

Constituents of a theory of the media

Constituents of a theory of the media by Hans Magnus Enzensberger

Enzensberger's 1970 essay argues that mass media aren't automatically tools of manipulation. Instead, they're technologies that can either liberate or control people, depending on who has access and power over them.

He challenges both sides:
capitalist media systems that turn information into a product
vs.
leftist critics who see all media as propaganda.

Enzensberger calls for a revolutionary approach that uses media's real strength which is its ability to mobilize people, build connections, and inspire collective action.

He believes that electronic and broadcast media could support participation rather than passive consumption, if people were more involved in producing and shaping content.

His critique moves through three main concerns:

- Who owns and controls media
- How feedback and interaction are limited
- How the Left often stays stuck in criticism instead of action.

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The Mobilizing power of the media

- Electronic media could enable mass participation instead of top down broadcast; the tech allows two way circuits, but one-way use is politically imposed to keep audiences passive

The Orwellian Fantasy

- Total, centralized control of a modern communication network is technically and socially unworkable; large systems are inherently leaky and can't be fully surveilled or censored without breaking themselves.

Cultural Archaism in the Left Critique

- The Left's fixation on "manipulation" shifts into moralism and defeatism; critique without strategy becomes a habit that avoids building alternatives.

Democratic Manipulation

- All media use involves manipulation so democratize it. Shift power so everyone can produce, shape, and reframe media rather than leaving control to elites.

A Socialist Strategy

- End isolation by organizing collective production with feedback (reversible sender/receiver roles). Treat media as a political tool for participation, not propaganda.

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Summary (chart)

- Repressive media (centralized, one way, specialist run, passive) vs emancipatory media (decentralized, two way, collectively produced, interactive).
- Redesign systems

The Subversive Power of the New Media

- From Fanon to transistor radios
- Electronic media carry real insurgent potential.

The Achievement of Benjamin

- When taken from below (ex. transistor radios, guerrilla uses), media amplify insurgent action, but tech alone isn't magic. Organization is what sustains impact.

The Supersession of Written Culture

- Electronic media shift emphasis from book bound monologue to interactive, time based communication (speech, image, performance), loosening the cultural dominance of print.

The Desacralization of Art


- Media don't make sacred, finished objects; they create programs/processes that invite feedback and participation. Moving art from ritual aura to political practice.

Illusion of Mass Mobilization



“Anyone who thinks of the masses only as the object of politics cannot mobilize them. He wants to push the maround. A parcel is not mobile; it can only be pushed to and fro. Marches, columns, parades, immobilize people. Propaganda, which does not release self-reliance but limits it, fits into the same pattern. It leads to de-politicization”

Consciousness Industry



Savanah Hernandez

@sav_says_

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WATCH: A huge group of African illegal immigrants are operating a black market on the corner of Broadway and Canal St in New York City.

The entire sidewalk is filled with illegals who state they are from Senegal and I watched as they fled police.


This corner looks exactly like the streets of Paris and the migrants even became angry and tried to tell me I couldn't film (similar to Paris).

As I was reporting, the migrants began scrambling to pick up their items before fleeing into vehicles or on foot due to police presence in the area.

One of the migrants explained to me that they're operating "without a license" and if the police catch them, they'll confiscate all of their items.

There were at least 20-30 illegals in the area conducting business that they know is against the law, however, this seems to be a common occurrence on this street and business is booming.

Perhaps [@ICEgov](#) should go check this corner out



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“The regime so threatened will in such cases, insofar as it is still capable of action, use force and adopt police or military methods.”

“A state of emergency is therefore the only alternative to leakage in the consciousness industry; but it cannot be maintained in the long run. societies in the late industrial age rely on the free exchange of information; the ‘objective pressures’ to which their controllers constantly appeal are thus turned against them.”



Homeland Security

@DHSgov



 Homeland Security

@DHSgov · Oct 22

 NEW YORK'S CANAL STREET IS SAFER: 9 illegal aliens arrested have violent rap sheets including robbery, burglary, domestic violence, assaulting law enforcement, counterfeiting, drug trafficking, drug possession, and forgery.

Under President Trump and @Sec_Noem, criminal illegal

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Profit Media vs. Public Interest



“Thus every use of the media presupposes manipulation. The most elementary processes in media production, from the choice of the medium itself to shooting, cutting, synchronization, dubbing, right up to distribution, are all operations carried out on the raw material. There is no such thing as unmanipulated writing, filming, or broadcasting. The question is therefore not whether the media are manipulated, but who manipulates them. A revolutionary plan should not require the manipulators to disappear; on the contrary, it must make everyone a manipulator.”

Discussion Questions

What would “emancipatory media” look like now?

When does digital activism shift from mobilization to performance?

How does the illusion of feedback (likes, shares, comments, hashtags)
neutralize real organizing?