

**European Journal of Sociology, 11, 1970, 26-66.**

**The Worker and the Media**

JUDITH B. AGASSI

The mass media have aroused concern and discussion by social scientists-both as media of political persuasion and as conveyors of mass culture. The first aspect-the media as means of political persuasion-arose as a direct result of the spectacular use of mass propaganda by the Fascists. It has since become a component of the continuing discussion about the means of modernization of under-developed societies. The second aspect-the media as conveyors of mass culture-goes back at least to the nineteenth century discussion about the impact of the first "mass medium", cheap print, such as the "penny dreadfuls" and the "railway literature". To the best of my knowledge the political aspect is rarely discussed with specific attention to the worker; the Fascist propagandist appealed to an indiscriminate mass-audience and was most successful with the *declassée* lower-middle-class, and the modernizing governmental authorities in under-developed societies face mainly the problem of how to reach the dispersed rural masses with the message of modernization. It is the mass-culture literature in the contemporary West in which the industrial worker plays a specific role of some importance.

Two other debates in the contemporary sociological literature touch on the media and especially on the media and the worker. First, the literature on the sociology of leisure, which, at least in France, has strong socialist overtones. Second, the literature discussing social stratification, particularly the "*embourgeoisement* debate" touches tangentially on the impact of the mass-media on the worker.

In this paper I shall first present the general trend in contemporary cultural criticism of the mass media and its historical roots. Second, I shall describe the concern with the working-class in the mass-culture debate and state its various underlying ideological orientations. Third, I shall list various claims concerning the worker's attitudes, the impact of the media, and the long-term effects of media use. I shall list the various claims about the special relationship between media and worker made in the literatures of mass-culture, of the sociology of leisure and of social stratification). Fourthly, I shall try to examine the validity of these claims, in the light of the existing research literature accumulated in the last two decades, unsatisfactory as this research literature unfortunately is. Fifth, I shall conclude with a presentation of the still open questions concerning the worker's use of the media and their effect on him. I shall tentatively outline possible avenues of research which may prove fruitful.

## I

The mass-culture debate is not carried out by social scientists but largely by the special breed of culture critics, some of whom even show an outspoken contempt for social science. A considerable group of these critics, usually those who take a simplistic neo-elitist position, do not differentiate at all between the different social components of mass-society. Contemporary mass-society is by them condemned in toto - because it provides a ready, willing, and lucrative market for mass culture; and mass-culture debases high culture, and threatens to seduce the genuine creator of high culture.<sup>1</sup>

The tradition of culture critics who condemn the upstart masses started in the nineteenth century, when the only genuine mass-medium was print, which started to produce large editions of newspapers and magazines as well as the first cheap books, literature called the “gutter-press”, the “penny-dreadfuls”, and the “railway literature”. The great majority of the consumers of this new cheap literature were not the industrial workers, most of whom were still illiterate and had neither the leisure nor the physical and financial facilities for reading, but the growing ranks of the lower and middle middle-classes.<sup>2</sup> Among the forerunners of present-day critics of mass-culture were Søren Kierkegaard, Gustave Flaubert, and Friedrich Nietzsche. Bernard Rosenberg, in a paper published in 1957,<sup>3</sup> claims Flaubert’s *Madame Bovary* as the classical statement of mass culture criticism: she behaves as stupidly as she does because she had batted on the garbage of the then contemporary flood of cheap romantic novels. Had Emma Bovary continued to be a simple small-town girl without access to

---

<sup>1</sup> Neo-elitists who do not differentiate between different classes are too many to list exhaustively. Let me mention a few. T. S. ELIOT, Sir Herbert READ, Bernard IDDINGS BELL, *Crowd Culture* (London, Harper, 1952); the following contributors to the anthology *Mass Culture* (Glencoe, Free Press, 1957), edited by B. ROSENBERG and D. M. WHITE: Leo LOWENTHAL (describing the consumer of mass-media as “half mutilated child and half standardized adult”, p. 57), Dwight MACDONALD (mass-society’s “morality sinks to that of its most brutal and primitive members, its taste to that of its least sensitive and most ignorant”, p. 70, “mass-culture is not and can never be any good”, p. 69), Clement GREENBERG (“to fill the demand of the new urban masses a new commodity was devised: Ersatz culture, Kitsch, destined for those who, insensible to the values of genuine culture [...]”, p. 102), Alan DUTSCHER (“cinema, radio, and television manifest from the first [...] the quantification and moronization which have marked their development ever since [...]”, p. 139), Ernest van den HAAG (“The high and folk culture works, even when they are not physically altered, change their function when they are absorbed into the stream of popular culture”, p. 527).

<sup>2</sup> An extremely interesting historical account of the development of the mass public of readers in XIX<sup>th</sup> century Britain can be found in Richard D. ALTICK, *The Spread of Reading*, in Eric LARRABEE and Rolf MEYERSON, *Mass Leisure* (Glencoe, Free Press, 1958), pp. 43-53. Altick refers to the beginning of working class reading thus. “The size of the audience that devoured the writings of Cobbett and the Chartists [1815-1850] is perhaps the best proof that the working-class had not been reduced to a completely bestial condition” (p. 52).

<sup>3</sup> B. ROSENBERG, *Mass Culture in America*, in ROSENBERG and WHITE, *op. cit.* pp. 3-12; see esp. pp. 6-7.

cheap printed material (other than her prayer-book) she would never have pursued the treacherous and false goal of romantic love. So says Rosenberg, and in a way, to be sure, so says Flaubert. Flaubert, however, is not concerned with the debasement of high culture, but simply with the pernicious influence of mass-culture on the naive mind. Nietzsche goes further and proclaims that every catering for a large audience would of necessity result in the debasement of good taste. The most common criticism of the new mass-culture, however, was neither that of Flaubert nor that of Nietzsche but a straight-forward moralistic one which deplored the low moral and the secular content of the mass literature and its effects on society. The nineteenth century also found its defenders of mass-culture, among them two famous Americans: Ralph Waldo Emerson and Walt Whitman, both of whom hoped for a great invigoration of literature through the introduction of the vulgar, the heroic common man. As to Tocqueville, the Cassandra prophecy which he aired in his *Democracy in America*-the image of mediocre mass-society with narrow and mediocre cultural tastes-is well known;<sup>4</sup> his more painstaking analysis of the widening of the culture-market is less well-known though it deserves study.<sup>5</sup> As he speaks he impact of a wider middle-class non-aristocratic culture-market on the producers of culture and on the characteristics of their products, he does not think of this culture as all evil but rather as less dependent on a literary education and more uneven in quality than aristocratic culture; and anyway he thinks of the process as fairly inevitable.

Unfortunately, the majority of twentieth century culture-critics are neither historically minded nor analytically sharp. They pick up current negative characterizations of their fellow-men coined by either philosopher, sociologist or journalist and apply them to contemporary mass society wholesale. For example, mass-man in general is accused by the culture critics of being escapist, conformist, status-seeking, and other-directed; recently he has also become one-dimensional. Mass-man in general is a passive consumer of all the Kitsch presented to him through the media, who is not ready to make the intellectual and moral effort to become a devotee of

---

<sup>4</sup> Alexis de TOCQUEVILLE, *Democracy in America*, originally published in French in 1835-1840: vol. II, chapter LXI.

[...] an innumerable multitude of men, all equal and alike, incessantly endeavoring to procure the petty and paltry pleasures with which they glut their lives each of them, living apart, is as a stranger to the fate of all the rest,-his children and his private friends constitute to him the whole of man-kind [...].

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* vol. I, chapter XXIV. Here, then, is a motley multitude whose intellectual wants are to be supplied. Literature will not easily be subjected to strict rules [...]

They prefer books which may be easily procured, quickly read, and which require no learned researches to be understood. They ask for beauties self-proffered and easily enjoyed; above all, they must have what is unexpected and new [...]. They require strong and rapid emotions [...].

genuine or high culture.<sup>6</sup>

This type of culture critic-and a good many creative artists unfortunately join in the chorus<sup>7</sup> - are concerned neither with the historical causes or processes which produced mass-society, nor with the differences between social groupings within it. There are exceptions, of course; not all of these, however, are for the better. Sir Herbert Read,<sup>8</sup> for instance, does offer a history of sorts blaming the Industrial Revolution, the growth of scientific rationalism, modern democracy and modern communications for the decline of the arts.

The great apostle of the neo-elitists of the twentieth century is José Ortega y Gasset. He put the blame squarely on modern political democracy<sup>9</sup> - what the Marxists would call bourgeois democracy- for the advent of the masses and of mass-culture. Most of his followers, however, do not really trouble themselves with the question whether the main historical cause of mass-culture was political democracy, the capitalist economic system, its American version only, or perhaps plainly modern industrial technology; they are content to lament bitterly the present prevalence of mass-culture, and express profound contempt for the products, producers, and consumers of mass-culture. Some culture-critics occasionally express hope that there might be societies where the situation is not as bad. Indeed, American and Western European artists and critics have frequently looked hopefully towards Soviet Russia<sup>10</sup> - which repeatedly disappointed them, need one say,

---

<sup>6</sup> Sir Herbert Read describes the passive consumer thus: "A dull-eyed, bored, and listless automaton whose one desire is for violence in some form or other- violent action, violent sounds, distractions of any kind, that can penetrate to its deadened nerves" (*The Necessity of Art, Saturday Review*, Dec. 6, 1969, pp. 24-27).

<sup>7</sup> Artists joining in the neo-elitist chorus are too many to list exhaustively. Let me mention those who took part in a seminar sponsored jointly by the Taminent Institute and *Daedalus*, the Journal of the American Academy of Art and Sciences, June, 1959, and whose contents were published in *Culture for the Millions? Mass Media in Modern Society*, edited by Norman JACOBS with an introduction by Paul Lazarsfeld, (Princeton, Van Nostrand, 1961): Randall JARRELL ("The values of the Medium [...] are business values: money, success, celebrity [...] the opposite of the world of the arts where commercial and scientific progress do not exist", pp. 101-102); Arthur BERGER ("Precisely because the outlets upon which our advanced composer must depend (symphony orchestras, recordings, opera-companies and organized networks for touring artists and chamber-groups) have become successful, mass-media, the efflorescence of vital new American music is seriously hampered", p. III); James BALDWIN ("[...] distressed about, when we speak of the state of mass-culture in this country, is the overwhelming torpor and bewilderment of the people [...]", p. 121).

<sup>8</sup> See reference in note 6 above.

<sup>9</sup> Jose ORTEGA y GASSET, *The Revolt of the Masses* [English edition], 1932: "The political innovations of recent times, signify nothing less than the political domination by the masses"[p.18]. He calls this "hyper-democracy".

<sup>10</sup> For details concerning Western intellectuals and the history of their pinning cultural hopes on Soviet Russia and on Communism- as well as their disappointments- see *Journal of Contemporary History*, volume II, *The Left Wing Intellectuals Between the Wars 1919-1939*, edited by Walter LAQUEUR and

with its propagation of socialist realism Kitsch for the masses (it is surprising how often bitter critics of Western mass-culture mention approvingly the Russian official propagation of the classics in monster-size editions). Many still periodically express hopes for the emergence of a genuine and authentic modern culture, presumably not given to any extensive use of the mass-media, in simpler developing societies, preferably societies in revolt, or by erstwhile suppressed racial and ethnic minorities.<sup>11</sup> European culture-critics, as well as some otherwise quite reputable European sociologists,<sup>12</sup> have often consoled themselves with the assumption that the American cultural waste-land is even bigger than their own because the mass-media in the U. S. are controlled by big business and have as their main purpose the selling of its product, while at least some European media are under the control of non-commercial public or governmental bodies where the voice of the intellectual is sometimes heard.

Many otherwise not sociologically inclined culture critics vaguely subscribe to a conspiracy theory:<sup>13</sup> there exists, at least in the U.S.A., a group of immensely selfish, powerful, and cynical, masters of the media who, for the sake of profit, put out materials at the lowest common denominator of taste, the level of the proverbial eleven year old intelligence, and purvey messages which have as their main purpose to stimulate their audiences into craving for, and purchasing, more and more consumer goods. In the process, so the theory goes, they debase the common man, seduce the artist, and probably will end up destroying high culture or the arts.

All this is a curious ideological mixture of medievalist, religious, anti-capitalist, anti-industrial, anti-technology, vaguely pro-revolutionary, pro-socialist attitudes. Fashionable views among liberal-arts intellectuals as expressed by most critics of mass-culture include varying blends of these

---

George L. MOSSE, (New York, Harper Torch, 1966). This is an interesting report on French, British, German, Austrian, Norwegian, Hungarian, and even Turkish, left-wing intellectuals between the wars.

<sup>11</sup> See Robert S. SHORT, *The Politics of Surrealism, 1920-1936* in LAQUEUR and Mosse, *op. cit.* pp. 3-25. "Their admiration for Eastern and particularly for primitive peoples [...]" was one of the factors leading the Surrealists into politics (p. 7). See also James BALDWIN, in *Culture for the Millions?* *op. cit.* says, "life in this country is appalling. Many of us [artists] are leaving [...] for poorer countries" [p. 187].

<sup>12</sup> For example see Joffre DUMAZEDIER, *Vers une civilisation du loisir?* (Paris, Editions du Seuil, 1962), pp. 156, 157 and 171.

<sup>13</sup> A typical example of culture critics endorsing vague conspiracy theories of the media is Gilbert SELDES, *The People and the Arts* in ROSENBERG and WHITE, *Mass Culture*, *op. cit.* pp. 74-97; on p. 81 he quotes James T. FARRELL, whom he calls "an enemy of uninhibited capitalism", to say, "American culture has been invaded by finance capital". The movies, he says, "serve the finance capitalistic state because most of them distract the masses of the people from becoming more clearly aware of their real needs". Paul F. LAZARFELD and Robert K. MERTON, *Mass Communication, Popular Taste, and Organized Social Action*, in *Mass Culture*, *op. cit.* pp. 457-473, while not fully subscribing to a conspiracy theory nevertheless do claim, "the mass media [...] operate toward the maintenance of the going social and cultural structure, rather than toward its change" [p. 473].

common ingredients.

## II

Other culture critics, and a considerable portion of the sociologists of culture, have more articulated, more conscious, sometimes even more historically oriented, socialist inclinations. They tend to single out the working-class as the special victim, sometimes also the future hope, in what they consider the tragedy of the unrelenting spread of mass-culture.<sup>14</sup> A special victim, because the industrial proletariat was in a special position different from that of the other components of mass-society, the ever-expanding lower middle-classes: until well into the second half of the nineteenth century the majority of European industrial workers were illiterate or barely literate. They lived completely outside of their respective national cultures. Many had even lost contact with that part of the older pre-national common European religious cultural tradition that had been incorporated into rural folk culture. However, in the period preceding World War I the Western European worker had gradually advanced out of that previous state of abject poverty and cultural brutishness (so well described by Engels for England and by Zola for France), had acquired literacy, had organized, and had gained a sense of dignity and solidarity-in short, he had presumably created a special working-class culture of his own. This culture, though definitely not high, nonetheless supposedly was an authentic functional culture, growing out of his specific social and economic conditions.<sup>15</sup> This culture was seen as a positive entity, like rural folk-culture, which is also not high yet authentic, etc. The working-class authentic culture was threatened in recent decades by the mighty avalanche of the media and their products. Working-class culture succumbed and all

---

<sup>14</sup> H. STUART HUGHES, Mass Culture and Social Criticism, in *Culture for the Millions? op. cit.* pp. 142-147. He compares today's workers passively consuming mass-culture with workers at the turn of the century:

How different things were a couple of generations ago! One has only to conjure up the image of half-literate European workers patiently listening to the exegeses of Marxism texts for hours at a stretch (a common scene around 1900) to realize the difference in cultural climate [...] They were convinced that the lengthy and largely incomprehensible speeches of their leaders and teachers were of moment to them [...] they] believed, it would make a difference in their own lives, or at least in the lives of their descendents [p. 145].

<sup>15</sup> Richard HOGGART, *The Uses Literacy* (London 1967) (first published 1957). "The remnants of what was at least in parts an urban culture 'of the people' are being destroyed; and [...] the new mass culture in some important was less healthy than the often crude culture it is replacing" [p. 23]. "To live in the working-classes is even now to belong to an all-pervading culture [...] formal. and stylized" [p. 31]. Bennett M. BERGER, *Sociology of Leisure, Industrial Relations*, I (1962), 31-45, quotes Hoggart, to say, "The strongest objection to the more trivial popular entertainments is not that they prevent their [consumers...] from becoming high-brow, but that they make it harder for people without an intellectual bent to become wise in their own ways" [p. 276].

but disappeared. Nowadays Western European and American workers are a near indistinguishable part of the mass-public and the mass-audience.<sup>16</sup>

Those who see the processes of modern society as parts of a rather conscious class-struggle assume that this indeed was the conscious intention of the ruling class: to rob the working-class of its contemptuous and often rebellious independence from the system, to corrupt it with the values of the economically acquisitive, culturally conformist, and politically passive middle-class; to keep it amused, distracted, and even drugged, and thereby to prevent critical thought and rebellious actions: in short to prevent the socialist revolution.<sup>17</sup>

This is the attitude of the revolutionary school of socialist intellectuals. They see mass-culture as a part of a strategy of the ruling class in the class-war, and they are disappointed and quite censorious of the worker for his having fallen into the capitalist's traps, for being so easily corruptible by trade-union gains, by welfare-state social security legislation, by suburban home-ownership, and, finally, by the flickering light of his television set.

While many of these revolutionary culture-critics currently have despaired of the old working classes-the steadily employed and usually unionized industrial blue-collar worker-recently some have made an attempt to rescue the old magic concept of the working class as the bright hope of the revolution. Some do so by forecasting a future new revolutionary phase of the same industrial worker.<sup>18</sup> Others bestow the name and the mantle of a working-class on essentially different social groups. These are alternatively the poor, the slum-dweller, the various suppressed racial and ethnic minorities,<sup>19</sup> the third world of emerging nations, and even the radical young. It is tragicomic that while the occupational characteristics of these

---

<sup>16</sup> Bernard IDDINGS Bell *Crowd culture, op. cit.* p. 19: "Bourgeois and proletarian have become [culturally] indistinguishable".

<sup>17</sup> Norman BIRNBAUM, *The Crisis of Industrial Society* (New York, Oxford U. P., 1969), pp. 135-136: The press and the mass-media, popular publications (whether politically censored or not? have propagated images of the world which have reinforced its dreadful immanence. They have conveyed crude versions of consensual ideologies, they have denied by implication the possibilities of realizing alternative social arrangements which would reverse or seriously alter the prevailing distribution of power, and above all they have mounted a savage attack on those powers of imagination and sensibility which alone could mobilize Psychic energy for criticism or revolt.

<sup>18</sup> André GORZ, *Stratégie ouvrier et néo-capitalisme* (Paris 1964), pp. 105-124. Serge MALLET, *La nouvelle classe ouvrier* (Paris 1963). Both hope for a renewal of a radical socialist consciousness in the working class. See also John H. GOLDTHORPE, David LOCKWOOD, Frank BECHHOFER, and Jennifer PLATT, *The Affluent Worker in the Class Structure* (Cambridge Studies in Sociology, no. 31, 1969), who tentatively predict, the coming of a new radical phase for the British worker.

<sup>19</sup> Eleanor LEACOCK, Distortion of Working-Class Reality in American Social Science, *Science and Society*, XXI (1967), pp. 1-21.

groups are mostly very different from those of the classical industrial, proletariat being employed only occasionally or seasonally mainly in the service industries or in agriculture, being frequently or chronically unemployed, or not yet having entered the modern labor market- the champions of these groups should now protest against the theories of the “culture of poverty” as an unfair and biased denigration of the character and culture of “the working class”.<sup>20</sup> Of course it is possible to speak for these groups without pretending that they are the working class; and some revolutionary culture-critics have done just this: they have attacked the media as corrupting the poor, the blacks, or the young.<sup>21</sup> Thus, television cannot do right: first it shows no members of the chosen group; and then it shows them in the wrong light, distorting reality and thus debasing culture and inhibiting the growing revolutionary consciousness at one and the same time.

Apart from the revolutionary culture-critics, we can discern two other groups; first the reformist-socialists, and second the small but influential group of moralist champions of the working-class and its culture. The reformist branch amongst socialist culture-critics and sociologists, generally also had-and still has-a negative attitude toward the media and mass-culture,<sup>22</sup> but out of a somewhat different concern for the worker. They had great hopes regarding the struggles for a shorter work-week, paid vacations, social security, and general post-primary free education. With these struggles nearing full victory, the worker could finally be emancipated not only materially but spiritually as well. With a higher standard of living, less fatigue, less material insecurity, more leisure time, general literacy, and

---

<sup>20</sup> Eleanor LEACOCK, Communication Working-Class Reality in Social Science: Discussion II, *Science and Society*, XX (1968), pp. 82-88.

<sup>21</sup> See Thomas E. Linton's review Eugene B. BRODY (ed.), *Minority Group Adolescents*, in *Psychiatry and Social Science Review*, III (1969), p. 37: “Adolescents cannot legally drink, they are the first to be risked in our wars, cannot vote, and are manipulated by a mass-media [*sic*] that knows exactly what it is trying to do them”.

<sup>22</sup> The reformist-socialist attitude towards the media is described and analyzed by Paul F. LAZARFELD and Robert K. MERTON in Lyman BRYSON (ed.), *The Communication of Ideas* (New York, Harper, 1948), esp. pp. 99-100. William H. WHYITE Jr., in *The Organization Man* (New York 1956), p. 342n, describes this attitude of disappointment in the worker thus:

This kind of disappointment has been very strong in England. For years liberal intellectuals fought to extend middle-class security to the workers, and now that they are succeeding they are discomfited. Writing in *The Spectator* (January 20, 1956), Charles Curran talks of life in the vast municipal housing estates where so many workers now live. He speaks of how they read the tabloids exclusively because the tabloids “offer a simple, cheerful, manageable universe, a warm cozy place of sex, excitement, triviality and fantasy [...] the daydream heaven of wealth, luxuries, and sexual attraction to which the football-pool coupon will one day provide a ticket of admission. An interior life of this kind and on this scale is something that has not previously existed in England. It contrasts sharply with the expectations that buoyed up the social reformers-that once the manual worker was free from the clutches of poverty and insecurity, he would begin to participate in our social heritage. Nothing of the kind has happened”.

some basic education, the worker could be introduced fully into the world of his national culture, indeed into human cultural heritage. Great efforts of adult education organizers, of workers' seminars and popular universities, would gradually open before him the worlds of science, literature, and the arts. There would no longer be "two nations" even in the sphere of culture.<sup>23</sup>

The reformist socialists had hoped, likewise, that the worker would use his increased leisure and literacy to inform himself about current affairs and would begin to participate fully and actively in civic affairs and the rank-and-file worker would, at long last, be willing and able to take care efficiently of the specific group interests of the workers in labor union and political party.<sup>24</sup> The socialist reformists were indeed interested not in keeping the worker isolated in his "working-class culture" (the issue of its characteristics and even of its existence is a confused one in this literature), but in guiding him to enter fully into the larger culture and civic society. Whereas the revolutionary culture-critics are ambivalent about high culture, criticizing mass-culture as debasing high culture yet dismissing much of the same high culture as bourgeois, the reformist socialists do not apply a rigid Marxist class characterization to their cultural heritage and so have not got this specific problem.

Many of the reformist sociologists started out not as culture-critics but as students of the sociology of work and of leisure. The strongest tradition in this field is French and it has flourished already in the inter-war period, with its central figure Georges Friedmann, and in the post-war period Joffre Dumazedier. These sociologists had been hopefully measuring the general leisure activities,<sup>25</sup> and especially the reading habits and the social activities of French workers for decades, noting the still existing but seemingly declining differences in those patterns between the blue-collar worker and the three groups nearest to him in the occupational hierarchy, the white-

---

<sup>23</sup> Ferdynand ZWEIG, *The Worker in an Affluent Society* (London 1961), p. 95.

<sup>24</sup> For the reformist concern with a rise of the generally low degree of civic participation and leadership of the industrial worker see Joffre DUMAZEDIER and Nicole LATOUCHE, *Work and Leisure in French, Sociology, Industrial Relations*, I (1962), 13-30, esp. pp. 27, 28, 30.

<sup>25</sup> The following are the most significant French studies of workers' leisure:

1. M. HALBWACHS, *La classe ouvrière et niveaux de vie* (Paris, F. Alcan, 1912), pp. 446-447.
2. G. FRIEDMANN, *Problèmes humains du machinisme industriel* (Paris, Gallimard, 1946).
3. M. CROZIER, *Petits fonctionnaires au travail* (Paris, CNRS, 1955).
4. P. H. CHOMBART de LAUWE, *La vie quotidienne des familles ouvrières* (Paris CNRS, 1958).
5. Jacqueline FRISH-GAUTHIER and P. LOUCHBT, *La colombophilie chez les mineurs du Nord* (Paris, CNRS, 1961).
6. Research carried out by the group on the sociology of leisure and popular culture of the *Centre d'études sociologiques*, e.g. the Annecy Study, carried out in 1957.
7. FRIEDMANN and P. NAVILLB (eds), *Traité de sociologie du travail* (Paris, Colin, 1961).
8. J. DUMAZEDIER and N. LATOUE *travail et loisir* (Paris CNRS, 1963).

collar employee, the artisan, and the small shopkeeper. Until well into the fifties they were not greatly troubled by “commercial entertainment”; even film and radio seem not to have worried them much. Yet with the advent and spread of television, the American and British condemnation of the media seems to have arrived in their midst and they expressed the fear that the media might cut short or even reverse the process of the French worker’s cultural progress.<sup>26</sup> It may be noted that after sober consideration and a good deal of survey work, they have come to the conclusion, it seems, that television too, at least French television, has some informative and artistic merit, and just like the other mass-media, has but a small impact on the general pattern of the leisure activities of the working class.<sup>27</sup>

There remains the small group of moralist champions of the working class culture. Perhaps it is even incorrect to speak about a group, and one should speak instead of the one-man-crusade of Richard Hoggart and his remarkable *The Uses of Literacy*. The impact of this volume of 1957, with its gifted intimate socio-cultural history of the British North Country working man and his sweeping condemnation of the new mass-media, its impact on both revolutionary socialist culture-critics and reformist ones, is quite unusual. There are, to be sure, others at least partly in this category. There is Ferdynand Zweig who, while in inclination rather a worker-cultural-improvement advocate, nonetheless reports Hoggart’s claim that the old British working-class culture permitted the worker to become “wise in his own way”, and he follows Hoggart in condemning the newer mass-media as a “candy-floss world”.<sup>28</sup> Many quote Hoggart to the effect that there existed an authentic working-class culture prior to the onslaught of the mass-media, implying that this culture had been autonomous or even revolutionary, thus obviously missing the gist of Hoggart’s argument concerning the existence of a special working-class way of life which had adapted pieces of high and of mediocre culture and even pieces of mass-culture to its own firm moral standards of family and neighborhood, not of revolution.

To conclude, we saw the culture critic and the sociologist represented

---

<sup>26</sup> DUMAZEDIER and N. LATOUCHE, *op. cit.* p. 30.

We fear particularly a useless and costly profusion of summary information and vulgar diversion sold by the great mass media of communication. Could such a development not have, in the long run, destructive effects on the free social and cultural development of these masses?

<sup>27</sup> DUMAZEDIER, *op. cit.* (note 12 above) pp. 155-156, notes that in France only 29% of the television programs are ‘distracting’ as compared to 60-75 % in the United States.

<sup>28</sup> See notes 15 and 23 above. Zweig adds: “We may hope that the rise in his cultural standards will come about in due course, provided that he is not deflected by vested interests into the marshlands of the candy-floss world”.

in the revolutionary socialist literature frustrated by the worker's loss of presumed revolutionary qualities; they are also both represented in the reformist socialist movement, where the media appear as a danger to the intellectual emancipation of the working-class. Finally we touched upon the moralist approach which accuses the new media of sapping the moral fiber of the working class.

### III

I now come to the various claims made about the worker's attitude towards the mass-media, the impact of the media on the worker, and their long-term effects. I shall glance at the rather limited statistical material available and evaluate the divergent interpretations of it made by sociologists of varying persuasions and of diverse specializations, chiefly sociologists of leisure and sociologists of social stratification.

The revolutionary culture critic uses as his main theoretical framework the classic theory of alienation, or rather varieties of variants on it. Briefly, there is a strong alienation of the worker under the conditions of neo-capitalist, or post-industrial, or affluent society. The cause of this strong alienation is, allegedly, largely the brutal meaninglessness of modern industrial work. This condition, according to Herbert Marcuse<sup>29</sup> and the French revolutionary culture critic, Andre Gorz,<sup>30</sup> throws the worker into a frenzy of consumption, no less. The alleged fact of excessive consumption is explained as a desperate attempt to compensate for the hollowness of life as a producer under the prevailing system. This is the false consciousness of the modern worker. His false consciousness and his alienation are accentuated by the mass-media, since these propagate "false needs": and also symbolism and imagery of these "false needs".

It follows that the worker, being alienated, is especially prone to the pernicious influence of the media; that he should, therefore, be an especially heavy consumer of mass-culture, and that he should choose those parts of mass-culture that help him satisfy his craving for escape. It is not clear whether according to this theory watching a commercial or the luxurious interiors of the dwellings of soap-opera heroes without purchasing the advertised commodity is a satisfaction of "false needs" or not: the theory is vague on these issues except to say that the worker's real needs are neither reflected nor satisfied by the mass-media. There is no doubt, in my opinion,

---

<sup>29</sup> Herbert MARCUSE, *One Dimensional Man* (London 1964), p. 5, "superimposed upon the individual by particular social interests in his repression". See also H. MARCUSE, "Liberation From the Affluent Society", in David COOPER (ed.), *The Dialectics of Liberation* (London 1968).

<sup>30</sup> André GORZ, *op. cit.* pp. 58-69, 111-118.

that the various give-away TV shows are pernicious because they create the illusion of the easy accessibility of the most luxurious commodities and are bound to create feelings of envy and frustration in the lower-income housewife. This is obvious without the use of the trappings of alienation theory. Whether the same charge of perniciousness applies as obviously to the soap-operas and situation comedies on TV and to the contents of the mass magazines, can at least be left in doubt prior to some empirical inquiry.

Preliminary to such empirical investigation must be some attempt to nail down the theory: for example, to describe alienation with greater precision. An attempt to do just this was made in relation to newspaper reading habits and television show watching.<sup>31</sup> It was attempted to describe alienation as suspicion towards institutions and authorities and general pessimism and feeling of lack of control over one's fate and to correlate degrees of this with the degrees of disposition to read sensational news items or to watch escapist television programs. In both cases the correlation turned out to be rather low.

All revolutionary socialist culture critics assume that the working class was more revolutionary prior to the present ubiquity of the mass-media. The history of the western industrial working class, however, exhibits only periodic and rather partial revolutionary inclinations; in most western countries a consistent stable revolutionary attitude was held only by a very small minority of the workers. Most observers of the industrial worker since the end of World War II agree that the feeling of security and optimism of the worker has grown considerably; and even his social self-assurance has noticeably grown. Some have predicted the decline of trade-unions and working-class political parties; this prediction obviously does not accord with observation. It is obvious that the basic cause of the changes in the mood and consciousness of the worker lies in the remarkable rise of his standard of living and of his social security, not in the increase of mass-communication.

Industrial workers all over the western world, and recently also in the eastern bloc, aspire to buy labor-saving domestic appliances and radios and

---

<sup>31</sup> Jack MCLEOD, Scott WARD, and Karen TANCILL, *Alienation and Uses of the Mass Media*, *Public Opinion Quarterly*, XXIX, (1965-1966), pp. 583-594. "The hypothesis of a positive association of alienation and interest in sensational headlines was not supported" [p. 589]. "Little support is given to the prediction that alienation will be positively correlated with time spent using the mass-media. The subsidiary part of this prediction, that the alienated would give special attention to the "fantasy-oriented" media, is given some rather weak support" [p. 587]. As to comic strips and alienation, a study by Leo BOGART, *Comic Strips and the Adult Reader*, in ROSENBERG and WHITE, *Mass Culture*, *op. cit.* pp. 189-198, concludes, "no evidence that those whose interest in the comics is high have more reason or desire for escapist fantasy than those whose interest is low" [p.197].

televisions. In the west they overwhelmingly become home and car owners. It is, however, extremely doubtful that this is much related to overexposure to advertising. Housing, washing-machines, refrigerators, and even motor cars, can hardly be labeled “false needs” in any case.<sup>32</sup>

An additional accusation is that the media are killing the critical spirit. Norman Birnbaum sees “a savage attack” of the media on “those powers of imagination and sensibility which alone could mobilize psychic energy for criticism or revolt”.<sup>33</sup> Certainly all over the western democratic world criticism and controversy are part of the contents of the mass-media (with the possible exception of the French radio and television under De Gaulle). Recently we have witnessed a conservative campaign in the U.S. against the alleged overly critical and radical mass-media: without endorsing this criticism in the least one might wonder if this does not indicate that there is no monolithic system of either criticism or its absence: the media seem to be a mixed bag. No doubt on a few issues some of the most widely read magazines and watched news shows have recently been more radical than their average audiences.

Leaving the revolutionary culture critic we now come to the reformist culture critic. The basic assumption of this group is that the worker is in need of intellectual skills and improved social skills; he should be introduced to the world of books, of scientific ways of thinking, and of the arts; he should learn to be active in his community. Many members of this group claim that the media endanger the worker’s progress in this direction because the mass-media, especially the commercial ones, have the opposite purpose: not to raise the level of his education but to satisfy the lowest common intellectual denominator of their various audiences. Mass media, it is alleged, are the enemies of worker’s intellectual emancipation because they (a) supply mainly entertainment and distraction, (b) debase high culture, and (c) take away time from more active pursuits. In addition, (d) the electronic media inhibit the use of printed matter, which is the traditional form of most educational material.<sup>34</sup>

There is little evidence that the mass-media have done considerable damage to the Endeavour of the worker’s adult education. Many 19th

---

<sup>32</sup> John GOLDTHORPE *et al.*, *op. cit.* pp. 183-184: “We would simply observe that it is not to us self-evident why one should regard our respondents concern for decent, comfortable houses, for labor-saving devices, and even for such leisure goods as television sets and cars, as manifesting the force of ‘false’ needs”.

<sup>33</sup> Norman BIRNBAUM, *loc. cit.*

<sup>34</sup> The arguments for the theory that the media inhibit the use of printed material, especially for education and self-improvement purposes, are discussed by Bernard BERELSON, Who Reads Books and Why?, in ROSENBERG and WHITE, *Mass Culture*, *op. cit.* pp. 119-125. See especially pp.120-125.

century institutions designed for the betterment of the worker either became middle-class institutions, like the poly technical colleges in England, or lost their educational contents and became working-class social institutions, like the workingmen's clubs. Hence the decline occurred prior to the ubiquity of the mass media.

The retort to this by the reformist culture critic would be this. His complaint is not that the movement has decreased in its effects and volume but that much of the new leisure which could have gone to its potential growth was consumed by the media instead. More than that, the media could and should function as a major instrument in the battle for the betterment of the worker, rather than become a competitor for his leisure time.

The answer to this must be more empirical. Mass media include everywhere an unmeasured quantity of informative matter, political and otherwise. Much of media entertainment is not on the lowest level of taste. And the media are not of a fixed character: they change as a result of the development of new media; especially TV has wrought a complete media revolution: film and radio, the previously main light escapist media, have become increasingly specialized and pluralistic. Even the audience's attitudes towards these media have become less passive. Daily newspapers have somewhat declined in importance, news-magazines have risen at the same time and are entering the mass-market, including the worker's home.<sup>35</sup> Paper-backs nowadays embrace all literature, low-brow and high-brow alike, records-all forms of information and music. The recent pluralism in recorded pop music is spectacular, as well as the rising involvement of the younger generation in this art-form. Television, the medium most feared by culture-critics as the most hypnotic, addictive, and influential, seems now on the thresh-hold of a major alteration; cable TV, piped TV, and pay TV, cassette viewing and educational stations, all may soon free the viewer from dependence on the major networks and from the commercials. In Europe, where non-commercial radio and television networks, rather than commercial ones, are the norm, the media have suffered from conservatism and low technical level due to lack of competition. In addition, the dangers of government monopolies are not smaller than the dangers of commercial banalities. The trend in Europe, too, seems to be towards pluralism with competition either from commercial stations or between divers publicly

---

<sup>35</sup> Leo BOGART, The Mass Media and The Blue Collar Worker, in Arthur SHOSTAK and William GOMBERG (eds.), *Blue Collar World: Studies of the American Worker* (Englewood Cliffs 1964), pp. 416-428. "According to 1959 *Newsweek* survey of the three leading news magazines [*Newsweek*, *Time*, *U. S. News and World Report*] these have a negligible readership among unskilled workers, but their readership among skilled, craftsmen, supervisory, and semi-skilled blue-collar workers, is actually higher than the national average".

sponsored stations.

In brief, the stereotype view of the media as escapist and as doing no more than “bringing Coney Island into every house”,<sup>36</sup> which so many socialist culture critics take for granted, is far from true. It is, however, true that the worker, more than most other social strata, is a heavy consumer of such light entertainments like telecast ball-games, western series, and of the least imaginative of the pop music, and, in his limited reading, of the detective novel. Nevertheless, surveys show that workers’ taste in media fare is not uniformly low but rather ambiguous. A Tchaikovsky ballet on American television,<sup>37</sup> or a highbrow movie like *La Strada* or *Le salaire de la peur* in France, may surprisingly gain high ratings in working-class districts.<sup>38</sup>

The fact is that the great obstacle to the introduction of higher culture to the worker, whether via the media or not, lies in the worker’s limited literary and verbal skills. I shall return to that later on. Another obstacle which might be easier to overcome, is the worker’s unfamiliarity with certain art-forms: given a sensitive and non-patronizing exposition, the barrier may be surmounted with astonishing results. We do not know as yet to what extent the media could contribute to this desirable development. The defect of the educational media is not their inaccessibility to the worker (only the better magazines are too expensive) - a fact ignored by the culture critics-but the technical poverty, stodginess, and dullness of most media educators, including professors and culture critics, who tend to turn, for example, the television studio into a boring lecture room.

From the revolutionary and reformist we now turn to the moralistic, i.e. Hoggart and his circle. It should be clear, first, that Hoggart is not critical of all media to the same extent. In his *Uses of Literacy* he mounts a passionate attack on the new mass print-media. He claims that the older British magazines which used to cater especially for the mass market of the workers were not pernicious and perhaps even constituted a relatively benign influence-because, he says, they had adopted the traditional moral values of the working-class culture.<sup>39</sup> Also, he approves of many of the programs on the two more popular channels of B.B.C. radio because they express the workers’ emphasis on family life and satisfy his preoccupation

---

<sup>36</sup> The quote is from an address delivered by Robert M. Hutchins (of the *Center For The Study of Democratic Institutions*), Washington, D. C., June 1, 1961.

<sup>37</sup> D. M. WHITE, *Mass Culture in America: Another Point of View*, in ROSENBERG and WHITE, *Mass Culture*, *op. cit.* pp. 13-21.

<sup>38</sup> DUMAZDIBR, *op. cit.* p. 144.

<sup>39</sup> HOGGART, *op. cit.* p. 101-109. “Peg’s paper and all that”, magazines; published by the Amalgamated Press, the Newness Group, and Thomson and Leng.

with the minutiae of daily living.<sup>40</sup> It is the newer and glossier magazines and other media which aim at a larger mass-market including either both working-class and lower middle-class girls and women, or all kinds of youths and young men at a loose end-these publications incur his wrath. They cater to the lowest common denominator, he says, and pander to all the weakest points in a traditional working-class morality. According to Hoggart this mass-literature purveys escapism (to which his objection is not so strong) and even worse- snobbishness, cynicism, meanness, selfishness, and moral permissiveness. These values do not always succeed in destroying the old working-class values, namely independence, decency, tenacity, humor, family and neighborhood loyalty. Wherever there is resistance, he says, it comes from strong primary groups, family and kin, as well as from established working-class neighborhoods. The new printed media, he says, as well as the products of Tin-Pan-Alley and Hollywood (he takes them as a homogenous product), prove to be a great danger, especially to youth and young adults removed from primary group protection due to a breakdown of family or temporary removal from home base, such as due to military service. Hoggart's depressive image is that of vacant faced youths spending hours on end in the Nickel-Odeon Milk Bars, listening to the spineless lyrics of the juke-box.<sup>41</sup> Hoggart claims that working-class teenage girls who seem to be completely captivated during the years between school-leaving and marriage by the tawdry styles and values of the "candy-floss world" of the glossy media, that these girls return surprisingly rapidly to many of the traditional patterns, values and responsibilities of the working-class wife and mother- provided, of course, that they have been brought up in a proper working-class family and neighborhood. In spite of Hoggart's admission that there is much persistence of the old patterns and values of the British working-class, he claims that the new media are the prime cause of a serious weakening of the moral fiber of the British worker.

We have already encountered the contention that a strong working-class culture did exist and has since been damaged severely by the mass-media. Those who repeat it as an argument in support of their own attack on the media often invoke Hoggart's name, often not realizing that he did not claim that the British working-class culture was an independent creation of the worker; that he did not claim that its contents were the product of anonymous popular artists; he did not see in working-class culture a parallel

---

<sup>40</sup> HOGGART, *op. cit.* p. 100. This includes the celebrated B.B.C. series Mrs. Dale's Diary, The Archers, and Huggerts; also variety programs which present "the people to the people" like Wilfred Pickles' Have A Go and Richard Dimpleby's Down Your Way, as well as Norman Evans' music hall style programs.

<sup>41</sup> HOGGART *op. cit.* p. 201.

to rural folk-culture. The cultural and artistic content of the British working-class culture, in fact, consists of works taken from high-culture, more often from mediocre art, i.e. middle-class art, and even from the mass-entertainment repertoire. Hoggart approves of this as it had been selectively adapted to the emotional and moral needs and standards of the worker and was performed by working-class performers within their own *milieu*.<sup>42</sup> The net result was certainly a closer contact between the real conditions of the worker's life and his culture that is at all possible in mass-culture. Hoggart's working-class culture was decidedly non-revolutionary (he views the political activist and his doings as utterly marginal, just as the self-improvement worker-education activist)<sup>43</sup> and he aims neither at revolutionizing it nor at improving its intellectual and cultural qualities; he merely wants to protect its moral integrity and dignity.

The main weaknesses of Hoggart's lively thesis seem to me to be (a) his overrating of the power of the media for good or ill, (b) his underrating of basic social and economic factors that have brought great changes in the lives of British and other workers since World War II, and (c) his insensitivity to the negative and constraining aspects of the old morality under changed conditions. According to my own experience and analysis of the content of those same semi-glossy British women's magazines of the same period (the fifties), their overwhelming content was the preaching of the good old virtues of pre-marital chastity, of settling down to modest but solid family life, not with the alluring but treacherous dark stranger, nor with the rich, but unloved, older man, but with the boy next door, and even of the superiority of often troublesome children to the flashy luxuries that the single career girl can afford. Snobbish and amoral adulation of film stars and jet-set figures took up only a small fraction of their pages.

As to Hoggart's underestimation of the economic factors, one need not be a Marxist to realize, what he fails to, that one cannot discuss effectively the development of mores and morals without taking into account economic and social developments. For example, the rise of the welfare state, full employment, higher income, the massive shift from rented row housing to secure council housing tenancy or private home buying, the shift away from the old concentrated industries (coal mining, iron and steel, textiles) to new relatively dispersed ones (cars, electronics, chemicals)- all these socio-economic factors obviously had interfered with the old ways of

---

<sup>42</sup> According to Hoggart, at the end of the fifties there still existed three thousand working-men's clubs in Britain, where this kind of repertoire was performed quiet regularly.

<sup>43</sup> HOGGART, *op. cit.* p. 33: "The purposive, the political, the pious and the self-improving minorities in the working classes".

life of kin and neighborhood relationships and made old attitudes of stoical resignation, consciousness of separateness from the rest of society and lack of expectation of improvement obsolete. Incidentally since the appearance of Hoggart's *The Uses of Literacy* in 1957, both British and American sociologists of stratification have discovered the so-called "bifurcation of the working class" into a traditional group which continues much along the patterns of Hoggart's North Country workers, and a modern group which has undergone considerable changes in patterns of life and attitudes.<sup>44</sup> It seems that this new and as yet unformed group is by no means as amoral and as cynical as Hoggart feared, but it certainly has not yet developed definite new attitudes to work, to education, and to social mobility. It is, hopefully, encapsulated in a transitional stage of intense preoccupation with the improvement of the physical well-being of the nuclear family. Though its discovery is not in full accord with Hoggart's predictions, the discovery is surely partly due to his studies.

In contradiction to both the revolutionary and the reformist culture critic, Hoggart charged the new media neither with the transformation of the working-class into the middle-class nor with arresting its intellectual development.

Rather, he charges the new media with their having given the worker false, cynical, amoral, mean, and even cruel attitudes. While, as I have mentioned above, this is little so in the case of British semi-glossy women's magazines, it is certainly true of parts of the comic, sex and sadism literature and of parts of recorded pop music, movies, and commercial radio and television. Hoggart claims that the media managers, because of their commercial nature, are now putting the worker into new spiritual bonds which are even more dangerous than the old economic bonds of exploitation.<sup>45</sup> Here, alas, Hoggart becomes a fanatic. He ignores the general moral and spiritual malaise of the age, and makes the media a scapegoat. Especially when we notice that Great Britain underwent an even more

---

<sup>44</sup> Bennett M. BERGBR, *Working-Class Suburb* (Berkeley 1960), conclusion: "The increasingly sharp distinctions between the upper middle-class and the lower middle-class (which are not merely distinctions of income) suggest that a similar phenomenon may be occurring on lower levels of society". Also Gerald HANDEL and Lee RAINWATER, *Persistence and Change in Working-class Life Style in SHOSTAK and GOMBERG, Blue-Collar World, op. cit.* pp. 36-41. "What seems to be a bifurcation of the working-class" [p. 41]. GOLDTHORPE *et al., op. cit.* Use the terms "traditional and modern working class" systematically.

<sup>45</sup> HOGGART, *op. cit.* pp. 220-201: Inhibited now from insuring the 'degradation' of the masses economically, the logical processes of competitive commerce. [...] are ensuring that working-people are culturally robbed [...] Since these processes can never rest, the holding down, the constant pressure not to look outwards and upwards, becomes positive thing, becomes a new and stronger form of subjection; this subjection promises to be stronger than the old because the chains of cultural subordination are both easier to wear and harder to strike away than those of economic subordination.

drastic social change than the United States, we may wonder how he could overlook the moral impact of this change. The mass media are more often than not the symptom rather than a causal link in the development. Much of high culture, sometimes even the most esoteric, in Britain as elsewhere, shows the same traits of the spineless, the perverse, and even the cruel. Certainly, the indiscriminate use of the worst-quality outpourings of the cynical, amoral, spineless material for the mass-market is deplorable; yet it is hard to see what, short of a paternalistic moral censorship a la "Auntie BBC" on the various commercial media, could remedy this.

Hoggart may have given the impetus to another discovery in American sociology. It was noticed that even in the U.S., where there never existed such a stable working-class culture based on a network of specific working class social and cultural institutions as described by Hoggart, that nevertheless, the American worker, and even the so-called American mass-man, does not get all his culture from - the media only.<sup>46</sup> There still exist older institutions and forms of - older popular culture in the local community-lodges, church, community and ethnic organizations. Most of these organizations, although not specifically working-class organizations (except in strictly working-class districts), have a considerable role to play in purveying to the American manual worker moral values, similarly family and neighborhood oriented, often with a good dash of regional and All-American patriotism and ethnic sentimentality added-in short, sentiments and a humor which may often be rather trite and vulgar but surely neither mean nor cynical, and certainly, neither new nor media-oriented.. They use the old forms of the brass-band and the parade, the fete, the fair, and the church bazaar. It is regrettable that this area of social life is still neglected by American sociologists.

Many of the most famous culture-critics, among them some hailed as sociologists, seemed to be completely oblivious of such facts. According to Jacques Ellul "the radio, and television even more than the radio, shuts up the individual in an echoing mechanical universe in which he is alone".<sup>47</sup>

We now turn to the major assumptions and presuppositions

---

<sup>46</sup> Edward SHILS, *Mass Society and Its Culture*, in Norman JACOBS (ed.), *Culture for the Millions? op. cit.* pp. 1-27, observes: It would be a mistake [...] to think that the culture possessed by these classes, the industrial working class and the rural population, is exhausted by what comes to them through the mass media. A large amount of traditional religious culture (and of sectarian variants of traditional religious culture) flourishes in all the non-intellectual classes. Much of regional and class culture, maintained by family, by colleagues, neighbors, and friends and by local institutions, survives and is unlikely to be supplanted by the larger culture which emanates from the center. This places limits on what is incorporated from the current flow of the mass media.

<sup>47</sup> Jacques ELLUL, *The Technological Society* (New York, Vintage Books, 1967), P.379.

concerning the worker and the media of the sociologists of work and leisure.

A basic issue which divides the students of work and leisure is this. How should we improve the worker's lot? What role does work play in a worker's life? One school, in which Georges Friedmann is the outstanding figure, contends that the key to the worker's emancipation is the radical improvement of his work-situation: where he spends the greatest single portion of his waking life has the greatest impact on his personality. Friedmann is a reformist socialist, often extremely critical of capitalist methods and scales of value, but a staunch believer in rational humanist reform in industry. His chief criticism of the industrial work conditions of today is, in brief, that the no longer necessary principle of maximal division of labor is still slavishly followed by most industrial production managers and engineers.<sup>48</sup> The result is the fragmentation and routinization of work and the stultification of initiative. Friedmann claims that the key to the understanding of the worker's leisure activities lies in its basic nature as compensation for the frustrations of work.<sup>49</sup> He agrees that, therefore, all the worker's leisure activities are in a sense escapist, but there are great gradations of the desirability of the various modes of escape. The aggressive leisure activities, such as drinking, gambling, and the watching of sadistic sports, are perhaps the lowest forms of escape, and, in his judgment, the active creative hobby activities may be the best. This is not moralizing but judging leisure as compensation.

In 1961 Friedmann extended and modified his view somewhat. Leisure may bring "professional compensations for work with a limited horizon, emotional compensations for the crudity of social relations in a mass of people, social compensations through the success which this leisure time activity can provide" and finally, "far from being a compensation, leisure is more often only an extension of occupational life. Thus, there is a tendency for the most frustrating leisure to be associated with the most frustrating work".<sup>50</sup>

---

<sup>48</sup> Georges FRIEDMANN, *Industrial Society, The Emergence of the Human Problems of Automation* (Glencoe 1955), chapter I: "Taylorism and the Human Sciences". See also his *The Anatomy of Work: Labor, Leisure, and the Implications of Automation* (Glencoe 1964), pp. 30-39, for American reactions against orthodox Taylorism.

<sup>49</sup> FRIEDMANN, *The Anatomy of Work, op. cit.* pp. 110-111.

<sup>50</sup> G. FRIEDMANN, Preface to Jacques-line FRISH-GAUTHIER and P. LOUCHET, *op. cit.* quoted also in DUMAZEDIER and LATOUCHE, *op. cit.* p. 14: Leisure activities bring different compensations: professional compensations for work with a limited horizon, emotional compensations for the crudity of social relations in a mass of people, social compensations through success which this leisure-time activity provide [and, Dumszedier and Latouche continue], finally, far from being a compensation, leisure is more often an extension of occupational life. Louchet's study shows that there is a tendency for the most frustrating leisure to be associated with the most frustrating work. However, in the case of the pigeon cultivators, the intellectual level and quality of training introduce a new type of conditioning. [They quote

Though Friedmann does not specifically deal with the media, his views offer criteria by which we can easily judge them. The decisive solution of the worker's stultification of spirit and intellect lies for him not in a more rarified cultural diet but in a drastic reorganization of work through job enlargement, job rotation; and later on, with the help of automation, to the elevation of the worker into a kind of engineer.

In the United States, Robert Blauner followed Friedmann's emphasis on the centrality of work in the worker's life.<sup>51</sup> As not all work-situations are equally frustrating, Blauner has offered a typology of different work-situations dependent on different technologies (as well as on the position of the industry within the local community) with an analysis of the degree of frustration each type may offer, in accord with the principles that the more control and initiative over the process of production a worker has, and the more hopes for achievement, the less frustrated he feels. Blauner agreed to his own satisfaction that automation is capable of making industrial work much more satisfying and thus could destroy the old barrier between the worker and the middle class which lay in the worker's inability to progress in his work. The conclusion of Blauner's view is that those interested in the betterment of the worker's lot should concentrate on the reform of the work situation, not on the reform of leisure.

By far the larger group of sociologists of work and leisure have turned their back on the thesis of the centrality of work in the worker's life. They use two arguments to justify their preoccupation with leisure and their demand to reform it first. The first argument has been used widely also by culture critics of all sorts. It is the theory of the leisure-society or the civilization of leisure which western society is presumably near realizing as a result of the progressive shortening of the workday and the workweek from the days of the early industrial revolution with its 16 hour day to the 8 or 7 hour day and the five-day week of today. It has been assumed that this trend will continue,<sup>52</sup> that we shall reach the three-day work week in the near future, and that automation will make all toil obsolete in the foreseeable future. The culture critics drew the conclusion that as the manual worker was

---

Friedmann again:] Better trained intellectually, [they] can participate more fully in discussions and in the organization of meetings.

<sup>51</sup> Robert BLAUNER, *Alienation and Freedom: the Factory Worker and His Industry* (Chicago/London 1964).

<sup>52</sup> A few of the theoreticians of the leisure society are quoted in Ronald GROSS *The Future of Toil*, in SHOSTAK and GOMBERG, *op. cit.* pp. 573-575, including Kenneth GALBRAITH: "We are on the brink of a workless world; leisure will move to the centre of men's lives [...]", and Gerald PIEL: "Blue collar workers will be as scarce as farmers by the year 2000". See also Bernard ROSENBERG and WHITE, *Mass Culture*, p. 4, "with imminent automation [...] manual labor is becoming obsolete".

the most manifestly affected party, he had the most serious problem of how to cope with his newly found extensive leisure. They have coined the expression “the worker who has to learn how to kill time lest it kills him”.<sup>53</sup> When the intellectual stares into space it is contemplation; when the worker does the same he is an empty-headed automaton.

Until quite recently sociologists of leisure have unquestioningly accepted the assumption of the ever increasing leisure time of the worker. Recent inquiries,<sup>54</sup> however, have completely refuted this assumption: it has become apparent that not only has the official reduction of working-day and working-week slowed down during the last decade but that, due to the practice of over-time, whether obligatory or voluntary, moonlighting and secondary jobs, there has been no decline whatsoever in the actual working time of most manual workers during the last decade.

The detailed inquiries of sociologists of leisure into the “leisure budgets” of workers in Britain, France, and the United States, have demonstrated that a very large chunk of the so-called leisure time of the worker is in fact taken up by non-voluntary or semi-voluntary chores mainly related to the upkeep of home and garden, much increased by increased home-ownership and wife’s outside employment. It has thus become obvious that the worker’s wife who holds down an outside job is even busier. It is, therefore, obvious that the modern blue-collar worker has not got that much time to kill-not as yet anyway.<sup>55</sup>

---

<sup>53</sup> See ROSENBERG, *op. cit.* p. 7: Contemporary man commonly finds that his life has been emptied of meaning, that it has been trivialized. He is alienated from his work, from his community, and possibly from himself-although this ‘self’ is hard to locate. At the same time he has an unprecedented amount of time on his hands which, as van den Haag has pointed out, he must kill lest it kill him. Society abhors a vacuum, and quickly fill this one with diversion.

<sup>54</sup> For Britain see: Richard BOSTON, What Leisure? *New Society*, 26 December, 1968, no. 938. “Average hours worked [...] (that is, in effect, ‘normal’ hours plus overtime), dropped by only 1.3, that is, from 47.7 to 46.4 hours per week-between 1938 and 1966. Male manual workers would appear to have gained half-an-hour leisure a week since 1948 [...] the official statistics reveal nothing about ‘double-jobbing’ or (as it is more picturesquely called in the U.S.) ‘moonlighting’. A Gallup poll carried out for the *Sunday Telegraph* in 1964 showed that one worker in six has a second job [...] time given to the second, job averaged 12 hours a week [...] the amount of moonlighting is still increasing [...] most workers in Britain get about 2 weeks paid holiday a year [...] the age of leisure is, then, still some way off”.

<sup>55</sup> J. DUMAZEDIER, Realites du loisir et ideologies, *Esprit*, XXVII (1959), 866-893, found, p. 879, that 25 % of this sample of industrial workers were moonlighting.

FRIEDMANN, *Anatomy of Work, op. cit.* p. 108, “[...] wage earning occupation is not the only compulsory activity [...] other kinds of duties [...] eat into their ‘free time’ [...]”.

ZWEIG, *The Worker in an Affluent Society, op. cit.* pp. 99, 100, observes that the British ‘affluent’ worker is not leisured: he works a good deal overtime; he is not bored; in fact he is under a good deal of pressure to keep up his home and garden; he spends more money on ‘constructive hobbies’; cars take time; “the weekend is often considered as the most exacting period of the whole week - for many it is not a period of relaxation but a second job - that of home-craft”.

Seymour L. WOLFBEIN, *Occupational Information, A Career Guidance View* (New York, Random House, 1968), pp. 72-74, observes that American workers do engage in a great deal of overtime work, not

The second argument in favor of the emphasis on leisure reform and the subsequent concern with the quality and impact of the media is due to a widely quoted paper by Robert Dubin of 1955.<sup>56</sup> Work is no longer the central life interest of the worker, he says, even though he is loyal to his firm and accepts the organization of the firm as the natural framework for his work-activities. His emotional ties, however, are to his family and community, not to either his superiors nor to his work-mates. Dubin drew from this the conclusion which, indeed, was widely endorsed, that the entire movement of “the human relations in industry” was futile and misguided. The energy expended by benevolent management on fostering the emotional attachment of the worker to his place of work was deemed futile by Dubin, who recommended that energy and funds should be diverted into the development of leisure activities of the worker in his community. Only thus could the quality of workers’ lives be improved.

A somewhat different argument which leads to a similar conclusion was marshaled by Bennett Berger.<sup>57</sup> The quest of so many socialist reformers and sociologists of work for the worker’s greater satisfaction at work was doomed from the start, he says, because the nature of the present economic system and of its technology of necessity has made industrial work meaningless. As long as men were occupied in the production of the obvious necessities of life, work had obvious meaning: now that they are occupied in the production of such frivolities as no-frost refrigerators and mink coats for poodles, they cannot possibly feel any pride in their activity. What has prevented western reformists from grasping this obvious truth was the lingering hold that the puritan ethic of work has on all of us; once we are free of such prejudice as the one that work ought to have meaning, we shall be free to concentrate on the real task at hand, which is the improvement of leisure activity.

Both Dubin and Berger had a considerable influence on the evaluation of work and leisure, and thereby on our topic, the impact of the media on the

---

necessarily because they like the idea of putting in long hours, but perhaps because in recent years one out of every nine dollars in a factory-worker’s pay-check was generated by the premium pay for overtime work; on the other hand, in the U. S. “only about 5 % of the employed workforce are multiple job-holders [...] the great majority of these people work on their second jobs during the day or weekends, not at night”. Milton M. GORDON and Charles H. ANDERSON, *The Blue-Collar Worker at Leisure*, in SHOSTAK and GOMBERG, *op. cit.* pp. 407-416, describe, on pp. 411-412, and 415, for their sample of Massachusetts workers leisure-time budgets of home improvement, gardening, and car repairs, similar to those of Bennett M. Berger’s Southern Californians.

<sup>56</sup> Robert DUBIN, *Industrial Workers Worlds: A Study of the ‘Central Life Interest’ of Industrial Workers*, *Social Problems*. III (1955- 1956), pp. 131-142; reprinted in LARRABEE and MEYERSON, *Mass Leisure*, *op. cit.* pp. 215-228.

<sup>57</sup> Bennett M. BERGER, *The Sociology of Leisure: Some Suggestions*, *Industrial relations*, I (1962), 31-45.

worker. Yet their train of thought has not led to any detailed study of leisure, and thus has not contributed to our knowledge of that impact.

It was left for two reformist sociologists of work and leisure, Dumazedier in France and Ferdynand Zweig in England, to undertake more detailed inquiries into the actual leisure patterns of the modern western worker and the role of the media therein. Dumazedier follows Georges Friedmann: he accepts the assumption of leisure activity as compensation for, or extension of, the frustration of work; yet in his detailed work about leisure patterns he indicates only limited correlation between work activities and leisure activities. Rather, following an early suspicion that the media might destroy the traditional pattern of leisure of the French worker, he discovered that neither the outdoor activities nor the cultural activities of the French worker had suffered from the advent of movies, radio and television; that at the end of the fifties the French worker was reading more than he had in the thirties;<sup>58</sup> that a surprisingly large percentage of the French workers owned small libraries and read French 19th century classics, as well as many detective thrillers and travel books, but none of the fashionable best-selling novels which won their authors many of the much coveted literary prizes. In general, workers read somewhat less serious books than white collar employees. They see somewhat more movies than the rest of the population, but like the same films and film-stars. In his more detailed study of film-viewing<sup>59</sup> he found that the French workers' taste in films was extremely catholic or ambiguous; some of the best films, as well as some of the worst, topped the list of popularity. Workers disclosed reasons for their choice of films for viewing were, first of all, to have a good laugh (Fernandel, not Brigitte Bardot), second, to identify with the brave hero, third, to escape to strange countries and adventures.

Dumazedier, incidentally, also joins his British and American colleagues in finding that the degree of participation, especially active participation in organizations and more especially in cultural organizations, of French workers is still considerably lower than that of salaried white collar employees.<sup>60</sup> As to the rest of the media, such as radio and television, and even newspapers, and such varied outdoor and sports activities as bowling, fishing, and skiing, attending festivals and shows, or frequenting coffee houses, the differences between the various social strata are

---

<sup>58</sup> DUMAZEDIER, *Vers une civilization du loisir? op. cit.* chapter on leisure and books, pp. 175-204, esp. p. 196.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.* chapter on the functions of leisure and movie-going, pp. 143-152.

<sup>60</sup> DUMAZEDIER and LATOUCHE, *op. cit.* pp. 23-24.

negligible.<sup>61</sup>

The main difference between blue collar and white collar, then, lies in the limitation of the fields of interest and curiosity of the former.

Dumazedier attempted to explain certain differences or rather variances within the working class: why are some more curious, or socially more active, than most? He found a divergence between the less mentally and socially active worker in the traditional firm, and the more in the modern progressive one. Modern firms were those housed in buildings constructed after World War II. They not only offered much more pleasant work conditions, but also tended to encourage worker participation in the management of the workers' social activities (though seldom successfully so, as is well known) and provided in the firm programs for workers' vocational training and education with a view to promotion.<sup>62</sup>

It also seems that in addition to these there is also a high correlation between social and intellectual activities and union activities,<sup>63</sup> although the interest of the union-activist is often rather political.

The upshot of Dumazedier's view of the impact of the media on the worker, then, is this. He fears "a useless and costly profusion of summary information and vulgar diversion sold by the commercial mass media of communication" because it could have "in the long run destructive effects on the free social and cultural development of the masses".<sup>64</sup> He is, however, not at all pessimistic about the French worker's coping with the media at his disposal at the present. The worker's taste is neither high nor low but catholic or ambiguous. Dumazedier confesses that to date he has no sufficient information to evaluate the impact of the messages of the media, and especially television, on the workers as opposed to other social groups.<sup>65</sup> The mass media supply the worker with a good amount of amusement as well as with information. The fact that the extent of the worker's interest and curiosity is rather narrow and that he does not tend to utilize sufficiently opportunities for self-improvement is not necessarily the fault of the media, which play only a limited role among his varied leisure activities, but rather in the poor work-situation of most manual workers. Anyway, the target for attack is, according to Dumazedier, not the media, despite all their faults, but the work-situation. When work becomes interesting, hope for education increases.

---

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.* p. 33.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 24-26.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.* p. 28.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.* p. 30.

<sup>65</sup> DUMAZEDIER, *Vers une civilization du loisir? op. cit.* p. 171.

In Britain, Ferdynand Zweig undertook in the late fifties an investigation into the life style of British workers “in the affluent society”,<sup>66</sup> which includes a revision of his findings of the late forties. Whereas Zweig is impressed with the changes in the attitudes of workers towards their own work and employers, seeing these new attitudes as more positive and tolerant than the old, and interpreting these changes as tending towards a more middle-class ethos of work, and whereas Zweig describes graphically and with pleasure the striking rise in the standard of living and comfort of the typical worker, nonetheless he is deeply depressed and shocked by the continuing cultural and intellectual poverty of the British worker. While the economic division of England into two nations has disappeared, he laments, the spiritual division is as deep as ever.<sup>67</sup>

What role do the media play here? Zweig has made no specific inquiry into this question, although he has unquestioningly adopted Hoggart’s animosity towards and dread of “the candy-floss world” of the media. Eighty to ninety percent of Zweig’s sample own television, the exceptions being owners of houses without electricity or with very poor reception. The intensity of and enthusiasm for viewing which, according to Zweig, was high in the first years of ownership, declined after the “honeymoon phase”.<sup>68</sup> (This hypothesis of the “honeymoon phase” is corroborated by Dumazedier, whereas in the U.S. many dispute its very existence). The attitude of workers towards television is decidedly ambiguous.<sup>69</sup> Workers claim that the set was bought only for the wife, that it wastes the time of the children, that they see more ‘rubbishy’ programs than good ones, that television kills conversation, reading and hobbies, that it is like a drug. They interchange these pejorative evaluations with positive ones: it is good for the children’s education, it keeps the wife out of mischief (during his nightshift work), it saves money by substituting for going to the movies, and it makes it easy to entertain visitors. Zweig tries to reconcile the conflicting evaluations by guessing that the more enthusiastic views are those belonging to new owners. For my part, I see the same guilt-feelings and ambivalence in diverse social strata, not less amongst intellectuals, in Europe and America alike. Television is still sinful, and at least many intellectuals hide their sets in their bedrooms; the American worker, according to a few surveys, is different in having embraced television more

---

<sup>66</sup> ZWEIG, *The Worker in an Affluent Society* op. cit.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.* p. 95.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.* p. 110.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 108, 109.

wholeheartedly- including even commercials, some say.<sup>70</sup>

To return to Zweig. Without much evidence he takes it that the British worker's traditional "sense of reality and large fund of common sense are being somewhat weakened by [television]".<sup>71</sup> What really shocked Zweig was the lack of familiarity of a very large part of the workers in his sample with the names of some of the most famous writers, artists, religious figures, scientists, and men of learning. Even Einstein, Freud, Darwin, Marx, the Buddha or Luther, were hardly heard of. Beethoven and Mozart fared better and were rather frequently identified as musicians-here the constant repetition of the B.B.C. announcer seems to have sunk in. Among British classical writers, only Dickens was recognized, and among more modern ones were G. B. Shaw and H. G. Wells. Foreign authors such as Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky were completely unknown. As all the names on his list appear frequently in the commercial mass media, and even more so on B.B.C. radio and television, clearly, a good deal of the information purveyed by the mass media passes by the worker completely unnoticed.

Zweig tries to determine what are the factors which make for more knowledge, more curiosity, a richer vocabulary, in his sample. He concluded that skilled workers, even when working temporarily as unskilled, scored on all counts considerably higher than unskilled; supervisors above skilled; women operatives even below the unskilled men. And, most interestingly, factory workers who were small entrepreneurs or property owners on the side (Zweig has found surprisingly many of these; market gardeners, small grocery shop owners, budgerigar breeders, and weekend TV repairmen) even when unskilled in their main job scored as much as the skilled and were generally more inclined than the average towards self-improvement through studies.

Zweig's study is certainly not thorough enough as to the worker's use of the media and the media's impact on the worker. All one can conclude from his study without much controversy is that these are rather limited; for good or ill. More stimulating work or outside activity of a semi-leisure variety are correlatives of more intellectual alertness and readiness to grasp an opportunity. Here Zweig and Dumazedier, or Zweig and Friedmann fully agree. Unlike Dumazedier's French workers, Zweig's British workers are

---

<sup>70</sup> Leo BOGART, *The Mass Media and the Blue-Collar Worker* in SHOSTAK and GOMBERG *op. cit.* pp 416-428, p. 423. Bogart quotes a 1961 study which reveals that American semi-skilled blue-collar workers (lower-class) are more concerned with the entertainment value of television, spend more time on television, find commercials helpful, are most indiscriminate viewers, have least explicit standards, are most readily influenced by commercials, are most involved in and indiscriminate versus commercials. For contrary evidence see notes 77-79 below.

<sup>71</sup> ZWEIG, *op. cit.* p. 110.

poor readers: 40 % never read a book I Among those who do read, in addition to the western and detective thriller readers, and the somewhat more numerous technical and hobby book readers, there exists also a small group (23 out of 601) who study systematically-even such esoteric subjects as astronomy and philosophy. Perhaps the most pathetic evidence for the claim that these workers' education and their ideas about learning were amiss lies in the fact that 5 out of these 23 intellectually active workers were systematic readers of encyclopedias.

Now we come to the attitudes of sociologists of social stratification towards the mass-media and the worker. The context in which most of these sociologists discuss our topic is the "*embourgeoisement*" debate. That debate concerns the question whether in the affluent society the worker is "becoming middle-class". The participants in this debate are not concerned with the impact of the media on the artistic taste and the intellectual *niveau* of the worker but with the so-called values conveyed by the media to the worker.

Already in the forties, in the heyday of radio, claims were made to the effect that the media, magazines and radio, had, by their advertising-content, by their insistent advertising campaign, extolling the virtues of the appurtenances of middle class living, the effect of encouraging the working class to aspire to such a style of life; magazines, radio, and later television imply constantly that all normal Americans own the latest models of major appliances and motor cars and that these add greatly to happiness and domestic bliss. Thus, the worker is seduced into heavy expenditure, mainly on the installment plan, a pattern of expenditure that was not typical of the traditional worker. It was assumed that the worker, just like the middle class, was acquiring these expensive products as status symbols, i.e., that the workers were becoming "status-seekers".<sup>72</sup>

In opposition to this view it has been pointed out that those American magazines which are the chief carriers for advertising for major appliances (*Life, Look, Better Homes and Gardens*, etc.), are not very popular among blue collar workers (who are more likely to read *Readers Digest* and the Macfadden group magazines). Similarly, advertising for major household appliances for television is concentrated during the low viewing daytime

---

<sup>72</sup> Kurt MAYER, *Diminishing Class Differentials in the U.S.*, *Kyklos*, XII (1959), 605-628.

Until recently, intense preoccupation with status symbols was typical only of the white collar groups. Blue collar workers tended to be mainly concerned with basic necessities and job security. However, as blue collar families have begun to arrive in the suburbs where they come into closer contact with white collar neighbors they have become infected with the letters' status consciousness. [p. 624].

hours, directed at the now declining percentage of home-bound women from all strata; evening television, which is used somewhat more heavily by blue collar families than by others, hardly advertises any major appliances except motor cars, but concentrates on such items as soaps, cigarettes, beer, cosmetics, and (later in the evening) patent medicine, hardly ‘status symbols’.<sup>73</sup>

The additional claim of the middle-class influence of the media was based on content analysis of Hollywood film-stories and of radio soap-operas. For example, an interesting content-analysis of Hollywood films<sup>74</sup> boils down to the conclusion that Hollywood reflects faithfully current popular sex-morality. In pre-war days the vamp personified evil sexuality while the good girl was only faintly sexy and in the post-war days there appeared a new heroine, the so-called “good/bad girl”, i.e. the girl who appears as bad and of loose morals and thus is sexually alluring, but in reality turns out to be a wholesome girl-next-door who can be safely taken for a wife. Such analyses are correct; the question is, what do they analyze? It can hardly be viewed as an analysis of mores implicitly taught to workers. The content-analysis of radio serials<sup>75</sup> (which can easily apply to many television soap operas and situation comedies) reveal that these programs were heavily biased in their choice of heroes towards the middle-class. The radio serial of the forties lacked any industrial working-class heroes; all its central heroes and heroines were middle-class, and only some secondary heroes were artisans, small shop-keepers, rural types or upper-class characters. Apparently the producers and script-writers took it for granted that most daytime women listeners and now viewers from different social strata would identify more readily with a middle-class heroine than with a working-class one. They assumed, perhaps correctly, that American working-class women did not have enough class-pride to demand a blue-collar heroine to identify with at a moment of amusement and escape.<sup>76</sup> But do these stories at all convey middle-class values? Do they strengthen significantly yearnings to adopt middle-class ways of life? The content-analysis of the radio serials-and as far as I can see the same holds for

---

<sup>73</sup> Richard F. HAMILTON, *The Behavior and Values of Skilled Workers*, in SHOSTAK and GOMBERG, *op. cit.* p. 49.

<sup>74</sup> Martha WOLFENSTEIN and Nathan LEITPS, *An Analysis of Themes and Plots in Motion Pictures*, in Wilbur SCHRAMM (ed.), *Mass Communications* (Urbana 1960) pp. 380-381.

<sup>75</sup> Rudolf ARNHEIM, *The World of the Day Time Serial*, in Wilbur SCHRAMM, *op. cit.* (1949 edition), pp. 360-378, esp. p. 362.

<sup>76</sup> Herbert GANS, *The Urban Villagers* (Glencoe, Free Press, 1962), p. 188: “The women prefer just the opposite. They like musical programs, soap-operas, and other stories that deal with romance or with family situations and problems, even middle-class ones”.

American television soap operas-present their heroes as entangled in constant breath-taking successions of crises and emergencies which are all caused either by personal agents, wicked or weak people, or by a constellation of accidents, but practically never by larger social causes such as a depression or a war. The crises in these programs are likewise solved in a dramatic personal manner devoid of all social meaning; justice always triumphs in the end.

Now one of the characteristics of the middle-class which is supposedly different from the lower-class, as well as from the traditional working-class, is the possession of knowledge of, and capacity to use, public agencies and services in order to advance the well-being and opportunities of their families. These serials do not teach their audiences such skills of the middle-classes. A central middle-class value is supposed to be the slogan of “getting ahead”, as contrasted to the working-class maxim of “getting by”. To get ahead, by using job opportunities and especially by prolonged education and training as well as by saving up for long-term projects such as college education or starting a business of one’s own, these are the famous middle-class values of “postponing gratification”. The wisdom of this attitude is certainly not preached by such mass media as the lyrics of the pop-song, the romantic stories and novels of the cheaper print-media, or the network radio and television soap-operas and situation comedies. Interestingly, on the British non-commercial B.B.C. radio and television, the serials do convey just such values and *mores*. On radio “Mrs. Dale’s Diary” and “The Archers” were renowned for decades for their public service; through the medium of the story, or even more plainly by putting a message in the mouth of a hero such as Dr. Dale, the public was informed about new social or economic legislation and how to make best use of agencies and services. The stories illustrated the drawbacks of such practices of the working-class such as entering a dead-end job at an early age or not clarifying legal ambiguities in family status. Is this public service the preaching of middle-class values to blue-collar workers?<sup>77</sup> If so, I am all for that. The discussion of the topic of the role of the media in the conversion of the worker into the middle-class is seriously confused by the lack of any definiteness as to the limitations and characteristics of the middle-class and of its values.<sup>78</sup>

---

<sup>77</sup> There are however, also on American television some less frequent attempts at guidance: loco cit. “Whereas both sexes used the media for entertainment, the women may occasionally watch dramas and even documentaries that show them how family problems are to be handled”.

<sup>78</sup> According to Herbert Gans’ perceptive study of a Boston working-class neighborhood of Italian origin, these rather traditional working-class media consumers are not at all passive or defenseless objects of the media and their messages: “the adults keep television set on all evening long [...] Preferences in mass

The original basic assumption concerning the embourgeoisement debate was the claim proposed by Kurt Mayer that since the end of World War II the borderline between blue-collar and white-collar was constantly blurring.<sup>79</sup> He observed that the worker was getting more and more similar to at least the lower middle-class in his consumption-patterns in food, clothing, and housing; that the income of the higher paid blue-collar worker was equal to or even higher than that of the lower paid white-collar employee; that the gap in the degree of formal schooling was narrowing; that working-class and middle-class practices of child-rearing were converging as the working-class becomes more conscientious and demanding while the middle-class becomes more permissive; that family size tends to equalize. Mayer assumed that the major remaining differences-in education and leisure pursuits-would likewise decrease in time and that the worker was becoming more status conscious.

Mayer viewed the leveling of income as the major cause of embourgeoisement, which he heartily welcomed; he did not refer to the media at all. The suburbia studies of the fifties too hardly mentioned the media; they laid the ground for the generally accepted view which greatly influenced the discussion about the media-a view according to which the trend of the post-war period was towards the creation of a uniform, extremely conformist middle-class mass population of the new suburbia. William H. Whyte, in his *Organization Man* of 1956 called the suburbs the second melting pot of American society<sup>80</sup> which melts down class differences of blue-collar urban, Midwestern-small town, rural-southern, and sophisticated eastern-urban, into one middle-brow middle-class junior

---

media programming and performers, however, are highly selective [...] they accept themes that mirror their own values, and reject others as illustrating the immorality and dishonesty of outside world" [*op. cit.* p. 187]. Men watch action programs. "While his [the hero of the action program class's] background is usually not defined, many of the norms and methods he uses to produce social benefits and to achieve personal success are those of the working-class culture [...] The hero with middle-class characteristics is rejected" [p. 189]. "A program upholding paternal authority and wisdom, such as 'Father Knows Best', receives more favorable response" [p. 191]. As to commercials Gans reports: "Television commercials are sometimes watched raptly, and then bombarded with satirical comments which question exaggerated or dishonest claims and meaningless statements" [p. 194].

<sup>79</sup> Kurt MAYER, Recent Changes in the Class Structure of the U.S., *Transactions of the Third World Congress of Sociology* (London 1956) vol. III, pp. 66-88; Diminishing Class Differentials in the U.S., *Kyklos*, XII (1959), 605-628; The Changing Shape of the American Class Structure, *Social Research*, XXX (1963), 458-468.

<sup>80</sup> WHYTE, *op. cit.*

Middle-class, college-educated organization people give the communities their dominant tone but there are other residents for whom arrival in the suburb [...] is [...] a crossing of the tracks [...] The new suburbs [...] have become the second great melting pot [...] As the newcomers to the middle class enter suburbia, they must discard old values [...] Figures rather clearly show that people from big, urban Democratic wards tend to become Republican and, if anything, more conservative than those whose outlook they are unconsciously adopting [p. 331].

executive species of organization man. For Whyte, the chief causes of this transformation were not the media but the physical and social peculiarities of the new suburbs: the similarity between houses, the proximity of the houses, the facility for easy social contact and the lack of privacy, the need to build all social services and amenities from scratch, the transiency of the population, their isolation from their kin, the similarity of their incomes, and their dependence for advancement on the approval of their superiors in the hierarchies of large organizations. These conditions, and the intense patterns of sociability that develop in these suburbs are for Whyte the basic causes for the fast and easy absorption (which he observes) of youngish couples of urban and working class background<sup>81</sup> into a common, new but decidedly middle-class, way of life. According to Whyte they adopt fashionable middle-class styles of furnishing, of sociability, of child-rearing; they change over to more prestigious denominations and desert the Democratic ticket in favor of the respectable middle-class Republican one. From Whyte's study many sociologists and political scientists drew the conclusion that the mass-movement of blue-collar workers to the suburbs in the fifties would necessarily bring with it the rapid disappearance of a discernable blue-collar pattern of life and of values and would cause the decline of labor unions and of the Democratic party.

There is a confluence of trends of thought here, which somehow- not necessarily with much logic-culminates with the primary thesis that the mass-media are a very important factor in the transformation of the worker into middle-class.<sup>82</sup> We have here Mayer's and Whyte's views, the one that class differences are being bridged and the other that the suburb acts as the new social melting pot. We have the culture critics in general and the left-wing ones in particular telling us about the ubiquity and power of the media, and their role as opiates lulling the critical and revolutionary spirit. Finally the content-analysts, joined by some culture-critics, tell us about the impact of advertising and the middle-class bias of the media in general. The conclusion to which one jumps is that it is the mass media which serve as a powerful instrument in the process of embourgeoisement of the worker. For

---

<sup>81</sup> B. BERGER, in *Working-Class Suburb*, *op. cit.*, has pointed out correctly that Whyte had described the easy acculturation not of genuine blue-collar workers but of persons who had already previously moved occupationally into the middle-class, i.e. into white-collar jobs.

<sup>82</sup> Gerhard LENSKI, *The Religious Factor* (New York, Doubleday, 1961), P.44:

[...] not only has the middle class been increasing in size relative to the working class, but its social standards are permeating the working class more and more with each passing year thanks to the growing influence of the mass media. As a result an ever increasing number of people who are objectively manual workers think and act like the middle class. This is especially true of the upper stratum of the working class: skilled and supervisory workers.

many laymen and social scientists this became a tacitly accepted and unexamined view.

The only systematic argument for this primary thesis is found in a paper by Leo Bogart of 1964.<sup>83</sup> His hypothesis is, “that the mass media represent perhaps the most powerful current by which blue-collar workers are swept into the mainstream of conformity to middle-class values and aspirations”. Bogart examined the whole meager and unsatisfactory literature on the use of the media by different social strata in the U.S. and he somehow concludes that it corroborates his hypothesis, I cannot see how.

To mention briefly the opposition to the primary theses both concerning the trend of embourgeoisement and concerning the role of the media in the trend, let me present first the arguments against the claim that workers’ conditions have improved so much; second, that their family and child rearing attitudes have changed so much; third, that post-war trends of suburbanization, proportional rise in the importance of the skilled sector, physical mobility and the break-up of traditional kin ties- that all these trends have rendered the working-class much more receptive to middle-class influences- either by contact with middle-class people or through the media. These views were attacked in a rich literature, and some of the criticisms were subsequently met with rebuttals. I can only mention a few: In 1961, S. M. Miller and Frank Riessman published an essay<sup>84</sup> attacking the embourgeoisement thesis, especially Kurt Mayer; they claimed that the basic statistical confusions which supported the thesis of an affluent worker were due to various factors, such as the inclusion of the non-blue-collar foreman within the working class, disregard of the fact that the prosperous skilled worker is still in a minority, that the figures of high-incomes of workers are misleading in that they conceal large-scale overtime which is a matter of fluctuation; in short, they say, the basic condition of most of the workers most of the time is still that of low-paid hard work and fatigue. In accordance with this basic condition, the old working-class value of getting-by is still much more prevalent than that of getting-ahead.

In 1959, Lee Rainwater, Richard P. Coleman, and Gerald Handel published *Workingman’s Wife* (with a preface by Lloyd Warner himself), which expounded the thesis that blue-collar workers, and especially their wives, “are not just like everyone else now that they have money to spend: they still have their own special dreams and desires, their own value

---

<sup>83</sup> BOGART, in SHOSTAK and GOMBERG, *op. cit.*

<sup>84</sup> S. M. MILLER and Frank RIESSMAN, Are Workers Middle-Class? *Dissent*, VIII (1961). In their later paper, The Working Class Subculture: A New View, in Shostak and Gomberg, *op. cit.* pp. 24-36, they point out, however, the new emphasis on stability and the increased aspirations for children.

systems". The workingman's wife still knows little about her husband's job and does not look at it as an avenue for advancement. She concentrates on the physical comforts of husband and children and her cultural and social horizons are still very limited. She does not trust the world greatly and is full of anxiety but longs for some brightness. The authors agree that the mass media "are clear channels of communication to the working-class and will increase in importance". These have, however, not yet had the effect of ironing out class differences, because the differences are poorly understood as yet by social scientist, businessman, and media manager alike.

Three studies examined the embourgeoisement thesis by studying in depth given samples which were deemed most suitable. First, Bennet M. Berger, 1957, who responded chiefly to the suburbia thesis in his influential *Working Class Suburb*. There he demonstrates that a relatively high income suburban and home-owning working-class community in Southern California, auto workers who had left several years before the study, their previous neighborhoods and kin in the Bay Area, nevertheless, had not acquired all those suburban middle-class characteristics which William H. Whyte and Vance Packard had described; they had little aspirations for social mobility and were neither status conscious nor status-seeking; in particular, they had not developed middle-class patterns of sociability and most of their social ties were still with their now physically more distant kin or informal ties with blue-collar neighbors. As to the influence of the media, the impact of magazines on them was marginal, and television did not introduce middle-class habits and values, especially not to the men, because they concentrated on Westerns and on sports. For at least part of Berger's sample of Ford workers, even television's insistence and appeals for personal hygiene seemed to come from another planet. Women were more amenable to television messages, and even a little status conscious. Most had little hope for upward social mobility but had rather vague and unrealistic aspirations for their children.

In the same volume, *Blue Collar Worker: Studies of the American Worker* of Arthur B. Shostak and William Gomberg of 1964, where Leo Bogart published his thesis on the all-importance of the media as purveyors of middle-class values, Richard F. Hamilton<sup>85</sup> examined the behavior and values of skilled workers, utilizing statistical data from the fifties. He found in this, presumably highest stratum, of the working-class, no signs of embourgeoisement. Their membership in all social organizations was still

---

<sup>85</sup> Richard F. HAMILTON, *The Behavior and Values of Skilled Workers*, in SHOSTAK and GOMBERG, *op. cit.*

very low; in fact it was more similar to that of operatives than to that of white-collar employees. With the exception of Catholic skilled workers, skilled workers place even less importance on religion than semi-skilled workers. Their level of book-reading is similarly disappointing. As to the media, Hamilton points out the paucity of information regarding its impact; “this is especially surprising in view of the frequency of the claim that the media ‘convert’ people to middle-class values”. Hamilton points out that this group reads especially trade and labor union magazines, and not the general mass magazines. He suggests that “conceivably they have greater work-satisfaction and do not have the same need for the off-the-job gratifications associated with possession of the status symbols dramatized in the family and home magazines”. We shall return to this peculiarity of Hamilton’s skilled workers later on.

The most thorough examination of a special sample of workers designed as a test of the embourgeoisement thesis was carried out recently by John H. Goldthorpe, David Lockwood, Frank Bechhofer, and Jennifer Platt. Their *The Affluent Worker in the Class Structure* of 1969 discusses their attitudes to work and includes sections on family life, leisure, and aspirations in general. The authors claim that the attitude of these workers towards work and towards their firms is still traditional, i.e., as means to earn a living rather than as a career. Their social relations were still mainly with kin, in spite of their physical move from their working-class neighborhoods to an industrial boom-town. In spite of living in socially mixed residential areas, they still associate exclusively with blue-collar neighbors. Their media contacts are the Sunday papers and television, yet their social and cultural horizons are as traditional as ever, and their lives center around the improvement of the physical condition of their home and of their immediate family; the authors call this privatization. They have little expectations and aspirations for upward social mobility. However, they decidedly do want their children to move upwards, which certainly is not traditional amongst British workers; we shall return to this soon.

The three quoted studies have come up with the conclusion that their samples of workers continue in distinct working-class patterns of life and that the media have not converted them to the middle-class values of seeking social advancement and status—even though all three studies examine those groups within the working-class that might be considered the nearest to the middle-class and as such the most favorable case for the embourgeoisement thesis. However, all three samples are problematic from an evolutionary point-of-view. That is to say, the samples do not mirror two most important historical trends which are going to influence the life patterns of industrial

workers in the future, namely, the rapid technological change in industrial work such as automation and the rise in the educational level of the worker. Two samples, of Berger and of the British authors, are of physically mobile and prosperous workers, but they are overwhelmingly semi-skilled and work in rather traditional conveyor-belt plants.<sup>86</sup> As to the third sample, the skilled workers of Hamilton, they are a statistical conglomeration of doubtful validity which includes declining artisan type skills, monopolistic craft union type skills, together with skills connected with new technology. So much about the skill and work situation. As to level of education, certainly the level of the first two samples is well below present-day average for industrial workers,<sup>87</sup> whereas, in keeping with their decision to choose the sample most favorable to the embourgeoisement hypothesis they should have chosen a sample above average in its level of education. And Hamilton even excludes from his sample all those with some college education as necessarily downward mobile from the middle-class—surely a dubious assumption. Thus, the question has not yet been as fully settled by observation as one might hope.

Nevertheless, all three studies have come up with a tentative conclusion of the existence of a process of bifurcation in the working-class—which certainly is some modification of their own claim that there is no process of embourgeoisement to be found anywhere. Berger suggests the interesting hypothesis that suburban prosperous home-owning American worker may be in the middle of the process of adopting a way of life centered around family and home and a central value of respectability and some yearnings for being the boss of one's own little business—which is very similar to that of the traditional vanishing American middle-class of small shopkeepers, artisans, and farmers, and which is now to be found only in small remaining corners of the lower middle-class, and is very different from the patterns of life and the values of the vast and expanding white-collar and junior executive middle-class, not to mention the upper middle-classes.<sup>88</sup>

---

<sup>86</sup> In Berger's sample of 100 Ford auto workers there were: 26 semiskilled line workers; 26 semi-skilled off line workers; 9 skilled workers; 12 foremen; 3 others.

In the Goldthorpe *et al.* final sample of 229 workers in 3 Luton plants there were: 86 assemblers, i.e. semi-skilled, traditional 41 machinists, i.e. semi-skilled, traditional 23 process-workers, i.e. semi-skilled modern; 23 setters, i.e. some skill, not high, traditional; 45 craftsmen, skilled, traditional. 11 craftsmen, skilled, modern. Only 34 worked in a technologically advanced plant; only 56 were skilled.

<sup>87</sup> The level of education of Berger's 100 workers was as follows: Last grade of schooling completed: 1-6: 8; 7-8: 31; 9-11: 35; 12: 19; 12 plus trade school: 1; 12 plus college (non-grad.): 6. Only 26 or ¼ of the sample were high-school graduates or above.

Of the Luton sample, 85 % had left school at the minimum legal school-leaving age of 15. Only 15 % had received any subsequent part-time instruction of a vocational kind.

<sup>88</sup> Bennett M. BERGER, *ibid.* pp. 95, 96:

Berger notices that workers in his sample wish their children to move upward, but have no realistic notion as to how to act upon this wish. The same has been noticed by the British authors.<sup>89</sup> The parents in the British sample neither knew how to help and encourage their children in their school work, nor did they have adequate contacts with school authorities. Results were most disappointing. The British authors came to the conclusion that their sample, though traditional in some ways, represents a bifurcation of the British working-class into a traditional and a modern type. They see their own workers as a sample of modern workers and they see in their worker's intense and optimistic preoccupation with the comfort of home and with the nuclear family- their so-called privatization- a hopefully transitory stage of laying the "minimum material basis [...] (for) a more individuated style of life".<sup>90</sup>

Hamilton, after he shows that his skilled workers are nearer to the semi-skilled than the white-collar in their patterns of social participation and use of the printed mass media, nonetheless comes to the surprising conclusion that the skilled workers may by now constitute "a semi-independent sub-culture", "a semi-autonomous status group" in American society.<sup>91</sup> In other words, he considers the bifurcation an accomplished fact.

To conclude, the empirical studies do reflect significant changes within the working-class which deserve more studies, but which certainly do not amount to embourgeoisement- if by this one means the adoption of the most conspicuous modern middle-class patterns of life and values. No doubt, the mass media do encourage the desire for the acquisition of the appurtenances of middle-class living; no doubt, they show to the working-class family how the other half lives, especially the prosperous middle-class; no doubt, they do not serve the public as a practical guide of any sorts (with the exception of some public or educational radio and television, popular mechanics and electronics magazines, etc.). All this does not amount to the preaching of middle-class values, much less conscious preaching; rather, the changes which occur in the working-class style of life and aspirations, are not caused by the media as much as by more basic factors, such as the enormous technological changes and dislocations of the second industrial revolution, rise in productivity and standard of living, high employment,

---

The organized well-paid industrial workers [...] seem to have taken over the style of the old middle class with its emphasis on respectability, without, however, inheriting the mantle of mobility. Yearnings of factory workers for 'a little business of my own' do not [...] represent social mobility to them [...] would not change their style of life.

<sup>89</sup> Berger, *op. cit.* p. 21. GOLDTHOR, *et al.*, *op. cit.* pp. 137-140.

<sup>90</sup> GOLDTHORPE *et al. ibid.* p. 184.

<sup>91</sup> HAMILTON, *op. cit.* pp. 49, 53.

welfare legislation, etc.

Let me close this essay with my own assessment of the impact of the media on the worker. To begin with my overview of the media. I view the mass media as a great potential instrument for the greater happiness of the greater number, bringing entertainment, amusement, artistic enjoyment, information, and intellectual stimulation to large parts of the population which in previous ages got only little of all these goods and services, and most often only of the crudest variety. The adaptation of any artistic or intellectual creation for a mass public does not necessarily debase it; working with the mass media does not necessarily debase the artist. The content of mass media whether managed commercially, governmentally, or civically, does not necessarily have to be of low intellectual and artistic level; competition, pluralism and the demand of the public for better service are some of the ways and means of improving the quality. None of the mass media force their messages on the public (with the exception of bill-boards and neon-ads in the West and public radio in totalitarian societies) and none condemns it necessarily to absolute passivity. The importance of the media in mass-society has been overrated because the continued existence of other and older forms of culture from church choirs to party games has been overlooked. The impact of the media on “mass-man” has been overrated because the decline of the primary group ties of kinship, neighborhood, and ethnic group, has been greatly exaggerated.

So far, for the media in general. Let me now review their impact on the worker in the past and the present. The claim that the media have diminished the revolutionary impulse seems to me sheer fancy. The claim that they inhibit critical thinking by producing false needs and intensifying alienation betrays a lack of human sympathy for the common man, even though there is the damaging give-away show which uneasily fits this claim. The claim that the media are making the worker more passive has been amply refuted by empirical study of his leisure-time budget. The claim that the especially heavy use of the new media by the worker destroys his moral autonomy is exaggerated both as to destructive moral content of the media and in view of the fact that the autonomy of the worker’s moral values is necessarily being breached by more basic economic and social changes. The claim that the especially heavy use of the media inhibits his intellectual growth is similarly exaggerated by the oversight of what entertainment the mass media have come to replace,<sup>92</sup> by underrating the admittedly low

---

<sup>92</sup> Berger, Zweig, Gordon and Anderson, as well as Goldthorpe *et al.*, all point out the considerable decline of drinking as a working-class leisure activity; which is connected with the new ‘family and home centered style of life.

intellectual content of the media used by the worker, and by the oversight of the admittedly slow increase of the level of sophistication and education of the worker. The claim that the media preach middle-class values and ways of life, not to mention the claim that they are successful in turning the worker into a bourgeois is empirically quite unfounded: the great changes in life style and attitudes of workers are hardly caused by the media.<sup>93</sup>

What remains of the mass of writing about, and little inquiry into, our topic which is of substance? The blue-collar worker is not a heavy consumer of the aggregate of all media. His consumption; of printed media is low and centers on the least literarily demanding. His unusually heavy use of the non-print media has gradually shifted from films via radio to television. In these media he is a slightly above-average consumer of light entertainment and below-average consumer of the more demanding programs. Age, sex, and level of education, however, seem to be much more relevant factors than occupational groups or class-membership however defined. The limited researches available show a significant rise in the level of use of the more demanding media and programs, correlated significantly to degrees of skill and of responsibility in work on the one hand and to degrees of skill and of initiative in leisure activities.

So much for what is empirically attested. The information I consider most sorely deficient has to do with my own interest and bias. I favor maximum intellectual and artistic development of each individual in accord with his talents and temperament. The sociological literature on the contemporary blue-collar worker has revealed the perpetuation of limited cultural and artistic horizons, of limited social activity and general level of interest. The two most suspect factors in the perpetuation of these ills seem to me most worthy of intense empirical study. They are the removable defects of both the schools and the industrial work situation. The media will be able to help us fight or at least alleviate these limitations of horizons and interest, once the defects of school and work situation are better understood.

---

<sup>93</sup> GANS, *op. cit.* examined not only the acceptance of middle-class values by workers via the media, but also the acceptance of values from the American culture by second and third generation Italian-Americans. His conclusion is this:

They—at least the adults—make highly selective use of the popular culture. Among the vast variety of available consumer goods movies, television programs, and reading matter, their choices are structured so as to filter out themes that do not support or enhance the life of the peer group society (p. 182). The defenses which they set up against the undesired themes and values are strong. Whether some of the values set through in spite of the defenses is impossible to say without much more intensive study [p. 195].