

Media, education and democracy

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Media, education and democracy are inseparably connected, as an educated citizenship is fundamental to the proper working of democracy. The mass media have a demonstrated and vital capacity to educate, especially beyond the parameters of formal education. The nature of such education is both civic and social, deliberate and unintentional. Vigilance is required to separate education from persuasion, information from propaganda. Given the centrality of media to democracy, not only do the media have an obligation to educate the citizenship, but the universities need to educate the citizenship about the media. Without such education, democracy itself is threatened.

There is an umbilical relationship between the media, education and democracy. Traditionally, an umbilical relationship is one in which the larger provides for the smaller. Here, however, we have a three-way relationship in which each both nurtures and invigorates the others. The equal health of all three is essential to the existence of the good society. If we are still to pursue the good society, we need not only to give serious thought to the media but, crucially, to re-think the parameters and even the purpose of education itself.

We have long understood the potential of the mass media to educate. Although the cinema began in the late 19th century as a simple medium for spectacle and entertainment, by 1927, John Grierson, the founder of the British documentary film movement, was seeking to persuade the government of the value of what he called ‘socially purposive cinema.’¹ Film, he argued, could provide models for social action. He was non party-political in his approach, and sought to represent the interdependence of the individual and society. In this way, the documentary film could have a part to play in ‘modern citizenship’ and, indeed, ‘civic appreciation, civic faith and civic duty.’² The film medium, in other words, both could and should be used for ‘civic education.’³ That, in turn, led Grierson to envisage an ‘informational State’ in which the documentary filmmaker assumed the task of explaining social issues to the public.⁴ This was a key point, because Grierson wished to go beyond Walter Lippmann’s belief that a successful democracy depended on an informed citizenship capable of making rational decisions on civic issues. Lippmann believed that the majority of people lacked the information necessary to participate in a democratic society, but Grierson was convinced that the mass media could ‘solve the problem’ and thus become ‘necessary instruments in both the practice of government and the enjoyment of citizenship’.⁵

Grierson set about this in both theory and practice with films such as ‘Drifters’ (1929), which portrayed the daily lives of British herring fishermen. To the modern audience, ‘Drifters’ (which was filmed without sound, in black and white, and which originally ran for almost an hour), may appear, frankly, dull. Viewed in its historical context, however, it demonstrates a seminal attempt to provide the pre-television public with an experience which they would otherwise never have enjoyed. How many of the population of Birmingham, for example, would previously have witnessed a storm at sea from the bridge of a fishing boat? More than that, of course, Grierson and his colleagues had a double agenda. In addition to providing mere information about the process of herring production, they sought not only to stress the interdependence of social endeavour, but also what they perceived to be the essential dignity of both labour and of the working man.

Grierson continued his mission with zeal. According to Renov, for Grierson ‘the screen was a pulpit, the film a hammer to be used in shaping the destiny of nations.’⁶ His determination to advance democracy with socially purposive cinema was only a limited success, however. This was due partly to the structures of the British film industry and partly to the advent of television, which rapidly became (as it remains today) a far more fertile medium for the making and showing of documentary programmes. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that after serving as the first Film Commissioner to the National Film Board of Canada (and later as Head of Information at UNESCO), Grierson returned to the UK to end his career in television, where he made over 300 programmes for the Scottish Television series ‘This Wonderful World’.

While John Grierson is widely held to have been the founder of the ‘documentary’ medium, the educative function (indeed, obligation) of the mass media was also central to the foundation and philosophy of the BBC. The forerunner to the BBC was a business. Founded in 1922, the British Broadcasting Company was set up by the Post Office as a matter of expedience to allocate valuable airwaves to a single organization rather than to a plethora of disparate commercial investors. It was united under the autocratic chairmanship of John Reith. Its financial basis soon proved problematic, however, and so the Crawford Committee recommended that it be formed into a public corporation operating in the ‘National Interest’. The British Broadcasting Corporation was founded in 1926 with a mission, reiterated in its current charter, ‘to provide sound and television programmes of information, education and entertainment’. The ordering of these three objectives is, as Colin Seymour-Ure has argued, highly relevant. The mission to inform led to news and documentary programming, while the mission to educate: ‘meant infinitely more than good schools programmes; a whole approach, rather, to broadcasting as a means of widening horizons, opening doors, increasing awareness ...’⁷

This emphasis on education in its widest sense is crucial to our understanding of the relationship between the media, education and democracy. For most of us, our formal education is finished at the age of 16. Some continue at school for two more years, fewer still continue to complete a degree, usually by the age of 22. The result is that whenever we complete our formal education, we spend the majority of our lives being educated by the media. Education, then, is so much more than schooling. It is a lifelong activity continued not by force but by choice. Up to the age of 16, our education is heavily structured and legally enforced. Until relatively recently it was even imposed with – at least the threat of – physical violence. Even post 16, our education still takes place within a disciplinary framework requiring attendance,

participation and examination. Education by the media, on the other hand, is an entirely optional, lifelong pursuit. We seek it only because we wish it. It leads us to an understanding of what Fred Inglis has rightly described as the 'self-educating' society.⁸

Although it is pertinent to dispute the actual – as opposed to avowed – emphasis on entertainment in the BBC both past and present, it is important to understand that the Reithian ideals of the early BBC have been by no means expunged. If we study both the radio and the television schedules, we discover that there is still a significant proportion of factual programming within the BBC. BBC Television, for example, claims that half of its peak-time output is factual in content.⁹ The BBC is not, of course, alone in providing informational and educational programming. The corporation's monopoly on broadcasting was broken by the introduction of commercial television in 1955, and since then a variety of independent television, radio, satellite and cable channels have added to the breadth of informational broadcasting available in the UK. It is fashionable to assume that non-terrestrial television in particular is devoid of factual content, but the existence of numerous specialist channels dedicated specifically to informative programming belies this notion.¹⁰ The BBC, meanwhile, continues to broadcast television programmes in partnership with the Open University, a relationship which it began in 1960. The current 'Learning Zone' programming is broadcast for up to six and a half hours during the early mornings on BBC2, while (for example) the Open University programme 'The Romans in Britain' received mainstream scheduling and attracted audiences of up to 2.6 million¹¹ – a figure considerably beyond those actually enrolled in Open University courses.¹² It serves as a valuable example of education by media through choice. Education by media is not limited, however, to issues of purely academic interest. It is through the media that the majority of people learn about the great issues of the day, whether they be global warming, HIV, genetically modified foods or race relations.

Informational and educational programming has, in recent years, branched out into 'new media' such as video, CD ROM, DVD and, of course, the Internet. Broadcasters actively encourage the use of these media in support of – and even in parallel to – mainstream programming. Despite the considerable hyperbole surrounding the so-called information revolution, it is too early to draw reliable conclusions on its real effectiveness. Some academics are already beginning to question the real impact of new media technologies on information and education.¹³ Of one thing we can be sure, however: it has not reduced it.

So far, so seemingly good. Grierson's and Reith's visions of the 1920s have – at least to some extent – been upheld. We have seen that the media still plays an active role in education, and presume that this must, therefore, have a beneficial effect on democracy. It is important now to stress, however, that the role of the media need not always be beneficent here, because we need to be able to differentiate between education and persuasion; information and propaganda. Democracy depends upon an informed and critical public; malleability depends upon it being neither. The media, then, can be used both to promote and to suppress democracy.

The control of the media is fundamental to totalitarian regimes. Once the Bolsheviks took power following the Russian revolution, they immediately took control of the Russian film industry.¹⁴ From June 1918, the Commissariat for Enlightenment produced a weekly newsreel called 'Cine-Week'. Here, Trotsky was seen reviewing troops; Lenin was shown enjoying the Kremlin gardens. In March 1919, the Eighth Party Congress passed a resolution stating that: 'Cinema, theatre, concerts, exhibitions etc... must be used for communist propaganda.'¹⁵

Projects such as the three-hour ‘The History of the Civil War’ ensued in 1921, under the sub-title: ‘Pictures of the struggles of Soviet Forces with Counter–Revolutionaries.’ The following year, the celebrated Russian filmmaker Dziga Vertov began a documentary series called ‘Cine-Pravda’, ‘pravda’, of course, being both Russian for ‘truth’ and the name of the official newspaper of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. Stalin continued Lenin’s enthusiasm for cinema. Andrei Zhdanov, Stalin’s commissar for culture, called it ‘the most important and most mass of the arts’ and so particularly important ‘for the goals of propaganda.’¹⁶

The continuing use of film, radio, television and other media by totalitarian regimes, both left and right, is a matter of historical record. The manipulation of the media for political ends, however, is by no means limited to them. Even in societies that pride themselves on the freedom of information, the ‘truth’ provided by media can still be a deliberately partial one, and democratic governments are no exception. In times of war, truth, as Phillip Knightley’s important study reminds us, is ‘the first casualty.’¹⁷ Even in undeclared wars, such as in Vietnam, the Falkland Islands, Iraq or Kosovo, the military, usually in collaboration with the government it serves, immediately takes command of the flow of information. Knightley concludes that every government wants to control the media in wartime and will, if necessary, lie to the media in order to gain this control.¹⁸ We do not like to think of democratic governments behaving in such a way, but they sometimes do. The information upon which the public judges the success – or even the virtue – of military action can therefore be withheld, distorted, invented or promoted by those who control both the access to it and its dissemination. Even flagrant misinformation may thus be justified ‘in the national interest’. So, where we had originally been thinking of the provision of information as fundamental to the success of democracy, there are those who would, at the same time, advocate the manipulation of it as sometimes necessary to the preservation of it.

The politicians’ use of media to persuade is not limited to times of war. Party election television broadcasts, for example, provide a sophisticated form of political advertising that has become an accepted – and even regulated – part of the democratic process. No election campaign is complete without them. The advertisers of overtly commercial products try to tell us that they are simply providing us with product information, but we are not (if we are wise) convinced. Similarly, political parties do not seek simply to inform us about their policies with a view to our making independent choices. They seek, just like other advertisers, to persuade. The result, however, is designed not to be the purchase of a particular kind of washing powder but, rather, who will head our democracy for the next number of years.¹⁹ Once a party is elected to government, does it then abandon its use of the media to persuade and exploit the population? Clearly, no. Advertisers (of all persuasions) speak glibly of ‘the educated consumer’ when in reality they seek to persuade. We need, therefore, to be able to differentiate between lifelong education and lifelong persuasion.

In its purest, Griersonian sense, the media serves to inform the population so that citizens can proceed to make their own, educated choices. Individual choices become collective decisions by way of the democratic process, a process in which the citizen is a participant and not a subject. How, though, are citizens to separate information from persuasion? The citizen needs to be able to separate the two in order to make sound knowledge the basis for good social action. It is crucial, then, that we investigate not only the power of the media to educate,

but equally that we educate the populace in the power of the media. In this way, the media will not be allowed to become an instrument of the state, but instead a public forum for the interchange of both information and ideas in pursuit of the good society.

We have so far looked at the media's relationship with democracy in the deliberate areas of news, current affairs, and documentary, to say nothing of overtly 'educational' schools and university programming. The educative role of the media is much broader, however, for even the silliest situation comedy has a social or ideological content that, wittingly or unwittingly, plays a significant role in our social and even political education.

The feature films of Hollywood director Frank Capra provide excellent examples of a conscious attempt by a commercial filmmaker to use the mass entertainment media to promote participatory democracy. Fundamental to the philosophy of these movies is the Jeffersonian ideal that all men are created equal and that, therefore, even the 'little man' has rights, dignity and a contribution to make to the good, democratic society. While the 18th century Thomas Jefferson envisaged an agriculturally based union with a deliberately weak central government, Capra's 20th century version of the same vision was one of small town values keeping big city operators in check. This was applicable to everything from commerce to government itself. In 'Mr Deeds Goes to Town' (1936), for example, a small town tuba player called Longfellow Deeds (Gary Cooper) needs all his home-spun wisdom in fending off the city slickers who seek to separate him from his newly inherited fortune. 'Meet John Doe' (1941) has Gary Cooper (again) inspiring a whole political movement from one man's anonymity, while 'It's a Wonderful Life' (1946) is a parable in which mid-Western banker, George Bailey (James Stewart) discovers that one man can make a difference as the whole town learns the value of community action. In 'Mr Smith Goes to Washington' (1939), Capra takes on central government at full tilt. Here, James Stewart plays Jefferson Smith (the name is not coincidental), a simple but clear-sighted man who is unexpectedly elevated to the US Senate. Smith is a Scout leader from the mid-West whose political ambition is to build a boys' camp, but as soon as he reaches Washington, he is confronted by vested interests, big business and corrupt practices. But Jefferson Smith holds on to his vision, inspired by his visits to the great shrines of American public life, including the Lincoln Memorial. We are left with a rallying call to the tenets of participatory democracy, and to the Jeffersonian conviction that the democratic process cannot be left to others. Throughout these films we are reminded of the need for perpetual vigilance in the preservation of democracy, and of the dependence of democracy upon the essential decency and informed participation of the educated private citizen.²⁰ As Stewart intones: 'Liberty is too precious a thing to be buried in books.'²¹

Capra, like Grierson, was on something of a mission. Their promotion of democracy by media was both avowed and deliberate. It is important to realize, however, that even the most inane media product can form a part of our social education whether it intends to or not. Soap operas, situation comedies, drama series all give us glimpses of lives beyond our own. We participate vicariously; and as in reality the modern world is one in which we withdraw increasingly into private life, the entertainment media serve to provide us with a surrogate community with which we interact not only in our imaginations, but whose lessons we apply to our actual lives. Our culture has always given us what theologian Don Cupitt describes as 'stories to live by'.²² Homeric epic, Biblical scripture and chivalric romance have long provided us with stories that may not provide us with literal reflections of the worlds they depict, but whose

narratives are loaded with inherent values about what was considered commendable or otherwise at the time. Scenarios are played out; consequences are described. What was true of ancient texts is equally true of more modern forms from fables and fairy tales to movies and serial drama. That is why Cupitt is able to assert that, in a contemporary world of mass media, 'our culture thus remains as much steeped in morally-guiding myths as any previous one has been.'²³ Stories, he concludes, 'teach life.'²⁴

Cupitt is not alone in this belief, for others have found practical examples in surprisingly everyday Hollywood movies such as 'Rocky' (1976), 'Alien' (1979) and 'Star Wars' (1977).²⁵ The stories taught by the media need not necessarily be constructive or democratic, however. Critical theorists T.W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer represented a whole school of sociologists who believed from the 1930s that the mass media deliberately sought to persuade the masses of the naturalness, inevitability and overwhelming virtues of industrial capitalism. For them, 'the triumph of invested capital' was 'the meaningful content of every film, whatever plot the production company may have selected'.²⁶ In this way, the ideology of the ruling class was encoded in forms as seemingly innocuous as a Disney cartoon: 'Donald Duck in the cartoons and the unfortunate in real life get their thrashing so that the audience can learn to take their own punishment.'²⁷ Thus, the masses were 'reduced to stupidity' and the culture industry became 'the prophet of the prevailing order.'²⁸ Not everyone agrees that the entertainment media have a purely right-wing bias. Some contemporary writers have equally argued that film and television drama favour the left.²⁹ Despite these differences, however, analysts are united in their agreement that even the most inane sit-com is an unwitting repository for ideological values. These values are both contended and contentious, as are whatever the conclusions we may draw from the analysis of them. We should ignore them, however, at our peril.

Not all the issues raised in film, television and radio drama are, however, deeply ideological. They teach, among other things, forms of social interaction. From the movies we may learn, for example, how to behave at the races or a 'prom', or in a hotel of a quality we may not usually be able to afford. For many teenagers, film and television characters provide a 'virtual peer group' in which norms (actual or aspirational) can be established. It has been shown, for example, that British Asian girls use soap operas as 'discussion documents' for questions of identity and moral responsibility within their own communities. Here, culturally sensitive issues become legitimate topics of debate when projected onto characters from the fictional realm.³⁰

It is crucial to understand, therefore, that our education takes place via the purely popular in addition to the avowedly educational media. It follows, then, that our education about the media should include all the colours of the spectrum. To exclude the popular on the simple grounds of aesthetics, for example, makes no sociological sense at all. A proper appreciation of the relationship between the media, education and democracy demands that we are able to cross the 'quality threshold' without looking back.

The rigorous and sociological study of the media demands much more than the crossing of the quality threshold however. It requires the careful analysis of not only the overt but also the latent ideological content of media texts. When we study the media message, we need to seek not only that which is intentionally being said, but also that which forms the underlying cultural values and assumptions. This is often much more articulate and revealing than the superficial content. It brings us, if we are sufficiently diligent and perceptive, to an understanding of the

differences between the natural and the cultural in society. In our mass media we can thus see ourselves writ large; we can look at ourselves and reflect upon change.

Whether it is 'Newsnight' or 'Neighbours', there is no doubting the centrality of the media today. Fred Inglis was entirely correct when he declared: 'to study public communications is to study one of the most important topics of the day. Such study should be a compulsory part of every citizen's liberal education.'³¹ Colin MacCabe similarly argued that the study of film and television should be part of the 'common stock of knowledge' in Britain and even part of the national curriculum.³² Indeed, by advocating the study of film and television, we were 'arguing for a more democratic Britain.'³³

Given the strength of these arguments, it is surprising that the study of the media has only recently become a part of the academic scene. The mere arrival of media papers, options and even degrees at British universities has not, however, sealed the relationship between media, education and democracy. Some of these problems are particular to media education; others are rooted in the state of university education as a whole.

As a new field, the academic study of media and communications has had characteristic difficulty in establishing itself. The academy has an in-built conservatism, and new fields have always attracted suspicion, if not outright hostility. This has certainly been the case with media and communications studies. Those in the established disciplines have often failed to understand that it is not necessary to admire something in order to consider it worthy of rigorous analysis. This has, in turn, led to fears that those who study mass communications are secretly seeking to dismantle the established canon of western civilization and replace it with Donald Duck. As Anthony Quinton trembled, this was 'comparable to the fall of the Roman empire, and its replacement by the barbarian kingdoms.'³⁴ Although Quinton has clearly misunderstood the situation, many of those involved in the study of the media (and especially in 'Cultural Studies') have reacted to such attacks with an unhelpful overcompensation of jargon and obfuscatory prose in order to make the field seem much more difficult and therefore somehow more 'respectable'. This has, in fact, done more harm to media and cultural studies than any of the attacks based on the traditional notion of the canon.

The struggle of any new discipline to gain acceptance is not unique to media and communications studies. The threat to the relationship between media, education and democracy lies in the threat to education as a whole. There appears nowadays to be a widely held belief that a good society is simply an economically successful one and that the purpose of the universities, therefore, is to serve the economy. As a result, universities are changing from being centres of excellence to becoming mere centres of expedience. Where the universities used to promote a critical, interrogative approach, which was intellectual in both basis and substance, they seem now to be gripped in the thrall of professional training. The universities need to become safe for intellectuals again.

If the universities are no longer fit places for intellectual life, the question arises as to where the intellectuals, present and future will go. Many will withdraw into private life, others may find that, interestingly, it is the media that nowadays provides a comparatively attractive platform for discussion, dissent and the dissemination of thinking and research. BBC Radio 4, for example, does not gauge the success of its programmes by the consequent employability of its listeners, nor is the content of such programmes thought only to be worthwhile if it has a direct and quantifiable application to business and industry. It is the media (or certainly

the enlightened ends of it) that nowadays appear to value the intrinsic value of knowledge more than the universities. It is a depressing conclusion.

It may be argued, therefore, that the vital yet delicate relationship between media, education and democracy would be most effectively served by scholars moving directly into the media. While this would have certain advantages, the proposal would be flawed in that the media would become the intellectuals' paymasters and thus seek to control the interrogation of the media itself.

The media, education and democracy are interdependent in the modern world. The welfare of one is conditional upon the welfare of the others. This is particularly true of democracy, which requires the active participation of an educated citizenship if it is to be truly democratic. Without a broadly informed and educated electorate, the concept that one person's vote is of equal value to another's lacks validity. For most people, formal education ceases even before they are entitled to vote. It is the media, therefore, which provides the majority of our education in what has indeed become a self-educating society. The media continues to educate, and it is important that it continues to do so freely and responsibly. It is equally crucial, however, that our formal educational system – and especially the universities – plays its part in promoting a keen-eyed vigilance over the educational and democratic contributions of the media. There is room for optimism in the commitment of the media to public service broadcasting. This is because the public continues to demonstrate an interest in education of its own volition even when (and possibly *especially* when) it has no direct vocational relevance. There is cause for much greater concern in formal education, however; a concern that has been fundamental to the whole of this essay. There is hope for the future in the partial recognition of the importance of both the participation and the study of the media as vital to the democratic process. This, in turn, is dependent upon a vision of a good society rather than just an efficient one. Media, education and democracy remain connected by this link; sever it and the threat is not to one but to all three.

Notes

1. Grierson's views were set out in a memorandum commissioned by the Empire Marketing Board Film Committee in April 1927: 'Notes for English Producers', Public Record Office BT64/86 6880. For a coherent summary of his arguments in this document, see I. Aitken (1992) *Film and Reform: John Grierson and the Documentary Film Movement*, Cinema and Society Series (London and New York: Routledge) pp. 97–101.
2. J. Grierson (1946) The challenge of peace, *Grierson on Documentary*, H. Forsyth Hardy (ed) (London: Faber and Faber), p. 174.
3. J. Grierson (1946) The challenge of peace, *Grierson on Documentary*, H. Forsyth Hardy (ed) (London: Faber and Faber), p. 178.
4. I. Aitken (1992) *Film and Reform: John Grierson and the Documentary Film Movement*, Cinema and Society Series (London and New York: Routledge) p. 192.
5. J. Grierson (1946) *Grierson on Documentary*, H. Forsyth Hardy (ed), p. 207. For more on Lippmann and Grierson see I. Aitken (1992) *Film and Reform: John Grierson and the Documentary Film Movement*, Cinema and Society Series (London and New York: Routledge), especially pp. 52–53 and P. Rosen (1993) Document and documentary: on the persistence of historical concepts, *Theorizing Documentary*,

- American Film Readers, Michael Renov (ed) (New York and London: Routledge, 1993), pp. 58–89, pp. 78–80.
6. M. Renov (1993) Toward a poetics of documentary, *Theorizing Documentary, American Film Readers*, Michael Renov (ed) (New York and London: Routledge, 1993), pp. 12–36, p. 29.
 7. C. Seymour-Ure (1996) *The British Press and Broadcasting Since 1945*, second edition, Making Contemporary Britain (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), p. 64.
 8. I am grateful to Fred Inglis for the many conversations we have had on this topic. The phrase is his.
 9. *BBC Annual Report and Accounts 98-99* p. 18. The precise figures given by the BBC are 52% of BBC1 and 49% of BBC2. The BBC additionally claims 328 hours of parliamentary broadcasting on terrestrial television and radio, with an additional 3108 hours on its dedicated parliament channel: BBC Parliament. *BBC Annual Report and Accounts 98–99*, p. 35. For a fuller breakdown of figures, see *BBC Annual Report and Accounts 98–99*, pp. 71–74.
 10. Note, for example, the Discovery, History, National Geographic and BBC Knowledge channels. Commercial radio, on the other hand, has turned out (partly due to the slackening of official controls) to provide little in the way of informational programming. While commercial stations have tended significantly towards popular music, BBC local radio has, in recent years, moved to a policy of speech programming during peak hours.
 11. *BBC Annual Report and Accounts 98–99*, p. 28.
 12. Correspondence with the BBC Education Programmes department, 3 July 2000, confirms that students make up only a small percentage of the Open University television audience generally.
 13. See, for example, S. Lax (ed) (2001) *Access Denied in the Information Age* (London and New York: Palgrave).
 14. See G. Roberts (1999) *Forward Soviet! History and the Non-fiction Film in the USSR*, Kino: The Russian Cinema Series (London and New York: I B Tauris), pp. 15–17.
 15. Cited in G. Roberts (1999) *Forward Soviet! History and the Non-fiction Film in the USSR*, Kino: The Russian Cinema Series (London and New York: I B Tauris), p. 19.
 16. Cited in G. Roberts (1999) *Forward Soviet! History and the Non-fiction Film in the USSR*, Kino: The Russian Cinema Series (London and New York: I B Tauris), Roberts, p. 133.
 17. P. Knightley (2000) *The First Casualty: The War Correspondent as Hero and Myth-maker from the Crimea to Kosovo*, revised edition (London: Prion).
 18. See P. Knightley (2000) transcript of a speech to the Freedom Council, 23 March 2000, coinciding with the launch of the revised edition of *The First Casualty*.
 19. For an analysis of party election broadcasts of the British general election campaign of 1997, see N. J. Cull and R. Howells (1997) The Battle for Britain: Political Broadcasting and British Election of 1997, *Historical Journal of Film Radio and Television* special issue, 17(4), October 1997, pp. 437–443.
 20. I gratefully acknowledge Graham McCann's lecture series 'Aspects of American Culture', Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, University of Cambridge, Spring, 1993.
 21. Dialogue from 'Mrs Smith Goes to Washington' (USA, 1939), directed by Frank Capra, screenplay by Sidney Buchman.
 22. D. Cupitt (1991) *What is a Story?* (London: SCM Press), p. xi.
 23. D. Cupitt (1991) *What is a Story?* (London: SCM Press), p. 36.
 24. D. Cupitt (1991) *What is a Story?* (London: SCM Press), p. 14.
 25. See, for example, J. W. Martin and C. E. Ostwalt Jr (eds) (1995) *Screening the Sacred: Religion, Myth and Ideology in American Popular Film* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1995).

26. T. W. Adorno and M. Horkheimer (1979) The culture industry as mass deception, *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*, translated by John Cumming (London: Verso), p. 43.
27. T. W. Adorno and M. Horkheimer (1979) The culture industry as mass deception, *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*, translated by John Cumming (London: Verso), p. 138.
28. T. W. Adorno and M. Horkheimer (1979) The culture industry as mass deception, *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*, translated by John Cumming (London: Verso), pp. 144–147.
29. See, for example, M. Crispin Miller (1988) *Boxed In* (Evanston, Illinois); S. Robert Lichter, L. S. Lichter and S. Rothman (1991) *Watching America* (New York: Prentice Hall); S. Powers, D. J. Rothman and S. Rothman (1996) *Hollywood's America: Social and Political Themes in Motion Pictures* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press).
30. See C. Barker (1998) 'Cindy's a slut': moral identities and moral responsibility in the 'soap talk' of British Asian girls, *Sociology* 32(1), pp. 65–81.
31. F. Inglis (1990) *Media Theory* (Oxford: Blackwell), p. 6.
32. C. MacCabe (1993) *On the Eloquence of the Vulgar: A Justification for the Study of Film and Television* (London: British Film Institute), p. 20.
33. C. MacCabe (1993) *On the Eloquence of the Vulgar: A Justification for the Study of Film and Television* (London: British Film Institute), p. 22.
34. A. Quinton (1993) Clash of symbols, *The Times Higher Education Supplement*, 30 April 1993, pp. 15–16.

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