

RADICAL MEDIA

**Rebellious Communication
and Social Movements**

JOHN D.H. DOWNING

with Tamara Villarreal Ford • Genève Gil • Laura Stein



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Preface

Common approaches to communication media are wildly lopsided precisely because they refuse to take seriously the historical persistence and geographical pervasiveness of radical alternative media. Although the extent of such media at the dawn of the 21st century CE is broader than ever before, and therefore ever more demanding of our analytical attention, radical alternative media are by no means latecomers to culture and politics. They are simply relative newcomers to the established research and theory agenda, which has a predilection for the seemingly obvious and the easily counted. By *radical media*, I refer to media, generally small-scale and in many different forms, that express an alternative vision to hegemonic policies, priorities, and perspectives.

Filling in a very significant gap is only one reason for focusing on radical alternative media. The other is related, but pragmatic rather than conceptual: the urgency of media activism in the face of blockages of public expression.¹ These blockages emerge from many quarters: powerful components within the dynamic of capitalist economy, governmental secrecy, religious obscurantism, institutionalized racist and patriarchal codes, other hegemonic² codes that appear natural and sensible; the insidious impact of reactionary populism, and also reflexes of all of these within oppositional movements themselves. Radical media activism is not the only response needed—media literacy campaigns,

growing media democratization, scientific and technical popularization, and support for media professionals struggling to upgrade mainstream media practice are all vital—but it is essential.

How can small-scale radical media have any impact worth having? This book sets out to answer that question, but the short answer is they have multiple impacts on different levels. Let me offer two rapid examples.

In the downward spiral of the second Cold War of the early 1980s, I was only one of many Americans, Russians, and others who looked on aghast as the two camps' senile leaders, Brezhnev and Reagan, pointed ever more massive nuclear weapons against each other (with the enthusiastic backing of their military staffs and military-industrial complexes). On this issue, mainstream media followed their leaders in both camps.³ However, in the United States and former West Germany, in particular, but also in Britain, Italy, and the Netherlands, large antinuclear movements sprang up or became reinvigorated, both against nuclear weapons and more broadly against nuclear power. Germany in particular produced a huge array of radical media exposing and attacking the nuclear arms race and the dangers of nuclear power (Downing, 1988a). In the United States, a number of antinuclear documentary films were made and widely screened, notably *Paul Jacobs and the Nuclear Gang* (1979) and *Atomic Café* (1982). These, in turn, fed the movements and ongoing demonstrations, which generated tremendous opposition to both the U.S. and U.S.S.R. leadership. A million people marched in New York City alone. This became a factor in the ability of the Soviet leadership to seize the high moral ground, but also provided an opportunity for both leaders to claim credit for stepping back from nuclear proliferation, beginning with the superpower summit in Reykjavik, Iceland, in 1987. Had it not been for these movements and their media, the possibility of mutual assured destruction—the war strategists' official doctrine—would have loomed ever larger.

This is an instance with major international impact. The Italian, Portuguese, Russian, and Polish case studies in Section 3, the Iranian case that we refer to intermittently, and the international anti-apartheid movement are some others.

On a much less dramatic plane are the little photographic visiting cards (*cartes-de-visite*) that Sojourner Truth used to sell to support herself in her later years. These little photographs of oneself, used as visiting cards and as mementos, were something of a national mania in the 1860s. Truth sat for 14 of these, all of them showing her dressed as a re-

spectable upper middle-class woman, mostly sitting with her knitting on her lap. Over a century later, the image may seem entirely banal. But as Nell Irvin Painter (1996) points out, in context, the image made a radical assertion. Truth was not working in the field or over a wash tub (the only other visual images of her). She *was*, by contrast, a respectable woman:

Black woman as lady went against the commonplaces of nineteenth-century American culture. But by circulating her photographs widely, Truth claimed womanhood for a black woman who had been a slave, occupying a space ordinarily off limits to women like her. She refused to define herself by her enslavement. Seizing on a new technology, Truth established what few nineteenth-century black women were able to prove: that she was present in her times. (pp. 198-199)

This instance, aside from encouraging us to acknowledge the all-important question of context, tells us something more. There is no instantaneous alchemy, no uncontested sociochemical procedure, that will divine in a flash or with definitive results truly radical media from the apparently radical or even the nonradical.⁴

In this multifarious, seething broth that we name society, what counts as politically oppositional, as personally expressive, as experimental, as embedded in the cultural present, as heralding the public's future, as reclaiming the forgotten merits of the past? For those with instinctively tidy minds, this category dilemma generates genuine pain, a real intellectual abscess. While, nevertheless, not wishing to praise fog for its own pure sake, it is perhaps precisely the indeterminacy of this seething broth that is the most important point. From such cauldrons may emerge social and cultural change in many directions, positive and negative and in between. The 1848 revolutions in Europe, the turbulence in Russia during the first decades of the 20th century, the Weimar Republic period in Germany, the Quit India movement of the 1920s through 1947, the international ferment of the 1960s and 1970s, are only a few examples.

Without such cauldrons, there is stasis—which may sometimes be preferred by reasonable and constructive people—but the issue here is not so much what is desirable as what actually happens and its relation to radical alternative media. And, simultaneously, what is at issue is the relation between (sometimes imperceptible) eddies and ferments of opinion and expression and the impact of such media. The specific

question of whether any particular activity in this alternative public realm is to be considered oppositional or self-indulgent or reactionary—or some compound of these—is a matter for argument. Maybe, it will be many decades—if ever—before the significance of such events can be established. But for present purposes, it is the ferment itself that counts, as matrix to radical media.

In the original edition of this study, published in 1984 by the South End Press collective in Boston, Massachusetts, I adopted an antibinarist and a binarist definition of radical media simultaneously. I was intensely concerned to challenge a prevailing orthodoxy of the time, namely, that there were only two viable models of how to organize media, the Western capitalist one and the Soviet one. Each system had its ideologues and its counterideologues. In the West, a disturbing number of individuals on the political left could be found who were, if not advocates of sovietized media, then at least reluctant to attack them or the Soviet system, on the spurious grounds that to do so would make it easier for Western media barons and ideologues to sing the corrupt glories of their own communication media, supposedly free agents of free expression. In the East, decades of intense frustration at the absurdities and worse of their own media systems led many thinking people to yearn for Western media and to write off critical Western media researchers as smug, deluded idiots. Either way, an international consensus seemed to hold that only two models of media organization were feasible or even imaginable.

I was determined to query that consensus, and so I spent quite some time critiquing the then-contemporary application of Leninist media theory in the East, as well as underscoring the idiotic triumphalism of those who chanted (and still chant!) the unalloyed virtues of capitalist media. I also endeavored to build up the rudiments of a theory of radical alternative media on the basis of some writings by socialist anarchists, British marxist feminists of that period, and dissident marxist theorists in Eastern Europe. (And I spent time annotating typical vices of alternative media.)

So that was my antibinarism. "A plague o' both your houses!" groaned Mercutio, unfortunately with virtually his dying breath, just having been stabbed in a street fracas between Montague and Capulet braggadocios. (Not an encouraging precedent, I felt, but I went ahead anyway.)

My own binarism, however, went unnoticed, at least by myself. It came about, effectively, through my being caught up in the Cold War spiral to which I have already referred. Thus, it seemed especially urgent to try to hammer home the merits of alternative ways of communicating politically, however picayune they might appear in the first instance. Underscoring their significance, however, led me to define radical media more tightly, in strict opposition to mainstream media, to a greater degree than I now believe possible for most conjunctures in political history. It simultaneously led me to write off major commercial media as permanently part of the problem, except on rare and good days. That was my slippage toward binarism. It was only implicit, and indeed, I contradicted it at a number of points in my arguments, but it still seriously simplified both mainstream and alternative media.

Taken to its ultimate point, that position would discount any movement toward democratizing large-scale commercial media, which would let them off the hook much too easily. It would render the quite often impassioned attacks on major media from the political right and the extreme right somewhere between incomprehensible and irrelevant. It would downplay the uses that oppositional movements and groups may sometimes be able to make of mainstream media.⁵ It would also flatten out the very considerable variety of radical media.

Let me sketch out then my preliminary definition of what differentiates radical alternative media from more conventional, mainstream media.

First, it must be acknowledged that to speak simply of *alternative* media is almost oxymoronic. Everything, at some point, is alternative to something else. The ever-expanding plethora of niche trade magazines or of corporate industry bulletins, although an interesting phenomenon in its own right, does not belong in the category of media studied here. To some extent, the extra designation *radical* helps to firm up the definition of alternative media, but even here, we need to make some preliminary qualifications.

For, second, radical media may, depending on the vantage point of the observer or the activist, represent radically negative as well as constructive forces. From my own angle of vision, fundamentalist or racist or fascist radical media are pushing for society to move backward into even more grotesque problems than we struggle with today. The fact remains that they are radical media. They, too, demand to be understood,

even if we differentiate them by certain criteria (examined in Part II) from the media whose agendas dominate this study.

But, third, in some circumstances, the designation radical media may also include minority ethnic media. So, too, sometimes, religious media. So, too, maybe a vast mass of community news sheets and bulletin boards, depending on the issues at stake in the communities in question. But equally, the adjective *radical* may well not fit a considerable number of these ethnic, religious, or community media. Everything depends on their content and context. What might abstractly seem a bland and low-key instance could, in a given context, be wielding a hammer blow at some orthodoxy, as the Sojourner Truth example shows.

Indeed, the very intentions of the communicators themselves may turn out to be no guide at all in this maze, or at least a notably insufficient guide. History is crammed with cases of individuals and groups who had no idea, and could have had no idea, of the chain of socially disruptive events they were setting in motion.

So context and consequences must be our primary guides to what are or are not definable as radical alternative media. The edges are almost always blurred. Every technology used by radical media activists is and has always been used mostly for mainstream purposes, not theirs.

Sometimes, fourth, and maybe in a majority of cases, radical media are mixed in the depth of their radicalism, let alone in the effectiveness of their expression. An example would be the cartoons in the U.S. pro-suffragist press (Israels Perry, 1994): Women were typically portrayed as inevitably virtuous, often as victims, rarely as authority figures, almost exclusively as white and well-educated, and if powerful women were depicted, it was as "Amazonian Wonder Women or allegorical figures drawn from classical culture" (p. 10). Thus, while demanding the vote for women, many of these oppositional cartoons simultaneously reiterated patriarchal stereotypes. Strictly binary definitions of these media simply bounce off their actual spectrum.

Yet, fifth, in some circumstances, when they are forced underground by systematic repression and censorship, especially in its fascist or sovietized variants, or in the typical military regime, then, such media are indeed in a binary, either-or situation. The earlier Reagan years, the Nixon years, and certainly the McCarthy era had some of that flavor for the political left in the United States, thanks to J. Edgar Hoover's FBI.

Sixth, radical alternative media are to be found in a colossal variety of formats. In the first edition, I focused almost entirely on regularly ap-

pearing print and broadcast media, the purpose being to try to understand how media activists, often unpaid or low paid, manage to keep going day by day, month by month, and even year after year. The objective was worthwhile, and indeed, the case studies in this edition are mostly of that ilk. But as a definition of the variety of forms radical media can take, it was impoverished. Such media may even find themselves within an alien media setting, as when waspish leftist cartoons nestle uneasily in conservative newspapers.

If, seventh, radical alternative media have one thing in common, it is that they break somebody's rules, although rarely all of them in every respect.

We may also say, eighth, that these media are typically small-scale, generally underfunded, sometimes largely unnoticed at least initially, on occasion the target of great anger or fear or ridicule from on high, or even within the general public, or both. Sometimes they are short-lived, even epiphenomenal; at other times, they last for many decades. Sometimes, they are entrancing, sometimes boring and jargon laden, sometimes frightening, sometimes brilliantly funny.

Ninth, radical alternative media generally serve two overriding purposes: (a) to express opposition vertically from subordinate quarters directly at the power structure and against its behavior; (b) to build support, solidarity, and networking laterally against policies or even against the very survival of the power structure. In any given instance, both vertical and lateral purposes may be involved.

Tenth and finally, there is a tendency within their internal organization to try to be somewhat more, or sometimes considerably more democratic than conventional mainstream media.

In Part I, I will endeavor to put conceptual flesh on these bones. In the rest of the book, I and my co-authors will examine a whole tapestry of radical media.

NOTES

1. There is a large literature on aspects of mainstream media hegemony, and I will refer the reader to some of it rather than try to encapsulate it here: Bagdikian (1999); Brook and Boal (1995); Curran and Seaton (1991); Dates and Barlow (1993); Entman (1989); Gitlin (1983); Gray (1995); Herman (1999); Herman and Chomsky (1988); Herman and McChesney (1997); Hertsgaard

(1988); Kellner (1990, 1992); McChesney (1996); Schlesinger (1992); Sinclair (1991); Sussman (1997); van Zoonen (1993).

2. In using the term *hegemonic*, I draw broadly on its use in the work of Gramsci. I discuss Gramsci's work in the first chapter and also in Downing (1996, pp. 199-204).

3. Although they did so completely slavishly in the Soviet bloc, whereas there were some exceptions on occasion in the West, the Soviets' public stance occupied the higher moral ground of rejecting the so-called "first strike" doctrine, that is, the strategy of initiating nuclear war. The U.S. position under Reagan was not to rule out a first strike. The Soviet position was extremely effective. It simultaneously heartened antinuclear movements in the West, gave them a stick with which to beat their government leaders, and reflected the Soviet public's very deep fear of war, ingrained from its colossal human losses in World War II. In reality, of course, in military matters as in team sports or chess, an impregnable defense makes a policy of attack all the easier to pursue because there is less fear of retribution. Describing weapons as offensive or defensive neatly skates around this reality. The Reagan administration's so-called Strategic Defense Initiative (sometimes referred to as the "Star Wars" project), the multibillion-dollar research program into computer- and laser-based weaponry, was another classic in this mystification: It, too, was claimed to be for defensive purposes only, to provide an impregnable shield around the United States to intercept any incoming missiles. Had it been technologically feasible, it would not have been simply defensive; and those of its elements that actually were feasible could be deployed in attack as well or better. The literature on the subject is enormous, but the following present useful guides: Aldridge, 1983; Lifton & Falk, 1982; Manno, 1984; Pringle & Arkin, 1983.

4. Equally, in a study of the early years of *The Cosby Show* (Downing, 1988b), I argue that in context, that seemingly cozy, even bromide-bound series successfully challenged a whole stack of racist shibboleths in and out of the U.S. television industry. In Section I, Chapter 1, and throughout Section II, we will find ourselves revisiting this question of oppositional cultures and their expression.

5. For a very helpful guide to this last issue, see Ryan (1991).

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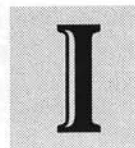
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Last, on a personal note, a word in honor and love for Anneli, Corinna, Juanita, Zoë, *chetvero absolyutno zamechatel'nykh i krasivikh docheri*; in loving memory of Jamal and Stansil; and in celebration of Ash Corea, *la mia compagna dappertutto*, who as I wrote first time round, represents what this book strives to bring about.

John Downing
Austin, Texas



Concepts: Radical Media Intersect Media Theory

In making sense of the enormous, shifting terrain of oppositional cultures and radical media, we need sooner or later to step back a little and consider some significant and interesting thinkers' perspectives, which may help us understand these media better. Depending on readers' familiarity with some of the debates around these ideas, what follows may turn out to be a little heavy going at times, even though I have tried to write these chapters as accessibly as possible. But, perhaps, for those to whom these debates are altogether new, it may be better to roam through the rest of the book first and then return to this section to make more sense of the terrain as a whole.¹

The topics to be explored below are approaches I have drawn together for this fairly novel purpose: popular culture and audiences/readers; power, hegemony, and resistance; social movements, the public sphere, and dialogue; community and democracy; the relation between art and media communication; radical media organization; and finally a further group of problems and issues (religion, ethnicity, the

international dimension, repressive radical media).² What I have sought to sketch out are the launching pads for understanding radical alternative media in ways that are much more sensitive to complexity than has mostly been the case to date. However, we shall also see that the perspectives that illuminate our topic, or have some claim to do so, are multiple, sometimes overlapping, sometimes contradictory.

NOTES

1. For those familiar with the material, some footnote explanations may be otiose. Dear highly informed reader, do not thereby feel yourself offended.

2. These topics are not exhaustive. Age, gender, sexuality, ecology, and others are also relevant but in this treatment are discussed at intervals throughout.

1

Popular Culture, Audiences, and Radical Media

The argument will be as follows:

- Popular culture is intertwined in many ways with mass culture.
- We should more accurately speak of popular cultures in the plural.
- These are not automatically oppositional or constructive.
- Oppositional cultures also intertwine with both mass and popular cultures.
- Audiences/readers may be defined as (sometimes resistant) commercial targets; as the necessary “reality-check” on supposed media impact; as joint architects of cultural production, this being the primary sense used in this book.
- Radical alternative media constitute the most active form of the active audience and express oppositional strands, overt and covert, within popular cultures.

These are fundamental issues, inasmuch as these various radical alternative media forms are, almost self-evidently, forms of popular and oppositional cultural expression. Indeed, as we will see, a sharp division between radical media expression and other forms of oppositional cultural expression makes little sense. Yet, who makes use of these multiple forms and how—in other words, audiences and readers—is as central to their operation as it is with all other media forms.

DEFINING POPULAR CULTURE

A classic definition of popular culture is to be found in Theodor Adorno's (1975) article, "Culture Industry Reconsidered," his commentary on the famous essay Max Horkheimer and he first published in 1944, entitled "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception" (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1987). Trying to rebut a charge laid by critics against the first essay, namely that it trashed popular cultural expression, Adorno urged critics to appreciate the distinction he and Horkheimer had tried to maintain between mass culture and popular culture. They had unequivocally rejected mass culture, the product of the commercial industries of advertising, broadcasting, cinema, and print media, as a spurious and implicitly even fascistic rendition of the public's needs, asphyxiating the questioning spirit. Popular culture, by contrast, was an authentic expression of the public's visions and aspirations, as in folk music and folk art, and had inherent oppositional potential.

Popular cultural forms have been quite exhaustively analyzed in the now huge literature of cultural studies. Sometimes, this has almost echoed Adorno, with a simplistic dualism that defines all popular culture as oppositional—"politically healthy"—in contradistinction to commercialized or mass culture. In one phase of his writing, a leading cultural studies analyst, John Fiske, strove¹ to identify the smallest and most fleeting flickers of audience response or shoppers' behavior as audience activism and resistance to oppressive social codes.

Tidy, but really too tidy. Jesús Martín-Barbero (1993, pp. 120-147) has rightly insisted on the interpenetrations between popular and mass culture. A major reason for the success of commercially produced mass culture, he points out, is precisely that the commercial culture industries pick up on numerous elements of popular cultural expression.

Their products and language are not simply impositions from on high.² He and others have correspondingly explored notions of hybridity/*mestizaje* in cultural life, examining the intricate mesh of cultural capillaries that suffuse the body of society.³ We shall return to this notion below in the discussion of social movements.

More than being just too tidy, dualist perspectives are seriously flawed: Popular culture is perfectly able to be elitist, racist, misogynist, homophobic, and ageist and to express these values in inventive and superficially attractive forms. The negative roles of women and girls in fairy tales and folk songs constitute but one example. Racist rock groups constitute another. Neither ethnic antagonism nor misogyny are simply implanted from on high or from outside into an unsuspecting and unwilling populace.

This is not merely a passing qualification, as regards this book's theme. Popular culture is larger than oppositional culture, at most junctures in history probably considerably larger. Yet, just as popular culture and mass culture interpenetrate and suffuse each other, so, too, does oppositional culture draw on and contribute to popular culture and mass culture. A droll example was when U.S. anarchist activist Abbie Hoffman, at the height of his notoriety, persuaded a commercial publisher to entitle his mass market book *Steal This Book*. A more sober U.S. example was the 1970s television miniseries *Roots*, which depicted some of the harshest aspects of slavery to a huge mass audience. Despite its limitations, it would probably never have been made at all had it not been for the Civil Rights and Black Power movements of the 1960s. These examples are but two that underscore how these various cultural strands are typically interspersed and intertwined with each other and can only be separated analytically.

The plural *cultures* is important for further reasons. Very few nations are monocultural, and even those that are overwhelmingly so, such as Japan or postwar Poland, typically have class and regional variants of the national culture. Gender and age cultures further diversify the picture. These various cultures are in a hierarchy, with bourgeois rank, whiteness, maleness, and correct mother tongue typically given an elevated standing, often quite simply consecrated as the national criterion for being taken seriously. But given all these elements, and not least the accelerating migration from one part of the globe to another over recent centuries, multicultural nations are the norm. Thus, minority ethnic media and feminist media, to take but two instances that ex-

press the priorities and aspirations of extruded cultures, constitute an important dimension of radical alternative media.

Peter Burke (1986) has a helpful essay in which he identifies three established approaches to popular culture. One he calls media based, the second he terms society based, and a third, that of the *Annales* historiographical school, emphasizes developments in popular culture over substantial periods of time (*longue durée*). The media-based analysis reflects Adorno. The society-based approach focuses, rather, on structural and institutional changes over the past two centuries, especially relations between social classes, and the influence these changes have sparked, culturally speaking, among subordinate classes.⁴ The *Annales* school has typically focused on premodern society and deploys quasi-ethnographic research designs. Burke pleads for a constructive synthesis of the two latter approaches, rejecting the first as threadbare. The particular point of value here is the historian's emphasis on the development of cultural forms and processes over extended periods of time, including centuries. A recurring and insidious temptation in media studies is to assess media from the singular vantage point of the contemporary moment. Both the impact and the origins of media become extremely foggy as a result. This is not least true of radical alternative media and oppositional cultures, which are already vulnerable to premature dismissal as ephemeral and therefore irrelevant.

DEFINING AUDIENCES

However, culture consists not only of texts or other artifacts, but also of their reception and use. We have already touched on the notion of audiences and readers, but once we address the question directly, we find that another central factor in this whole nexus is the kind of cultural appropriation that audiences perform on and with mass cultural products, often taking what they are offered and constructing imaginary scenarios from it, some of which have resonances with a liberating potential.

A path-breaking study by Janice Radway (1984) examined how women readers of Harlequin romance novelettes drew on them to dwell pleasurably on alternative, more satisfying types of gender relations

than the ones they themselves had experienced. Her study helped to spark a huge wave of audience research that in one way or another explored the cultural activism of audiences as they use commercial media products. One instance is TV series fans' Internet use to construct discussions and interpretations of their favorite television text, as in Henry Jenkins's (1992) study of *Star Trek* fans whom, following Michel de Certeau (1984), he terms "textual poachers." Thus, mainstream media products may well draw on popular culture, as Martín-Barbero proposes, but equally, even when molded or transmuted and then "handed back" by the commercial industries, these products are still subject to all kinds of interpretive influences generated—once again—from the public's everyday cultures.

In the two terms *popular culture* and *audiences*, we also see the conceptual overlaps and contradictions mentioned above as characteristic of the array of concepts I am deploying to make sense of radical alternative media. The first term was coined in the sociology of culture, where popular culture serves as a generic category referring variously to cultural production and reception by and within the public at large. Audience serves the corporate world as a highly specific designation of enumerated groups of viewers, listeners, and readers, derived from the market strategies and discourses of film and broadcasting firms, publishers, and advertisers. For payment, media firms seek to deliver to advertisers the eyes and ears of audiences, in the sense of groups of consumers with buying power.

The two terms, used thus, raise sharply different problematics and emerge from totally distinct perspectives, even though ostensibly both are defining actual human consumers of and generators of culture. To some degree, the terms have been yoked together in the concept of the "active audience," already adumbrated just above when Radway's work was discussed, namely, an audience that is conceived as working on and molding media products, not just passively soaking up their messages. The grassroots initiative implicit in popular culture and the ineluctable question of media text reception both have a foothold in this concept. However, although more astute advertisers endeavor to refine their messages in recognition that the audience is active, in their fundamental strategy, advertisers see audiences as being there to be persuaded and seduced—if necessary by sophisticated low-key methods that do not insult their intelligence—but not empowered.

DEFINING RADICAL MEDIA

The term *popular culture*, then, focuses attention on the matrix of radical alternative media, relatively free from the agenda of the powers that be and sometimes in opposition to one or more elements in that agenda. At the same time, the term serves to remind us that all such media are part of popular culture and of the overall societal mesh and are not tidily segregated into a radical political reservation.⁵ They are endemically, therefore, a mixed phenomenon, quite often free and radical in certain respects and not in others. Sadly, the record speaks for itself of many women suffragists' failures to oppose slavery, of many abolitionists' failures to support women's suffrage, and of much of organized labor's failure in relation to both women workers and workers of color. Mixed, indeed.

The popular culture frame also prods us to acknowledge two further issues central to the argument of this book. The first is that the full spectrum of radical media in modern cultures includes a huge gamut of activities, from street theater and murals to dance and song—see the Panorama section of this book—and not just radical uses of the technologies of radio, video, press, and Internet. The second is equally important, namely, what Edward Thompson (1978) described as the forgotten half of people's culture:

[People] also experience their own experience as *feeling* [italics added] and they handle their feelings within their culture, as norms, familial and kinship obligations and reciprocity, as values, or (through more elaborate forms) within art or religious beliefs. This half of culture (and it is a full one-half) may be described as affective and moral consciousness. (p. 352)

On the other hand, the term audiences (in the plural) forces our sometimes unwilling attention toward actual users of media. It pushes us to consider the real flows of media influence, including those of radical media, and not simply to speculate concerning hoped-for flows. If audiences are redefined as media users rather than as consumers, as active rather than uncritical, and as various (audiences) rather than as homogeneous, then the term is able to be freed of much of its purely marketing baggage.

In this process, the dividing line between active media users and radical alternative media producers becomes much more blurred. It be-

comes more productive to envision a kind of ascending scale in terms of logistical complexity, all the way from interpreting mainstream media texts in liberating ways, à la Janice Radway and many others, through writing graffiti on billboards and culture-jamming,⁶ to occasional flyers and posters, up to systematically organized and autonomous media production over extended periods of time. Juxtaposing the concept of popular culture as qualified by Martín-Barbero with this refined and not commercially driven definition of the term *audiences* offers a framework within which we can more easily understand the operation of radical alternative media.

However, we need to link the notion of audiences to two further major considerations. One is the question of time scale, the other the question of social movements.

Audience research as practiced is overwhelmingly interested in the instantaneous. Longer term impact is an extravagance in terms of commercial priorities. The notion of "slow burn," as in Peter Burke's (1986) urging that we consider the longer term in popular culture, which might have much more relevance to small-scale alternative media, is not on the agenda. If, however, the implication of radical alternative media content is that certain kinds of change are urgently needed in the economic or political structure, but the present is very clearly one in which such changes are unimaginable, then the role of those media is to keep alive the vision of what might be, for a time in history when it may actually be feasible. A classic instance here would be *samizdat* media in Russia and Eastern Europe during the Soviet era (see the Panorama section [Part III] and Chapter 22 for further details). But one might equally cite as instances some of the work of Blake or Goya, virtually unseen in their own lifetimes, but with an ongoing impact two centuries later.

Audiences, as a term, implies something rather static, typically wrapped cozily around a TV set at home. Social movements, as a term, implies something active and on the streets. We will review social movements more closely later, but it is important to grasp that audiences and movements do not live segregated the one from the other. In the ongoing life of social movements, audiences overlap with movement activity, and the interrelation may be very intense between the audiences for media, including radical alternative media, and those movements. Thus, the somewhat static, individualized—or at least domesticated—audience is only one mode of appropriating media content. Radical alternative media impact needs to be disentangled, therefore, from the often axiomatic assumptions we have about audiences.

Summary: Popular culture is the generic matrix of radical alternative media. It also intertwines with commercialized mass culture and oppositional cultures. In active, multicultural audiences, we may see the joint architects—along with textual producers—of media meanings, sometimes poaching what they want from media products and subverting the values originally intended. In turn, some of these joint architects, drawing on popular movements and oppositional cultures, may themselves become producers of radical media and, then, risk textual poaching—which is a glancing acknowledgment of one of the aspects of radical media that has been least studied and is most in need of it, namely their audiences/readership, a topic that this book only addresses at a very general level. An urgent and intriguing research terrain beckons.

But in thinking about cultural and audience processes as they relate to radical media, we need to assess them over the long term as well as in the immediate moment and to view them in relation to the dynamic of social movements. (Both these are recurring and important strands in this book's argument.)

However, we need now to add to the concepts already reviewed by exploring in more detail notions of power, hegemony, and resistance that have been implicit so far. In the preceding discussion of the hierarchy of cultures and of interactions between popular culture and mass culture, we have stepped sharply away from a common assumption about culture, which is that it simply emerges spontaneously from the bowels of society. It is naive to suppose that either culture or communication are anything so innately democratic, although their construction is certainly more emergent than it is presciently organized. In communication and culture, power processes and differentials are everywhere.

NOTES

1. See, for example, Fiske (1988), and for a very interesting study that is not hobbled by that approach, Fiske (1995).
2. Martín-Barbero's (1993) text is one in which I have found valuable confirmation and inspiration for this study.
3. Sadly, in some postmodernist writing, hybridity itself has been inflated into a mantra, with everyday life, as Tony Bennett (1992) so splendidly put it, "construed as a rich domain of the unfathomable" (p. 11). The seductiveness of all-purpose concepts is remarkable.

4. Examples include the work of Raymond Williams (1977) and E. P. Thompson (1968, 1978, 1993).

5. Lenin, in his famous strategy text, *What Is To Be Done?* (1902/1965), sought strictly to demarcate the Marxist political party press from the general run of oppositional expression, not only by its tight organizational hierarchy but also by its pristine political content guaranteed by professional revolutionary intellectuals. We will return to this topic below.

6. This term means using official cultural symbols against their intended purpose. For more on the subject, see Chapter 12.

2

Power, Hegemony, Resistance

To illuminate the relation between power and culture and, most particularly, the roles of radical alternative media within that relation, I propose to play with a mazurka of concepts drawn from socialist and feminist anarchism, Antonio Gramsci, and some other sources on subversive ploys in everyday life. Specifically,

- Socialist and feminist anarchism's identification of multiple sources of subordination beyond capitalism's directly economic dimension; what, in other words, is the full range of forces that radical media are combating?
- Gramsci's exploration of capitalist cultural hegemony and popular counterhegemony; where do radical media fit?
- Scott's examination of everyday resistance tactics; what is the relation between them and radical media activism?

THE CONCEPT OF POWER

Power is potentially one of the more vacuous concepts in social and cultural analysis. It can refer to everything from the sadistic secret

police of a dictatorial regime to the diffused networks of micropower addressed in Michel Foucault's work (e.g., Foucault, 1977). In a Marxist framework, it can refer to a fusion between economic and political dominance for good (in a socialist regime) or, over the long term, for ill (under capitalism). Within a socialist-anarchist framework, power often carries a dual negative, namely, capital and the centralized state. In a right-wing anarchist framework, frequently found within the contemporary United States, the problem of power is defined as the state pure and simple, with the power of capital strangely off the map. In addition, the word may denote popular power and the power to resist as well as the competitive power struggle between corporate leaders. It may also denote positive power, the capacity to achieve something or create something (see the discussion of Macpherson in Chapter 4). Yet, everyone uses the word *power* freely and therein often lies a major problem in its discussion: the inaccurate assumption of shared meaning.

We will begin by noting an important contribution of socialist anarchism¹ to understanding the issues (cf. Martín-Barbero, 1993, pp. 13-17). A number of particular strengths in anarchist angles of vision have a bearing on radical alternative media. The one I will focus on at this point—others will surface later—is the emphasis on multiple realities of oppression beyond the economic. The tendency in Marxist thinking to focus exclusively on political economy is much rarer within anarchism, although somewhat in evidence in its syndicalist version. When reading Emma Goldman's (1970, 1974) lectures or autobiography, for instance, the breadth of her concerns is evident—the theater, women's rights, contraceptive education, sexuality, prisons, puritanism, patriotism, the positive intellectual contributions of Freud and Nietzsche—as is the fact that they are valued in their own right or denounced (prisons, etc.) for their impact on the human personality *in its entirety*, not just in terms of economic exploitation. Marxist writers often seem to have to link everything to political economy for their analysis to be validated; having made the linkage, which is predictably present at some point or points, the analysis is then considered complete.²

Within anarchism, however, there is a recognition, as David Wieck (1979) has put it, "that any theory that finds the secret of human liberation in something as specific as the politics of property neglects the interdependence of the many liberations" (p. 143). Defining the source of the problems we face and the nature of the power that maintains them

is central to deciding how to address them. The angles of vision of socialist anarchism, historically Marxism's chief antagonist on the Left, offer a significantly wider view than does conventional Marxism.

GRAMSCI'S NOTION OF HEGEMONY

In recent decades, however, the writings of Antonio Gramsci from the 1920s and 1930s (Gramsci, 1971; see also Femia, 1981; Forgacs, 1988; Hall, 1986; Lears, 1985) have been a very influential source of thinking about power, capitalism, and culture within European, Latin American, and even some U.S. circles. Paradoxically, despite his Marxist credentials, Gramsci could be faulted for having had less to say on economic issues than they deserve, but his analyses of culture and power are remarkable for their sensitivity and precision. Elsewhere, I have offered a more detailed evaluation of his relevance to general media analysis and have suggested that a more diffuse notion of *hegemony* is probably more productive than tying ourselves to all the specifics of his *egemonia* concept (Downing, 1996, pp. 199-204). Here, it will suffice to establish some of the basics.

Gramsci's strategy for resisting and eventually overcoming the power of the capitalist class³ in its most advanced nations, and thereby for deeply democratizing those nations, rested on his conviction of the need to challenge and displace the cultural dominance and leadership (= hegemony) of their ruling classes with a coherent and convincing alternative vision of how society might organize itself. He argued that over the two centuries of its expansion and consolidation, capitalism maintained and organized its leadership through agencies of information and culture such as schools and universities, the churches, literature, philosophy, media, and corporate ideologies. The perspectives on the wider society generated within these institutions often produced, he proposed, an unquestioning view of the world that took the status quo as inevitable and ruling class power as founded on that class's unique, self-evident ability to run the nation successfully (whatever the critiques of the class's individual members).

Thus, although the system was also powered by its economic mechanisms and shored up during political crises by the use of police, courts, jails, and ultimately the military (= the state in the classical Marxist sense), mass hegemonic institutions such as those listed were, so to

speak, its first line of defense, its outer ramparts. At the same time, their cultural influence emerged over protracted periods of time, not—outside of a fascist scenario—through some centrally orchestrated plan.

A hegemonic socialist countervision of a nation's future, Gramsci argued, would be constructed over time through mass involvement—quite unlike the subordination of wage workers and small farmers characteristic in capitalist hegemony. A socialist hegemony would embrace this majority of the public, whose demands and priorities would constantly develop it further. This majority political movement would largely be led—but should never, in his vision, be manipulated or crunched underfoot—by a communist party.⁴

At all events, whatever our take on some of the specifics of Gramsci's analysis, it is reasonable to acknowledge that some forms of organized leadership are essential to coordinate challenges to the ideological hegemony of capital and to put forward credible alternative programs and perspectives. In this regard, his notion of the "organic intellectual" might almost be re-rendered as the "communicator/activist," inasmuch as for Gramsci the term *intellectual* never implied people sitting by themselves and thinking great thoughts that only they and a small circle might share. Gramsci looked forward to the role of intellectuals/activist communicators organically integrated with the laboring classes in developing a just and culturally enhanced social order, in contradistinction to those intellectuals organically integrated with the ruling classes, whose communicative labors strengthened the hegemony of capital.

Subsequently—although Gramsci himself never used the terms— notions of *counterhegemony* and *counterhegemonic* have become fairly common among writers influenced by his thinking, as a way to categorize attempts to challenge dominant ideological frameworks and to supplant them with a radical alternative vision. Many radical alternative media clearly belong within this frame. A proliferation of such media would be vital, both to help generate those alternatives in public debate and also to limit any tendency for oppositional leadership, whatever forms it took, to entrench itself as an agency of domination rather than freedom.

At the same time, Gramsci's perspective offers a fresh way of understanding such media. In a framework within which classes and the capitalist state are analyzed simply as controlling and censoring information, the role of radical media can be seen as trying to disrupt the silence,

to counter the lies, to provide the truth. This is the counterinformation model (cf. Baldelli, 1977; Herman, 1992; Jensen, 1997), which has a strong element of validity, most especially under highly reactionary and repressive regimes. Mattelart's (1974, pp. 75-123, 233-267) pioneering study of radical media in the Popular Unity period in Chile from 1970 through 1973 is a classical instance. His conceptual handling of the issues was fairly rudimentary, framed mostly in terms of alternative media as devices for giving voice to the Left's political parties, given that major media were unavailable and hostile, agents of what he brilliantly characterized as a Leninist mass agitation campaign from the extreme Right (pp. 187-229).⁵

However, Gramsci's position directs our attention equally to less tense, perhaps more everyday scenarios, in which one way of describing capitalist hegemony would be in terms of *self-censorship*⁶ by mainstream media professionals or other organic intellectuals in positions of authority, their unquestioning acceptance of standard professional media codes. Radical media in those scenarios have a mission not only to provide facts to a public denied them but to explore fresh ways of developing a questioning perspective on the hegemonic process and increasing the public's sense of confidence in its power to engineer constructive change.

Gramsci, however, was always at great pains to emphasize that (a) hegemony is never frozen stiff but is always under negotiation between superior and subordinate social classes, that (b) capitalist cultural hegemony is unstable and may experience serious intermittent crises, yet at the same time (c) that it may enjoy a rarely questioned normalcy over long periods.

Gramsci's approach has been attacked from a variety of quarters (e.g., Anderson, 1977; Bennett, 1992). The critique by anthropologist James C. Scott (1985, pp. 314-326; 1990) is the most interesting one for our purposes, because it raises very directly the nature of counterhegemonic resistance cultures. The issue is central in that their respective positions could be described as one in which the public mostly acknowledges the rectitude of its condition and the ability of the ruling classes to lead (Gramsci), as opposed to one in which the public is seething with systematically masked discontent (Scott). As a result, radical media could easily be read two very different ways: as necessary to build counterhegemony but only truly powerful at times of political upsurge, or as within a heartbeat of expressing deeply entrenched and disruptive

mass discontent (although Scott's analysis does not address media as such, only symbolic communication).

SCOTT'S EXAMINATION OF RESISTANCE

Scott (1990) dwells at length on "hidden transcripts" and "infra-politics" (pp. 15-19, 67, 87, 111, 120, 132, 183f., 191, 200). By these, he means similar things, namely, that each social class or antagonistic group has a public statement of what it considers itself to be doing and a private one that only circulates within the group. Infra-politics, Scott (1990) argues, expresses the real, private levels of resistance and anger, typically not simply about the economic exploitation people face but also about "the pattern of personal humiliations that characterize" it, "arbitrary beatings, sexual violations, and other insults" (pp. 111-112, 21). The infra-politics of the poor hatches a variety of acts of resistance, some very subtle to the untutored gaze, some intentionally ambiguous so that even given the elite's watchful and tutored eyes, there would be insufficient grounds for reprisals. Or, in the case of the powerful elites, infra-politics meant their hidden transcript of contempt and anger at poor farmers.

In Scott's view, many, including Gramsci, are too willing to overlook "the massive middle ground, in which conformity is often a self-conscious strategy and resistance is a carefully balanced affair that avoids all-or-nothing confrontations" (Scott, 1985, p. 285), and manages thereby "to miss the immense political terrain that lies between quiescence and revolt . . . [and instead] to focus on the visible coastline [rather than] the continent that lies beyond" (Scott, 1990, p. 199). That middle ground is occupied by a "constant testing of the limits . . . hardly has the dust cleared before the probing to regain lost territory is likely to begin" (Scott, 1990, p. 197). Within "the continent that lies beyond" Scott locates insincere flattery, feigned stupidity, hostile gossip, malicious rumor, magical spells, anonymous threats, songs, folktales, gestures, jokes, grumbling, arson, sabotage, lateness, and failure to return to work after the midday break. He includes, too, what he terms "imposed mutuality," namely, the sanctions imposed by the group on individuals who are ready to break ranks and kowtow to the elite (Scott, 1985, pp. 241, 258-60; 1990, pp. xiii, 140).⁷

Scott's instances strongly echo the panorama of oppositional culture traced out in Part II. We have argued there is powerful reason to

take into account all the levels of cultural action of which he speaks and to see them all as radical alternative communication, sometimes in media form, sometimes expressed purely through conversational networks.

Together, Gramsci and Scott have a great deal to bring to our discussion, not least their common acknowledgment of the bedrock realities of economic exploitation, political power, and social class *relations*. In some ways the difference between the two is one of focus. Gramsci was concerned with class politics in leading capitalist nations during the first third of the 20th century and often wrote more from the historian's viewpoint on long-term seismic shifts in politics and culture, such as the Renaissance, the Reformation, the Italian Risorgimento. Scott, by contrast, is concerned with a thick ethnographic description of the immediacies of micropolitical conflict, as expressed through many symbols and forms of communication, within a Third World agrarian setting in transition.

Scott does spend more time on detailing everyday resistance within this framework than does Gramsci. Yet, to understand counterhegemony in general, or radical alternative media in particular, it is essential not only to understand the dominant local class, as Scott takes considerable pains to do, but also the wider history and trajectory of the dominant classes nationally. Only armed with such understanding is it possible to comprehend why radical media are born and have sway outside an immediate locality or to evaluate their performance. Their context is not merely society, abstractly, but particular conjunctures of elite policy, as well as struggles for power—cultural, economic, and political.

MULTIPLE SOURCES OF OPPRESSION

To bring the story full circle, and also as a segue into the discussion of social movements, let us pick up again the socialist anarchist theme of the multiple sources of oppression in society. Sheila Rowbotham (1981), writing from a libertarian Marxist feminist perspective, echoes this in a way that also directly poses the urgency of lateral communication, of media of resistance:

For if every form of oppression has its own defensive suspicions, all the movements in resistance to humiliation and inequality also discover their own wisdoms. We require a socialist movement in which

there is freedom for these differences and nurture for these visions. This means that in the making of socialism people can develop positively their own strengths and find ways of communicating to one another what we have gained. (pp. 46-47)

The communication she means is not first and foremost a matter of having a printing press or a radio transmitter or Internet access, but it must surely include that. Sharing perceptively the gamut of issues plaguing social life, as experienced from numerous vantage points, and sharing their possible solutions, and sharing in hilarity at their daily idiocies, too, fit the potential of media far more than any other counterhegemonic institutions, such as a party, a union, or a council.⁸ Resistance, in other words, is resistance to multiple sources of oppression, but in turn, it requires dialogue across the varying sectors—by gender; by race, ethnicity, and nationality; by age; by occupational grouping—to take effective shape. Radical alternative media are central to that process.

Summary: Radical media activists have very often experienced state repression—execution, jailing, torture, fascist assaults, the bombing of radical radio stations, threats, police surveillance, and intimidation tactics.⁹ It is hopelessly naive to see their operation as simply part of a war of ideas conducted by Queensberry rules. The story of radical media, as Gramsci himself knew only too painfully in his own life, is all too often one of survival and tension in the face of vehemently, sometimes murderously hostile authority. Placing radical alternative media within this larger context of state power, hegemony, and insubordination is a necessary step toward understanding them. We need to be alert to multiple forms of power and subordination, often interlocking; to the centrality of culture as the ground on which struggles for freedom and justice are fought out; and to the powerful operation of microsubversive strategies. However, these strategies do not explode into life outside of a culture of resistance, social movements, and their networks of exchange and debate. Earlier, I noted how important social movements are for understanding radical media, and so it is to them that we now turn.

NOTES

1. The treasured and long-running stereotype of the anarchist as lunatic bomb-thrower is a convenient way to excuse oneself from thinking about the often searching questions raised in anarchist writing, most of which has

shunned terrorist methods. We should begin with the recognition that anarchism is not purely a philosophy. In many countries, the labor movement has been deeply influenced by it, with Spain being the pre-eminent example, but others include Italy, Portugal, Mexico, and other Latin American countries. Until 1917, the British labor movement had a considerable anarchist element. Anarchist thinking has been correspondingly diverse and multifaceted, divided not only into its syndicalist wing and its purer wing, rejecting all centralized national organization, but also into many different small groups. There is no single anarchist view on many questions—indeed anarchists have been as capable of vicious sectarian infighting as any other political tendency.

2. There is an argument, although it cannot be developed here, that it was the mistaken enthronement of Marx's (1977) *Capital* as his crowning achievement and therefore as the bible of the Marxist movement, that in turn diverted attention from his own much broader methodology, which had rather little in common with what subsequently often passed for Marxism. (See Colletti, 1972; Negri, 1991.)

3. Much of the confusion that has historically emerged over Marxist analysis of social classes has arisen from the projection—by many Marxists and many non-Marxists—of a unified political consciousness on to subordinate classes, especially wage workers. Thus, the focus has shifted tacitly but very substantively away from the leadership and direction of society supplied by capitalist classes to wage workers' class awareness and resistance. Always the most helpful way to understand how the Marxist analytical tradition (at its best) conceives of classes is to begin by focusing on the corporate sector and its policies, largely formed within national and international market competition, and on state regulations in relation to the workforce, national and global. Corporate policies are not necessarily consistent or coherent, not necessarily well-advised, not necessarily farseeing, but they exist and have repercussions and ramifications that sooner or later stretch into every corner of life. By the close of the 20th century, this corporate sector, at its most influential, consisted of huge transnational corporations, the majority ultimately based in the United States, but no more necessarily compliant with U.S. government policy at any one time than were their purely domestic corporate forebears. The responses the policies generate in the various realms of societal life in turn may spark fresh policies (be they short- or long-term, nice or nasty). Over time, the push and pull that ensues has proved to be a tremendous motor force within nations and today, increasingly, internationally.

This relational and historical concept of class is utterly distinct from the stunted one common in public discourse in the United States, where *middle class* means the vast bulk of the population. It is also sharply different from the American social science use of *class* to mean socioeconomic status (SES), which is a simple conceptual grid imposed on a nation or community at a particular point in its history to distinguish between the wealthy, the not-so-wealthy and the poor as consumers and status holders, with relative power almost absent from the picture. Finally, it has nothing to do with the lampoon version of Marxist thinking, in which there are just two social classes that will slug it out

until the bigger one (the proletariat) wins and then everyone will be happy forever after. The concept of class I am deploying, I argue, is no mantra, but a way of cutting through conceptually to the bone of issues, in the cultural and media sphere as elsewhere. Its function is not to end debate but to focus it and to prompt penetrating further questions.

4. In view of the political record of many communist parties in the 20th century, although not all, this element of his vision is liable to raise acute and justified anxiety. It is important, therefore, to remember that his own year's stay in the Soviet Union was during its very early period, in a much more open atmosphere immediately following the 1918-1920 civil war and before Stalin was officially in charge or even widely known. Furthermore, Gramsci was jailed from 1926 until a few days before his death in 1937, barred from receiving information or even many visits. Thus, while his vision of the future role of a communist party may have been flawed, it was not a vision based on the historical experience that would so tragically and terrifyingly disfigure the socialist movements of the 20th century. Adamson (1987) interestingly suggests that Gramsci expressed a quasi-religious perception of the future role of Marxism in a revolutionary society, seeing it as a kind of secular faith that would serve to integrate society's goals and general culture within a socially just and democratic order. Thus, even if Gramsci might be attacked for Pollyanna-ism, Stalinism was not his stock in trade. Of course, this vagueness about the future can also be attacked for paving the way, through its optimism, for ruthless opportunists to seize and wield power in the name of justice and counterhegemony.

5. Arguably, Mattelart failed sufficiently to problematize the parties of the Left, which maintained a fierce sectarian hostility toward each other even a full decade after the Popular Unity experiment had been drowned in blood under the Pinochet coup. It is also plausible that even had the parties been less obsessed with competing with each other, their instinctively authoritarian culture would have narrowed the impact of the media under their control. At the same time, the dynamism of the Right's media campaigns in that period, with energetic assistance from the CIA, does not make this a simple question to resolve. See Simpson Grinberg (1986b) and Huesca and Dervin (1994) for arguments that this dualistic phase of thinking about radical media in Latin America needed to be, and was, supplanted by more complex models.

6. Self-censorship can, of course, take different forms, one conscious, in which there is a specific decision to avoid a danger area, and the other entrenched to the point of being instinctual and unconscious. The latter is a stronger instance of hegemony in the Gramscian sense.

7. Scott's account of Gramsci tends to conflate him, without actually stating so, with Max Weber, whose concept of legitimation proposes a dualistic model in which regimes are or are not legitimated, whether in traditional terms, bureaucratically, or charismatically. There is none of the middle ground for analysis suggested by Gramsci's acknowledgment that hegemony is negotiated over time and is subject to crises and instability. Furthermore, Scott (1985, p. 314) cites the famous aphorism from Marx and Engels's (1972) *The German Ideology*—that the ruling ideas are the ideas of the ruling class—as

though this little rhetorical nugget perfectly encapsulated Gramsci's political analysis. Any reasonable reading of Gramsci, I submit, will not support this. Scott even (p. 340) refers to the notion of a hegemonic ideology as equivalent to a political theory of general anesthesia. In this, I think, he has completely misread Gramsci, perhaps confusing his work with versions of Gramsci passed through the work of Louis Althusser (1971), who defined ideology as a unitary cultural perspective solidly supportive of the capitalist order.

8. Mainstream media are conspicuously unsuccessful here, the "bare-all" TV talk-shows of the 1990s and the agony columns being pitiful caricatures of this potential.

9. See Parts II and III of this book for numerous instances. See, too, Aronson (1972, pp. 39-61), Armstrong (1981, pp. 137-159), Rips (1981), and a number of the case studies in the first version of this book (Downing, 1984), which are not included in this one.

3

Social Movements, the Public Sphere, Networks

The argument in this segment will be as follows:

- Social movements represent one of the most dynamic expressions of resistance, as contrasted with more stable and enduring institutions such as unions or parties.¹
- Their importance for understanding radical media and oppositional cultures is enormous.
- Movement upsurges appear both to generate and to be stimulated by radical media.² Conversely, at times when such movements are at a low ebb, the flood of alternative media also subsides.
- However, this is not the end of the matter. Properly understood, the relation between movements and radical media is not one of base and superstructure but one of dialectical and indeed acute interdependence.
- The second related question is triangular: the connections between social movements, media (both radical and mainstream), and the so-called public sphere.

- The third question is the relation between radical media and non-media communication networks.

SOCIAL MOVEMENTS AND RADICAL MEDIA

We need to begin by clarifying what is meant by a social movement. Obvious as the term may sound, it has been variously deployed in the aftermath of the many social and political upheavals across the globe since the 19th century.

Arato and Cohen (1992, Chapter 10) offer a threefold classification of the senses in which it has been used. The earliest model was that of the rioting mob, the crowd in tumult, acting blindly and insensately, driven only by emotions wildly out of control—in other words the *perception* of mass public activism typical among those horrified alike by the French Revolution and by labor and socialist upsurges.³ In flat opposition to this model is the second model, that of social movements as rational actors. In this view, members of the general public, because they lack property and are often impoverished, have to generate alternative resources to wield influence over the political and allocation process. These alternative resources consist of such collective actions as strikes, sit-ins, occupations, demonstrations, go-slows, and traffic blocking. So far from being irrational eruptions by crazed mobs, these actions consist of carefully considered tactics on the part of those without wealth or state power.

A third model comes from academic research on so-called New Social Movements (NSMs), namely, ecological, feminist, or peace-oriented social movements. Some scholars argue that these movements represent a qualitatively new stage in contemporary political culture, sharply marked off from the characteristics of earlier social movements, especially the labor movement. Whereas the labor movement, for example, sought to achieve specific economic gains from the capitalist class and to pressure governments into legislation and policy initiatives that its leaders felt would benefit the rank and file, NSMs had no such calculated material outcome. Rather, said these researchers, NSMs sought goals in large measure independent of what the state might concede, goals that bore a much closer relationship to a sense of personal growth and identity in interaction with the subculture of the movement. An emblematic instance of what NSM theorists had in mind would be the

“consciousness-raising” dimension of U.S. and Western European feminist movements in the 1960s and early 1970s, in which small groups of women would meet together to talk through their life experiences, with the aim of exploring and thus shaking off in their own psyches the patriarchal restraints to which they had been subjected from birth—but without necessarily setting up any subsequent organized project based on this exploration. Collective identity was all.

Much of the problem with the NSM literature lies in its most eager advocates’ almost messianic conviction that they have stumbled on a major new dimension of contemporary culture. Social movements that did not fit their schema, such as the labor movement, were effectively consigned to the trash can of a prior epoch, now waned. The literature was also very Western in focus: Movements in other parts of the world, such as the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa and its support network across the globe, or Afro-Brazilian political movements, or the Palestinian *intifada*, or even the nationalist movement in Québec were not on the map at all. Nor, seemingly, was the U.S. Civil Rights Movement.

Furthermore, the NSM current had a tendency to be blind to any aspects of “its” movements that did not fit its conceptual mold. Thus, those aspects of feminist movements that sought better day care facilities, or improved widows’ pensions, or new legal protections for rape victims—in other words, concrete outcomes from governmental sources—simply seemed to be off the NSM analytical map. These are not the only instances of a certain programmed blindness to movement facets that evaded the model’s parameters. For instance, the antinuclear movement pressed governments to close down nuclear power stations, to dismantle missiles, and to not build any more stations (or weapons). Parts of the ecological movement focused on environmental racism, attacking the established tendency for firms, with the support of local governments, to build toxic waste dumps close to minority ethnic communities. This was hardly pure identity politics.

Elsewhere, I have discussed these three approaches at greater length (Downing, 1996, pp. 18-22, 26-27, 96-102, 111-112). Here, let us simply note that each contributes something to our understanding of social movements and resistance, even the mob approach on a purely descriptive level. Political movements are a vital component of politics in many contemporary nations, not least in those where formal political processes have become colonized by the presumed demands of main-

stream television on the one hand and by the colossal costs of campaigning on the other. In this situation, mainstream political parties are less and less responsive to the deepest public needs. The dynamism in the political process is, therefore, often derived from political movements operating outside the party structures, although admittedly often in some relationship with one or more political parties. Parties legislate, but they do not generally initiate or lead major movements of social opinion. This means that the political life energy and the burning issues of a nation are more often to be found in and around social movements than in the official institutions of democracy.

These movement flashpoints may be of a retrograde variety, like the anti-immigrant poison that seeps⁴ out of Western nations—although not only them. Or they may be constructive, such as antinuclear or feminist movements. The fact remains, they are where the action is, and therefore, public debate, dialogue, and conversation take place around their agendas. The essential point is that in the life of social movements, there are dizzy highs and lows, dramatic moments, conflicts and splits, and generally an intense interaction with forces and subcultures on their boundaries as well as in opposition to them. Communication and media, both within their ranks and without, play a huge role in movement trajectories. Oddly, however, much of the social movement literature fails to engage in any disciplined way with the question of communication and media. For the mob approach, communication takes place by some barbaric chemistry; for the rational actor approach, by dint of demonstrations and other organized expressions of discontent; and for the NSM approach, by sustained mulling over questions of identity inside the movement itself.

It is on the edge of being weird that there is so little systematic analysis of communication or media in the social movement literature. There is now a growing communication literature on the relations between mainstream media and movements⁵ and on alternative media of the movements.⁶ It frankly beggars the imagination to explain how so many social movement specialists could think it feasible to analyze the dynamics of social movements without systematic attention to their media and communication.

There are, of course, counterarguments that such media have been in sharp decline, and in this case, their relative neglect would not count for much. Jakubowicz (1993) proposes that alternative media were very much a phenomenon of the turbulent 1960s and 1970s and that their

proliferation should not be thought of as a permanent feature of modern media environments. Neveu (1999) writes of "the crisis of militant media" (p. 47).

The problem with this critique is to find an empirical yardstick for the claim that radical media are withering away. Almost by their nature, they often go unmeasured, uncounted, and poorly known in official circles or outside their localities. Generally—as is the argument of this book—their power is misperceived because they are not stereotypical mainstream media. Historically, however, as Part II will illustrate, such media have been a constant. Some, as the Soviet era and Portuguese examples in this book will testify, have been extraordinarily potent and wide-ranging in their impact. Obituaries for radical media, I would venture to suggest, are premature.⁷

HABERMAS AND THE PUBLIC SPHERE

At the close of their review of the three interpretations of social movements, Arato and Cohen (1992) propose that in the contemporary period, social movements constitute what they call the public sphere.⁸ Here, they lock social movements together with the concept of *Öffentlichkeit* originally defined by Habermas (1962/1989) to embrace the alternative zone of freer speech and critique of monarchical government that he identified as emerging in the 18th century, especially among the intellectual elite in London's coffee- and teahouses. Regrettably, they only assert this effective fusion conceptually, without articulating further the numerous ways in which it would presumably be expressed. Nor is the problem of media on their radar. However, let us explore the concept *Öffentlichkeit*, and then return to their basic insight.

A whole literature has grown up around the term *public sphere*, the expression usually used to translate Habermas's term *Öffentlichkeit*, a word for which there is no single English equivalent that carries its range of senses.⁹ Perhaps the easiest way to garner the sense in which Habermas uses the term is to consider the related but opposite sociopolitical reality, namely, the royal court. As the European monarchies gradually lost their absolute powers, a factor directly involved was the extension of the sphere of political influence and debate outside the narrow confines of the courts. Courts slowly lost their power to these wider circles. Communication and information, including broadsheets, flyers,

and early types of newspapers, all of which circulated in the settings noted above, were crucial elements within this gradually widening zone of influence and debate. The virtual monopoly of the court over official politics was slowly eaten away. Thus, the openness and publicity represented by the word *Öffentlichkeit* were a break with the seclusion and secrecy of the royal courts. (In the contemporary era, Habermas claimed, corporate and government hegemony had ironed this public sphere out of existence.)

Admittedly, the developments Habermas pointed to were gradual and patchy and were under constraints he took for granted in his original essay. For instance, in the English setting, class and gender held sway: women were effectively excluded, along with provincial elites and indeed the great majority of the male population. In prerevolutionary France, by contrast, a few women who ran some of the famous Paris salons, which also extended political debate and influence beyond the court, were at the very heart of this expansion. Paradoxically, as Landes (1988) has shown, after a very brief experiment with further steps in women's emancipation during the French Revolution, women were then excluded from the public sphere and for some decades had less scope than previously to wield public influence.

Habermas also tended to define debate and rational exchange as activities characteristic of the public sphere. Iris Marion Young (1990, Chapter 4) has argued that this is a very masculine perception of the deliberative process. Not only is the exclusion of women passed over in silence, but the presumption is that successful discussion and review of a matter only operates, and can only operate, in a completely antiseptic rationalistic mode.¹⁰ Yet, a number of the radical alternative media reviewed in Part II from precisely those periods in England and France show very clearly, through their use of irony, satire, caricature, cartoon, slander, innuendo, salacious public gossip, and pornography, that sober, clearly argued debate was no more victorious then, or the dominant mode of discourse, than we see it to be today. If we think of the radical Methodist chapels or the bars of 18th-century London, the radical underworld that McCalman (1988) has so vividly described, or the vigorous and sometimes scurrilous satire depicted by Donald (1996) and Wood (1994), then it is hard to envisage in those settings the orderly reasoned discourse that supposedly would have tapped its desiccated way along its appointed paths.

In a direct response to Habermas, two Marxist critics, Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge (1972/1993), argued that in the contemporary era the notion of a *proletarian* public sphere should head the agenda. Rather than engage in Habermas's lament for the disappearance of a bourgeois public sphere, the settings in which the proletariat could debate its past, present, and future were, they urged, the really interesting question. There was a strongly doctrinaire and abstractly utopian character to large parts of their argument, but it suggested an important qualification in principle, namely, the identification of alternative zones for radical debate and reflection within present-day society.

One attempt to tie the term down to some form of relevance for radical media analysis was my own study of the antinuclear movement media in what was then West Germany (Downing, 1988a). I proposed that an alternative public sphere was empirically visible in the movement organizations and the flood of antinuclear books, pamphlets, magazines, and flyers that circulated at that time. (West Germany, Britain, the Netherlands and Italy, were then the epicenters of European antinuclear activism.) I similarly suggested (Downing, 1989) that certain forms of political activism in the United States, centering on then quite novel alternative computer uses, could be termed examples of an alternative public sphere.

Implicit was not only the notion of two types of public sphere, alternative and official, but also the variety of such spheres in and around social movements. This latter theme is precisely the subject of an outstanding essay by Fraser (1993), who writes in favor of the notion of "counter public spheres," strongly alluding to a Gramscian problematic but also recognizing the pluralism existing on the Left. She also directly involves feminist perspectives and movements in her analysis, although unlike Rowbotham, she does not address what this pluralism may bring with it or how far pluralism and fissiparity are distinct terms. Broude and Garrard (1994) provide an excellent discussion and reproductions of the dynamic impact of feminist movements on art in the United States during the 1970s, which wonderfully illustrates Fraser's argument.

So if the spatial metaphor does not require an actual agora, if the spatial dimension is overly accentuated by the terms *sphere* and *realm*, if it is the activity within locations or inside groups or particular forums that is the matter in hand, then surely the essence of what is being pinpointed in the terminology of *Öffentlichkeit*/public sphere is informa-

tion, communication, debate, media—public conversation¹¹ on issues of moment. The effective fusion between public sphere and social movements proposed by Arato and Cohen (1992) injects into the somewhat static, locational sense of public sphere precisely the kinetic, contested dimension this translation of *Öffentlichkeit* lacks. Arato and Cohen, however, make no distinction between public sphere and alternative public sphere; for them, the public sphere is necessarily a democratic forum.

However, although we may prefer Arato and Cohen's optimism that there is a public sphere in the contemporary world to Habermas's pessimism that it is dead and gone, we must not lose sight for a moment of the fact that this public conversation within social movements is still shaped within the powerful impulses of capitalist economies, racialized social orders, and patriarchal cultures. Power, hegemony, and resistance are everywhere etched into and suffused within the institutions and practices of public dialogue and social movements, just as popular culture may be elitist, sexist, racist, and the rest.

As we pull together the threads of social movements, public sphere, and radical media, Raboy's (1984) hard-headed study of alternative and mainstream media and the nationalist movement in Québec in the 1960s and 1970s helpfully illustrates this discussion. A prevailing tendency with which I am doing constant battle in this book is to ask whether radical media have any impact at all. This leaves their status perpetually teetering on the edge of conceptual emptiness. Raboy, without ever romanticizing them, takes the opposite tack, to the point of underscoring the damaging impact that movement activists' failures to think through the problem of media and to organize effective alternative media may have on the trajectory of social movements. His study interestingly blends official and alternative public spheres by examining the relationship within the context of an ongoing social struggle between mainstream media professionals and alternative media activists. This is an issue somewhat blurred in the discussion of public sphere above, but one of considerable importance, flagged in the Preface, to which we shall need to return. Raboy also pays careful heed to the destructive impact of leftist sectarianism on movement media.

Based on his and other studies, we may provisionally conclude that radical alternative media are of considerable, if varying significance because it is they that typically first articulate and diffuse the issues, the analyses, and the challenges of the movements. They typically owe

their primary allegiance to and experience their principal fascination with the movements. And although particular alternative media may get tossed aside in the impetuous, unforeseeable trajectory of a given social movement, others often rise rapidly to prominence and take their place.

Nonetheless, one reservation needs repeating. We should not let the social movement dimension, important as it is, overly frame our definition of radical alternative media. We should beware of squashing all such media into this rather effervescent model. Many continue over decades, quietly and patiently keeping issues alive and, especially, developing fresh themes in and new types of public conversation. Both phases or dimensions of such media require maintaining in focus. There can also be a process of generational resurgence, where the memory of what once was thinkable and doable is revived in new, more propitious circumstances.¹²

Thus, as already argued in the Chapter 1 discussion of audiences, a model of media influence that maintains a constant tight close-up on immediate consequences will fail to register accurately the significant long-term resonance of radical alternative media, especially if yoked only to the consideration of the moment-by-moment of social movements at their height of activity. The fact that our conscious memory does not recall everything specifically that we read or heard or saw in media does not mean that certain messages and frames have lost their sway over our imagination and sense of priorities.¹³ This sense of the longer term is crucial for understanding all media. By "the longer term," I do not mean anything quite as extended as the *longue durée* of the *Annales* school, but I certainly have in mind something in the order of a three-generational scenario.

Let us add one more element to this discussion of social movements, namely, the contribution that can be made from a socialist anarchist angle of vision. Historically, the anarchist movement has always given priority to movements over institutions. Constructive social change must, in this philosophy, be built on the basis of mass activity, of self-mobilization. Effective communication within and by social movements is, therefore, a vital necessity for self-mobilization to emerge and prosper. Radical media are in no way to be dismissed as just a curious little experiment for revolutionary culture freaks.

Their linchpin role becomes all the more obvious as we face up to the tough reality of the divisions Rowbotham (1981) flags between

movements and activists with different experiences and targets. Whether it is the all-too-common neglect of women's issues in labor and ethnic struggles or of racism in women's movement debates or competitive hostility between minority ethnic groups, the divisions are patent, sometimes blatant. Lateral communication between these groups, Rowbotham is totally accurate in claiming, is a first, essential, even if very difficult step, if we are not to be forever pitted one against the other. As she argues in the passage cited in the Chapter 2 discussion of resistance, our shared understanding of the dynamics of exploitation and extrusion has to grow enormously to form any movement worth committing ourselves to, let alone powerful enough to shake the power structure's hegemony.

An example of what movement building with radical media to aid us could actually look like might be taken from the women's movement's development of sensitivity to the daily immediacies and nuances of extrusion and control. This feminist awareness was a gain not only for the women's movement itself, but for everyone, and had it been more widely diffused, it would likely have matured many political projects. To cite Rowbotham (1981) once more,

When women on the Left began to criticize this language (i.e., Fraternity, Chairman, Brothers) we were told we were just being petty. But the ideas and politics of women's liberation emerged out of precisely these small everyday moments of dismissive encounter. (p. 27)

Radical alternative media can enable people within social movements to communicate these and other insights to one another. Not with automatic success, of course. But the potential of media to communicate laterally is contained within their technology, whereas the hierarchical structure of parties and unions has been predefined for so long that they could often only operate laterally in the ideal not the real world.

Husband (1996) presents a stimulating confirmation of Rowbotham's point in relation to the public sphere notion and the question of ethnic justice. He begins from twin initial premises: (a) that a third generation of human rights entitlements is in order, beyond the first (civil and political) and second (economic, social, and cultural); and (b) that the proposal in the 1980 UNESCO MacBride Report on global communication policies about the right to communicate is one of this third generation of entitlements. Husband (1996) sees the MacBride assertion as in dire need of a complement, namely, "the right to be understood." This

places upon us all a duty to seek comprehension of the other. It is a rejection of, and condemnation of, egocentric and ethnocentric routines of engaging with the communicative acts of others, both in-group and out-group. . . . Without the inclusion of the subordinate claim of the right to be understood the right to communicate becomes too easily a unidirectional and egocentric democracy of Babel. (pp. 209, 210)

In turn, this means very consciously defining the public sphere as multi-ethnic, not mono-ethnic, this latter a lapse, Hanchard (1995) argues, that has all too often disfigured academic debate around the term. The need for radical alternative media in a multi-ethnic public sphere is self-evident, and their potential roles legion.

THE ROLE OF COMMUNICATION NETWORKS

The final point to be considered in this discussion of social movements and the public sphere is the question of communication networks, that is, those webs of interpersonal communication that do not operate through media, even though they are fed by media and feed into media. Sadly, the typical rupture in communication research between media and interpersonal communication is particularly damaging to an attempt to understand the linkages between radical alternative media and social networks. Yet, these networks are essential both to such media and to social and political movements. We are dealing in this regard with a very different notion of media audience than the typical one, for it is those elements of the audience who are active members of social networks that, in times of social tumult and political crisis, are often the best-placed heralds of the new and the best-informed advisers on movement strategies to those networks. It is in those skeins that we find the key communicative linkages between radical alternative media and social movements.

Once again, however, we are confronted by overlapping terminologies. For one writer, the term will be social movements, for another the public sphere, for a third, communication networks, and for a fourth, audiences. The utility of the notion of networks is that it gets away from the notion of audiences as atomized, composed simply of individuals or households. It also underscores the internal connectivity characteristic of social movements and the centrality of that process in the mesh between media and movements. The public sphere ceases to be simply an

idealized agora and becomes something tangible between members of interlocking circles, whose mutual communication engages them at many levels, not just that of rational, ordered debate. (The notion of community, to be addressed in the next chapter, partly addresses this dimension as well.)

In the Iranian revolution (Mohammadi & Sreberny-Mohammadi, 1994, pp. 35-37), we see a particularly clear instance of the operation of already existing networks in relation to media. It was through religious networks that audiocassettes with banned materials were circulated, and the values and traditions of these networks gave cohesion, sanction, and energy to the vast movement in opposition to the Shah. To appreciate radical media in that context, it is essential to perceive their interaction with these networks. The authors correctly identify a parallel with Catholic parish networks and resistance to the regime in Poland during the decades of Soviet control. Álvarez (1990, pp. 59-75) equally pinpoints the networks of Christian base communities as nodes of social movements against the dictatorship in Brazil during the 1970s.

However, although religious beliefs certainly offer a very important focus, it would be a mistake to see the relevance of communication networks to radical media operation in social movements as uniquely a religious phenomenon. Such networks are a prime dimension of all social movements and a vital audience dimension for radical media.

Summary: The relationship with movements in full flood does not exhaust the roles of radical media. To acknowledgment of their major role in that regard, to the public conversations they spark within the communication networks with which they interact, we need to add recognition of radical media's impact in periods of political quiescence and equally of how they may light a mnemonic flame that sometimes burns over decades and generations. Furthermore, the character of social movements needs accurate definition; not least, that like popular culture, they may be reactionary as well as constructive.

Öffentlichkeit—once redefined in terms of alternative or counter (Fraser) public spheres, of forums providing movements with opportunity to talk through their internal divisions and so to enrich and strengthen themselves (Rowbotham, Husband)—is a concept that directs our attention to the role of radical media in stimulating debate. Indeed, the term *conversation* has kept turning up in the review of Öffentlichkeit. In

the discussion of community, democracy, and radical media that follows, we shall revisit it more closely, adding a discussion of the closely related concept of dialogue.

NOTES

1. The relation in practice between these is important and complex but would draw us too far away from our theme here.

2. Examples we will touch on in Part II and the case studies in Part III include the Reformation; the American, French, and Haitian revolutions and their reverberations in other countries; the rise of socialist movements toward the close of the 19th century; the turbulent 1960s; the growth of feminist movements during the 1970s; the 1980s antinuclear movements; and the vortex within the Soviet bloc in the late 1980s.

3. One of the earliest was Edmund Burke, whose denunciation of the French Revolution included his notorious dismissal of the public as "the swinish multitude." Radical media activist Thomas Spence named his newspaper *Pig's Meat* by way of riposte (Wood, 1994, p. 88).

4. *Pours* might be a better word.

5. Compare Halloran, Elliott, and Murdock, 1970; Gitlin, 1980; Hackett, 1991, 1993; Dale, 1996; Sampedro Blanco, 1997; Neveu, 1999. Ryan (1991) provides a very good study for movement activists on how to engage mainstream media.

6. Mattelart (1974, 1986), Raboy (1984), Goodwyn (1991), Laba (1991), and Kubik (1994) address in some measure the role of the *Solidarnosc* movement's communication processes and use of symbols. Sreberny-Mohammadi and Mohammadi (1994) address alternative media in the revolutionary movement against the Shah of Iran in the late 1970s. Thede and Ambrosi (1992) offer an edited selection of studies of alternative video use around the world. In Mattelart and Siegelau (1983) and Kahn and Neumaier (1985), there are a number of shorter case studies of radical alternative media in relation to social movements. These edited volumes are a major resource, especially for earlier 20th-century instances in the former case.

7. As indeed the research indicates that Neveu cites in his very stimulating article.

8. A further point of importance, rarely addressed in the social movements literature, is the question of fascist and racist movements or their media. We will discuss this further in Chapter 8.

9. The root is *offen* (open), but it can be translated as publicity, public opinion (*öffentliche Meinung*), in public, public act. "To take the public into one's confidence" would be *sich in die Öffentlichkeit flüchten*. *Sphere* is a spatial metaphor, which does not by itself suggest the kinetic qualities enshrined in the term Öffentlichkeit. The spatial metaphor does, however, have the merit of

prompting the empirical question, Where and what is the public sphere? An extraordinary amount of toner has settled on to paper in referring to this term and precisely, sad to say, because it is one of those concepts whose academic vogue is directly proportional to its ample measure of the vague. For the two best collections of essays on the concept, see Calhoun (1993) and François and Neveu (1999).

10. Habermas's (1984/1987) later emphasis on the "ideal speech situation", although intended as a yardstick against which to measure social reality, has the same implied ratiocinative character.

11. The word *conversation* has its own limits: It implies a relaxed chat between friends, whereas in *Öffentlichkeit*, the debate is likely to be noisy, rancorous, and pungent, at least from time to time—a long way from Habermas's vacuum-packed vision of communicative bliss. But we need to theorize the actual, not only to set up abstract yardsticks by which to judge it. In Chapter 4 on community and democracy, we will return to this topic.

12. One of the more notable examples in the later 20th century was how a number of the young intellectual rebel communicators of the Soviet "thaw" era of 1956-1964 became leaders for a while of the *glasnost* process in Soviet media in the late 1980s (until they, too, were mostly swept from influence in the final collapse of the Soviet Union). In the deadening intervening years of Brezhnev's period in office, they had bided their time, but their memories were fresh (Downing, 1996, p.121, note 3, p. 226, note 8). A complementary example is the role of the daughters of U.S. leftists of the 1940s and 1950s in the genesis of the internationally influential U.S. women's liberation movement in the 1960s and 1970s (Evans, 1979).

13. The question of political and historical memory and media is a vast one. One of the most crippling obstacles to the development of constructive social movements is the absence of public memory of the struggles of past decades. In Argentina, the Mothers' of the Plaza de Mayo struggled for over 20 years to keep the horrors of the 1976-1982 military junta from lapsing into a cozy silence (Kaiser, 1993). In Stalin's Russia, painstaking steps were taken to iron the past out of both history books and news photographs (King, 1997), and one of the most pivotal moments in the collapse of the Soviet system in the later 1980s was when this history began at last to be made available for public discussion (Davies, 1989; Nove, 1989).

Yet, without state censorship of such materials in many Western countries, a voluntary political amnesia seems often to be in force there. In the United States, the Palmer raids, unemployed workers' marches, McCarthyism, two World Wars, continued interventions in Latin America and the Caribbean, the Korean War, the Vietnam War, civil rights struggles, labor history, and women's struggles seem only to resurface as obscure flotsam and in no way shape or form as moments and movements that almost indelibly stamped American culture. Moreover, although the United States is often thought of as having an exceptionally ahistorical culture, this is not much more true than it is of many European countries. Political amnesia typically benefits the ruling order, dropping a thick, hushed blanket of sparkling snow over somber and jagged landscapes.

Throwing conventional understandings of the past into question with the aid of social and labor history can often be a hugely subversive act that provokes substantive re-evaluation of the present.

In addition, radical alternative media may serve to disarray a second vital component of collective memory by challenging the mnemonic categories iterated by mainstream media, which enable axiomatic slotting of each day's whirl of new information into a hegemonic frame. This may be done by media critique and media literacy columns and programs or by humor and irony. Even, occasionally, within the framework of mainstream media, a classic example being the media skits in BBC television's *Monty Python's Flying Circus*.

4

Community, Democracy, Dialogue, and Radical Media

- Radical media are quite often referred to as community media and as democratic alternatives to media monopolies. However, both *community* and *democracy* are potentially fuzzy words, a mere heartbeat behind *motherhood*, typically signifying a “generally good thing.” They urgently need anchoring by definition and critique to make them in any way useful.
- Some significant recent writers on democracy are reviewed to underscore the frequent failure to connect media to strong definitions of democracy. C. B. Macpherson’s work is noted because his definition of developmental, counterhegemonic power helps ground radical media in a unifying concept.
- The discussion of *conversation* as the leitmotif of democratic process is resumed, reaching more closely into the everyday role of media in the United States and to some observations of Bakhtin and Freire on the term *dialogue*.

THE FUZZY CONCEPT OF COMMUNITY

The term *community* has been widely used as a catch-all. It has had a localist sense (this community stands firm on the issue of . . .), a world politics rhetoric (the international community’s stance against terrorism), a professional sense (the scientific community), a politics of sexual frankness usage (community standards of decency), and a nostalgic sense harkening back to a supposed era of harmony (we need to recover a sense of community). *Community* also commonly turns up as a way of attributing lock-step homogeneity of opinion to minority ethnic groups (*the Black community, the Jewish community*).

The term has also been used as a populist way to refer to subordinated social classes while avoiding the use of leftist jargon. It has also been used to avoid singling out any particular group among the poor. Thus, the designations *community radio* and *community access television* have been ways of defining these media as institutions responsive to demands and priorities from below (the working class plus¹ women plus minority ethnic groups plus lesbians and gays, plus . . .). Implicit in this use of community is the assumption that mainstream media are at the service of power (how that is so is variously conceptualized).

Often, many of these latter uses imply a seamless social tissue that is local and therefore healthy, in contradistinction to a wider governmental reality that is foreign and unhealthy. This can easily slide into a right-wing version of anarchism and even forms of xenophobia. It also makes quite idiotic assumptions about the absence of class and other serious social rifts within the local tissue. It is, therefore, exceptionally hard to give the term community a lucid and exact sense.² Yet, when the word is used as convenient verbal shorthand for the spectrum of the relatively dispossessed, or local realities, it is hard to think of a replacement.

Whichever way you cut it, the term persistently raises many more questions and dilemmas than it answers. Using it in relation to radical alternative media demands that its meaning be carefully defined to avoid the production of endless and pointless fog. Perhaps a viable meaning, pinpointing something genuinely important in social life, can be constructed through combining the inclusive populist meaning of the word with a sense of social connectedness over at least a generation, indeed, with the local communication exchange and networks that have grown up over time.³ But we must repeat: This connectedness is but

rarely egalitarian or democratic on the local level. It may only seem so relative to transnational corporate power, or the national state. Terms such as *community* media or *grassroots* media may easily conceal more than they reveal. They are stronger in what they exclude—mainstream media—than in what they signify.

MODELS OF DEMOCRACY

Democracy, as a term, knows only highs or lows: the mellifluous highs of political theorists, and the lows of shabby practice, of procedure mongering and procedure flouting, vote fixing and vote interpreting, trash can manifestos and demagogic politicians, tens of millions spent on TV blitzkriegs and secret polling.

Yet, junking actually existing democracy rather than struggling to improve it is self-evidently no option. So our central question for the remainder of this segment of the discussion is what roles do radical media play in democratic processes? Especially, beyond formal democratic procedures at the national or regional level, how do they strengthen democratic culture in everyday life?

If we examine the huge political science literature on democracy for guidance, we find an immediate paradox. Quite often, even those in favor of struggling to improve democratic processes have little or nothing to say about communication or media, except by silent implication or occasional throw-away reference. Let us take as examples three U.S. contributions to debate on democracy.

Held (1987), in an exemplarily lucid dissection of 10 different models of democracy, explicitly intends to encourage a broadening of democratic process, but he only begins to draw near to the issues of communication and media at the close of his book (pp. 283-289) when he addresses what he argues as the pressing need for a "double democratization," that is, of both the state and civil society. Even Barber's (1984) very searching analysis of how to strengthen democratic life, which centers on communication issues, barely touches on media as such.

Touraine (1994), too, underscores the urgency of extending democratic culture to rescue us from the destructive centripetal tendencies he argues are driving us into a technological and market-driven instrumentalism, on the one hand, and spurring retreat into a closed world of communalist⁴ cultural identities, on the other. He takes on some of

the most difficult problems for democratic practice, such as majority-minority rights, the status of immigrants, women's equal participation, even the ramifications of the global North-South split. He adopts, indeed, the immigrant as emblematic of modern society's acute dilemmas of inclusion and extrusion. Like Rowbotham and Husband, Touraine insists that the only solution to so much fissiparity is democracy, because that

is where dialogue and communication take place. . . . What measures the democratic character of a society . . . is the intensity and depth of dialogue between personal experiences and cultures different from one another that are, moreover, responses, all of them specific and limited, to the same common quests (concerning human purposes). (pp. 315-316)

Yet, he, too, has just four pages (pp. 247-250) on the need to reconstitute the public sphere, in which he nowhere suggests how this might be done in practice with actual media, mainstream or alternative.

The unfortunate aspect of the political science literature's lacuna in the area of media and communication is that it is often those most committed to democracy who seem to wander forever in a media-free desert. Some of the worst, admittedly, do scramble around in media and elections, to the point in some cases of offering themselves as spin merchants to career politicians, which ranks as one of the more egregious forms of academic prostitution. But most just never get to the point at all.

It is absurd. It is as though the democratic process were conceived, as I have suggested elsewhere when discussing the standard tropes of political science (Downing, 1996, Chapter 1), as being composed of astute but entirely mute chessboard pieces, anticipating each other's moves and forging countermoves in total silence. In other words, the majority of political analysts' models of democracy, because they are without communication, are without humans, too. Does this not risk caricaturing the simplification inherent in model construction?

I do not mean to say that such theorists have nothing at all for us. It merely means that their obsession is with structures and issues, laws and institutional procedures, all of which are certainly important, but—in the absence of communicating actors and groups—their models resemble the machine without even its ghost. Patently unrealistic: For

how, in a large-scale society, does democracy communicate without also using media? If, however, all this quite inexorably present communication process is not discussed simply for the reason that it is automatically oiled and glistening, nonproblematic, and, therefore, a trivial dimension for professional political scientists, why will they not tell us where lies this magic transparent land so we can all go see how it works?

There are a few voices within political science that address media seriously. Dewey and Lippmann did so (see Hardt, 1993), although their perspective receives a needed corrective in the work of Raymond Williams (see Sparks, 1993). Dewey and Lippmann judged media in general as providing the necessary information and communication opportunities for effective deliberation to take place. Williams also argued that media, once freed from their overwhelming subjection to private firms or the state and opened up to mass participation, could stimulate and sustain a common culture and a lively democracy. Particularly important, he took the issue beyond straight information, as in the rather ratiocinative focus of Habermas, Dewey, and Lippmann, and wrote very tellingly of the need to embrace fiction and the imaginative realms of culture, the "structures of feeling" (Williams, 1977, pp. 128-135) that are integral to a nation's or a community's public conversation.⁵ In Chapter 5's discussion of art and radical media, and in some of the chapters in Parts II and III, we will venture further into this theme.

The difficulty with even these three thinkers is that although they state very attractive positions concerning communication and democracy, they do not address the messy world of actuality. They do not engage closely with the tiresome and daunting problems of trying to democratize actually existing mainstream media. So although that goal remains one of immense importance, until or unless there is substantial movement in that direction, the role of radical alternative media of all kinds will continue to be extremely significant.

This is not to say that mainstream media contribute nothing at present to democracy. That would be an ill-considered and lumpish distortion. The organized far Right in the 1980s and 1990s, in the United States and elsewhere, has made great play of denouncing mainstream media as leftist pulpits, so that it would be a huge error for the Left simply to contribute to a "media-attack culture" without, simultaneously, very noisily indicating fierce opposition to the extreme Right's project to wipe out all expression of dissent to its left.

We still must face up to the fact that mainstream media make no pretense of offering themselves up to any form of public control, short of consumers' letters or consumers' refusal to buy them or switch them on. As means of public leverage or democratic influence, these various responses are either feeble or indiscriminately blunt. In small communities, they may be used to some effect, but not in nations with a large population. Indeed, when these levers are pulled, it seems likely to be by tightly organized extreme Right fundamentalists putting pressure on a firm to pull TV advertising from a program they hate.⁶ Consumer sovereignty, often blazoned as a democratic fix-all, bears no relation to practical media realities.

Can we say that, by contrast, radical alternative media are the chief standard bearers of a democratic communication structure?

The argument here is yes; that, although flawed, immensely varied, and not necessarily oppositional, many such media do contribute in different degrees to that mission, and more truly than the mainstream media, in ways that are often amazing, given their exceptionally meager resources.

MACPHERSON AND DEVELOPMENTAL POWER

It helps to support this judgment to reflect on C. B. Macpherson's (1973, Chapter 3) analysis of the basis of democracy, even though he has nothing directly to say about media at all. His concepts nonetheless provide a pivotal schema by which to interpret the roles of radical media. He has proposed, as central to our understanding of the basic purpose of power in a democracy, developmental power, the opportunity for members of the public "to use and develop [their] capacities" (p. 42). Developmental power represents the positive possibilities for human achievement inherent in cooperative social life, which, up to the present, the construction of economic and political life most often sidelines.

Macpherson's (1973) low-key and apparently innocuous language is actually much more momentous and challenging than it appears at first blush. It has as its ground his conviction that the public's "capacities" to create viable societal arrangements are infinitely more capacious than cynics and elitists will allow, but also that the public's ability to activate them is widely shackled. The shackles may include, most ob-

viously, malnutrition, homelessness, and illiteracy, but also lack of access to the means of production as a result of the division of power between capital and labor. The obstacles also encompass lack of protection against arbitrary attack on one's body or one's liberty (for further explanation, see Macpherson, 1973, pp. 59-70).

Macpherson uses the term *extractive power* in the opposite direction, to denote both the power of capital over labor and the very concepts of power customary among modern philosophers and resonant with the capital/labor relationship. These theorists almost universally define power as the ability to impose your agenda on other people. Democracy, in this light, is then best understood as far more than a set of agreed procedural rules of debate and negotiation, important as those are; if Macpherson is correct, democracy, at its best, entails a cultural, political, and economic setting in which developmental power flourishes. The concept of developmental power may be used to build on the notions of counterhegemony and alternative public spheres, and it has an easy symbiosis with the hallmarks of many social movements.

Radical alternative media serve as developmental power agents in a number of senses. Without idealizing them (some of the case studies later in the book militate against that), they are much more central to democracy than commentators bemused by the easily visible reach and clout of mainstream media will typically acknowledge.⁷

First, radical alternative media expand the range of information, reflection, and exchange from the often narrow hegemonic limits of mainstream media discourse. This is accomplished, in part, by their very number. Second, they frequently try to be more responsive than mainstream media to the voices and aspirations of the excluded. They often have a close relationship with an ongoing social movement and thus fairly spontaneously express views and opinions extruded from mainstream media, or ridiculed in them. They are quite often in the lead in addressing issues that only later get noticed by mainstream media. Third, radical alternative media do not need to censor themselves in the interests of media moguls, entrenched state power, or religious authority. Fourth, their own internal organization is often much more democratic than hierarchical, as we shall see in a series of the case studies. And last, some of these media fulfill the innovative role that Raymond Williams (1977) ascribed to what he termed "formations; those effective movements and tendencies, in intellectual and artistic life, which have significant and sometimes decisive influence on the active development

of a culture, and which have a variable and often oblique relation to formal institutions" (p. 117). Putting these elements together, it makes every sense to see radical media as agents of developmental power, not simply as counterinformation institutions, and certainly not as a vapid cluster of passing gnats.

To be blunt, however, we are faced with a key problem still, or rather two. One is the level of abstraction of these concepts, for although they are a necessary stage in understanding the roles of radical media, they are not sufficient. We need to link these overall angles of vision with more immediate practicalities. Later, we will address these in significant measure, but the second problem we need to re-examine more closely is equally practical, namely, public conversation, dialogue, talk, communication networks, popular culture, all of which have much to do with democracy and a democratic culture.

However, the contributions we will examine to help us do this also do not address radical media but rather focus more generically on the relation between public communication and developmental power. Nonetheless, it is the argument of this book that what media could be is often much better realized in alternative public spheres, so the fact that these writers do not themselves address radical media does not particularly matter.

RADICAL MEDIA AND DIALOGUE

Two major writers who directly focused on the notion of dialogue, with definite implications for the democratic roles of radical alternative media, are Freire (1970, 1972, 1974) and Bakhtin (1981). Their contributions are on quite different but ultimately complementary planes.

Freire, primarily concerned with literacy education for public empowerment, put oppressive structures and political engagement against them at the center of the communication process (McLaren & Lankshear, 1994). In his concept of *conscientização*⁸ he emphasized eliciting students' intelligence and perceptions rather than delivering "superior knowledge" to empty subjects. Thus, in teaching literacy, he insisted on using the everyday language and images of the students (poor farmers or city dwellers), and rejected pre-packaged language and images pulled from the scholar's authoritative shelf. This was to engage in a dialogue from the start with the learners' reality, to encourage their ex-

pression of opposition to their exploitation and material poverty. Freire saw literacy as a technique enabling students not to fit into the world as it is but to change it: It would help students to challenge the history of their own shaping. He readily acknowledged, too, the opportunity for the educator to grow in this process as well as the student.

Freire solely and entirely concentrated on face-to-face interactivity and never extended his vision further to encompass media (De Lima, 1979, p. 98). However, if for dialogic educator we read radical media activist, Freire's pedagogy can serve as a core philosophy within which to think through the nature of the activist producer/active audience relationship.⁹ It proposes a democracy of the communication process, once more acknowledging the audience as joint architects with the media producers, radically unlike the "they watch it so we must be giving them what they want and need" ideology of commercial media. Whereas Freire tended not to differentiate different groups among the oppressed (Weiler, 1994), Findley (1994) proposes that the learning processes Freire championed can, nonetheless, be an important means for social movements "in their struggle to achieve and maintain common understandings of the problems they intend to address, and thereafter to work toward continually renewed consensus on strategies, tactics, and procedures" (p. 118). The role for radical media in this process is obvious, underscored by Rowbotham and by Husband in Chapter 3's discussion of the public sphere.

Bakhtin, focusing on novels¹⁰ as a vital form of popular, even subversive, narrative communication in the modern era, particularly stressed the competing discourses and voices (*heteroglossia*, *raznorechie*) represented in them. His observations, perhaps seeming not contentious to the casual reader, were penned during the depths of Stalinist repression in the Soviet Union, when enormous pressure was applied to public expression to force it into a deadening ideological uniformity. *Raznorechie* was a notion in deep disfavor, and indeed, Bakhtin wrote his essay during a 6-year political exile in an obscure little town far away from the Kremlin in the wilds of Kazakhstan. (Some of his close intellectual associates perished in the camps.)

It was within that stifling context that Bakhtin (1981, pp. 297, 342-348, 369-371) critiqued the limitations of poetic discourse, authoritative discourse, and mythological thinking, in favor of "internally persuasive discourses." By this, he meant the day-to-day language and voices of the general public, emerging from the public's experiences and their great variety. His commentary on the raunchy marketplace language in

Rabelais' novel, *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, which we shall discuss in Chapter 5, is a strong example. He urges that the novel should always give these internally persuasive discourses pride of place against official, uniform speech issuing from on high. He writes,

In the history of literary language, there is a struggle constantly being waged to overcome the official line with its tendency to distance itself from the zone of contact [i.e., everyday life] . . . the internally persuasive word is half-ours and half-someone else's. Its creativity and productiveness consist precisely in the fact that such a word awakens new and independent words . . . It is freely developed . . . it enters into interanimating relationships with new contexts. (p. 345)

Bakhtin's emphasis on this dialogue of voices within the novel (or the soap opera) could equally be applied to radical media as a dialogic, democratic public sphere within popular culture. Furthermore, his angle of vision on this art form underscores a recurring theme in this book's argument, already noted in the discussion of popular culture and of Iris Marion Young and Raymond Williams: the centrality of emotion and imagination in radical media, the peril of seeing their role as informative in a purely ratiocinative sense. A democratic culture cannot only subsist on rational argument, a theme that will be taken further in Chapter 5 on art and aesthetics.

Both Freire and Bakhtin provide support for a dialogic vision of radical alternative media, embedded in the push and pull of everyday life, not sectarian, at their best engaged with audiences at their most active, producing as well as receiving media content.

COMMUNICATION AND DEMOCRACY

Barber (1984) argues for a series of procedures that can be undertaken to strengthen the democratic process and, in so doing, nails his colors very firmly to the mast on the subject of communication.¹¹ "At the heart of strong democracy is talk" (p. 173), he says. Indeed, he is quite lyrical on the subject:

Politics . . . would ossify completely without its (i.e., talk's) creativity, its variety, its openness and flexibility, its inventiveness, its capacity for discovery, its subtlety and complexity, its eloquence, its potential

for empathy and affective expression, and its deeply paradoxical . . . character. (p. 174)

In line with some of the other thinkers already cited, Barber stresses that "strong democratic talk" requires listening as well as uttering, that it is affective as well as cognitive, and that its linkage to intentions draws it out of speculation and into the realm of real-world practice. "Listening is a mutualistic art that by its very practice enhances equality . . . [talk] can build community as well as maintain rights and seek consensus as well as resolve conflict" (pp. 175, 177). He proceeds (pp. 178-212) to define nine functions of what he terms *strong democratic talk*.

However, there are two absences in his argument, arguably related to each other—media¹² and democracy beyond the locality. He sees media technologies as aids toward effective public debate in neighborhood assemblies. Media, for him, seem to be technical channels rather than social institutions. In his final chapter (pp. 273-281, 289-290), he explores a little gingerly how democratic activity might deploy local television, videotex, electronic balloting, and favorable postal rates for informational print media. But he does not grapple at all with national realities outside neighborhoods, let alone with the international media dimensions of a functioning democracy.

Communication theorists Carey (1995) and Schudson (1997) have presented opposing views¹³ on the question of *conversation, talk, and democracy*. For Carey, drawing heavily on Dewey and somewhat on Habermas, spontaneous conversation about policies and politics is the very kernel of democracy. By the close of the 20th century, however, Carey argues, a culture of political conversation is more or less extinct because mainstream media have almost ceased to prime the public's conversational pump. Political polling and manipulated television spectacles have largely replaced politics. Hence, democracy itself is withering on the vine. He does not address the question of social movements, although it seems from the music of his argument that it would naturally flow in that direction. Nor does he address alternative media.

Schudson's (1997) critique is concerned to inject a certain sour realism into Carey's impassioned call. He suggests, with corroborative evidence from both New England town meetings and the American Constitutional Convention, that although conversation in general is the very stuff of society, democratic debate is a specific form of conversation that needs to be procedurally based to work. Thus, it cannot evince the quality of spontaneity that Carey sees as its soul. Furthermore,

Schudson proposes, democratic debate typically results in printed media (a petition, a notice, a law), rather than being sparked by them.

Their disagreement is apposite to this phase in our discussion of public sphere, social movements, community, and democracy. It addresses exactly the intersection between the social, the political, and the communicative (three conceptual categories that have heuristic value only up to the point at which they are not reified). Schudson wins the argument so long as we accept that the formal structures of democracy are its core. Yet, although we certainly cannot pretend that such structures are not there or that they are irrelevant or purely oppressive, a democratic culture is a necessary part of the democratic infrastructure. A democratically organized economy would be just as much so.¹⁴ Without that culture, congressional proceduralism may entirely replace the rules of debate, and indeed, the polling management and public relations manipulation that Carey deplores may easily be victorious. That is precisely why the energy of popularly based social movements—not manipulated jacqueries¹⁵—is central to democratic culture and why the media of such movements are at the core of the process. It is a pity Carey did not address them.

Valuable further insight is provided by Friedland (1996), who primarily discusses specific U.S. case studies of Internet use in the democratic process.¹⁶ His conceptual starting point is an interesting combination of civic engagement and social capital theory with network theory. In the course of his argument, Friedland underscores the very important point that the purpose of democracy is not only deliberation but also governmental action, whether on the national or the local level or a combination.

With this in hand, Friedland (1996) stresses that democratic conversation consists not only of people sitting around talking politics (Carey) or of legislators deliberating policy (Schudson) but also of engaged citizens combining in a variety of roles to review what they may achieve with a given project—and then carrying out the project, often debating and modifying it as they go. Those combined roles may, in the United States, be those of federal, state, city, or county legislators; civil service workers at any level of government; staff at large or small think-tanks and academic research institutes; community and movement activists, and netizens or media activists. There may be serendipity in debate and policy execution, or the reverse.

This conversation/deliberation is not abstract, unbundled from everyday practice; it is both national and local, and especially—

Friedland stresses this point—it centrally involves ongoing relationships of reciprocity and trust.¹⁷ This links straight back into Chapter 3's discussion of communication networks. Thus, Friedland's approach to the issues suggests a rich and complex integration of levels and aspects of talk/conversation, democratic culture, media technology, and political action.

To wrap up this discussion, let us examine a very interesting argument from what Rodríguez (in press) describes as a nonessentialist feminist position. She specifically takes up the question of praxis and democracy in relation to radical media. She argues that we need to break away from "a modern understanding of citizenship as expressed by voting and protesting . . . [and] from thinking of political actions and social movements as linear, continuous, and conscious processes toward a common goal." Instead, based in part on her own research in Colombia and Nicaragua and partly on the theoretical work of Mouffe (1992a, 1992b) and of McClure (1992), she proposes that we reconceptualize the impact of alternative media in terms of their impact on the participants' sense of themselves and their potential as human beings. She summarizes what may happen as follows:

It implies having the opportunity to create one's own images of self and environment; it implies being able to recodify one's identity with the signs and codes that one chooses, thereby disrupting the traditional acceptance of those imposed by outside sources; it implies becoming one's own story teller . . . ; it implies reconstructing the self-portrait of one's own community and one's own culture; it implies exploring the infinite possibilities of one's own body, one's own face, to create facial expressions (a new codification of the face) and nonverbal languages (a new codification of the body) never seen before; it implies taking one's own languages out of their usual hiding place and throwing them out there, into the public sphere and seeing how they do, how they defeat other languages, or how they are defeated by other languages. (1996, p. 2)¹⁸

THE PRICE OF PARTICIPATION

The final, very basic topic to include under the democracy heading is cost. Access to media is governed, over and above the codes mainstream media lay down for the public's participation (talk shows, game shows,

opinion poll results, establishment "experts"), by how expensive media technologies are. In early 19th-century Britain, for instance, the Stamp Tax, described by its opponents as "a tax on knowledge," lifted the price of a daily newspaper to seven pence, far beyond anything a worker could afford, and was clearly designed to price workers out of the public realm.

At various periods in time, print technology has been fairly cheap. Until, for example, the outset of the 1840s, the United States boasted a considerable number of labor newspapers in the incipient industrial centers of Boston, New York, Philadelphia, and Baltimore (Schiller, 1981). The advent of the rotary technique brought with it machinery costs that mostly crushed the labor press. It would be fair to say that the spread of photocopiers since the 1970s has worked in the opposite direction (cf. Enzensberger, 1974). Indeed, the very strict control of access to them within the old Soviet Union reflected rather exactly the then political elite's anxieties about the uses to which dissident communicators could put them.¹⁹ The rise of cheap video cameras and cassette recorders had a similar trajectory, although in their earliest, most expensive phase, print was still necessarily the format of choice for low-cost radical media. Public access television is one result (see Laura Stein's Chapter 20, this volume). The expanding uses of the personal computer and the cheap modem since the mid-1980s are a further case in point, as Chapter 17 by Ford and Gil demonstrates.

However, there are also radical formats that are not technologically driven and expensive, such as graffiti, buttons, T-shirts, song, street theater, performance art, many of which we will discuss in Part II. If the public is not to be priced out of communicating via media, then low-cost formats become all the more crucial for democratic culture and process.

Summary: We have examined the rather fluffy notion of community and some approaches to expanding the democratic process. Oddly, the wing of political science that favors a deepening and strengthening of democracy rarely addresses the role of media in the cultural and procedural mesh that would be needed, including Barber, who examines communication up to a point but does not really engage with media. Even those who do, such as Williams, rarely engage with the messy world of everyday praxis, and Keane (1991), who follows Williams's basic diagnosis, similarly offers only rather implausible proposals for implementing mainstream media change.²⁰ Carey and Schudson's de-

bate about the role of conversation in the democratic process is resolved to a considerable extent, although he makes no specific reference to it, by Friedland when he links together deliberation, policy action, and the question of ongoing reciprocity, reviewing roles that may be played by Internet communication in this linkage. Obviously, the notions of counterhegemony, alternative public sphere, and dialogue, which we have already examined, are in their various ways also addressing these problems, and they ultimately all center on what Macpherson would term the expansion of developmental power.

In the next chapter, we will layer into our analytical framework approaches to the exceptionally important relation between art, media, and communication. Too often, these three are written and spoken about as though each were an entirely separate realm. The high-art/low-art distinction, which strictly segregates art from media, is really quite extraordinarily tenacious. We shall examine some approaches that do not fall into the trap of segregating information, reasoning, and cognition from feeling, imagination, and fantasy, thereby focusing our attention on how media may enhance developmental power.

Dance, street theater, cartoons, posters, parody, satire, performance art, graffiti, murals, and popular songs or instrumental music are, as we shall illustrate fully in Part II, only some of the most obvious forms of radical media whose communicative thrust depends not on closely argued logic but on their aesthetically conceived and concentrated force. For easily understandable political reasons, in the analysis of radical media, tremendous weight has often been placed on their role in transmitting to the public information that has been systematically censored, distorted, or dismissed in mainstream media. This information/counterinformation model (cf. Baldelli, 1977; Jensen, 1997) is an important one, but it has sometimes overflowed into a purely logocentric definition of alternative media: lies/truth, cover-up/facts, ideology/reality.

We need to begin by acknowledging that part of the 19th- and 20th-century background to this issue is the long history of ultradogmatic alternative media, associated with leftist political currents of one stripe or another, whose rhetoric was only too often dipped in concrete and judged by its Leninist/theological exactitudes, or similar pseudo-

religious jargon named for some revolutionary figure (Kropotkin, Trotsky, Mao Ze-dong, Che Guevara, etc.). A language of lead and an incantation of enshrined phrases were the result, inordinately reassuring to the faithful and somewhere between sophomoric and soporific to those outside the magic circle: Capitalism is in its death-agony . . . The proletariat, under the wise guidance of the party . . . Stormy applause greeted the General Secretary's speech . . . The heroic struggles of the people . . . Imperialism, as comrade Lenin so brilliantly observed . . . The USSR is a degenerated workers' state. . . The renegade revisionist clique . . . Communism will win . . . The masses . . .

Thus, the liveliness and zest that ideally should be synonymous with radical media have been conspicuous by their frailty within the highly influential Marxist and Leninist political tradition over the past 150 years.²¹ For this reason alone, it is essential to recuperate the urgency of artistic flair in planning or evaluating radical media projects.

NOTES

1. The effort becomes more and more tortured, as though the working class were composed entirely of straight white males.
2. Also, see Downing (1999a) on community in cyberspace.
3. See Putnam (1993) for an extended argument in this direction, based on Italy.
4. I am using the word here in the sense in which it was used in public debate in India in the later decades of the 20th century, to denote the destructive focus on the supposedly homogeneous and embattled interests of particular segments of the nation. In India, it was a matter of religio-political identities (Hindu, Muslim, Sikh), but the particular labels and cues vary from nation to nation.
5. See similarly Edward Thompson's assertion that "fully one-half of culture . . . is affective and moral consciousness," noted in Chapter 1.
6. The history of this tactic on the part of the extreme Right goes back at least to the *Red Channels* saga of the McCarthy era (Barnouw, 1990, pp. 121-28).
7. Kellner (1990, pp. 207-222) is a notable exception.
8. Roughly, evoking a critical perception of reality. A term Freire used in his earlier work, *mutismo*, later rendered in his writing as "the culture of silence" (of the poor), which he perceived as "rooted in the favorable spoils of Latin American land tenure" for the rich (De Lima, 1979, p. 117), is unfortunate in that it implies still the need for the outside intellectual to arrive to start people thinking. James C. Scott's (1985, 1990) work raises serious questions about

this perception. Nonetheless, Freire maintained a mixed attitude on this score, insisting, for example, that clay dolls and popular songs were as much culture as internationally famous artworks (De Lima, 1979, p. 125). His contemporary compatriot Glauber Rocha's beautiful 1962 film *Barravento* evinces much of the same dualism of perception. I am grateful to Cacilda Rêgo for advice on interpreting Freire's work.

9. See Huesca and Dervin (1994) for a utilization of Freire's notion of "theoretically guided and self-reflective action," which requires "a synthesis of local process and global referent through reflective practices" (p. 63). This "untamed terrain" as they term it (p. 65), enables, they claim, the entrenched opposition in much social theory and analysis between structure and agency to be transcended, with great benefit to the understanding of alternative media. A transition "from the conceptual to the practical world" (p. 64) seemingly compels, or at least enables, this to happen. Yet, although they correctly note (pp. 65-67) that Latin American alternative media theory, up to the date of their article, did not engage very much with the question of how communication has its effect, their own focus on praxis equally constitutes a claim, not an actuality.

10. We perhaps tend to think of the novel as "frozen" communication, radically distinct from the unpredictable process at the heart of Freire's work, but that, in turn, implies that the author's intentions lock the novel's readers into a single interpretation of it. The discussion of Janice Radway's (1984) work in Chapter 1 suggests that to be a very inadequate understanding of how audiences operate.

11. Barber's proposals approximate Held's (1987) two final models of the democratic process, the participative and the democratic autonomy models (pp. 254-264, 289-299).

12. Barber's (1984) only fleeting references to media in the body of the book are slighting ones to mainstream media, to the danger of letting specialists such as journalists do our democratic communicating for us (p. 193), or to the inevitable degeneration of language into an instrument of elite rule once we hand it over to "the media, the bureaucrats, the professors, and the managers" (p. 197).

13. I am indebted to my colleague Chuck Whitney in the Journalism Department at the University of Texas for drawing my attention to this debate.

14. A serious discussion of what this might mean in practice is beyond our scope here.

15. The Rush Limbaugh phenomenon in the mid-1990s was an instance of what I mean here. I repeat, the wider question of fascist social movements and populist ultra-Rightism will be addressed later.

16. Besides Chapter 17 on radical Internet use, the case studies on cyberdemocracy in Tsagarousianou et al. (1998) are well worth reviewing.

17. Putnam's (1993) study of civic engagement in Italy interestingly puts this latter dimension in a long historico-cultural framework, far beyond individual lifetimes.

18. See Huesca and Dervin (1994) for a very comparable argument about the centrality of praxis in the analysis of radical media and Huesca (1995) for an

empirical study of Bolivian miners' radio stations from that perspective (although in the second piece, he uses the term *process* instead of *praxis*).

19. See the discussion in Chapter 22 on *samizdat* media in the former Soviet Union and Soviet bloc, not least the success of Polish oppositional movements in evading photocopier controls.

20. See, for example, the review of his book by Scannell in *Media, Culture & Society* (1992).

21. For a further evaluation of Leninism and alternative media organization, see Chapter 22.

5

Art, Aesthetics, Radical Media, and Communication

- Art and media: critique versus capitulation?
- Expressionism, dada, surrealism, the Situationists
- The elusive but ultimately productive notion of aura in the work of Walter Benjamin
- Bertolt Brecht, radical theater, and cofabulation

It is interesting to note how difficult it is even for a politically committed writer and artist such as John A. Walker (1983), in his stimulating and lucid discussion of the relation between art and mass media, to concede anything to media in the process. Walker effectively defines art—not all art, he makes very clear, but politically committed art—as the only form of radical alternative media left to us. Indeed, for him, fine art's role in the present era must include the critique of mass media representations, so as to enable media consumers to distance themselves from the deluge of deadening images and narratives poured out through those channels. He writes that fine art continues to be essential because it "is distinguished . . . by its greater degree of independence, individuality, personal expression, and handwork" (p. 90).

Walker's tendency simply to dismiss media as the problem facing us practically dismisses alternative media uses and projects as well (although along the way he does passingly acknowledge radical and community video). He also fails to address the potential for audience users to create their own dissident readings of mass media texts, nor does he mention culturally subversive elements in mainstream media. Willy-nilly, then, as the only substantive version of radical communication still standing, critical artwork will be destined to reach a rather small choir. This is often true of small-scale oppositional media, as well, but it seems perverse to neglect them and thereby shrink the authentic world of radical communication still further. Walker's argument risks, despite his patently expressed wishes to communicate with as many people as possible, being a left-wing pitch for a political ghetto. It would be much more productive to consider how the kinds of political art he discusses might feed into alternative media content and how a stimulating dialogue might be mounted over the long term between politically committed artists and media activists.

THE RELATION BETWEEN ART AND MEDIA

There is, after all, a rich history to be considered here. Emerging out of German Expressionism, the dada movement, surrealists, and Situationists have variously conceived the relation between art and media. All three formations, in Williams's sense of the term, foregrounded art as a form of public, political communication, and in certain ways, although very distinct, each formation was heir to the previous one. Walter Benjamin and Bertolt Brecht, both of them influenced by the Berlin dada movement, also contributed interesting perspectives to the discussion.

None of these can be understood outside the context of the millions slaughtered for nothing in World War I, the turbulent years of the Weimar Republic, the Nazi era, and Stalinism, although for Situationists, the post-World War II era was the most immediate context. Expressionism, an artistic current with a long history in German art from Max Ernst through to the films of Fassbinder, seemed in the early period of the First World War carnage to speak through the harshness of its imagery to the horrors of the trenches. As the war ground interminably on, gorging itself on hundreds of thousands then millions, some artists—and vast numbers of others—became galvanized by the desire to com-

municate their impotent scream of outrage, their total rejection of the unending mass slaughter. To some in that frame of mind, even Expressionist art seemed to have become passive and futile.

Enter dada. For the dada movements, art was "shit." Art itself had to be exploded, both as a category and as an institution, because its modes of expression had either helped pave the path to the war or were totally irrelevant to its understanding. Dada, possibly derived from a French children's term for rocking horse, instead generated art objects that until then had been considered totally irrelevant to art. Examples included so-called "found objects," everyday products such as shoes or bricks or rusting iron or a toilet-bowl, which were made part of formal art exhibits. Berlin was one of the dada movement's several centers, along with Zürich, Paris, and New York. Berlin dada was marked strongly by support for socialism and the early Russian revolution and was greatly influential on the work of Grosz and Heartfield (discussed in Chapter 14), as well as Brecht and Benjamin. In the end, this attempt to dismantle conventional art ended by being absorbed into the canon as a school, and as much a commodity as any other.

Surrealists by contrast, such as Breton, Cocteau, Magritte, Dalí, Aragon, Césaire, and Lam, largely operated from the get-go within artistic and literary conventions, subverting them from inside rather than struggling to dismantle them entirely. Their work sought to defamiliarize the public with what seems self-evident, most easily taken for granted: hegemonic visual and verbal reality. They focused on "the eruption of the marvellous into ordinary experience . . . [they were] searching for the means to express all that is unexpected, fresh, awesome, and vertiginous" (Plant, 1992, p. 48). For both dada and surrealism, public shock and scandal by means of art—although dada ferociously rejected the title, thereby seeking to blur the art-media distinction—was their primary objective. Some of the leading French surrealists were pro-Marxist, although most kept their distance from the organized Left.

The situationists (Andreotti & Costa, 1996; Marelli, 1998; Plant, 1992; Wollen, 1989) were deeply knowledgeable in and influenced by the historical currents of both dada and surrealism. It makes sense, therefore, to leap ahead a moment in time to discuss them here, before returning to Benjamin and Brecht. Their definition of post-World War II consumer society or sovietized nations in Eastern Europe as a huge, mystifying spectacle and of the public as constrained only passively to spectate (cf. Marcus, 1989, p. 99) led them to urge the creation of provoc-

ative counterspectacles. These were typically mounted on behalf of rather than by the public and, like dada and surrealist expression, were designed to scandalize, to disrupt the cozy alienation of First World¹ capitalism. The most famous verbal examples were from the social explosions of May-June 1968 in Paris, not all of them directly authored by situationists, but often influenced by a situationist aesthetic (Viénet, 1992). Some of the slogans give the flavor: "Beneath the cobble-stones, the beach,"² "Put imagination in control!" and "Humanity will not be happy until the last bureaucrat has been hanged with the guts of the last capitalist."³

Situationism, unlike Marxism, had no sense that human history was moving toward victory for subordinate classes. There was a permanent dualism in its adherents' view of recuperation, namely, that the ruling class could twist every form of protest around to salvage its own ends. The situationists' enthusiasm for what they termed *détournement* (Plant, 1992, p. 86; cf. Andreotti, 1996, pp. 26-30) suggests that by this term they meant something akin both to subversion and diversion. In terms of the spectacle of everyday life, *détournement* particularly operates by redeploying official language but can also employ official visual imagery to subvert the established order.⁴ It is the revolutionary counterpart to recuperation, a subversive plagiarism that diverts the spectacle's language and imagery from its intended use. When we come to examine in Part II the impact of dada on graffiti, public and performance art, street theater, and culture jamming, a number of these dadaist, surrealist, and situationist themes will recur. The notion of *détournement*, in particular, will be seen to have had great influence even without being cited as such. These varying historical and conceptual attempts to fuse artistic and media expression—and to declare en passant the destructiveness of their mutual segregation—are of abiding interest.

BENJAMIN AND THE NOTION OF AURA

Let us now return to two of the most influential writers on the art-media relationship. Walter Benjamin (1973), in his by now interminably discussed essay on artworks in the era of technical reproducibility,⁵ vigorously argued that art and media should not be separately categorized. McCole (1993, pp. 180-205) offers perhaps the best discussion of Benjamin's reasoning on this issue, and I shall rely on his exposition here.

As opposed to those who saw mass media technologies as bringing about a continual debasement of culture and communication, Benjamin joined ranks with the Soviet constructivist artists of the early 1920s, along with filmmaker Sergei Eisenstein and photo artist Aleksandr Rodchenko, in celebrating the combined political and aesthetic potential of these then-novel technologies. Benjamin saw film, says McCole (1993, pp. 190-191), as fostering a critical testing stance toward experience through bringing the images and sequences filmed right up close, so that they were almost tactile, as distinct from the sacral, "auratic" quality of traditional art's distanced, reverential modes of exhibition and contemplation.

This immediacy and virtual tactility, Benjamin proposed, would stimulate audiences to adopt for themselves the camera's actively constructing posture rather than one of contemplative passivity before the divinely inspired—or genius inspired—painting or sculpture. Rather than genuflecting, audiences would reach out, grasp hold, and engage. The ability of the camera operator to focus on movement and to change both angles and location, together with the editor's ability to create a montage of close-ups, distance shots, and scenes, fostered, he argued, a new and much more intensively analytical mode of seeing into contemporary culture, one with the sensual closeness of touch rather than the distance of vision.

Benjamin also argued that this gradual, even imperceptible expansion of people's perceptual thresholds through familiarization with cinema, together with the collective mode of film reception and its pleasurable dimensions, were decisive steps forward in artistic awareness enabled by the new technology. In other words, these then-new media technologies held ample possibilities for the cultural empowerment of vast numbers of people, for energizing popular culture.

At the same time, as Cooper (1996) is at pains to point out, Benjamin's celebration in this essay of the death of the aura of artwork hails the democratization of a contrived aura, one that mystified artwork and reserved it for a small elite. Indeed, Cooper argues (p. 165f.) that aura in a different sense is still a positive term for Benjamin. He instances Benjamin's (1973, p. 190) description of aura being experienced to the highest extent (in his essay, "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire") in the dialogue process between two individuals who return each other's gaze—or even between an artwork and its beholder, when struck by it and engaging critically with it, rather than approaching it reverentially as sacral: "to perceive the aura of an object we look at, means to invest it with

the ability to look at us in return." In the technical reproducibility essay, (Benjamin, 1973, pp. 224-225) by contrast, the aura Benjamin attacks is one that underscores the hierarchical distance between the perceiver and the object.⁷

Benjamin's positive and negative notions of aura, intensely suggestive but also elusive, may be taken as his attempt to articulate the impact of art and of media. Not only that, but to define the impact in terms of interactivity, of a dialogical "looking" and interrogation rather than a hegemonic relationship. Benjamin directly continues, in his Baudelaire essay, with an initially delphic illustration of his point that is, nonetheless, worth unraveling, an illustration drawn from his interpretation of Proust's fascination with unexpected flashes of memory (*mémoire involontaire*; see McCole, 1993, pp. 259-279) that he seeks to develop in a fresh direction.

Benjamin picks up on Proust's observation that memory surfaces spontaneously and then can be reflected on—or not—depending on the alertness of the individual. For Proust, this operated principally within the realm of individual biography, whereas Benjamin is at least if not more interested in engaging with the public's history and memory. In this re-reading, the present can be reflected on to debate with a collective past, and in the process, aspects of the past that were previously unremarkable or obscure may suddenly come to make sense and have meaning in relation to the present. There are, in other words, artwork and media moments in which people may find themselves unexpectedly addressed, challenged to intense reflection on how historical forces have shaped them and the political conjuncture. Freire's conviction that education must seek to stimulate critical reflection—*conscientização*—is couched in different terms but to the same end, a process of critical engagement with and against hegemony.

BRECHT AND RADICAL THEATER

In Bertolt Brecht's work, we see the same commitment, albeit expressed in different terms, to understanding and using art and media dovetailed. Dramatist Erwin Piscator was part of Berlin dada. Brecht was somewhat younger but initially worked closely with him. Together, they injected a series of new dimensions into theatrical performance during the 1920s (Mueller, 1989, pp. 5-21). These included

[the] use of banners and placards, division of the stage by colorful curtains, simultaneous scenes, short scenes, montages of scenes, use of songs, dance and pantomime, and emphasis on rhythm, movement and body language. Spoken language was not required to comply with the acceptable standard of stage language; instead, actors were encouraged to retain their dialects and individual characteristics . . . the cabaret style . . . is the epic style par excellence, in that episodes, events and "numbers" are only loosely strung together, an ideal structure to accommodate epic breadth and volume. (Mueller, 1989, p. 8)

The connections between Berlin dada and Russian artists in the early Soviet period, such as Mayakovsky, Meyerhold, Eisenstein, and Tretyakov, have already been flagged. In various ways, the Berliners found in the Bolshevik revolution's initial years a huge opportunity to experiment with novel artistic forms.⁸ Brecht's and Piscator's work in part drew as well on amateur theater work done in Germany at that period. From film in particular, they not only drew versions of montage for the stage but even imported screenings into their plays. A rendition of the satirical antimilitarist Czech novel, *The Good Soldier Schweik*, for example, included filmed tracking shots of Prague streets and an animation film designed by Grosz. This was a period in which alternative media production in both Germany and Russia was at the cutting edge aesthetically as well as politically.

The theatrical communication strategy for which Brecht is most renowned is his effort to engage the audience actively rather than luring them into passively soaking up the play's narrative. A favorite comparison he drew was with people watching sports. Just as members of the crowd at sports events or watching them on TV will comment, sometimes boisterously, on their approval and disapproval of the action and will readily voice their judgments on particular turns of play, so Brecht wanted theater audiences to be equally engaged. He did not mean to produce plays whose scenes and characters were mechanically constructed to be "bloodlessly noted and weighed up" by detached spectators (cited in Mueller, 1989, p. 64). The mainstream theater strategy he attacked was, rather,

the obsession with coercing the spectator into a one-dimensional dynamic where he is prevented from looking left or right, up or down . . . the reduction of an infinite variety of emotional as well as intellectual responses to one single mode of reception, namely empathy—the single act of identification with the hero . . . [where] the interdependence of audience and performance acts as a vicious circle, one reinforcing

the other to disfranchise the spectator completely. (cited in Mueller, 1989, pp. 65, 64, 62)

Instead, he argued for what he termed *cofabulation*—akin to joint architects of production (the term used earlier to describe the active audience)—which in his view would leave "the spectators free to agree with, disagree with, or change any of the parts presented on stage" (Mueller, 1989, p. 94). They would compare the play with their own experiences and stories and so would import their own narratives into the production. Shades of Freire once again—although Augusto Boal, whose theatrical work will be discussed in Part II, moves a further step beyond Brecht.

Brecht enunciated this art/media dialogism (Brecht, 1983) less intensely but with exemplary clarity in his well-known remarks on the potential of radio to be a gigantic interactive transmission system, as opposed to its vertical one-to-many utilization. Between World Wars I and II, the worker-photography movement in Europe and the worker-documentary movement in the United States also endeavored to activate the democratic and participatory possibilities in visual media technologies, albeit inevitably with varying success (Alexander, 1981; Mattelart & Siegelau, 1983, pp. 174-181).

Now, admittedly, Benjamin and Brecht were writing at a time before film production and distribution had become such a gargantuan international enterprise, and one that is so profoundly commercially driven, as it is today. Naturally, they were aware that these media technologies were not simply, or even mainly, in the hands of the public. They were not writing out of technological triumphalism, but rather out of desire to grasp all the media that the public could access to foster counter public spheres to try to combat the fascist tornado. We need to recall their context in other respects: the riveting socialist experimentation in film, photography, and theater being undertaken in Russia and Germany; the root-and-branch obliteration of confidence in civilization seared by World War I into many survivors' consciousness; and the urgency of effective communication to large masses of people if Europe were not to be engulfed by the even more monstrous avalanche of Nazism and fascism. This was the stark agenda of their struggle: to communicate against the impending crisis.⁹

The agenda continues to be to address ways in which all radical media, from paintings to video, from flyers to computer games, can convey aesthetic impact and stimulate alternative dialogue activity, not simply

provide counterinformation. Interaction between artists and alternative media producers, and overall the kind of intense media interactivity of which Benjamin and Brecht wrote, are central to the future of radical media. Alexandra Juhasz (1995), in her study of oppositional videos on AIDS in the United States, has made this point particularly forcefully:

It is precisely this openness of the alternative AIDS media, as opposed to the bounded and closed nature of so much mainstream television, which I celebrate and applaud: a forum as rich, open, and malleable as are the individuals and communities who have been scarred by AIDS and scared into action against it. For the AIDS community, in all its diversity, as for minority populations around the world, access to media production allows us to express our needs, define our own agenda, counter irresponsible depictions of our lives, and recognize our similarities and differences. (p. 73)

Summary: Moving beyond Walker's constrained definition of media, the history of dada, surrealism, and situationism suggest very lively scenarios for radical media, even if as artistic movements they ended by partial absorption into the canon they had struggled so hard to explode. Benjamin's reflections on art and media technologies with respect to radical media focus on (a) the impact of aesthetic content, (b) the intensely interactive character that should denote such media—compare Brecht's cofabulation and the notion of joint architects of production—and (c) the possibilities opened up by mass access to media technologies. At the dawn of the 21st century, this interactive access is especially visible in terms of computer technology, and Chapter 17 by Ford and Gil at the close of Part II explores that theme in some detail.

In some ways, this discussion of aesthetics and alternative media brings us back to some of the questions of audiences and readers, of resistance, and of the public sphere, that we examined earlier. It does so with a new twist, injecting into the analytical framework the necessity of creativity in interaction. Difficult as Benjamin's notion of aura is to grasp, it serves to address the mysterious power of those moments in which our active intelligence and emotional perspicacity are engaged by, and engage with, a communication, an interaction, that we denote as artistic. Despite its imprecision, it captures the process—I would argue—much more effectively than empiricist audience studies have been able to do. Benjamin's dissolution of art into media does not evacuate art of its punch.¹⁰

We must now move from the absorbing question of radical media aesthetics to the intensely mundane but absolutely unavoidable question of radical media organization. This is a jump-cut only because we are used to notions of art as the lofty work of the lone genius.¹¹ Some of the longer case studies in Part III examine this aspect of radical media at length, both because the issue must be addressed head-on and not be skirted and with a view to making sure that the wheel does not have to be reinvented by every new radical media project. For a number of the more short-run radical communication examples in Part II, these questions are of less relevance, but for ongoing radical media, they are intensely significant.

NOTES

1. In fact, they generally wrote as though the affluent nations in which they lived were the only ones that existed, and if they did break their silence to speak of Vietnam or Cuba, it was often as a convenient metaphor for revolt.
2. Perhaps the most famous of them. The reference to cobblestones is to the form of paving of Paris' streets in some areas at the time; to the fact that they were dug up during the May-June upsurge to hurl at the police, whose brutality against protestors was merciless; and to the fact that simultaneously with driving off the forces of repression, the earth beneath emerged to view and suggested, in a sideways slippage, sunning and enjoying oneself "doing nothing" at the seaside. The fusion of protest and pleasure was exactly symptomatic of situationist philosophy.
3. This one has a long history. A version was popular in radical London taverns by the close of the 18th century.
4. Instances cited by Plant (1992, pp. 86-89, 148-149) include altering comic strips, creating public provocations such as installing an unofficial Santa Claus in a department store at Christmas to give out free gifts, and altering public notices with interspersed graffiti.
5. As Walker (1983, p. 70) among others has pointed out, the translation in *Illuminations* of the title words of Benjamin's essay—"technischer Reproduzierbarkeit"—as "mechanical reproduction," fogs the sense of his essay. He was not writing about art and industry in general.
6. The term aura was common at that time in the many German literary circles influenced by the art-for-art's-sake poet Stefan George but carried a foggy mystical and spiritual sense, almost like the notion of *numen*. Benjamin used it differently, as we shall see, and not always consistently.
7. The example he draws from the contemplation of peaceful nature (a mountain range, a branch casting its shadow over the onlooker) has perhaps suggested, inappropriately, that this kind of aura is a positive one.

8. The finely illustrated catalog edited by Antonowa and Merkert (1995) provides a whole series of essays examining the multiple artistic links between Berlin and Moscow in particular, during the first three decades of the 20th century. They were years of extraordinary political and cultural ferment in both nations and especially in both capitals. The essays trace the interconnections between the Expressionist and dada movements, constructivism (as interpreted in both locations), and still other artistic currents and phases. One of the signal features of the connection in both countries was the frequent overlap between politics and art. Another was the conscious interpenetration of artistic forms, not only between traditionally separate disciplines such as architecture and theater design but also between established art forms such as painting and sculpture, and technologies that were simple to access, new or old, from still photography to woodcuts. All this was in considerable measure the matrix from which sprang much of Benjamin's thinking about art and communication, reviewed in Chapter 4. (For a review of Berlin's socialist and communist cultural activity in the 1920s, which traces its influence over Brecht's work, see Bodek, 1997). The implications of the period in terms of *agitprop* art and the dynamics of socialist evangelism was taken up in Chapter 6. But as I noted earlier in this chapter, the ebullience of radical alternative cultures in Germany was not strong enough to withstand the murderous onset of Nazism, nor could the dynamism of Soviet cultural experiment survive the descent into Stalinism. The later essays in Antonowa and Merkert's (1995) volume address these grim histories.

9. And in retrospect, a tragedy beyond description, not least in view of the horrors befalling Soviet Russia only a year or so following Benjamin's 1926-1927 visit to Moscow.

10. I am not a boxing or martial arts enthusiast, but readers finding the metaphor distasteful might recall that these performances are highly interactive and, at advanced levels, quite the opposite to pugilistic.

11. An older English expression—"from the sub-lime[y] to the gorbimey"—expresses the irony in the character of this transition. But the connection must be forged and held on to tenaciously.

9

Conclusions

We have drawn on a considerable variety of perspectives, all of them framed by different questions and problems, to begin to make sense of the radical media phenomenon and potential. The journey we have undertaken has not led to a tightly wound, smooth conceptual conclusion. There are a number of rough edges and discontinuities, but perhaps that better corresponds to the messy nature of social being than a series of perfectly oiled axioms.

We will recapitulate them in a moment, but before we can do so, there is one dimension of current media theorizing that must first be addressed. It is the position, especially identified with an early phase of U.S. media research (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955; Klapper, 1960), that media are weak social agents. If this view were to hold, it could be devastating to the argument here about radical media. If large-scale media are thin and insubstantial entities, what interest could there possibly be in researching small-scale radical flimsies?

It is my contention not only that the weak effects model is wrong about mainstream media, but also that the serious study of radical media helps show why. For the weak effects school, media seem always assumed to be an either-or. Either they are autonomous agents, shown by their measurable power and distinctive functions—like, say, the family,

or schooling, or religion—or they are woven so imperceptibly into the social fabric that their influence is virtually impossible to detect.

The problem in this argument arises from the implicit comparison of media to other social institutions, which then ends up by making their particular cultural roles almost invisible. The family and the other institutions mentioned have a set of roles unique to each of them. We, for the most part at this point in history, do not expect religious institutions to nurture babies, or schools to propagate religion, or the family to broadcast the news. Media, however, are lifelong and universal in a way religion no longer is, even in theocratic states. They are multiform, from news to fiction, from sport to religion, from comedy to kid stuff, from music to computer games, from discussion to databases.

Their influence, therefore, I would argue, issues normally and overwhelmingly from a molecular, symbiotic strength in their very connectedness to other social forces and processes. We are not segregating physical elements, nitrogen from oxygen from hydrogen, but studying media as what they are, perhaps the most universally—globally, throughout the life cycle, graffiti to Internet—enmeshed social institutions of all. Their power stems precisely from combination, from embeddedness, not even necessarily or generally in parasitic dependence but in dialectical mutuality over time. Like enzymes such as yeast, media cannot operate without co-enzymes (minerals, vitamins, proteins) and without the amino acids that operate as their bodily carriers.

I would, therefore, conclude that the study of radical media and their impact, whether by the array of concepts defined and discussed above, or in the empirical tapestry that follows in Part II, acts to highlight this combinatorial reality. Popular culture, audiences, social movements, democracy, developmental power, hegemony, resistance, art-work, public sphere, and radical media are sometimes complementary, sometimes conflicting angles of vision; on another level, inasmuch as each captures something of social reality, they are each other's matrices. In media research, even more than family or state or social movement research, the hunt for sole agents is condemned to futility.

The concepts and issues we have discussed evince certain continuing strands: power relations, political, cultural, and economic; the relation between information, emotions, humor, art, dialogue, and democracy; the usefulness of concepts of public sphere and alternative public sphere and their relation to social movements. We also shook the kaleidoscope and examined ethnic, religious, and global dimensions of radi-

cal media and the shadow case of repressive radical media. And, not least, we explored last century's two leading organizational directions for the daily pragmatics of radical media.

I would conclude by suggesting that maybe the metaphor of the yeast enzyme might actually help to focus our understanding of the cultural and political operation of radical media. All inanimate analogies for animate processes are flawed, yet, if we consider the generative power of this microscopic enzyme, its capacity to alter its environment, perhaps we will not be so trapped by our instinctive skepticism concerning small-scale and often ephemeral media. Whether we take social movements, artworks, radical media, democracy, and the rest as political commitments or as concepts that shed light on different facets of oppositional activity, or just dispassionately as enzymes and co-enzymes, it is polymorphously perverse to dismiss the historical and contemporary impact of rebellious cultures and their media. The chapters of the next two Parts argue why that is so.