to have been obsessed by attitude change or to have settled for even simpler behaviouristic responses, such as imitation. We have had very little to say about the more complex agenda-setting functions of the media, or about stereotyping, legitimization, or association. The media may associate certain types of behaviour with certain groups. They may confer approval or disapproval on both persons and values; they may select issues, define problems, legitimize certain types of behaviour, label persons, places, and things – in fact,

structure the whole debate in any given area. Of course, these processes are more difficult to measure than attitudes and imitation, and this may well be the crux of the matter. ~~The challenge presented by these problems is rarely faced. Unfortunately, it seems to have been assumed by many workers in this area that if it can't be measured, then it can't be important.~~

We are also handicapped because, together with other social scientists – and almost without thinking – we have borrowed from the natural and physical sciences without having much regard for the nature of our subject matter. The usefulness for social science of much that has been borrowed has never been fully established, yet we persist in our borrowing and unthinking application. As a result, the images of man and the models of society implicit in our work often bear little relation to reality. Frequently in our operational definitions we have disembodied, fragmented, and pigeon-holed human beings into cognitive, affective and behavioral bits and pieces. We have rid society of its embarrassing complexity by displaying a total disregard for what is really taking place. The situation has been approached, seen, examined and analyzed, according to the requirements of fabricated model or design. In such circumstances, partiality and superficiality are practically inevitable. We often stress the need for reliability, but it is the neglect of validity which has led to serious distortions of social reality. How valuable is it to be precise and consistent about something that isn't true or doesn't matter?

One final point about our inadequacies. Just as the lack of theory is to be regretted, so also is the tendency to ignore normative or value considerations, and this seems to have been another characteristic of mass communication research in the past. The contention that researchers ought to strive to remain for ever neutral is being increasingly challenged: perhaps we should accept that they might wish, or even have an obligation, to direct their efforts to vital social issues. But there are problems in doing this, and we shall have to return to these later. In any case, as far as so-called neutral work is concerned, it wasn't so much that values were not present or had disappeared, but that the researchers had become so identified with the values of the establishment that it looked as though they had disappeared.

It seems fairly clear that, on the whole, these 'neutral' enquiries have served to maintain the status quo. If it is inevitable that built into our whole research exercise are components which work in this conservative way, then at least let us face up to it and not feign a neutrality which is impossible. We need to recognize that our work, and what we do, are embedded in the system in which we make a living. Research is a form of social control, although we often tend to rationalize our intention in terms of clarification, increased knowledge, informed decision-making, better understanding, and so on. We should at least be prepared to look at the possibility that social science is just another unit in the service of the political-economic system, be it capitalist or socialist. In the sort of work we do there is need for constant vigilance and self-examination in this connection.

[Let us now look in more detail at a few of the areas where research seems to be seen as a threat or a challenge by people both inside and outside the media.]

We know to our cost that there are still those who think in terms of crude cause-and-effect models when discussing the media portrayal of violence and aggression. Some researchers seem to have misled themselves and others by their obsession with the elegant simplicity of one-dimensional analysis. ~~One million dollars was recently spent in the U.S.A. on one research programme of 23 separate projects, most of which were inadequately conceived from the outset. When we state that if it is thought that the media/violence relationship is worth studying, there are many non-media factors which have to be taken into account, we are accused of being too academic.~~ It is not appreciated that we have to bear in mind that violence is culturally and even sub-culturally defined, that not all violence need be regarded as negative, that some forms of violence are legitimized by the media, that the media may play a part in defining the problem and in associating certain groups with certain forms of behaviour, that there is more to influence than imitation and increased levels of aggression, that as far as television is concerned violence need not stem solely from the portrayal of violence but could possibly be related to relative deprivation or frustration (which might be linked to other non-violent media material, such as advertising), that there might be some other relevant

contributory factors apart from the media, and that it might be worthwhile studying those who appear to be so violently concerned about media violence and who also appear to be over-aggressive or extra punitive in so many other areas. The approach which takes all these factors into consideration is not favoured by those in the media, for it is not seen by them as dealing directly with their problems as they define them – nor is it favoured by others who would like to be able to use the media as scapegoats – and perhaps at the same time absolve themselves from looking at their own involvement in the problem.

In another problem area, two of my colleagues recently completed a project which went under the heading Mass Media and the Secondary School. When this work was first commissioned, it was probably thought by the sponsors that the research might enable them to make suggestions about relatively simple curriculum reform, perhaps with regard to media-appreciation classes or media-based teaching generally. The results from this work do in fact have implications for this sort of teaching, but there are other implications which go far beyond this. It is suggested that simply to introduce more mass media material into lessons will not help to close the gap between the school and the environment, or reduce the number of alienated pupils, unless it is part of a more general reassessment of basic assumptions and structures in education. Murdock and Phelps maintain that ultimately the argument is not about technique, nor even about content, but about the quality of the relationship between teachers and pupils and the assumptions on which these relationships rest and, beyond that, about the kind of society we want. The media then cannot be studied in isolation. The results from this type of research have far-reaching implications and in this particular case may present a challenge to many authorities in different institutions.

In another area, journalists (particularly those in this country) would appear to see a challenge or even a threat in our approach to the study of news. Because of their training and the ways of their craft, they tend to think in terms of freedom of the press, objectivity, fairness, impartiality, balance, the reflection of reality, true representation, readily accepting a clear distinction between

fact and opinion, and so on. In view of this it would be foolish to expect them to welcome research which shows that news is *made*, that from hundreds of events a few are selected, and that these are processed and presented in a highly patterned, ordered and predictable manner. The organization and structure of the broadcasting station or newspaper, professional values, day-to-day routines, and technological facilities are all reflected in what appears as news. In a sense, news is whatever the media tell us is news (however un-newsworthy or trivial it may appear by other standards), and what is not presented is prevented from becoming news. The media select and structure the pictures of the world that they make available and, in turn, these pictures may influence possible modes of action for those who receive them. For example, our research shows that the question of immigration and other race-related issues tends to be presented by all the media (despite differences in editorial positions) in such a way as to present immigrants, and coloured people generally, as a threat and as a problem. It is not that the media change attitudes overnight, or even that a programme or series of programmes could make people more prejudiced, but that over time problems are defined, meanings conveyed, perspectives created, solutions offered – and that this all structures possible modes of action in the population at large.

Deliberate bias, distortion, falsification, or direct slanting are not the main issues. It is the unwitting bias inherent in the system as it currently operates that is important. Events typically tend to be selected and interpreted for their relevance to a basic, pre-determined news issue. This means that, as the same basic news values prevail in both print and electronic media, despite the obvious inter-media and editorial differences there is a sameness in presentation, and a sameness in definition and meaning, across the whole range of media output. ~~When one looks at this narrow uniformity, side-by-side with the closure of newspapers, and the concentration of ownership in the media, we are bound to ask whether we have the necessary variety of channels (a variety which is generally considered to be an essential requirement for the democratic society) through which news and opinion can be freely communicated. It also makes it all the more urgent that we should give serious consideration to~~

exploring the possibilities of entirely new forms of communication which may be offered, by the development of cable television systems.

The news values on which the selection and presentation of domestic events are based are also the same values which underly the work of the international news agencies. These values, together with established technology (the wire systems of the world) influence the international flow of news and consequently control the pictures of the outside world that are presented to us. The pictures we receive of small, distant countries are not unlike those we have of minority groups within our own country. Crises and negative stereotypes prevail.

Some colleagues in Finland who adopt a critical approach, not unlike our own in some respects, in a study of international purchase and exchange of television programmes, have drawn attention to the one-way flow of information and cultural material from the industrialized world to the developing world.* They suggest that at best this amounts to inadvertent information and cultural domination; at its worst it could be seen as a new form of imperialism.

Although this exploratory work is not comprehensive, and there are many gaps in it, it is worth looking at in some detail, because it challenges the whole notion of 'the free flow of information' which has played such a prominent part in western thinking in the post-war years. Most television programmes that are distributed internationally are produced in the first place to satisfy audience tastes in the United States, Canada, Australia, Japan and western Europe. Consequently, popular entertainment dominates the international flow of TV programmes. The two discernible trends in the international flow of television programmes are, first, a one-way traffic from the big exporting countries to the rest of the world, and second, a dominance by entertainment material.

The one-way tendency and the relative concentration of sources of supply are also noticeable in the importation and exchange of newsfilm. The distribution of television news material is concentrated in three worldwide agencies: British Visnews, the (half British and half American) UPI-TN, and the American CBS-Newsfilm. The fourth important newsfilm dis-

tributor is in West Germany. There are practically no other worldwide newsmagazine distributors, and nearly all the broadcasters of the world, including the socialist countries, use film services by these agencies in their news bulletins.

As might be expected, the present or past colonial and current economic relations of the western European countries are reflected in programme distribution. The United Kingdom has dominant ties with the Commonwealth countries and English-speaking countries in general. France distributes most of her exports to French-speaking Africa, and the Netherlands to its former and present colonies. The Federal Republic of Germany, having had no colonial ties for a long time, exports equally to Latin America, Asia and Africa.

The situation as far as east-west flow within Europe is concerned is that all western productions (news and television programmes) constitute a relatively larger share of the total television output in eastern Europe (approximately 10 per cent) than do eastern productions in western European countries (approximately 2 per cent).

Despite the exploratory nature of this study, these findings and their implications certainly challenge conventional thinking in the media world, and, as I mentioned earlier, make us question the principles of freedom of communication and the so-called free flow of information in much the same way as we have had cause to look again at the concept of freedom of speech. Perhaps we ought to be suspicious about those, usually from the powerful and wealthier nations, who argue for unhindered communication. The development of satellite communications is very relevant in this connection. Incidentally, the nature and direction of the international traffic in television news takes on an added significance when we realize that in most countries in western Europe television is not only the most-used source of news but it is also regarded as the most-credible source.

Nearer home, our own work on local radio seemed to be regarded as a very real challenge by both B.B.C. and the government of the day, and in view of what happened this is not surprising. When local radio was introduced it was claimed that it represented a new form of broadcasting in the public interest. Its aims, as stated by B.B.C. and government, were to rejuvenate

community life by combating the anomic tendencies of contemporary society, furthering cohesion and integration, keeping people in touch, making people proud of their locality and more willing to participate in local affairs, allowing new forms of expression, and reinforcing the distinctive character and the sense of identity in the selected communities -- not my words, but those in the official government paper and B.B.C. publications. Although the innovation was officially regarded as an experiment, no adequate steps were taken either by government or B.B.C. to make a systematic social-scientific attempt to evaluate the experiment in terms of its declared aims. In fact we know that the government attempted to discourage independent social-scientific research.

The independent research that we eventually carried out, admittedly with help from the B.B.C., may help to explain this attitude of the government. We were able to show that after roughly two years, only just over 40 per cent of the adult population had the necessary facilities to receive local radio, and whilst 17 per cent claimed to listen on at least three days per week, at least two-thirds of the adult population in the three selected areas were making little or no use of the service. This hardly represented a high degree of community involvement, and the research produced little evidence to indicate that the declared community aims had been met. In view of the ambitious claims and the shortness of the experimental period this is not surprising, but this did not prevent the government from stating that the experiment had been a success, nor did it stop government and B.B.C. from collaborating in the development of further stations. (Incidentally, the financial aspects of the experiment were also a complete failure.)

~~It is worth noting that, prior to the experiment, the B.B.C. had emphasized that the criterion by which the creation of local broadcasting stations must be judged was the existence of a definable community in which a real sharing of community interests could be seen or foreshadowed. Later policy and developments made it clear, however, that this criterion was no longer central. Social and community factors were pushed into the background by political and economic considerations, and eventually the whole 'community experiment' was over-~~

shadowed by the decision to introduce commercial local broadcasting which, as far as I understand it, has a somewhat different set of aims and objectives, stated and unstated.

I hasten to add that so far as local radio in this city is concerned, I would like to make it clear that I am not attempting to argue about its success or failure - that is not the point. In fairness it should be said that local radio did manage to find an audience, albeit a small one, but this audience had to be won and it did seem satisfied with what it was getting. In any case things have changed since the research was carried out, the experiment period was too short, and the declared aims were quite unrealistic. ~~My point is an entirely different and more fundamental one.~~

~~In passing,~~ It is worth noting that this project on local radio offers a good example of some of the problems we face. To do this type of work, and to do some of our other work as well, we need the co-operation of the organization which is being studied. We try to adopt an independent critical stance - no strings attached. We recognize this and what it entails, and insist on publishing the results whatever they may be, or whoever they may favour. Our main interest is to contribute to an important debate, to add to a public body of information. We want no part in a secrecy which seals off knowledge from possible action. We are pleased to co-operate with and study a media organization, and in doing this we do not have to share its values. Yet we must accept that when we do research we intervene and that by the very nature of our work we cannot be neutral. In any case, as Mark Twain said somewhere, "Who are you neutral against?" In this sort of work our findings, whatever they are, represent a for or against position. We appreciate that the consequences of this stance do not always bode well for further research developments. In certain areas the first project could be the last, the doors may be closed, we may not be granted access. We do encounter opposition but so far the situation has not been too bad. However, whatever the consequences it is difficult to conceive of any other worthwhile approach.

~~Another of our research proposals deals with information needs.~~ We start by recognizing that societies are becoming increasingly complex, and that this places a vast new range of demands on their citizens. To understand these complexities is a

fundamental human right which depends on knowledge and information. The institutions which influence people's lives are often out of reach of the ordinary citizen and this remoteness means that information about the way these institutions work and about the provision and operation of vital social services often does not reach substantial sections of the population. This can lead to distress, and prevent full participation in the life of the community.

We ask what actual needs have to be met and how best can they be met, and seek to answer these questions by carrying out a systematic inquiry into both needs and sources of information. Both national and local media are covered in this work, as also are official sources (government and local authorities), relevant associations and organizations, and libraries, as well as interpersonal and traditional sources. Needs are examined at several levels from the basic or subsistence level to the more complex level of the need to know about how society works, and about the personal and social implications of different political and economic structures and institutional organizations.

The role of the mass media could be crucial in this information process, for not only do the media convey information but, as we have seen, they also define problems, indicate priorities, suggest solutions, and generally explain the world (including their own role in it) to their audiences. The public's consciousness of its own needs, how these can be met, and of the situation generally, is influenced in this way; as also are people's expectations about the role of the media and other institutions as sources of information. From this work we might be able to identify needs which the media are not meeting but perhaps could meet, given new policies or structures.

If we wish to contribute to the debate about the future of broadcasting and about media developments generally, and we do, we must look at new developments in media technology against the background of communication needs. Take television for example. The television institutions in Europe serve the nation state whatever the politics of the state. Television tends to be centralized, monopolistic, and engages in one-way communication with a fragmented audience to whom there is little accountability. On the one side there are the broadcasters with

their professional values and practices, and these professionals select, process and present messages. On the other side, there are individuals who make up the non-participating audiences, and who receive the messages in relative isolation. There is a case for stating that throughout Europe broadcasting institutions, as currently organized, tend to maintain, perhaps even to multiply, the power of a small, relatively well-educated, élitist group, and of course there are some who think that's how it should be. Over the last year or so the debate about the future of television has widened a little and it now includes such questions as accountability, access, participation and so on. Staff recruitment may be more broadly based than it used to be, 'access' programmes may have been introduced, albeit at inaccessible times, minority groups invited to participate, and so on. In some ways things have changed. But these could be surface changes and we need to ask whether they have really made any difference to basic communication relationships within our society.

In England we now have experiments in four areas in community cable television. It might be thought that this development promised more in the way of real change than local radio. But at present local television is small-scale, it operates on shoestring budgets, and it has to compete with the major television networks. Moreover, even when local television makes it possible for a simplified television technology (such as small portable cameras, simple/cheap studio facilities) to be made available to non-professional local groups, these people still tend to be members of the dominant groups. The experiment could become little more than a local version of the same old system.

We are still very limited and restricted in our views about how television can be used. We have been conditioned by our experience which has been dominated by scarcity of channels, and by what some have called the tyranny of professionalism. But we must be prepared to consider the possibility of using television in entirely new ways. 'New Television' is not just a matter of access and increased worker participation, and it may call for radical changes in the structure of existing broadcasting organizations. Of course, access and participation are important, and we must welcome the changes in this direction which are currently taking place. But perhaps one of our most important

tasks is to investigate the possibility of whether the basic relationship between communicator and receiver, between broadcaster and audience, can be changed. This relationship is at the heart of the matter, and perhaps we might even think of the possibility of removing the conventional distinction between the two by means of genuine community access and participation. Must it always be the select few talking to the many?

In talking about media development – in fact in talking about most of the subjects I have mentioned in this lecture – we have been dealing with topics that have wide social repercussions. It is a public matter, it is something which falls within the sphere of public as distinct from private interests. In fact, in some countries it has been accepted for some time that decisions in this area ought to be taken away from the free-for-all of the market place.

Let me then return to my starting point (the Unesco proposals) for in these proposals it is recommended that there must be communication policy and planning, and there must also be related research policy and planning. In fact “research should be problem- and policy-oriented” for if it isn’t then we shall not have the information which, so it is claimed, provides the base for adequate and intelligent communication policies. In this country there is little likelihood in the foreseeable future of this ‘essential information’ being available. However, having said this and accepting that we need the information, do we have to adopt the full policy research approach recommended by Unesco? Are there any disadvantages in such a policy?

Are social scientists going to be content to be systematic collectors and providers of data for others to use? (Admittedly, many of them appear to have prospered on this in the past.) Is the proposed system, in essence, any different from the service and administrative research which I have just criticized? Must national interests (any national interests) always predominate? Must national policy dictate both the character and the programmes of social science in this area? Has the researcher any alternative but to co-operate and plug into the national system and hope for the best? Does his survival depend on the amount of satisfaction he can give to those who determine national policy?

We are, of course, discussing policy research, the pros and cons of which have been argued many times before. With the nation, as with the single broadcasting institution or organization, we still have to face the apparently inevitable clash between national interests on the one hand, and the requirements of social-scientific enquiry on the other. We are right to fear that where policy needs prevail the critical aspects of social science may disappear, and that the truly social-scientific effort would be the exception rather than the rule. We don't need to subscribe to value-free approaches to recognize these problems and difficulties. I am sure in any case that the utility of research to policy-making bodies depends on the maintenance of some degree of separation between policy making and social science. It is the nature and extent of this separation that is our problem. This is the delicate ground where, in our system, we have to walk all the time.

When he was at the Social Science Research Council, Andrew Shonfield wrote that policy makers would be helped in the long run as the result of the advancement of basic knowledge and that the academic world could be left to decide its own priorities. But we all know what Lord Keynes, another economist, said about the long run. There is an urgency about the situation which is not likely to be met by conventional approaches. Still, it is this separation, its nature, degree and what it entails, that we must explore. Relationships between social science and policy vary from country to country. In some countries the research effort is geared entirely to national policy, and there is a clear understanding of the role of the social scientist. In others, the two spheres might be formally regarded as completely independent of each other, but in practice different parts of the research sphere will probably have different relationships with the policy sphere. The pattern can vary from complete servitude, to something approaching genuine critical independence; but there is more than a suspicion that independence and purity are usually inversely related to power, status and influence in decision making. In this sort of situation, the sort of situation that we are in, there is usually considerable confusion and uncertainty about the role of social science with regard to policy. It is sometimes said with approval that in Great Britain policy and social science

interact without a great deal of tension. However, this apparently happy state of affairs could lead to a loss of identity at both political and scientific poles. A heavy stress on problem orientation can lead to a neglect of large-scale analysis of social systems and social forces, and this is something we have to be careful about.

The history of mass communication research in Great Britain is so short, and the case studies so few, that as yet it is impossible to say with certainty whether this general statement applies. However, what is abundantly clear is that if we hold that the provision of information on important communication issues is an acceptable criterion of success (no matter how the information is used) then our present system has failed. It has not produced the necessary data and the public and political debates on the organization, structure, control, content and impact of mass communication still have to rely more on prejudice than on information.

It was suggested earlier that policy makers in ministries and media institutions do not want to be troubled by the sort of information that independent, social-scientific enquiries are likely to produce. We have seen cases where non-confirmatory research has been ignored (this happens even when the research has been commissioned by the institution), and it is clear that ignorance has its function and that knowledge can be embarrassing. In Britain, both the government and the broadcasting institutions frequently testify to this in their approach to the media. Even national enquiries on the future of broadcasting (e.g. Committee on Broadcasting [Pilkington] 1960) appear to have little use for social science.

For the most part, what research is done in this country is still piecemeal and unco-ordinated. It reflects, quite properly in one sense, the academic interests of those few who are interested in this field, and generally these academics are free to pursue their interests handicapped only by lack of resources, teaching duties, and the reluctance of the media to allow probes into their inner workings. We have at least in principle a plural base, we have a fair degree of freedom 'to pursue truth as we see it', we have some resources, and as yet we do not have to be mere service agents for a national communication policy. Unfortu-

nately, however, despite the list of projects I referred to earlier, the contributions we are able to make to the vital communication issues of our time are extremely limited.

The main reason for this is that the traditional approach to research generally accepted by most of the bodies concerned is individualistic. Grants are usually awarded to individual scholars, mostly teachers in a university, to enable them to carry out research in their chosen field. There is, of course, much to recommend this but it is slow, unco-ordinated, wasteful, and extremely limited in its scope. It is only slowly being recognized that the structures which may have adequately served traditional university purposes need not be the most appropriate structures for dealing with some of the aims and purposes I have discussed in this lecture. In allocating funds and in formulating research policies we need not neglect the traditional aims, but we must also accept new ones. One question we must certainly ask is: What is the most appropriate way to invest scarce research resources so that we may adequately address ourselves to the major social issues of our time?

It is appreciated that this approach is not without its dangers and that it raises all sorts of issues and problems. In addition to the problems already mentioned, these include (and I can do no more than list them here): the role of research within the university, the relationship between research and teaching, the establishment of special units or centres, the problems of research institutions inside or outside the normal university structure, career structures in social science research, and the relationship with outside bodies including media and governments. There is also the danger referred to several times that social science will suffer if it is tied too closely to policy and problems.

It would be foolish to underestimate the difficulties, but it would be worse still to hold back from attempting new approaches because of a fear of imagined consequences. We must work on the assumption that the difficulties can be overcome. Some research which has attempted to deal with the major social issues of the time may have foundered on these rocks, but there is no sound reason why all such attempts should end in this way. It is encouraging to hear from an official funding and policy body like the Social Science Research Council that there

ought to be an increased awareness of the social relevance of research, and that research that has direct bearings on matters of recognized public importance should be encouraged. It is even accepted by this body that, in the past, focussing on specific problems and issues has often brought rapid scientific progress. On the other hand we know that usefulness is but one criterion amongst many and that there will be little progress in the long run without underlying knowledge and theory. An over-emphasis on short-term problem orientation could create an imbalance, and it could be misleading and dangerous to over-sell social science as an immediate problem solver.

In the social sciences it is rarely possible to pose questions and provide quick, neat answers, and it is a refusal to recognize this that has often led to difficulties. It is the nature of most of our work that it tends to produce useful ideas with an increasingly firm factual base, rather than clear-cut answers to major policy questions. We must try to tease out the relationships which have a crucial effect on policy, and in doing so provide not so much widely applicable generalizations as a sound, informed basis for decision making and, at the same time, cut down the area of reliance on guesswork and prejudice.

Our own specific aim is to contribute to important social questions so that society might be better served, and we can best do this by transcending rather than by accepting consensus in social science, broadcasting or politics. We do not have to be over-concerned with the restitution of normative patterns, nor need we fall into the trap of examining the costs of dissensus and ignoring the price we have to pay for consensus. We can, and in our work do, address ourselves to social problems without necessarily identifying ourselves with the values of the establishment, and without pretending to be neutral. The issues that we select for inclusion in our research programme are a clear indication of what we consider to be important. In examining social problems and current issues we do not and should not accept the prevailing or conventional definitions at face value. We should insist on the right to redefine. In fact, it often seems that one of our main functions is to get people in the media, and others responsible for media policy, to question their basic assumptions, to re-examine the current 'common-sense' ex-

planations of the nature and effects of their work, to search for new definitions and understandings, and to explore genuine alternatives.

I referred earlier to the question of survival. Tie yourself to the prevailing system and values and you are safe; question them and you may go under. It would be wrong to exaggerate this problem - we are surviving - but we do ask ourselves from time to time how long we are going to be allowed to continue with our sort of work. Will those who support the work at present and who grant the research facilities (this is not just a matter of funds but also of the granting of facilities for participant observation, interviewing and so on) continue to do so if they consider that the results from our research might threaten their cherished values? Are we not naïve to think that we shall be allowed, still less positively encouraged, to probe and question as we have done in the past? At first it probably wasn't realized what we are really doing.

What developments there have been in mass communication research in this country have largely been a matter of chance. Can we afford to leave developments to chance in the future?

Several years ago the Television Research Committee, recognizing the urgency of the problem, recommended that the Government, through the Social Science Research Council and the University Grants Committee, should provide long-term support for mass communication research. It also proposed that what resources were made available should not be dissipated on numerous unrelated projects, but should be used to strengthen the existing institutional developments in a few 'centres of excellence'. The Social Science Research Council reacted favourably to the general tone of the report but rejected the idea that the research effort should be concentrated in a few Centres. In a strict sense we are still the only Centre of its kind in the country. Notwithstanding this, my preference in the present circumstances in this country is to work within the existing system with all its inadequacies and shortcomings rather than search for an entirely new system on the lines recommended by Unesco, and hope that eventually the recommendations of the Committee will be accepted. (The situation in other parts of the world might demand an entirely different approach.)

Three or four well-established, independent research institutions within the university structure as recommended by the Committee would fulfil the requirement. There would be problems, as we have seen, but this development would go a long way towards providing the information on which intelligent policy formulation depends. Both undue dissipation and fragmentation on the one hand, and over-centralization on the other, would be avoided. Focussing, long-term planning on large-scale operations, would all be possible. Staff could have security of tenure within a university setting. A committee or group acting in an advisory capacity, which might include representatives from the media, could help with co-ordination and prevent unnecessary overlapping and duplication, without at the same time superimposing a straitjacket of orthodoxy or official policy. The research staff of such Centres need not exist either in purdah or in the more splendid isolation of an ivory tower, but could make a teaching contribution to their respective universities, perhaps through other departments. The problems are not insuperable and it could be that the main stumbling blocks would be within the universities or even within the social science fraternity itself.

I said of broadcasting institutions in this country that when faced with the possibility of change and new developments, they seem to react rather negatively and defensively. They seem to say: "How can we best deal with the innovations and the challenges without having to change existing structures, policies and practices?" In their minds the good of society is frequently equated with the good of their own institutions.

It is not only broadcasting institutions that react in this manner, and we need to ask these questions about ourselves in the universities. However, it is with confidence and with some security that I can say this in this University — in a way I am preaching to the converted — because our Vice-Chancellor, in his several capacities, and the University generally, have taken the lead and given the example. We can only hope that this lead will be followed and that in our turn we, as critical researchers, will do (perhaps I should say will be allowed to continue to do) what is required of us.

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