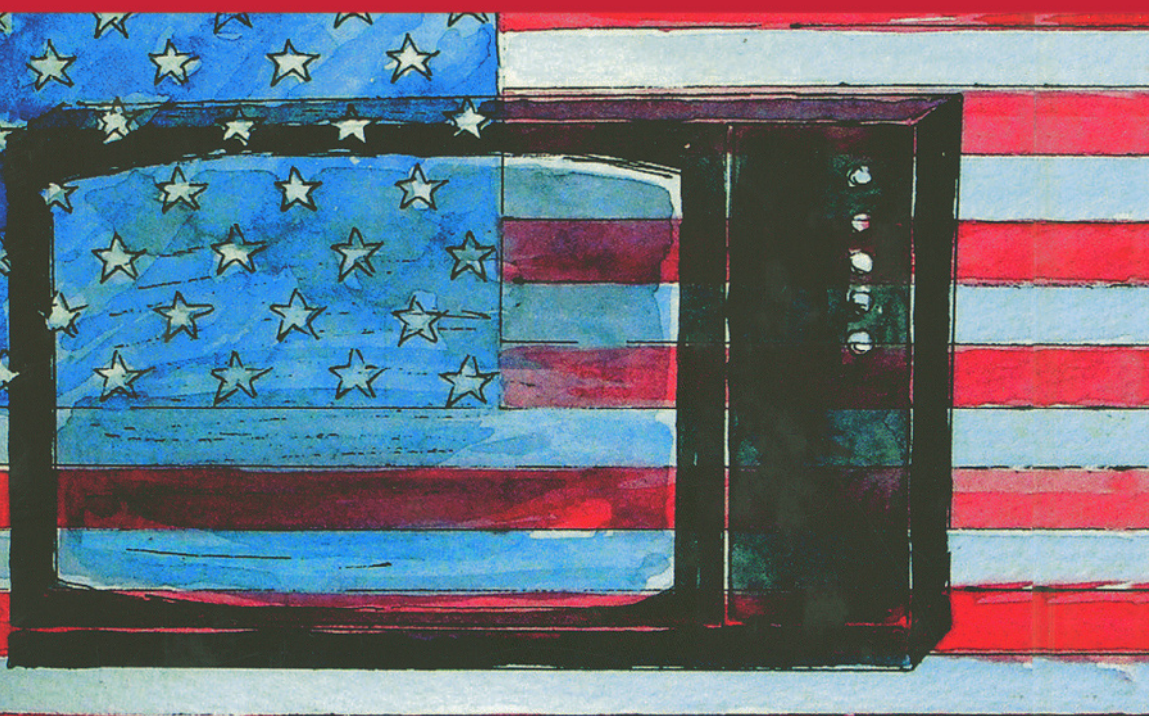


American Television on British Screens

A Story of Cultural Interaction



Paul Rixon



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Introduction

Preamble: A personal view

Looking back over the years, American programmes have always been part of my television diet – from *Bonanza* and *The Virginian* in the 1960s, *Mission: Impossible*, *M*A*S*H*, *The Rockford Files*, *Star Trek* and *Starsky and Hutch* in the 1970s and, more recently, *Nip/Tuck*, *24*, *Frasier*, *Friends*, *Sex and the City*, *Homicide: Life on the Streets*, *The Wire*, *The Shield* and *Lost*. This does not mean I only watch American programmes but, when discussing my memories and experiences of watching television, these programmes are as likely to surface as British ones. Indeed, from my perspective, I see little difference between the two. American programmes have always, for me, been both part of British television while also appearing different; they were often faster paced and strangely colourful, while infused with different narrative rhythms. I particularly remember the Quinn Martin Productions with their prologues and epilogues, which no British programme seemed to use.

Many years later, while staying in a motel in America, much in the way that Raymond Williams had many years earlier, I saw some of the programmes I had watched in Britain as a child. They were obviously the same programmes – I recognised the characters, the setting, the formula of the series, even occasionally the actual episode – but they were not shown in the same way; the whole experience of watching such programmes was different. Indeed, I noticed that the rhythms of the programmes I had once found rather strange now made sense. For example, in *Star Trek*, when watched on the BBC, there were, every so often, strange fade-outs and fade-ins which seemed to happen for no reason, appearing as a kind of reiteration of parts of the narrative; they happened around important moments in the story. Now it made sense, they had been made to fade out, on a narrative high, to the commercials

and on our return we faded back in with a small recap of what was happening. Seemingly, programmes were changed when they were shown on different types of channels in different cultural contexts; in some way they were assimilated. It is this interest, in this idea of assimilation, which has led me to attempt this work, to explore the way American programmes are selected, used and assimilated into British television – to study the changing role of American programmes on British screens.

Constructing an approach

With the coming of the first American programmes on British television in the 1950s, many viewed them in a similar way as they had other forms of American culture over the past decades – American culture was crass, standardised and formulaic. American television programmes were commercial products imposing American values and outlooks upon British audiences; British culture had to be defended. Such a view held to a belief that the programme, a text of sorts, was imposing inbuilt meanings and values on a rather passive audience. However, over the years, this position has been countered by an active view of the reader, a reader who is able to understand text in a different way – that the text did not have one possible reading but many. It could, however, be argued that both positions need to take account of the other more than they do. On the one hand, America does dominate the global flow of many cultural goods, their cultural industries are the largest and strongest in the world and billions of people consume their culture; on the other, just because someone watches an American film it does not mean they will automatically become American. There is, therefore, a need for an approach that can accept both positions, that can offer an understanding of how cultures interact. Therefore, in this work, I wish to take a more dynamic view in which American and British television cultures are in an active dialogue with each – one which can focus on the interaction between imported programmes and the domestic television culture.

Therefore, in Chapter 1, after exploring past and existing discourses about American culture and work undertaken on American programmes and British television, I will – by building on work of Nancy Morris (2002), Jeffrey Miller (2000), Nick Browne (1984), Steemers (2004) and John Ellis (2002) – develop a multifaceted approach to study and explore the reasons for the trade in programmes, the way broadcasters act as national mediators between cultural systems, how programmes

are actively assimilated into the national schedule, the public discourse that seeks to frame such imports and where this might be going with the development of new technologies.

Nancy Morris's model (2002) is a useful starting point in understanding how a predefined culture might adapt to new imported cultural elements. She suggests societies have shared cultural 'deep structures' that influence how culture is constructed, shaped, produced and consumed. Therefore, if an external culture, say a television programme, enters an existing cultural system, it will be shaped into an acceptable and understandable form, what she calls a 'surface structure'; this process will be guided by existing structures, for example by national broadcasters, who are informed by the wider shared cultural 'deep structure'. As the audience interprets and reacts to these surface structures, elements of the new external culture might enter and become part of the deep structure of that society, nation or community in question (Morris, 2002: 283).

In a similar way to Morris, Jeffrey Miller presents a dynamic view of how we can understand the way cultures interact with each other. He does this by using the work of Bakhtin to develop the concepts of dialogue, utterance and assimilation (Miller, 2000: 7–11). Miller talks about utterances as the smallest unit of intercourse, the speech act made concrete. However, these are not heard in isolation, they are part of a dialogue, a dialogue between a speaker and a respondent, both of whom are situated within a web of dialogues, meanings and discourses. Therefore the meanings of such utterances are not fixed and closed, they include past and current utterances, with 'every element of discourse . . . itself a response' (ibid.: 8). In this way, the idea of dialogue, if transposed to the interaction of television programmes and television systems, suggests a 'process through which a text created in one culture enters another for any number of reasons and is apprehended by any number of people for any other reasons' (ibid.: 9). Such a view moves away from the idea that text, such as programmes, have inbuilt ideological effects or meanings and are imposed on other cultures (Schiller, 1969), and suggests, instead, that a culture selects, reads and uses cultural imports in many different ways, often differently to how they were understood and used in the original context of its production.

Miller is not suggesting, however, that text have no meaning, or that no hegemonic processes are at work, either between nations or within a nation, but that forms of negotiation happened over meaning, and that possible alternatives can also be found within the text (ibid.: 10, 181). To help understand this process, he develops Bakhtin's concept of

assimilation; he defines this not in terms of a 'dominant set of meanings grabbing and devouring meaning introduced from a foreign source', but one where 'both partners in the act of assimilation have something to say about the transaction' (ibid.: 10). The interaction, in this way, is dynamic; no one side imposes its views or values on the other, though equally neither is completely powerless.

In Chapter 2, to provide a context for this work, I will present a historical overview of the development of British broadcasting in which I will focus on its changing relationship with American television and the different roles played by American programmes. I begin by noting that much of the current historical work that covers American programmes on British screens is rather limited, and when covered, it often discusses them through particular cultural, social, political and economic discourses. However, by pulling together a number of these accounts I am able to present here a useful diachronic overview of the changing role of American programmes, one which can help situate the following chapters with their more synchronic focus, where they tend to dig down to explore various issues, processes and discourses in more depth. In Chapter 3, I will explore the economic rationale of why a trade in programmes exists, why broadcasters import and export programmes and why America has come to dominate the international trade of certain programme genre. I will therefore explore the different push (for exports) and pull (for imports) factors that operate in the British and American environments and the relationship that has developed between the two. The chapter ends by focusing on how a market discourse, which for so long had taken second place to cultural, social and political concerns, has recently become more dominant, playing an important part in the creation of more open competitive regimes around the globe which American firms are trying to take advantage of.

One important way of exploring and understanding the cultural interactions at work, at least in terms of broadcasting, is by focusing on the role of broadcasters as mediators (Steemers, 2004: 17–20). Therefore, in Chapter 4, I will explore, through a series of interviews, how British broadcasters perceive and experience the trade in programmes; how they professionally 'read' American programmes, judging their worth, their fit with the domestic sensibilities and the brand of the channel and what economic or cultural benefits they see them bringing; I will then explore their views of how American programmes are scheduled, edited, changed, marketed and promoted and indeed, how they become part of British television culture.

To explore some of the issues raised in Chapter 4 in more detail, I will, in Chapter 5, focus on how American programmes come to interact with and are altered by their use within British television. To do this, I will develop and utilise three concepts suggested by Nick Browne (1984) – text, supertext, megatext – to which I add another, that of context. While Gripsrud suggests that the programme proper can be stripped of the surrounding elements, my approach will hold to the idea that there is no finished text; they are constantly being adapted, changed and assimilated depending on the context in which it is screened and consumed (1995: 131–2). A programme, as it enters a new environment, or megatext, with its own history and conventions, can be altered, can be edited, the sound track can be changed and, if a series, it can be shown in a new order; it will be shown within a schedule of programmes, a different supertext for which it was originally produced, with which it will interact, dynamically, creating new associations and meanings; it will be framed within a larger cultural discourse, or context, one that will again change and create new understandings. Programmes, as such, have to be understood in how they work within the particular supertext, megatext and context in which they are shown and watched.

In Chapter 6, I will explore the different types of television criticism and reviewing that have appeared over the last fifty years and how these have covered and represented American programmes. Though this discourse is not all-important in how programmes are watched, or what is popular, it is indicative of wider debates about American culture. While earlier forms of criticism aligned themselves with a widely held derogatory view of American culture, other forms have appeared over time that, while not threatening the dominant cultural hierarchy, do present more popular, alternative and, sometimes, subversive readings of American programmes. As American programmes have changed, as they have been shaped to target more upmarket audiences, much of the earlier attacks on its formulaic and standardised form have been replaced by critical acclaim; increasingly, American programmes are now offering a cultural distinctiveness sought by critics and the affluent niche audiences.

I will end, in Chapter 7, by exploring the current and future developments affecting the role and use of American programmes on British television. I will initially explore how both the British and the American markets are changing, changes that are affecting the relationship between the two: on the one hand American firms, as they face competition at home, have gone through a series of mergers as they

shore up their American businesses (Holt, 2003), which has led to the development of new strategies to tap into the international market; likewise, on the other hand, as more channels appear in the British market, the demand for and use made of American programmes is changing. I will then end by exploring the various technological developments which, for some, signal a move away from television as a form of broadcasting aimed at and serving a large national audience by use of schedules of programmes, perhaps towards a form of Me-TV; towards a form of television that will allow a viewer to select and buy programmes to watch whatever and whenever they want (Hoskins *et al.*, 1997: 133; Winston, 1998: 127). Changes that will affect how American programmes are watched and experienced by British viewers in the future.

Conclusion

This work has two main aims behind it: to re-evaluate the use of and roles taken by American programmes on British television while developing a suitable methodological approach. Rather than to conceive of such relationships as either an imposition of the culture of one nation on another, as those taking a cultural or media imperialism position often do, or, alternatively, to view the text with no inbuilt meaning, where the receiving nation subjugates and uses the cultural product from another nation as it wishes, I have tried to utilise a more dynamic approach – an approach that seeks to understand such processes in terms of a dynamic interplay between cultures. In this way American programmes, as they enter the British television environment, are mediated by broadcasters, who select what will fit best with their and the audience's needs, and who will alter and change American programmes as they are assimilated into the British schedules. Then, through their interaction with surrounding programmes, they become part of, while changing, British television. They are then framed and marketed to audiences in particular ways. So, even before the audience has viewed an American programme, what they will experience has already been selected, filtered, changed and shaped to their sensibilities.

This work is not, therefore, an attempt to textually analyse American programmes, or to explore how they are consumed or to highlight the number of programmes bought and sold, or even to look at the trade in formats or the development of co-productions, but to analyse the way American programmes, originally produced and shown in America, become part of British television, the way they are bought, used and framed within and for the British television environment. In such

a book as this, there has been little space to explore every avenue fully, indeed as many questions are raised as answered, the point has more been to indicate something of the multifaceted approach that is required to understand, the 'process through which a text created in one culture enters another for any number of reasons and is apprehended by any number of people for any other reasons' (Miller, 2000: 9).

1

Theories of Cultural Assimilation

1.1 Introduction

In many ways it is hard to comprehend the way American programmes have been accepted, watched, talked about and assimilated into British (television) culture without, in the first instant, understanding the wider discourse concerning American culture; partly as it has been so influential in later discourse about the role and use of American television programmes within British schedules. I will therefore, in the first chapter, begin by surveying the wider cultural debates that have developed over the last couple of hundred years that have come to link the coming of the mass society and mass culture with American culture. I will undertake this by exploring the work of those writers often labelled as part of the cultural and civilisation tradition, those such as Matthew Arnold, F. R. Leavis and Q. D. Leavis, before turning my attention to similar debates of the left; here I will focus on the work of the Frankfurt School. Following this, I will turn to work by Richard Hoggart, a forerunner of the cultural studies approach, and his work *Uses of Literacy* (1957), in which he, while expressing worries about American culture and its affect on British working-class culture, begins to open up a space to discuss and analyse popular culture.

I will then turn my attention to more recent attempts to understand and confront the unequal flow of American culture; initially this will involve exploring the debates that have arisen since the 1960s around issues relating to forms of media or cultural imperialism. While such approaches focused, in the first place, on the continuing relationship of the core and peripheral countries, the First and Third World, these were later extended to understand the developing media and cultural relationship between America and developed countries. Much of this work

accepted, without much detailed research, the presumed effect of the media and cultural flows and relationships between countries; flows which are often asymmetrical, with one nation and its media and culture being in a position of dominance over another. After this I will move on to look at later work that has, by exploring the way texts are actually consumed, refuted these unsubstantiated views of media and cultural effects (for example, Katz and Liebes, 1986).

I will end the first section of this chapter by looking at some of the few works that have come to focus on the way American programmes have been acquired and used by British broadcasting organisations, for example Segrave (1998) and Lealand (1984), and those that have looked at how programmes have been bought and sold, for example *Selling Television* by Jeanette Steemers (2004). However, as I argue, these are the exception rather than the rule; most work has focused on the micro level, on the text or its consumption, or at the macro level, on international flows of programmes and relationships between nations. In the second part of this chapter, utilising a number of existing concepts and ideas, I will develop a multifaceted approach to study the way an external culture is assimilated within and by a different culture; the way British television incorporates American programmes into its schedule and the way they interact; the way American programmes become part of British (television) culture.

1.2 Discourses on the mass media and Americanisation

1.2.1 Mass culture and mass society debates: Culture and civilisation tradition

Debates about and concern over the rise of a mass culture have been around for hundreds of years. Indeed, Strinati (2001) notes that Lowenthal (1957) suggested that such worries are found in the writings of Pascal and Montaigne dating back to the 16th and 17th centuries, respectively (ibid.: 2). In many ways, at least in the British context, such concerns start to appear as Britain went through huge changes from the 18th century onwards; as it moved from a feudal towards a mercantile and then a capitalist society; as it started to exploit global markets, develop an empire, employ new forms of technology in agriculture and industry and move towards an industrial form of production and contract employment. For some, as people moved off the land and into the cities, the agrarian communities of old broke down; as this happened, the feudal-based society, the old order, changed and the spectre of the

masses raised its head. This was a primeval mass; a mass of people in which the rules of old, the old hierarchy, and the tensions kept in check by civilisation and its associated values were thrown off; where the individual was subsumed into the crowd, leading to a loss of individuality (LeMahieu, 1988: 108–9).

This was a 'mass' that, partly through the developing media, began to become aware of itself and the new ideas of democracy. Increasingly, this mass of people, encouraged by various writers and activists, pressured for political and social change (Thompson, 1982: 84–110). On all fronts the old order was under attack. The elites, in apprehension, saw the rise of a mass society leading to the spread of democratic ideals and forms of democracy. Many looked to America, some in apprehension, as one of the more open societies, politically and economically, as an example of what might happen to the old order (Tocqueville, 1961; Aron, 1983: 191–206, 219–32). This was not the emergence of a new egalitarian society in which everything would be fairer but, instead, the beginning of the tyranny of the masses: the rule of the mob. The traditional hierarchy, built as they saw it on the right of the best educated, cultured and bred to rule, was being undermined by an idea that suggested everyone's voice was as equal, that everyone's views were valid, that 'everyone's general cultural preferences are as valuable and as worthy of being respected and fulfilled as those of the traditional elites' (Strinati, 2001: 7–8).

Linked to the spread of ideas of democracy, of enfranchising the masses in societies around Europe, was the rise of the mass media. While for some the media, if used in the right way, offered a means of informing the citizens, a way of uplifting the populace culturally (for example, see the influence of Arnold's ideas on John Reith, 1949), for others it was viewed more negatively as creating a standardised form of a mass culture, one which did little to encourage thought or obedience in the masses (LeMahieu, 1988: 103–5). This was a culture of the masses, one pandering to the lowest common denominator. Critics, such as F. R. Leavis, Q. D. Leavis and T. S. Elliot, writing between the wars, were interested in preserving the status quo; they accepted the idea of a cultural hierarchy, with the elite culture being worth more than mass produced or simplified versions of culture. Standing at the top of the cultural pyramid was culture produced by the creative artist, the sole genius who attempts to understand man's place in the world, who creates art to stimulate thought. However, it required certain cultural capital to enjoy; a capital only they, the elites, had. This hierarchy had to be defended against the development of mass culture,

against the rule of the masses, against democracy; standards had to be maintained. There was a need to combat '...the steady influence which operates silently in any mass society organised for profit, for the depression of standards of art and culture. The increasing organisation of advertisement and propaganda – or the influencing of masses of men by any means except through their intelligence' (Elliot, 1939: 39–40).

America was viewed as the nation at the forefront of the development of the mass media, of creating a cultural industry organised along factory-like lines, with Hollywood being an early proponent. As America started to successfully export its products abroad, especially its cultural products, the various fears about the development of a mass society, mass culture and democracy started to conflate. All three became linked to the idea of America and its cultural output (Strinati, 2003: 19–21). Its cultural industries were the most developed, the most driven by the profit motive and the one most likely to be dominant in an open market. As Leavis argues, 'American conditions are the conditions of modern civilization, even if the "drift" has gone further on the other side of the Atlantic than on this' (cited in Johnson, 1979: 96). It was producing a culture able to attract huge audiences rather than one that was made to educate, to stimulate or to create works of genius; it was a culture of the masses, not the culture of the elites or the working classes.

1.2.2 Frankfurt School

Another group, interested in the development of a mass culture, while holding different political views shared some of the concerns of the cultural and civilisation tradition, was the Frankfurt School. This was a group of leftwing German academics which escaped Nazi Germany in the 1930s eventually settling in America, where they stayed until after the Second World War (Brookeman, 1984: 77–88; Strinati, 2001: 53–6). Much of their work, for example *The Authoritarian Personality* (1950), was focused on understanding how fascism had developed in Germany and whether such processes were also at work in America. They saw the capitalist system with its factory-like cultural industry eroding a more organic culture that had grown out of the endeavours of artists and craftsmen over hundreds of years. This 'new' culture was formulaic, standardised and could easily be consumed with little active thought. Such a culture produced a passive, malleable and controllable mass. For John Carey, the Frankfurt theorists (except Benjamin) shared the view that mass culture and the mass media, as developed under capitalism,

had degraded civilisation in the twentieth century: 'they regarded the masses as dupes, seduced by capitalism's equivalent of Prolefeed. Happily gobbling down the products of the commercialised "culture industry", the masses had developed a "false consciousness", so that they no longer saw things as the Frankfurt theorists wished' (1992: 43).

However, unlike those cultural critics like Matthew Arnold and F. R. and Q. D. Leavis, those associated with the Frankfurt School were not worried about the onset of cultural anarchy – anarchy resulting from the end of the cultural hierarchy and the standards it promoted – but, instead, saw such developments leading to the manipulation and control of the masses (Storey, 2003: 27–9). They saw the capitalist system, most highly developed in America, creating a cultural industry that produced a culture that helped stupefy, to control, the masses, thus allowing or helping in the rise of authoritarian-fascist states. They did, however, agree with the conservative cultural critics that the finest culture, that which had a life beyond the now, 'that kept alive the human desire for a better world beyond the confines of the present' (Storey, 2001: 86), was that of the elites – the avant-garde, classical music, opera and painting – culture that had been produced by the lone artist or groups of craftsmen outside of the cultural industry and appreciated by a privileged elite (Adorno, 2002: 29–60).

For those of both the culture and civilisation tradition and the Frankfurt School, mass culture, often conflated with the term 'popular culture', required little detailed study. Its effects could be read off from its conditions of production and consumption. American culture, produced by a culture industry, in a factory-like system, was viewed as formulaic and standardised; it was viewed pessimistically as it eroded the existing authentic or organic culture, leading to a controlled mass or a form of cultural anarchy.

1.2.3 The cultural turn: Richard Hoggart

From the 1950s, Richard Hoggart, writing alongside such contemporaries as Raymond Williams and E. P. Thompson, studied the culture of the working classes. In many ways he was one of the founders of modern cultural studies in Britain, a field of study that sought to redeem popular culture for study (Turner, 1996: 12). Employing existing forms of textual and historical studies, Richard Hoggart analysed the changes occurring in working-class culture, leading to the publication of his seminal work, *The Uses of Literacy*, in 1957. Unlike the earlier cultural critics, and the Frankfurt School, he was not completely pessimistic about the developments that were occurring:

It was in the latter half of the last century and the opening years of this century that the effects of these changes first came home forcefully to the bosoms of working-class people, in the extension of the franchise, the possibilities of much greater material comforts than had been known before, the effect of the Education Acts, and in much else. (Hoggart, 1957: 171)

The Uses of Literacy is divided into two parts. The first section explores what is left of the traditional working-class culture, through textual readings of popular cultural texts such as magazines, books, newspapers and films, as well as analysis of his experiences, conversations, interviews and forms of textual analysis and observations. Through such work he explores how the development of working-class culture had, traditionally, been linked to working-class needs; it was not imposed from outside. It was a culture they made their own, whether as a means of surviving the daily grind or for making sense of the world around them. Indeed, to understand this process, to comprehend the way culture was made their own, Hoggart suggests, requires not just an understanding of the text but the context within which it gained meaning (Dyer, 1973: 40).

The second part of *The Uses of Literacy* concentrates on how the working-class culture was being whittled away by the rise of a mass media, indeed, how it was, at certain moments, becoming Americanised. Such a reading has similarities to those of Leavis and Elliot in that mass culture and Americanisation are viewed as having an eroding influence on what was there already, of an alien culture imposed from above by capitalist concerns:

This kind of shiny barbarism is having some success here... [s]urrounded by a great quantity of material goods designed to serve and amuse and yearly increasing in number and ingenuity, but with little sense that these are the end-products, and in many cases the more trivial products, of centuries of slowly-acquired knowledge and skill. (Hoggart, 1957: 193)

This was a culture that provides no substitute for 'a popular culture experientially connected to the social conditions of those who produce and consume it' (Turner, 1996: 45). Hoggart, however, is not completely dismissive of all these developments; he accepts that some of this new mass culture, for example crime novels, for some working-class readers was closer to their experiences and lives than that produced by British

writers (Strinati, 2001: 28–9). He also, throughout his work, tries to understand how this imported culture is assimilated and consumed by the working classes: How ‘much that is new and may seem, at first glance, merely injurious, is assimilated and adapted’ (ibid.: 323). Such formulations, in some ways, seem to pre-date much of the later work on active audiences undertaken in the name of Cultural or Media Studies.

Hoggart is important for this discussion in the way he helps open up a discursive space in which popular culture could be studied, he is not just interested in elite culture. He does not dismiss popular culture out of hand as being completely imposed on the consumer by cultural industries. While worried about American culture, he is prepared to understand what it means to people, to the working classes in particular. Through his work he provides a more active view of the media user than many before him – they are not passive dupes, they actively use and make this culture their own. Though Hoggart’s analysis asks new questions of popular culture, his approach is limited by the continuing strength of the existing critical traditions and the need for more complex conceptual tools. By the 1960s and 1970s we start to see the development of other new ways of understanding and approaching the study of American media and cultural exports, namely around the idea of media or cultural imperialism.

1.2.4 Media and cultural imperialism

Another influential input into the discourse around American culture and its impact on British culture developed in the 1960s and 1970s in relation to America’s growing worldwide hegemony. Many saw America’s worldwide influence not just in terms of its military or economic power but also as the result of its growing dominance of international media and cultural markets (Schiller, 1969). Rather than being a set theory, this approach should be thought of more as an area of conflicting discourses, focused on aspects of media or cultural imperialism (Tomlinson, 1991: 8–11). Those advocating such ideas argued that even with the end of the colonial epoch western nations continued to exercise power over ex-colonial nations; the imperial relationship continued but in another form. While this discourse was first developed in relation to the Third World, it was soon expanded to investigate and explain the apparent dominance, and possible effects, of the American capitalist system upon other developed societies (Boyd-Barrett, 1979). Many of the early approaches found under this umbrella have tended to study such developments at the level of the international, elevating supposed structural relationships between nations (cultural, economic, technological

and ideological), seeking to explain a power position: 'imperialism' (Tomlinson, 1991: 34–41).

Those holding such positions view broadcasting, along with other media and cultural activities, as replicating and reinforcing this structural relationship, helping the dominance of one nation state, culture or system over another – for good (with moves down the road towards socialism for traditional Marxists) or ill (underdevelopment/dependency and hence stagnation for neo-Marxists) (Schiller, 1969). Such a position can, however, be divided differently: into the still ideologically loaded conspiratorial or intentional version and a more pluralist/liberal or economic-dominated version (Pool, 1977; Hoskins and Mirus, 1988). Both see forms of domination but the former takes a more traditional Marxist position, seeing it connected to a greater ideological battle, and the latter sees it merely as the inevitable result of the economics of television, which can therefore change over time (Lee, 1979: 41–2; Tomlinson, 1991: 21–3).

Those interested in exploring such ideas in relation to television often studied the international televisual relationship by way of a number of different 'visible' or quantifiable elements: the numbers of programmes bought and sold, the foreign ownership of production and broadcasting companies and the degree of control over advertising (Nordenstreng and Varis, 1974; Varis, 1985). This is usually expressed by the direction and size of the 'flow', whether programmes, ideas or investment, which is indicative of the strength of the relationship between the nations. Underpinning this, for those taking an ideological or conspiratorial position, is an assumption of the effects of such a 'flow' or relationship on the society in question (Tomlinson, 1991: 35–41).

Thus, for those working within this field, the concern has centred less on the actual effects of these international relations – whether and how such flows and contacts affect the national system and audience in question – than on an assumption of its effect upon the 'nation' in question (Schlesinger, 1991: 148–9). So that if imbalances exist so, it is assumed, does a situation of dominance and all that that implies. While this has led to criticism of such an approach being more a methodology for supporting a particular ideological position lacking a coherent theory or framework – being ideologically loaded – it still remains 'an elaborate and sophisticated approach with its reformists and revolutionaries' (Kivikuru, 1988: 9–34).

Preben Sepstrup (1990) has attempted to take note of these various criticisms by extracting a methodological approach from the ideological positions noted earlier, presenting a more firmly grounded framework.