
Power, Hegemony, and Communication Theory

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But anyway, on this particular summer day Bernabé Montoya walked out of Rael's just as Onofre's mottled-green, 1953 Chevy pickup with the three-legged dog on top hiccopped to a stop at the town's lone parking meter and, with a dispirited — call it a lonely — “*Ai, Chihuahua!*” the sheriff reached for his citation pad. Bitterly he began to write, thinking as he did so that if ever all the cantankerous streaks in people like Amarante Córdova, Joe Mondragón and Onofre Martineze were united behind a common cause, there would be much more than all hell to pay.

John Nichols, *The Milagro Beanfield War*

Introduction

Shortly after the airing of the ABC mini-series polemic, *Amerika*, a viewer wrote to the *TV Guide* editor: “*Amerika* was thought-provoking, challenging and debate-inspiring. . . . Unfortunately, one of the premises of democracy is that people not only be able but *willing* to think about and discuss things for themselves. If this is an unrealistic expectation, then the best we can hope for is an efficient and relatively enlightened tyranny, whether of the right or the left. The point of the show, after all, is that we get the government we deserve.”¹

This viewer, probably innocently and unwittingly, in just these few simple sentences, provides a theory of “power,” one which is strikingly close to what Martin Carnoy has called the “official ideology of capitalist democracies” — pluralism.² Put briefly, the pluralist thesis of power says that power is a diffuse and empirically verifiable outcome of healthy conflict among competing interest groups, usually manifested as individual consumer-like decisions; and even though based on “conflict,”

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power-as-pluralism works for the "common good," integrating us into our social environment, ultimately producing social stability by easing social tensions. In the absence of overt conflict, consensus reigns in a state of equilibrium, and "power" becomes irrelevant. Power simply exercises itself out of business.

At the same time, embedded in the viewer's letter are statements that might, at first blush, look like critiques of that pluralist ideology, but which are actually *qualified* criticisms that ultimately form an ironic articulation of apology for a "common good" view of power. The viewer betrays one of the uncritical biases of pluralism — that we can unproblematically "choose" our own relations of power, or we can at least identify the manifest obstacles to our participation in the system. By extension, we deserve what we get if our apathy prevents us from attempting to exercise the power of choice that we all have at our disposal. Hence, while we might criticize our failure to take control of the process, criticism of the process *itself* is rendered inapposite.

In contrast to general "common good" notions of power — either in pure or apologetic form — of which pluralism is exemplar, are views of power that question the notion of social integration as social "stability." Instead, they interpret stability as *control*, and provide a critical opening for examining the nature of domination and struggle. This general contrast forms the basis for a number of parallel and ongoing debates within the social and behavioral sciences, most explicitly within social and political theory. The debate over contrasting conceptions of power is also found in communication theory in the form of the conventional contrast made between "mainstream" (i.e., common good) and "critical" approaches to communication studies. While one might quarrel with the wisdom of reducing the underlying debate to method or research purpose, the implicit *substantive* debate is one grounded in the nature of the concept of "power." In particular, the debate rests on ways that the intimately related notion of "consensus" becomes implicated and interpreted by competing theories of power.

What are generally taken to be "mainstream" approaches to communication include those views that argue or assume that communication plays a socially integrating role. Power is seen as an ultimately integrative force, and communication is functional in not only exercising power, but also, in turn, in producing and maintaining social stability. Traditional development communication campaigns and the field of journalism, for example, make such functional, integrative assumptions. To some extent, those views do not test or even acknowledge their own theories of power, but simply take them as given. The assumptions they make about the nature of power are often quite opaque — only implicit in their theories of communication.

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At the same time, ironically, their assumptions about power suggest that power itself is transparent. That is, their embedded, hidden theories of power assume that power is essentially a phenomenon that can somehow be made empirically available for our inspection and criticism — power is something that cannot hide from us. And since power is potentially transparent to all, perhaps that is why such "mainstream" approaches to communication studies do not perform a thoroughgoing *explicit* analysis of the nature of social power and the role that communication plays in creating and sustaining certain forms of power.

More explicit are criticisms from within what I call a "politic" tradition of communication theory, in which one might locate many — though certainly not all — contemporary American academic communication studies, as well as a number of recent European studies. Such criticisms of the role that communication plays in power relations are still rather genteel in that they amount to a bemoaning of the *failure* of social integration. Those polite critiques essentially languish for power-as-pluralism as an ideal model, and note the failure of communication — for example, the failure of the news or the dearth of public debate — to perform its consummate functional, integrative, socially stabilizing work.

Though system *grievances* are systematically exposed, their theories are not theories of social *control* — they remain implicit theories of social integration and contain biases in favor of social "stability." Their analyses are analyses — indeed, critiques — of relations of communication, but fall short of being thoroughgoing, explicit analyses and critiques of the nature of power relations by extension. Their assumptions about the nature of power remain relatively opaque while still implying that power is relatively transparent. So, while ostensibly "critical" in their approach, they tend to be located within the broadly defined "mainstream" category of communication studies by virtue of their implicit apologetic stance toward power as a functional "common good" force in society.

"Critical" communication studies, on the other hand, make few apologies for the nature of power relations, and also make explicit their complex assumptions about power. In fact, a "critical" approach to communication is critical largely because it assumes that social relations of communication are inseparable from social relations of power. The "integrative" role of communication in the exercise of power is analyzed and critiqued as a form of social *control*, rather than stability, partly in an effort to create the possibility for process and social change.

Furthermore, I argue that critical approaches to communication also assume that all theories of social relations — whether political, social, economic, social-psychological, cultural, etc. — are also theories of power, explicitly or implicitly. The buried assumptions about

power found in more traditional approaches are excavated and laid bare. Hence, the "critical" purpose of such broadly defined critical approaches to communication is not only to analyze and critique — in short, to demystify — the nature of power relations as social control and the role of communication in creating and sustaining those relations, but also to demystify theories of social relations. While more traditional approaches to communication presume a kind of apolitical objectivity or autonomy from the social practices they examine, critical studies presume a "moral" imperative of demystification as creating "possibility" — that is, as creating a climate of questioning all that is otherwise taken for granted about social action. Such a climate of questioning potentially opens sites for struggle to break the stasis of social control.

The three very general views about power and communication that I have introduced above — the thoroughly integrative view, the apologetically integrative view, and the critical view — are reflected historically within political theory in Stephen Lukes's classic treatise, *Power: A Radical View*.³ In that work, Lukes defines three basic views of power essentially in terms of three dimensions of opacity: (1) the one-dimensional view — a pluralistic view of entirely transparent decision-making behavior; (2) the two-dimensional view — a qualified critique of the overt behavioral focus of pluralism; and (3) the three-dimensional view — a thoroughgoing critique of pluralism, where power is assumed to be quite opaque, found, for example, in latent, and thus unobservable, conflict. Below, I use Lukes's three categories of the concept "power" not to define, but to help elaborate the assumptions of the three general approaches to the study of communication and (thus) power that I have described. I provide several general examples as illustrations.

Communication as Social Integration: The Thoroughly Integrative View

I didn't know why I done it, and I don't know what good it would have done me if I had. Knowing wouldn't have made it any less done.
(Molly, in Larry McMurtry's *Leaving Cheyenne*)

The first model of power described by Lukes is what he calls a one-dimensional view that focuses on overt decision-making behavior as the principle manifestation of power. This ideal model of "pluralism" assumes that the important social issues are those key issues clearly on the public agenda. Power is defined by overt, manifest conflicts over those issues — as, for example, with traditional political participation in public debate and elections and other ballot measures. According

to this view, power is evenly diffused throughout society and citizens rule as consumers within the free marketplace of ideas. Historically, this general pluralist model (as well as other "common good" conceptions of power and the State) has taken (and continues to take) the individual as the focus of its analysis.⁴ As empirically verifiable behaviors — i.e., conscious, intentional decisions that express policy preferences — power is an option that is assumed to lie transparently on the surface of social action in the face of overt conflict. Consensus and inaction render power irrelevant, since power requires easily seen conflict.

Implicit within the model of power-as-pluralism is the assumption that the decision-making process described above works for the "common good." Power is thus functional for preserving the general stability of the system — where stability is viewed as highly desirable. The notion of stability, or social integration, enjoys a long history in traditional American communication theory within its parent disciplines. In many senses, the template was set early in this century when social philosopher, John Dewey, and sociologists, Charles Horton Cooley and Robert Park, argued that communication media could be harnessed for democratic purposes. "Together, they construed modern communication essentially as an agent for restoring a broad moral and political consensus to America . . ."⁵ This general integrative vision of power's (and communication's) purpose later made itself evident (if sometimes only implicitly so) in development communication, normative models of the "social responsibility" of the press, and functional studies of media uses and gratifications, all in which the audience ultimately reins as rational, intentional "consumer."

The emphasis on rational, informed decisions, particularly consumer-like "buying" or "adopting" behaviors, has traditionally driven much development, diffusion, and communication-campaign research. In many respects, diffusion and educational communication campaigns are not unlike typical marketing campaigns for commercial products; the objective is generally to persuade individuals to adopt new behaviors (for example, adopt an innovative agricultural practice) or change existing behaviors (stop smoking, for instance). Similar strategies have been used (most often by researchers from highly developed nations) to diffuse innovative forms of political participation in developing nations. Until recently, development communication has concentrated its efforts on "modernization," both economic and political, preferring to diffuse pluralist political structures with their extant "free" economies.⁶ Such structures are premised on open debate and conscious decision-making behaviors by individuals.

One of the primary — indeed, "necessary" — vehicles presumed to effect open debate is a "free press." In the United States, the normative

model of the "social responsibility of the press" clings tenaciously to pluralist ideals when it holds that it is the job of the press to keep a heterogeneous public informed — to objectively, impartially reflect a pluralist world — so that individual citizens may then participate rationally in an open political system. In its assumptions about diffuse, visible power — following from its presumptions of "objectivity" and "impartiality" — this ideal view of the press disregards the many complexities of the agenda-building process, such as technical and practical newsroom routines, constrained source-reporter relationships, and market pressures, all of which tend to work against less-entrenched opinion. And, as John Westergaard has argued, the notion of "social responsibility" inherently contradicts itself. Journalists deny their own influence, as objective purveyors of the "news," but claim responsibility for public education and, in the end, social integration. That "responsibility" of course, entails some authority.⁷

The integrative flavor of this general implicit model of one dimensional power is perhaps most conspicuous in functional studies of media uses and gratifications. In general, this approach argues that people choose to use media to gratify basic human needs — in particular, the need to be connected with one's social environment. But, as Philip Elliott observes, it considers neither the *source* of those needs nor the peculiar distribution of social power and opportunity. Since needs develop within an *existing* set of social relations, such an approach — based on simply identifying and describing needs and their gratifications — inevitably supports those existing relations, hiding and suppressing alternatives.⁸ And by emphasizing *use* (i.e., decision-making), this approach, as with more overt politically pluralist approaches to communication, obscures less obvious covert or latent forms of power and conflict played out through complex social arrangements and "logics" that ultimately define and limit the parameters within which individuals are able to make choices. The following view of power provides at least a limited alternative.

The Failure of Communication as Social Integration: The Apologetically Integrative View

A little "confessed" evil saves one from acknowledging a lot of hidden evil . . . it is well worth the price of an immunization. What does it matter, *after all*, if margarine is just fat, when it goes further than butter, and costs less? What does it matter, *after all*, if Order is a little brutal or a little blind, when it allows us to live so cheaply? (Roland Barthes, "Operation Margarine," in *Mythologies*)

The two-dimensional view of power that Lukes describes is represented primarily by Peter Bachrach and Morton S. Baratz's qualified critique of the behavioral fetishism of pluralism.⁹ The "second face of power" identified by Bachrach and Baratz is *nondecision-making*. What is key to this view is that not all consensus is "real" — some consensus is merely apparent and takes the form of *covert* conflict. In other words, this model of power accounts for the suppression of challenges to the interests of a decision-maker as another important way of exercising power.

When one prevents another from making a decision with regard to a policy grievance, one has gone beyond simple decision-making behavior with regard to explicit, key issues. *Potential* issues are now at stake. And those issues may be kept *off* the public agenda, as when marginal social groups are prevented from gaining access to mass media. Thus, the process of agenda-building, rather than merely the agenda itself, becomes relevant. The "agenda" is no longer presumed to be an unrefractive mirror of a pluralist world, but a more selective representation of that world.

Still, in spite of the added critical complexity, the two-dimensional view of power, according to Lukes, remains merely a qualified critique of the behavioral focus of pluralism because it presents nondecision-making as yet another *form* of decision-making. The individual is thus retained as the unit of analysis. Furthermore, it retains the empirical focus of pluralism in that power continues to be defined in terms of *manifest* conflict — whether overt or covert. By failing to escape the essential limitations of the pluralist model — its individualism and empiricism — this ostensible critical view of power, I argue, ultimately works as an apology for "common good" conceptions of power by first displaying its working inefficiencies and imperfections, but then rescuing the *ideal* model by falling back upon its own limiting assumptions. Michael Shapiro has exposed and critiqued the rhetoric of apology as a genre of discourse, and I extend the analogy here to examine a similar genre of communication and power.¹⁰

Often, criticisms of a particular mainstream area of communication study come from within its own bounds when historical and material reality motivate researchers to reconsider the questions they ask. For example, although the assumptions and political biases of traditional development and diffusion research have been criticized sharply from outside on both substantive and empirical grounds, scholars working in that tradition have also noted some of the limitations of their earlier work. Everett Rogers, for instance, notes the passing of the older behavior-persuasion paradigm with its built-in assumption that development results in the equitable distribution of resources; in its place, a growing concern with inequitable gaps in knowledge and effects — and how to

correct them — has emerged.¹¹ Still, such criticisms tend to focus on the failure of campaigns due to their incorrect structure or strategy, rather than to provide a thoroughgoing critique of the underlying model of pluralism upon which such campaigns are intimately premised in the first place.

Similarly, recent research areas within journalism and political communication provide challenges to the strictly pluralist bent of traditional ancestors. For example, studies of news "gatekeeping" examine the agenda-building process and consider ways in which issues are prevented — through the editorial process especially — from ever reaching the public agenda.¹² Those studies probe a deeper level of power than do their pluralist progenitors; they excavate "apparent" consensus and expose its grounding in covert conflict.

The suppression of social voices assumes a certain spotlight as an object of study — nondecision-making, in Lukes's terms, is recognized as another face of power. But, as in Lukes's scheme, nondecision-making, such as gatekeeping, is regarded as yet another form (if more complex and hidden) of decision-making. Immanent within this view of power, the active suppression of voices (whether intentional or merely incidental to the exigencies of production) operates much like a "bad apple," spoiling the "barrel" of otherwise pluralist diversity. The barrel provides both the context and limiting assumptions, but the apple becomes the primary object of analysis and critique. The imperfections of the journalistic process are discussed at length, but neither the reasons for those "imperfections" nor the larger paradox of the notion of a "free press" in this society are addressed adequately.

The growing interest in socialization and the construction of social reality (or our image of the social world about us) provides — from within the research "mainstream" — another significant, if sometimes limited, challenge to the static functional, behavioral model of pluralism. This general research area provides a significant corrective for the lack of context of functional "media-use" oriented studies. For example, studies of social identity make an explicit attempt to identify the links between internal psychological processes and external social processes at different levels of analysis.¹³ Such an approach potentially provides a way of explaining how needs and wants, expressed socially, come into being within a complex social milieu. Similarly, studies of socialization examine the social process of integrating individuals into a larger "legitimate" role structure. Legitimation — a way of explaining or justifying a given social structure and the ideas that support it — mystifies by preventing people from recognizing the conventional, changeable basis of such a social creation.¹⁴ Hence, power implicitly takes on a form of mediation within this approach that is suggestive of

the Gramscian view of "hegemony" (which I discuss below).

Still, many studies of social reality seem reluctant to take the critical step of tackling and analyzing the underlying limiting assumptions of the notion of social integration *itself*. Rather, they often seem content with describing the process and how it can sometimes go wrong. Perhaps "Cultivation Analysis," especially of television violence, provides a notable exception from within the research "mainstream." Cultivation theory turns explicitly the entire notion of "consensus" on its head by arguing that resistance to the system is prevented by the cultivation of fear and acquiescence to authority via symbolic representations of power. In other words, we accept authority in the name of safety.¹⁵ Clearly, the theory reinterprets the notions of "integration" as control and containment of change, and of consensus as *consent*. Thus, the approach opens the door to the analysis of *latent* conflict and the complex exercise of power through social arrangements. In the following section, I present an elaboration of just such a compelling critical alternative to the pluralist thesis and its apologies, which takes a more sophisticated form in the concept of "hegemony."

Communication as Social Control: The Critical View

"Why do you keep telling me that things are going from bad to worse on my estate, my dear fellow?" the landlord says to his steward. "I know it without you; can't you talk about something else? You should let me forget about the state of things, leave me in ignorance of it, then I shall be happy." (Nikolai Vasilievich Gogol, *Dead Souls*)

Critical approaches to communication have in common not merely that all social relations and relations of communication are also relations of power; they also assume that those relations of power take some form of *domination* within a complex contextual social web. In other words, "social integration" is explicitly recast as "social control." But the shapes that social control is presumed to take, and the ways relations of domination are accounted for take many different forms. In other words, there is no single "critical" approach to the study of communication, much less social theory: the many and varied approaches that fall within this rubric have drawn from and built upon a wide range of sometimes deeply conflicting intellectual traditions.

For example, political-economic approaches to media studies are grounded in a long tradition of historical materialism. They search for both direct and mediated connections between economic power and cultural forms, leading to questions of media ownership and the role of

cultural production itself. In general, such analyses provide a material context for interpreting the role of culture in reproducing social relations and identities; they provide an explicit account of the dynamics behind the production of ideas and the mystification of the whole production process, as opposed to explaining only content or effects.¹⁶

A more static, functional approach to explaining the nature of social domination is represented by Structuralist Marxism, associated perhaps most strongly with Louis Althusser and Nicos Poulantzas (in his earlier works). In contrast with the historical focus of political-economic analyses, structural analyses in general search for objective structures (economic, political, ideological) that social action presupposes. According to Althusser's anti-existentialist argument, power is effected through individuals' willing subjugation to ideology, which defines them and locates them within a social structure.¹⁷

Post-structuralist approaches take a very different tack, preferring criticism of manifest social practices, rather than analysis of the underlying structures that give rise to them. Michel Foucault, for instance, focuses on the relationship between power and knowledge in his criticisms of the privileged discursive practices of institutions (such as medicine) and who gets to "talk" those discourses. Rather than seeking the deep structure of discourse (i.e., language), as a semiotician might, Foucault has stayed with its surface structures, its "rules of formation" at given historical moments. In general, Foucault has been more concerned with criticizing the use of power to dominate — where social practices are represented in discursive practices — and less concerned with theorizing about the origin of power relations.¹⁸

All critical approaches to power, such as those illustrated here, cast social relations as relations of domination, thus directly challenging pluralist assumptions about "diffuse" power. Further, all confront more or less directly the notion of "consensus" with, for example, arguments about mystification or willing subjugation to ideology. Since a thoroughgoing critique of "consensus" is crucial for a thoroughgoing critique of the inadequacy of the pluralist thesis for explaining power relations, it is important to single out here the critical approach that most explicitly takes apart "consensus" — not only "apparent" consensus, but also "real" consensus — at a useful level of abstraction. Such an approach embraces the Gramscian theory of "consent." Thus, that is the approach on which I focus here. And that is also the critical alternative and thoroughgoing challenge to pluralism reflected in Lukes's third model of power.

Unlike Bachrach and Baratz's "second face of power" (the suppression of grievances), the third dimension of power involves the conditioning of consensus by the prevention of grievances in the first place rather

than simply the prevention of their expression. This process allows the manipulation of the public agenda by the presentation of a paradigm of society that seems natural, inevitable, and unchangeable. "Decisions are choices consciously and intentionally made by individuals between alternatives, whereas the bias of the system can be mobilised, recreated and reinforced in ways that are neither consciously chosen nor the intended result of particular individuals."¹⁹

Hence, latent conflicts become important foci for the exercise of power, and their suppression is no longer adequately characterized as an individual-level activity, but as "a function of collective forces and social arrangements."²⁰ The complexity of this view of power lies in its assumptions about the opacity of power. Power is relatively hidden because it is not necessarily observable (it may be located in latent conflict) and is exercised through an obscure web of sometimes abstract social relations. Such an argument provides both a penetrating critique of and an alternative to the empiricism and individualism of the pluralist model of power, much more so than the politic criticisms reviewed in the previous section.

Lukes's general three-dimensional view of power is not unlike the complex concept of "hegemony" found in critical social-theoretical literature. "Hegemony," though used by some to refer simply to "ideological domination," is more correctly a conceptual tool for understanding and potentially subverting the "consent" of the masses to their own oppression, especially under late monopoly capitalism. Associated most seminally with Antonio Gramsci, the concept goes beyond both the "liberal" idea of consent as "consensus" and the economic Marxist notion of consent as "false consciousness."²¹ Antonio Gramsci's major contribution to Marxism is that he systematized, from what is implicit in Marx, a Marxist science of political action.²² There are two general (intimately related) uses of the idea of hegemony by social theorists: (1) as a theory of consent, which exposes the process; and (2) as a political strategy, a way of searching for access points for struggle.

The first goal of the critical model of power-as-hegemony is the project of demystification by theoretical activity. The theory of hegemony — i.e., of consent — goes far beyond pluralist theories of social integration because it does not stop with the observation that we can, indeed, empirically observe a kind of "consensus." Rather, it poses the problem of how that consensus is produced and who produces it, how it is that governed classes "freely consent" to the rule of more powerful governing classes. As such, the concept of hegemony also recasts the notion of "dominance" no longer as one of coercion, but rather as a much more complex, more subtle and dynamic process. Stuart Hall, most conspicuously identified with British cultural studies, argues that:

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Hegemony implied that the dominance of certain formations was secured, not by ideological compulsion, but by cultural leadership The critical point about this conception of "leadership" — which was Gramsci's most distinguished contribution — is that hegemony is understood as accomplished, not without the due measure of legal and legitimate compulsion, but principally by means of winning the active consent of those classes and groups who were subordinated within it.²³

Hall also argues that the concept of hegemony became important to communication studies precisely because of the observation that media are neither autonomous social actors nor merely reflective of dominant ideologies or consensus. Instead, *media* are *key actors* in the *production* of consent — at once free of direct control by powerful social groups while also subject to working within limits and conditions neither of their own choosing nor within their direct control. Media tend to give weight to well-established opinion (which they help to establish as well), but not by virtue of force — and not unproblematically.

Todd Gitlin uses the notion of hegemony to explain how the American New Left was both "made" and "unmade" in the news media during the mid-1960s.²⁴ In the struggle over images, conventional framing devices were used by media to first marginalize and trivialize that political movement, and then later to absorb and domesticate its conflicting values and definitions of reality — a process entered into, in some senses, by the movement itself. Gitlin argues that, in journalism, social conflict is brought into the news and reproduced, but reproduced in terms of prevailing "common sense" definitions of reality. "As the mass media have suffused social life, they have become crucial fields for the definition of social meaning — partially contested zones in which the hegemonic ideology meets its partial challenges and then adapts."²⁵ And the process of adaptation can be highly contradictory.

The second goal of the model of power-as-hegemony is strategically political, which follows partly from the general "moral," reflexively educational imperative of many critical studies. But it also follows from the interpretation of the concept of hegemony itself — not only from Gramsci's notion of "leadership," but also from the ever-changing, imperfect, contradictory nature of the process of hegemony. The imperfection of hegemony is precisely what opens up sites of access for the struggle over images and discourses in culture. Martin Carnoy argues:

Gramsci, in the last analysis, was, like Marx and Lenin, an *educator*. Yet, unlike Lenin, he believed in the intellectual qualities of the masses and their capability to create themselves the hegemony of their class rather than have it done for them by an elite vanguard party or an elite bureaucracy responsible for revolutionary theory and tactics. The

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development of a working-class consciousness, such a crucial element in Marxist theory, is for Gramsci the principle moment in explaining both capitalist domination and its overthrow.²⁶

In particular, Gramsci's ideas on revolution focus on the concept of hegemony — as *counterhegemony*. The struggle against bourgeois dominance requires a strategy by which an alternative concept of society is created — one that assaults bourgeois hegemony in a "war of position."²⁷ For Gramsci, the key struggle takes place not in the realm of militancy, but, instead, in the realm of ideology. That is, the "hegemonic crisis" leads to a struggle over competing definitions of social reality.

In addition to asking questions about power that refer to its location — "who-whom" questions that get at the ideas of "responsibility" and "gain" — Lukes recently suggested that we might also ask the question "Who can secure the achievement of collective goods?"²⁸ That question permits us to identify critical access points in the struggle over media images and representations. In communication studies, Hall has long affirmed the importance of the politicizing role of confronting the problem of ideology.²⁹

In particular, Hall's "theory of articulation" has political consequences in that it informs us about cultural transformations and the creation of new political subjects through the use of media; an example Hall has given is the Rastafarian movement in Jamaica. Others, too, have attempted to provide strategies for the struggle over meaning and political action, such as Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe's attempt to find a politics of discourse.³⁰ In general, the theorist who uses the concept of hegemony tends to be more engaged politically — as self-reflexive "educators" and by virtue of the politicizing nature of the concept itself — than pluralists or other political theorists who tend to presume a certain distance from their subject.

The theory of power-as-hegemony, whose use is illustrated in communication studies, provides a greater complexity of explanation about power in its opacity than do the pluralist thesis and its apologia. But in addition to providing a penetrating critique of pluralism, the complexity of the concept of hegemony also provides a substantive *alternative*. In fact, "hegemony" turns the notion of social integration on its head and escapes pluralism's fetishism of the individual and the observable, allowing us to acknowledge the roles of latent conflict and obscure social actors in power exercised as social control. The concept thus demystifies those roles, potentially opening avenues for access. Further, "hegemony" makes *explicit* its assumptions about the process of power — indeed, the politicizing nature of the concept hegemony is inherent in its use.

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In general, using the concept of hegemony allows us to ask questions about power that might be obviated by the use of the pluralist thesis or its politic critiques. Analogously, critical approaches to the study of communication and power carry the same advantages over pluralist and quasi-critical approaches. In general, critical communication studies explicitly conceptualize relations of communication as problematic relations of power — that is, power becomes something more than a state or relation to be taken for granted or merely described. Power becomes the central problem for analysis.

Notes to Chapter 4

4. Power, Hegemony, and Communication Theory

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