2

Analysing Gender in Media Texts

Introduction

THE purpose of this chapter is to introduce a number of different approaches that are used for studying gender and the media. Because the book is primarily about representations of gender in media – rather than media production and/or audience readings – the focus here will be on theories/methods that have been used to analyse media texts. I wrote theories/methods, rather than choosing one or other of the words, because most of the approaches discussed here are both methods of analysis and theories of representation – that is, the approaches are built on specific epistemological foundations such as beliefs about the relationship between 'representations' and 'reality', understanding of how meaning works, and so on. This should become clear early in the chapter when you encounter the radically different understandings of meaning espoused by content analysts and semioticians.

The first part of the chapter deals with what might be understood as the 'standard' approaches media studies uses for analysing texts: content analysis, semiotics and ideological critique. Next, however, the chapter focuses on newly emerging perspectives from discourse analysis and discourse theory, including an empirical social scientific tradition and an approach influenced by the French theorist Michel Foucault. Finally, the chapter examines a group of perspectives that, although not yet well represented by specific studies, pose a radical and critical challenge to previous theories of the relationship between meaning and power (that builds on understandings from discourse theory). Specifically, the chapter looks briefly at the extraordinary importance of postmodernism, postcolonial theory and queer theory for contemporary cultural analysis, picking out some of the ways in which they have already impacted upon feminist media studies.

Content Analysis

'Content analysis' is sometimes used as a generic term to refer to a variety of methods used to analyse texts, but it is generally taken to define a specific type of analysis – a quantitative technique which measures certain aspects of a media text. At its most simple it can be used as a way of 'measuring' the relative numbers of males to females who appear on television, in magazines or in the press. It has often been used in feminist research to provide a measure of the kinds of roles which men and women appear in on TV or the kinds of traits they are represented as possessing. Essentially, it involves counting the frequency of particular kinds of portrayals, using a coding framework that has been created and agreed in advance. The raw data it produces comes in the form of frequencies, which can then be translated into percentages, or analysed for significance using a variety of different statistical packages.

Content analysis has been used to examine portrayals across a range of media and genres including adverts, pop videos, news, drama, computer games, etc. But the approach is not limited to looking at how women and men as groups are portrayed. It can also be a means to document a whole variety of patterns in media, such as the relative amounts of airtime given to different political candidates during an election, the number of times female news interviewees are interrupted compared with their male counterparts, the range of ways in which violence against women is understood, or the portrayal of specific groups of women, such as disabled women or aboriginal women.

By far the largest and best-known examples of content analysis being used to analyse gender are the three Global Media Monitoring projects which took place in 1995, 2000 and 2005 as part of the enormous energy generated by the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing. At the regional and international meetings held to plan for the conference there was a sense of urgency about the need to include media issues in the Platform for Action to be adopted – these had been downplayed in the three previous conferences. The degree of importance attributed to media is reflected in the fact that no fewer than seventy-one countries took part in the systematic media monitoring. Margaret Gallagher has written movingly of its import:

> The significance of this project was enormous. The 1995 Global Media Monitoring Project gave women a tool with which to scrutinize their media in a systematic way, and a means of documenting gender bias and exclusion. The project was unprecedented not simply in terms of its geographical scope, but also in its execution. From teachers and researchers, to activists and lobbyists, to journalists and other media

> professionals – some with considerable research experience, others with none – groups and individuals from a wide spectrum of backgrounds contributed to the data collection. In some countries disparate groups co-operated for the first time, united by concern about the portrayal of women in their national media. The process of monitoring their news media proved an eye opening, educational experience for many of those involved. For some it created a new awareness of the pervasiveness of gender stereotyping. For others it provided concrete evidence to support long held personal opinions. (Gallagher 2001: 27)

As this demonstrates, research using a content analytic approach has been enormously valuable over the last thirty years in raising the profile of questions about gender representation in the media, and documenting the narrow and restrictive range of stereotypes used to depict women and men. The relatively low costs of conducting this kind of research – essentially available to anyone with access to a tape recorder, video recorder or the price of a sample of daily newspapers – has encouraged groups beyond academia to undertake studies and has empowered many women to become involved in campaigning on issues around media representation. Today increasing numbers of activist groups use some form of quantitative data collection to document critiques and strengthen their overall arguments. The high status accorded to the quantitative data produced by content analysis has made it a persuasive tool for use with broadcasting/media organizations and their regulators. Indeed, this type of research is still the industry's standard way of measuring and assessing gender representations (as well as the representation of ethnic minorities and people with disabilities). It is used by the major broadcasting corporations across the world and it attracts large amounts of funding.

Content analytic research plays an important role in political leverage and in holding media bosses and programme makers accountable with questions such as 'why do women constitute only 30 per cent of people on television when they make up 52 per cent of the population?' Despite this, many of the approach's underlying assumptions have been called into question by critics. First, the idea that the media act or should act like a mirror for society has been roundly challenged by many media scholars as at best naive and at worst extremely damaging for our understanding of media/gender relations (Cowie 1978; Gledhill 1978; Jaddou and Williams 1981; Betterton 1987; Myers 1987). Rather than reflecting reality, such theorists argue, the media are involved in producing or constructing particular versions of reality in order to make them 'real' and persuasive (such perspectives are explored later in this chapter). Secondly, content analysis's conception of meaning is problematic – particularly its focus upon bias and distortion, with the suggestion that sexism resides in single images such as

the 'dumb blonde' or the 'unintelligent housewife'. Not only is this challenged for its accuracy of understanding (i.e. it does not capture how sexism works), but it is also deemed to lead to a problematic form of political action focused on excising 'bad' stereotypes, but leaving the rest of media content intact. Thirdly, the approach does not distinguish between levels of meaning, and, in fact, only ever addresses the manifest content of representations, thus ignoring the way that 'woman' can be used to symbolize an enormous variety of different meanings including stability, comfort, conservatism and sexuality. Indeed, research in the content analytic tradition tells us little about the images it examines, except how frequently they occur. Finally, content analysis tends to gloss over the specificities of representations and offers instead a tale of the persistence of certain well-worn stereotypes (Winship 1981). The major problem with this is its failure to pick up on differences and on how things are changing. At its worst, content analysis may be accused of only telling us what we know already.

Semiotics and Structuralism

Semiotics originated in studies of language, but it can be used to analyse everything that can communicate meaning for example gestures and non-verbal communication, sports, architecture, road signs, flags, fashion, myth, music, all kinds of media texts and much more. It is both a theory and a method, and works by unpacking and making explicit meanings that we all – as lay semioticians – create through our engagement with 'texts' of all kinds.

The term semiology was coined by the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure (1857–1913), whose lectures were published posthumously as *A Course in General Linguistics* (Saussure 1974). The term 'semiotics' was proposed by the American philosopher Charles Peirce (1839–1914), writing at about the same time. Today the two terms are used more or less interchangeably.

Saussure's work posed a radical challenge to linguistic theory. He argued that semiology should become a new science – 'a science of signs'. He proposed that an analytic distinction could be made between two parts of a sign – the signifier and the signified. He used the term *signifier* to refer to the word or speech sound, and *signified* to refer to its mental concept. Thus, for example, the sign 'snow' was made up of the sound produced by the word snow (the signifier), and the concept soft white matter which falls from the sky (the signified). Saussure argued that there is no natural or inevitable relationship between the signifier and the signified – their relationship is purely arbitrary. Any word could have been chosen to name the soft white

matter which falls from the sky; indeed, the fact that snow has different signifiers in other languages – 'neige' in French, 'Snee' in German – illustrates this point. It is important to note that the signified is not the 'thing' which is represented, but it is the mental concept of that object. In practice, the signifier and signified are linked; the distinction is an *analytic* one.

The arbitrariness of the sign

Arguing against traditional word-object conceptions of meaning Saussure contended that the meaning of any word comes not from any inherent or natural relationship between the signifier and signified but *from its relationship to other elements within the system*. The signifier snow gets its meaning by being distinguishable from other words which share some of the same features when written or spoken, such as flow and snot and snore, and the signified derives its sense from its distinction from the mental concepts of sleet, rain, hail and ice. We could have called snow 'snew'; this is perfectly easy to pronounce in English and is not used for any other signified, but it sounds like nonsense because of its lack of relationship to other signs. Sense – or meaning – is a product of relationships and differences within the language as a system. As Saussure put it: 'in language there are only differences without positive terms' (Saussure 1974: 120).

The relationship between signifiers and signifieds is, then, an arbitrary one. But Saussure went further than this. He also suggested that signifieds, concepts, are themselves arbitrary. The world could be conceptually partitioned in an infinite number of ways, but each language makes only some differences significant. Saussure called this the *arbitrariness of the sign*. To use a standard example: whilst the Innuit have a variety of different words for different types of snow, in English we have only one term. There are different ways of interpreting this: philosophers and linguists have argued about the extent to which the concepts which a culture marks as detectable in language are determined by the 'world', and to what extent our language constrains which features of the world we can actually 'see'. Some feminist linguists contend that most languages are inherently patriarchal – they divide up the world conceptually in ways that serve male interests and encode male perceptions, making some of women's experiences invisible (Spender 1985). Before the terms 'sexism' and 'sexual harassment' were coined, for example, women had difficulty in talking about important features of their lived experience – what Betty Friedan (1963) called the 'the problem with no name'.

As this indicates, language, like other forms of representation, is a site of struggle. Some new words – like the many arising out of

developments in information technology such as snail-mail and mouse potato – pass into the language uncontested, generating little more than a wry smile from the individual who encounters them for the first time, whilst others, such as 'sexual harassment' and 'political correctness' produce enormous passion and controversy precisely because they encode contested meanings. Saussure challenged the idea that language was a process of naming, in which each object-in-the-world has a name corresponding to it. He was not interested in referents and he recognized that, in any case, many words – for example abstractions like 'freedom' or 'democracy' – have no concrete referent. He argued that all signs are *cultural constructs* that take their meaning from learned, social and collective use. The word snow, for example, is now used in Northern communications technology-saturated societies to refer to white specks on a television or computer screen; at other times it has been slang for cocaine, and so on.

Iconic, indexical and symbolic signs

Saussure was concerned primarily with language. Peirce, in contrast, focused his attention on a whole range of different signs, including pictorial ones. He distinguished between three types of signs – the iconic, the indexical and the symbolic. Iconic signs are signs which resemble the object, person or place being represented. The signifier–signified relationship is one of likeness. Painted portraits constitute an obvious example of an iconic sign, as do documentary photographs, since they are designed to look like the thing being represented. The relationship between these signifiers and their signifieds often appears to be a straightforward one – as expressed by the oft-quoted view that 'the camera never lies'. In fact, they are no less mediated and culturally determined than any other signifier–signified relationship. In order to make sense of any drawing or photograph we have to be familiar with a whole series of learned conventions, which, once acquired, are taken for granted – conventions about scale, perspective, lighting, etc. It is extremely difficult to recognize even the most mundane objects when they are photographed in unfamiliar ways – from unusual angles, with unconventional lighting, from very close up, etc.

Indexical signs are signs that rely on some kind of connection between signifier and signified: smoke, for example, is an index of fire, while profuse sweating is an index of a high temperature. Indexical signs are used extensively in all the visual media, and we have become adept at reading them – knowing, for example, that a representation of the White House is not merely a depiction of a particular building but a sign which stands indexically for the President of the USA, or the

US government, or Washington, or even the USA itself (depending on other contextual signifiers). Liesbet Van Zoonen (1994) has argued that women are frequently used as 'signs', with a young, blonde girl dressed in white signifying (within the codes of Anglo-American television) innocence and probity, and dark-haired women signifying danger and sexuality – a set of codes that was used, for example, in *Dynasty*.

For both iconic and indexical signs there is *some* relationship between the signifier and the signified, even if this is determined culturally; that is, these signs, in being 'caused' by their referents, lack the absolute arbitrariness of the signifiers of speech. However, symbolic signs rely entirely on convention: there is no 'natural' relationship between the signifier and the signified. Advertisements rely heavily on symbolic signs, developing brand symbols to 'stand for' the product. Recently multinational companies have become so adept at the use of symbols that even the presence of particular colours in a landscape can symbolize the product – such as the red and white of Coca-Cola, or the purple of Silk Cut. Music too can act as a potent symbol, evoking the signified of a particular product even when it is played in an entirely different context.

Denotation and connotation

Two other concepts which are central to semiotic analysis are denotation and connotation. Denotation refers to the most literal meaning or to the first level of signification of any particular signifier – for example a picture of a rose denotes a particular type of flower. At a second level, however, the rose has many other connotations – it may indicate love or passion, or the British Labour Party, or a particular county in the War of the Roses (Lancashire). The study of connotation or second-level signification was opened up by the French theorist Roland Barthes. Barthes's essays on many different features of French popular culture dissected everything from adverts and travel books to food and wrestling, exploring the process of second-level signification. Connotative readings of signs, Barthes argued, are introduced by an audience or 'reader' who possesses the appropriate cultural codes. This highlights a very important point about semiotics generally – that the process of semiosis is *culture bound*. The sense of any particular signifier is only meaningful within particular cultural or sub-cultural settings.

Barthes's most famous example of second-order signification comes from his essay 'Myth Today', which elaborates his theoretical and methodological system for analysing popular culture. He describes his encounter with a particular edition of the popular magazine *Paris Match:*

> I am at the barber's, and a copy of Paris-Match is offered to me. On the cover, a young Negro in a French uniform is saluting, with his eyes uplifted, probably fixed on a fold of the tricolour. All this is the *meaning* of the picture. But, whether naively or not, I see very well what it signifies to me: that France is a great Empire, that all her sons, without any colour discrimination, faithfully serve under her flag, and that there is no better answer to the detractors of an alleged colonialism than the zeal shown by this Negro in serving his so-called oppressors. (Barthes 1973: 116)

The first level of signification produces the most literal meaning: a black man is saluting the French flag. But, as Barthes argues, at a second level the image works to naturalize French imperialism and to present it as positive – so positive indeed that the black man in the photograph feels not like a victim of oppression, but a proud subject of the French Empire.

Barthes is interested in a particular type of second-level signification: myth. For him, myth is 'depoliticized speech'; it is the transformation of history into nature. Barthes's work on myth has particular relevance for feminist analyses particularly in the field of advertising.

Semiotics and advertising

Advertisements work by constructing myths, in such a way as to endow products with meanings which *appear* to be natural and eternal. The task of semiotic analysis is to show how these sign systems work, to decode them. Semiotic analysis, then, is quite different from content analysis in its approach to adverts. While content analysis looks at the frequency of particular images or stereotypes, and compares them with some notion of an undistorted reality, semiotic analysis is concerned with *how* adverts mean. Judith Williamson's (1978) book *Decoding Advertisements* was the landmark publication for semiotic analyses of adverts. She combined insights from psychoanalysis and Althusserian Marxism to produce compelling analyses of more than one hundred advertisements, as well as explicating a groundbreaking theoretical approach. Williamson was concerned with the 'currency' of adverts – the way in which they permit the meaning of one thing to be expressed in terms of another. They provide a structure which enables language of objects to be transformed into a language of feelings or people. 'Thus a diamond comes to "mean" love and endurance for us. Once the connection has been made we begin to translate the other way and in fact to skip translating altogether: taking the sign for what it signifies, the thing for the feeling' (Williamson 1978). As Robert Goldman (1992) argues, when we recognize an advert as an advert,

we recognize a context or framework in which meanings are rearranged, so that exchanges of meaning can take place. If we did not recognize the motive of an advert we would frequently be baffled by its juxtapositions: why is that car dancing? How come those people in jeans can run through walls? What is a giant blackcurrant doing in the road?

Advertisements do not work by imposing meanings upon us or by manipulating us in some crude way. They create structures of meaning which sell products not for their use value, their functional value as objects, but in terms of ourselves as social beings. Through advertising, products are given an 'exchange value' – statements about a particular commodity are translated into statements about who we are and who we aspire to become. Ads are commodity signs which attach to products. Through advertising the exchange value of many products is made to far eclipse their use value. For example, the value of a Rolex as a sign of affluence and success is far more significant to what a Rolex is than its utility as a timepiece (Goldman 1992).

One of the principal ways in which advertisements communicate with us, Williamson argued, is through what Althusser (1984) described as *interpellation* or *hailing*. One of Althusser's major contributions to discussions about ideology was his argument that ideology works by 'constituting concrete individuals as subjects' (Althusser 1984). Recognizing ourselves as subjects is an act of ideological recognition, and it operates through interpellation. Using the example of a street scene Althusser argues that when someone turns around in the street in response to the shout 'hey you there!' that person becomes a subject. 'Why? Because he has recognised that the hail was "really" addressed to him, and that it was *really him* who was hailed' (Althusser 1984: 48)

Williamson suggests that Althusser's notion of interpellation captures precisely what happens in advertisements. Adverts address us through the implied phrase: 'Hey you!' and, as we 'recognize' that we are being addressed so, in that instant, we take on the (ideological) subject position being offered to us by the ad. Lawrence Bardin (1977) suggested three different forms that interpellation in adverts can take – the vocative form (direct address), the imperative (which urges the addressee to become what she is addressed as), and a variety of other more subtle forms which permit identification. Janice Winship (1981) argues that one way in which we can analyse advertisements is to ask: 'who does this advert think I am?' In doing so, we can attempt to lay bare the assumptions about age, gender, 'race' and class around which the advert is based. Chinyelu Onwurah (1987) cites the advertising copy: 'Isn't it nice to be brown when everyone else is white' as a particularly graphic demonstration of assumptions

about 'race' in glossy women's magazines. Winship (1981) suggests that we use the technique of reversal when analysing to whom an advert is addressed; this can help to make clear the assumptions that are implicit in the ad. As I will argue in the next chapter, however, reversals have, since Winship was writing, themselves become a mainstay of advertising, and do not necessarily have the critical force they once did.

Using semiotics to analyse an advert

The advert in figure 2.1 shows a photographic image of a contemporary living room with two people seated in the foreground. The man, to the left of the picture, is slightly in shadow, leaning forward with a contemplative look on his face and his left hand placed on the woman's thigh. The woman is wearing a short black lace dress which has fallen open to reveal her left thigh, and black patent shoes with high stiletto heels. Her lips and eyes are made up to accentuate them and light falls across her body. Also in the foreground is a stylish glass table on which chrome hi-fi equipment is laid out. Superimposed on

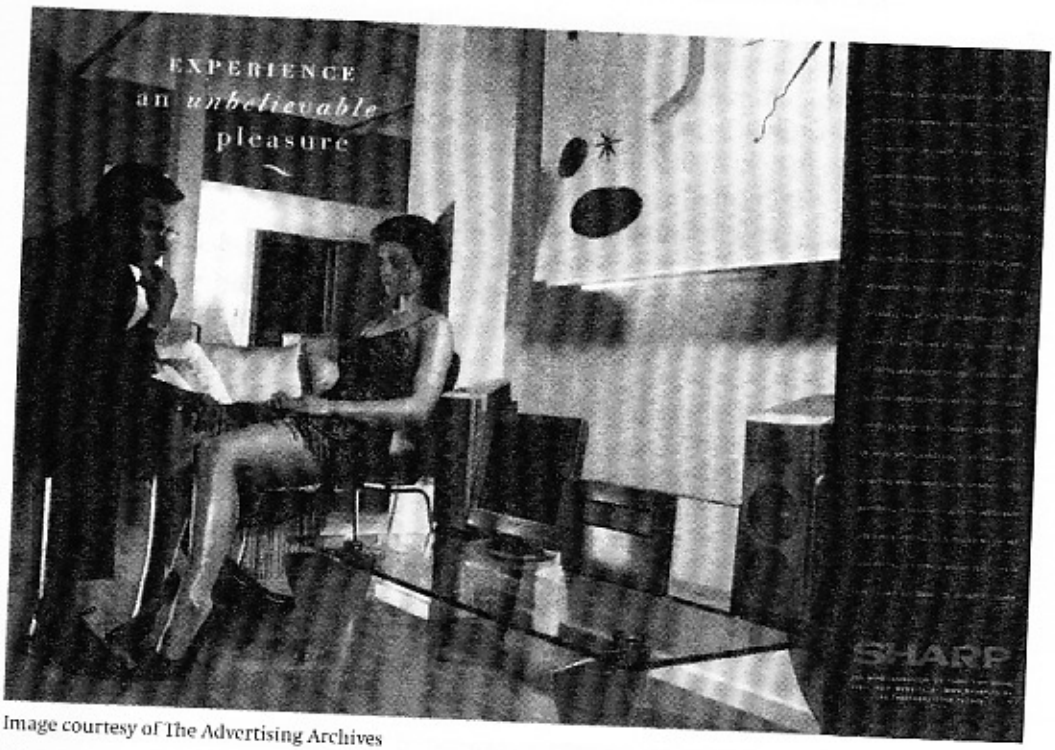

Image courtesy of The Advertising Archives

Figure 2.1 Experience an unbelievable pleasure

the photo, and placed visually between the man's and woman's heads, is the caption: 'Experience an unbelievable pleasure'. Down the right-hand side of the double-page spread a small printed text describes the 'perfect' experience of one-bit audio by Sharp which is 'set to revolutionise the way we listen to music'.

So much for the denotative meanings. It is the connotations of the photograph that offer the richest material for the semiotic analyst. The room with its polished floor, neutral furnishings and Miro-esque modern painting connotes both affluence and taste. This is reinforced by the attire of the man who appears to be at ease in the situation and whose well-cut, sober suit and glasses suggest status and substantial financial means. In contrast, the woman appears less at ease. She is sitting on a hard chair, leaning back with her spine arched and her legs parted. While he stares into the middle distance (or at the hi-fi?) she gazes at him, as if waiting for him to act or move. The man's hand upon her thigh connotes possession of her. Her attire, gaze and position are strongly coded as sexual, and this is underscored by the lighting in the room which suggests that it is late evening or night.

The advertiser has set its readers a puzzle. In order to produce the desired reading we (the readers) have to fill in meanings, perform what Judith Williamson (1978) calls 'advertising work'. The caption cues us to read the photograph as one in which unbelievable pleasure is being experienced or is about to be experienced. The small printed text at the right-hand side of the photo explains the nature of this pleasure: it comes from listening to music on Sharp's unique analogue and digital technology which allows 'every sound made by every instrument' to be perfectly reproduced. However, without reading the small print, the viewer is invited to make a different kind of sense of the unbelievable pleasure on offer. The woman's body – which could be said to *stand for* sex – seems to be being offered to the man in the photo (and viewers of the image) as the source of unbelievable pleasure for him (and them/us).

The puzzle for the viewer, then, is why this man seems so uninterested. He is sitting close and is touching the woman but his hand seems placed almost carelessly on her thigh and he appears to be somewhere else, absorbed in something that does not involve the woman. The printed text offers a possible explanation of this: 'one-bit audio reproduces more than just the music. It actually recreates the performance space itself'. The puzzle is solved – the man has been transported by the music; its pleasure is so intense that he has forgotten the other potential pleasure awaiting him in the form of the woman's body.

For the semiotic analyst interested in gender a number of critical points can be made about this advert. First, there is the use of the

woman's body to signify sex. We are invited to read her presence solely in terms of the promise of sexual pleasure. There are no signifiers of any relationship between man and woman and, in the absence of these, her attire and deportment suggest that she may be a 'call girl' or prostitute bought by him for the evening for his gratification. Perhaps the neutrally furnished room is a hotel room. A clear power dynamic is in evidence between them: she half-sits, half-lies, watching and waiting; he is in control.

The advertisement creates a visual economy in which the woman becomes an object on offer for the man (and for viewers). In the 'currency' (to use Williamson's terms) of the advert an equivalence is established between the woman and the hi-fi: both offer the man unbelievable pleasure. This is reinforced by the lighting and *mise-en-scène* of the advert, with light falling on the woman's bare arms and legs and on the front of the chrome hi-fi. If we answer Janice Winship's question; 'who is the advert addressed to?' in this case the answer is clearly *men*. It is the man who is absorbed in the pleasure of listening to Sharp's sound system – *his* is the pleasure we are alerted to. The woman, in contrast, appears not even to be listening – she is impassive, but with all her attention focused on him. (And it is interesting that Sharp must be so certain that its target audience is male that it risks showing a woman so evidently unmoved by the experience of its one-bit audio.) Likewise, the sexual pleasure on offer is pleasure for the man in the photograph and for heterosexual male viewers. There is no suggestion of mutual pleasuring, and, on the contrary, the woman's body is the commodity (like the hi-fi) that promises men unbelievable pleasure.

Overall, then, in order to make appropriate sense of this advert the viewer has to participate in a meanings system which reproduces highly traditional gender power relations. Regardless of gender or sexual orientation the viewer is expected to adopt a masculine spectating position (Mulvey 1975) and to view the woman as an object offering sexual gratification.

Ideological Critique

A third important tradition within media studies is ideological critique or analysis. Good examples of work in this vein include Angela McRobbie's and Janice Winship's (McRobbie 1977, 1978; Winship 1978) studies of girls' and women's magazines, which look at how magazine discourses are constructed around highly restricted ideologies of femininity centring on romance, domesticity and caring. In addition, a much broader range of work within feminist

media studies – characterized perhaps as 'thematic analysis' or merely as criticism – can also be understood as ideological analysis. Susan Faludi's (1992) book *Backlash*, for example, is not formally labelled as a piece of ideological analysis, but its concerns with documenting the ways that the media have sought to attack, discredit and marginalize feminism clearly place it within this genre.

Here the term is used inclusively to refer to a large body of work focused on the connection between cultural representations – meanings – and power relations, affirming the importance of images, values and discourses in constructing and reproducing the social order. A useful general critical definition of ideology can be found in John Thompson's work. He uses the term to refer to 'the ways in which meaning is mobilized for the maintenance of relations of domination' (Thompson 1984: 5).

Analysis of the media's ideological role comes out of a long tradition of Marxist scholarship. At the heart of this work is the wish to understand how it is that social relations based on domination, antagonism and injustice come to be seen as natural, inevitable and even desirable by those who benefit least from them. In Marxist terms, then, the question concerns why it is that the working classes acquiesce in a system which gives them such a raw deal: selling their labour and being paid less than the value of what they produce so that the capitalist class may cream off the surplus value as profit to line their own pockets. Attention to this question by Marx and Engels highlighted several important points – which have been the topic of intense discussion and contestation ever since. First, Marx and Engels argued that the people who own and control the material means of production (factories, workshops, etc.) are the same people who also control the production and distribution of ideas in society. This is not just chance, they suggest, but a key way in which the ruling (capitalist) class secured their own power. The quote below from *The German Ideology* is one of the most celebrated summaries of their position:

> The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas, i.e. the class which is the ruling *material* force of society is at the same time its ruling *intellectual* force. The class which has the means of material production at its disposal, has control at the same time over the means of mental production, so that thereby, generally speaking, the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it . . . In so far, therefore, as they rule as a class and determine the extent and compass of an epoch, it is self-evident that they do this in its whole range, hence among other things rule also as thinkers, as producers of ideas and regulate the production and distribution of the ideas of their age; thus their ideas are the ruling ideas of the epoch. (Marx and Engels 1970: 60–1)

Marx and Engels also argued that people's consciousness (their ideas and beliefs about the world) is determined by their material life: 'it is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence but the social existence that determines the consciousness.' This was the basis of their materialist theory of ideology, which stressed that ideas are not somehow 'free-floating' but are the product of the groups, social locations and conditions which produce them.

Throughout the twentieth century there was intense debate about Marx's theory of ideology, particularly on the issues of determination versus relative autonomy, structure versus culture and the question of false consciousness. Contemporary media studies inherited a tradition of writing informed by the Frankfurt School, the structuralist Marxism of Louis Althusser (whose work has already been briefly discussed), the culturalist perspectives of Richard Hoggart, Raymond Williams and E. P. Thompson, as well as a body of Lacanian psychoanalytic theory (Hall 1980; Bennett, Martin et al. 1981; Hall 1982, 1986). Today's ideological media critique, however, owes its biggest debt to the work of the Italian theorist Antonio Gramsci.

Gramsci

Gramsci's work – or at least a particular reading of it associated with the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at Birmingham University and at the Open University in Britain – allowed a way out of the 'impasse' represented by the previous debates. Gramsci developed four concepts which are at the heart of current research in media studies. First, he elaborated the notion of *hegemony* to refer to ideological and cultural power. It denotes the processes through which a group or party is able to claim social, political and cultural leadership throughout a society or social formation. Hegemony does not mean domination. Rather, Gramsci emphasized the need to win approval or consent. It is an active, ongoing process which is always temporary and contested.

The second key concept is that of *articulation*. Elaborated by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (Laclau 1977; Laclau and Mouffe 1985) from Gramsci's work, the notion of articulation is a way of thinking about the relationship between different elements of the social structure in non-determinist and non-reductionist ways. It allows us to think in non-essentialist terms about the relationship between one's position (in the social structure) and one's beliefs or actions. In relation to gender, for example, it means rejecting the idea of an automatic link between one's gender and one's attitude to feminism. Thus, simplistic assertions about all men as rapists or patriarchs would be rejected, as

would similarly crude statements about women's natural affinity for feminism (which cannot explain why large numbers of women do not consider themselves feminist).

A third contribution of Gramsci's ideas is the notion that ideology is best understood as a *discursive phenomenon*, often fought out on the terrain of fragmented and contradictory common sense, rather than being characterized by clashes between fully formed, coherent world-views.

Finally, Gramsci's ideas have made a contribution to understanding how ideology works *by constructing subjects* – by producing new identities for us to occupy. Rather than seeing this (as most psychoanalytically inspired accounts do) as something that happens once and for all in infancy, Gramsci favoured a more dynamic and historical reading which could take account of the ways that our subjectivities can be made and re-made: in short, we change.

As with the other perspectives discussed so far, a brief example should help to illustrate these key themes. Stuart Hall (1988b) has provided one of the best Gramscian analyses in his work on the ideological power of the governments led by Margaret Thatcher in the 1980s in Britain. Hall argued that Thatcherism was best understood in Gramscian terms as a 'hegemonic project'. This is not to say that it achieved hegemony, nor does it mean that Thatcherism was purely a cultural and ideological phenomenon, but it stresses the importance to the Conservative administration of winning people's hearts and minds, not merely changing economic policy.

The Thatcher government's radical right-wing programme constituted a huge shock and change for many people in Britain at the time, used to a more consensus-based form of politics. But Stuart Hall urged people on the Left not to misread Thatcherism as an alien, external force imposed on the 'masses' from the outside, but instead to recognize its popular appeal. As he put it, Thatcherism made itself 'not only one of "them", but, more disconcertingly, a part of "us"' (Hall 1988b: 6). By addressing certain popular discontents and harnessing or articulating them to its own agenda, it was able to win popular support and, more significantly, to redefine the content of common sense.

For Gramsci, common sense is at the heart of ideology (which also has a more theoretical or philosophical domain). When ideologies come into conflict, the struggle is rarely between fully formed coherent world-views, but instead involves contestation over the meaning and ownership of particular notions – like democracy, freedom or the nation. In Britain during the Thatcher years, for example, there was intense ideological struggle over which of the two main parties could claim to be the 'party of the family'. What was contested was the

very nature of the family, with the Conservative Party defining it in 'traditional' nuclear terms, and the Labour Party pushing for a broader, more inclusive definition that would include lone parents, stepfamilies and, in some formulations, gay couples with children. The task for the Labour Party was to wrest 'the family' from a traditional chain of connotations, and to build it into discourses favourable to Labour. The key point is that both political parties wanted to claim to have the true interests of the family at heart and wanted to harness this to their political project.

Hall argued that Thatcherism represented a particular articulation of liberal free-market discourses and conservative themes of tradition, family, nation, respectability, patriarchalism and order. He called the resulting mix 'authoritarian populism'. His main interest was in accounting for how it was that Thatcherism took hold of the popular imagination so quickly and so pervasively. It did so, he argues, by articulating popular discontents to its own project; something that was emphasized by the deliberate use of ordinary language – what Brunsdon and Morley (1978) describe (in another context) as 'popular ventriloquism'. Vivid metaphors, analogies and illustrations featuring 'U-turns', 'handbags' and homespun wisdom from the domestic arena helped to sediment Thatcherite ideology in common sense consciousness. A similar process can be seen with President Bush's use of baseball metaphors.

Above all, Hall argued that Thatcherism worked by creating new subject positions and by transforming subjectivities. It deliberately sought to detach people from their existing points of identification and to reposition them in new sets of discourses which hailed them as 'concerned patriot', 'self-reliant taxpayer', 'respectable home owner', and so on. Indeed, in this way, Thatcherism did nothing short of *remaking subjectivities* – as a central part of winning consent or achieving hegemony.

Gramsci's ideas have proved a powerful tool for understanding representations of gender in the media, allowing us to go beyond the study of single images to examine patterns and themes in representations. His work allows us to attend to the dynamic qualities of ideology – its mobility and fluidity; the fragmented nature of subjectivity; and the significance of winning consent for particular identities through struggle. As such, it can help us to understand (for example) the multiple and contradictory ways in which contemporary young men are addressed by the media – as new men, lads, new fathers, metrosexuals, etc. – and to analyse the struggle between these subject positions. In order to do this effectively, though, a more fine-grained approach is often needed, and it is this that we turn to next.

Discourse Analysis

The terms 'discourse' and 'discourse analysis' are as hotly contested as 'ideology' and 'ideological analysis'. Discourse analysis refers to a huge variety of approaches including critical linguistics, social semiotics, ethnomethodology and conversation analysis, speech act theory and a number of post-structuralist approaches to texts and history. In this chapter two broad traditions of discourse analysis will be examined. First, we will focus upon a tradition developed over the last two decades in the social sciences as a way of rigorously analysing a variety of different texts. Next we will look at Foucault's ideas which constitute a different – historical or genealogical – discursive analysis.

Discourse analysis (in the first sense) has been developed in recent years by scholars in sociology and social psychology (Potter 1987; Wetherell 1992; Speer 2005). It is useful to think of it as having four main themes: a concern with discourse itself, a view of language as constructive and constructed, an emphasis upon discourse as a form of action, and a conviction in the rhetorical organization of discourse. First, then, it takes *discourse* itself as its topic. The term discourse is used to refer to all forms of talk and texts, whether it be naturally occurring conversations, interview material, or written or broadcast texts of any kind. Discourse analysts are interested in texts themselves, rather than seeing them as a means of 'getting at' some reality which is deemed to lie behind the discourse – whether social or psychological or material. Instead of seeing discourse as a pathway to some other reality, discourse analysts are interested in the content and organization of texts in their own right.

The second theme of discourse analysis is that *language is constructive*. Potter and Wetherell (Potter 1987) argue that the metaphor of construction highlights three facets of the approach. First, it draws attention to the fact that discourse is built or manufactured out of pre-existing linguistic resources. Secondly it illuminates the fact that the assembly of an account involves choice or selection from a number of different possibilities. It is possible to describe even the most simple of phenomena in a multiplicity of different ways. Finally, the notion of construction emphasizes the fact that we deal with the world in terms of constructions, not in a somehow 'direct' or unmediated way; in a very real sense, texts of various kinds construct our world. This basic social constructionist point highlights the connection of discourse analysis to post-structuralist and postmodernist approaches more broadly. It marks a break with traditional realist models of language in which it is taken to be a transparent medium.

The third feature of discourse analysis is its concern with the *action orientation* or function orientation of discourse. That is, discourse

analysts see all discourse as social practice. Language, then, is not viewed as a mere epiphenomenon, but as a practice in its own right. People use discourse to do things – to offer blame, to make excuses, to present themselves in a positive light, etc. To highlight this is to underline the fact that discourse does not occur in a social vacuum and it is oriented to specific interpretive contexts.

Finally, discourse analysts treat talk and texts as organized rhetorically (Billig 1987, 1991). Discourse analysts see social life as being characterized by conflicts of various kinds. As such, much discourse is involved in establishing one version of the world in the face of competing versions. This is obvious in some cases – politicians, for example, are clearly attempting to win people around to their view of the world, and advertisers are attempting to sell us products, lifestyles and dreams – but it is also true of other discourse. The emphasis on the rhetorical nature of texts directs our attention to the ways in which *all* discourse is organized to make itself persuasive.

An increasing number of media scholars are adopting discourse analytic approaches (Montgomery 1986; Fairclough 1989; Scannell 1991; Fairclough 1995). In my own research on gender in popular radio I used discourse analysis to examine how broadcasters accounted for the fact that there were so few women working as presenters or DJs (Gill 1993). At the time, fewer than one in ten radio presenters was female. The research was carried out in two independent (i.e. commercial) pop radio stations in England which were typical in this respect: one employed no female presenters and the other had only one, whose show was broadcast in the early hours of the morning – the so-called 'graveyard shift'. Male radio presenters and programme controllers were interviewed and asked a whole range of questions about their role, responsibilities, view of the audience, freedom and autonomy, career progression – as well as a number of questions about the lack of women DJs.

The analysis involved careful reading and rereading of transcripts and attempts to code responses, paying attention to variability and contradiction. Six interpretive repertoires were identified which the broadcasters used to account for the lack of women in presenting roles. These were organized around the following ideas:

- women just do not apply (for the job of presenter);
- the audience prefer male presenters;
- women don't have the right skills for radio presentation;
- women who want to become broadcasters all go into journalism;
- women's voices are wrong;
- daytime radio is 'housewife radio' so it is better to have a male presenter.

The broadcasters all drew on and combined these different repertoires, moving between accounts when it felt right to do so. Thus one moment they might assert that the reason for the lack of women at the station was that no women applied or sent in demo tapes; the next they would regretfully explain that actually the issue was audience objections, or the fact that women's voices did not sound appealing on radio.

One of the things that attention to the fine detail of discourse was able to show was how carefully these accounts were constructed. They were, for example, full of disclaimers about sexism (such as 'I'm not being sexist but . . .'), and other rhetorical devices designed to head off potential criticisms of their own sexual politics or the equal opportunities practices of the radio station. The interviews were also characterized by multiple strategies to make their accounts persuasive – for example, detailed stories or narratives to act as warrants, the use of scientific terms to lend credibility and objectivity, the deployment of 'extreme case formulations' and so on.

The analysis focused attention on the way that the accounts were designed to make the lack of women appear to be natural, self-evident and – regrettably – beyond the control of the radio station. All the accounts constructed the reasons for the lack of female presenters as lying in women themselves or in the preferences of the audience. The role of the radio station was rendered indivisible in these accounts, and discussions of employment practices and institutional sexism were conspicuous by their absence. In this way, broadcasters were able to present themselves as non-sexist, while they simultaneously justified the lack of women at the radio station where they worked.

What the analysis showed, in sum, was the subtlety and the detail of the way that discrimination was practised: at no point did any one of the interviewees say that they did not think women should be employed as radio presenters – on the contrary they were keen to stress their positive attitude to female presenters and to suggest that they were (to quote one) 'looking hard' to appoint women. However, what they produced were accounts which justified the exclusion of women, while simultaneously protecting themselves against potential accusations of sexism. The research concluded that a kind of 'new sexism' was in operation, which shared a number of features with 'new racist' discourse (Barker 1981).

Foucaultian Approaches

Since the late 1980s another type of discourse analysis has had a profound impact on cultural theory: that associated with the French writer Michel Foucault. Foucault was interested in the development of

modern power from the sixteenth century onwards, and specifically in understanding the shift from feudal forms of control to a new distinctively modern political rationality. His work has transformed contemporary understandings of power. Rather than seeing power as a top-down phenomenon, a 'thing' that some people wield and others are oppressed by, Foucault conceptualized it using the metaphor of the capillary or grid: it is not uniform or centralized but runs throughout the whole society.

Whilst in the feudal period power was individualized in the person of the king or sovereign who had absolute authority, Foucault argued, in the modern epoch it is dispersed, impersonal and productive rather than simply repressive:

> If power was nothing but repressive, if it never did anything but say no, do you really think that we should manage to obey it? What gives power its hold, what makes it accepted, is quite simply the fact that it does not weigh like a force which says no, but that it runs through, it produces things, it induces pleasure, it forms knowledge, it produces discourse: it must be considered as a productive network which runs through the entire social body much more than as a negative instance whose function is repression. (1980: 119)

Among the most important influences of Foucault's work in cultural and media analysis has been his critique of the notion of ideology, and his analysis of the power–knowledge nexus. Foucault rejected the Marxian emphasis on the distinction between ideology (understood as falsehood) and science or truth. He argued that it was not possible to divide up representations into those that are true and those that are false, and he was more interested in 'truth effects' and how they are linked to power. Moreover, rather than seeing science as 'innocent' and 'truthful' Foucault was concerned with the ways in which the newly emerging human and social sciences were themselves enmeshed in, and central to, power relations. For Foucault, modern power was intimately connected with the production of new knowledges which had a regulatory function – for example through the categorization and measurement of more and more areas of human life and experience, rendering them knowable and manipulable, as well as through the production of new subjects such as the hysteric, the schizophrenic, the homosexual, etc.

Peter Miller and Nikolas Rose (1997) have used this insight about power/knowledge in their analysis of the way that advertising and marketing developed together with the 'psy disciplines'. Following Foucault, they reject the idea that advertising is simply about creating and imposing 'false needs' but instead examine the way in which newly emerging psychological techniques and knowledges were mobilized to chart and anatomize (in minute detail) people's passions, desires and

behaviours. Miller and Rose's insightful analysis of the Tavistock Institute of Human Relations in the post-war period in Britain highlights a number of distinct ways of understanding the consumer – psychoanalytically, psychologically and as a 'rational' shopper – which each constructed or configured the consumer in a radically different way. Rather than simply describing what was already there, Miller and Rose argue, these new perspectives and the technologies associated with them quite literally brought them into being:

> This charting does not merely uncover pre-existing desires or anxieties: it forces them into existence by new experimental situations such as the psychodynamically interpreted group discussion, that enable them to be observed, it renders them thinkable by new techniques of calculation, classification and inscription such as 'flavour profiling' and hence makes them amenable to action and instrumentalization in the service of sales of goods. (Miller and Rose 1997: 31)

Other recent work on the 'psy complex' has focused on the rise of popular therapeutic discourse as a form of regulation. Ian Hodges (2001, 2003) in his analysis of radio advice programmes uses a Foucaultian approach to examine how the shows provide an interpellation within which subjects recognize themselves as requiring therapeutic transformation; incite the caller to engage in particular techniques of the self such as monitoring and measuring their own conduct; and provide normative models of conduct such as the well-adjusted individual, the functional family, etc. The growing literature on talk shows affirms this and examines the operation of power in the incitement to 'tell all' or 'confess' on TV (see chapter 5). Rather than conceptualizing talk (e.g. about sexuality) as 'liberation from repression', Foucaultian analyses stress the roles that 'confession and testimony play within the machinery of discipline and power . . . The encouragement to "confess" on TV or anywhere else is a fundamental part of modern systems and regimes that govern sexuality' (Probyn 1997a).

Foucault's work has also made an important contribution to feminist media studies through his notion of *disciplinary power* – in which power is conceptualized as circulating through ever finer channels, invading the body and seeking to regulate every aspect of its functioning. Foucault's work focused upon the operation of discipline in specific institutions like the factory, prison, clinic and military, but a number of feminist writers have developed his ideas to examine forms of discipline that are not tied to single institutions but cut across a variety of social spheres and spaces such as the family, workplace, media, etc. Sandra Lee Bartky has argued that feminine bodily discipline is often institutionally unbounded:

> The woman who checks her makeup half a dozen times a day to see if her foundation has caked or her mascara run, who worries that the

> wind or rain may spoil her hairdo, who looks frequently to see if her stockings have bagged at the ankle, or who, feeling fat, monitors everything she eats, has become, just as surely as the inmate of the panopticon, a self policing subject, a self committed to a relentless self surveillance. This self surveillance is a form of obedience to patriarchy. It is also the reflection in woman's consciousness of the fact that she is under surveillance in ways that he is not, that whatever else she may become, she is importantly a body designed to please or to excite. There has been induced in many women, then, in Foucault's words 'a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power'. (Bartky 1990: 80)

Foucault's analysis of surveillance and self-discipline, building on the idea of 'the panopticon' (a design for a prison in which individuals are isolated but know they can always be seen) has proved a particularly fruitful metaphor for feminist analyses of the operation of femininity as a discipline. Adverts and women's magazines have been identified as key sites of this form of power in a society increasingly oriented towards the visual media. Their representations of normative femininity form part of the 'public habitat of images' that works to discipline and regulate women's relationship to their own bodies. Bartky (1990) suggests that images of normative femininity have replaced the religious tracts of the past and now operate as a form of discipline acting on all classes of women throughout the life cycle. A key challenge has been to understand how this disciplinary power works, how women engage in self surveillance, and to theorize this in ways that do not render women only as passive, docile subjects (Sawicki 1991; Bordo 1999).

> Feminine bodily discipline has this dual character: on the one hand, no one is marched off for electrolysis at the end of the rifle, nor can we fail to appreciate the initiative and ingenuity displayed by countless women in an attempt to master the rituals of beauty. Nevertheless, in so far as the disciplinary practices of femininity produces a 'subjected and practised', an inferiorized, body, they must be understood as aspects of a far larger discipline, an inegalitarian system of sexual subordination. This system aims at turning women into the docile and compliant companions of men just as surely as the army aims to turn its raw recruits into soldiers. (Bartky 1990: 75)

Some writers have argued that gender itself is a disciplinary technique: Judith Butler (1990) famously regards it as a 'regulatory fiction', while Teresa de Lauretis (1989) argues that gender is the product of various social technologies including film and media. Both writers have been profoundly influenced by Foucault, both engage with contemporary texts of various kinds, and both pose the question of how to think about gender *beyond the limits of sexual difference.*

Foucault's notion of *normalization* has also been a valuable one in analyses of gender and media. Since the seventeenth century and the *birth of statistics (the science of the state), the state has been amassing* more and more details about every aspect of populations' lives. The power to regulate through description, measurement, calculation of differences between individuals and the norm has taken over from simple sovereign power. Increasingly, appeal is made to statistical measures and judgements about what is normal rather than absolute notions of right and wrong. These procedures of normalization operate upon every aspect of our intimate lives from the cradle to the grave, rendering into norms our frequency and type of sexual intercourse, the number of times each year we consult a doctor, our consumption of units of alcohol, how often we watch television, our weight and body mass index, etc., etc. Such discourses are central to an increasing number of media products, from magazine quizzes to advice columns and reality TV shows, as we are invited to survey and discipline the self by comparing our own conduct with what is 'normal' (Currie 1999).

Finally, Foucault's *methodology* – in particular his later genealogical approach – has had an important influence on some media analysts. His work refuses mono-causal explanations, single totalizing stories, and he attempts to write 'histories of the present' that disrupt the sense of obviousness about the way things are: 'The genealogist tries to rediscover the multiplicity of factors and processes which constitute an event in order to disrupt the self-evident quality ascribed to events through the employment of historical concepts and the description of anthropological traits' (quoted in McNay 1992). In contemporary media studies this emphasis can be seen in Sean Nixon's (1996) analysis of the development of new sexualized ways of representing the male body in the late 1980s. Drawing on Foucault's approach, his achievement is to show that the emerging representational practices for signifying masculinity had multiple points of origin – in advertising, photography, fashion, retailing, etc; they were not the result of one single change (see also Gill 2003).

Postmodernism, Postcolonialism, and Queer Theory

Foucault explicitly rejected the terms 'post-structuralist' and 'postmodernist' to describe his work. Nevertheless his ideas have been extremely important to and influential within these bodies of work – taken up by feminist postmodernists, postcolonial writers and queer theorists. In this final section of the chapter we look briefly at these traditions and their importance for media studies.

Postmodernism, postcolonial theory and queer theory cannot be described as approaches in the way that content analysis, semiotics and discourse analysis are; they are not methods that can be applied to single texts or straightforwardly deployed to analyse a corpus of representations. Rather they are best thought of as critical orientations to textual analysis, ways of reading critically or against the grain, 'writing back' and making political interventions. In key respects they also challenge the distinction between criticism and cultural production, and postmodern, postcolonial and queer are used as frequently to designate cultural products and their creators as modes of critical inquiry, for example a postmodern building, a queer film, a postcolonial novel.

Postmodernism

Postmodernism has been one of the most debated terms of the last decades. As the cultural theorist Dick Hebdige (1988) has noted, the term is 'overloaded' – bearing the weight of many different meanings. For the purpose of clarity it can be useful to think of postmodernism as having four different types of meaning:

Postmodernism as artistic movement Probably the most specific way in which postmodernism is used is to refer to an artistic movement in painting, literature, music and architecture. The term was first coined by a group of artists and critics working in New York in the 1960s (including the composer John Cage and critic Susan Sontag). They wanted a term that would distinguish what they were doing from what they saw as 'high modernism' which they believed had become exhausted and rendered safe through its institutionalization in the academy, the gallery system and international art markets. In order for art to play its proper questioning and subversive role, they argued, a new movement was needed that would be as radical as Expressionism or Cubism or Dadaism had been at the beginning of the twentieth century. They called this movement postmodernism (see Foster 1985 for a helpful discussion).

Postmodernism as cultural trend A second way in which postmodernism is used is to refer to general cultural trends that go beyond art and architecture. The media and popular culture are often described as postmodern and this is a way of suggesting that they are characterized by some of the following features: a mixing of forms from high culture and popular culture and, more significantly, a breakdown of agreement about the criteria for judging cultural worth; pastiche, bricolage, fragmentation and genre mixing; intertextuality; knowingness;

nostalgia; irony; preoccupation with the surface/aesthetic values – looks, fashion, spectacle – rather than depth (see Featherstone 1991 for further elaboration).

Postmodernism as historical epoch Some people use the term postmodernism to refer not to trends or styles of cultural or artistic movements but to designate a historical shift beyond modernity. The dates for a shift vary according to different theorists, but broadly speaking focus upon the period from the late 1960s onwards. The change is understood as having been driven by a move into a distinct period of (late) capitalism, characterized by changes in the organization of work and production – including a shift from Fordism to post Fordism, increasing globalization of capitalism, and a move to much more flexible forms of production consumption and accumulation (Harvey 1990; Jameson 1984).

Postmodernism as epistemological crisis The notion of postmodernism is also widely used to signal a crisis in the ability of philosophy to underwrite knowledge production. The crisis – and thus postmodernism – was prompted by a number of factors. First, feminism and movements against racism and colonialism all challenged the claim of philosophy to speak about universal subjects. Together, they highlighted the fact that the supposedly universal knowing subject at the heart of philosophy was in fact historically and socially situated – and was invariably and implicitly a white, First World, male subject. Secondly, the notion of the unified rational subject, built on enlightenment ideas about the autonomy of reason and the equation of mind and consciousness, was called into question by psychoanalysis which stressed the pre-eminent position of the unconscious and of fantasy and desire in understanding human action. Thirdly, post-structuralist ideas, and in particular ideas from discourse theory, challenged the basis of the entire enterprise of philosophy – namely the possibility of representing reality. As we have seen, discursive theories argued that language is not a neutral, transparent medium which can be used to reflect or represent the world, but is active and constructive. Such approaches recast social life as thoroughly textual so that, rather than language merely representing truths about the world, the very idea of truth came to be understood as an effect of discourse. Fourthly, postmodernist theorists problematized the grand narratives or meta-narratives – ideas of History, Reason, Science, Marxism as too 'big', too universalistic and totalizing (Lyotard 1984). Moreover they were constructed from binary oppositions which constituted a central organizing principle of Western philosophy – for example, nature/culture, emotional/rational, female/male. Deconstruction showed how these binaries worked by projecting all the chaos

and disorder onto the subordinated of each binary pair – hence feminist oppositional slogans such as 'I won't play nature to your culture' (Weedon 1987). This crisis has had an enormous impact across arts, social sciences and humanities – interrogating the very nature of knowledge production. Two bodies of work which have 'pushed' the crisis are postcolonialism and queer theory.

Postcolonialism

Like postmodernism, the term postcolonialism is used in multiple, overlapping and contradictory ways – for example, we can distinguish historical, literary and psychoanalytic variants and even hybrid postcolonialisms. Early uses of the hyphenated form were used to designate a specific historical moment after colonies secured their independence – a moment of decolonization and the end of direct territorial control. However, the usefulness of such a definition is called into question by ongoing complex forms of intervention and control in the New World (Dis) Order: structural adjustment policies, aid tied to political reform, nation building, the 'liberalization' of the global economy – these could all be read as new forms of colonization (to say nothing of increasingly aggressive Anglo-American foreign policy and the 'War on Terrorism'). As Anne McClintock (1995) has argued, the 'post' in postcolonial may be prematurely celebratory and a variety of neocolonialisms are in play (see also Hall 1996; Spivak 1988). Today, the term is used less to signify the end of colonialism than to locate postcolonial theory in 'the historical fact of European colonialism' and to 'reject the diffusion of the term . . . to refer to any kind of marginality at all' (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 1995).

It is important to note that the 'post' in postcolonialism is not necessarily the same as the 'post' in postmodernism – precisely because of the former's location in the brutal material reality of colonialism. Indeed, a potent postcolonial critique of postmodernism is in fact its Eurocentrism – its irrelevance to, or, worse, violence to the vast majority of the world's people whose experiences are not in the least 'postmodern'. Notwithstanding this, there are significant shared themes. Foucault's notion of power/knowledge has been at the heart of postcolonial theorizing. For European imperial powers 'knowing the Other' was central to political and economic control, and was achieved through the development of a colonial sociology concerned with categorizing and differentiating its subjects.

The postmodernist/deconstructive project of exposing the binaries on which Western thought depends is also central – in explicitly political terms – to postcolonial theorizing. Edward Said' s groundbreaking study of Orientalism is perhaps the classic example of this, showing

how Orientalism as a discourse depended on a binary relationship with 'the Occident': 'Orientalism is more particularly valuable as a sign of European-Atlantic power over the Orient than it is as a veridic discourse about the Orient (which, in its academic form, it claims to be)' (Said 1985: 6). As Trinh Minh-ha (1991) has argued, the meaning of 'Third World person' (or 'colonized subject' or 'blackness') cannot be specified independently, but comes from its contrast with a silent binary-other. The task of postcolonial writing is not to reverse the binary relationship – colonizer and colonized, centre and periphery – but to displace binary discourses altogether:

> Without a certain work of displacement, again, the margins can easily comfort the centre in its goodwill and liberalism; strategies of reversal thereby meet with their own limits . . . By displacing, it never allows this classifying world to exert its classificatory power without returning it to its own ethnocentric classifications. (Minh-ha 1991: 17)

The job of the postcolonial intellectual is to trouble or upset or interrupt, to analyse and disrupt the representational practices that make such epistemic violence possible. Ien Ang likens him or her to a party pooper:

> The diasporic intellectual acts as a perpetual party pooper here because her impulse is to point to ambiguities, complexities and contradictions, to complicate matters rather than provide merely for solutions, to blur distinctions between coloniser and colonised, dominant and subordinate, oppressor and oppressed. (Ang 2001: 2)

Most postcolonial work, then, is (like most postmodernism) committed to a radical anti-essentialism. Its project is not to reclaim or give voice to the experiences of the oppressed or colonized. Indeed, answering her own question – can the subaltern speak? – Gayatri Spivak (1988) is sceptical of whether it is possible to recover a subaltern voice that is not a kind of essentialist fiction. She argues that postcolonial intellectual work must avoid reproducing it as merely another unproblematic field of knowing (see also Hall 1988a on the problems with the 'essential black subject'). The tactics of postcolonial writing are largely deconstructive rather than making counter-hegemonic claims. They aim to disrupt, to focus on the 'in between', to create 'the third space', to emphasize hybridity (Bhabha 1990, 1994).

Within media studies, the impact of postcolonial theory has been felt in a variety of ways (although there is still some considerable way to go before its transformative potential is met). There has been the emergence of 'new' constituencies, politico-regional articulations such as Chicana/o and Latina/o cultural studies – albeit positioned against 'nativist essentialism' and identity politics (Quinonez and Aldama 2002). Postcolonial theory has also generated renewed attention to the

'politics of location' (Mohanty 1988) in a postmodern world where any overarching sense of who 'we' are has become problematic and contentious. Ethical and political questions about representing Others are on the agenda (though without the impact they should have) and there is a new focus on interrogating whiteness (Carby 1982; Frankenberg 1993; Fine 1996; Gilkes, Kaloski-Naylor et al. 1999; Ware and Back 2002; Fine 2004). 'Globalization' has become a central topic of analysis, with theorizations that attempt to challenge the global/local binary and examine complex flows of power and resistance (Gillespie 1995; Morley and Robins 1995). Interestingly, postcolonial theorizing has also led to a revitalization of 'political economy' approaches which focus not only on the cultural power of multinational corporations but also on their economic power, globalized employment practices, etc.

Queer theory

Since the early 1990s, queer theory has also had a significant impact in media studies, particularly on those traditions of textual analysis with origins in the humanities. Like postcolonialism, its political intent and impact have been to disrupt and destabilize rather than to advance alternative truth claims. There are now 'queer readings' of everything from Shakespeare to Bridget Jones, and 'queer' can be used as a verb – thus public spaces can be 'queered', as can film-making practices, modes of consumption, etc. (Sinfield 1994).

Queer theory emerged as the complex outcome of a number of different factors – the influence of Foucault's ideas, particularly his work on the history of sexuality; the shortcomings of identity-based liberation politics for lesbians and gay men; and the exigencies of activism around the AIDS crisis. 'Queer' is often used as a shorthand to refer to 'lesbians, gay, bisexual, transgender' (LGBT). As Stephen Epstein puts it, the term:

> offers a comprehensive way of characterising all those whose sexuality places them in opposition to the current 'normalising regime'. 'Queer' has become convenient shorthand as various sexual minorities have claimed territory in the space once known simply, if misleadingly, as 'the gay community'. As stated by an editor of the defunct New York City queer magazine Outweek, 'when you're trying to describe the community, and you have to list gays, lesbians, bisexuals, drag queens, transsexuals (post-op and pre) it gets unwieldy. Queer says it all.' (1996: 150)

But 'queer' is much more than this: its import is less in providing an inclusive term to help magazine editors, than in marking a break with previous 'minoritarian' and subcultural models of activism in which lesbians and gay men saw themselves as oppressed minorities

with similar claims to minority ethnic groups. It signals a new kind of political engagement framed in terms that are more explicitly confrontational to the heteronormative order. Moreover, it foregrounds the instability in the supposedly stable relationship between sex, gender and sexual desire. Above all, queer theory constitutes an attack on the notion of stable identity as a foundation for theory or political action.

Among the most influential contemporary queer theorists are Judith Butler, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Theresa de Lauretis and David Halperin (De Lauretis 1984, 1989; Butler 1990; Sedgwick 1991; Butler 2004). These scholars have all been profoundly influenced by post-structuralist and postmodernist thinking (as well as – to varying extents – psychoanalysis). They are sceptical of the notion of the unified, coherent and autonomous subject, seeing it as an ideological fiction. Subjectivity is not a pure essence but is constituted in and through discourses and social structures. Lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans subjectivities are no exception – and thus should be regarded as provisional and contingent rather than fixed. From this perspective a position that regarded LGBT as stable identities would always be problematic – no matter how progressive its intent. Not only is it 'wrong' (that is, inaccurate) from any position influenced by postmodern thought, but it is also politically dubious because homosexuality is never an autonomous category but is part of a binary that works to privilege and stabilize heterosexuality.

This reading owes a great deal to Foucault. For him, the category 'homosexual' was a product of both the agents of social control (e.g. psychiatrists and sexologists) who defined it in the late nineteenth century, *and* the people who mobilized around it to attempt to reverse or contest its negative construction. Although this activism challenged the meaning of homosexuality, it also helped to solidify the very idea of a binary. This illustrates the complex nature of power/knowledge and the intimate relationship between power and resistance.

A further way in which the focus on lesbian and gay identities was regarded by queer theorists as problematic was on account of its multiple exclusions. As Robert Corber and Stephen Valocchi (2003) have argued, the field's 'focus' cannot account for practices such as cross-dressing, sadomasochism and transsexualism, not defined by the gender of object choice, and, in this way, lesbian and gay studies does not address the full range of non normative genders and sexualities. Moreover, in practice, the idealized subject at the heart of many lesbian and gay discourses has repeatedly been identified as a white, middle-class, able-bodied, young male.

Like the 'party-pooping' postcolonial intellectual, the queer theorist's/activist's job is to interrupt and disrupt the smooth functioning of the heterosexual/homosexual binary, with the aim of

dismantling it. Judith Butler's work has been central to this project and has also secured an ongoing dialogue between feminism and queer theory (Weed and Schor 1997). In her book *Gender Trouble*, Butler reversed the feminist understanding of the relation between sex and gender – a relation in which (biological) sex was understood as providing the foundation for (social/cultural) gender. Butler argued that 'sex itself is a gendered category'. It is not the means of underwriting gender, but one of gender's most powerful effects. Butler's work severed the idea of a necessary connection between sex, gender and sexuality and argued that identities are performatively constituted by the very expressions of gender and sexuality that are thought to be produced by them. Her argument is not a humanist one: what is conceptualized is not role-playing in which a knowing subject 'behind' the performance controls the enactment of gender. More radically, Butler is suggesting that it is the repeated performance that produces gendered subjectivity. Because of this, the knowing performance of drag or camp can be used to disrupt and subvert the process and draw attention to the performance of gender and sexuality.

Queer readings of media texts – like some postcolonial critique – highlight the importance of the heterosexual/homosexual binary to their functioning, and/or show how homosexuality is key but repressed. Another powerful critical tool is the notion of heteronormativity which refers to the ways in which particular structures privilege heterosexuality. It allows for the possibility that there may be modes of organizing sexual relations between straight people that are not heteronormative and, conversely, patterns of organizing gay and lesbian sexual relations that are. A good example of this might be the US sitcom *Will and Grace*, in which the sexual aspects of homosexuality are completely erased and the two protagonists – a straight woman and a gay man – are presented as ABM (all but married). Indeed, it could be argued that most media representations of LGBT persons and lifestyles are deeply heteronormative and represent little challenge to the existing structures of gender and sexuality.

Conclusion

This chapter has covered an extraordinary amount of ground. It has tried to convey the range of different approaches that can be used for studying gender representations, from those, like content analysis, which regard gender as something that can be unproblematically quantified, to those, like discursive, queer and 'post' theories, that regard its construction as inextricably linked to historically produced binaries about race, colonialism and sexuality.

It is hoped that this chapter, like the previous one, offers a useful foundation for the discussions that follow. But a word of caution is needed: it is not always possible to neatly identify the approaches being used in analyses of actual media texts. This is partly because very often analysts do not name or make explicit the approaches they are using or because they are theoretically pluralist and draw on more than one approach. It is also because the impact of each of the approaches has been felt well beyond its specific domain. In particular, discourse theory and postmodern approaches have had reverberations across media studies. Sometimes I have pointed this out, highlighting, for example, the impact of Foucault's ideas on how talk shows or magazines are understood. But word constraints together with an absence of published material have meant that this is not always possible. The challenge for you – the reader – is to use the tools provided here to think through for yourself how the different approaches conceptualize the issues. How might queer theory understand the emergence of 'new lad' imagery? Is postmodernism useful for making sense of contemporary advertising? What might a postcolonial critique of chick lit look like? – and so on. In posing these questions the key point of this chapter should become clear: namely that the different perspectives produce different knowledge about the media. Quite simply, they make the world knowable in different ways.

3

Advertisi
Postfemi

ADVERTISING is in
societies, and inc
average US citizen s
2000). When you trai
ing' with adverts, and
are sobering; Kilbour
the average lifetime
the heart of our soci
ing's influence has b
religion (Lazier-Smit
(Williamson 1978) an
most consistent body

As well as having a
ing is also key to me
economy of the medi
ing revenues fund all
casters, as well as the
ing, and, increasingly
both directly and ind
not made, and wheth
It is often said, for
programmes aimed
that can be easily 'sol
people with conside
most networks attem
ous point but it is wo
the entire shape and

Perhaps more tha
has been the target
Zoonen 1994). As
because gender ideo
Since the late 1960s
examining advertisi