

COMMUNICATIONS RESEARCH SINCE LAZARSFELD

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It's time to ask what happened to what Lazarsfeld and Stanton (1944:vii) casually called "the discipline of communications research." Much of the history of this enterprise, discipline or not, can be written as a set of continuing arguments with Paul Lazarsfeld. Far from subsiding, these arguments have become more pointed in the last decade.

Limited Effects: The Dominant Paradigm and Its Rivals

Between 1940 and about 1960, from *The People's Choice to Personal Influence*, Paul Lazarsfeld and his troops at the Bureau of Applied Social Research were occupied with a series of panel studies on the role of mass communications in the making of decisions—to vote, to buy, to go to the movies, to change an opinion.¹ This was in direct

1. The Office of Radio Research was created in 1937 by means of a grant from the Rockefeller Foundation, with Paul Lazarsfeld as director, "to study what radio means in the lives of the listeners." Frank Stanton and Hadley Cantril were associate directors. First located in Newark, then at Princeton, it was finally settled in 1940 at Columbia University, where it became the Bureau of Applied Social Research (Morrison, 1978a; Pollack, 1980).

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I also wish to thank colleagues who debated some of the ideas that appear here and in a companion piece on "media effects" for the forthcoming *Encyclopedia of Communication*. In particular, I thank Steven Chaffee, Jay Blumler, Peter Monge, Sandra Ball-Rokeach, Milton Rokeach, James Beniger, Everett Rogers, Daniel Dayan, Tamar Liebes, Michael Schudson, Michael Real, and Eric Rothenbuhler.

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continuation of Lazarsfeld's early interest in occupational choice, and, indeed, the underlying theme of all this work has to do with choice.

The decision studies echoed earlier conclusions at the Bureau and elsewhere that the effects of the media are mitigated by the processes of selectivity in attention, perception, and recall, and that these, in turn, are a function of predispositional and situational variables such as age, family history, political affiliation, and so on. If there is a hero in these stories it is not the newspaper or the radio but the primary group, which is represented both as a network of information and a source of social pressure. The "two-step flow of communication," the brilliant afterthought of *The People's Choice*, then took on a life of its own, weaving its way through one Bureau study after another and attracting widespread academic interest beyond the Bureau. Amended in a dozen ways to prefer influence over information, talk between equals over opinion leaders, multiple steps over two steps, etc., the hypothesis is still about, and still controversial (Okada, 1986).

These studies, then, deal with decision and action, which is to say that they assess the short-run effects of mass communications in the context of campaigns. And, on the whole, their findings remain valid. In spite of the blind belief of advertisers, politicians, some academics, and the public that media campaigns are capable of inducing massive change in opinions, attitudes, and actions—always somebody else's, not one's own (Davison, 1983)—the research evidence continues to say otherwise (McGuire, 1986; Schudson, 1984).² Lazarsfeld and company concluded that it is a good thing for democracy that people can fend off media influence (Lazarsfeld et al., 1948: 158) and implied that the crowd may be less lonely and less vulnerable than mass society theorists had led us to believe. At this juncture, Klapper (1960) codified the field, and Paul Lazarsfeld abandoned it.³

Twenty-five years after the last of the decision studies was published, the *model of limited effects* is acclaimed as the dominant para-

2. Below, as well as in Katz (1980), I consider alternative definitions of effect, many of them outside the realm of persuasion. But see, nevertheless, Lazarsfeld et al. (1948: 73–100) for their subtle discussion of "activation," "conversion," and "reinforcement."

3. I do not know whether Berelson's (1959) premature requiem for communications research reflects Lazarsfeld's views. Altogether, there is uncertainty about whether Lazarsfeld's interest in mass communication was methodological, substantive, or coincidental—or combinations of these (Morrison, 1978b). It is widely thought today, however, that the Bureau emphasis on the social psychology of short-run effects disenchanting sociologists and humanists from study of mass communications, and that the finding of limited effects discouraged the social psychologists (Ball-Rokeach, 1986). But this seems an inadequate explanation even if I don't have a better one. Later discussions of the state of the art are Gans's (1972) "famine" and then the resounding "ferment" of the *Journal of Communication* (1983).

digm,⁴ but one that has exhausted its welcome or, worse, led the field astray. In spite of (or because of) the fact that the Columbia voting studies (Lazarsfeld et al., 1944; Berelson et al., 1954) are the most referenced volumes in the field of political communication (Chaffee and Hochheimer, 1982); that Marxists and traditionalists alike take comfort in the idea that classes and cultures are not easily homogenized by the media (Giddens, quoted in Gitlin, 1978); that the concept of public space finds operational translation in the link between interpersonal and media networks (Gouldner, 1976; Newcomb and Hirsch, 1983; Hallin and Mancini, 1984)—despite all this, the critics would prefer to deep-freeze the paradigm, to monumentalize it, and to proclaim the need for alternative paradigms and new starts.

Creative as this impetus may be, it does not absolve the critics from the error of identifying the limited-effects model as the Bureau's program for communications research. It is the critics—not the Lazarsfeldians—who say that the paradigm they discern equates communications research with the study of short-run effects and limits effect to change in the opinion of individuals.

These latter-day critics are spokesmen for alternative paradigms. While there are a number of such afloat, I find that they fall roughly into three groups. If I may be given license to do what I have just denounced—to fiddle with the framing—I would like to present each of the three as if it (1) proceeded from an explicit critique of the limited effects model, (2) proposed a theory of direct and/or powerful effects instead, and (3) pointed to a program of research.⁵ I will refer to these, respectively, as *institutional*, *critical*, and *technological*.

4. I shall use *decision model* and *persuasion model* interchangeably with the *paradigm of limited effects* or the *dominant paradigm*.

5. Two concepts used throughout this article—indeed, throughout the field—need clarification: “direct” and “powerful.” By *direct* I mean unmediated, i.e., influence originating in the mass media that is not filtered through mechanisms of “defense” such as selectivity and interpersonal relations. *Powerful* is a vaguer concept, originating in the image of the media—particularly radio—as able to exert direct influence, thus to change opinions, attitudes, and actions of large numbers. Ideally, it would take the form of influencing everybody (total), simultaneously (immediate), and directly (unmediated). Latter-day definitions of *powerful* include (1) small degree of influence but on very large numbers; (2) large influence on a few (e.g., imitation of media-publicized suicides; Phillips, 1986); (3) small influence on small numbers which, however, has great social significance (e.g., influencing a small number of Eisenhower Democrats to return to Kennedy after the first Kennedy–Nixon debate; Katz and Feldman, 1962); (4) statistical significance measures of the difference in reactions of groups exposed and unexposed to a message from the media in an experiment or survey (Rosenthal, 1986); (5) cost-effectiveness of achieving a response using mass media vs. other avenues of persuasion (e.g., Flay, 1987). These definitions arose in discussions at the Annenberg School of Communications, University of Southern California, with Sandra Ball-Rokeach, Milton Rokeach, James Beniger, Peter Monge, Daniel Dayan, and other colleagues and students.

Three Paradigmatic Challenges

Campaign studies of the sort that occupy the limited effects paradigm are thought to address the proposition that the media tell us *what to think* or what to do.⁶ If we were to identify a similar motto for each of the three challenging paradigms, we might propose that the institutional model says that the media tell us *what to think about*, the critical paradigm *what not to think* or what not to think about, and the technological, *how to think*, or *where to belong*.

THE INSTITUTIONAL PARADIGM

I call the first of these institutional, but it might just as well be called political or cognitive, because it emphasizes the role of the media in transmitting information in a political system. Of the three, this is the least radical in its challenge to the paradigm of limited effects, and most empirical in its commitment; indeed, in spite of their criticism, leaders of this group see themselves standing squarely on the shoulders.⁷

Their quarrel with the limited effects paradigm is, first, that it mistakenly treats the media as agents of persuasion rather than as providers of information, agendas, and "public space"; second, that it mistakenly substitutes voting for politics and thus narrows the political role of the media to that of influencing votes; third, that it underestimates the influence of media in politics by lumping voting with decision making in other realms (Chaffee and Hochheimer, 1982); fourth, that it invokes the straw man and alien image of mass society—omnipotent media and defenseless masses—in order to "discover" how hard it is to change minds (Chaffee, 1977; Delia, 1987); fifth, that it fails to post a warning against generalizing from Sandusky and Elmira of 1940 and 1948 to other times and places. Instead, they say, treat politics as an institution—complete with roles, norms, organizational forms, and history—rather than as collective behavior, and focus on the interaction among the component parts.

The best known of the institutional traditions is the one that proposes that the media tell the polity *what to think about* (McCombs and Shaw, 1972).⁸ By preempting attention, the media are thought to con-

6. In earlier reviews of this material (Katz, 1980), I was insensitive to the important difference between "what to think" and "what to choose." It is the difference between campaigns for which choices are or are not provided, and thus the campaign propaganda is for one or another of the sides, or for the only side. That the media of the decision studies are seen in terms of choice brings them closer to the gratifications studies that see the media as offering resources from which to choose. Altogether, the Lazarsfeld studies of communications campaigns are wrongly perceived as behavioristic.

7. Merton (1965) would not want Newton's phrase to go unattributed.

8. Note the similarity to the Bureau's "status conferral" (Lazarsfeld and Merton, 1948), which proposes that the media tell us whom to think about.

strain us to evaluate a president, say, in terms of drugs rather than foreign affairs. Social psychology's frame of reference emerges here as agenda setting, and then, in turn, as the constructionist proposition that the media are architects of social and political reality, a concept that links the institutional and critical paradigms.⁹

The findings of institutional theories are compatible, on the whole, with Klapper's (1960) specification of the conditions under which the limited effects model makes room for direct media influence. Thus, agenda setting comes masked as information rather than persuasion, and is less likely, therefore, to be intercepted by the defenses of the limited effects paradigm. Likewise, the recent rise in the political influence of the media is attributed to the decline in the extent of party affiliation (Chaffee and Hochheimer, 1982); the knowledge-gap phenomenon, whereby information campaigns increase knowledge but unequally, is attributed to the fact that the better informed learn more (Tichenor et al., 1970); the overriding of selectivity in presidential debates results from the even-handedness of the institutional form (Chaffee and Hochheimer, 1982).

Placing these findings in their institutional context sometimes makes powerful at the system level what seems weak at the individual level. Thus, a modest increment in information may further polarize the social classes, just as a winner-take-all election may be won by influencing a very small number of votes.

At the organizational level, institutional theorists point to the ways in which television has transformed political campaigning, or how it has reframed the party convention as a media event. We are directed to consider the functions of media framing of conflict—whether presidential debates or labor relations—whereby a sense of order is communicated to the public, rules are imposed on the contestants, and certain players are not admitted at all (Coleman, 1957; Glasgow, 1976; Crain et al., 1969; Adoni et al., 1984).

Sociologists of social science will find interest in the public service, or professional, undertone of this paradigm. In fact, Chaffee and Hochheimer (1982) themselves trace its origin to the schools of journalism, which, in the process of upgrading themselves academically, merged with social science-oriented communications research to become schools of communications. Uneasy about being told by the limited effects paradigm that journalism was without much influence, the new journalism Ph.D.s realized that they were not in the influence business at all but in the information professions. The job of journalism is to inform and to frame, they argued: why assess its power to do something else?

9. The difference, as we shall see, is that the one sees agenda setting as public service, the other as hegemonic imposition.

THE CRITICAL PARADIGM

It is not news that the critical paradigm is less friendly, but that does not make it less interesting. And if one says that the gap is narrowing, it is attributable in some measure to the fact that critical theorists are now conducting empirical research. It is worth noting that Lazarsfeld (1941) himself, in one of his many bridge-building gestures, welcomed the companionship of the critical theorist in deed and in word.¹⁰ Specifically, he welcomed the critical theorists' concern over media ownership and control, the process of gatekeeping, and the problem of quality and value. That was in 1941, in the exchange with Adorno.

In 1978, Todd Gitlin published his "Media Sociology: The Dominant Paradigm," a painstaking diatribe against *Personal Influence* (Katz and Lazarsfeld, 1955), denouncing the Bureau tradition as masking the true power of the media. Short-run changes, he says, are too microscopic to reveal much influence (sic).¹¹ The study highlights the recalcitrance of the audience, complains Gitlin, not its acquiescence and gullibility. The opinion leader is celebrated, he says, because administrative researchers study proximate causes which are accessible to their patrons, even if it is obvious that the opinion leaders are mere conduits for the media, in the way that city streets carry the waters of a flood (sic).¹² In a word, Gitlin charges the limited effects paradigm with attending to the drainage system instead of the floodwaters. If the institutional paradigm is a call for abandoning the mass society model as the measure of power, critical theory is a call for its reinstatement.¹³

Gitlin's catalog of powerful effects overlaps that of the institutional

10. Not everybody is pleased when gaps are narrowed, least of all critical theorists (see Ang, 1987, and Allen, 1985). Lazarsfeld kept trying to explain to others how work in public opinion and mass communication can contribute directly, or through interaction, to disciplines such as history (Lazarsfeld, 1950), journalism (Lazarsfeld, 1948b), political science (Lazarsfeld, 1957), and, of course, critical theory. Some of us are still trying (Blumler et al., 1986). This piece on critical and administrative research appeared in the journal of the exiled Frankfurt school, which Lazarsfeld helped to resettle in the United States.

11. It is incongruous to attack the "administrative" orientation for providing powerful tools of persuasion to the marketers, politicians, etc. while arguing that the effects of such persuasive attempts are invisible in the short run.

12. Ironically, the opinion leader is far *less* accessible to the advertiser or politicians than are the mass media; Gitlin is altogether wrong here. He is also wrong in asserting that the opinion leader is a mere conduit; rather, he is an active gatekeeper and interpreter. Gitlin is wrong, too, about floods. Had he studied the Nabateans of the Sinai desert, for example, he would find that their civilization flourished because they learned how to canalize the gush of winter rain.

13. I count Gouldner (1976) as the most sophisticated of the critical theorists of communications, a dissenter from "vulgar" critical theory. Connecting Habermas (1974) and the decision studies, Gouldner is very eloquent on the importance for critical theory of studying conversation and interpretive communities.

paradigm, which also attributes to the media the power to construct political and social reality—to define the legitimate and the deviant in politics, to shape the image of social movements, and the like. Gitlin's strong point, rather, lies in his critique of the decision as the operational site of media influence. Power does not express itself on occasions, says Gitlin; it is a state. Change is less interesting, therefore, than nonchange, and the measure of the power of the media is in slowing change, or maintaining the status quo. What is important about this is that workers in the dominant paradigm are being told that their "mere" reinforcement, the finding that drove away the seekers after powerful effects, is not a residual category, but *the* paradigmatic powerful effect.¹⁴ The hegemonic mission of the media, in other words, is not to tell us what to think or what to think about, but what *not* to think, or what *not* to think about. (How to operationalize the hypothesis that change would be accelerated if it weren't for the media is a nice puzzle.)

This pattern maintenance function of the media is not always anonymous, Gitlin thinks. Even if conspiracy has been dropped from the imagery of critical research, Gitlin accuses the administrative researcher of giving legitimacy to the elites who set agendas, specify choices, or, worse, deliberately offer false choices between things that are the same or about which the establishment is indifferent—say, the choice between Pepsi-Cola and Coca-Cola or between Ford and Carter. It fosters the illusion of freedom while excluding those other choices which are not to be thought, thus perpetuating false consciousness. Horkheimer and Adorno (1973) and Hall (1973), each in a different way, have warned that the media produce the illusions of classlessness and consensus by ruling certain positions and certain genres in and out of order.

Gitlin (1983) himself and many other sociologists (e.g., Tuchman, 1978; Molotch and Lester, 1974; Gans, 1979; Burns, 1977; Roeh et al., 1980) have been attracted to the newsroom and the studios to observe the relationship among media professionals, their sources, and their bosses.¹⁵ But institutional and content analysis is nothing new for critical theorists. What is new is that critical theorists are doing empirical research, not only on organizations and texts but on audiences. Even more surprising is that the impetus to this work is the hypothesis that at

14. Klapper (1960) knew this, too, but, as Gitlin would (rightly) say, he notes it only in passing.

15. But Gitlin (1983) here sidesteps his big chance to prove the utility of the critical paradigm, and to do the things he chastises the Bureau tradition for avoiding. See my review of his study of decision making in Hollywood (Katz, 1985). His earlier work (Gitlin, 1980) on media treatment of dissent is more directly to the point.

least some television viewers (other than critical theorists) must ostensibly be reading hegemonic texts “oppositionally.”¹⁶

This convergence of humanists and critical theorists on audience decoding of television texts brings them into an orbit inhabited also by descendants of the dominant paradigm, as we shall note below.¹⁷ It represents a facing up to the impasse that critical theory had no way to explain change!¹⁸

The boom in studies of audience decodings has almost overshadowed two pioneering empirical studies which operationalize a more classic critical stance, those of Gerbner and Gross (1976) and Noelle-Neumann (1973). These come, respectively, from the Left and the Right of the political spectrum (which means that a case can be made that the Right can also have a critical theory).¹⁹ Both studies assume a classical mass society in which the individual is atomized, locked into his home for fear of going out (Gerbner), or locked into silence for fear of being ostracized (Noelle-Neumann). In the absence of contact with others there results a high degree of pluralistic ignorance, and thus a high degree of dependence on the mass media (Ball-Rokeach, 1985) as definers of social reality. For Gerbner, the hegemonic message of the media is the call for law and order in a dangerous world, while for Noelle-Neuman—who reads the German press as dominated by a leftist mafia of journalists—it is that the Left will prevail. The monopolistic message of the media and the absence of reference groups thereby neutralize both selectivity and interpersonal influence. It is on this basis that Noelle-Neumann has sounded the call for “a return to a theory of powerful effects.” I shall not enter here into the sharp methodological debates over these studies (Hirsch, 1980;

16. If the hegemonic message is ubiquitous, if the media are programmed to reproduce the status quo, how explain the feminist movement, for example, in which critical theorists find great interest? Thus the same soap opera that used to be declared an instrument of repression by critical theorists, in which Bureau researchers were declared guilty of collaborationism (Allen, 1985), is now being hailed as liberating—a major “site of gender struggle”—and the critical audience researcher is its prophet (Ang, 1985).

17. David Morley has been at the forefront of this work on decoding of television news and fiction (Morley, 1980; 1986), inspired by Stuart Hall (1973), as have Larry Gross (Worth and Gross, 1974), Radway (1985), and others in the United States. On this convergence, see Blumler et al. (1986), Schroder (1987), and Liebes (in press), and the discussion below.

18. It is ironic to suggest that a Marxist model has no way to explain change when this, of course, is the Marxist critique of functionalism. Critical theorists of communication, anchored in Marxism, have had to face three crises over the years: (1) that the cultural “superstructure” was not a mere by-product of class relations at the base; (2) that the symbolic reproduction of the status quo in the genres of popular culture need not be directed and controlled by conspiring elites but by the sort of “hegemonic” process suggested by Althusser and Gramsci; and (3) that the hegemonic message may not do its work uniformly, and thus that “alternate” and “oppositional” decodings may be possible.

19. Classifying them paradigmatically as critical is my claim, not theirs.

Gerbner et al., 1981) except to note their ferocity and their centrality. More to our point is that these studies are based on the founding myths of the mass society as if to say that the mass society is now, in the era of television and violence, even if it did not materialize in the earlier period.

THE TECHNOLOGICAL PARADIGM

Unlike the others, technological theorists have hardly addressed the Bureau paradigm. The implicit critique, however, surfaces in McLuhan's derision of Lazarsfeld's attempt to dissociate radio from Hitler's rise to power. McLuhan cares not at all about the *what* of Hitler's message or even about the extent to which he had control of the new medium (Lazarsfeld says he did not) but about the fact that the "tribal" voice resonated to German fascism regardless of what was said and who controlled it. McLuhan's (1964) meteor has fallen by now, but I want to propose that we take seriously the more elementary idea that the essential attributes that characterize a predominant medium might affect social order, or, in other words, that the media may tell us both *how to think* and *how to organize*. Even if we resist the proposal that the linearity imposed upon us by print is evident in assembly lines and railroad trains, there is a case to be made for the idea that the technologies of communication connect us to each other in ways that are largely independent of their messages. If I may continue as a technological determinist for a moment more, let me cite Innis's (1964) argument about the influence of papyrus on the extension of the Egyptian empire, Carey's (1983) study of how the telegraph created a nationwide market for American business, Eisenstein's (1979) analysis of the influence of print on Renaissance scholarship and science, and the well-known claim that leads from print to literacy to vernacular translations from the Vulgate to the Protestant Reformation.

Note that in each of these examples, the causal agent is technological, i.e., portability, simultaneity, exactness, reproducibility, and that the effect is on organization—empire, market, science, church. The example, noted earlier, of the influence of television on political campaigns is minor by comparison, but it is related. So are the ideas that the European newspaper disconnected people from their neighborhoods and regions and connected them to a national center; the manufacturer—in the earliest advertising campaigns—neutralized the retailer by soliciting the loyalty of the consumer (Beniger, 1986); the imperial presidency began with the fireside chat that addressed the nation over the heads of the Congress.

Of course, there are intervening psychological and social processes

at work here as well. I am purposely putting them aside, because it is obvious that institutions and power elites are not only constructed by these technologies but that the technologies are defined and harnessed by them. Nevertheless, the technological paradigm challenges communications research to consider why we invest so much energy in exploring the influence of media on opinion and ideology and so little on social organization.

The new media technologies are the subject of great research activity, attention having shifted from influence to information, and, I believe, from individual to social organization. The locus of such work is in schools of communications but also, and not incidentally, in schools of business and in institutes of technology.

The Original Paradigm Revisited

Obviously, each of these competing paradigms is equally interested in effect—although they sometimes say otherwise—whether the focus is on agenda, consciousness, or integration, that is, on information, ideology, or organization. I want now to show that many of these same things are being done by on-line disciples working in the very Bureau paradigm that the critics pronounce exhausted.

I will proceed, therefore, to correct the collective memory of the Lazarsfeld program for communications research and show how what was done led to steps which, more often than not, fall beyond the critics' misframing of the Bureau paradigm. The result will show, in conclusion, that some of the things that the critics say should be done and some of the things that the critics are doing are being done by the disciples.

WHAT LAZARSFELD SAID, AND WHAT LAZARSFELD DID

Let us now flash back to the Office of Radio Research of the 1930s to ask the question that has been waiting to be asked, namely, How did it happen that, of all things, persuasion was chosen as the focus of a program of research on broadcasting? Why not information, or, better, entertainment? If one asks a man on the street what broadcasting is about—certainly nowadays, and probably in the golden days of radio as well—he will say, unhesitatingly, "entertainment."²⁰ Only politicians and advertisers, and some academics, think that broadcasting is

20. Scholars concerned with this emphasis include Wright (1975), Mendelsohn (1966), Stephenson (1967) and, more recently, Tannenbaum (1980), Gerbner and Gross (1976), and Comstock (1987).

about persuasion. And if it had to be persuasion, why limit it to the short run? Critical theorists—no less interested in persuasion, but in the long run—would blame the administrative orientation. The object, they would say, was to help sell products or votes.

Looking back to the late 1930s for a fuller answer, the introductory remarks to the *Radio* volumes and the terms of the Rockefeller grant direct one to consider education and mobilization (Lazarsfeld, 1940; Lazarsfeld and Stanton, 1942, 1944, 1949).²¹ The twin problems of propaganda and education recur many times in allusions to enlisting citizens for New Deal programs, mobilizing support for the war effort, worrying about enemy broadcasts, etc. Persuasion was also at the heart of the Yale program in mass communication and attitude change, which had its start in motivating American soldiers to fight (Delia, 1987). Even Herta Herzog's studies (1941, 1944) of quiz programs and soap operas are couched in the language of popular education.

Was mass society theory a serious point of departure for these studies? Were the Lazarsfeld voting teams surprised not to find omnipotent media brainwashing defenseless masses? Probably not.²² While this confirms an objection of the institutional theorists (Delia, 1987; Chaffee and Hochheimer, 1982), the fact is that much of their own work on direct and powerful effects, and certainly that of mainline critical theorists (Gerbner et al., 1976; Noelle-Neumann, 1973; Gitlin, 1978) is based on the reinstatement of some of the conditions of mass society vulnerability which are challenged by the limited effects model. So the issue is still alive.²³

Whatever the right answers to the role of mass society theory in the Bureau tradition, it is altogether clear that Paul Lazarsfeld did not think that the study of persuasion, or the limited effects paradigm as framed, was the blueprint for the study of mass communications. He had a program for media research of which studies of persuasion were just one part.²⁴ The fact is that the Bureau and its offspring pioneered in audience studies (Lazarsfeld and Kendall, 1948; Steiner, 1963; Bower,

21. Herta Herzog spontaneously mentioned this in our conversation.

22. There is a lamentable gap between the Chicago sociology of mass communications (Janowitz, 1968) and the Bureau tradition. Delia (1987) also notes the discontinuity.

23. I take some of the responsibility for this. In my doctoral dissertation, which constitutes Part One of *Personal Influence* (Katz and Lazarsfeld, 1955), I thought that mass-society theory should be seen as the source of the expectations that accompanied the Bureau researchers into the field. While Chaffee and Hochheimer (1982) and Delia (1987) correctly note that empirical research was never guided by this theory, there is no doubt that it was a highly prevalent image among both political and cultural philosophers, academic and popular.

24. There was nothing original about the program in the sense that it represented a consensus of the leading figures in the field and, by now, is well worn; in Lasswell's (1948) formulation it is Who Says What to Whom, etc., or, alternatively, audience studies, content studies, channel studies, institutional studies.

1973), in content analysis (Berelson, 1951), and in channel studies (Lazarsfeld, 1940).

What I wish to emphasize here, however, is Paul Lazarsfeld's formalization of how to go about studying effect. In an important but forgotten paper (Lazarsfeld, 1948a), he cross-tabulates a typology of effects—immediate, short-term, long-term, and institutional—with the probable causes of such effects—single units (a radio broadcast, for example), general type (soap opera), economic and social structure of the medium (private vs. public ownership, for example), and technological nature of the medium. He then exemplifies each of these “16 kinds of communications studies.” Under institutional changes, for example, he discusses the possible effect of a single unit such as Uncle Tom's Cabin on North–South relations before the Civil War; a generic effect such as the live broadcasting of Parliament on Australian politics; a structural effect such as the self-censorship of controversial issues in American films, because of private ownership; a technological effect such as the influence of the permanence of print or the speed of radio on Western civilization. He goes a step beyond those critical theorists who think the history of media technology begins and ends with the capture of a new medium by a ruling elite, by pointing out that there may be a further moment, as when the penny press ushered in Jacksonian democracy. In the meantime, he admits that at this moment “the mass media tend to reinforce the status quo rather than influence change in the institutions of this country” (p. 253).

Regretting the methodological and financial difficulties of studying long-term effects, he states that “mass media are not mainly effective in promoting a specific idea or engendering a stand on a definite issue. What they tend rather to do is to shape for us the picture of the more distant world with which we do not have direct personal contact Short-term investigations will never be able to trace the way in which, over a lifetime, the mass media accentuate for some people parts of the social world and conceal them from others” (p. 255). As examples of long-term effects worthy of investigation, he cites the effect of radio on musical taste (general type); the development of cynicism and the quest for sincerity “as people become more and more bombarded with advertising and propaganda” (media structure), the possible influence of broadcasting on the shift of listeners' attention from the harmonic to the melodic structure of classical music, or the effect of film-editing style “on our way of looking at nature and things to the detriment of contemplation and immersion” (media technology).

This is what Lazarsfeld said. How much of it did he do? In fact, he and his collaborators made a start in a number of these directions, and the panel method should be seen as a major step toward taking system-

atic account of time.²⁵ Moreover, it should be recalled that the focus of the early gratifications studies—which preceded and coexisted with the decision studies from the late thirties to the late forties—is not on decision, but on the repeated, long-term involvement with a genre or medium, not on atomized individuals, but on differentiated social roles.

MEANWHILE: PARADIGMATIC SPINOFFS

While the critics were waiting to take aim—20 and 30 years later—the paradigm of limited effects was spawning second and third generations. With only a little rhetorical flourish, one can argue that each of the two mediating variables in the persuasion model—selectivity and interpersonal relations—sired a new tradition of work. Selectivity, as has already been noted, bred the refurbished tradition of “uses and gratifications” (Blumler and Katz, 1974; Rosengren et al., 1986).

Interpersonal relations, for its part, bred a tradition of work on the diffusion of innovation. Retreating altogether from the image of media impact as total, immediate, and unmediated, the idea that influence takes time and that conversation has survived into modernity made it possible to forge a connection between media research and those other areas of academia—archaeology, for example, or anthropology, folklore, history of religions, marketing, epidemiology, and the like—that are interested in the patterns and processes through which influence spreads (Katz et al., 1963; Rogers, 1982). This convergence is well expressed in the mutual discovery of students of the diffusion of farm practices and students of mass communication that they were similarly engaged (Katz, 1960).

Each of these traditions, in turn, spawned another generation. Gratifications research begat audience decoding, and diffusion research begat social networks. Of course, it takes partners to beget, and that brings us close to the end of this argument.

Gratifications research has been through a long period of soul-searching and self-criticism. Too mentalistic, too empiricistic, too functionalistic, too psychologistic in its disconnection from social structure—say the critical theorists, in spite of the emphasis on role (Elliott, 1974), and they are largely correct. Early gratifications research had leaned too heavily on self-reports, was unsophisticated about the social origin of the needs that audiences bring to the media,

25. So perhaps should “reason analysis” or “impact analysis,” which are concerned with phases in decision making. These methods—like the reconstruction of decisions—are based on what Lazarsfeld calls “introspection,” which he situates between behaviorism and psychoanalysis (Lazarsfeld, 1972: 64).

too uncritical of the possible dysfunctions both for self and society of certain kinds of audience satisfaction, and too captivated by the inventive diversity of audience uses to pay much attention to the constraints of the text. These problems, plus frustration over the unresolved debate concerning the extent of audience passivity or activity, has led gratifications research to probe much more deeply into the nature of audience involvement and the process of audience "decoding" as steps toward a better understanding of uses and effects. Texts now loom large in gratifications research, whereas they had earlier come to be dismissed as inkblots, irrelevant to an understanding of what viewers do with them. Decoding is now conceptualized as a sociopsychological process via which viewers enter into "negotiation" with a text through classic mechanisms such as "identification," broadcast-related mechanisms such as "para-social interaction" (Horton and Wohl, 1956; Rosengren and Windahl, 1972, 1977; Merton, 1946; Beniger, 1987), but also through arguing with a text, playing in it (Stephenson, 1967; Turner, 1977), acting the critic (Worth and Gross, 1974). In a second step, decoding is conceptualized as a process of interpersonal interaction in "interpretive communities" which, in turn, act as gatekeepers that determine what, if anything, of a program or genre will seep its way into the culture. My interest in the comparative study of decodings of "Dallas" is a response to the elementary questions of how such a quintessentially American product crosses cultural frontiers so easily; whether and how it is understood in different cultural contexts (in dubbing and subtitles); what its uses are, and whether and how it makes its way into conversation; and, of course, whether it infiltrates the culture. This is the hard way—but the only way—to talk about television imperialism. And we have resurrected the focus-group method to do so (Katz and Liebes, 1985; Liebes and Katz, 1986).

If gratifications research has aligned itself with students of meaning, diffusion research has found partners for the study of spread. Focusing on the flow of influence through social and media networks, diffusion research has forged alliances with network studies in anthropology, community studies in political science, elite studies and the sociology of science, and the social psychology of collective behavior (e.g., Kadushin, 1968; Menzel, 1971; Crane, 1972; Selvin, 1976; Shibutani, 1965). The media play a multiple role as providers of the content which flows through interpersonal networks, as links between those networks and remote locations, and, to a certain extent, as determinants of the structures of the networks.

In our study of great television ceremonies—Sadat in Jerusalem, the Pope in Poland, the Royal Wedding, the Kennedy funeral—we find that television can unify the world, or reassemble the British Empire, or

reconcile formerly hostile nations, at least for a moment (Katz and Dayan, 1985). These structures correspond, on a symbolic level, to the media-induced structures which we know from technological theory, but also to those occasions in diffusion theory when new social networks arise to accommodate a revolutionary message in defiance of the networks of routine. During the high moments of these broadcasts, however, the diffusion model is silenced. The technology of simultaneity takes over to provide the kind of total, immediate, and unmediated participation in the live event which the limited effects paradigm had banished. In short, on these extraordinary occasions, television can define and unite a community, declare a holiday, reinforce values, change opinions, and sometimes change the world.

Conclusion

I have been trying to make several big points and too many small ones. Let me summarize.

First of all, I have tried to sketch the generations of the Bureau's work on mass communications. A strong interest in short-run change permeates these studies, and can be traced, I believe, to a concern with the potential of radio for education and propaganda. There was a decade of research in the area of gratifications, linked to an undeveloped idea of role, and two decades (partly overlapping the first) of research on persuasion and decision. The righting of the balance between media power and audience power, intrinsic to both traditions of work, led to the somewhat distorted paradigm of limited effects and to the twin emphases on selectivity and interpersonal influence. These, in turn, led to the revival of gratifications research and to work on the diffusion of innovation which, in their next incarnation, have become occupied, respectively, with "decoding" and "networks." These recurrent themes—that of *meaning* (selectivity, gratifications, uses, text, reading, decoding) and of *flow* (networks, information, influence, technology)—appear to be the major dimensions underlying the field (cf. Carey, 1979: 412).

Second, I have tried to analyse three challenges to the paradigm of limited effects which I have called institutional, critical, and technological. I have tried to state their objections to the limited effects paradigm, the basis of their proposals for alternative theories of powerful effects—information, ideology, and organization, respectively—and the empirical work that characterizes each. I conclude that the theories complement each other—part of a continuing search for an adequate conceptualization of effect—and, in spite of occasional acrimony, are

good competition. Even at those points at which the theories are not altogether complementary, the *empirical* research is certainly convergent with work stemming from the Bureau paradigm.

Third, I have tried to show that critics of a paradigm may misframe their target. I note the critics' error in assuming that the "dominant" paradigm is standing still while only theirs are moving ahead. Yet another critical error, I believe, is to assume that only the doing rather than the saying constitutes a paradigm, as if the program of actual work were being offered as a blueprint for the field.

Finally, I have tried to show how communications research has become institutionalized in the interim. Abandoned by sociology, it has established itself in schools, colleges, and departments of communications, building on mergers of traditions of rhetoric and speech, journalism and publicistik, critical traditions in film and literature, and sociopsychologically oriented media research.²⁶ Communications research and studies of public opinion have become disconnected somehow, in favor of work on a much smaller scale, but there are signs of reunion. There is a flocking back to the field by humanists, film theorists, political scientists who had gone off in their different directions 30 years ago. Even the sociologists are coming back.

Riddle: So why is communications research like a (Greek) soap opera? First, because it has many putative fathers, none of whom is rushing forward to claim paternity; second, because the baby is kidnapped or lost and later found, grown and attractive, on some other ranch, unaware of the grand heritage it is carrying; third, because we, the viewers, know that the clue to the identity of the true father is revealed by observing whom the offspring are trying to do in.

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26. A good guess is that some 120+ Ph.D. degrees in communications are awarded annually. There are some 20–30 journals of reasonable quality, and perhaps 6000–7000 members in three or four partly overlapping professional associations.

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