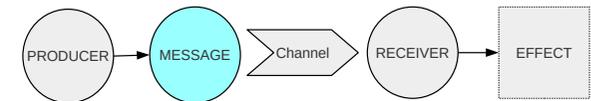## Media & Society: 11

Television: 2

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## Outline

- Introduction
- Intellectual Background
- Concepts: Hegemony & 'Common Sense'
- **'Encoding/Decoding'**
  - 'Reading positions'
- Cultural Studies Approach

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## Lasswell's Communication Model

- Who says what in what channel to whom with what effect?
- **Texts**

PRODUCER → MESSAGE → Channel → RECEIVER → EFFECT

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## CCCS: Richard Hoggart – Stuart Hall

- 1964: Birmingham University, Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (**CCCS**) starts work
- New approach to popular culture
- Academics from literary criticism, sociology, history, anthropology

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## Richard Hoggart (1918-2014)

- *The Uses of Literacy* (1957)
- Hoggart's attack is not on popular culture; rather it is on mass culture which is **imposed** from above.
- He was concerned about the weakness of '**media OF the masses**' in the face of industrialised '**media FOR the masses**'.

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## Stuart Hall

- Born in Jamaica 1932
- Came to UK with a scholarship at Oxford Univ.
- Studied English but eventually abandoned a PhD to become more involved in political activism
- Founded "New Left Review" magazine

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## Hall's works...

- **Semiotics** – builds on works of Roland Barthes and Umberto Eco
- **Sociology** – colonialism and depictions of race and ethnicity
- Hall, Stuart; C. Critcher; T. Jefferson; J. Clarke; B. Roberts (1978), *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State and Law and Order*. London: Macmillan.
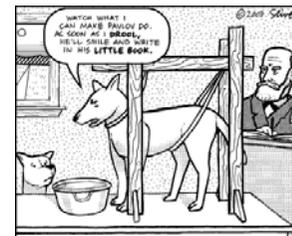
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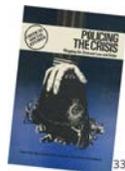
## Development of Audience Research

**Effects Research**

Laboratory experiments often carried out by behavioural psychologists

**"Behaviourism"**

Stimulus → Response

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## A 'Behaviouristic' Approach...

- Therefore,
  **A media text has AN effect.**
- This was the thinking behind much media effects research in the US and in the UK until the 1970s (and even now!).
- Question asked was: **"What do texts do to people?"**

## Causal Connections (?)

- James Carey: the **cultural** approach, unlike media effects research, which is grounded in the social sciences, "does not seek to explain human behavior, but to understand it. . . . It does not attempt to predict human behavior, but to diagnose human meanings"
- **Communication as 'culture' not 'transmission'**

"Mass Communication Research and Cultural Studies: An American View," in
Curran J., Gurevitch M., and Woollacott J., eds.,
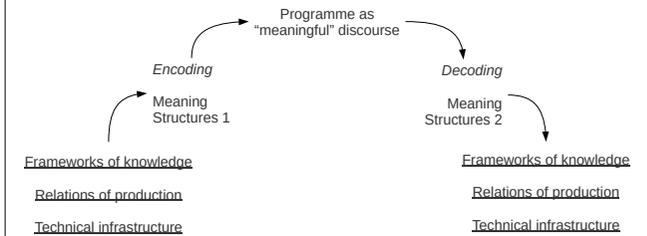*Mass Communication and Society* (1977)

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## Encoding/Decoding (1980ish)

"Hall makes a conclusive break with the hitherto dominant American communication models, with aesthetics and with the notion of the audience as passive consumers of mass culture. In their place, Hall installs a **new vocabulary of analysis and a new theory of cultural production and reception**."

Turner, G. (2003). *British cultural studies: An introduction*. Routledge, London, 3rd edition, p72-3

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## Encoding/Decoding Model

Programme as "meaningful" discourse

*Encoding* → Meaning Structures 1 → *Decoding* → Meaning Structures 2

Frameworks of knowledge

Relations of production

Technical infrastructure

Frameworks of knowledge

Relations of production

Technical infrastructure

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## Gramsci: 'Hegemony'

- Leadership – not just the **coercive** power to control and direct a population/people.
- Power to **define** and circulate/insert these definitions into everyday lives
- Create a society's 'common sense'
- Create **consent** (to be led, governed, directed etc)

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## 'Common Sense'

- Everyone, for Gramsci, has a **number of 'conceptions of the world'**, which often tend to be in contradiction with one another and therefore form an incoherent whole.
- **Many of these conceptions are imposed and absorbed passively from outside**, or from the past, and are accepted and lived uncritically. In this case they constitute what Gramsci calls 'common sense' (or, in another context, 'folklore').
- Many elements in popular common sense contribute to people's subordination by **making situations of inequality and oppression appear to them as natural and unchangeable**.

[Forgacs, 2000] Forgacs, D., ed(2000).
*The Gramsci Reader: Selected Writings 1916–1935*. New York University Press, New York.

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## Proverbs / sayings as 'common sense'

- **"The best things in life are free"**
  - So, why would you want a pay rise?
  - Should I even be asking for a pay rise?!?
- **"Everything comes to he who waits"**
  - Be patient, and maybe we'll get round to it...one day...
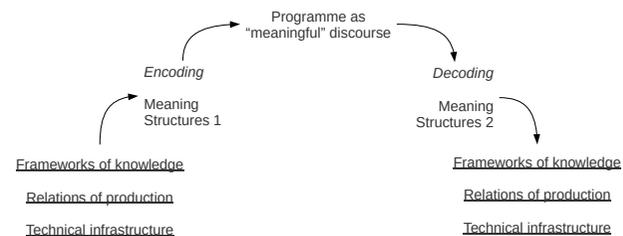  - Maybe I should just be patient and not complain

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## Hegemony

- Hegemony is having the power to convince people that this is just "the way things are"
- That the current state of affairs (social arrangements) is "natural"
- Mass communications is a useful tool
- Ideology is a **'site of struggle'**

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## Encoding/Decoding Model

Programme as "meaningful" discourse

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Frameworks of knowledge

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## Encoding / decoding

'A "raw" historical event cannot, in that form, be transmitted by, say, a television newscast.

Events can only be signified within the aural-visual forms of the televisual discourse.' (p2)

## 'Moments'

**At a certain point, however, the broadcasting structures must yield encoded messages in the form of a meaningful discourse.** The institution-societal relations of production must pass under the discursive rules of language for its product to be "realized". This initiates a further differentiated moment, in which the formal rules of discourse and language are in dominance. Before this message can have an "effect" (however defined), satisfy a "need" or be put to a "use", it must first be appropriated as a meaningful discourse and be meaningfully decoded. **It is this set of decoded meanings which "have an effect", influence, entertain, instruct or persuade, with very complex perceptual, cognitive, emotional, ideological or behavioural consequences.**

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Production      Consumption

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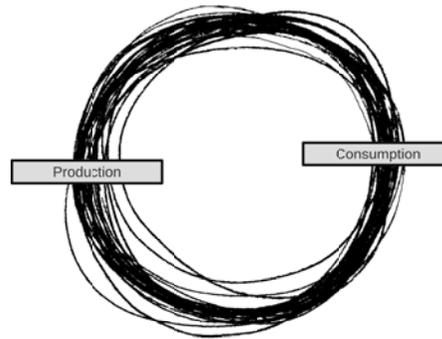
## Miscommunication

The degrees of "understanding" and "misunderstanding" in the communicative exchange – depend on the degrees of symmetry/asymmetry (relations of equivalence) established between the positions of the "personifications", encoder-producer and decoder-receiver. But this in turn **depends on the degrees of identity/non-identity between the codes** which perfectly or imperfectly transmit, interrupt or systematically distort what has been transmitted.

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## Semiotics / Codes

- "there is no intelligible discourse without codes"
  – Even "realistic" images are such because we have *learned* what features we should identify in an image for us to describe it as 'realistic'
- "The dog in the film can bark but it cannot bite!"

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## Denotation / Connotation (from Barthes)

"warm garment" (denotation)

the activity/value of "keeping warm"

an informal style of dress

at its more connotative levels, to signify "the coming of winter"

"a cold day"

a fashionable style of *haute couture*

positioned by the romantic sub-code, it may connote "long autumn walk in the woods"

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## Dominance

- **Connotative codes are not equal among themselves.** Any society/culture tends, with varying degrees of closure, to impose its classifications of the social and cultural and political world. These constitute a ***dominant cultural order***, though it is neither univocal nor uncontested.
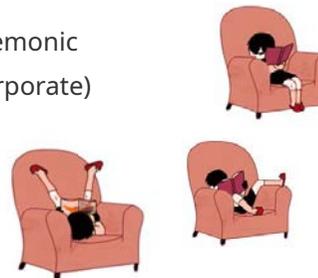
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## "Misunderstanding"

- **Literal / knowledge**: don't know / understand the words / concepts used…
- "more often broadcasters are concerned that the audience has **failed to take the meaning** as they – the broadcasters – intended" (p7)

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## Hypothetical reading 'positions'

- Dominant-hegemonic
- Negotiated(-corporate)
- Oppositional

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## Dominant-hegemonic

- Audience is operating (decoding) in the dominant code when the read the tv text as encoded by the producers.
  – "defines within its terms the mental horizon, the universe, of possible meanings, of a whole sector of relations in a society or culture; and
  – it carries with it the stamp of legitimacy – [...] what is "natural", "inevitable", "taken for granted" about the social order." (p9)

## Negotiated(-corporate)

- acknowledges the legitimacy of the hegemonic definitions to make the grand significations **(abstract)**, while,
- at a more restricted, situational (situated['corporate' in the sense of 'having a body']) level, it makes its own ground rules – it operates with exceptions to the rule.

## Oppositional

- "it is possible for a viewer perfectly to understand both the literal and the connotative inflection given by a discourse but to decode the message in a *globally* contrary way"
- One of the most significant political moments [...] is the point when events which are normally signified and decoded in a *negotiated* way begin to be given an *oppositional* reading.

## CCCS and 'Cultural Studies'

- Interested in wider **systems of power** interconnected with social phenomena (ideology, class, nations, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender, generational differences etc
- 'Cultures' are...
  - **NOT** fixed, bounded, stable, discrete
  - constantly interacting and changing sets of practices and processes

## Types of work...

Barthes, Roland (1966) "Introduction to the Structural Analysis of the Narrative"

Hall, Stuart (1968) "The Hippies: An American 'Moment'"

Hall, Stuart (1973) "Encoding and Decoding in the Television Discourse"

Morley, David (c.1973) "Industrial Conflict and the Mass Media"

Willis, Paul E. (c.1973) "Symbolism and Practice: A Theory for the Social Meaning of Pop Music"

Clarke, John (c.1973) "The Skinheads and the Study of Youth Culture" Clarke, John (1973) "Football, Hooliganism and the Skinheads"

Willis, Paul E. (1975) "How Working Class Kids Get Working Class Jobs"

Griffin, Christine (1984) "Young Women and Work: The Transition from School to the Labour Market for Young Working Class Women"

## Summary

- Approaches to 'texts' can vary widely
- Hall (and 'cultural studies') understand media texts as objects embedded in a broad 'culture'
- The language used can be very different across different approaches. We can learn by thinking about what these differences point to.

## Ends