SPACE, TIME AND MEDIA THEORY: AN ILLUSTRATION FROM THE TELEVISION–ADVERTISING NEXUS

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Introduction

The ways in which society and geographical space are reciprocally constitutive is an issue of some vintage (Urry, 1985). Yet it is an issue which can fairly be said to have been by-passed in debates centring on the mass media. Certainly, there is no lack of passing reference to space in work, of various stripes, concerning itself with the media. The treatment of space by scholars of the media has, however, never really allowed an appreciation of space and geographical specificity on a par with the acceptance of the significance of time and historical specificity. This is not simply to level an accusation against scholars of the media. From the opposite direction, it has long been acknowledged (albeit by a committed few) that the media has been singularly neglected as a topic of concern within geography (Burgess and Gold, 1985). The broad intention of this paper, therefore, is to contribute to the bridging of this gap between studies of the media and studies of space. Where the paper has some claim to originality, given that the general point has been made before, lies in its focus on the relations between media institutions and away from the readings of texts by audiences.

There can be little doubt that the relations between the mass media and capitalism form a central concern of much critical debate on the media (Garnham, 1990). Precisely how this set of relations becomes instantiated at a given historical time, in a given geographical context, however, is an issue so potentially complex that it remains largely underdeveloped. This is in spite of earlier calls for such an agenda (Moores, 1986). It is the intention of this paper to indicate how we might most adequately conceive of the tangled web of relations between the media, capitalism, space and time.

The structure of the paper reveals its specific aims: the first section reflects upon the theoretical importance of space to the media as a counter to the established biases in studies which have privileged time over space; the second section pins this down, in a detailed consideration of recent work on the political economy of television advertising; thirdly, a theorisation of the spatial aspects of the television-advertising nexus is presented, using the case of the United Kingdom's commercial television system to interrogate the validity of such political economic accounts. The concluding section looks to the wider implications of the arguments presented in the earlier sections. In effect, the paper juxtaposes an abstract political-economic theorisation with an empirically informed account of the spatiality of the media. This difficult juxtaposition - which arguably cuts over different levels of abstraction - seeks to assess the compatibility of different approaches, which lay different stresses on time and space.

At one level, therefore, the paper seeks to promote the idea that something of a major reconceptualisation is needed to advance the sophistication of our understanding of the relations between the media, culture, society and space. At a more modest level, however, the paper is intended as a geographical contribution to the literatures on television and advertising. In respect of the latter intention, it should be noted that it is never easy to conceive of precisely how space is implicated in the constitution of social processes. The empirical material on the regional structure of commercial television provides a conceptualisation of the spatial relations between television and advertising which has value independently of the wider thesis of the paper. But it is to this wider thesis that we first turn.

The 'reassertion of space' and the media

The argument has been made, sometimes a little simplistically, that the widespread collapse of modernist certainties - characterised as they were by a linear preoccupation with time - has coincided with a 'reassertion of space' in social thought (Soja, 1989; see also Harvey, 1989; Lefebvre, 1991). It is fair to say, however, that this 'reassertion of space' has not been particularly apparent within media studies. I wish to argue strongly that this is to the detriment of our understanding of the media.

In spite of continuing debate, the relations between society, space and time remain problematic. As Soja (1989) suggests, however, the social sciences <u>in general</u> have, since their inception, neglected space and geography in favour of time and history. Space and time are in fact intimately related:

concrete social entities are constituted in relation to, and situated in, both space <u>and</u> time (Thrift, 1983). Thus, neither space nor time should be conceptually privileged in a hierarchical manner, the one over the other. It occasionally seems fair to argue that, at a given conjunction, one half of the space-time coupling may carry more significance. But, ultimately, modes of thought which divorce geography from history, or - even more seriously - neglect all reference to historical <u>and</u> geographical situation, are bound to hit upon serious problems of conceptual inadequacy. It is, therefore, important <u>not</u> to engage in a simple reversal of the time/space dichotomy but rather to develop a renewed conceptualisation of both space <u>and</u> time in media theory. This is admittedly easier to state in principle than to carry out in practice. The present paper is, at least, an attempt to meet the principle.

It is worth pursuing in a little more detail the argument that spatial and temporal contexts matter to the operation of social, or, indeed, natural processes. Even at an abstract level, it can be demonstrated quite simply that context or situation 'matters'. Sayer (1985) provides such a demonstration of 'the difference that space makes' from a realist perspective (cf. Sayer, 1984). If we consider the following letters, it is evident that they are arranged in space, each letter in a certain set of spatial relations ('P' is <u>between</u> 'O' and 'Q'; 'A' is <u>above</u> 'O'; and so on):

A B C

O P Q

If the letters are taken to stand for, say, piles of chemicals, then it is quite conceivable that if the spatial arrangement above were to be altered (e.g. by switching the position of chemicals 'A' and 'Q') an explosion might occur - for instance if 'O' and 'Q' were combustible in each others presence - simply by virtue of the (altered) spatial arrangement. It is not difficult to think up social rather than natural examples to demonstrate this crucial difference that space can make. Given that a non-trivial example of the difference space makes to a specific media process is provided in the next section, it is felt that this example will suffice for the present.(1)

To return the argument more directly to the media, I have suggested that more attention has consistently been paid to time than to space by media scholars. Before making this case in detail, it is useful to consider some identifiable traditions of work on the media that have made explicit reference to space. Two areas of work deserve mention: first, there is an established set of work concerning itself with the kinds of geographical representations found in media texts; secondly a heterogeneous body of literature deals with the changes wrought upon space by the global tendencies of the mass media. The former has managed to develop something of a dialogue between media studies and geography, most recently over environmental meanings (Burgess, 1990; Corner and Schlesinger, 1991). The latter has seen far less explicit dialogue, the chief exception being the exchanges between Sack (1990), Leiss (1990) and

Meyrowitz (1990). Such influential works as McLuhan (1962) and, more recently, McLuhan and Powers (1989) and Meyrowitz (1985) clearly represent classic statements on communication and globalisation but similar ideas are to be found in Giddens (1984, 1989) (who, like Meyrowitz, draws in part on spatial conceptualisations developed by Goffman [1959]) and in Harvey's (1989) notion of 'time-space compression'. One important aspect of recent work, which holds potential for a connecting these two traditions, is a sensitivity to the changes in everyday spaces that globalisation might imply (cf. Morley, 1991).

Whilst acknowledging the existence and importance of such work, however, the central argument remains valid; the lack of a thoroughgoing concern with space across the whole range of work on the media can reasonably be asserted. Indeed, the work mentioned above does tend to relate to areas of concern which by their very nature, cannot but be formulated in a geographical way. Perhaps, therefore, such work can be characterised as the exception that proves the rule. The case presented in the paper aims to demonstrate that it is not reasonable simply to assume that those areas which somehow 'ought' to incorporate spatial concerns already do so.

An important example, given the substantive concern of this paper, relates to the privileging of time over space in work locating itself within the political economy tradition. This is, perhaps, quite surprising given the development over the past decade or so of a particularly strong body of work seeking to develop the spatial dimension of political economy (most notably Harvey 1982a). To push this assertion a little further, the remainder of this section briefly reviews some contributions to the political economy of the mass media.

Titles can, of course, be misleading. But at least at a symbolic level the recently published postscript to Garnham's (1979) classic 'Contribution to a Political Economy of Mass Communication', entitled 'The Economy of Time' (2) provides a case in point. It is not difficult to see why Garnham (1990) places such a focus on time. The point being stressed goes right to the heart of Marx's dialectical method: that social entities - the different manifestations of capital in Marx's case - are effectively different moments in a (circulatory and temporal) process. It is more than just churlishness, though, to note that such processes involve space as well as time (cf. Harvey, 1985, 144-5). Indeed Garnham (1990) obviously, though generally implicitly, recognises this; it is evident, for instance, in comments such as 'once TV had achieved, via global satellite, a commodity circulation time which was virtually zero ...' (Garnham, 1990, 52, emphases added); or in citing Marx's (1973, 535) statement to the effect that 'while the necessity of this continuity [of the process of capital] is given, its phases are separated in space and time ...' (Garnham, 1990, 47, emphasis added). These almost incidental references to space, though, are never developed in a wholly convincing way. It may be unfair to offer undue criticism on this score given that the piece undoubtedly had rather different concerns but the stress on time can nevertheless be taken as symptomatic.

A second example is provided by Smythe's (1977) seminal article on the political economic status of the media audience. Although Garnham (1990, 29) rejects what he sees as reductionism in Smythe's focus on the audience as the commodity form specific to the mass media, Smythe's thesis ends up in precisely the same position as Garnham (1990) in that it too privileges time over space. Jhally's (1990, 64-121) most sophisticated development of Smythe's thesis has formally analysed the commodification of the audience in _temporal_ terms, as the '_value form of time_' (Jhally, 1990, 102, original emphasis). This analysis contains no mention whatsoever of _space_. And yet audiences simply do _not_ exist on the head of a pin. Depending on the spatial organisation of the media, they exist in different strengths in different areas at different times and at different spatial scales: local; regional; national; increasingly international; and potentially global. These nested spatial structures are not, of course, mutually exclusive. The actual map of the media is a complex, overlapping and dynamic spatial structure.

The argument presented above provides good _a priori_ reasons for believing that the initial proposition is well founded; that questions of space have indeed been neglected in preference to questions of time in the study of the media. The following two sections expand on the ideas introduced above: firstly, the idea that time has been privileged in the conceptualisation of the media audience is given a fuller analysis with a detailed consideration of the work of Jhally; secondly, the idea that the media have some significant form of spatial organisation is illustrated by the case of Independent Television in the United Kingdom. The latter represents the foundation of a critique of the former which is developed in a more sustained way the final section, following the necessarily separate initial analyses.

The Political Economy of the Television-Advertising Nexus

It is not a novel suggestion that, in capitalist societies, activities performed away from the world of work can be more or less beneficial to capital (cf. Lefebvre, 1971). People may, for example, spend their time outside work sleeping or gardening; or, alternatively, handing their hard-earned money over to capital by drinking in a pub, paying to see a film at the local cinema, or by shopping. Jhally's (1982, 1984, 1990) development of Smythe's (1977, 1980) thesis on the media audience can be seen as taking a body of media theory into this tradition. Jhally's work focuses on the way in which the media is able to use the audience as a peculiar type of commodity, so that the most popular leisure activity of 'watching television' performs a considerable service to capital. Attention needs to be paid to the kinds of insight generated by this line of work, partly because it presents a challenging neo-Marxian argument (Murdock, 1978; Livant, 1979) but more importantly because it makes strong claims to explain precisely how the media-advertising nexus operates.

The value of focussing attention on the advertising audience is best stated initially in an intuitive and unrefined way. Thus it can be said that, each time a person views an advert, effectively they have been 'sold' to the advertiser; or more accurately their attention, not necessarily undivided, has been sold in this way. Further, in viewing adverts, audiences are said to be performing a type of labour for advertisers; viewing is, in effect, 'working' to ensure that the goods and services capital produces are exchanged so that their value may be realized. It is clearly necessary to clarify the intuitive truth of this conceptualisation.

Jhally (1990) defines the commodity produced by media industries as 'messages'. Arguing against a bourgeois and one-sided concern with the use-value of messages {'their meanings (in context)', [Jhally, 1990, 69]}, he suggests that attention should focus also on their exchange value. Their exchange value can only be understood, however, by understanding 'the system of exchange-value within which the commercial media are based' (Jhally, 1990, 71). This then permits a 'backward' move, toward the hidden, underlying commodity constituted by the audience.

The 'audience commodity' has some significant characteristics. For instance, the media do not sell <u>audiences</u> to advertisers, but rather audiences' <u>watching time</u>. 'Media sell <u>potential</u> audience-power [i.e. the <u>potential</u> purchasing power of the audience as consumers], but the only thing they can guarantee is the <u>watching activity</u> of the audience' (Jhally, 1990, 73).

This is important, given the widespread uncritical assumption that, because commercial media companies <u>trade</u> in audiences, they therefore <u>produce</u> audiences. There is a non-sequitor apparent here. In fact, audiences actively participate in the production of the commodity 'audience time'. Although media companies produce and/or broadcast the programmes which are a precondition for an audience to produce itself, their key role is the selling of the 'audience time' that has unwittingly been produced for them by the audience itself. 'It is only because [media companies] own the means of communication that they have title to the commodity which has been produced for them by others' (Jhally, 1990, 74).

Given that the audience reflexively <u>produces</u> itself as a commodity, the valorisation process involved in this unusual production process is amenable to political economic analysis. Jhally insists that his argument in this respect is not simply analogous to Marx's labour theory of value. Rather it is an extension founded on a concrete abstraction: '[TV] watching is an extension of factory labour, not a metaphor' (Jhally, 1990, 83). Just as the value of labour power is determined by the cost of its reproduction (defined at a given historical norm), so the value of 'watching power' is the cost of its reproduction, namely 'the cost of programming, which ensures that viewers will watch and be in a position to watch extra (the time of advertising)' (Jhally 1990, 85). The argument therefore turns on the division of broadcasting time, the 'watching day', between the different transmissions of advertisements and programmes. Here it is interesting to point out that this idea, though purporting to be a universal theory, is firmly rooted in a national broadcasting context that lacks, for example, the British tradition of public service broadcasting (see MacCabe and Stewart, 1986). This is hardly a damning critique of Smythe and Jhally but it signals an important point to be returned to at a later stage.

Commercial broadcasters produce or buy-in programmes, consequently generating an audience, which can then be sold on to advertisers. To be viable, the cost of producing/buying-in and transmitting a programme must clearly be less than the revenue earned from selling the advertising air-time, or rather the audience's watching power: 'Without the audience watching, advertising time would be valueless' (Jhally, 1990, 76). In terms of the source of value and surplus value of the audience commodity, the 'watching day' can accordingly be divided into: a necessary amount of advertising time, which the audience much watch to cover the costs of programming; and surplus 'watching time' where the watching of commercially sold time is earning a profit for the broadcaster - '[h]ere the audience watches to produce surplus-value for the owners of the means of communication' (Jhally, 1990,76). Clearly, broadcasters will aim to increase surplus watching time relative to necessary time. According to Jhally this constitutes the driving force behind all manner of media practices.

Jhally (1990) develops this point, again in a manner homologous to Marx's analysis of the labour process. Two ways of increasing surplus value, as defined by surplus watching time, are noted: the extraction of an _absolute_ surplus; and the extraction of a _relative_ surplus. The historical emergence of these strategies for extracting a surplus is said to follow the sequence of change in the labour process. Jhally draws on Marx's (1976, 943-1085) distinction between the _formal_ and _real_ subsumption of labour, a distinction devised to elucidate the initial co-existance of, but inevitable transition between, different modes of production. The formal subsumption of labour occurs where capitalism conveniently adopts a pre-existing (e.g. feudal agricultural) labour process, managing to extract absolute surplus value, usually by lengthening the working day. Given the obvious finite limits (i.e. the number of hours in the day) constraining this extraction of an absolute surplus, attention shifted historically to the extraction of relative surplus value. Marx showed how this could be achieved by, for instance, cutting the costs of reproduction of labour power (hence decreasing the amount of necessary labour time). As capitalism successfully grafted its own relations of production onto those areas it adopted, it finally _really_ subsumed the labour process, extracting a further relative surplus with the creation of a more efficient division of labour, a more efficient labour process, and continuous technological innovation.

Jhally (1990, 87) suggests that 'watching activity' was, to begin with, only _formally_ subsumed by capitalism. Broadcasting initially developed to sell radio (and, later, TV) sets, and advertisers typically sponsored whole programmes. Thus, just as early labour history was primarily witness to attempts to extract an increasing absolute surplus value (by extending the working day), the early history of broadcasting was characterised by a search for the extraction of an absolute surplus in terms of watching time; that is, by expanding advertising time relative to programming. For example, commercial sponsorship of shows represented 'an extension of the time that people watched or listened for capital' (Jhally, 1990, 85). By the 1950s, however, broadcasters began to provide 'magazine programming', so that they could sell specific advertising airtime spots to advertisers. This more fully capitalist form of organisation was much more efficient (for capitalism as a whole) than viewers watching a singly sponsored programme for a full thirty minutes. The re-organisation of time involved in the move to 'spot selling' represented a switch from the extraction of absolute to relative surplus value, given that spot selling is a more efficient way for broadcasters to cover necessary watching time.

Again, without unduly disrupting the exposition of Jhally's argument, it can be noted that theoretical argument is evinced by the North American experience. In the case of the United Kingdom, the origins of commercial television broadcasting were much later and effectively assumed the 'spot selling' stage at their inception. Sponsored programming of a rather different kind to that mentioned by Jhally, however, is now increasing <u>in addition to</u> spot selling. This is returned to at the end of this section.

For Jhally (1990), the extraction of relative surplus value continues in various forms of broadcasting today. This is evident, he suggests, in the constant cutting of programming production costs (leading to an increasing diet of quiz shows and sitcoms) which attains a reduction in necessary watching time. Jhally (1990, 103) notes that, in contrast to programming costs, adverts continue to receive vast amounts of production time, effort and money. He estimates the per minute cost of programmes as being around $12,500, whilst the figure for adverts can typically be as much as $100,000 [3]. It is suggested that the very different roles of the two cultural forms are explained by their respective economic natures (Jhally, 1990, 111). Programmes are akin to, or perhaps a form of, consumer goods. They are mass produced, largely poor quality and, like all consumer goods, designed for instant gratification but long term disappointment (always requiring a further 'fix' [cf. Clarke, 1991, 94]). There is, in Jhally's view, no economic need for 'quality' programming; 'people do not turn on the television set to watch particular shows: they turn it on to watch television. It is a[n] habitual activity' (Jhally, 1990, 105). Adverts, on the other hand, represent capital goods, 'used by the owners of the means of production to try and stimulate demand for particular branded commodities' (Jhally, 1990, 111). Moreover, it is claimed, like factory machines they have far less built-in obsolescence.

Jhally's argument is, clearly, oversimplistic here. Firstly, advertising is increasingly not restricted simply to branded good advertising. More importantly, though, Jhally describes just one economic tendency towards low quality programming and ignores possible countervailing tendencies - notably those relating to competition between rival media companies that 'force up' programme quality. This is linked especially to the move toward more effective audience targeting ('narrowcasting' rather than broadcasting). However, this last tendency also has surplus value implications. Narrowcasting 'leads to a form of 'concentrated viewing' by the audience in which there is (from the point view of advertisers) little 'wasted' watching' (Jhally, 1990,78-9). As well as acting to extract relative surplus value, by increasing the cost effectiveness of potentially reaching a desired market segment, 'specification and fractionation' of the mass audience can also increase absolute surplus value, by extending 'the total amount of time that the audience watches (and thus watches advertising time)' (Jhally, 1990, 90).

The move from programme sponsorship to spot selling enabled an initial extraction of a relative surplus. Further changing the division of advertising time can extract a further relative surplus; adverts of a shorter duration can generate a larger surplus than fewer lengthier ads. Jhally (1990, 81) provides a numerical example but the point is easiest grasped by recognising that, although shorter ads are less expensive per spot, they are more expensive per second. This method of extraction is limited by human cognitive powers but techniques such as 'time-compression' are used to squeeze adverts into a slightly shorter time-frame without pitch distortion; thus, technological innovation permits a further extraction of a relative surplus.

Jhally permits technological change a contradictory role. The advent of video cassette recorders and remote controls, allowing the 'zapping' of commercials, means that audiences can potentially watch TV programmes ('get paid') without doing the work (of watching the commercials) (Jhally, 1990, 89). This has worried the advertising and media industries for years: the only way around this seems to be to make commercials better in 'creative' terms - one form of the 'blurring' of programmes and adverts.

Such blurring is not a one way process, however. Increasingly, parts of programmes are really adverts, as exemplified by 'product placement' (or, more correctly, brand placement). Where this occurs, then 'part of the programme time is not really consumption time: rather it is labour time and the length of the working day has been extended' (Jhally, 1990, 92). Consequently an increased absolute surplus has been extracted. Narrowcasting intensifies the potential blurring between bona fide programmes and adverts. This is evident when it is recognised that the environment provided by the narrowcaster's programming is tightly defined and adverts are more targeted. The difference between adverts and programmes, in terms of content, will increasingly be eroded. (Anyone who remembers the product placement parody in the film Wayne's World will undoubtedly accept this point!) Blurring is also evident in the new form of programme sponsorship in the United Kingdom noted above, where brands aim to attract prestige by being linked to established high quality programmes.

This detailed and comprehensive thesis of Jhally (1990), it has to be acknowledged, provides an account that is apparently capable of embracing successfully all manner of developments in the media, within a single overarching framework. In some ways, though, its hermetically sealed character presents difficulties. A number of specific criticisms of Jhally's work are covered in the final section. What is particularly notable at this stage, however, is that the mainstay of the argument centres entirely on the temporal dimension in order to explain the media-advertising nexus. In doing so, it is occasionally guilty of reading the North American experience as universal. This does not necessarily condemn the ideas Jhally generates but it does suggest that more recognition of geographical specificity is required.

As a counterpoint to the temporal emphasis in Jhally's work, the next section provides a consideration of commercial television in the United Kingdom. This exposition reveals the importance of space to the advertising airtime market in a way which acknowledges the specificity of the situation but indicates the potential general importance of the geographical dimension.

Television and Space: The Case of the Independent Television Regions

One of the most informed accounts of the economics of television in the United Kingdom is provided by Collins et al. (1987). This work, however, illustrates the trait identified in the opening section by neglecting any real concern with space. It will be argued here that an understanding of the spatial organisation of the Independent Television (ITV) network is vital, in that this impacts significantly upon the economics of commercial television in the United Kingdom. The account presented here provides an analytical description of the regionality of this system. It is based on research into the behaviour of both advertising agencies and the Independent Television companies with respect to geographical space. Given that fuller accounts of this work are available elsewhere (Clarke and Bradford, 1989; 1992) only a basic overview of the main arguments will be presented here. This section of the paper aims specifically: to outline the spatial characteristics of the advertising-television nexus in the United Kingdom; to offer some insights into the institutional practices of advertising agencies; and television companies and to describe the spatial-economic consequences of these practices. The discussion contrasts the operation of the ITV system prior to deregulation with a necessarily more speculative discussion of the present and future operation of the system. The insights this provides serves to demonstrate the importance of a spatial formulation. In particular, it reveals how the 'market' can effectively value audiences differently in different areas precisely as a result of its own spatial organisation.

More than most commercial media, terrestrial commercial television in the United Kingdom is dependent on advertising revenue for its financial survival (Curran, 1986). As a result, the activities of advertising agencies are particularly important to the ITV companies (Clarke and Bradford, 1989). This advertising-television nexus can usefully be conceptualised in terms of the market metaphor. Quite how this 'market' is conceived, however, is an issue of some contention. The issue turns on the perspective taken with respect to the commodity being exchanged and the 'market roles' of the institutional actors. To clarify this, two alternatives may be noted. First, advertising agencies can be seen as constituting the 'demand side' of a market in advertising <u>airtime</u>, with the TV companies representing the suppliers of that airtime (this view is common within both industries). Second, the TV companies can be regarded as the demand-side of the system, seeking an adequate supply of <u>advertising</u> from the agencies. Neither of these alternatives attends to the idea that the audience is the real commodity of interest (cf. Jhally, 1990) but both are of heuristic value in focusing attention on to different aspects of the system as a whole.

The first conception can be used to reveal the highly significant point that the advertising airtime market in the United Kingdom is prone to failure (i.e. the price mechanism fails to operate in the normal way). This issue is developed in detail below, given that it reveals the full significance of the spatial organisation of Independent Television. The second conception is, though, equally important: not least in explaining the day-to-day activities the ITV companies undertake as a means of ensuring they receive an adequate supply of advertising from the agencies (Clarke and Bradford, 1992). Neither of these accounts per se, however, tell us very much about the spatial nature of the commercial television system. At one level, this geographical aspect of television seems quite familiar and unremarkable. With more attention, though, the spatial organisation of Independent Television can be seen to carry the most important ramifications.

The map of the Independent Television regions has effectively been bounded by transmitter considerations. The regions frequently cut across recognisable cultural areas (with, for instance, the North West of England region stretching into parts of North Wales) and generally overlap each other significantly. With the exception of the important London region, wholly autonomous companies hold the sole franchise rights to broadcast to the regional audiences. Until 1st January 1993 the regional ITV companies represented 'spatial monopolies' from the point of view of advertisers wishing to buy airtime. The ITV companies sold Channel 4's advertising airtime in addition to their own, so that there was no within-region choice facing advertisers wishing to reach a particular regional television audience. Although the London regional franchise was shared, the two companies, Thames and London Weekend Television, broadcast over a temporal [weekday/weekend] split which retained the monopolistic structure. The ultimate consequence of this system of spatial monopolies can be shown to be a highly uneven regional distribution of advertising revenue accruing to the regional ITV companies (Clarke and Bradford, 1992). The detail of this process, as it actually operated, is undoubtedly highly complex. The basic mechanism at work, though, can be outlined in relatively simple terms. Although this monopolistic system has now been broken, it is easiest to describe the mechanism as if it were still in operation, as a kind of yardstick against which to consider the likely consequences of broadcasting deregulation.

Given that the supply of advertising airtime is fixed externally to the market (presently by the Independent Television Commission [ITC]), then the way in which the cost (or price) of advertising airtime behaves can be regarded as being 'demand driven' - taking advertising agencies to represent the demand-side of the market. That is to say, if agencies were tomorrow to demand, on aggregate, more airtime in, say, the Anglia region, then the price of Anglia's airtime would be 'driven upwards'. In allocating their client's budgets across the ITV regions, however, agencies, are rarely dissuaded by such high costs from advertising heavily in the most highly demanded regions. Such regions are seen as being the most important and the agencies' clients are usually unwilling to reduce advertising there - even if this results in excessively high proportions of the total advertising budget going to only a few regions (Clarke and Bradford, 1989). Indeed, perversely, increases in airtime costs in such regions often lead to an even higher proportion of an advertiser's total advertising budget going there. On aggregate this can result in large revenues accruing to those TV regions which actually represent poor value for money!

Similarly, because advertising agencies are concerned to attain a given level of advertising in such regions, regions facing falling viewing figures (ratings) can also perversely experience increases in the amount of money allocated there by individual advertisers (who, in effect, have to spend more money there to reach the same audience as prior to the fall in ratings). For the TV companies, poorer ratings can therefore result in an increased overall advertising revenue. Broadbent and Jacobs (1984, 235) sum up this perverse situation:

> 'a contractor [ITV region] with exceptionally good ratings or a low rate card [cost-per-thousand viewers], trying to increase his (sic.) revenue, may ask himself 'Should I try to get the ratings down or my rate-card costs up?'. If this question baffles him - and who can blame him - he tries other ways of getting his area selected or favoured by the advertiser.'

This paradoxical situation may have even more absurd ramifications. It has been suggested, for example, that the ITV companies may well scheme to improve BBC television output to increase their own advertising revenues![4]

The market mechanism, therefore, upon which apologists of the market pin their faith, singularly fails to equilibrate the regions (although they can offer discounts and other cost incentives), and must therefore look to 'other ways' of competing, as Broadbent and Jacobs (1984, 235) put it. These other ways essentially rely on efforts by the ITV companies to differentiate their 'offers' from the rest. Clarke and Bradford (1992) provide a comprehensive account of such efforts. Examples range from additional services (e.g. research services) to the sorts of promotional campaigns many of the Northern regions undertook, particularly in the 1980s, to change their image which still remain relatively widespread today. These efforts at competing by 'product differentiation', though, seem to be in vain. There is little evidence of such efforts leading to any 'evening out' of the regional distribution of TV company revenues over time (Clarke and Bradford, 1992, 1630-1).

The fact that the regional distribution of the different TV regions has remained fairly stable can be explained by recourse to the dynamics of competition. The various attempts by the regional TV companies to differentiate their offers, so as to attain a competitive advantage, have generally started life as innovations <u>specific to one company</u>. Such innovations, however, have usually prompted others to follow suit, eroding any initial differentiation. In the long run, this leaves individual companies in the same <u>relative</u> positions but alters the state of the system as a whole. Precisely how the system is altered depends on a number of things. The cost outlays of all individual companies are usually increased but, depending on the nature of the innovation, their revenues (and thus their net profits) may also be raised. Certain innovations provide services which are run on a profit making basis but others, such as promotional campaigns can have less tangible benefits. The search for competitive advantage can be simply a waste of resources, given that product differentiation cannot be sustained over time.

To summarise thus far, the spatial structure of ITV before deregulation, which has been characterised as a system of regional monopolies, rendered normal cost competition in the United Kingdom's television advertising airtime market practically impossible. It served to generate an uneven distribution in the ITV companies' revenues from advertising in a manner highly biased towards the South East of England. Efforts by the ITV companies to engage in non-cost competition seem to have had little effect in changing this regional bias. This account clearly illustrates how an explicitly spatial formulation of the system can reveal the way in which audiences in different regions are valued differently by the market. Given that all of this can be interpreted as resulting from the absence of within-region competition, however, there is a need to discuss the effects likely to stem from the breaking of the regionally monopolistic airtime market.

The description of the ITV system prior to deregulation as a set of spatial monopolies relied upon a fairly rigid definition of the system along two different dimensions. Firstly, it assumed that regions were not directly substitutable for one another (an advertiser wishing to advertise in the London region would not necessarily view the Scottish region as an acceptable substitute). Secondly, it assumed that different media were not direct substitutes (advertisers wanting television coverage in London will not necessarily see a press campaign in that region as a suitable substitute). Although the system did work on the basis of levels of inter-regional competition for a given medium (notably television) and inter-media competition within a given region, it is reasonable to recognise the system as essentially monopolistic.

A number of developments, relating both to policy and technological changes in televisual broadcasting (Collins, 1990; Reville, 1991) have already begun to introduce competition into that system. It has been noted that on 1st January 1993 intra-regional competition was formally introduced in the form of the separate selling of Channel 3 and Channel 4's airtime. Such developments as Direct Broadcasting by Satellite (DBS) and potential new channels such as Channel 5 are also highly important in this respect (Collins, 1991; Blanchard, 1990; Cornford and Robins, 1991). The principles drawn upon in the rest of the section consider the effects of such changes against the model of the system prior to broadcasting 'deregulation'.

Additional TV channels in any given region represent a form of competition likely to result in the unit price of advertising (measured in terms of 'cost-per-thousand' viewers) being reduced (for example, owing to the erosion of any monopoly profits). Moreover, additional channels represent increases in airtime extent that 'minority' audiences represent a larger and more profitable audience. A monopoly broadcaster, on the other hand, could offer both a mainstream and minority channel, thereby capturing all of the audience and providing a greater diversity of programming. Precisely how broadcasting competition will affect audiences in practice is difficult to asses.

There is widespread evidence of duplication of broadcasting effort in competitive situations and this has long been a key argument for the preservation of a public service channel in the United Kingdom in the form of the British Broadcasting Corporation. It has been suggested, however, that in this case, three or more commercial competitors would lead to TV companies seeking to target 'minority' audiences thus providing the socially desirable range of programme output (Hughes and Vine, 1989). This issue presents a difficult area on which to speculate in terms of viewer choice but in terms of audience size it is reasonable to assume that, at least to a certain extent, competition will lead to the existing audience being spread more thinly. This is significant because it implies that, overall, the total amount of advertising money needing to be spent to reach a given audience will have to increase. This is especially true given that there is usually a minimum threshold quantity of advertising required on each channel an advertiser uses in order to attain a given sales effect.

The regional implications of additional channels are similarly difficult to predict but there is little reason to believe that the likely increased level of advertising expenditure would be allocated more evenly across the ITV regions. The possibility of Channel 5 operating solely in the London region has been raised but, for the present, laid to rest by the ITC. If an additional channel in the London region were to be permitted, it is highly unlikely that the additional supply of airtime would reduce the imbalance in regional advertising revenues. It is not difficult to imagine that, given such an eventuality, many advertisers would want to maintain their advertising on the existing London channels as well as using a new London channel. The unit cost of airtime (measured in costs-per-thousand viewers) in London might fall as a result of intra-regional competition. The region would be highly likely, however, to continue to receive a disproportionately high share of the total national advertising expenditure as advertisers chase a more thinly spread audience in this single most important region. Again, it should be stressed that this analysis is highly speculative; but again it clearly demonstrates how the spatial organisation of the media may affect the valuation of audiences.

To summarise, therefore, this section as a whole has worked with an explicitly spatial conception of the (market) relations between advertising agencies and commercial television. The account has illustrated the crucial difference that the spatial structure of the system makes to the operation of this process. By focusing on the advertising airtime market it could be argued that the analysis concentrates unduly on the surface level appearance of things - for example, conflating the pricing of audiences with the valuation of audiences' watching time. This is to anticipate the kind of critique likely to emanate from a political economic position. In this light, the final section seeks to compare and contrast the alternative approaches to the television-advertising nexus presented above and to assess the possibility of a more integrated understanding of this vitally important aspect of the media.

Space, Time and the Television-advertising nexus

The two accounts of the television-advertising nexus presented above differ significantly. Given the expressed commitment to incorporate a thoroughgoing concern with space into the theorisation of the media-advertising nexus, Jhally's hermetically sealed aspatial argument demands a careful critique. The question of whether Jhally's account provides any room for spatial concerns is not an easy one. This section proceeds by outlining the obvious differences between the approaches described above, before detailing some of the difficulties with Jhally's account. This critique points to an alternative political economic approach which, on the face of it, appears to offer greater potential with respect to the integration of spatial concerns.

An immediately apparent difference between the accounts presented above concerns the definition of the commodity of interest. In the spatial account, attention focused on the trade of the 'advertising airtime' commodity, whilst Jhally (1990) developed

Smythe's (1977) thesis, stressing the need to dig beneath this surface level and to view the audience as a commodity. Clearly, advertising airtime and the advertising audience are not unrelated entities. At one level, the former would seem simply to allow access to the audience. But Jhally's point is that the relations between the two concepts are considerably more complex than this. Only by focusing on the audience as actively producing itself and being exploited by media capital can the dynamics of the advertising-media nexus be adequately grasped. If this theoretically powerful argument is accepted, yet the above argument on the significance of space is also given credence, this begs the question of whether a sensitivity to spatial factors can be integrated into Jhally's (1990) approach.

Whether or not this is possible requires a careful consideration of the compatibility of the accounts. We have to be clear about the precise nature of the regional Independent Television case. This case refers to a system where market prices, measured in money terms, exhibit regional differentials because of the spatial structure of the market. What is unclear and requires further analysis is whether there are corresponding regional variations in audience values or prices of production. This might be taken as implying that watching TV in different regions is analogous to labouring with different skills - but these regionally variable 'skills' are, in fact, wholly contingent phenomena. They are not really analogous to labourers' skills. This analogy is more convincing in terms of the move to narrowcasting, where a subdemographically defined audience segment can reasonably be considered as offering something more akin to particular skills. This cannot, however, be adequately formulated in spatial terms; regions are not homogeneous in terms of their audience make-up. An account of precisely how market prices diverge from prices of production and values in a system of regional broadcasting monopolies requires considerable further work. Whether or not this kind of analysis is necessary, however, is a rather different question. Empirically, advertising audiences and airtime costs are quite different, though clearly related, entities. Nonetheless, the account of the ITV system was able to suspend a consideration of this relation without running into immediate difficulties. A need to assert the distinction only arose in considering the effect of competition in splitting the audience.

Although Jhally's (1990) work represents a virtuosic attempt to extend Marxian theory, it does tend to run up against difficulties. The problem of accounting for evident spatial variations in the advertising airtime market could be conveniently side-stepped as a matter of minor importance. It is argued here, however, that this kind of issue is rather more significant than a mere contingency. The remainder of the paper presents a further critique of Jhally's work which opens the way for an alternative formulation of the television-advertising nexus.

One of the most important issues regarding the validity of Jhally's work centres on his specification of television viewing as performing a type of labour. This conceptualisation implies that audiences are a reproducible commodity and that viewing is an actual form of labour (audiences reflexively produce themselves). Jhally's analysis is homologous to Marx's, rather than simply analogous or metaphorical. Lebowitz (1984, cited in Jhally, 1990, 115) has suggested that Jhally's thesis is a misappropriation of Marx's method, generating the decidedly un-Marxian conclusion that TV viewing can be a source of surplus value. This critique can be framed in more substantive terms by focusing on Jhally's premiss that watching TV is (a form of) labouring. Whereas labourers under capitalism are compelled to work (because they are wage slaves) people are arguably not similarly compelled to watch TV (Truchill, 1984). All forms of consumption (e.g. preparing a meal) require work but Marx explicitly did not afford this work the significance of paid work upon which his theory of value ultimately depends.

Though by no means constituting a large literature, a number of different approaches to advertising broadly align themselves with the political economy tradition. 'Orthodox' Marxist accounts (Arriaga, 1984; Janus and Roncagliolo, 1978) view advertising as a necessary circulation cost, acting to speed up the circulation process (i.e. to shorten the turnover time of capital). It is in this work that the main political economic alternative to the 'watching theory of value', is to be found. This tradition of work essentially takes the audience as a non-reproducible good, which therefore generates rent:

'The Marxian theory of differential rent is not limited to capitalist agriculture but can be applied whenever a greater productivity of capital is related to a natural or external condition not reproducible by capital' (Arriaga, 1984, 43-4).

The idea of 'broadcasting rent' deserves considerable future attention. As Livant (1985) recognises, there has been significant recent development of land rent theory (Fine, 1979; Harvey, 1982) which could provide a sound basis for a theoretical understanding of the television-advertising nexus. Livant suggests that urban land rent theory is likely to be more applicable to broadcasting than agricultural rent theory, on the grounds that the analogy of 'location' may serve better than 'fertility' in considering the nature and value of audiences. That is, broadcasters can never guarantee that airtime will definitely generate sales. All they can guarantee is watching activity. Increasingly, however, this guarantee is able to specify a given audience segment. Although this idea demands a fuller future analysis, at an analogical level it would seem to offer considerable potential. The relative values of the alternative approaches might be considered to hinge on at least two considerations: firstly the view taken on extent to which capital is empowered to produce audiences - on whether it is more valid to see the audience as a reproducible or non-reproducible commodity; secondly, it depends on the kinds of insights the alternatives provide with respect to the actual workings of the media-advertising nexus. In particular it is vital to assess the capacity of any approach to cope with the spatial dimensions of the system.

Conclusions

This paper has not ranged across the whole terrain of media theory. Indeed, it has not even covered all existing theoretical accounts of the media-advertising nexus. It has, though, forcefully argued that geographical space has an important influence on the media by critically exploring the contours of one substantive area. The more general argument, it is suggested, has a far wider applicability than the specific area directly covered here. As noted in the introduction, whilst the paper provides a detailed specific example, it carries a general message. Rather than conclude the paper with a summary of the detailed points covered, therefore, it is worth reinforcing the argument once again with the use of a final small but nonetheless telling example.

Meehan (1984) has developed a rather different explanation of the media-advertising nexus to any of those considered above. She suggests that the commodity determining the nature of the system as a whole is, in fact, television ratings. Market research companies produce and trade this commodity and the media soon becomes tied in to the system, in a more or less single-minded way, as their raison d'etre begins to revolve around the ratings game. Jhally (1990, 112) reasonably notes that, although the system will undoubtedly be strongly influenced by ratings, it is difficult to afford ratings such a determinate role. In making this point he remarks that it is 'obviously in the interests of broadcasters to have the ratings as high as possible (leading to higher advertising rates) while advertisers would benefit from low measures of audience watching.' As the discussion above demonstrated, the peculiarities of the regional structure of commercial television in the United Kingdom render this is in no way an obvious truth. The quotation from Broadbent and Jacobs (1984, 235), cited above, highlights the perverse character of this situation in the case of the United Kingdom's commercial television system. Once again, geographical space can be seen to make a significant difference to the operation of the media.

The business of 'adding space' to media theory can, therefore, problematize all manner of 'obvious truths'. This could be regarded as presenting an unfortunate state of affairs. On the other hand, recognition of this fact allows us to see that a variety of interesting challenges are to be found lying, untouched, at the intersection of geography and the media. The paper has had much to say about the regionality of the media but it is quite evident that there are many important areas left to broach. Globalization, local media and other topics with an explicitly spatial dimension are most certainly not unestablished topics of concern. The argument made here, though, is that a far more self-conscious effort to conceive of <u>all</u> media processes as being embedded in space, as well as time, can only serve to allow for a more adequate conceptualisation of media processes. This kind of clarion call has certainly been made before (cf. Moores, 1986). This paper has been an attempt to put this task back onto the rails.

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Notes

(1) It is worth noting that this example has, for the sake of simplicity, abstracted the dimension of time from the picture. This causes no difficulties in principle. It is easy to add time to our chemical example by noting that there may be a time lag before reactions occur, hence temporary proximity may not cause an explosion where prolonged proximity would. (I accept that this argument may not work in practice - I am no chemist! - but it works in principle.)

(2) The postscript is published in Garnham (1990): All subsequent page references refer to the 1990 version. Interestingly, the preface seems to refer to the postscript as 'the problem [rather than 'economy'] of time'.

(3) It ought to be noted that these figures should probably control for the significant economies of scale involved in film production. One would expect a lower per minute (or 'unit') cost for the longer programmes rather than the shorter adverts.

(4) I am grateful to James Cornford (CURDS, Newcastle-upon-Tyne) for this point.

(5) that is, the demand curve for advertising airtime would seem to be, at least over part of its range in certain ITV regions, upward-sloping.

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