

Media role in everyday life



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Analyse the following quote: “ it is because the media are central to our everyday lives that we must study them... as social and cultural as well as political and economic dimensions of the modern world. ” (Roger Silverstone, *Why Study the Media?* 1999.)

criteria understand respond to question
construct logical argument key terms/concepts used accurately provide relevant examples where required

Reading 1. 1 Why Media Studies is Worthwhile: Bazalgette 'Media studies is controversial because it is still new and because it deals with things that are not only continuing to change but are also the focus of many anxieties. 2000: 5 'Newspapers, film, radio, television and, increasingly, computer software and communications networks are generally considered to be immensely popular in ways that are not fully understood and about which there is little consensus. They are consequently blamed for all kinds of social ills, political problems and cultural degeneracy. Each of these media has also, in its time, been seen as the harbinger of apocalyptic change – for better as well as for worse.

Similar essay: Disagreement in Natural Sciences

But because the oldest of them – the mass circulation press – has only been in existence for little more than a century, the process of change has been too fast for anyone to arrive at definitive conclusions about what its social, political and cultural effects really are. 'As much as everyone likes to think they rebel against their parents and teachers, and keep up to date with new ideas and technologies, we are all substantially formed through the frameworks of ideas and thought of earlier generations, and we all find change difficult. ' 'Change almost always provokes strong feelings: excitement, anxiety, tension, fear, anger.

The media, conspicuous and changing objects in a world that is itself changing, are a particularly public focus for these kinds of emotion and argument. There is therefore much disagreement about how the media should be understood, regulated and consumed. 2000: 6 It is essential to recognise that media studies, even as we enter the twenty-first century is still new. '... it is a subject still in the process of being formed. Full of disagreements and different claims as to what it is 'really about'. It is also a hybrid subject: that is to say, the ideas and approaches that it draws upon come from many different sources. The mass circulation press, the cinema, radio, television, digital software and the internet each attracted comment, analysis and speculation from the start (2000: 7) Everyone who spoke or wrote about these media was themselves already educated within existing academic disciplines and motivated by particular interests 2000: 7 Nevertheless, hybrid disciplines do appear all the time: semiotics, structuralism, sociolinguistics, and many more. Media studies snaps them all up: there can never be too many different ways of analysing just what is really going on in those fleeting images. Those rapt audiences.

Those smoke filled boardrooms of owners. Technology and theory 2000: 8 – The media themselves change much faster than any theory. In fact it is often changes in the media – even basic technological changes – that impel changes in the academic construction of the subject. As I write this in the late 1990s we have moved into a period of what are profound changes brought about by digital technologies. Until the 1980s the term 'media' meant what it said (although it was, and still is, widely misused as a singular

noun). It refers to numbers of different ways of physically reproducing and carrying meanings.

The whole point of a media text is that it moves and flows: the meaning is never 'there' at a given moment, but in juxtaposition and sequence, in the tension between one moment and another. 2000: 8 2000: 9 Media studies is thus a catch-all title designating a wide variety of courses, and since these are all embroiled both in developing a coherent theoretical base and in keeping up with technological and institutional developments in the media themselves, does it even make sense to lump them all together? 2000: 9 In media studies you are asked about the profit motive.

In media studies you are asked this. You are asked to look at cinema and television as industries which employ large numbers of people and to understand how they work, how they are financed and why they produce what they do. 2000: 10 In media studies you may be asked to think about films, television programmes or other 'media texts' in the same way. But you will certainly also be asked to think about how they address you – or other people – as a member of a group: as British, say, or as a black person, or as a man, or even – but how often? – as all three.

By asking you to think about texts in this way, and by making you investigate who made, say, a film or programme, and why, and in whose interests, media studies is essentially political. Every investigation of even quite short or trivial texts potentially leads into larger questions about power structures in society and how they are organised. 2000: 10 – It is just as 'political' to be asking questions about who owns this newspaper, who financed this film, and why; or perhaps more interestingly, who

wouldn't finance that film and why, or how one kind of television programme is more likely to be made than another.

The politics of the media affect our lives as much as the politics of Parliament or Congress, and can be more satisfying to investigate since the evidence is all around you every day. 2000: 10 At the same time it is the inclusion of this political dimension that media students often find the most satisfying and worthwhile aspect of the subject. 'You stop taking things at face value'. You should beware of media courses which render the subject down to a few handy maxims such as 'the basic function of all media is to sell audiences to advertisers'.

To object that this can hardly apply to public service broadcasting or a community video workshop is not to deny that these institutions will also have political roles to play and manipulative techniques to use. But it does reassert the principle that there is more than one way to look at any text. A political dimension to critical analysis should add complexity, not simplification 2000: 10 So far, I have identified two basic principles that media studies courses are likely to have in common: using economic and political perspectives as key ways of understanding the media.

These are the most characteristic differences between media studies and most other subjects. But no course will concentrate on these areas alone. 2000: 11 One of the strengths – and also the challenges – of media studies is precisely that it asks you to consider texts from different and often sharply contrasting perspectives. What do you study in media studies? 2000: 11 Just what – if anything – constitutes a valid argument for studying one text, or one group of texts, rather than another? There are five main ways of

answering this question? Popularity (2000: 12) The emphasis might be on the phenomenon of mass audience pleasure and on understanding and legitimating the enjoyment people derive from these texts or in contrast, the aim of the analysis might be to reveal how audiences are manipulated and deluded by stereotypical or reactionary material Exemplification is an obvious ground for worthiness of study, especially when the aim is to illustrate an aspect of theory, such as genre or representation. Notoriety (2000: 12)- is an interesting and useful reason for studying a text that can offer a way in to thinking about social, political and cultural contexts.

Texts which are interesting to study in their own right, but whose notoriety reveals much about their conditions of production or consumption, include banned or controversial television documentaries etc 'Such 'case studies' form the starting point or central exemplar which can illuminate aspects of the media we don't normally think about or see. Turning points and groundbreaking texts could be included in the previous category, but texts can be significant without being notorious, especially in retrospect. Aesthetic value (2000: 12-13) s a criterion that many media teachers would deny using as a way of selecting or judging texts. 2000: 13 What is it all for? 'It is also obvious that the media industries themselves are hard to get into and rely increasingly on freelancers, '2000: 14: that a knowledge of history, politics, economics, accountancy, law - you name it - would be equally useful as a basis for working, as, say, a journalist or editor It is increasingly likely that, whatever job you do or whatever your domestic circumstances, there will be more opportunities for you to engage with the media, and not just as a consumer.

Indeed, the field of 'alternative' and subversive media production may be the one that grows fastest over the next few years (who knows? How could you tell?) as access to technology and circulation systems widens. Inside or outside the corporate producers, the new voices will come from the people who are already literate in the new media. What media studies can really do is open up your understanding of how things work, how people become informed – or misinformed – and how the myths and ideologies that govern all our lives are created and sustained.

Reading 1. Media and Communications: Theoretical traditions 2002: 23

The field of Australian media and communications theory and research is in a unique position. On one hand, it is highly derivative..... this is partly due to general globalisation of ideas today, but also to Australia's past as a British colony and in more recent decades, to its dependence on the United States. On the other hand, in Australia we are able to observe and compare the influences and models emanating from the metropolitan centres of the Northern Hemisphere and to selectively combine and modify them in accordance with our own national reality and place in the world -.. identify the origins of the major paradigms or schools of thought which have arisen in European and American theory and research as they apply to media and communications; to trace the formative influence they have had on particular styles of work in Australia; and to show how they have become transformed in the process of being adapted to our experience here

EUROPE VERSUS AMERICA 2002: 23 ..

'European means heavily interpretive and holistic in scope – that is, taking a macro perspective, looking down on society as a whole. Its sociopolitical stance is critical of society as it exists, and most often specifically Marxist.

In its methods, it is deductive in that it applies general principles to the analysis of particular cases. By contrast, the American approach is strongly empirical and micro in its scope – at its extreme, its form of knowledge relies on the direct observation of distinct phenomena, preferably controlled and measurable occurrences, like in a laboratory experiment. Its sociopolitical stance is said to be liberal or pluralistic – in other words, it is not aligned with any sector of society which has an interest in changing the world, but in that sense, it is really more conservative. However, ideas do not belong to geographical territories and it is important to appreciate that, even if critical theory has traditionally been weak in the United States, Europe in fact has not only produced the characteristic critical and interpretive schools of thought, but also has a strong tradition of 'positivism', which is much more aligned with 'American' empiricism and functionalism (Giddens 1974). Positivism is basically the idea that the methods of natural science can and should be applied to understand and control society and culture, which includes the media.

Western Marxism and Ideological Critique 2002: 24 In order to understand contemporary media studies, it is crucial to understand the significance of the Frankfurt School and its tradition. A critique of the rise of the mass media (mainly the new media of cinema and radio in those days) which has defined one important direction for Marxist criticism ever since. 2002: 25 This is the ideological critique of the media. Reading 1. 3 Self and Experience in a Mediated World Reading 1. 4 New Media and Technological Development A Beginner's Guide to Textual Analysis