Media Theory

Multiple & divergent perspectives

- **Leftist** (critical of media power of large corporations) vs. **conservative** (critical of liberal news & damage to values)

- **Critical theory** (exposure of problems of media practice w.r.t. social issues) vs. **applied theory** (harnes mass coms to effective use)

- **Media-centric** (focus on media's sphere of activity as autonomous) vs. **society-centric** (media seen as reflection of political & economic forces)

- **Culturalist vs. materialist**
Figure 1.1 Dimensions and types of media theory – four main approaches can be identified according to two dimensions: media-centric versus society-centric; and culturalist versus materialist
1. Media-culturalist perspective – focus on media content & form & to subjective reception of media messages as influenced by immediate personal environment

2. Media-materialist – emphasis on organisational, financial, technological aspects of media

3. Socio-culturalist – emphasis on influence of social factors on media production & reception & functions of media in social life

4. Social-materialist – see media & contents mainly as reflection of political-economic & material forces & conditions
The concept of mass

- Large aggregate
- Undifferentiated
- Mainly negative image
- Lacking order
- Reflective of mass society
The mass communication process

• Large scale

• One-directional flow

• Asymmetrical

• Impersonal and anonymous

• Calculative relationship

• Standardised content
The mass audience

- Large numbers
- Widely dispersed
- Non-interactive and anonymous
- Heterogeneous
- Not organised or self-acting
Mass culture

- Non-traditional
- Non-elite
- Mass produced
- Popular
- Commercial
- Homogenised
The dominant paradigm

- A liberal pluralist ideal of society
- A functionalist perspective
- A linear transmission model of effects
- Powerful media modified by group relations
- Quantitative research and variable analysis
The alternative paradigm

- A critical view of society and rejection of value neutrality
- Rejection of the transmission model
- A non-deterministic view of media technology and messages
- Cultural and qualitative methodology
- A preference for cultural or political-economic theories
- Wide concern with inequality and sources of opposition in society
4 models

Transmission model

Expression or ritual model

Publicity model

Reception model

Sender

Transfer of meaning

Performance

Competitive display

Preferential encoding

Receiver

Cognitive processing

Consummation/shared experience

Attention-giving/spectatorship

Differential decoding/construction of meaning