DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 361 816 CS 508 328

AUTHOR Kellner, Douglas
TITLE The Crisis of the Discipline: Some Metatheoretical Reflections.
PUB DATE May 93
NOTE 35p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the International Communication Association (43rd, Washington, DC, May 27-31, 1993).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Communication (Thought Transfer); *Culture; Higher Education; Intellectual Disciplines; *Interdisciplinary Approach; *Research Methodology
IDENTIFIERS *Communications Research; *Cultural Studies; Metatheory

ABSTRACT

Communications scholars need to become aware of how the field of cultural studies enlarges and enriches the field of the study of culture and communications. Cultural theorists need to become more aware of how the cultural artifacts are mediated by a system of production and reception and pay more attention to communications research. Cultural studies should include analyses of the production of culture and the ways that dominant systems of production structure and inhibit specific forms, content, and effects in cultural studies. On the other hand, there are reductionist and scientistic communications research approaches to culture and communication that would benefit from broadening their vistas and utilizing the methods of cultural studies. An integrated approach is needed to combine the study of cultural production, analysis of cultural texts, and inquiry into their reception. A productive dialogue between cultural theorists and communications scholars could help overcome the bifurcation in the field that is now causing unnecessary conflict and tensions. Intense focus on the nature and functions of culture and communications can help produce better social theories and the study of culture and communications in turn could benefit from the application of social theories to its subject matter. (Fifteen notes are included. Contains 30 references.) (RS)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 361 816

c:\art\cta\cd

The Crisis of the Discipline: Some Metatheoretical Reflections

Douglas Kellner

The boundaries of the field of communications have been unclear from the beginnings. Somewhere between the liberal arts/humanities and the social sciences, communications exists in a contested space where advocates of different methods and positions have attempted to define the field and police intruders and trespassers. Despite several decades of attempts to define and institutionalize the field of communications, there seems to be no general agreement concerning its subject-matter, method, or institutional home. In different universities in various countries, communications is sometimes placed in humanities departments, sometimes in the social sciences, and generally in schools of communications. But the boundaries of the various departments within schools of communications are drawn differently, with the study of mass-mediated communications and culture[1] sometimes housed in Departments of Communication, Radio/Television/Film, Speech Communication, Theater Arts, or journalism departments. Many of these departments combine study of mass-mediated communication and culture with courses in production, thus further bifurcating the field between academic study and professional training, between theory and practice.

Of course, all academic disciplinary divisions are arbitrary, subject to power relations and contingencies of specific institutions. Yet it seems that the identity of the field of

CS508328

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
D. Kellner
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

communications studies is particularly tenuous, conflicted, and uncertain. Such disciplinary uncertainty and anxiety over the domain of communications leads to the sort of narrow and rigid disciplinary definitions and policing that is described and criticized in the papers that follow. My focus, however, will be somewhat different. From the perspective of metatheory (i.e. theoretical reflections about the theories and fields of communications), I shall discuss a current disciplinary crisis in defining the field of communications that has emerged from the bifurcation of the field of communications into two separate domains, the fields of mass-mediated communication contrasted with cultural studies. These divisions of the field employ two different methods drawn from the opposing academic sites of the humanities and social sciences -- a division that has caused much heated debate and conflicts within communications departments. I then discuss the ways that the critical theory of the Frankfurt School and the tradition of cultural studies associated with the Birmingham school provide resources for overcoming this crisis. Yet I also point to limitations in these approaches and conclude with some suggestions for a more comprehensive approach to study of media, culture, and communications which overcomes the one-sidedness of many dominant and alternative approaches.

The Bifurcation of the Field and the Frankfurt School

The crisis of disciplinarity that I address is documented in the 1983 Journal of Communications issue on Ferment in the Field (Vol. 33, No 3 [Summer 1983]), where many of the participants in

this discussion of the state of the art of the field of communications studies around a decade ago noted a bifurcation of the field between cultural studies and the study of mass-mediated communications. The approach of cultural studies at the time was largely textualist, centered on the analysis and criticism of texts, using methods primarily derived from the humanities. The methods of communications research, by contrast, employed more empirical methodologies, ranging from straight quantitative research, empirical studies of specific cases or domains, or more broadly historical research. Topics in this area included analysis of the political economy of the media, audience reception and study of media effects, media history, the interaction of media institutions with other domains of society and the like.

These conflicting approaches pointed to a bifurcation of the field into specialized subareas with competing models and methods, and, ironically, to a lack of communication in the field of communications. Some contributors to the JC symposium suggested a liberal tolerance of different approaches, or ways in which the various approaches complemented each other or could be integrated. Yet, there are, I believe, some contemporary approaches to communications and culture that do not bifurcate the field in the first place, but present models of ways to study the interconnection of communications and culture within the broader fields of society, politics, and history.

In my book Critical theory, Marxism and Modernity (Kellner, 1989a), I argued that the Frankfurt School overcame this

bifurcation of the field of communications by taking both culture and communications into their conceptual field and by conceptualizing the nature and effects of both within the framework of critical social theory.[2] The Frankfurt School, I argued, inaugurated critical communications studies in the 1930s and combined political economy of the media, cultural analysis of texts, and audience reception studies of the social and ideological effects of mass culture and communications. In their theories of the culture industries and critiques of mass culture, they were the first to systematically analyze and criticize mass-mediated culture and communications within critical social theory. They were the first social theorists to see the importance of what they called the "culture industries" in the reproduction of contemporary societies, in which so-called mass culture and communications stand in the center of leisure activity, are important agents of socialization, mediators of political reality, and major institutions with a variety of economic, political, cultural and social effects.[3]

I also noted the flaws in the original program of critical theory and suggested a radical reconstruction of the classical model of the culture industries (Kellner 1989a). This would include: more concrete and empirical analysis of the political economy of the media and the processes of the production of culture; more empirical and historical research into the construction of media industries and their interaction with other social institutions; more empirical studies of audience reception

and media effects; and the incorporation of new cultural theories and methods into a reconstructed critical theory of the media and culture. Cumulatively, such a reconstruction of the classical Frankfurt School project would update the critical theory of society and the project of cultural criticism by incorporating contemporary developments in social and cultural theory into the project of critical theory.

In addition, I argued against the Frankfurt School diremption of high culture and low culture and for a more unified model that takes culture as a spectrum and applies similar critical methods to all cultural artifacts ranging from opera to popular music, from modernist literature to soap operas. This argument entailed a rejection of the Frankfurt School model of a monolithic mass culture and an ideal of "authentic art," which limited critical, subversive, and emancipatory moments to certain privileged artifacts of high culture. The Frankfurt School argument that all mass culture was ideological and debased and duped a passive mass of consumers was also deemed objectionable and I argued for a distinction between the encoding and decoding of media artifacts, for an active audience that often produces its own meanings, and for the possibility that critical and subversive moments could be found in the artifacts of the cultural industries, as well as canonized classics of high modernist culture that the Frankfurt School seemed to privilege as the site of artistic opposition and emancipation.[4]

Nonetheless, methodologically and on the level of metatheory,

their work preceded the diremption and bifurcation of the field and thus the Frankfurt School provides a model to overcome contemporary divisions in the study of media, culture, and communications.[5] Their studies dissected the interconnection of culture and communication in artifacts that reproduced the existing society, positively mirroring social norms and practices, and legitimating the dominant organization of society. The Frankfurt School carried out their analysis within the framework of critical social theory, thus integrating communication and cultural studies within the context of study of the existing social order and the ways that communications and culture were produced within this order and the roles and functions that they assumed. Thus the study of communication and culture was integrated within critical social theory and became an important part of a theory of contemporary society, in which culture and communication were playing ever more significant roles.[6]

British Cultural Studies

Since the heroic moments when the Frankfurt School was arguably the cutting edge of critical social theory and cultural criticism, the cultural studies of the Birmingham School and a variety of postmodern theories have come into vogue. Thus, many other attempts have appeared which overcome the bifurcation of the field. Critical theory, postmodern theory, and the project of British cultural studies all overcome disciplinary boundaries and thus the bifurcation of the field into specialized studies of culture and communications with separate and opposing methods and

goals. These theories combine -- at their best -- political economy, social theory, cultural analysis, philosophical speculation, and specific political interventions, and thus potentially overcome the disciplinary crisis I describe by overcoming specialization which bifurcates the field of study of the media, culture, and communications.[7] These alternative approaches also destabilize the discipline and disciplinarity and open up the study of culture and communications to the fields of history and society. They draw on a disparate range of disciplines to theorize the complexity and contradictions of the multiple effects of a vast range of forms of media/culture/communications in our lives and, to different extents, demonstrate how these forces serve as instruments of domination, but also offer resources for resistance and change.

Thus, like the Frankfurt school, the work of the Birmingham school of cultural studies is also formally, in terms of their metatheory, interdisciplinary and overcomes the bifurcation of the field.[8] Like the Frankfurt School, cultural studies is cross-disciplinary and subverts academic boundaries by combining social theory, cultural analysis and critique, and politics in a supradisciplinary project aimed at a comprehensive criticism of the present configuration of culture and society and that is oriented toward fundamental social transformation. British cultural studies situated culture within a theory of social production and reproduction, specifying the ways that cultural forms served either to further social domination or to enable people to resist and

struggle against domination. It analyzed society as a hierarchical and antagonistic set of social relations characterized by the oppression of subordinate class, gender, race, ethnic, and national strata. Employing Gramsci's model of hegemony and counterhegemony, it sought to analyze "hegemonic," or ruling social and cultural forces of domination and to seek "counterhegemonic" forces of resistance and struggle.

The Birmingham project was aimed at a political project of social transformation in which location of forces of domination and resistance would aid the process of political struggle. Richard Johnson, in discussions at a 1990 University of Texas conference on cultural studies, stressed that a distinction should be made between the postmodern concept of difference and the Birmingham notion of antagonism, in which the first concept often refers to a liberal conception of recognizing and tolerating differences, while the notion of antagonism refers to structural forces of domination, in which asymmetrical relations of power exist in sites of conflict. Within relations of antagonism, oppressed individuals struggle to overcome structures of domination in a variety of arenas. Johnson stressed that the Birmingham approach always defined itself as materialist, analyzing socio-historical conditions and structures of domination and resistance. In this way, it could be distinguished from idealist, textualist, and extreme discourse theories which only recognized linguistic forms as constitutive of culture and subjectivity.

Moreover, British cultural studies subverts the high and low

culture distinction -- like postmodern theory -- and thus valorizes cultural forms like film, television, and popular music dismissed by previous approaches to culture which tended to utilize literary theory to analyze cultural forms, or to focus primarily, or even solely, on the artifacts of high culture. Raymond Williams and the members of the Birmingham school are responsible for the rejection of the term "mass culture," which they argue, properly I believe, tends to be elitist, erecting a binary opposition between high and low, that is contemptuous of "the masses" and its culture. It is also monolithic and homogeneous and thus covers over cultural contradictions and oppositional and critical practices and groups.

I would also, however, reject the term "popular culture" which John Fiske (1989a and 1989b) and other contemporary practitioners of cultural studies have unproblematically adopted. The term "popular" suggests that mass-mediated culture arises from the people and covers over that it is a top-down form of culture that often precludes participation. The term "popular" has long been utilized in Latin America and elsewhere to describe art produced by and for the people themselves as an oppositional sphere to mainstream or hegemonic culture. Thus, in Latin America and elsewhere, "popular forces" describe groups struggling against domination and oppression, while "popular culture" describes culture of, by, and for the people, in which they produce and participate in cultural practices that articulate their experience and aspirations.

The term "popular culture" also presents a celebratory gloss

associated with the Popular Culture Association, which often engages in uncritical affirmations of all that is "popular." Since this term is associated in the U.S. with individuals and groups which often eschew critical, theoretically informed, and political approaches to culture, it is risky to use this term, though Fiske has tried to provide the term "popular culture" with an inflection consistent with the socially critical approach of cultural studies. In a recent interview (1991), Fiske defines the "popular" as that which audiences make of and do with the commodities of the culture industries. He argues that progressives should appropriate the term "popular," wresting it from conservatives and liberals, using it as part of an arsenal of concepts in a cultural politics of opposition and resistance (discussion in Austin, September 1990). More debate is needed as to whether using the term "popular culture" in any form risks blunting the critical edge of cultural studies, and whether it is thus simply better to avoid terms like "mass culture" and "popular culture." A possible move within cultural studies would therefore simply be to take culture itself as the field of one's studies without divisions into the high and the low, the popular and the elite -- though, of course, these distinctions can be strategically deployed in certain contexts. Thus, I believe that instead of using ideological labels like "mass" and "popular," I think it suffices to talk of culture and communication and to develop a cultural studies cutting across the full range of culture.

In any case, British cultural studies presents an approach

that allows us to avoid cutting up the field of culture into high and low, popular vs. elite, and to see all forms of culture as worthy of scrutiny and criticism. It allows approaches to culture that force us to appraise the politics of culture and to make political discriminations between different types of culture that have different political effects. It brings the study of race, gender, and class into the center of the study of culture and communications and adopts a critical approach that, like the Frankfurt School, but without some of its flaws, interprets culture within society and situates the study of culture within the field of contemporary social theory and oppositional politics.

From the beginning, the work of the Birmingham group was oriented toward the crucial political problems of their age and milieu. Their early focus on class and ideology derived from their acute sense of the oppressive and systemic effects of class in British society and the struggles of the 1960s against class inequality and oppression. Studies of subcultures in Britain sought to search for new agents of social change when it appeared that sectors of the working class were being integrated into the existing system and conservative ideologies and parties. Their attempts to reconstruct Marxism were influenced as well by 1960s struggles and political movements. The turn toward feminism, often conflicted, was influenced by the feminist movement, while the turn toward race as a significant factor of study was fuelled by the anti-racist struggles of the day. The move in British cultural studies toward focus on education was related to political concern

with the continuing bourgeois hegemony despite the struggles of the 1960s. The right turn in British politics with Thatcher's victory led in the late 1970's to concern with understanding the authoritarian populism of the new conservative hegemony.

In other words, the focus of British cultural studies at any given moment was determined by the struggles in the present political conjuncture and their major work was thus conceived as political interventions. Their studies of ideology, domination and resistance, and the politics of culture directed cultural studies toward analyzing cultural artifacts, practices, and institutions within existing networks of power and of showing how culture both provided tools and forces of domination and resources for resistance and struggle. This political focus intensified emphasis on the effects of culture and audience use of cultural artifacts, which provided an extremely productive focus on audiences and reception, topics that had been neglected in most previous text-based approaches to culture.[9]

Yet, especially as it has developed in the United States, many current configurations of cultural studies are too one-sided, producing new bifurcations of the field and, in part, occluding the field of communications proper, by focusing too intently on cultural texts and audience reception. In his study of Madonna, for instance, Fiske writes: "A cultural analysis, then, will reveal both the way the dominant ideology is structured into the text and into the reading subject, and those textual features that enable negotiated, resisting, or oppositional readings to be made.

Cultural analysis reaches a satisfactory conclusion when the ethnographic studies of the historically and socially located meanings that are made are related to the semiotic analysis of the text" (1989, 98). This focus on text/audience, however, leaves out many mediations that should be part of cultural studies, including analyses of how texts are produced within the context of the political economy and system of production of culture, as well as how subjects are produced by a variety of social institutions, practices, and ideologies. Thus, focusing on texts and audiences to the exclusion of analysis of the social relations and institutions in which texts are produced and consumed truncates cultural studies, as does analysis of reception that fails to indicate how audiences are produced through their social relations and how to some extent culture itself helps produce subjects and their reception of texts.

Likewise, in many versions, the focus on the audience and reception is too-one-sided. Indeed, there is the danger of the fetishism of the audience in the recent emphasis on the importance of reception and audience construction of meanings. Thus, there has been a large-scale shift in emphasis from focus on text and the context of its production to emphasis on the audience and reception, in some cases producing a new dogmatism whereby the audience, or reader, alone produces meaning. The texts, society, and system of production and reception disappear in the solipsistic ecstasy of the textual producer, in which there is no text outside of reading -- resulting in a parody of Derrida's bon mot that there

Fanon, and Marcuse, among others, have argued, can be either emancipatory, directed at forces of oppression, or reactionary, directed at popular forces struggling against oppression. Many feminists, in turn, see all violence as forms of brute masculist behavior and many people involved in peace studies see it as a problematical form of conflict resolution. Moreover, unqualified valorization of audience resistance to preferred meanings as good per se can lead to populist celebrations of the text and audience pleasure in its use of cultural artifacts. This approach, taken to an extreme, would lose its critical perspective and would lead to a populist positive gloss on audience experience of whatever is being studied. Such studies also might lose sight of the manipulative and conservative effects of certain types of mass-mediated culture and thus serve the interests of the cultural industries as they are presently constituted.

I am also put off by what I take to be a fetishism of audience pleasure in some current research. Reacting against a somewhat ascetic attitude toward certain types of culture in the older radical theory, from the 1970s to the present, arguments have been made that attention should be paid to people's pleasure in certain types of film, television, or other forms of culture, and that this pleasure should be positively appraised and appropriated. While this was a useful move in many ways, it has led, I fear, to valorizing certain forms of culture precisely because they are popular and produce pleasure. Such a sweeping and uncritical approach disdains distinguishing between types of pleasure and the

ways that pleasure can bind individuals to conservative, sexist or racist positions, as when films like Rambo or Die Hard mobilize pleasure around extremely masculist and violent behavior.

Resistance and pleasure cannot therefore be valorized per se as progressive elements of the appropriation of cultural texts, but difficult discriminations must be made as to whether the resistance, oppositional reading, or pleasure in a given experience is progressive or reactionary, emancipatory or destructive. Thus, studies of the audience and reception, in some cases, avoid textual criticism and political critique, and often fail to situate the reception of culture in the context of social relations of power and domination. Furthermore, there remain text-centered approaches within cultural studies which engage in theoretically informed readings of texts without considering their production, reception, or anchorage in an institutional organization of culture that takes varying specific forms in different countries, or regions, at different times in history -- which is to say that textualist approaches often avoid study of the production and political economy of culture and even the historical context of culture.

While emphasis on the audience and reception was an excellent correction to the one-sidedness of purely textual analysis, I thus believe that in recent years cultural studies has overemphasized reception and textual analysis, while underemphasizing the production of culture and its political economy.[10] While earlier, the Birmingham groups regularly focused attention on media institutions and practices, and the relations between media forms

and broader social forms and ideologies, this emphasis has waned in recent years, to the detriment of mu current work in cultural studies, I would argue.[11]

Beyond the Bifurcation of the Field

Thus, cultural studies has tended to put its primary emphasis on culture and to decenter and defocus attention on mass-mediated communication, its political economy, institutions, and practices. Much communications studies, by contrast, have neglected analyzing the specificity of cultural texts, their effects, and their uses by audiences, or focus one-sidedly on one part of the circuit of communications and culture to the neglect of other parts, or promote their methods and approaches as the only legitimate way to do communications studies. To overcome the bifurcation of the field and the one-sidedness of partial approaches, I would suggest, therefore, as a metatheory to overcome the crisis of disciplinarity, a multiperspectival approach which includes in the studies of media, communications, and culture, the three dimensions of: 1) the production and political economy of culture; 2) textual analysis and critique; and 3) study of audience reception and the uses of media/cultural texts.[12]

This proposal involves suggesting, first, that cultural studies itself be multiperspectival, getting at culture from the perspectives of political economy and production, text analysis, and audience reception. I would also propose that textual analysis and audience reception studies utilize a multiplicity of perspectives, or critical methods, when engaging in textual

analysis, and in delineating the multiplicity or subject positions, or perspectives, through which audiences appropriate culture (see Kellner 1991). While it was a salutary intervention to stress the importance of the audience and reception in cultural studies, it is possible to overdo it and focus primary attention on the audience to the neglect of providing readings of cultural texts and/or analysis of their production.

In particular, there is a danger that political economy and the production of culture might be underscored in cultural studies. Inserting texts into the system of the political economy of culture within which they are produced can help elucidate features and effects of the texts that a textualist reading might miss or downplay. Consequently, rather than being antithetical approaches to culture, political economy can actually contribute to textual analysis and critique. For the system of production often determines what sort of artifacts will be produced, what structural limits there will be as to what can and cannot be said and shown, and what sort of effects the text may generate. Semiotic study of codes, for instance, is enhanced by studying the formulas and conventions of television, film, or music production. These cultural forms are structured by well-defined rules and conventions, and the study of the production of culture can help elucidate the codes actually in play. Because of their control by giant corporations oriented primarily toward profit, film and television production in the U.S., for instance, are dominated by genres and cycles of the most popular types of artifacts. This

economic determination explains why there are cycles of certain genres and subgenres, sequelmania in the film industry, crossovers of popular films into television series, and a certain homogeneity in products constituted within systems of production with rigid generic codes, formulaic conventions, and well-defined ideological boundaries.

To do a comprehensive and adequate study of Madonna and her effects, for instance, it is not enough simply to analyze the texts and their reception by the audience, as Fiske suggests (1989a) in the text I cited above. One also needs to situate the rise to cultural power of the material girl during the conservative era of Reaganism and the way that Madonna articulated and opposed cultural trends of that era. One also need to relate Madonna to the rise of MTV in which music videos and image became central to the production and reception of popular music. One also needs to interpret the Madonna phenomenon in relation to the rise of the new image culture in which look, style, and fashion took on key importance. In analyzing Madonna's reception, one needs to look at the social construction of teenage girls and the ways that consumption patterns were producing new forms of teen culture. One needs to look sociologically at the ways that Madonna at once articulated rebellion against middle-class conformity that struck a responsive chord in young girls and the ways that she contained this revolt in new forms of consumerism and image-production. One then needs to analyze how Madonna also incorporated people of color (especially Hispanics and blacks), gays and lesbians, and academics

into her audience and the role of public relations and her own image/publicity industry in so doing. Finally, one needs to understand how Madonna herself became an important media industry and corporation. Only through bringing such mediations into one's cultural analysis can one adequately explicate the meanings and effects of Madonna's texts (and Madonna as a text) and their appropriations by multiple and varied audiences.[13]

To those in communications studies, by contrast, my proposals suggest that cultural studies have provided indispensable tools for communications research. Study of the production and effects of the text of the "Gulf war" require the tools of cultural studies to describe how the images and discourses of the "crisis in the Gulf" and then the "Gulf war" (both media constructs and thus put into quotes) mobilized audience support for the U.S. intervention. Using the tools of cultural studies enables one to show how images of race, gender, technology, authority, "our soldiers," "the enemy," and other components of the event helped structure audience response and mobilize consent to the U.S.-led attack on Iraq. Study of the language and discourses of the war is also important to analyzing the war against Iraq as a media event and spectacle. Thus, in many ways, the methods of cultural studies can enrich and strengthen communications studies.

On the other hand, the more conventional tools of communications research, such as study of disinformation and propaganda campaigns, control of media sources, censorship and gate-keeping, standard media practices and crisis situations, and

the like can also help elucidate the event of the "Gulf war."[14] To reduce the Gulf spectacle to the intersection between text and audiences leaves out consideration of the ways that the U.S. military and government manipulated and orchestrated the text of the "Gulf war," and the ways that the mainstream media, for the most part, served as willing conduits for the state-produced spectacle which demonstrated U.S. military power, the wonders of U.S. military technology, the competency and patriotism of the Bush administration, and other goals aimed at by the war managers. Indeed, to properly understand the "Gulf war," one needs to situate the events within broad geopolitical contexts having to do with the end of the Cold war, the decline of U.S. military power, attempts at the unification of Europe, the complex situation of the Middle East, and many other broad factors that entered into the event.

I am not, however, making the impossible suggestion that one adopt this comprehensive multiperspectival approach every time that one sets out to do cultural studies or a piece of communications research. Obviously, intensely focusing on political economy, on audience reception, or on close textual reading and criticism, alone can be very valuable and yield important insights. But exclusively and constantly focusing on one of these dimensions to the exclusion of others can be destructive for a project such as cultural studies that aims at developing comprehensive and inclusive approaches to culture, or for communications research that seeks broader vistas. Moreover, such a metatheoretical optic suggests the value of a variety of methods and approaches, and thus

militates against believing that one particular approach is the only way to go. As noted, within the fields of both cultural studies and communications, not only are these disciplines divided between themselves, but there is a battle between different methods for disciplinary hegemony, or even legitimacy, within both domains. That is, there is a tendency for advocates of empirical research as the proper method for social science or culture and communications study to champion their own scientific, hard-headed, rigorous quantitative approaches, and to dismiss fuzzy, confused, and obscure textualist or qualitative approaches. Textualists in the field of cultural studies, or qualitative social and cultural researchers and theorists, however, often attack the superficial, positivistic, and irrelevant results of number-crunching, non-interpretive research and champion their own critical and emancipatory approaches. And there are battles within cultural studies between those urging the virtues of deconstruction, or feminism, or psychoanalysis, or some other theory or combination of theories as <u>the</u> key to cultural interpretation or critique.

I am suggesting, however, that the opposing methods and approaches can be used to complement each other and that it is unproductive to engage in methodological wars when dialogue and synthesis might be more useful. Yet in each concrete topic and subject matter under investigation, theorists and researchers must decide what approaches, methods, theories, and concepts to adopt. Sometimes it might be appropriate simply to do textual analysis, while other times one wants to connect the text with its audience

reception and use, or the broader social and cultural contexts that produce both texts and audiences. One's specific intentions, projects, goals, and limitations dictate what methods and approaches might be useful in a given instance and obviously one cannot do everything, or as much as one might want, in any given project or context. But one should be open to how a variety of methods and approaches might enhance one's investigations and begin to adopt more multiperspectival optics in doing one's work to overcome the limitations of one-sided approaches and the unproductiveness of sterile battles.

Conclusion

I have argued that cultural studies has tended to their detriment to neglect the study of mass-mediated communications and that communications research should in turn see the value of the methods and approach of cultural studies. I have argued for the importance of including analyses of the production of culture and the ways that dominant systems of production structure and inhibit specific forms, content, and effects in cultural studies. On the other hand, there are reductionist and scientistic communications research approaches to culture and communication that would benefit from broadening their vistas and utilizing the methods of cultural studies. Of course, there are problems with approaches that merely focus on production and political economy, such as economism and reductionism. But taking production and political economy as but a moment of analysis -- which also focuses on the meanings and effects of texts and their reception by the audience -- mitigates

against reducing the nature and effects of texts to their origins in the production process, or to seeing all culture as ideological effects of capitalist corporations -- models which operate with monolithic models of capitalism and ideology. There is good and bad political economy, just as there are good and bad cultural studies.

Consequently, I would urge an integrated approach that combines study of cultural production, analysis of cultural texts, and inquiry into their reception. I am assuming in this paper that there are departments of communications located in different schools in the current -- and always arbitrary -- academic division of labor. My argument suggests that it doesn't crucially matter what specific institutional site the study of communication and culture are located in. Rather, what is important is the adoption of a multiperspectival approach that prevents excessively one-sided definitions of the field and arbitrary policing of methods, approaches, and perspectives that do not fall into the specific definition of the field of communications advanced by certain individuals, departments, or schools. That is, I am suggesting that if one views the very field of communications and culture as a continuum, one sees that it is arbitrary to cut up the field in a way to separate the two domains.[15]

It seems obvious that the domain of media, culture, and communications is central to the economy, polity, social life, and other domains of contemporary experience, and that therefore the field of communications must be open to other academic fields and by definition be multidisciplinary. It would be useful for academic

departments of communications, or cultural studies, to engage individuals trained in various disciplines to carry out studies of media, culture, communications, and society. Indeed, I think that it is beneficial for sociologists, political scientists, philosophers, and others to study culture and communications, and to illustrate the specific insights that their approaches bring to bear on the topic. Then, those who study media, culture, and communications as a vocation can utilize perspectives and positions developed in other disciplines to help study and understand their objects. In this way, it would be possible to overcome the one-sidedness and limitations of any given academic discipline.

And so I suggest -- in conclusion and to sum up -- that communications scholars need to become aware of how cultural studies enlarges and enriches the field of the study of culture and communications. And cultural theorists need to become more aware of how the cultural artifacts are mediated by a system of production and reception and pay more attention to communications research. A productive dialogue between these fields could thus help overcome the bifurcation in the field that is now causing unnecessary conflicts and tensions. Yet I am not offering any grand synthesis that overcomes all divisions. Productive debates between different approaches can produce new insights. Each project and researcher is different and will utilize a different combination of methods and perspectives. There is much work to be done in the fields of media, culture, and communications and what methods and approaches prove most productive will depend on what actual work is done.

Yet occasionally it helps to back off from one's projects and to engage in metatheoretical reflection on the nature of one's field and the competing perspectives in order to help overcome arbitrary disciplinary conflicts and impasses and to proceed on to new projects and perspectives. Metatheoretical reflections can thus provide new insights to the limitations of existing practices and the need for new ones that might help produce new perspectives and progress in the fields of both cultural and communications studies. Thus I have argued for a genuinely interdisciplinary approach which overcomes specialization and which overcomes the bifurcation of the field by focusing intensely on both culture and communications in the context of social theory. Indeed, I believe that intense focus on the nature and functions of culture and communications can help produce better social theories and that the study of culture and communications in turn could benefit from the application of social theories to its subject matter. In these ways, metatheory suggests some of the productive relations between various disciplines and the ways to overcome limitations and to develop better theoretical perspectives.

Notes

1. My reasons for rejecting the term "mass communication," or "Mass Comm," will become clear in the course of this article, though here I might note that I am consciously using the plural "communications," rather than the singular "communication," to denote the plurality of objects in the fields of communications,

objects that might be significantly different -- a heterogeneity covered over by the harmonizing unification of the singular "communication." Indeed, we will seen that even the vocabulary for describing the objects in the field of study of communication, media, and culture are up for grabs and highly contested, as are the boundaries of the field. As David Sholle will argue in his paper in this issue, this situation contains problems and dangers, but also productive possibilities.

2. On the Frankfurt school theory of the cultural industries, see Horkheimer and Adorno 1972; the anthology edited by Rosenberg and White 1957; the reader edited by Bronner and Kellner 1989; and the discussion of the Frankfurt school approach in Kellner 1989a.

3. I've analyzed these effects in the contemporary scene from a reconstructed critical theory perspective in analyses of Hollywood film with Michael Ryan (1988), two books on American television (Kellner 1990 and 1992), and a forthcoming collection of cultural and media studies (Kellner 1994).

4. There were, to be sure, some exceptions and qualifications to this "classical" model: Adorno would occasionally note a critical or utopian moment within mass culture and possibility of audience reception against the grain; see the examples in Kellner 1989a. But although one can find moments that put in question the more bifurcated division between high and low culture and the model of mass culture as modes of manipulation and its reception as the incorporation of individuals into the existing society and culture, generally the Frankfurt School model is overly reductive and

monolithic, and thus needs radical reconstruction -- which I have attempted to do in work over the past two decades.

5. The field of communications was bifurcated into a division, described by Lazarsfeld (1941) in an issue edited by the Frankfurt School on mass communications into the critical school associated with the Institute for Social Research and administrative research, which Lazarsfeld defined as research carried out within the parameters of established media and social institutions that would provide material that was of use to these institutions -- research with which Lazarsfeld himself would be identified.

6. In the 1930s model of critical theory, theory was supposed to be an instrument of political practice. Yet the formulation of the theory of the culture industries by Horkheimer and Adorno (1947) in the 1940s was part of their turn toward a more pessimistic phase in which they eschewed concrete politics and generally located resistance within critical individuals, like themselves, rather than within social groups, movements, or oppositional practices. Thus, the Frankfurt School ultimately is weak on the formulation of oppositional practices and counterhegemonic cultural strategies.

7. Initially, I planned to discuss the challenge to studies of culture, communications, and society involved in the more radical versions of postmodern theory, especially Baudrillard's claims concerning the implosion of these domains in the contemporary moment and thus the loss of object for those studying communications or society. Lack of space, however, limits me to

making a few remarks here concerning the metatheoretical similarities between critical theory, cultural studies, and postmodern theory in their transgressing disciplinary boundaries and their offering of transdisciplinary models to the study of communications and culture. On Baudrillard, see Kellner 1989b and on postmodern theory see Best and Kellner 1991.

8. By "cultural studies," I mean that project of approaching culture and society from a critical and multidisciplinary perspective that was initiated by the Birmingham school of cultural studies in England and that provides an especially rich and useful set of studies that describe the imbrication of society, politics and culture. In recent years, many other versions of cultural studies have emerged in the U.S., Canada, Australia, and elsewhere, many of which have lost the critical and political edge associated with the Birmingham school. While I shall, in effect, present and defend the classic Birmingham model here, I shall ultimately argue for a variety of types of cultural studies and for an open, undefined field of cultural studies that, however, integrates studies of communications, culture, society, and contemporary politics. Several genealogies of the trajectory of cultural studies in England now exist: see Hall 1980a; Johnson 1985/6; Fiske 1986; O'Conner 1989; Grossberg 1989; Turner 1990; and Agger 1992. See also the attempts to define cultural studies in Grossberg, Nelson, Triechler 1992.

9. Textualism was especially one-sided in North American "new criticism" and other literary practices which for some decades in

the post-World War II conjuncture defined the dominant approach to cultural artifacts. The British cultural studies focus on audience and reception, however, was anticipated by the Frankfurt School: Walter Benjamin focused on the importance of reception studies as early as the 1930s, while Adorno, Lowenthal, and others in the Frankfurt School carried out reception studies in the same era. See the discussion in Kellner 1989a, 121ff. Except for some exceptions, however, the Frankfurt School tended to conceive of the audience as primarily passive, thus the Birmingham emphasis on the active audience is a genuine advance, though, as I argue below, there have been some exaggerations on this issue and qualifications to the notion of the active audience are now needed.

10. Most North American cultural studies and other varieties of cultural studies which have been influenced by postmodern theory likewise neglect production and political economy. I am not sure whether this is the influence of Baudrillard's pronouncements on "the end of political economy" (1976), or just laziness and ignorance of the domain of political economy, or a certain softness in practitioners of cultural studies that are uncomfortable with the "hard" domains of production and economics.

11. In a 1983 talk published in 1985/1986, Richard Johnson provides a model of cultural studies, similar to mine, based on a diagram of the circuits of production, textuality, and reception, similar to the circuits of capital stressed by Marx (see his diagram on p. 47). Although Johnson emphases the importance of analysis of production in cultural studies and criticizes Screen

for abandoning the perspective of production in favor of more idealist and textualist approaches (pp. 63ff.), much work in cultural studies has replicated this neglect. One could indeed argue that most recent cultural studies have tended to neglect analyses of the circuits of political economy and production in favor of text and audience-based analyses.

12. I set out this multiperspectival approach in an earlier article and book on the Gulf war as a cultural and media event (Kellner 1992), and will illustrate this approach in forthcoming studies of the Vietnam war and its cultural texts, Hollywood film in the age of Reagan, MTV, advertising, Madonna, cyberpunk fiction and other topics (Kellner 1994). Here, I shall merely set out the metatheory that I will illustrate with a couple of brief examples, though I am aware that for my proposals to have any real force, they have to be exemplified and illustrated in concrete studies.

13. My study of Madonna in Kellner 1994, will attempt to carry out such a study.

14. I combine these different methods and approaches in my study of The Persian Gulf TV War (Kellner 1992a) and an article that articulates how such a multiperspectival approach can usefully be mobilized to analyze cultural texts of a variety of types (Kellner 1992b).

15. The complexity of the concepts of culture and communications require further conceptual analysis and deconstruction is probably in order to overcome a rigid binary opposition between the two concepts, but space limitations prevent

me from undertaking such an exercise here.

References

Agger, Ben (1992) Cultural Studies. London: Falmer Press.

Baudrillard, Jean (1976) L'echange symbolique et la mort. Paris: Gallimard.

Best, Steven and Douglas Kellner (1991) Postmodern Theory: Critical Interrogations. London and New York: Macmillan and Guilford Press.

Bronner, Stephen and Kellner, Douglas (1989) Critical Theory and Society. A Reader. New York: Routledge.

Fiske, John (1986) "British Cultural Studies and Television." In R. C. Allen (Ed.), Channels of Discourse. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 254-289.

Fiske, John (1987) Television Culture. New York and London: Routledge.

Fiske, John (1989a) Reading the Popular. Boston: Unwin Hyman.

Fiske, John (1989b) Understanding Popular Culture. Boston: Unwin Hyman.

Fiske, John (forthcoming) "Popular Culture and Popular Resistance: Reading Die Hard Against the Grain."

Grossberg, Lawrence (1989) "The Formations of Cultural Studies: An American in Birmingham," Strategies, 22, pp 114-149.

Grossberg, Lawrence, Nelson, Cary and Paula Treichler (1992) Cultural Studies. New York: Routledge.

Hall, Stuart et al (1980) Culture, Media, Language. London: Hutchinson.

Hall, Stuart (1980a) "Cultural Studies and the Centre: Some

problematics and problems," in Hall et al, 1980, 15-47.

Hall, Stuart (1980b) "Encoding/Decoding," in Hall et al, 1980, 128-138.

Horkheimer, Max and T.W. Adorno (1972) Dialectic of Enlightenment. New York: Herder and Herder.

Johnson, Richard (1986/87) "What is Cultural Studies Anyway?" Social Text 16 (1986/87), 38-80.

Kellner, Douglas (1982) "Kulturindustrie und Massenkommunikation. Die Kritische Theorie und ihre Folgen," in Sozialforschung als Kritik, edited by Wolfgang Bonss and Axel Honneth. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp.

Kellner, Douglas (1989a) Critical Theory, Marxism, and Modernity. Cambridge and Baltimore: Polity and John Hopkins University Press.

Kellner, Douglas (1989b) Jean Baudrillard: From Marxism to Postmodernism and Beyond. Cambridge and Palo Alto, Polity and Stanford University Press.

Kellner, Douglas (1990) Television and the Crisis of Democracy. Boulder, Col: Westview.

Kellner, Douglas (1992a) The Persian Gulf TV War. Boulder, Col: Westview.

Kellner, Douglas (1992b) "Toward a Multiperspectival Cultural Studies," Centennial Review, Vol. XXVI, No. 1 (Winter 1992), 5-42.

Kellner, Douglas (1994) Cultural Studies and Contemporary Society. Between the Modern and the Postmodern. London

and New York: Routledge.

Kellner, Douglas and Michael Ryan (1988) Camera Politica: The Politics and Ideology of Contemporary Hollywood Film. Bloomington, Ind: Indiana University Press.

Lazarsfeld, Paul (1941) "Administrative and Critical Comunications Research," Studies in Philosophy and Social Science, Vol. IX, No. 1.

Lowenthal, Leo (1986) "The Utopian Motif is Suspended," New German Critique 38.

O'Connor, Alan (1989) "The Problem of American Cultural Studies," Critical Studies in Mass Communication (December), 405-413.

Rodden, John (1991) "Cultural Studies and the Culture of Academe," Border/Lines 20/21, 8-12.

Rosenberg, Bernard and David White (1957), editors, Mass Culture. Glencoe, Ill: The Free Press.

Turner, Graeme (1990) British Cultural Studies: An Introduction. New York: Unwin Hyman.