CULTURE FOR THE MILLIONS?

MASS MEDIA IN MODERN SOCIETY

Edited by

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With an Introduction by

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PANEL DISCUSSION

PAUL F. LAZARSFELD

Mass Culture Today

OVER THE last thirty years much has been written about mass society, mass culture, and the mass media. Two variations make the present volume different from previous symposia on the same topic.

One is the composition of the group of contributors. There are some of the expected names: Gilbert Seldes who, in 1927, with his book *The Seven Lively Arts*, put the mass media on the agenda of intellectual discussion and has contributed to it ever since; Bernard Berelson, one of the empirical research specialists who, over the last two or three decades, has made mass communication one of the best documented aspects of the American scene. The mass media themselves are mainly represented through spokesmen who have had serious research backgrounds: Frank Stanton, who has done some of the pioneering work in radio research and who is now president of the Columbia Broadcasting System; Leo Rosten who, with his *Washington Correspondent*, made one of the early contributions to the study of the "communicator," and who is now an influential policy adviser for *Look* Magazine. Two of the contributors are affiliated with magazines that have continuously paid great attention to the study of mass culture: Irving Kristol, the former Managing Editor of the *Reporter*, and Nathan Glazer, a regular contributor to *Commentary*. And there are the social scientists who are professionally concerned with analysis of the contemporary scene: Edward Shils, Professor of Social Thought at the University of Chicago; Ernest Van den Haag, co-author of an outstanding book, *The Fabric of Society*; and the well-known author Hannah Ahrendt, who won the Goethe Prize for her book on *The Human Condition*.

Three other types of participants are not usually represented in this kind of symposium. We find professional historians of prominence in their own fields, like Oscar Handlin, Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., and Stuart Hughes, all of Harvard University. Then, there are three well-known philosophers: Ernest Nagel and Charles Frankel

from Columbia, and Sidney Hook from New York University. Most unusual, however, is the participation of artists. As far as I know, this is the first time people who write about culture and those who create it have confronted each other. Among the participants are: Randall Jarrell, the poet; James Baldwin, the novelist; and Arthur Berger, the composer.

The second interesting feature of this volume is a very careful record of the discussion which followed the original presentation; it gives an additional element of depth to what is offered in the formal papers. Many discussants made important contributions but wrote no papers. Their comments will be found in the summaries of the discussions at the end of this volume. Some of those whose prepared statements are included in this volume often said more personal, and therefore more important, things in the discussion. These will also be found at the end of the book.

I consider it my task and my privilege to give the readers some help in the perusal of all this material.

Mass Society and Mass Culture

The keynote paper by Edward Shils is indeed an illuminating presentation of the whole problem. It is important, however, to distinguish two strands in it. Shils gives a coherent presentation of almost all the issues, but at many points he also adds his own observations of the situation. The reader might do well to separate these two aspects and to consider first the formal structure of Shils' contribution.

He begins with a brief description of what he considers the essence of mass society. One should not worry too much about the definition. We all know from direct experience that tremendous growth of the population, the complexity of urban life, the mechanization of the productive system, and a changed political structure have engendered in many countries a way of life quite different from the one existing, say, a hundred years ago. In the United States we have to add the rapidly rising standard of living and the development of a large entertainment industry. What the essential features of this new type of society are and how they affect human existence is, as we shall see, one of the major topics of this symposium. The main facts are known to everyone and only the term "mass society" might be new to some.[1] Shils describes the culture of this mass society; he distinguishes three levels of culture which in colloquial terms are often

called highbrow, middlebrow, and lowbrow culture. The classification, although vague, is useful and perhaps inevitable. When we talk of highbrow culture we think of enduring works of art and the contemporary efforts of avaut-gardists who deserve respect because of the seriousness of their intentions. We think of the average movie, the family magazine, or the respectable television program when we use the term middlebrow. By lowbrow we mean such things as comics, detective stories, and vaudeville. It is no coincidence that the examples are cultural products offered to people rather than activities in which they themselves engage.

Little was said at the symposium about lowbrow culture. But a distinction between the first two levels is crucial. For in a nutshell one can say that everyone is concerned with two main problems: What happens *to* highbrow culture in mass society? And what does the great increase in middlebrow culture *do* to people? The focal point at which both these problems can be unraveled appeared to Shils to be the mass media. All through the symposium this emphasis on the mass media is hardly ever questioned, and yet I shall try to show that this is not a completely obvious point of view.

Shils also deals with the consumers and the producers of the various forms of cultural products. He briefly summarizes what is known of the social stratification of "audiences." It is useful to learn that a simple classification of the population by education or by some index of social economic status permits reasonably safe predictions of what people will select on their television sets or do with their free time.[2] But Shils adds an observation which has rarely been made. The cultural activities of *young* people at least in this country are much less related to their social status. Here he implies an interesting problem indeed: Will these young people twenty years hence recreate the stratified pattern of their parents or should we expect greater homogeneity of cultural interests in the future?

In the latter part of the keynote paper, some of the most urgent issues are laid out. There is the question of historical comparisons. Certainly many more people participate in "culture" today than took part, say, one hundred years ago, and that has necessarily made for lowering the level of the average supply. But if we were to look at strata comparable to the upper class and aristocracy of the nineteenth century, would the same be true? The tendency toward and the difficulty of seeing historical trends is very marked in such discussions.

Handlin's paper in this volume provides a characteristic example.

He sees a great difference between the folk art of the past and today's mass culture. But a careful reading of his contribution shows that what he means by folk art could have played only an occasional role in people's lives. What did they do on long winter evenings? Were they desperately bored? Or is boredom itself an experience which has developed in industrial society? From Handlin's personal remarks one gathers that historians know very little about how people used to spend their time, so comparisons become speculations. But Shils correctly raises a second question: Is there an inherent threat to highbrow culture in mass society? Where does this threat come from? Are commercial interests corrupting the public? Or is it that a mediocre audience, which can afford to pay for entertainment, is distracting valuable talent from more worthy pursuits? Is there a withering away of elites who are a necessary breeding ground for cultural innovations? The keynote paper also introduces a notion of "mediocre intelligentsia." These are the men and women who, while highly trained themselves, produce the middlebrow culture. We shall later see that they are a special problem for the creative artist.

Shils is optimistic on most of the points and it was this strongly expressed optimism which obscured for many participants the merits of his general formulations.[3] Both Van den Haag and Arendt more or less explicitly stressed that Shils had omitted one important category. Their argument was that one should not only look at the nature and content of the cultural supply; one should be much more concerned with the way it is received. Van den Haag argues that people in mass society have lost the ability to take cultural issues seriously. The whole idea is symbolized in a statement by T. W. Adorno: "Radio has made of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony a hit tune which is easy to whistle." The theme of Miss Arendt's contribution is related; she says popular culture has made of the classics something to be consumed rather than understood. In a way, Handlin's paper belongs in the same group. When he compares the folk culture of an earlier period with the mass culture of the industrial age, he finds a change in function. Folk art was not necessarily better but it was much closer to people's daily lives and their social traditions; "it dealt with the complete world intensely familiar to its audience and permitted a direct rapport between those who created and those who consumed this culture."

Nathan Glazer suggested that from a combination of the content level of the cultural product and the way it is received, one should derive four types of situations. In an oversimplified form, these are:

(a) Serious work seriously received;

(b) serious work denatured by the attitude of the "consumer" —looking at the reproduction of a great painting inserted in a picture weekly, listening to a Mozart aria preceded and followed by some popular hit in the frame of a television set;

(c) mediocre works received in a serious mood as exemplified by a woman who listens to a day-time drama in order to understand her family problems better or the Book-of-the-Month Club subscriber who honestly wants to improve himself;

(d) finally, there is bad stuff consumed to fill empty time, this being the enemy of the people.

Each of these situations might have been discussed in its own terms, but it would take a long time to explore them systematically. In retrospect, I can only urge the readers of this volume to penetrate in their own way and as best they can this notion of functional variation in *reception* which is the common theme of Handlin, Arendt, and Van den Haag.

Attention should be drawn to characteristic differences between various contributions. The social scientist Van den Haag e.g., in the last part of his contribution, gives a list of properly numbered indictments of the deterioration of human relations in mass society: we have lost the taste for privacy and contemplation, have replaced sincere personal contacts with an empty gregariousness, and so on. Randall Jarrell, the poet, in the first part of his paper, uses—purposely, he says—a stream of metaphors and impressive aphorisms which he feels communicate more. One other comparison should not be missed. Shils characterizes mass society in terms which show his basic optimism: Social participation has increased, the rights of each individual are more respected, rationality is more widespread. Van den Haag, in the second part of his paper, takes up all these points and so to say reverses their sign: Social participation is uninformed and vulnerable to slogans, individualism has broken all human bonds, rationality comes about at the expense of deep and sincere experiences. The interchange might give some readers the feeling which Hughes at one point expressed only half facetiously: that whomever he listens to he has to agree with. Perhaps the fact that positive and

negative elements are so interwoven in the contemporary scene is one of its most characteristic features.

Mass Culture and Mass Media

The first papers in the symposium, while supposed to deal with mass culture in general, devote much space to the mass media. As the sequences progress, the mass media increasingly become the center of attention, with television receiving the major share. By the end of the volume, one can tell that they have become the main topic of the program. In some ways this should not cause surprise. Since the participants are mostly people who make their living from writing, problems of communication are nearest to their hearts. Still this bias deserves some further comment. I have for a long time noticed the intensity with which topics related to broadcasting and to a lesser degree movies and the printed media are discussed in the United States. I may be permitted to repeat an interpretation I made more than ten years ago.

> "Twenty or thirty years ago liberal organizations were concerned almost exclusively with questions of social betterment—child labor, woman suffrage, economic insecurity, the exploitation of workers, and so on. These same liberal organizations are today almost as exclusively concerned with the danger of radio, the danger of newspapers, and the bad effects of motion pictures. . . . Broadcasters think of themselves as honest, hard-working, and decent people; why is it then, that doctors and preachers and teachers dislike them? The liberals of today feel terribly gypped. For decades they and their intellectual ancestors fought to attain certain basic goals—more leisure time, more education, higher wages. They were motivated by the idealistic hope that when these goals were reached, the "masses" would develop into fine human beings. But what happened? After the liberals had won their victories, the people spent their newly acquired time and money on movies, radio, magazines. Instead of listening to Beethoven, they listen to Johnny Mercer, instead of going to Columbia University, they go to the Columbia Broadcasting System. The situation of the liberals is much like that of the high school boy who, after weeks of saving, accumulates enough money to buy a bracelet for a girl, and who then learns that the girl has gone out with another boy to show off her nice new trinket."[4]

It seems that this interpretation is still valid today. And the position of the spokesmen for the mass media has also remained unchanged. Rosten and Stanton stress that they make considerable contributions to adult education. Of course they are first of all responsible to their stockholders but they plow much of their profits back into public

service features. The manager of and advisers to the mass media feel that their economic success is proof that they do "what the people want"—and that in addition they provide cultural leadership. Interestingly enough, a similar attitude is reported as characteristic of the attitude of businessmen even if their own profits are not involved. One contributor to this volume, Mr. Sweeney, at the time Director of the Museum of Modern Art, blames the board members of many museums for resorting to mass appeal when it is not economically necessary. Museums have the double function of serving the trained mind and being educational agents for a broader public. It is regrettable that no expert in adult education was included in the symposium. His opinion would have helped to develop further Mr. Sweeney's interesting observations.

The emphasis on the mass media is characteristic of the American scene and obscures certain other aspects of mass culture. This can be somewhat remedied by a short digression into the way similar discussions are conducted in another country, France.

In one respect the French and the American situations are like one another. The social scientist and the man of letters in both countries are likely to be politically left of center. But in France, because they have as a frame of reference strong labor parties, they debate cultural values more in their relations to political militancy. The central theme in discussion of mass culture is usually the use of leisure time. Mass media only play a marginal role. The great symbol of the first labor government under Leon Blum in 1936 was the enactment of laws guaranteeing paid vacations and regulating details of week-end arrangements. Equally characteristic are a number of government supported activities like the popular theatre and the youth sport movement. The issue hidden behind the intensive theoretical discussions about leisure time is whether it will lead to an independent labor class culture or whether it will end in assimilation of all workers into a middle-class pattern.

One gets a good picture of this climate of thinking through an issue of the magazine *Esprit* which appeared in June, 1959, simultaneously with the symposium, which led to the present volume. The issue is devoted to "Le Loisir." The theoretical papers are primarily concerned with the relation bteween leisure time and participation in social movements. Empirical studies analyze how the legally guaranteed vacation period is utilized by various groups of employees. Data on mass media exposure are used to bring out the sociological meaning of various types of work. Thus, for instance, one study

compares two groups of white collar people who have about the same income but differ according to the degree their work is mechanized. The group with more interesting work shows a normal distribution of activities like movie attendance or listening to the radio. Those who have monotonous work show bimodal behavior, they either engage in an excessive amount of mass media activities or they retreat into an isolation, which takes them either to the saloon or leads to an impoverished family life. It is this retreatism which is considered the main cultural danger by many authors. One has the impression that mass media exposure is looked on as a hopeful sign of incipient concern with the larger world.[5]

Quite a number of other aspects are often crowded out from discussions of mass culture among American intellectuals. Only Hazard in this symposium points out that the objects of daily use have an aesthetic aspect which is definitely part of the surrounding culture. He seems to feel, for instance, that by and large the design of home equipment achieves quite high standards. The social scientist might make a distinction between objects which have high social visibility and lend themselves to social competition and which are often in bad taste—some types of cars would be a good example. Other objects like refrigerators and dictating equipment are more easily left to the control of the professional designer, and do indeed often display considerable taste. In poorer countries, alcoholism is usually an important topic in mass culture discussions.

The Voice of the Artist

While the scope of this symposium is restricted in one direction, it is enlarged in another. Included in the present volume are the statements of three creative artists and the record of the discussion includes the comments of some others. I have tried to extract from all this a statement of their position.

They all agree that the goal and task of the artist is to interpret human experience. There is some disagreement as to whether he does so mainly by describing other people's lives or by being especially articulate about himself. But they have no doubt that life for everyone would be much harder if art didn't help to make sense out of it.

Some idea of a division of labor is implied. Not every human being can, by himself, add this kind of depth to what happens to him. Only the artist is in a position to perform this task because he lends all his

efforts to it; but throughout history he has done this at a great sacrifice. Because the artist's social function is intangible and its importance not easily appreciated, he is usually economically insecure and the contact with his audience, if it exists, is precarious and frustrating. Today additional difficulties are added because of the nature of mass society, the role of the mass media, and in the United States also because of some consequences of its economic system. On the first point the main complaint is that the mass man is unreceptive to contemplation; that a complete separation has come about between artistic production on the one hand and occupational and community life on the other; that it has become less and less clear for whom the creative artist is working; and that he is often restricted to addressing himself to just a small group of experts.

The mass media complicate the matter in a variety of ways. By providing endless diversion, they corrode people's willingness to pay attention to serious thought. The mass media emphasize the fleeting events of the moment and weaken people's connection with the past, as it is expressed in myths and the kind of symbolism which epics or the Bible provide. This has grievous consequences for the artist, for his creativeness consists essentially in providing new variations on pervasive themes.

The record is most explicit on two dreaded features of the American scene. The one could be called institutional temptation. It is true that artists are not likely to starve as they did a century ago; there are fellowships, foundation grants, and teaching positions at the universities. But they all require the artist to do a great many things that are not essential to him. He is rarely paid for performing his most creative function. The objection was made that nothing keeps him from starving as his ancestors did and working on what the spirit moves him to. But I think there was real understanding that in an overpowering institutional setting such individual solutions are hardly possible.[6]

The second target of the artist's complaints—and also pointed out at length by Miss Arendt—is the role of the popularizers. The existence of a large audience wanting some easy information and eager to pay for it creates a new group of technicians who take the original and make it palatable, be it fashioning a movie out of a drama or a magazine article out of a serious piece of analysis. This again increases the sense of despair for the serious artist. In terms of fame and material success, he finds himself pushed into the background as compared to the mass communicator; compared with the past, he

suffers less absolute and increasing relative deprivation. This point lends additional complexity to the debate with the defenders of the mass media. Rosten in his paper points out how hard he and his colleagues try to popularize important subject matters. However, the artist can more easily condone the ineptness of a bad writer than the slickness of a popularizer. The grievance, incidentally, does not seem to be restricted to the artist. The physicist Holton mentioned in the discussion that he and his colleagues resent the image of the scientist portrayed by the mass media.

It was surprisingly difficult to get artists to talk in terms of their own experience. Notice, for instance, how Mr. Jarrell's paper clearly falls into two parts. In the first he describes mass society mainly in the same detached way as any social scientist would—but his style is different from Van den Haag's. Only in the second part of his paper does he write about his own experiences. And the most personal and revealing remarks of Mr. Baldwin are found in the record of the discussion and not in his paper. Perhaps in such a symposium the artists resent playing the role of guinea pigs. In this sense then the presence of the creative writers was a noble experiment but not a complete success. The partial failure shows, however, how important it would be to pursue the effort further. What is needed are men and women who are willing to talk to us social scientists about themselves as artists in the world of mass culture, rather than about the nature of art.[7]

Interestingly enough, it is the musician Arthur Berger who is most specific and articulate. Perhaps it is reading and explanation of musical scores which gave him analytical training. He makes many interesting points. Among these is the idea that one should not be overjoyed by the extensive performance of classical music over radio, because the unanticipated effect might be a freezing of musical taste. The trend in artistic style has always been toward increasing complexity, and it usually takes a new generation of laymen to accept what was considered revolutionary and unharmonious in their parents' day. Such acceptance might now take much longer because broadcasting puts all its weight behind works which people are accustomed to hearing. Berger singles out quite a number of other impediments which are built into the technology and social structure of the mass media. New works, e.g., are difficult to play and require a great deal of rehearsal. But because of union rules and other traditions developed in broadcasting, lengthy rehearsals become almost prohibitive today. Incidentally, magazines too develop a

style of their own, and television has producers who are believed to know what the medium requires. All this means that in many areas professional techniques interpose themselves between the artist and the public. Whatever the need for or the justification of this trend, the artists do not seem to take it kindly.

Berger suggests concretely that broadcasters should make unconditional grants to modern writers and composers. Their contribution should not be linked to the suitability of a work for television or radio. It should rather be looked on as an additional tax, because a broadcasting license turns over a public property—the airwave—for the benefit of a private businessman. While he did not put it quite this way, the remarks of A. W. Brown went in the same direction. A former president of the Metropolitan Educational Television Association (which provides educational television stations with program material), he pointed out that, because of lack of funds, only about 50 education channels have been put in operation out of 250 available channels. More such stations would give artists a larger number of outlets. If one adheres to the formula that commercial broadcasters should make somewhat less money than their franchises permit in the free market, it is easy to conclude that they should give active financial support to educational television.[8]

I might be permitted to add one remark which is personal in the sense that it concerns only my own professional specialty. The artists in the symposium request effort and respect for difficult modern art. At the same time they are impatient when they are confronted with the corresponding problem in the social sciences. Mr. Jarrell said at one point that he loved anthropologists but hated sociologists. The context made it quite clear that what he dislikes are statistical tables difficult to read and what he is pleased by are essays on cultural subjects more akin to poetry. Two men who took pessimistic positions in the discussion have a similar record. The *Reporter*, of which Mr. Kristol was the Managing Editor, and *Commentary*, of which Mr. Glazer is a frequent contributor on social sciences, have been consistently hostile to all modern trends in the social sciences. As Mr. Hazard put it in an aside, empirical social research might be the counterpart of atonal music. It seems to create the same hostility among modern artists which their work creates among the general public.

And yet there is one type of research which might help on some of the problems which the artists brought up. I mentioned above that the way people receive or "consume" cultural products is of con-

siderable concern to some of the participants. Seldes, for instance, comments on the passivity of modern audiences; Hook, on the other hand, insists that he does not understand what is meant by this frequently used term. Now it so happens that mass communication research has developed sophisticated interviewing techniques which bring out what people feel while they watch a movie or television program, at what points they are involved, where they misunderstand the content, and so on. Such analysis of the listening experience has been used mainly for the purpose of improving the effectiveness of propaganda, commercial or otherwise.[9] There is no reason, however, why it should not be used for more objective ends.

As a matter of fact, such an effort was made once by I. A. Richards, who was one of the pioneers of the "New Criticism" which started in England after the First World War.[10] His Cambridge group was mainly interested in substituting for the romantic approach to the personality of the author a structural analysis of the work of art itself. Richards wanted, in addition, to look at the other side of the coin and to study the structure of the readers' experience. He developed a procedure which seems to be little known and to which more attention should be given.[11]

Richards asked a number of his students to read carefully and repeatedly an array of poems ranging from serious pieces to conventional trash. He then requested them to describe in detail all the reactions, associations and opinions they had. These reports he analyzed and classified carefully. The main product is a detailed description of what today we would call the audience experience. The purpose of Richards' experiment as well as the organization of his book are best described in his own formulation of his three aims:

> "First, to introduce a *new kind of documentation* to those who are interested in the contemporary state of culture whether as critics, as philosophers, as teachers, as psychologists or mainly as curious persons. Secondly, to provide a new technique for those who wish to discover for themselves what they think and feel about poetry (and cognate matters) and why they should like or dislike it. Thirdly, to prepare the way for *educational methods* more efficient than those we use now in *developing discrimination* and the power to understand what we hear and read." [Emphasis supplied]

I have never quite understoood why Richards' idea has rarely been pursued further. Perhaps it falls in a no-man's land between psychologists and students of literature. Perhaps Richards' rather primitive techniques seem disappointing. But as the studies quoted

above show, we now know that one can give a very good picture of how a specific type of person understands a work of art, how he is affected by it, and how it fits into the stream of his personal experiences. I would strongly urge that a convergence of these research techniques with serious artistic concerns be more widely tried. Obviously, the goal is not to custom tailor creative production to the wishes of the man in the street. But a great many interesting and mostly unpredictable outcomes can result from a systematic confrontation of the artist with his actual and potential audiences. To say the least, the type of controversies which the present symposium exemplifies could be referred to a firmer body of facts.

Dilemmas of Reform

Stuart Hughes in his paper takes the position that one cannot have political without cultural democracy; we are paying for our freedom of opinion by letting the people have the freedom of choice in cultural matters. Phillips in the discussion objects: he does not see any necessary connection. A somewhat different formulation might make the issue more concrete.

The expression "paying for" is indeed somewhat vague and perhaps fatalistic. What actually happens is that, in the mass media field, we are confronted with a set of basic values which we hold equally dear but which cannot be all fully realized. Schlesinger, for instance, argues for a stronger role of the government in broadcasting policies. Even if television is accepted as a business, the idea of free enterprise does not preclude some government regulation. He correctly points out that at many points in our economic system we have laws on wages and hours and similar business decisions. In the communications field, however, we run into a conflict with the First Amendment which specifically precludes government interference in the realm of ideas. Even if this difficulty could be resolved by stating that television, like the movies, conveys mainly entertainment and, therefore, doesn't fall under the First Amendment, a realistic problem remains. American broadcasting is really quite free so far as political controversy goes. It is questionable whether the opposition party would have a fair chance in a government controlled system. One would, therefore, have to look for a form of regulation which affected cultural matters only.

Once this is conceded, another question comes up. In a democracy, is there any justification for imposing elite standards on the whole

country? In this connection a distinction which is often overlooked must be made. The realistic issue is not whether the majority should accept what the intellectual minority prefers. The problem is whether *within* the realm of what was referred to as middlebrow culture standards could be developed and should be maintained. The Federal Communications Commission, for instance, receives many complaints about the abundance of violence in television dramas. The question then arises whether one does not find less violence there than, for instance, in *Hamlet*. Everyone has an uneasy feeling that this is a specious argument, but it would be difficult to articulate clearly under what conditions an overbundance of violence is regrettable. While there is no answer on this specific problem, there are similar issues on which communication research can provide answers. Everyone is familiar with the programs called "soap operas." They are about families which get into trouble, solve a predicament somehow, only to start a new episode of difficulties. It is certainly not high art, but it is sometimes entertaining and listeners should not be deprived of this kind of relaxation. However, even if one accepts the basic formula, one can point to some specific deficiencies. Arnheim has analyzed a score of such plots and has shown that the troubles in which the families find themselves are usually created by men while the happy solution is provided by women. It is not difficult to understand the purpose of this tradition: it makes the soap opera more attractive to women, and this is the audience in which the advertisers are primarily interested. But the same type of entertainment could be provided without such elements of bias and this would be an intrinsic improvement.

What I am trying to say is that even if we accept the legitimacy of middlebrow culture, it is still possible to develop standards which make for improvement on its own terms. The role of the elite then would not be that of dictators but of advisers. Concretely this role can take a variety of forms. Hyman's contribution to this symposium describes what he as a college teacher does to influence the standards of his students. On another occasion Robert Hutchins stressed the importance of periodic reviews. One of the proposals of his Commission on the Freedom of the Press was that the content of mass media be sampled under appropriate categories so they could be subjected to the limelight of public opinion. This is supposed to make for improvement without specific regulation. The success of such a scheme depends very much of course on the introduction of creative descriptive ideas like the ones exemplified by Arnheim's study.

A third dilemma which deserves attention is due to a special piece of broadcasting legislation. The Federal Communications Act provides that, in order to avoid collusion on the setting of advertising rates, the anti-trust laws should apply to broadcasting. On this it proved ineffectual. But in present application it also precludes concerted action on program content. Stanton in his paper points with justified pride to the many fine programs one finds in an average week on CBS. Competing networks could make the same claim. But what would be overlooked is the fact that for competitive reasons all of these programs are usually heard at the same time. The value of the existing program supply could be greatly enhanced by a very simple procedure. Now the networks pit against each other programs with mass appeal at one time and programs with elite appeal at another time. Nothing but legal traditionalism prevents an arrangement by which on some days one network has a large audience and another network has a smaller number of connoisseurs: on other evenings the situation would be reversed by agreement. It is not so much the commercial nature of broadcasting but a narrow interpretation of commercial competition which accounts for some of these difficulties.

Since this symposium was held, interest in the problematics of the mass media has extended, at least temporarily, to broader public groups. It is rather characteristic that this interest was not aroused by the cultural critics but by moral indignation over cheating on a television show. This raises the question whether discussions like the one published in this hook have any practical utility at all. And here we can once more turn to the teachings of history. The contribution of Leo Lowenthal shows that every technological innovation in the field of communication was experienced by some people as a cultural danger: the less expensive book, the lending library, the magazine and so on. It is really startling how timely the discussions which Lowenthal reports from the 17th and 18th century sound today. Stimulated by his material, I went back to the first recorded discussion of mass communication: Plato's *Phaedros*, the dialogue concerned with the skills and the social implications of the public orator. Socrates, of course, takes the position which the pessimistic critics in this volume take and he, too, goes back to history. He feels that the misery started with the discovery of writing.[12]

"For this discovery will create forgetfulness in the learners' souls, because they will not use their memories; they will trust to the external written characters and not remember of themselves. . . . They will appear to be

omniscient, and will generally know nothing; they will be tiresome company, having the show of wisdom without the reality."

In spite of this dire foreboding, writing, orating, printing and now broadcasting have spread, and society still survives. Matters often look bad, but somehow they always stop short of being disastrous. True, as in other fields, especially in social legislation, it was often an accidental event which triggered an improvement. But this would not have happened if a continuous stream of criticism had not kept us prepared to take advantage of such opportunities. It is the tragic story of the cultural crusader in a mass society that he cannot win, but that we would be lost without him.

REFERENCES

1 Since this symposium was held, a very instructive summary of the pertinent literature has been published. Kornhauser, in the first part of "The Politics of Mass Society" shows that the idea has two historical roots: fear that traditional standards will be destroyed by the political movements following the French Revolution; and fear that democratic rights will be lost, engendered by the experience of fascistic dictatorships. Instead of trying one unitary definition of "mass society" Kornhauser shows the types of meanings the concept has acquired in varying contexts.

2 What people read or watch is well known from numerous studies. For a first orientation, one may consult several chapters in a "Reader on Public Opinion and Communications Research," Bernard Berelson and Morris Janowitz (eds.) (Glencoe, Ill.: The Free Press, 1953).

3 Actually, toward the end of his paper he expresses interesting ideas of what in his opinion are the shortcomings of the American scene. But these points were not picked up during the symposium and therefore will not be reviewed here.

4 Paul Lazarsfeld, "Role of Criticism in Management of Mass Communications," *Communications in Modern Society* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press), 1948, pp. 191-192.

5 They actually play a different role than they do in the United States. The government-owned radio-television system has definite cultural and social assignments which are maintained by advisory councils of artists and other professional groups attached to the broadcasting agency. It is indicative that the French literature has not created special words for mass media but taken over the English words. Especially interesting are papers which deal with education for leisure utilization. To give just one characteristic example, the French beaches are as crowded as ours, but the problem is raised as to what people should do when they find themselves in such a situation. Instead of frantically trying to preserve a square yard of pseudoprivacy, they should think of joint activities and organize equitable use of available facilities.

6 I was recently struck by the observation that in countries like Switzerland and Austria mountain climbing is rapidly declining; the number of professional guides, for instance, has greatly decreased. This is due to the fact that more and more cable cars and hard surface automobile roads are being built. Here again the point could be made that no one has to use these technical devices; one could still reach mountain peaks by his own strength. But it is obvious that such pursuits lose their sense if at the end of such a climb one meets all the people who have come up with the help of some technical gadget.

7 During the discussion Berelson especially stressed the need for better communications between the various agents active in the communications field. In another symposium sponsored by Notre Dame University he contributed an imaginary exchange between three such characters: the philosopher who pursues ideals, the operator who has to make a success of the mass media and the academician who tries to be guided by empirical research. His paper makes good contributory reading to the point of view represented in the present collection.

8 Little is known about the actual audiences of educational stations, the needs they could serve and the types of programs they could develop. There is, however, great hope that this gap will be filled. The recently legislated Defense Education Act provides grants for research and several major grants have been made to research groups working in areas in which educational stations are in operation.

9 It is not possible to give a complete picture of this procedure without devoting much more space to it. The best examples can be found in the studies that the Army did during the last war on the reaction of soldiers to films designed to give an understanding of the contemporary historical situation. The results are summarized in the third volume of *The American Soldier* (Princeton, N.J.; Princeton University Press, 1949, Ch. 4). A more detailed discussion of the technique I am referring to is given by Merton *et al.*, in *The Focused Interview* (Glencoe, Ill.: The Free Press, 1958), and in Tore Hollonquist and E. A. Suchman, "Listening to the Listener," in P. F. Lazarsfeld and F. N. Stanton (eds.), *Radio Research 1942-43* (New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1944).

10 A vivid description of how this movement originated can be found in F. N. W. Tillyard, *The Muse Unchained* (London: Bowes and Bowes, 1958).

11 I. A. Richards, *Practical Criticism* (London: Kegan, Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., Ltd., 1929).

12 *The Philosophy of Plato* (Jewett translation), (New York: Modern Library), p. 323.