9 Consumerism and everyday life

Introduction

The final strand of media theory that we will consider are theories of media consumerism and media audiences that heralded the move away from reception theory – emphasized by the uses and gratifications approach (see Chapter 2) but typical in many strands of media theory – towards theories of consumption. Since the 1980s, partly as a consequence of feminist theory along with the cultural turn in postmodern theory, media studies of consumerism have emerged as a major and distinct theoretical tradition of their own. Theories of consumerism have responded to an orthodox behaviourist, modernist, structuralist, patriarchal and Marxist emphasis on the power of material production. Ethnographic accounts of active, creative audiences take precedence over the idea that mass culture is bad for you. Moreover, media texts and products are considered to empower as well as, if not more so than, exert power over consumers. With media products as with capitalist production more generally, ‘goods are both the creations and the creators of the culturally constituted world’ (McCracken 1990: 77). As such, texts and products may contain meanings, such as profit motives, but we also create meanings from what we consume. Consumerist media theory is also – more straightforwardly – a response to the rise of consumerism in a ‘consumer society’ from circa the 1950s in Western countries (Corrigan 1997: 2).

Like all the traditions of media theory considered in this book, consumerism is theorized within a contested arena of competing perspectives and arguments. For example, it is a matter of debate merely to define who and what media audiences are, given that they are – unlike, say, theatre audiences – geographically dispersed and therefore invisible. As Shaun Moores (2000) suggests, it ‘becomes harder to specify exactly where broadcasting’s audiences begin and end. The boundaries of “audiencehood” are inherently unstable’ (Moores 2000: 17). A further contestation is the relationship between media consumption and production. As we shall discuss, Fiske and de Certeau position consumers either in resistance to or untainted by the media and cultural industries. By contrast, Jenkins, Silverstone, Abercrombie and Longhurst consider consumers to be producers themselves. As such, the clear-cut distinction between media consumption and production no longer holds firm, and this is facilitated by new communications technologies like the internet that provide media-literate individuals with the tools to encode – not only decode – their own mediated messages by creating websites, online
music hubs, and so on. The pervasiveness of media consumption and, increasingly, production in everyday life is a theoretical concern explored throughout this chapter. We will end our discussion of consumerism on a cautious note, however, with the work of Bourdieu that returns us to the question addressed by Giddens's structuration theory (see Chapter 5) about how structure — particularly capitalist structures of media and cultural production — determines agency (i.e. everyday consumerism).

**Fiske: consumer resistance**

John Fiske is the archetypal exponent of consumer power. Contrary to Adorno and orthodox political economy theories, he asserts that 'Popular culture is made by the people, not produced by the culture industry' (Fiske 1989: 24). 'Power to the people', as John Lennon sang, is actualized in Fiske's theory of consumer resistance. By 'the people', he does not mean a homogeneous 'mass' of passive individuals but a fluid, heterogeneous formation of productive consumers who embody 'a shifting set of allegiances that cross all social categories' (Fiske 1989: 24). This explains why advertisers waste so much money trying to target particular demographic groups. Fiske would argue that men aged 18–35, for instance, do not exhibit similar interests and patterns of consumption, so external sociological factors (age and gender in this case) are inadequate in classifying such a diverse group. Commercial breaks during televised football matches will always carry advertising aimed at young men — razors, cars, video games — but not all young men need to shave regularly, and not all young men drive or can afford to buy a car, and not all young men play video games. Fiske compares the desperate pursuit of the people by advertisers to 'a conflict between an occupying army and guerrilla fighters ... the hegemonic forces of homogeneity are always met by the resistances of heterogeneity' (Fiske 1991a: 8). Media and cultural industries speak of serving consumers with high-quality products, entertainment and information — 'that's what they want, that's what they'll get' says the wise newspaper editor — but the two sides are actually engaged in prolonged warfare.

Of course, the people cannot entirely decide what is advertised to them or what products are offered to them by industries under the dominant influence of white, patriarchal capitalism. We can choose not to watch a television programme or not to see a film, but we cannot choose what we want to watch on television or at the cinema. Fiske acknowledges this situation but still insists that consumers make popular culture because they determine what becomes popular. Cultural and media products are rejected by consumers — they become expensive flops, such as Waterworld (1995) and Thunderbirds (2004) — if they only serve dominant ideological interests that provide no
scope for alternative meanings or pleasures. By contrast, cultural products become popular when they 'carry contradictory lines of force' (Fiske 1991a: 2) that provide scope for alternative, resistant readings, which in turn allow the people to make meaning and pleasure from them. Whereas Hall's Encoding/Decoding model (see Chapter 4) emphasizes the power of dominant ideologies to impose preferred readings of media texts (the dominant code) upon audiences, Fiske suggests that Hall's oppositional code is not the exception but the rule. He argues that audiences routinely resist and reinterpret the preferred meanings of media texts such as celebrities and pop songs. This resistance is located not only in the texts themselves – although, as previously discussed, a celebrity such as Madonna is only popular because she provides scope for alternative readings of her persona – but in the contexts of everyday life in which these texts are used by consumers. Fiske identifies two kinds of resistance that are interrelated: semiotic and evasive resistance. Semiotic resistance succeeds in constructing oppositional meanings from texts, whereas evasive resistance escapes any constraints of meaning within texts by producing pleasures that override such meanings.

Although resistance is commonplace, it only exists in surrogate form against the dominant ideology of profit-driven capitalist production. Resistance and dominance are like twins, constantly quarrelling but dependent on each other for their meanings. Fiske refers to two economies of television: the financial economy and the cultural economy (Fiske 1987; 1989: 26–32), differences of which are compared in Figure 9.1. The financial economy of commercial television is focused on the production of popular programming that will attract high audience ratings and, subsequently, substantial advertising revenue. The audience is nothing more than a commodity in this financial economy – a statistical category (say, ten million people mostly aged 18–35) – that can be sold to advertisers in return for profitable revenues. In stark contrast, the cultural economy of television is centred on the consumption of programming that essentially determines which programmes become popular and which become short-lived flops. In the cultural economy the audience is no longer a mere commodity but, rather, a producer of

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Figure 9.1 Fiske's two economies of television
meanings and pleasures through semiotic and evasive forms of resistance. Media texts are produced by both media industries and audiences, depending on which of the two economies we locate the texts in, but the cultural economy is the ultimate producer of popular culture. The cultural economy is the key point at which the discursive relationship between media industries and audiences transforms a text into either a success or a flop. The financial economy cannot determine outcomes in the cultural economy. Producers in the financial economy can decide to withdraw an unsuccessful television drama if ratings — governed by audiences in the cultural economy — are low, or they can commission a new series if ratings are high, but they cannot predict the ever-changing moods and preferences of the cultural economy.

Several case studies provide Fiske with evidence for his theory of consumer resistance. For example, he identifies semiotic resistance in young female fans of Madonna. Madonna as a media text (pop star) in the cultural economy enables her fans to identify with a rebellious, subversive, feminist representation that they can transpose into their everyday relations with others. As the author states:

The teenage girl fan of Madonna who fantasizes her own empowerment can translate this fantasy into behaviour, and can act in an empowered way socially, thus winning more social territory for herself. When she meets others who share her fantasies and freedom there is the beginning of a sense of solidarity, of a shared resistance, that can support and encourage progressive action on the micro-social level.

(Fiske 1989: 172)

Madonna’s fans are guerilla fighters who use the meanings that they produce from the star’s persona to activate a ‘felt collectivity’ (Fiske 1989: 24) against existing patriarchal structures. These fans draw on the fantasy of the Madonna persona to empower their status in ‘real’ social contexts, such as their relations with boyfriends and ‘their refusal to give up the street to men as their territory’ (Fiske 1991a: 11). Over time, this guerilla fighting is likely to affect social change and gradually erode the patriarchal structures that disempower young women. Another example of consumer resistance — here closer to what Fiske defines as evasive resistance — is video gaming. Video gamers are less interested in searching out resistant meanings against dominant ideologies, but instead experience resistant pleasures in intense bodily action and concentration. Gamers become authors of their consumption, performing their bodies in sophisticated enactments that produce intense displays of emotional, orgasmic release — losing themselves in the game — which constitute ‘moments of evasion of ideological control’ (Fiske 1991a: 93). Such intense pleasure threatens the financial economy of popular
culture, not least, by internalizing desire in bodily practices rather than external, cosmetic products.

Fiske has extended his theory of consumer resistance to a multicultural perspective on the United States as an embattled society moving closer towards a heterogeneous social order in which a wide range of forms of consent are given to its people (see Fiske 1993). However, he has since acknowledged deficiencies in a universal view of everyday consumption as radically resistant to corporate intentions (see Fiske 1996). He has certainly had his fair share of criticism, most notably in accusations of cultural populism (McGuigan 1992). Jim McGuigan attacks Fiske's celebratory perspective on consumer resistance, 'never countenancing the possibility that a popular reading could be anything other than "progressive"' (McGuigan 1992: 72). McGuigan argues that Fiske's theory of consumer resistance panders to the populist jargon of free-market cultural industries that also insist on empowering consumers, but only - implicitly - those obedient consumers who purchase the products that are supposed to empower them. He also criticizes Fiske for neglecting to discuss issues of corporate ownership, regulation and technological innovation that have characterized the increasingly concentrated financial economy of television and other media industries in the contemporary era. Nonetheless, recent widespread warfare between the occupying army of major record companies and guerilla fighters - in the shape of illegal uploaders and downloaders of pirated internet music (MP3 file-sharing) - does resonate with Fiske's theory. If we turn to Michel de Certeau's ideas about everyday tactics which inspired Fiske's theory of consumer resistance, however, some key differences between the two theorists can be revealed.

**De Certeau: everyday tactics**

The practices of everyday life detailed by de Certeau (1984) consist of a range of tactics deployed by consumers within the formal 'strategies' of powerful - i.e. corporate capitalist, scientific, and so on - institutions. Both tactics (consumer practices) and strategies (corporate ones) are types of action that seek to occupy space and time. Strategies operate so that space is successfully won over time, through property acquisition and ownership for instance. These spaces become isolated as places of power (like scientific laboratories) and acquire a panoptic function in tandem with Foucault's theory of discourse in disciplinary societies (see Chapter 4). Tactics, in comparison, win time rather than space, for 'a tactic depends on time' (de Certeau 1984: xix) as it is an action performed within the complex ebbs and flows of everyday schedules. A tactic 'must vigilantly make use of the cracks that particular conjunctions open in the surveillance of the propriety powers. It poaches in
them' (de Certeau 1984: 37). An example of everyday tactics is the act of reading as poaching. While authors write books with the intention that their every word is read and preferably remembered, in everyday poaching tactics such as speed reading there is a freedom of movement and 'an autonomy in relation to the determinations of the text' (de Certeau 1984: 176). This is partly an historical outcome of the transition from oral to silent reading (most of us now read books in silence). Oral reading once served as a strategy for powerful institutions such as the medieval Church to control the places where it exercised its religious doctrine - as Innis's and McLuhan's medium theories testify (see Chapter 3) - but with the expansion of near-universal literacy the silent reader is 'Emancipated from places, the reading body is freer in its movements' (de Certeau 1984: 176). Readers, free to make their own meanings from texts, are ‘nomads’ or travellers, not constrained by place (property) in the strategic sense.

It should be noted that de Certeau’s theory of everyday tactics is similar to a strand of literary theory that suggests a text (novel, poem, play, and so on) only begins to have meaning when it is read. Moreover, if we the readers cannot afford the time to sit down and read a whole book or watch a whole film, we might speed read or speed watch by skipping pages or fast-forwarding the DVD to find out what happens at the end. The case of speed reading points to a fundamental difference between de Certeau and Fiske. Whereas Fiske emphasizes resistance in the discursive relations between the production and consumption of media texts, de Certeau offers a more radical theoretical perspective. He states that ‘the operation of encoding, which is articulated on signifiers, produces the meaning, which is thus not defined by something that is deposited in the text, by an “intention”, or by an activity on the part of the author’ (de Certeau 1984: 171). In short, an author’s intended meanings are at the mercy of the textual meanings produced by readers. Hall’s Encoding/Decoding model is turned on its head by de Certeau, who argues that consumer tactics amount to practices of encoding – not decoding – that determine how texts are made to mean things. Authors and producers also encode texts (strategies) but the encoding of consumers (tactics) transcends this moment of original encoding. These two processes of encoding exist in arbitrary relation to one another due to the temporal quirks of everyday life. The strategies of producers are superior to tactics in their occupation of space – evidenced by their places of production, such as state-of-the-art record studios or huge manufacturing plants – but they cannot control how everyday people play with time and make time for their own tactical practices. So ‘the two ways of acting can be distinguished according to whether they bet on place or on time’ (de Certeau 1984: 39). Strategies bet on – and win – places; tactics bet on – and win – time.

As well as the poaching tactics of speed reading, de Certeau cites tactics in another everyday practice which in France is called la perrugue: ‘the worker's
own work disguised as work for his employer' (de Certeau 1984: 25). Those
who indulge in la perrugue are usurping their contracted work time for a
different sort of time that might be spent writing love letters or playing online
games. Moreover, la perrugue is 'infiltrating itself everywhere and becoming
more and more common' (de Certeau 1984: 29), not just in work contexts but
also in contexts of consumption and use. Everyday consumer tactics in
winning time escape the knowledge of researchers (whether academic or
market researchers), however, because of their elusiveness: 'The practices of
consumption are the ghosts of the society that carries their name' (de Certeau
1984: 35). Evidence based on analysis of texts or statistics about audience
numbers reveals nothing about such practices. For example, 'once the images
broadcast by television and the time spent in front of the TV set have been
analysed, it remains to be asked what the consumer makes of these images
and during these hours' (de Certeau 1984: 31). Television, like the medieval
Church, aims to isolate texts (programmes) from readers (viewers) in order to
control their meanings in line with powerful strategic interests, but it is
helpless in the face of 'the silent, transgressive, ironic or poetic activity of
readers (or television viewers) who maintain their reserve in private and
without the knowledge of the “masters”' (de Certeau 1984: 172). This utili­
zation of private time by ordinary consumers is the practice of ‘making do'
with the cultural resources offered by strategic powers, and they make do with
these resources – TV programmes, popular music, and so on – in their own
ways, outside any constraints on their time that profit-driven producers aim
to impose. The transgressive tactic of switching channels during commercial
breaks is one way that television viewers make do with what is offered to
them.

De Certeau's idea that media texts have no determining influence on
consumers (i.e. media audiences) has been widely criticized (see Brunsdon
1989; McGuigan 1992; Buckingham 1993). An alternative approach is offered
by studies of media literacy that aim to explore to what extent media texts
are used by consumers – like readers of books – to gain knowledge and learn
skills. Although a very different theoretical approach to consumer tactics,
media literacy research tends to uphold de Certeau's – and Fiske's – argument
that media audiences are sophisticated users of texts rather than passive
consumers. David Buckingham's (1987) research with young viewers of Brit­
ish soap opera EastEnders (1985–), for instance, found that they were highly
critical of its implausible storylines and 'did not confuse its representation of
the world with reality' (Buckingham 1987: 200). Likewise, Buckingham's
(1993) later research with children found that they were sceptical about the
intentions of television advertisements, showed awareness of how audiences
– including themselves – were targeted, and understood how celebrities were
used in advertisements to promote a brand image. These high media literacy
levels among Buckingham's interviewees demonstrate their 'metalinguistic
competencies' (Buckingham 1993: 257) and contradict Postman's medium theory perspective on the 'disappearance of childhood' (as discussed in Chapter 3): 'In regarding children as passive victims of television, [Postman] ignores the diverse competencies that are involved in making sense of the medium' (Buckingham 1993: 127; see also Buckingham 2000). Buckingham argues that children should be encouraged to use television as a means of developing critical perspectives - not, as Postman would have it, kept away from television and handed a pile of books.

In a similar vein, Marie Messenger Davies's (1989) research with children found that they take pleasure in recounting the music and narratives of ads on television, but rarely feel the desire to purchase the products being advertised, which often are forgotten about. Furthermore, David Gauntlett's (1996) creative video project in which children filmed their local environment concludes that 'the children demonstrated a high level of media literacy ... Making a video came naturally to them' (Gauntlett 1996: 143). More recently, Sonia Livingstone's (2002) research on young people's new media use advocates a 'learning by doing' approach evident, for instance, in the empowering experience of computer game-playing: 'the skills that young people have developed within their leisure time are only now being recognised as, potentially, crucial for ICT literacy (or literacies) more generally' (Livingstone 2002: 232). Children and young people, indeed, are often more media and computer literate than adults, precisely because they have learnt how to watch television or play computer games - just like they have learnt to speak, read and write - from a young age. However, the young continue to be treated as vulnerable victims of media texts and technologies, not least the dangers of the internet. Livingstone (2002: 242) agrees that regulation is needed but that existing forms - instead of regulating commercial contents - tend to regulate the 'learning through fun' practices that hone young people's media literacy skills. Ofcom, the regulatory body for the British media and communications industry, recently (2006) banned junk food ads from television and other media that target young consumers. Even the most adept practitioner of de Certeau's consumer tactics, it could be argued, is only offered a restricted freedom in relation to media regulation.

Textual poachers and fandom

Henry Jenkins's ethnographic study of fan practices is heavily influenced by the theories of Fiske and particularly de Certeau. He rejects the negative stereotype of a fan as a 'fanatic' (from which the word 'fan' derives) who is too emotionally obsessed by a particular 'fad' or 'craze' that is usually considered by others to be trivial or even infantile. Fan as 'fanatic' resonates in at least three theoretical traditions we have encountered: Adorno's political economy
theory of the culture industry (Chapter 7), the ideological construction of popular music fandom (Chapter 6 under discussion of McRobbie’s work), as well as theories of media effects (Chapter 2). Frenzied teenage girl fans, otherwise known as teenyboppers, queuing to see their pop idols at a concert are cited as evidence of mindless consumption. However, in *Textual Poachers* (1992) Jenkins strongly defends fan practices as meaningful pursuits that are both creative and productive. Echoing de Certeau, he argues that ‘fans actively assert their mastery over the mass-produced texts which provide the raw materials for their own cultural productions and the basis for their social interactions’ (Jenkins 1992: 23-4). He also agrees with de Certeau’s claim that readers are nomadic and freely move from one text to another without permanently becoming immersed in any particular text. Fans, like nomadic readers, are not led – like a dog on a lead – to decode dominant, negotiated or oppositional codes in media productions. On the contrary, a fan is ‘continuously re-evaluating his or her relationship to the fiction and reconstructing its meanings according to more immediate interests’ (Jenkins 1992: 34-5). Fans, like other consumers, wander away from any preferred meanings in a singular text because they consume texts intertextually – as Jameson theorized (see Chapter 8) – and experience pleasure in these fleeting intertextual connections.

Despite the obvious similarities with de Certeau’s theory, Jenkins suggests two differences between his perspective on fans and de Certeau’s perspective on everyday consumers. First, fans interact with each other on a reasonably regular basis – de Certeau’s consumers, by contrast, appear isolated from each other, not least because they are *imagined* consumers in the sense that de Certeau neglects to consider audience research into real consumption practices. Jenkins, on the other hand, is a participant observer in the network of real fan practices that he researches and subsequently theorizes. Fans interact with each other through, for example, fanzines, social events and even – in the case of Trekkers (fans of *Star Trek* (1966-69)) – annual conferences. Second, Jenkins shows that fans are not split apart from relations with producers – in the way that Fiske’s resistant consumers and de Certeau’s speed readers are – but actively become involved in their own forms of production that might also affect producer decision-making within media institutions. Jenkins refers to fan artists (as opposed to fan consumers) who engage in entrepreneurial activities such as producing fanzines and art work dedicated to their favourite television dramas, rock bands, and so on (see Figure 9.2). Media fandom is ‘founded less upon the consumption of pre-existing texts than on the production of fan texts’ (Jenkins 1992: 47). Moreover, fans often try to interact not just with themselves but with media producers in order to express their own views, for example, on what should happen next in a relationship between two characters in a television serial, or what the sleeve design should be for a rock band’s latest album. Fans are therefore readers and
writers — not just travellers — who encode their own fan texts and may, in some cases, affect encoding in the institutional production of their favourite text.

Fans of media productions interact with each other and with institutional producers in what Jenkins describes as a 'participatory culture'. This concept derives from Howard Becker's (1982) concept of 'art worlds'. Consistent with Becker's interactionist perspective (see Chapter 5) but more often discussed as a concept that brings together production and consumption practices, art worlds consist of disparate groups — artists, distributors, publicists and audiences, for example — that nonetheless collude in collective activities that together give meaning and substance to the end products. These collective activities dispel the myth that works of art are created by some intrinsic talent or genius on the part of an individual producer. On the contrary, all who participate in art worlds breathe life into the activities of that world and perhaps bring it to the attention of interested outsiders. Like art worlds, participatory cultures of fandom 'transform the experience of media consumption into the production of new texts, indeed of a new culture and a new community' (Jenkins 1992: 46). The outcome is an autonomous, 'self-sufficient fan culture' (Jenkins 1992: 47) that can exist outside the frames of reference determined by media texts and actively seeks — and often succeeds —
to exist as a counterweight to decisions made in the determination (i.e., institutional production) of media texts. A recent example of a cult media text that has attracted a significant fan following and been the topic of discussion on endless online message boards is the television drama *Lost* (2004–). Jenkins’s conception of fandom as participatory culture has inspired a growing body of ethnographic research and theory into fan cultures (see, for example, Bacon-Smith 1992; Hills 2002; Sandvoss 2005).

**Silverstone: the cycle of consumption and mediated experience**

Roger Silverstone’s (1994; see also Silverstone et al. 1992) consumption cycle usefully attempts to understand how everyday consumer practices feed back to producer practices, which are in turn fed back to consumers. His model of mutually dependent consumption and production is not dissimilar to Jenkins’s concept of participatory culture, and similarly rejects structuralist theories that cite production (or the encoding of texts) as determining consumption (how texts are decoded). Silverstone notes six phases in the cycle of consumption. The first phase of *commodification* (institutional production) in material and mediated products both influences and is influenced by five other ‘dependent moments of consumption’ termed imagination, appropriation, objectification, incorporation and conversion (Silverstone 1994: 123–4). Second, the phase of consumer *imagination* usually occurs before – but sometimes after – the purchasing of a product. Imagination and anticipation of the pleasure that might arise from a prospective purchase as well as the work of attaching pleasurable meanings on to the purchased product ‘either as a compensation for disappointed desire or as a celebration of its fulfillment’ (Silverstone 1994: 126) are compared by Silverstone to those productive, imaginative tactics outlined by de Certeau and typified by speed readers. Following imagination, the third phase of *appropriation* occurs when consumers transform the mediated and public meanings of products – that are initially consumed via advertisements or supermarket shelves – into their personal and private meanings in post-purchase contexts such as living rooms. *Objectification* – the fourth phase – then occurs through the embedment of new products alongside existing ones in everyday domestic consumer lives. Television, for instance, becomes objectified in everyday household interactions: ‘accounts of television programmes, the characters in soap operas, or events in the news, provide a basis for identification and self-representation’ (Silverstone 1994: 128–9).

Following objectification, a fifth phase of *incorporation* occurs when household products become ‘a part of the furniture’ and float freely within the ebbs and flows of everyday life, such as ‘the use of radio as a companion
for the tea-break' (Silverstone 1994: 129). The sixth and final phase within the consumption cycle involves the conversion of products with everyday personal and domestic meanings into products that are capable of conveying meanings outside the home, in public contexts such as offices and cafés. Television programmes form topics of conversation beyond close-knit family members and friends, and become talked about with classmates, colleagues and even strangers. Consumption has now turned full circle to inform the phase of production or commodification that began the cycle:

The consumption cycle, perhaps more of a spiral in its dialectical movement, acknowledges that objects not only move in and out of commodification as such ... but that their status as commodities (and their meaning as a commodity) is constantly in flux. (Silverstone 1994: 124)

Figure 9.3 Silverstone's cycle of consumption

Figure 9.3 shows the cyclical process involved in these six phases of consumption. Significantly, this cyclical model questions the emphasis on the commodity values of media and cultural products associated with theories of commodity fetishism (Adorno 1991) and ideology. If consumers routinely feed back their thoughts and feelings to producers at the phase of commodification, this would banish the theory that commodities have purely ideological functions, given that they must be – to some extent – inflected with consumer values. However, Silverstone's cycle only rotates in one direction from public to private (through appropriation) and later from private to public (through conversion) contexts of consumption. Although the purchasing of mediated products such as television programmes or music on the radio never physically occurs – and Silverstone acknowledges this point about non-material products – it is still implied that both mediated and
material products go through some sense of personal embodiment or private ownership within this consumer cycle. The many media consumer practices that do not involve private, personal purchase or commitment – watching televised sports coverage in public places, for example – would appear to break the cycle somewhere between appropriation and conversion, and would therefore never feed back to the phase of commodification, leaving media institutions oblivious to such elusive, impersonal consumer trends.

Elsewhere, Silverstone (1999) has outlined three dimensions of mediated experience that overlap but are nonetheless distinctive:

1. **Play**: this is not a dimension regularly associated with media experience but we *play* with media routinely as a source of pleasure, and media play is not only applicable to computer and video gamers: ‘Watching television, surfing the net, doing the crossword, guessing the answers in a quiz, taking part in a lottery, all involves play’ (Silverstone 1999: 60-1). Play is an act of participation in a make-believe situation which temporarily lifts us out of the ordinariness of everyday life: ‘players can safely leave real life and engage in an activity that is meaningful in its rule-governed excess’ (Silverstone 1999: 60).

2. **Performance**: unlike play, performance is a very real activity: ‘performances are not just games … Our lives and identities depend upon them. They become real, the real thing’ (Silverstone 1999: 70). This is performance in the Goffmanian sense of believing in the ‘fronts’ that we present to others – even when they are an act – but Silverstone also suggests that media consumers move ‘across the boundary between performer and audience, with increasing ease, as a matter of course’ (Silverstone 1999: 71). The internet – MySpace and YouTube in particular – provides us with scope to be performers and producers as well as audiences, albeit not mass performers for a captive audience: ‘Technology has given me a stage. I can perform on it. I can claim a space. If someone would only listen’ (Silverstone 1999: 77).

3. **Consumption**: like play and performance, consumption is an *acting out* of meanings and pleasures, but it is an act of everyday ordinariness in contrast to the slightly more extraordinary experiences of media play and performance. Like de Certeau, Silverstone argues that consumption is about the dynamic, creative use of time, which means different things to different people. For many of us our time is scarce and precious, but we succeed nonetheless in *making* time our own and contradicting mediated attempts (e.g. advertising) to determine our time within the parameters of obedient consumption.

These three dimensions of mediated experience are consistent with Silverstone’s cycle of consumption because they do not consider consumption
as a separate process following production, but instead consider the two processes as dynamically intertwined in the everyday. The interaction between mediated experiences and our everyday lives is a theme that Silverstone continues to explore in his last book, *Media and Morality* (2007), which introduces the notion of ‘the mediapolis’: ‘The mediapolis is, I intend, the mediated space of appearance in which the world appears and in which the world is constituted in its worldliness, and through which we learn about those who are and who are not like us’ (Silverstone 2007: 31). Moreover, media technologies intrude into and affect how we manage our everyday lives. The mediapolis with its mediated appearance of the world ‘provides a framework for the definition and conduct of our relationships to the other, and especially the distant other’ – but the immediacy of mediated experience via internet and mobile phones, for example, tends to obscure differences between people and cultures in social reality to the point that mediated appearances are ‘easily mistaken for life itself’ (Silverstone 2007: 110, 114). So while a new kind of ‘publicness’ is facilitated by mediated technologies, Silverstone also fears that the mediapolis disguises the difference between peoples located in it: ‘Such difference is what constitutes the basis for what we have in common. What we have in common is our difference’ (Silverstone 2007: 118). Use of the internet by terrorists to mediate their message, for example, is a dark side of the mediapolis that threatens the creative and performative potential of mediated experience.

**The diffused audience and consumer authority**

A new paradigm – or theoretical framework – for understanding media consumption is proposed by Nicholas Abercrombie and Brian Longhurst in *Audiences* (1998). The two authors argue that what they call the Incorporation/Resistance Paradigm (IRP) should be replaced by a Spectacle/Performance Paradigm (SPP). The IRP emerged from structuralism and the work of Hall in particular (see Chapter 4), but its influence can also be traced to Fiske’s theory of consumer resistance. Although Fiske argues that consumer practices such as gaming routinely resist or evade incorporation by dominant ideological and commercial interests, his theory is still located within this paradigmatic tension between dominance and opposition; incorporation and resistance. Abercrombie and Longhurst show how the IRP has become the orthodox paradigm for theorizing media but they argue that ‘the ordered structure given by the IRP is being undermined by the disorder of actual audience response – a disorder of unpredictability not of resistance’ (Abercrombie and Longhurst 1998: 32). Instead of a receptive, captivated audience assumed by Hall’s Encoding/Decoding model, we see the emergence of a more recent generation of skilled media audiences. According to the authors,
audiences today use media texts and technologies in more sophisticated ways than older generations who grew up with the intense visual media experience offered by cinema and theatre. Today’s media audiences tend to consume and communicate through multi-media technologies that dispel the myth of the disciplined audience member who pays close attention to – and decodes a position in relation to – a single media text. Indeed, media today are better understood as resources rather than texts given the symbolic creativity with which they are put to use by young consumers in particular, often for productive ends (see Willis 1990). Hegemony theory and its assumption of a dominant power bloc no longer make sense in contemporary culture where power is far more diffused (Abercrombie and Longhurst 1998: 36).

Three types of audience are distinguished:

1. **Simple audiences**: examples would be theatre audiences or spectators at a football match, as well as studio audiences for a television show. Simple audiences are co-present at and participate intensely in the performances they witness: ‘the performance conventions for simple audiences demand high attention’ (Abercrombie and Longhurst 1998: 54).

2. **Mass audiences**: while simple audiences exist in co-present contexts, mass audiences exist in mediated ones (e.g. watching television, listening to music online). Mass audiences are not tied to the ceremonial rituals of simple audiences – such as attending a theatre performance, which requires an immediate aesthetic – but instead they require a mediated or constructed aesthetic in order to appreciate what they consume. However, both mass and simple audiences can only be understood in relation to distinctive performances and ‘involve a communication between producers and consumers who are kept physically and socially separate from one another’ (Abercrombie and Longhurst 1998: 58).

3. **Diffused audiences**: unlike simple and mass audiences, the diffused audience is not party to any singular performance but consumes several via ‘a fusion of different forms of the media’ (Abercrombie and Longhurst 1998: 76). For example, someone who watches the news on TV at the same time as sending a text message via mobile phone and listening to music via MP3 player is exhibiting the skills of a diffused, multitask consumer. Being a diffused audience member in modern societies is ‘constitutive of everyday life’ and a performative experience because media ‘provide an important resource for everyday performance’ (Abercrombie and Longhurst 1998: 68, 74; see also Longhurst 2007, who discusses ordinary life experiences of belonging to and distinguishing from others in diffused audience and performance contexts). Diffused audiences are also less clearly demarcated in their relation to producers, and like Jenkins’s textual
poachers and Silverstone's concept of performance, the boundary between diffused audiences/consumers and performances/ producers becomes increasingly blurred.

Although simple and mass audiences are still commonplace in contemporary media and culture, diffused audience contexts are a more pervasive and mundane feature of everyday life. Furthermore, diffused audiences can be situated within the SPP – they engage in interactive processes of spectacle and performance, including narcissism, because 'the aim of modern life is to see and be seen' (Abercrombie and Longhurst 1998: 81). The SPP foregrounds the fluidity of identity formation. Diffused audiences are like Anderson's (1991) imagined communities (as discussed in Chapter 3) – participants perform identities to imagined audiences and their relations with others are 'a reflection, as in a mirror, of the self' (Abercrombie and Longhurst 1998: 92). These processes of narcissism and identity formation so central to the SPP are also evident in the notion of 'mediascapes' (Appadurai 1993). Mediascapes (media landscapes) emphasize the omnipresence of media images and narratives in our own, self-narratives (i.e. biographies). Media constitute our principal resources for learning about the world beyond our habitual spheres, and these resources are utilized skilfully and imaginatively by diffused audiences, particularly fans, enthusiasts and even petty producers such as Jenkins's fan artists (see Abercrombie and Longhurst 1998: 140–50). Further evidence of the skilful, diffused audience is provided by Joke Hermes's (1995) study of everyday media use in which she found that 'People read women's magazines because it suits their everyday routines' (Hermes 1995: 20). Women's magazines do not, on the whole, function as mass-produced fantasies as suggested by Modelski's analysis of soap operas and Radway's analysis of romance readers (see Chapter 6). If magazines seek to break everyday routines and lull their readers into a fantasy world, they are 'easily put down' according to Hermes. She also argues that 'Meaningful study of media use has to take the “media ensemble” into consideration' (Hermes 1995: 24). Hermes's media users, like diffused audiences, refer to an array of media – rarely does a single medium or media text 'consume them' with its meaningfulness – in everyday talk with others.

The idea of a skilled, diffused audience is also evident in Abercrombie's theory of consumer authority. According to the author, sociological accounts 'make it difficult to get at the idea of resistance to authority because they are more usually concerned with resistance to power' (Abercrombie 1994: 48). The problem with thinking in terms of power with respect to contexts of consumption and production is the assumption that power is either something that an individual or group possesses, or does not possess. Power is not easily theorized by degrees. Typical measures of power – social class, wealth, property ownership and rights – are grounded in assumptions about
exclusion and (lack of) inclusion. Resistance to power is therefore typically associated with large-scale changes in the social and political order, such as the de-stratification of social class structures or the de-privatization of property ownership. Resistance, to this extent, is hardly a routine event and is only ever likely to occur during a revolution. Although 'power' is clearly an important concept in understanding media consumer-producer relations, Abercrombie argues that it is a restrictive concept because it neglects to consider everyday consumer activities that can erode powerful institutions such as media corporations. If power and resistance are two sides of the same coin, operating in the currency of the IRP, Abercrombie's concept of authority – consistent with diffused audiences – allows for subtler and more dynamic shifts in relations between consumers and producers. If power is about ownership of products (the means and meanings of production), consumer authority is about the right to claim ownership of a product and its meanings.

Authority contexts, according to Abercrombie, are pervasive in contemporary life and subject to frequent changes in character. A traditional example of an authority context would be the teacher–student relationship, where the authority of the teacher (both in terms of knowledge and discipline) is expected to – but does not always – hold sway. In the realm of late capitalist economies, the relationship between consumers and producers – unlike the orthodox teacher–student relationship – has become ever more intimate to the extent that most production is now consumer-led: 'The shift from producer to consumer means that the capacity to determine the form, nature and quality of goods and services has moved from the former to the latter' (Abercrombie 1991: 172). By extension, authority contexts involving consumer and producer groups are dynamic, collusive and insecure. Two components of authority contexts as discussed by Abercrombie are expertise and meaning. These two components serve to legitimate the voices of authority. In the case of expertise, consumers will only accept the legitimacy of producer authority if producers are shown to 'deploy their expertise successfully in the ways recognized by both superordinates and subordinates. Clearly, this recognition breaks down from time to time, undermining the basis of authority' (Abercrombie 1994: 47). In the case of meaning, ‘the authority of the producer is sustained by the capacity to define the meaning of the transactions involved and is lost as consumers acquire that power’ (Abercrombie 1994: 53). Authority contexts, like art worlds, involve collective interaction between producers and consumers, but are more prone to changes of direction in flows of expertise and meaning between participants.

Authority within diffused media consumer-producer contexts rests, therefore, on how expertly claims can be made about owning the meanings of products. For every legally purchased U2 album, there are plenty of bootlegged versions that can be downloaded free of charge. The music industry has felt the full force of consumer authority in recent years due to the
proliferation of internet piracy, facilitated by peer-to-peer software (see McCourt and Burkart 2003; Woodworth 2004; Leyshon et al. 2005). While download sites such as Napster have ‘gone legal’ and become incorporated into the mainstream music industry, there are many more examples of unlicensed sites that continue to freely supply music, regardless of ongoing investigations by music industry bodies. As my own research has found, illegal MP3 music file-sharing continues to be a widespread, everyday practice among young people in particular (Laughey 2006). Indeed, the music industry as a whole can only conjure up a ‘fantasy consumer’ model for its own marketing purposes – predicated on highly unreliable evidence and forecasting – which explains why ‘record companies spend a considerable amount of their time producing “failures” … the “public verdict” is allowed a retrospective authority’ (Frith 1996: 60). Only about one in ten albums succeed in making a substantial profit – many more suffer heavy losses.

eBay is another breeding ground for authorial battles over expertise and meaning. eBay sellers may lack expertise in several aspects of their work, thus threatening their producer authority. Inaccurate or misleading information on auction listings, amateurish images of products, and neglecting to reply to customer emails are just some of the discrepancies that can affect consumer perceptions about levels of expertise, and in some cases afford opportunity for consumer authority in the form of negative feedback comments. Meanings of eBay products are prone to consumer authority too. It is quite possible – given internet access and basic computer literacy skills – for eBay users to acquire quite sophisticated levels of knowledge and skills in evaluating certain products, to the extent that enables them to buy comparable products (at car boot sales, trade fairs, and so on) in order to sell them on eBay or elsewhere. Of course, eBay demonstrates consumer authority over large retailers and manufacturers in a wider sense, given that its consumer-to-consumer site is a facilitator of global consumerism (see Hillis et al. 2006), and that it has a tendency to attract counterfeit goods (e.g. ‘Burberry-like caps’) which directly confront the ‘brand power’ of big producers. Consumer authority is also deemed by one commentator to be an empowering outcome of web-logging: ‘Blogs can, and do, provide and link information that equips audiences with the knowledge to question media conglomerates and other powerful interests’ (Bird 2003: 184). Blogging and other online discussion forums enable individuals to exchange advice and opinions on an unprecedented scale, often to the detriment of commercial interests.

Bourdieu: the habitus and field theory

The notion of autonomous consumer power or authority – together with the populist perspective that taste cannot be accounted for (see discussion of Ang
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in Chapter 6) — is critiqued in the work of Pierre Bourdieu, especially *Distinction* (1984). His theory of ‘the habitus’ (Bourdieu 1977) aims to show how consumer taste — in clothes, music, television shows, and so on — is not a purely personal choice but, rather, is structured according to social circumstances. **Habitus theory** is based on the conviction that ‘although diverse and varied, consumption practices are socially structured’ (Mackay 1997: 5). Any individual’s habitus, therefore, simultaneously produces and reproduces ‘a stable and group-specific way of seeing or making sense of the social world; in other words, a *distinctive mode of cultural consumption*’ (Lee 1993: 34).

Operating below the level of individual consciousness, the habitus is at work in taken-for-granted consumer tastes for food, films, and so on, as well as in one’s bodily expressions and dress (Lury 1996: 85). In short, the habitus is an invisible classificatory system that shapes consumer tastes. However, this is only half the story. The habitus is not — like ideology — a fixed set of values that filters down from the ruling classes. On the contrary, the habitus is both a structured and a structuring principle — we make our habituses while at the same time being made by them. As Bourdieu states, the habitus is a ‘strategy-generating principle enabling agents to cope with unforeseen and ever-changing situations’ which is ‘laid down in each agent by his [sic] earliest upbringing’ (Bourdieu 1977: 72, 81). Note the term ‘agent’ here. Like Giddens's theory of structuration (see Chapter 5), habitus theory tries to understand the correspondence between social structures (i.e. institutional power) and individual agency. The phrase ‘we are what we eat’ gives agency to us — we decide whether to be healthy or not — but, at the same time, the habitus determines that what we eat is not entirely of our own choosing. To use Bourdieu’s words: ‘Through taste, an agent has what he likes because he likes what he has’ (Bourdieu 1984: 175).

For Bourdieu, taste is manifested in one’s habitus by a set of predispositions that each individual learns to adopt from an early age in relation to their levels of economic and cultural capital. In terms of economic capital, we are predisposed to act (and consume things) in certain ways depending on whether we are born into wealth or poverty. Economic capital, of course, is an important structuring marker of consumer taste. However, money is not the only marker of taste. What Bourdieu calls ‘cultural capital’ also influences an individual agent’s predispositions. Cultural capital consists of resources that one is able to draw on in order to demonstrate competence in social practices (such as speaking a language, eating a meal, reading a book, dancing to music, and so on). Bourdieu refers to ‘The very close relationship linking cultural practices ... to educational capital (measured by qualifications) and, secondarily, to social origin (measured by father’s occupation)’ (Bourdieu 1984: 13). In other words, levels of cultural capital are closely linked to education and occupation (social class). Those individuals with high cultural capital are likely to be well educated as well as wealthy, while those with low cultural
capital are less well educated and less affluent consumers. Central to Bourdieu's ideas about the habitus and its social structuring of taste, however, is his claim that despite the close relationship between economic and cultural capital, the two forms of capital are nevertheless distinct and not inextricably linked. For example, a university student has high cultural capital (especially once they have graduated) but is likely to be low in economic capital (unless they have wealthy parents). See Figure 9.4 for other examples of occupational types that are low in economic but high in cultural capital, and vice versa.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Economic capital</th>
<th>Cultural capital</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LOW EC, LOW CC</td>
<td>Unskilled labourers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Long-term unemployed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HIGH EC, LOW CC</td>
<td>Lottery winners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Drug dealers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LOW EC, HIGH CC</td>
<td>Students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Freelance writers/artists</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HIGH EC, HIGH CC</td>
<td>Leading scientists</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Head teachers</td>
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</tbody>
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Figure 9.4 Some occupational classifications based on levels of economic capital (EC) and cultural capital (CC)

Bourdieu (1984) argues that economic and cultural capital are the key social markers through which the habitus works to classify consumer tastes. *In practice, this means that the habitus structures the relationships we are voluntarily predisposed to form with others. We include and exclude others in our social networks based on a sharing of cultural tastes (liking the same music, sport, and so on) and economic circumstances (being of similar social class), while at the same time being included and excluded by others according to the same classifications. Bourdieu's concept of 'social capital' – propensity for individuals of similar economic background to bond with each other through friendships, business dealings, and so on – is associated with this process but is a different form of capital again (see Bourdieu 1986). These practices of inclusion and exclusion – what Bourdieu means by 'distinction' – explain why, generally, it is possible to classify (i.e. predict) an individual's predisposed tastes based purely on information about their economic status and educational history. For example, Bourdieu (1984) argues that consumers with high economic and high cultural capital are far more likely to enjoy classical music than consumers in the lower classes who are less well
educated, the latter being more prone to like pop music. This distinction is not just a coincidence or a personal matter, but an outcome of the structurally marked classifications (i.e. habituses) that consumers are predisposed to practise in relations with each other. In short, we associate with similar others according to social expectations that we are predisposed to fulfil. Despite endless opportunities, we do not – on the whole – associate with individuals of a different social class and educational background.

Bourdieu’s theory of the habitus is informed by survey data on consumer tastes in his native France. While his theoretical discussion of this data is exceptionally sophisticated and has become canonical in sociology and other disciplines, including media studies, the data analysis itself is questionable. The habitus is premised on the idea that consumer tastes are closely related to occupational status. While occupations may well affect tastes, they do not necessarily determine economic status. Home ownership and the value of one’s property, for example, are other determining factors in economic status, as well as inherited wealth. This problem of ‘measurement’ is widely regarded as a major weakness of the survey method per se. Furthermore, Bourdieu’s avid search for cultural distinctions often distorts a situation in which such distinctions are slight between different social classes or barely exist at all. In the case of music consumers:

41 per cent of classical music albums are purchased by those in social classes AB, pointing in the direction of a Bourdieu distinction paradigm. However, only 17 per cent of the albums purchased by AB social classes are of this type. They are far outnumbered by the purchase of rock and pop albums which constitute 52 per cent of purchases.

(Longhurst and Savage 1996: 288)

This example of how Bourdieu’s data analysis can be interpreted with different outcomes underscores how his survey research lacks a complementary ethnographic component to understand broader, more meaningful practices in the contexts generated by everyday consumer tastes. Perhaps not surprisingly, de Certeau doubts the claims made by Bourdieu about the structuring structures of the habitus: ‘In order to assume that the basis has such a stability, it must be unverifiable, invisible’ (de Certeau 1984: 58). Invisible structures are clearly acrimonious in relation to de Certeau’s notion of consumer tactics that are non-formalized practices ‘neither as deterministic nor as rooted in social class as Bourdieu tends to assert’ (Gardiner 2000: 170).

As well as habitus theory, Bourdieu’s (1993) field theory is a related but somewhat different perspective on media and cultural consumption – although it is principally concerned with media and cultural production. A field is the site of practices, struggles and possibilities enacted in various
arenas of cultural production. For example, there are literary fields, educational fields, media fields, and so on. Each field is characterized by 'the structure of average chances of access to the different positions ... and the dispositions of each agent' (Bourdieu 1993: 64). To paraphrase, each field has its own hierarchy of positions (trainees, executives, managers, directors, and so on) that function to restrict, regulate and reproduce certain types and methods of cultural production. However, each field of cultural production also brings certain dispositions – that is, corresponding habituses – that are adopted by producers so as to effectively shape what is produced and ultimately consumed. Field (positions) and the habitus (dispositions), in their 'astonishingly close correspondence', constitute a 'sense of social direction which orients agents' (Bourdieu 1993: 64). For example, risk-taking in fields of cultural production is rare. The positions and predispositions of producers are oriented against taking risks so as not to threaten existing consumer uptake of their products. However, risk-taking – typical of avant-garde production – tends to produce more daring and original cultural work. Unfortunately, 'The propensity to move towards the economically most risky positions, and above all the capacity to persist in them ... seem to depend to a large extent on possession of substantial economic and social capital' (Bourdieu 1993: 67). So innovative media and cultural production, in practice, is structured by economic and social constraints. Producers who occupy the more junior positions in a given field, therefore, are not predisposed to 'sacrifice everything' for a risky venture, given that they do not have the necessary economic capital to cushion the blow of failure, or the necessary social capital to build up contacts for the sales and distribution of their products.

How does field theory inform consumer practices? For Bourdieu, the self-generating, self-regulating fields – and corresponding habituses – of cultural production tend to mean that consumers are subject to the same products from the same producers (i.e. large corporations). Even the large corporations high in economic and social capital, however, take limited risks in what they produce because their positions of power remain in the balance wherever there is competition. In the journalistic field, for example, 'competition for consumers tends to take the form of competition for the newest news ("scoops")' (Bourdieu 1996: 71). Market forces weigh heavily on the journalistic and especially the television fields. In turn, individual journalists feel this 'weight exerted by the journalistic field' which shows how 'the economy weighs on all fields of cultural production' (Bourdieu 1996: 56). These market forces are not only felt by journalists either: 'Enslaved by audience ratings, television imposes market pressures on the supposedly free and enlightened consumers' (Bourdieu 1996: 67). So consumers – who determine what is produced in fields such as television – are oppressed by the very logic (i.e. audience ratings) that Fiske cites as evidence of consumer power. Risks are generally not taken, so audience ratings are tested out on risk-free practices of
media and cultural production, some of which are inevitably measured as successes and reproduced across all positions within a field. The journalistic field's obsession with audience ratings, likewise, weighs on other fields. For instance, 'Political success increasingly depends on adapting to the demands of the journalistic field' (Bourdieu 1996: 5). Furthermore, the political and journalistic fields effectively collaborate in their 'capacity to impose a way of seeing the world' (Bourdieu 1996: 22). Television is vital for politicians as a means of conveying their positions in struggles with opposition parties. As Herman and Chomsky claim (see Chapter 7), journalists tend to favour mainstream political sources of which they are familiar. Similarly, Bourdieu argues that television consumers are forced to see a rather narrow, mainstream political view of the world as an outcome of fields of cultural production.

Like Bourdieu, Nick Couldry is sceptical of theories that overstate the capacity of consumers to deflect the weight exerted by the media field. For instance, while sharing their interest in the role of media in everyday life, he criticizes Abercrombie and Longhurst's neglect of media power: 'they write sometimes as if underlying issues of power relating to the media had simply disappeared' (Couldry 2000b: 21). By contrast, Couldry is keen to explore 'the inequality in the power of "naming" social reality which the media themselves constitute' (Couldry: 2000b: 22). In Media Rituals (2003), Couldry draws on Bourdieu's field theory in his attempt to explain 'how the social world is "mediated" through a media system that has very particular power-effects, and how the actions and beliefs of all of us are caught up in this process' (Couldry 2003: 1–2). However, media power to name and represent social reality is not fixed and centralized. On the contrary, Couldry refers to the myth of the mediated centre – the idea that the media (in common phraseology) is concentrated in the hands of dominant ideological interests – and he claims that media rituals are 'condensed forms of action where category distinctions and boundaries related to the myth of the mediated centre are worked upon with particular intensity' (Couldry 2003: 47) in order to naturalize media power. Couldry's theory of media rituals, therefore, demands a broader understanding of media power and its role in our everyday life experiences. An important set of media rituals, for example, seek to reinforce the myth that television and other media present (unmediated) reality. 'Liveness' is a ritual category at work in 'reality TV' because the notion of 'real time', by definition, implicates audiences in the immediacy of what media present to them. As such, liveness 'guarantees a potential connection to our shared social realities as they are happening' (Couldry 2003: 96–7). As well as liveness, Couldry (2003) discusses media pilgrimages – for example, fans visiting filming locations for television shows – and mediated self-disclosure performed, say, in the ritual space of talk shows like The Oprah Winfrey Show (1996–), as other categories of media rituals that reveal dynamic social processes at work in power relations between audiences, texts and institutions.
Summary

This chapter has considered:

- Competing definitions and theories of media consumerism and everyday life.
- Fiske's theory of consumer resistance and consumer power, including his comparison between the financial and cultural economies of television.
- De Certeau's theory of everyday consumer tactics, exemplified by speed reading and la perrugue, along with media literacy approaches that reaffirm the text-reader relationship but nonetheless find sophisticated everyday practices, particularly among young media consumers.
- Theories of fandom as textual poaching and participatory culture (Jenkins).
- Theories of the consumption cycle and mediated experience (Silverstone) that show how media consumption and production inform, and overlap with, each other.
- Theories of the diffused audience and consumer authority (Abercrombie and Longhurst) that call for a paradigm shift away from concepts of media power and resistance (media institutions and texts) to concepts of performance and narcissism (media resources) in unpredictable, changeable authority contexts.
- Bourdieu's habitus and field theories, which when combined suggest that predisposed consumer tastes are shaped by the habitus – a system of classification – and are reproduced in fields of cultural production, including the journalistic field.

Further reading


A valuable edited collection of articles on Bourdieu's field theory and journalism, especially in France and the United States. Included is an article by Bourdieu himself. Accessible to all media students, although some articles are better suited to advanced undergraduates and postgraduates.

A collection of essays that discuss, for example, news audiences and their responses to media scandals, and the role of the American Indian in popular culture. The value of media ethnography is a consistent claim made by the author. Accessible to all media students, although some essays are better suited to advanced undergraduates and postgraduates.


A diverse selection of historical and contemporary writings on audience research and theory, including sections on fan audiences, screen theory, female audiences and interpretive communities. Useful for all media students.


Excuse my indulgence, but this is one of the few empirically-informed accounts of music media consumption and how music interacts with young people's everyday lives (note that this book is also useful in relation to interactionist perspectives discussed in Chapter 5). Accessible to all media students, although some discussion is better suited to advanced undergraduates and postgraduates.