MEDIA STUDIES 101

Media Hack Team

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

1: Reading Media Texts

1.1: Analysing Texts- Media and Theory

Communication and media permeate our society. At its most basic level, we can think of communication as the exchange of information or meaning – but what does that mean? When are you not exchanging information or meaning? To try and help make sense of the wealth of encounters in which communication might be said to be occurring, we try and categorize communication into different types. Some of these types include:

- interpersonal communication, or one-on-one talking and rhetoric, where we analyse things like tone, body language, and speech
- mass communication, which includes one-to-many and many-to-many communication acts, with a particular interest in mediated communication, such as with the press.
- Organizational communication, where we look at how people organize their information exchanges to maintain and facilitate group behaviour
- Intercultural communication, which looks at the exchange of information and ideas across different cultural groups or subgroups.

But is communication purely a functional and pragmatic tool for the exchange of information, and serves no other function or plays no other role within society? Or is there more than one level to consider when studying the act and role of communication in a social context?

Building on work started by Robert T. Craig, we can generally talk about seven models or traditions of communication – we can look at any communication practice through the lens of one or more of these models to develop a more nuanced understanding of communication in everyday life.

The seven models (adapted from Miller) are:

1. **Rhetorical** – this model is concerned primarily with communication as a discourse, and tends to concern itself primarily with interpersonal, one-to-one or one-to-few communication acts, such as speech. Post the linguistic turn of the mid- to late-twentieth century, rhetoric has expanded its area of focus to include mass communication that attempts to persuade, such as political communication and advertising. A rhetorical approach to communication might look at who was speaking to whom, in what context, and to what end or purpose (i.e.: to persuade or to change an opinion or belief).
2. **Semiotic** – this model sees communication primarily as an exchange of signs within a meaning-making system. We will be going into much further depth into the idea of semiotics in a later module, but for now it is just worth noting that semiotics approaches communication in itself, seeing the communication as a sign within a sign system, which employs signs in culturally contextualized combinations to convey meaning.
3. **Phenomenological** – this model is primarily concerned with communication as an experience. A phenomenological approach would see communication as both a representation and a reinforcement of what the communicators see to be self-evident. A phenomenological approach can take on both interpersonal and mass communications, and may also take under its purvey objects or ideas as sites of meaning-making.
4. **Cybernetic** – this model views communication as a flow of information. This is not just the pragmatic A sends a message to B type of flow, but also tries to take into account factors which influence and constraint the flow of information, including social factors such as mores and etiquette, technological factors such as channel access and availability, and political factors such as regulation.
5. **Psychological or Socio-psychological** – this model, as the name suggests, is concerned with the impact of communication acts on the individual, particularly their sense of self in society. This model sees communication as representing certain individual choices made in order to maximize benefit to the individual or group. We'll come back to these ideas when we discuss symbolic interactionism in the next module.
6. **Sociocultural** – this model sees communication as a way of replicating and reinforcing (and challenging) the social order. This approach assumes that people in societies have models of how that society should operate; communication acts to build, reinforce, and propagate these models.
7. **Critical** – this model views communication as a set of assumptions that are open to challenge and negotiation; as you might have guessed, it has strong links to the socio-cultural tradition. Approaches such as Marxist critique are representative of this model.

We can look at any act of communication through any of these models, and uncover something different about the communication itself, the meaning it helps construct and reconstruct, and how that communication and the communicators involved fit within a socio-cultural context.

It's worth stepping back even further for a moment, and turning your attention to the wider role of communication in everyday life. To do this, it is worth starting with a question: can you imagine a world without communication?

What does it look like?

What might be some of the cultural roles of communication in everyday life? In no particular order, we can talk about the following:

1 Communication tells stories, and perhaps more importantly, they *retell* stories. Communication, particularly mass communication and the mass media, tends to fall into repetitive and recursive patterns of representation and ideology, ones that often reinforce the dominant hegemony of a culture or society. For example, the narratives around masculinity and sports such as rugby — think of the way stories about All Blacks are constructed and reconstructed in the media.

By using these narrative strategies in our communication patterns, we are engaging in a kind of *shorthand* that facilitates communication behaviours, signals a shared culture or values system, and indicates an expectation of communicative and ideological symmetry. However, such myths also propagate a particular set of ideas about what is valued within a culture, and what or who is marginalized.

Let's take a look at All Blacks for example – think of the language that is used to describe them, and the thoughts and feelings it evokes such as: www.nzherald.co.nz/all-blacks...ectid=11168151 or www.nzherald.co.nz/sport/news...ectid=11193344

These sports stars and their games, which are a form of communication, reinforce particular, in this case modern and Western, views about masculinity, which then has an impact on how the readers of these texts understand the masculine in their culture.

We'll be coming back to sports stars and cultural mythology when we touch on gender in a later module. In the meantime see this http://www.onlineprnews.com/news/142894-1306526248-real-men-wear-pink-ribbon-novelty-athletic-socks.html

2 A second role that communication plays in everyday life is to help maintain social order by taking on a kind of surveillance operation, in that communication demonstrates to a society what behaviours are considered acceptable and unacceptable. This may be through object representation, or it may be through commentary on active behaviours. An example of the former might be soaps. Soaps like *Shortland Street* plays out, in a mass media, the narratives of types of private lives and decision processes of different groups of people in a palatable, easy to understand and follow manner. It is not by accident that reality TV and soap operas follow the same structural beats. Both are structured to play out long-form 'life' narratives, with different characters taking on the role of hero or villain. An example of commentary might be gossip, whether about a sports star, a pop singer, or your neighbours.

Facebook is a great example of this, in that it runs on social communication – on gossip and networking – and people very deliberately structure their behavior on these sites to present the best 'face' and thus receive the most desirable commentary and feedback from others. For example, think about how long you spent choosing and setting up your profile picture to use for your Facebook page? Along similar lines, new communication channels and technologies now allow us to extend our interpersonal surveillance, both across space and through time. Whereas once students who went off to college in a way escaped the surveillance of their parents, now their parents can (unless they've locked their account) follow their children's antics on Facebook. Those same antics may then form part of a person's online profile which is seen by potential employers as they use those same tools of surveillance to get a sense of who you are before they call you in for a job interview.

Either way, this role of communication serves to demonstrate correct social behavior, and the consequences of incorrect social behavior, and to allow social sanctions and feedbacks on our own behavior and decisions.

3 A third role that communication plays is to help us interpret and make sense of information. This has become a particularly important role in the modern communication landscape, as information overload has become an increasingly common part of our everyday lives. Again, new media and electronic communication channels have raised the profile of this role of communication in everyday life. We can see this most clearly in news media, and the idea of agenda setting, but even the use of particular language or even images can also frame a topic or give subtle hints and clues as to how we are 'meant' to interpret information according to our culture.

4 This act of interpreting, of governing behavior, and even of storytelling, is of course at its heart a representation of a particular set of values and ideologies that emerge from and are part of a culture. It is very important to remember that no act of communication is ideologically neutral! Ideologies are part of our lifeworlds, part of the assumptions we make and encode into and decode out of our communication practices and behaviours, and so if we are to study communication, we need to address these ideological underpinnings.

5 That's not to say that we always communicate thinking about these things – they are often covert, assumed and unchallenged parts of our everyday lives. But they exist, even when we think about communication on a basic uses and gratifications level. Uses and gratifications is a very simple theory you may already be familiar with at some level. It hypothesizes that audiences, and communicators in general, are active in why they seek out media and communicative exchanges. These four reasons are diversion, socialization, identity, and surveillance. We may have multiple simultaneous reasons, or we may just be bored and channel surfing. But even those decisions and positions – to be bored, to seek our diversion through television rather than another way, or to settle on a particular channel or show – reflect ideologies and social, technological, and political pressures that are so every day that we don't even think about them anymore.

So, to recap. Communication is pervasive and an integral part of our everyday lives – we cannot imagine our world without communication. Communication serves a number of concurrent functions in society – pragmatic, normative, ideological and informational. We can approach an analysis of communication at a number of different levels – rhetorical, semiotic, phenomenological, cybernetic, socio-psychological, socio-cultural or critical. We can move between these different levels to uncover different aspects of communicative processes. But in general, it is important to remember that communication serves more than just a functional process of getting information from point A to point B. Communication also propagates what a society considers to be normal or normative behavior. It reinforces the dominant ideologies of a society, and may also create space for new ideologies to come in and challenge that dominant hegemony. We can see these ideological debates being played out as people challenge and critique existing stories and narratives that permeate and propagate through our communicative culture. We can break communication down to the level of the individual sign, or scale it up to see it play out over time across an entire culture, but communication is never ideologically neutral.

In the next section, we'll discuss how communication fits and is a part of cultural systems.

Discussion Questions

1. Can you identify a time or situation when you are not exchanging information or meaning, and in a wider context, discuss what a world without communication might be like?
2. Find examples of each of the seven models of communication. Give reasons for your choices.
3. In the media or elsewhere, identify examples of competing ideologies that challenge an existing hegemony. Describe their context – political, commercial, social and academic etc – and give a short outline of each, including the media role in communicating the information.

References

Craig, Robert T. and Heidi L Muller. *Theorizing Communication: Readings Across Traditions*. Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 2007.

Miller, K. *Communication Theories: Perspectives, Processes and Contexts*. 2nd Ed. McGaw Hill: New York, 2005. Pp 1-16

1.2: Communication and Culture

What is communication, why do we communication, how do we communicate, and to what end, are all questions we ask in the study of communication. At its most basic, communication is the exchange of information and meaning. We are constantly communicating, in a wide range of different contexts, such as with each other (interpersonal communication), with different cultural groups or subgroups (intercultural communication), or to large audiences (mass communication), just to name a few. However, to understand communication, we need to understand the place of communication in culture.

Culture as a term is widely used in academic as well as in daily speech and discourse, referring to different concepts and understandings. While the term originally stems from ancient Greek and Roman cultures (Latin: *cultura*) it has various dimensions today built from the different needs and uses of each field, be it anthropology, sociology or communication studies. For communication studies, we might start by defining culture as a set of learned behaviours shared by a group of people through interaction.

Cultures are not fixed, monolithic entities, but are fluid, always changing and responding to pressures and influences, such as the changing experiences of its members, or interaction with other cultures. However, to its members, the artefacts and even the existence of cultural behaviours and schemas may seem invisible or unremarkable. A culture may even have within it certain subcultures which exist within the main cultural framework of a society, but share within it specific peculiarities or modalities that also set it apart from the mainstream. These subcultures may continue to exist for many years or only a short period of time. They may die out, or may become incorporated into the mainstream as part of this ongoing evolution of culture.

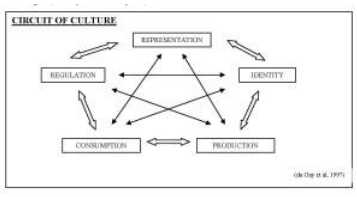
While there are specific differences to each culture, generally speaking, cultures share a number of traits, such as a shared language or linguistic marker, definition of proper and improper behaviour, a notion of kinship and social relationship (i.e.: mother, friend, etc), ornamentation and art, and a notion of leadership or decision making process.

Culture and society, though similar, are different things. Cultures are defined by these learned behaviours and schemas. Societies at their simplest can be defined as groups of interacting individuals. However, it is through this interaction that individuals develop and communicate the markers of culture, and so in human societies, it is very difficult to separate out 'culture' and 'society.'

And thus we come back to the role of communication within culture. The idea of culture as something that is shared means that it is vital to understand culture and communication in relation to one another. The relationship between culture and communication, in all its forms, is tightly interwoven and interlinked. We can see that communication enables the spread and reiteration of culture. Both communications and the media propagate the values and schemas of a culture through the *repeated* interaction and exchange enabled by the communications process.

Notice the emphasis on repeated there: it is not in single instances of communication that culture is made, but rather in the repeated exchange of information and the reinforcement of the ideals and values it embodies, all conveyed within a particular moment. One way we can think about this complex interplay is by looking at du Gay, et al (1997) notion of the circuit of culture.

The circuit of culture is a way of exploring a product of a culture as a complex object that is affected by and has an impact on a number of different aspects of that culture.



from du Gay et al 1997

Image (c) du Gay et al, 1997

It's worth briefly going through each of these five variables on the diagram now, and then applying it to a familiar form of communication in culture. This text will return in later sections to deal more deeply with many of the idea's that this diagram introduces.

Representation – how is the meaning conveyed to the audience, user, or co-communicator? What signs, modes and discourses help convey the meaning – not only the 'factual' or informational meaning, but also the social meaning. For example, what does the colour pink represent in your cultural context?

Identity – refers to how meaning is internalized by the receiver or audience. Our identity is shaped by our culture, which creates a range of viable and non-viable identity options that are presented, refined and renegotiated through our communication and exchange of cultural objects. By consuming and displaying certain communicative texts and strategies, we are both claiming certain identity positions, and simultaneously rejecting others.

Production — here refers to the production of meaning. Meaning can be produced and reproduced in a number of ways. An individual may produce meaning about themselves in the way they dress or wear their hat. Apple™ produces meaning about itself in the way they design and build the iPhone™. A terrorist organization may produce meaning about itself by making videos they put on Youtube. This act of meaning production may be unproblematic within mainstream culture, and help maintain the hegemony, the dominance of a particular set of schema or values. Alternatively, this production may challenge dominant beliefs or values in some. A pop culture example of this might have been early Lady Gaga, whose mode of dress was confrontational because it deviated from existing cultural schema about appropriate dress for someone of her class, race, gender and occupation.

Consumption – The flip side of production is consumption. Consumption of texts, whether they be an outfit, a conversation, or a pop-song, reflects cultural values and expectations – conforming to values and expectations leads to unproblematic consumption – it's what is expected, it fits our internalized schema. Texts that do not fit this schema are confronting, challenging, even shocking. To continue to use Lady Gaga as an example, when she released a nine-minute long music video centered around a narrative of female violence, it was shocking both in terms of its format (which wasn't standard MTV fare) and its narrative structure.

Regulation – finally, regulation refers to the forces which constrain the production, distribution, and consumption of texts. These forces may be explicit, such as the television broadcasters code of conduct, or they may be implicit, such as the blogger litmus test of 'would you say this in front of your mother?'

Finally, linking together these areas are these arrows – the arrows are very important, because as du Gay says, none of these variables can really be considered in isolation. It would be like looking only at the tyres to try and figure out why your car isn't running. So it is important, when considering communication within a cultural context, to remember that there are multiple factors influencing the production of text and meaning. These factors may support the text, reinforce a cultural position, or alternatively, they may challenge or confront a cultural schema.

du Gay's model is regularly applied to analysing the interplay between communication and culture within one cultural situation. However, with the globalisation of the media and communication landscape, it is becoming increasingly important to think about the specificities of intercultural communication.

Discussion

1. How would you explain what culture is in your own words?
2. Choose a form of communication or a media text, and see if you can apply the five variables du Gay suggests to understand that example.

References

du Gay et al. (1997) *Doing Cultural Studies: The story of the Sony Walkman* Milton Keynes: Open University; Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

1.3: Intercultural Communication

As mentioned in the Communication and Culture section intercultural communication generally describes communication efforts between different cultural groups or subgroups. Differences between those groups, even if they speak the same language, can create problems and make understanding each other much harder. As globalisation has brought the whole world closer together, business between different cultures happens on a daily basis. To make things run smoothly, intercultural communication skills are crucial.

Intercultural communication research mainly focuses on national comparisons and is hooked in the background of management and organizational theories. One pioneering model is the one Geert Hofstede derived in worldwide studies of different nations along certain characteristics.

Hofstede refers to culture as “the collective programming of the mind distinguishing the members of one group or category of people from others” (Hofstede, 2013). Comparing values, behaviours and organisation for different nations Hofstede developed five dimensions to classify cultural principles. Each dimension builds up between two poles who describe the idealised extremes of it.

Hofstedes original dimensions included power distance (PDI), individualism vs. collectivism (IDV), masculinity vs. femininity (MAS) and Uncertainty avoidance (UAI) (Hofstede, 2001). A fifth definition, the one of long-term vs. short-term orientation or in other words pragmatic vs. normative, was added by Micheal Bonds research in 1991, followed by the definition of indulgence vs. restraint by Michael Minkov (Hofstede 2013). In each dimension the lowest possible score is 0 and the highest is 100.

The following questions give a better understanding of the six dimensions which have been researched to a broad extent in the last couple of years:

Power distance:

- How flat are hierarchies?
- How does a culture deal with inequalities?
- Is societal influence concentrated in the hands of a few or distributed throughout the population?
- How authoritarian is a country’s organisation?
- Are communication efforts interactive?

New Zealand Score: 12
New Zealand’s low score indicates a culture with flat hierarchies and a very low power distance. Communication in organisations is interactive and rather informal.

Individualistic vs. Collectivist culture:

- Does the interest of the group or the individual matter the most?
- Are people only looking after themselves and their immediate family?
- How well are individuals integrated and networked?

New Zealand Score: 86

With the rather high score of 86 New Zealand can be described as a rather individualistic culture with people looking after themselves and their immediate families first.

Masculinity vs. Femininity:

- Which values are aimed for?
- How strong is a society following material values and success in comparison to the quality of life, interpersonal relationships and the concern for the weak?

New Zealand Score: 59

A score of 59 signalises masculinity rather then femininity. People strive to be the best they can be in work or school-related settings with the focus on winning, being proud of their achievements and success in life.

Uncertainty avoidance vs. taking risks:

- Do members of a society feel threatened by unknown situations?
- Are there attempts to control the future or do people just let it happen?
- How high is the willingness to try something new or different?

New Zealand Score: 39

With a score of 39 New Zealand can be described as a pragmatic society that deals with uncertainties in a relaxed and flexible fashion. Originality is valued. People are willing to accept new ideas, give innovative products a try and a not too averse to taking risks.

Long-term vs. short-term orientation (Pragmatic vs. normative):

- How are individuals subordinating themselves for longer term purposes?
- How are the tendencies towards short-term spending and long-term savings, perseverance and quick results?

New Zealand Score: 28

New Zealand is shown to be a normative country with a normative way of thinking. Motivation to save for the future is rather low, therefore the focus on quick results is high.

Indulgence vs. Constraint:

- How freely are hedonist drives as gratifications towards enjoying life and having fun tolerated and allowed?
- Is the gratification of needs restricted by strong social norms?

New Zealand Score: 75

A rather high score of 75 pictures New Zealand's society indulgent. With it people tend to possess a positive attitude and a tendency towards optimism. Leisure time is regarded as important, also the ability to spend money as one likes and and to follow desires and needs to enjoy life and have fun.

As you can see in the questions above Hofstede's model is all about comparison. National cultures and their distinct attitudes, behaviours and norms can be seen as specific through boundaries and differences in comparison to others. Although Hofstede's model is widely accepted in organisational communication and management theory critics argue that most research is not integrated with findings from research that is not concentrating on purely economic and organisational values (Kirkman et al, 2006).

While values change with the developments of society globalization and convergence tendencies of new technologies and communication structures lead to a broader integrated international consumer culture and national values. General tendencies towards a culture of networked individualism are researched and referred to in literature (Castells 1996; Wellman 2002). Still Hofstede's dimensions seem to be quite stable and remain over time. Changes in technology affect a lot of countries at the same time or with only a small delay and therefore make their relative position amongst the other nations rather stable as every nation shifts in the same direction.

Discussion

1. What can you say about your nation's culture?
2. How would you classify it in terms of Hofstede's model?
3. How do you evaluate New Zealand's scores? Do you agree?
4. Have a look online to compare your estimation with your country's scores!
5. Compare with other countries you know.

Alternative links

Hofstede youtube channel "Hofstede insight": www.youtube.com/user/HOFSTEDE.../5/PVbkjobD8ao

Hofstede homepage: http://geert-hofstede.com/ and score results for New Zealand: geert-hofstede.com/new-zealand.html

References

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Hofstede, G. H. (2001). Culture's consequences: Comparing values, behaviors, institutions and organizations across nations. Thousand Oaks: Sage.

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Jandt, F. E. (2012). An introduction to intercultural communication: Identities in a global community. Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Wellman, B. (2002). Little Boxes, Glocalization and Networked Individualism. In Tanabe, M.; van den Besselaar, P.; Ishida, T. (eds.). Digital Cities II. Computational and Sociological Approaches. Berlin: Springer. pp. 10-25.

1.4: Semiotics

Introduction

Ferdinand de Saussure; Image source Wikimedia Commons

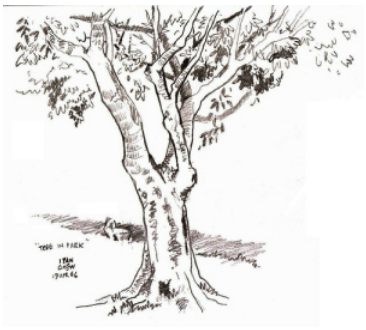
Semiotics is the study of signs and their meaning in society. A sign is something which can stand for something else – in other words, a sign is anything that can convey meaning. So words can be signs, drawings can be signs, photographs can be signs, even street signs can be signs. Modes of dress and style, the type of bag you have, or even where you live can also be considered signs, in that they convey meaning. This chapter will introduce the idea of signs, how they function within systems and as tools of communication, and situate signs within codes.

Signs and Signifiers

- Sign Systems
- Semiotics and Communication Processes
- Codes

1.5: Signs and Signifiers

Let's start with a really simple example. Take a look at these three things:



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by Axel Boldt wiki commons

Source: Library of Congress US

These signs all 'stand in' for the idea of a tree. But they do so in different ways. We generally categorize signs into three types:

1. **Iconic signs** – icons are signs where meaning is based on similarity of appearance. So our drawing of our tree stands in for the notion of 'tree' based on a crude similarity of appearance.
2. **Indexical signs** – Indexical signs have a cause-and-effect relationship between the sign and the meaning of the sign. There is a direct link between the two. So a leaf might be an indexical sign.
3. **Symbolic signs** – these signs have an arbitrary or conventional link. The word tree, t-r-e-e only comes to stand in for the notion of tree because of the conventions of our language. In another convention, the symbolic sign for tree might be 'arbor' (German) or '□' (Japanese)

In each case, the sign can be broken into two parts, the *signifier* and the *signified*. The signifier is the thing, item, or code that we 'read' – so, a drawing, a word, a photo. Each signifier has a signified, the idea or meaning being expressed by that signifier. Only together do they form a sign. There is often no intrinsic or direct relationship between a signifier and a signified – no signifier-signified system is 'better' than another. Language is flexible, constructed, and changeable. de Saussure uses the word 'arbitrariness' to describe this relationship.

A good example is the word 'cool.' If we take the spoken word 'cool' as a signifier, what might be the signified? In one context or situation, cool might refer to temperature. But in another, it might refer to something as 'stylish' or 'popular'. The relationship between signifier and signified can change over time and in different contexts.

This is important, because signs are understood and encoded in context. As with the words ‘’cool,’ the relationship between signifier and signified is made meaningful in context. This area starts by looking at signs in isolation, but as you become more confident with semiotics, you will start to look at signs as part of a sign system.

Discussion

1. What is the relationship between a signifier and the signified?
2. What might be an example of an iconic, indexical and symbolic sign for the idea of your pet?

1.6: Sign Systems

We can look at signs and sign systems in three ways:

1. **Semantics** – this is the 'how' of semiotics, and is concerned with this relationship between a signified and signifier – the sign and what it stands in for.
2. **Syntactics** – this refers to structural relations. One structural relation in language is grammar, but syntactics in semiotics refers to the formal relationship between signs that lets them build into sign systems.
3. **Pragmatics** – pragmatics, according to Morris (Morris, 1938), is the relationship of sign to the person reading or understanding that sign.

To explore this, lets look at a very familiar yet very arbitrary sign system – traffic lights.

LED Traffic Lights from Wikimedia Commons, Petey21

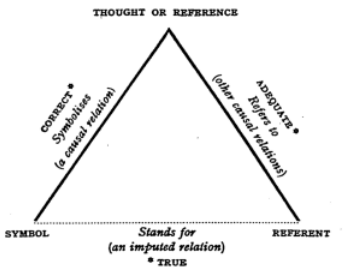
If **semantics** is the 'how' of semiotics, concerned with the relationship between signifier and signified, how might we read semantically the traffic light? We might read red as stop, and green as go.

If **syntactics** is the formal relationship between signs in a sign system, then how might we read the syntax of traffic lights? We might see the relationships between red, amber, and green as three parts of a sign system that also refer to other sign systems (such as white lines on the road, or the shape of a stop sign). These sign relationship then make the structure of traffic lights as a sign system.

And finally, if **pragmatics** is the relationship between sign and reader, how might we pragmatically read the traffic light? If the light is red, for example, we know to stop.

The last useful concept from basic semiotics that is worth mentioning is the idea of syntactic indeterminacy (Messaris, 1994). Syntactics is the formal relationship between signs and sign systems. But as we've noted, sign systems are constantly changing and evolving, with the arbitrariness of the relationship between signifier and signified creating a kind of 'wriggle room' for meaning to change and evolve within context. This flexibility in meaning creates space where a sign that means one thing to me might mean something slightly or significantly different to you. Very savvy advertisers often exploit this syntactic indeterminacy to encourage audiences to draw their own meanings from a number of possible interpretations, or to imply rather than overtly state a message (which may turn off the ad's target audience), as this classic New Zealand ad for 'Instant Kiwi' lottery products demonstrates.

We each develop different interpretations of advertisements, or any set of signs, based on our own experience, interpretation and frame of reference. One way to think about the interplay of these factors when looking at signs is to use a semiotic triangle (Ogden and Richards, 1923).



Ogden and Richards (1923) The Meaning of Meaning

There are a number of different versions of this triangle, and you will sometimes see different labels used at each of the points of the triangle (though they might be a different points, they are the same in relation to each other). But generally speaking, there are three main points to the triangle. The first point is the *reference*, the second is the *sign* (or sometimes the expression), and the third is the *concept*. Some versions also put in the centre of the triangle the actor or agent who makes these connections through experience.

This leads us to thinking about semiotics as part of the process of communication.

Discussion

1. Can you apply the semiotic triangle to the 'Instant Kiwi' ad linked to above?
2. What is the **reference, symbol** and **thought** presented within the sign system of this advert and how do they relate to each other?

References

Messaris, P. Visual Literacy: Image, mind, and reality, Westview Press, 1994.

Morris, C. Foundations of the Theory of Signs, University of Chicago Press, 1938.

1.7: Semiotics and Communication Processes

At this point, it is worth thinking about the two fundamental views of communication, the transmission and the ritual view, and consider how ideas of the sign play out in each.

The transmission view, which was about the functional exchange of information from sender to receiver across space, can utilize signs as a vessel for the exchange of such information. The panoply of signs that surround us are all signifiers, and thus can be seen to at least be attempting to communicate or convey information.

In a ritual view of communication, which is about the idea of culture being developed over time, ideas are seen to be circulating a culture, and again through the use of signs to facilitate the exchange of meaning. What a sign 'means' is often determined and refined by culture, even for indexical signs. What meanings are dominant, what symbols correlate to what ideas, is constructed by culture. Again, think of the word 'cool' as an example of this in action.

This brings us to the concept of codes. In all the communication you have participated and been exposed to, we have had to 'read' and deconstruct the signs presented in context. We all bring to bear on the act of meaning-making our understanding of that context, and prior experiences with those signs to help make sense of the message being transmitted. To continue the example of this Instant Kiwi lottery advertisement, we read that ad referring back to our own personal experiences of exam situations, as well as other media texts that have presented similiar or parallel narratives.

Signs are not presented in isolation, one at a time. We can try and isolate them to study them, but we cannot fully make sense of them without taking into account the context. Signs, how they operate and how they relate signifier to signified, take place within systems that we call codes.

Discussion Questions

1. Take this New Zealand PSA commercial as an example, and think about the **codes** — the prior texts and experiences and meanings — you as the reader need to bring to bear to understand the message it intends to convey.

1.8: Codes

Codes are so important to the understanding of semiotics that, if a sign does not appear to conform to a code, there is doubt that it is even a sign at all. All codes are systems, but not all systems are codes. These codes are used by both encoders and decoders of signs to help ensure that the message intended is approximate to the message received. We often use contextual cues to let us know what kinds of codes are expected or to expect – for example, an academic textbook uses words and pictures differently than a children's storybook. They both use signs in the form of words and drawings, but how we approach understanding these signs is quite different.

Some codes, we are quite aware of. For example, iambic pentameter is a form of poetry, which is a code system in which there are certain expectations about the arrangement of word-signs in regards to both their signified/meaning (imagery) and their signifier/structure (rhythm).

Other codes are a little more subtle, and we apply them almost without being aware of it. For example, what is this?

CC-BY-SA by Bgabel @ wikimedia commons

Most people say it is Auckland, but it is more accurate to say that it is a photograph of Auckland. Photography is itself a codification of iconic and indexical symbols, but carries with it its own system of meaning making – two dimensions stand in for three, movement is frozen, time stands still. Photography is said to be a perceptual code, but one that we are so familiar with that we tend to forget it is a code and a set of signs at all.

Part of perceptual coding involves what is foregrounded and what is backgrounded (part of the coding of perception). Chandler provides us with this classic example of foreground coding. What do you see here?

en.Wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Facevase.png

http://en.Wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Facevase.png

If you are most familiar with Western visual codification systems, you may not at first see the two faces. This is because, in Western culture familiar with still images, our codification system for such images tends to code darker areas as background in relation to lighter areas (with a few exceptions, related to symmetry and balance). This is how a lot of optical illusions are made, they actually exploit a learned code for visual perception. But such codes exist to account for every type of sign there is.

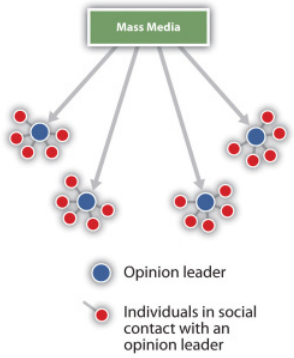
So in summary, semiotics is a powerful tool for helping to understand and interpret how meaning is constructed and deconstructed in messages. It is now worth stepping back and looking at how semiotics fits into the wider social patterns and ideologies.

Discussion

1. Semiotics is the study of signs, and how these signs 'stand in' for anything else. These signs are interpreted and read by readers who utilize their past experience with similar signs and codes. These codes are cultural, and are learned over time and through experience, and therefore can change over time. For example, take a look at these covers and contents from classic issues of New Zealand Woman's Weekly. What different experiences and codes do the editors expect their readers to bring to bear reading these texts? How are they different to the codes used in the modern editions of the magazine?

1.9: Two-step flow of communication

Towards the end of the Second World War, sociologist Paul Lazarfeld added to the media effects research frame the social aspect of human agency. Rejecting the direct influence of the hypodermic needle or magic bullet theory, he introduced an intermediary between the sender of a message and the audience. This intermediary, dubbed an "opinion leader", was usually a person of influence with greater access to information. They would be seen as an authority able to filter, interpret and explain media messages. It is the credibility of the weatherman that persuades the individual to bring along an umbrella, rather than the factual data from the meteorological department themselves. And it would be the community or religious leader expounding on the messages released by politicians that actually hold sway over the masses. The two-step flow of information paved the way for research into multi-step models.



Paletz,D.; Owen, D.;Cook, T. 21 century American Government and Politics, Chapter 7, adapted from Katz, E., Lazarsfeld, P. Personal influence (New York: The Free Press, 1995)

Another great example to explain the influence of opinion leaders is the world of fashion. Magazines play an important role in showing the trends of the coming season by passing on information from big fashion brands to a wider audience. The reader's knowledge of next seasons fashions and trends is filtered by the magazines. While this describes a classic two-step flow of communication new technologies have changed the role of the media.

Again in the example of fashion, the magazines provide the audience with a chance to describe their likes and needs through participation in the discussion. Information is flowing in many directions through different media channels and filtering through new opinion leaders, such as fashion bloggers. Clicking through the Australian fashion blog breakfastwithaudrey and its links to other influential bloggers demonstrates how connected they are. Such referencing of each other builds a strong network of opinion leaders for the reader audience to follow.

Magazines and blogs: opinion leaders in today's fashion industry CC-BY-SA

Interlinking might also occur between different brands, magazines and other bloggers which makes the process more complex and the flow of information more challenging to follow, especially to understand in terms of influence and power. A single user can be influenced by different sources or opinion leaders when following the trends of the season. The shaping of the user's opinion follows a more complex pattern and flow.

Discussion

1. Pick a point of interest (other than fashion) and create a flow chart of the various sources, pathways and intermediaries that provide or filter information to any interested party. Identify any direct, two-flow and multi-flow conduits of knowledge as well as any other interesting features.

1.10: Gender and politics

Because men have been attributed a certain superiority and power over women for a long time, women have a harder time than men to have the same credibility.

A YouTube element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here: https://opentextbc.ca/mediastudies101/?p=44

From ABC News (Australia)

1.11: Limitations of minimal effects model

Conceptually and methodologically, the minimal effects models have limitations. Much of the empirical data was gleaned from research on the media's impact on voters during elections in the US. Using voting as the dependent variable poses problems. Chiefly, it does not measure effect accurately. While the media may not change a voter's decision, it can still influence the voter's support. If, after consuming the media messages, a voter is more convinced than ever, that in itself is still an effect. Sometimes, a voter's confidence in a candidate may be weakened but not to the point of voting for the candidate's rival and this effect (of weakened conviction) will not show up in the data. The primary method of data collection for these studies are surveys, and this has been criticised as unreliable, as the voters are required to recall and report their own vote as well as decision making process. Thus, they have to rely on their memory of what are likely to be transient moments. For example, they are unlikely to be aware of what they were thinking of when listening to a political debate or advertisement.

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

2: Culture and Contexts

2.1: Ideology

Ideology helps us to explain how unequal and unjust social relations are maintained in society. More specifically, the concept has been central in attempts to explain how economic and social inequalities in capitalist societies are justified and appear to be normal. If capitalism only works in the interests of a small number of people, as many argue, the majority have to be convinced that the capitalist system is natural. So despite the failings of capitalism, such as economic and social inequality, exploitation of workers, and so on, ideology prohibits any alternative perspectives from being taken seriously. Theories of ideology attempt to explain why people who are disadvantaged by the capitalist system seem to make concessions for it.

We encounter ideology in situations in which unequal social relations appear to be normal and difficult to challenge. For example, ideology plays a role in how we might think about situations such as poverty, and emerges in questions such as: are the poor to blame for their poverty? Have they made bad choices? Or is poverty produced structurally by a distribution of wealth that favours an elite social class? Capitalist ideology tends to answer these questions with the view that, like everyone in society, the poor are individually responsible for their own life situation. This means that the capitalist system, which many argue works by concentrating wealth upwards into the hands of the wealthy few, is not the cause of poverty. In this example, ideology takes the form of a dominant social value: individualism. Individualism is seen as good because everyone can pursue his or her own interests, and capitalism is the only system that allows this pursuit.

Ideology has been theorised in three basic ways:

Ideology as false consciousness

In the first, ideology is understood as false consciousness. This means that belief in the system is derived from cultural messages that cover over and obscure the reality of exploitation. We could call this the ideology as ‘rose coloured glasses’ view. For example, we might enjoy owning a number of digital communication gadgets, such as smartphones, tablets, and/or Ipods. The prevailing view is that these digital devices are environmentally clean and green. However, this is far from the reality. These gadgets contain many hazardous materials, such as chromium, mercury, and cadmium. The rapid development of digital gadgets means that devices that are only two or three years old become redundant. This rapid development has produced an e-waste crisis, in which millions of tonnes of e-waste globally has found its way into landfill. In many instances, this e-waste is exported from wealthy nations to dumps in poorer nations. In this example ideology covers over this wasteful and hazardous aspect of digital gadgets, as well as the devastating health effects of the hazardous materials upon the world’s poor. Challenges to ideology, in this first sense, involve exposing the illusion with the truth.

Ideology as a set of social practices

In the second, theorised by the French political philosopher, Louis Althusser, ideology is less an illusion that is vulnerable to truth than a set of practices and ideas that are produced within social institutions such as the church, media, and the school. In this second sense, ideology doesn’t involve conscious thought and false knowledge about the social world. Instead, ideology is understood as a social mechanism that produces subject positions; this to say a place in the social world from which we live our lives. These subject positions include, for example, student, teacher, cleaner, CEO, and so on. The point is that ideology invests such subject positions with social meaning. A teacher, for instance, makes sense of their actual social position by imagining how this relates to the social world as a whole. The teacher’s imaginary can be politically conservative, conformist, reformist, or revolutionary. The point that Althusser makes is that even though our subjectivity is institutionally produced, we feel as though we are free. This is what he calls, “bourgeois ideology”. By this he means an ideology that makes us feel as though the social world is there for us to express ourselves, rather than us being mere functionaries for the system. In this second sense, ideology can never be overcome since it plays an important role in how we understand our place in the world. Progressive social change involves challenging “bourgeois ideology”, that is an ideology that equates freedom to the pursuit of financial gain, with ideologies that promote the common good.

Ideology involving beliefs and fantasies

In the third theorisation, instead of understanding ideology as a problem of knowledge or the imaginary, ideology is thought to involve our beliefs and fantasies. Ideology attempts to assemble a coherent account of the social world by focusing on one aspect of things and taking this as an account of the whole. Slovenian philosopher, Slavoj Žižek, sets forth this theory. This partial construction works as an object of fantasy, and displaces the real conditions of social inequality. For Žižek, the citizenry no longer believe in the integrity of politicians or that capitalism is the most apt economic and social system, but they act as if they do

believe. Ideology today has thus become cynical. The capitalist system has become the grounds for the expression of pleasure and enjoyment. Žižek includes everyday examples to demonstrate this view. Part of the purchase price for a Starbucks coffee, for instance, is donated to help poor children. Along with the product, buying a Starbucks coffee thus involves doing good, and makes the consumer feel that their purchasing produces positive benefits for others, in this case poor children. But Žižek points out that the enjoyment derived from this "ethical' form of consumption covers over the very capitalist system that produces poverty in the first place. The point in this instance is that ideology works by investing consumption with enjoyment, and even though we know that people suffer and that there is exploitation in the world, the very system that produces this suffering remains unchallenged.

Quotes

Georg Lukács – ideology "appears, on the one hand, as something which is *subjectively* justified in the social and historical situation, as something which can and should be understood, i.e. as 'right'. At the same time, *objectively*, it by-passes the essence of the evolution of society and fails to pinpoint it and express it adequately. That is to say, objectively, it appears as a 'false consciousness'. On the other hand, we may see the same consciousness as something which fails *subjectively* to reach its self-appointed goals, while furthering and realising the *objective* aims of society of which it is ignorant and which it did not choose" (*History and class consciousness (1971)*, Cambridge: MIT Press, 50).

Louis Althusser – "In a class society ideology is the relay whereby, and the element in which, the relation between men and their conditions of existence is settled to the profit of the ruling class. In a classless society ideology is the relay whereby, and the element in which, the relation between men and their condition of existence is lived to the profit of all men (*For Marx* (2005), London: Verso, 236)

Slavoj Žižek – "[…] we have established a new way to read the Marxian formula 'they do not know it, but they are doing it': the illusion is not on the side of knowledge, it is already on the side of reality itself, of what the people are doing. What they do not know is that their social reality itself, their activity, is guided by an illusion, by a fetishistic inversion. What they overlook, what they misrecognize, is not the reality but the illusion which is structuring their reality, their real social activity. They know very well how things really are, but still they are doing it as if they did not know. The illusion is therefore double: it consists in overlooking the illusion which is structuring our real, effective relationship to reality. And this overlooked, unconscious illusion is what may be called the *ideological fantasy*" (*Mapping ideology (2012)*, London: Verso, 315-316).

Discussion

1. What are the ideologies that inform the role of being a student in a classroom?
2. What are the *dominant* ideologies (the ideologies that "everyone" accepts) about being a student?
3. Can you think of any alternative ideologies to explain that subject position (of being a student in a classroom?)

2.2: Discourse, Institutions, and Power

Discourses, institutions and the social power relations and intra-group tensions and agreements they represent are all very interesting in their own right. But now might be a good time to link this back to communication studies. Why should we care about discourses and institutions? Firstly, discourses and the institutions that produce and propagate them reflect the flow of power and control in society – most of the discourses that we are exposed to reflect the dominant position in society, and conflict between discourses, such as with smoking in the second half of the 20th century, reveal underlying social tensions between those dominant discourses and new and emerging discourses. So looking at discourse and institutions reveals for us who may speak, who might be silenced, and why certain groups, activities or relationships are framed in particular ways – so why might one group frame an individual to be a terrorist and another a freedom fighter could be revealed by understanding the institutional context of the speakers.

Secondly, institutions shape the communicative process. The media, particularly the commercial media, operates within institutional restrictions such as policy, copyright, and broadcast practice. Certain types of language and even types of signs are encouraged within particular institutional contexts, and other types are not. So discourses shape our communication and the types of texts we send, and how we understand the texts and messages we receive – we never communicate in a vacuum, we always bring to bear on our communications our context, our social norms, and our prior experiences.

Finally, an understanding of the discourses and their institutions that are active in a society helps us to come to terms with how communication is operating on a macro-level – so not just looking at individual texts or individual moments of communication, but communication as a whole. A good example is a classroom. If we were to look at a classroom in this way, you would need to think about the wider institution of education, the relationships and expectations it has in regard to teachers and students, and dominant discourses about knowledge and learning. Looking at the classroom this way helps to unpack the classroom-as-institution, and makes clearer the privileges and power it fosters. For example, who can speak and who must listen in a classroom is tied to these institutional relationship and supported by discourses of education that are so deeply engrained in us that many of us do not question it until we see other types of educational institutions and the types of discourses they support.

Discussion

1. What are some current discourses within the Australian, New Zealand and Pacific Regions?
2. Identify the signs and language employed in those debates and consider whether or not they are unique to the particular discourse or institution.
3. Then identify who is ‘speaking’, and who is not, and consider this information in terms of the discourse and institutional contexts.

2.3: Institutions

So what are institutions? We sometimes talk of things like banking institutions, or medical institutions, which sometimes evoke ideas of institutions as places, whereas institutions are really a mechanism of society. We create institutions as a way to govern and maintain society – they are structures that hold together social life. For example, we sometimes speak of the family as an institution. We are not referring to some discrete object when we talk about family – we are interested in the relationships that we have grouped together under the label of family. Different societies have different groupings under that label. For some, it might be the nuclear family. For other societies, it might be the extended family, or some other set of relations beyond notions of biology. What is important to remember is that each institution reflects and supports the values of the society in which it is situated.

Societies build and maintain institutions to create and perpetuate acceptable modes of behavior and interaction that help propagate and stabilize that society. In capitalist societies, banks are considered an institution in that they refer to a relationship of labour and capital. In the economic crashes of the early 21st century, banks were said to be destabilizing. This means that the relationships that form the institutions of banking were seen to be weakening, and as such, we saw a commensurate change in the notions of labour and capital, and their relationships and roles within society.

Social relations that are codified into institutions therefore have within them some measure of power. And this is where we come back to discourses. Institutions produce discourses as part of the interaction of their social relations, and these discourses reflect and reinforce the dominant ideologies that support and maintain these institutions. It is only when these discourses are challenged that we see the institutions challenged, and sometimes this leads to an institutional change which reflects the changing values in a society.

That's a lot of looping around, so let's take a look at an example that has a number of different communicative elements. Let's look at smoking.

Smoking as a social issue and a personal behaviour has now entered the public health discourses. It is now related to and reflects a negative social position – smoking is seen to be socially undesirable, and these negative connotations are framed in terms of health and wellness.

This is a relatively recent change. In the first half of the 20th century, smoking occupied a different institutional position, and was part of a different set of discourses related to relaxation and social desirableness. In the immediate post-war period, smoking was seen as a masculine pursuit, and women did not smoke publicly until smoking as a sign entered into discourses around female enfranchisement and the gendering of power. With the rise of public relations, discourses of smoking as a socially acceptable activity for both men and women were constructed by the early ad men, reflecting a developing institutional idea of feminine power. They even came up with the tagline 'torches of freedom.' (Bernays) Smoking was a public performance of power, prestige, and luxury and so the sign of smoking became associated with such discourses.

To propagate the business of smoking (a very profitable industry) as the first negative health impacts of smoking became apparent, the discourses surrounding smoking shifted again, and we started to see the rise of the early medical and health rhetorics to counteract the negative discourses of smoking-related illnesses. So in the advertising around cigarettes from 1960 to 1990, we can see a tension between two competing institutional discourses – smoking as being good for you (social discourse) and smoking as being bad for you (medical/health discourse).

A YouTube element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here: https://opentextbc.ca/mediastudies101/?p=102

1949 TV commercial from Camel cigarettes

Slowly, over the decades, the smoking-as-unhealthy discourse gained dominance, and smoking shifted more fully to fit into discourses of health and social wellness as the institutional landscape around medicine, the human body and leisure were renegotiated to take into account these new relationships and the new signification of smoking cigarettes.

Now, smoking is something of a social taboo, reflecting the new dominant ideologies around smoking and the relationships that represents between smoking and health, and evoking medical discourses and symbols and language of not only ill-health, but also signifiers of shame and ostracism.

A YouTube element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here: https://opentextbc.ca/mediastudies101/?p=102

Australian anti-smoking ad (nd)

We can see similar trajectories of discourses and institutions regarding race, class and gender throughout history. Over time, as new ideologies gained social power, old institutions underwent a period of disruption, and new institutions, new sets of social relations, were built up in their place.

Discussion

1. Describe what you understand as an institution in your own words.
2. Consider the institutionalised discourse about Maori culture during history. How has it changed over the years?

2.4: Discourse and Institutions

Nearly all the communication we are exposed to or engage in conform to discursive patterns. Discourses are so ubiquitous that, if you looked it up in a dictionary, sometimes discourses are defined as ‘communication or debate.’ Yet considered critically, discourses are much more interesting and complex than that.

We can start off by thinking about discourses as a form of communication that conforms to or reflects a particular social practice or ideological position. So we can speak of legal discourses, environmental discourses, medical discourses, feminist discourses, etc. All communication conforms to at least one discourse. This is because all communication is encoded and decoded, and as such passes through institutional and ideological filters that shape how the messages are encoded and decoded. Think of it as a kind of spin we consciously or subconsciously put on any message we give off or receive. A famous and basic example of this is news coverage of an attack – do you call the attackers terrorists, or do you call them freedom fighters? Insurgents or soldiers? Broadly speaking, both pairs have similar meanings to each other, but each word conjures up different emotions, moods and tones. Each fits within a different discursive position. If you call them freedom fighters, you are aligning your coverage to the ideology of those who are attacked. If you call them terrorists, you are constructing a more oppositional discourse by evoking signs and language that evokes such ideologies.

But discourses are more than signs. They are also organizing principles that set out the boundaries between different fields and areas and positions. Discourses can also include other forms of communication beyond written and spoken language. For example, what does a white lab coat signify? If you’re in a hospital, it might be part of the discursive system of medicine; in a meatworks, it might be worn by the butcher. These discourses do not operate in isolation but are part of, produced by, and help support institutions.

Discussion Questions

1. What are discourses? Can you think of an example where there are competing discourses?

2.5: Media and Democracy

One key tenet of a liberal democracy, the dominant form of government today, is the separation of powers into the various independent branches of government, usually in the form of the legislature that makes the laws, a judiciary that interprets and applies the law and an executive that carries out the administration and operations of governing. Societies in the past were relatively small and citizens were able to engage face-to-face or via handwritten messages in their deliberation and decision-making process. As populations grew larger participation in a democracy required mediation, i.e. communication is now mediated. The earliest mass media was the newspaper, followed by the radio and television, and today, the Internet.

Because of its emerging function as a watchdog that monitors the running of the nation by exposing excesses and corruption, and holding those in power accountable, the media was regarded as the fourth estate, supplementing the three branches of government by providing checks and balances. The media also plays a more basic role as a provider of information necessary for rational debate. A healthy functioning democracy is predicated on the electorate making informed choices and this in turn rests on the quality of information that they receive. The media, as an institution, has for a long time enjoyed the position as a trusted primary source of news and information. Due to the enlarging population, it has become no longer possible for every citizen to participate directly in the democratic process. This led to the the representational form of democracy where representatives speak and act on behalf of individuals. The media, in this environment, took on the role of being a voice of the people to those in government.

This evolution of the media into a place where the public can participate in the democratic process prompted Dahlgrens (1995) to separate the mediated public sphere into four dimensions in order to understand it better. The media can be studied as an institution. Is the media independent or state owned? Do they serve the public's interest or a narrow range of interests belonging to the owners of the media? Are government funded and government regulated media institutions used for public service or are they propaganda mouthpieces? When private corporations own the media are they furthering their own commercial interests or the public's?

In the face of these developments, questions have also been raised about the media's representation of the public. Because journalists, and by extension the media, are seen now as a representative of the public, questions are raised over whether there is a wide enough range of opinion to represent the public's interests. As the media becomes increasingly commercial there are also questions about the quality of the news and information, which may be compromised when the media focus more on entertainment to retain their audiences' attention. Entertainment is often seen as emotive and the antithesis of rational discussion. There are also concerns that the role of the citizens are now reduced to a passive observer whose only democratic function is to cast the final vote.

In the face of these developments, Dahlgren questions the general social structure that is now evolving and the role media play. What are the relationships between the public and the existing social structures? How do the newer, alternative media forms fit into the present environment? What is the relationship between them and the traditional media?

Finally, Dahlgren highlights the issues pertaining to the decline of face-to-face interaction. With the media taking over the space where people used to meet face-to-face, is the traditional social practice of people assembling together threatened? In the face of globalisation people are more dispersed. Can the media mitigate the loss of this human link? Is it essential that this human link be maintained?

Under this section democratic legitimation through the formation of publics and public opinion is discussed. This section will clarify "who is the public?" as well as an introduction of the fundamental model of Habermas' public sphere.

Discussion

1. The last two paragraphs already draw the attention on the media's role in democracy. What role should the media ideally play in your opinion?
2. In contrast, what role is the media fulfilling now*?*

Reference

Dahlgren, P. (1995). Television and the Public Sphere. London: Sage.

Dahlgren, P. (2001). The transformation of democracy. In Axford, B. & Huggins, R. (eds.). New Media and Politics. London: Sage. pp. 64-88.

2.6: Habermas' Public Sphere

Habermas' definition of a public sphere is the first and founding trigger to classification attempts of the formation of public opinions and the legitimisation of state and democracy in post-war Western societies. It is widely accepted as the standard work but has also been widely challenged as the concept of the public sphere is constantly developing. To get a good grasp of general criticism and current approaches towards an up-to-date understanding of what and in which ways public opinions are shaped, general terms of the Habermasian model have to be explained.

The public sphere is seen as a domain of social life where public opinion can be formed. (Habermas, 1991, 398) It can be seen as the breeding ground, if you want. Habermas declares several aspects as vital for the public sphere. Mainly it is open to all citizens and constituted in every conversation in which individuals come together to form a public. The citizen plays the role of a private person who is not acting on behalf of a business or private interests but as one who is dealing with matters of general interest in order to form a public sphere. There is no intimidating force behind the public sphere but its citizens assemble and unite freely to express their opinions. The term of a political public sphere is introduced for public discussions about topics connected to the state and political practice. Although Habermas considers state power as 'public power' (ibid. 398) which is legitimized through the public in elections, the state and its forceful practices and powers are not part but are a counterpart of a public sphere where opinions are formed. Therefore public opinion has to control the state and its authority in everyday discussions, as well as through formal elections. A public sphere is the basic requirement to mediate between state and society and in an ideal situation permits democratic control of state activities. To allow discussions and the formation of a public opinion a record of state-related activities and legal actions has to be publicly accessible.

Habermas dates the formation of the terms of public sphere and public opinion back to the 18th century. Before the rise of the Bourgeoisie and the creation of bourgeois public spheres the understanding of the term 'public' was quite different. Before that time the representation of authority through a lord was called 'public' referring to the public representation lords were seen as. This public representation was merely stating their authorities before the people than for the people they governed. Although the basic concept of representation through a government or head of state remained, the attachment to aristocracy was discarded over time. By the end of the 18th century the feudal powers of church and nobility diminished paving the way for the rise of a bourgeois society in Europe. With it the meaning of the word 'public' changed as well. 'Public' no longer described the representative court of a person and their authority. It came to mean the legitimising regulations of an institutional system that held governing powers. Citizens were now subsumed under the state forming the public. (Habermas, 1991, 401)

Habermas' liberal model of a public sphere holds a normative claim. This means, that it is describing many idealised issues , pointing towards how a public sphere should ideally be. As such it does not actually exist in modern democracies that are industrially advanced, constituted as a social-welfare state and where masses of people are supposed to form a public. It is an idealistic model of democracy which is shaped through structural changes of society that ended in a transformed understanding of the public sphere. Habermas himself had to admit that the participation of women and the inclusion of minorities is not guaranteed by his model relying on the circumstances of bourgeois society in the early 19th century. In the following interview Jürgen Habermas describes the most important results of many years of his research as well as certain limitations.

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Habermas Interview uploaded by Youtube user davidmeme

Habermas and many other scholars have worked to further develop and broaden the understanding of his theories for modern societies. Other theorists and their concepts of the public sphere and related terms such as public opinion can be found in our other posts in the category of Media and Democracy.

Discussion

1. Is Habermas' public sphere described as normative?
2. Do you think the internet changes the understanding of the public sphere as described above?

Reference

Habermas, J.(1991): "The public sphere" In Mukerji, C.; Schudson, M.(Ed.): Rethinking popular culture. Contemporary perspectives in cultural studies. Berkeley/Los Angeles: University of California Press. pp.398-404.

2.7: Who is 'the Public'?

Our introduction post about Media and Democracy shows that an existing public is a legitimising ‘must-have’ for democracy. Still, there are varying concepts and understandings of a public. A look at basic definitions and early adaptations of the term might help to understand what this ‘public’ is and who its members are.

One basic understanding of ‘a public’ describes it as groups of people that evolve in response to issues, which are important for the individuals concerned. These individuals are the citizens that elect the state. This early concept has been brought up by John Dewey (1927). In Dewey’s understanding the public as such comes into being when significant issues that affect them negatively arise. Only then do they band together and make themselves heard in the political process.

worldwide protests for more democracy and democratic change Puerta del Sol, Madrid, 20 May 2011, by Julio Albarran under cc-by-nc-sa

However, it needs to be noted that not everyone agrees. Two times Pulitzer Prize winning journalist Walter Lippmann in his books *The Public Opinion* (1922) and *The Phantom Public* (1927) argued that it is a human tendency to view the world through “stereotypes” and thus construct an understanding of the world using partial truths. This makes them incompetent as directors of public affairs and, he contends, the modern world is too complex for ordinary citizens. Therefore the public’s opinion is unreliable, incoherent and thus irrelevant to the political process. In other words, it is practically nonexistent.

While Dewey and Lippmann had an ongoing discourse about their different understandings of the public, its existence and shape is still the centre of debate today. See also the section, Habermas’ Public Sphere.

Discussion

1. Which events in recent history provoked the formation of a public? Can you think of any in Australia or New Zealand?

References

Dewey, J. (1927). *The public and its problems: An essay in political inquiry*. New York: Holt.

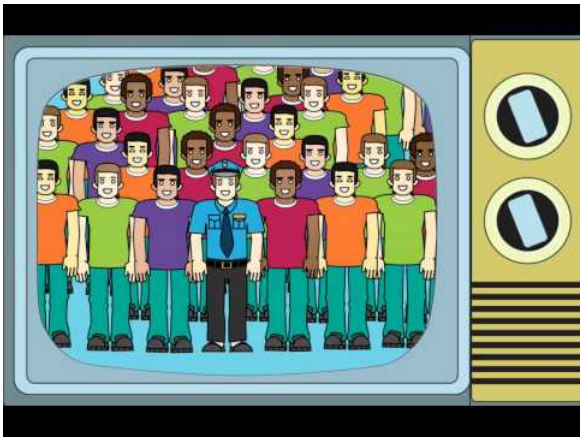
Lippmann, W. (1927). *The Phantom Public*: Transaction Publishers.

Lippmann, W. (1946). *Public Opinion*: Transaction Publishers.

2.8: Media Effects - Introduction

When 20-year-old Adam Lanza shot more than two dozen students and staff members of Sandy Hook Elementary School as well as his own mother in 2012, an old debate about the influence that violent video games has on young people was reignited. The free online game, Kindergarten Killers, a game Lanza played, was blamed: playing violent games makes you violent. But others argue that it is people with violent tendencies that are drawn to violent games. The question remains: are violent video games the cause of violent behaviour or are they merely the manifestation of violent tendencies?

This is essentially the same argument people have about media effects. Historically, it has been regarded as intuitive that media has a tremendous effect on audiences. Research has shown that establishing causation is not as easy as it seems.



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By CommGAP

2.9: The Hypodermic Needle

The view that the media has the ability to mesmerise, influence and even control its audiences has its roots firmly in the early 20th century. Then new communication technology in the form of moving pictures, the gramophone and radio expanded the mass media previously occupied by newspapers.

It might be argued that the First World War was also the first war fought using the media. During a period when public opinion became crucial, the media was used to drum up morale and support, and Britain even established a Ministry of Information to produce the necessary propaganda. The Russians, Germans, Italians and Spaniards deployed similar methods of mass persuasion.

In the intervening years between the two World Wars (1918-1939) this ability of their leaders to seemingly "brainwash" citizens using the media was explained using the "hypodermic needle" (sometimes known as the "magic bullet") model. This model was very much rooted in the dominant notion of behaviourism, most famously represented by Pavlov's experiment where a dog was trained to salivate at the ring of a bell.

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In the hypodermic needle model, the concept of conditioning was applied to the mass audience who were seen as passive recipients of whatever message that was injected (or shot) by the media, and who can be manipulated to react in a predictable, unthinking and conditioned manner.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W6YNHq1qc44

The classic case study cited to support this view is the famous radio broadcast of *The War of the Worlds* by Orson Welles on Halloween of 1938. In this episode of a radio drama series aired by Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS), the programme was "interrupted" by an urgent announcement of a Martian invasion in progress. The realistic portrayal of the story had purportedly sparked widespread panic throughout the country, and was taken as further proof that the media had the power to control audiences. However, the lack of empirical studies led some scholars to question this model, which was based on many assumptions unsupported by research. Using the example of The War of the Worlds critics pointed out that there was no actual empirical data on how widespread the panic was and suggested that the newspapers that reported it could be exaggerating.

Discussion

1. There are many examples of wartime propaganda in New Zealand as elsewhere, but what about peace time events such as 911 and subsequent institutional responses and attempts to influence populations.
2. Do Local disasters such as bushfires in Australia and earthquakes in New Zealand present another opportunity for 'brainwashing' or in any way influence the local populations? Is any perceived 'panic' over New Zealand building construction standards driven by the media as well as political agendas, and if so, to what degree are audiences reactive or passive receivers?
3. See this account of the Forgotten Silver (New Zealand) hoax and compare it with Orson Welles and 'The Martian landing' of 1938. Are audiences any less gullible?

2.10: Minimal effects models - the post WWII years

Screen Capture from Albert Bandura film 1961, © under Youtube Standard License.

Because propaganda was again employed extensively during the Second World War, research on media effects received renewed interest by scholars who questioned its exact efficacy. In addition, alarm over the rise in violence after the war accompanied the advent of television, sparking off a moral panic.

However, establishing causation, as pointed out earlier, is extremely difficulty in media research due to the multiple factors that are present. Also most media research relies on content analysis and surveys where the subjects are asked to self-report. This has been criticised as unreliable, and at best can only establish a correlation. In order to demonstrate causation, all other factors must be controlled. Usually this can only take place under laboratory conditions and not in a real-life context where factors are complex and unpredictable. This did not prevent researchers from trying and in 1961 Albert Bandura's controversial "Bobo doll experiment" demonstrated how, in a laboratory context, children's behaviour can model itself on adult violence.

However, critics again pointed out that media responses in real-life are socially and culturally entrenched. Audiences actively construct meanings from the media, unlike laboratory animals. Humans also have the cognitive ability to discern and make decisions, and their prior knowledge and experiences shape these decisions. While immediate media effects, such as people carrying an umbrella after rain is forecast can be demonstrated, not everyone goes shopping after watching an advertisement. To accommodate these observations, the term media influences began to replace effects. These observations also led to two new lines of thinking: firstly, what causes audiences to respond positively to the weather forecast, and secondly, what filters audiences employ to inform their shopping decisions?

Limitations of the Minimal Effects Models

Conceptually and methodologically, the minimal effects models have limitations. Much of the empirical data was gleaned from research on the media's impact on voters during elections in the US. Using voting as the dependent variable poses problems. Chiefly, it does not measure effect accurately. While the media may not change a voter's decision, it can still influence the voter's support. If, after consuming the media messages, a voter is more convinced than ever, that in itself is still an effect. Sometimes, a voter's confidence in a candidate may be weakened but not to the point of voting for the candidate's rival and this effect (of weakened conviction) will not show up in the data. The primary method of data collection for these studies are surveys, and this has been criticised as unreliable, as the voters are required to recall and report their own vote as well as decision making process. Thus, they have to rely on their memory of what are likely to be transient moments. For example, they are unlikely to be aware of what they were thinking of when listening to a political debate or advertisement.

Discussion

1. If, as the last paragraph suggests, audiences "have the cognitive ability to discern and make decisions, and their prior knowledge and experiences shape" their choices can you identify any examples of advertising that is directed at such a discerning audience?
2. Can you deduce why the advertiser might have chosen such a 'minimal effects' model of advertising in the example?

2.11: Agenda Setting

The media can and does have a strong effect on what people think about. By highlighting certain events repeatedly, they create a sense of urgency about those issues even though this is not always an accurate reflection of reality.

Reality is what is actually happening in the world pertaining to the economy, society, politics and science. The **media selectively highlights** certain events and gives them prominence. The criteria for the selection depends very much on the ideology of the media editors and their vested interests. By highlighting certain events an uncritical audience will perceive and construct the mediated reality as reality. One example is the royal wedding of Prince William to Kate Middleton, which mesmerised the world, including parts of the world that have no connection to the British monarchy. Discerning audiences may well ask why the wedding of two people, who are in no way related to them, is important enough to justify worldwide media attention, or indeed, how and why it might be relevant to them?

The agenda setting theory was formally developed by McCombs and Shaw (1972) when they studied the US Presidential Election of 1968. Their analysis of the news and media coverage found a strong correlation to the opinions held by the voters in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. Similar findings were found in the media study surrounding the murder trial of OJ Simpson (Salwen & Driscoll, 1997) and the attempted impeachment of US President Clinton (Yioutas & Segvic, 2003).

These videos explain the agenda setting theory in detail:

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From calleno16 under Standard YouTube License

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From CSIxxTwee under Standard YouTube License

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Discussion

1. Obviously journalists cannot include everything that happens in the world on any given day in their Newspaper TV or internet news program.
2. Investigate a cross section of media sources on a given day – compare how and why the different sources choose, and then mediate, the events for their expected audience.
3. Then consider the question, are they accurately representing the importance of the issues of the day?

References

McCombs, M.E and Shaw, D.L. (1972) The agenda-setting function of mass media. Public Opinion Quarterly,36 (2).

Salwen, M. B., & Driscoll, P. D. (1997). Consequences of third-person perception in support of press restrictions in the OJ Simpson trial. Journal of communication, 47(2), 60-78.

Yioutas, J., & Segvic, I. (2003). Revisiting the Clinton/Lewinsky scandal: The convergence of agenda setting and framing. Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly, 80(3), 567-582.

2.12: Uses and gratifications model

A more radical shift in focus was to move away from what impact the media has on audiences, towards investigating why or how audiences react to the media. Based on the assumption that audiences are not passive or powerless but instead exercise choice, researchers developed the uses and gratifications model. This explains the process audiences employ when deciding their response to advertisements – do they respond by shopping more, or do they ignore it? The uses and gratifications paradigm views audiences as active seekers of media that best fulfills their needs, or that reinforces their existing beliefs and interests. Using the earlier example, a person looking for a new dress will actively look out for advertisements for sales on dresses, and respond positively to them. A person with no desire for a new outfit will simply ignore the same advertisements.

The earliest researcher in this area was Herta Herzog who, in 1944, identified emotional needs, wishful thinking, and the desire to learn new things as some of the reasons people turn to the media. Later researchers built on Herzog's work by re-categorising and expanding this set of motivators. Branston & Stafford's research (2010, p.388) identified and summarised them into five groups:

1. cognitive: audiences make use of the media to learn.
2. affective: audiences seek out media content that satisfies their emotional needs.
3. tension release: media provides a source of relaxation to audiences.
4. personal integrative: audiences tune in to media content that helps them explore issues related to the construction of their personal identity.
5. social integrative: audiences seek out media content that explores issues of relevance to their social identity.

The importance of this model is largely that it dismisses the idea of the media as able to change people's opinions. What it does is reinforce the *status quo*, where the media is satisfying audience need and desires.

Discussion

1. Think of Shortland Street and other Soap operas. What are uses and gratifications that watchers might follow?
2. Now think of TV series that you are watching regularly. Why are you watching them? Line up possible uses and gratifications.

2.13: Post-Cold War- strong effects model

In the wake of the Cold War researchers made a U-turn and revisited the idea of a strong effects model. While it was clear from earlier research that the media does not control outcomes in terms of audience action, it was undeniable that the media does indeed affect what and how people think. Two areas where there is strong evidence of media effects are:

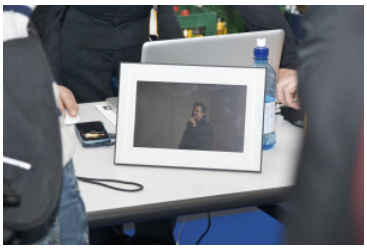
Agenda setting

After discussing the questions posed under Agenda Setting look at them again but in terms of the degree the particular media sources are attempting (or not) to affect audience opinion on an issue. List any reasons and observations that lead you to that point of view.

Media framing

Do the same as above but in terms of Media Framing Theories.

2.14: Framing



by Walljet (cc)

Framing occurs when the construction and dissemination of messages acts to highlight, emphasize or obscure some aspects of the message over others. We can do this through language via how we organize and structure information, choose signs out of a polysemic group that have overlapping denotic meaning and even appeals to wider context, and the intertext of prior experience which combines to help guide the recipient towards a particular dominant reading. Framing's relationship to intertext and context is particularly important to underline, as framing is best seen as a cumulative process, or one in which continued exposure to a certain frame helps to guide and internalize that frame's intended recipient response. It is often argued that framing is one of the central, if implicit, tools we bring to bear to understand complex and diverse experiences – by framing together experiences or texts that seem similar, we mentally simplify and reduce complexity and can then make decisions about what and how to engage with texts.

Both when talking specifically about frames or about language more generally, it is important to highlight that by language we don't just mean formal spoken or written language. Any coherent symbolic system can be taken as a linguistic system. Under this broad definition one of our earlier examples, street signs and lights, collectively form a linguistic system.

Because we are exposed to consistent language systems and the frames that encompass them repeatedly, language systems and frames become landmarks, part of our day-to-day system of cues and markers that help guide us to solve problems and come to conclusions as members of a culture.

But how do frames actually work within a cultural and communicative context? Firstly, we can break framing approaches down into two broad categories, episodic and thematic framing. Just as their names suggest, episodic framing is where an issue is approached in terms of a specific event or episode. Episodic frames often position individuals in the narrative as free of any constraint or influence of society – as such, individual actions are not usually considered in terms of wider discourses or institutions.

In contrast, thematic framing approaches an issue as part of a continuing topic or theme, rooted within wide social trends or functions. Episodic and thematic frames have different approaches to an issue and can have a dramatic impact on how that issue is subsequently read and understood. Interestingly, it is argued that news media in particular tends to favour episodic over thematic frames because episodic framing better suits the constraints of broadcast and print journalism (such as a 90 second slot or 200 word articles). However, the emphasis on episodic framing means that news as a whole tends not to encourage a reading of issues that takes into account broader themes, issues, or undercurrents. These might otherwise build collectively into a more textured understanding of an issue. This is a major critique of current news systems.

A great example of this is this interview with Maori commentator Willie Jackson where he tries to position the Tuhoe leaders as "good guys" and does so using an interesting set of language and framing techniques. He positions the accused as 'not bin Ladin' types, evoking current global stereotypes about what a "terrorist" is, and instead tries to reframe it as part of a wider conversation about institutional racism — both thematic framing (and reframing) approaches.

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Consider that interview (filmed for Maori tv) with this interview from 3News NZ, which isolates another of the accused, Marama Mayrick, but this time takes an episodic frame, positioning the subject, Mayrick, simply as an artist, 'caught up' in an event that floats in the news narrative without reference to wider contexts or issues (such as terrorism or racism).

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Discussion

1. Identify examples of both episodic and Thematic framing in some news or general documentary media sources.
2. After examining these ask, why would they be presented in the respective manners? Is it because of something inherent in the story or does it satisfy the media presenter's agenda? Or indeed, can you argue any other reason for the presenting style?

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

3: Production and Structures

3.1: Political Economies

What is Political Economy?

This section explores various ideas connected to the notion of political economies of media. Political economy (PE) is an approach to studying media whose focus is attenuated towards the ways in which media is produced, distributed and consumed, rather than on analysing the interpretations of the signs and symbols found within texts. The combination of the terms ‘political’ and ‘economy’ which make up PE is an explicit reference to the fact that media texts are produced within specific and historically contingent systems which are not merely an ideologically neutral form of exchange, but are conditioned by a range of complex interactions between nation states, international organisations, legal institutions and frameworks, cultural traditions and heritages, other organisations (such as media corporations), technologies, and economic pressures. In other words, PE focuses upon the ways in which politics and economics are not separate entities, as we often encounter them within educational contexts, but that economics and politics are fields which are best understood as being entangled – meaning that they are functionally inseparable – and that understanding elements of this entanglement is pivotal to understanding the way that any society and culture works.

3.2: Political Economies of Mass Culture

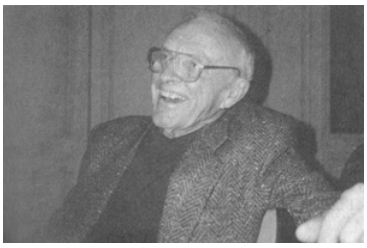
Whilst PE has been applied as a way of exploring and understanding the media since the 1960s and 70s, the ways in which it has been used can be characterised as being divided into two fairly distinct approaches which stem from roots in Europe and the USA. Within Europe, the cultural and political tradition of social(ist) democracy entailed that the model of broadcast media such as television and radio were dominated by public service broadcasters such as the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), who were state funded organisations whose services were free at the point of contact and featured no commercial advertising. Consequently, early PE approaches to broadcasting within these countries adopted a Marxist approach which was heavily focused upon the relations between political governance and the media industries, exploring ways that regulation and legislation impacted upon the media whilst also exploring the links between commercial organisations and sections of the press. By contrast, in the USA the lack of a social democratic tradition and politics saw the media organised along strictly commercial lines, which led to PE approaches to media being more focused on the economics of media ownership than their European counterparts.

CC image by Gwydion Williams

In the UK, Raymond Williams was a key figure concerned with the study of media and culture within the university system, and his writing made some important revisions to Marxism which were central to the political economy of culture. Marx's materialism posited that the socio-economic reality of material experience and commodity production formed the base of society, whereas cultural content such as communications and media were seen as the superstructure which grew out of the base. Numerous Marxist readings of culture subsequently argued that as the economic base determines the cultural superstructure, the superstructure simply presents an ideological reflection of the base. Williams, however, contested these notions, arguing that:

We have to reevaluate determination towards the setting of limits and exertion of pressure, and away from a reflected, reproduced or specifically dependent content. And crucially, we have to revalue 'the base' away from the notion of a fixed economic or technological abstraction, and towards the specific activities of men in real social and economic relationships, containing fundamental contradictions and variations and therefore always in a state of dynamic process.Williams 1973 p6

3.3: The Audience Commodity



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Moving from European contexts to those originating from the USA, Dallas Smythe (1981) is often cited as introducing a further key element to PE approaches to media, inverting the assumption central to prior approaches to PE which focussed upon meanings, messages and information as the central commodity which relates to media. Smythe instead contends that the economic relationship which is the primary driver of media as an industry is one whereby audiences – or more specifically the attentive capacities of audiences – are sold to advertisers.

This approach makes sense when moving to the commercialised American media context, as it sharply departs from many European countries which, until the deregulation and privatisations of neo-liberal regimes under leaders such as Margaret Thatcher during the 1980s, were dominated by public service broadcasting, in which there was often no commercial advertising as the media was funded by central governments as a public good with a mandate to both inform and entertain the public. However, when we approach contemporary global media networks, the role of public service media has generally receded, with commercial networks providing a far greater proportion of media content in countries like the UK than in the 20th Century, when there only existed a handful of television channels, and almost half the content was created in house by the BBC.

A very similar broadcasting history can be observed within the New Zealand context. Up to the 1980s the broadcasting scene, in both radio and television, was dominated by the New Zealand Broadcasting Corporation, an organization very like the BBC in terms of funding, structure and monopoly power. However, its descendants, TVNZ and RNZ, are competing with commercial interests, for audience attention, funding and content, in a very different media market.

The notion of the audience commodity is useful in conceptualising the PE of media, as it further refines the boundaries of what can be understood as a commodity, but does so in a way which helps to explore exactly why and how a vast amount of contemporary media – newspapers, television, radio, and websites amongst other modes – is funded. These forms are typically free or very cheap at the point of access for the ‘consumer,’ but the economic cost of production is paid for by the insertion of advertising into the media being viewed. The media is thus not paid for by the audience (the cost of a printed newspaper comes nowhere near covering the costs of the paper, printing, journalists, designers, copy editors etc that went into the production of the newspaper, and watching television or surfing the web is usually free) but is funded by the advertisers, who are purchasing the attention of an audience. Buying advertising time during peak hours, or in a more popular newspaper, costs proportionally more precisely because the number of eyeballs the advertising reaches is enlarged.

This economic situation is also of critical relevance to the ideological context of media content. As the media is funded by commercial (primarily corporate) organisations, the materials which are produced by this system are highly unlikely to be overtly critical of corporate capitalism and consumerism. Indeed, there have been notable cases whereby advertisers have threatened to withdraw funding from television networks if particular programs are aired as they are concerned that this will negatively affect brand connotations. An example of this is highlighted in the video below, an extract from the feature-length documentary film *The Corporation (dir. Joel Bakan 2004)*

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Discussion

1. How might we understand the phrase ‘the cost of free media’ with reference to the notion of the audience commodity?

3.4: The Propaganda Model

Following Smythe's exposition of the audience and Jurgen Habermas's (1991) elucidation of mass media as providing an apparatus whereby elite sectors of society can transform the democratising potential of the public sphere, a series of leftist academic media scholars have attempted to delineate the precise methods by which the mass media operates as a distorting lens which represents the vested interests of economic elites.

Most prominent within this PE-centred approach has been the 'propaganda model' (PM) of mass media presented by Noam Chomsky and Edward Herman in *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of Mass Media* (1988). Chomsky and Herman begin by proclaiming that

The mass media serve as a system for communicating messages and symbols to the general populace. It is their function to amuse, entertain, and inform, and to inculcate individuals with the values, beliefs, and codes of behaviour that will integrate them into the institutional structures of the larger society. In a world of concentrated wealth and major conflicts of class interest, to fulfil this role requires systematic propaganda. Chomsky and Herman 1988:1

3.5: Political Economies of Digital media

PE led approaches to the study of digital media again fall into several distinct areas which approach the production of digital media from disparate areas. While Marxist approaches are again often central, there exist an additional series of approaches which consider the ways in which production of digital media, and of digital commodities in general depart in certain respects from other modes of information access and distribution.

Some of the early approaches to new/digital media focused upon the ways that the increasingly widespread distribution of networked computers afforded a mode of access which was a radical departure. Previously media had been dominated by broadcast technologies and mass media generally, whereby a very small volume of individuals were entrenched within a privileged position as content creators, and were able to broadcast mediated content from centres out to the millions of citizens who could only receive media. Mass media, then can be understood as both a one-to-many model of communication as well as a one way model, as only those who work in broadcasting can produce media, whilst the vast majority of citizens can only receive information. Such a one-to-many system of communications corresponds to the model of a centralised network.

By contrast, the Internet heralded the arrival of an alternative model, in which any network user was able to connect to any other network user(s), and was able to both send and receive mediated communications. Rather than being a one-to-many mode of communication, the Internet allowed one-to-one, one-to-many and many-to-many forms of discourse, taking the form of a distributed network. Additionally the hierarchical restrictions to access had seemingly tumbled down, with any citizen who possessed a computer, modem and internet connection able to produce mediated content. This led to a wave of early Internet scholarship which saw the Internet as a technology which contained a vast democratising potential, realising some of the formal elements discussed by socialist theorists of media such as Bertold Brecht (1932) and Hans-Magnus Enzensburger (1970) as necessary preconditions for the formation of a democratic and participatory media and culture, negating the criticisms made by Jurgen Habermas (1991) which posit the media as a fundamentally anti-democratic mode of communication which turned active citizens into passive consumers.

Whereas mass media representation reinforced and re-inscribed the structures of representative democracies, whereby an economic and political elite who have access to the means of media production and distribution are able to disproportionately influence the majority of the populace by means of their wealth (of both power and capital), networked electronic media allegedly creates structures predicated upon non-hierarchical interactions.

Such claims have been tempered, however, by the realisation that while contemporary media technologies have greatly increased the ability of certain previously marginalised groups to effectively communicate their concerns and participate in mediated discourse, the material reality of information technology commodities within the network society, has not seen social inequalities diminish and democratic participation increase. The digital divide exists as one of many divides between the haves and have-nots in contemporary society alongside divisions in wealth, education, health care, and technical expertise. Expecting the introduction of digital communications platforms to enact a process whereby these inequalities simply dissipate in the face of the deterministic properties of new technology is a utopian fantasy. As Espen Aarseth (1997:67) reminds us:

The belief that new (and ever more complex) technologies are in and of themselves democratic is not only false but dangerous. New technology creates new opportunities, but there is no reason to believe that the increased complexity of our technological lives works toward increased equality for all subjected to the technology.

3.6: Commons and P2P Production

This post outlines several modes of commons – types of asset which are held in collective or communal ownership rather than as private commodities owned by individuals or individual corporations.

The first mode of commons I'd like to discuss is the model of common land – what we could think of as a pre-industrial mode of commons, albeit one which still exists today through our shared ownership and access to things like air. Land which was accessible for commoners to graze cattle or sheep, or to collect firewood or cut turf for fuel. Anyone had access to this communal resource and there was no formal hierarchical management of the common land – no manager or boss who ensured that no one took too much wood or had too many sheep grazing on the land (although there did exist arable commons where lots were allocated on an annual basis). So access and ownership of this communal resource was distributed, management was horizontal rather than hierarchical, but access effectively depended upon geographical proximity to the site in question.

A second mode of commons is that of the public service, which we could conceptualise as an industrial model of commonwealth. For example consider the example of the National Health Service in the UK: unlike common land, this was a public service designed to operate on a national scale, for the common good of the approximately 50 million inhabitants of the UK. In order to manage such a large scale, industrial operation, logic dictated that a strict chain of managerial hierarchy be established to run and maintain the health service – simply leaving the British population to self-organise the health service would undoubtedly have been disastrous.

This appear to be a case which supports the logic later espoused by Garret Hardin in his famed 1968 essay the Tragedy of the Commons, whereby Hardin, an American ecologist forcefully argued that the model of the commons could only be successful in relatively small-scale endeavours, and that within industrial society this would inevitably lead to ruin, as individuals sought to maximise their own benefit, whilst overburdening the communal resource. Interestingly, Hardin's central concern was actually overpopulation, and he argued in the essay that 'The only way we can preserve and nurture other, more precious freedoms, is by relinquishing the freedom to breed.' Years later he would suggest that it was morally wrong to give aid to famine victims in Ethiopia as this simply encouraged overpopulation.

More recent developments, however, have shown quite conclusively that Hardin was wrong: the model of the commons is not doomed to failure in large-scale projects. In part this is due to the fact that Hardin's model of the commons was predicated on a complete absence of rules – it was not a communally managed asset, but a free-for-all, and partially this can be understood as a result of the evolution of information processing technologies which have revolutionised the ways in which distributed access, project management and self-organisation can occur. This contemporary mode of the commons, described by Yochai Benler and others as commons-led peer production, or by other proponents simply as peer-to-peer(P2P) resembles aspects of the distributed and horizontal access characteristic of pre-modern commons, but allows access to these projects on a non-local scale.

Emblematic of P2P process has been the Free and Open Source Software (FOSS) and Creative Commons movement (this textbook being an example of the latter). FOSS projects often include thousands of workers who cooperate on making a piece of software which is then made readily available as a form of digital commons, unlike proprietary software which seeks to reduce access to a good whose cost of reproduction is effectively zero. In addition to the software itself, the source code of the program is made available, crucially meaning that others can examine, explore, alter and improve upon existing versions of FOSS. Popular examples of FOSS include WordPress – which is now used to create most new websites (including this one!) as it allows users with little technical coding ability to create complex and stylish participatory websites – the web browsers Firefox and Chrome, and the combination of Apache (web server software) and Linux (operating system) which together form the back end for most of the servers which host World Wide Web content.

What is really interesting, is that in each of these cases, a commons-led approach has been able to economically out-compete proprietary alternatives – which in each case have had huge sums of money invested into them. The prevailing economic logic throughout industrial culture – that hierarchically organised private companies were most effective and efficient at generating reliable and functional goods was shown to be wrong. A further example which highlights this is Wikipedia, the online open-access encyclopaedia which according to research is not only the largest repository of encyclopaedic knowledge, but for scientific and mathematical subjects is the most detailed and accurate. Had you said 15 years ago that a disparate group of individuals who freely cooperated in their free time over the Internet and evolved community guidelines for moderating content which anyone could alter, would be able to create a more accurate and detailed informational resource than a well-funded established professional company (say Encyclopaedia Britannica) most economists would have laughed. But again, the ability of people to self-organise over the

Internet based on their own understanding of their interests and competencies has been shown to be a tremendously powerful way of organising.

Of course there are various attempts to integrate this type of crowd-sourced P2P model into new forms of capitalism – it would be foolish to think that powerful economic actors would simply ignore the hyper-productive aspects of P2P. But for people interested in commons and alternative ways of organising, a lot can be taken from the successes of FOSS and creative commons.

Now where some this gets really interesting, is in the current moves towards Open Source Hardware (OSH), what is sometimes referred to as maker culture, where we move from simply talking about software, or digital content which can be entirely shared over telecommunications networks. OSH is where the design information for various kinds of device are shared. Key amongst these are 3D printers, things like RepRap, an OSH project to design a machine allowing individuals to print their own 3D objects. Users simply download 3D Computer-Assisted-Design (CAD) files, which they can then customise if they wish, before hitting a print button – just as they would print a word document, but the information is sent to a 3D rather than 2D printer. Rather than relying on a complex globalised network whereby manufacturing largely occurs in China, this empowers people to start making a great deal of things themselves. It reduces reliance on big companies to provide the products that people require in day-to-day life and so presents a glimpse of a nascent future in which most things are made locally, using a freely available design commons. Rather than relying on economies of scale, this postulates a system of self-production which could offer a functional alternative which would have notable positive social and ecological ramifications.

Under the current economic situation though, people who contribute to these communities alongside other forms of commons are often not rewarded for the work they put into things, and so have to sell their labour power elsewhere in order to make ends meet financially. Indeed, this isn't new, capitalism has always been especially bad at remunerating people who do various kinds of work which is absolutely crucial the the functioning of a society – with domestic work and raising children being the prime example. So the question is, how could this be changed so as to reward people for contributing to cultural, digital and other forms of commons?

One possible answer which has attracted a lot of commentary is the notion of a universal basic income. Here the idea is that as all citizens are understood to actively contribute to society via their participation in the commons, everyone should receive sufficient income to subsist – to pay rent, bills, feed themselves and their dependants, alongside having access to education, health care and some form of information technology. This basic income could be supplemented through additional work – and it is likely that most people would choose to do this (not many people enjoy scraping by with the bare minimum) – however, if individuals wanted to focus on assisting sick relatives, contributing to FOSS projects or helping out at a local food growing cooperative they would be empowered to do so without the fear of financial ruin. As an idea it's something that has attracted interest and support from a spectrum including post-Marxists such as Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri through to liberals such as the British Green Party [see also NZ Green Party work and employment policy].

For more details on P2P check out the Peer to Peer Foundation which hosts a broad array of excellent articles on the subject.

Discussion:

1. What kinds of commons exist within New Zealand?
2. What kinds of benefits apart from efficiency might we associate with P2P models?
3. What does the emergence of P2P production say about the relationship between economics, society and technology?

3.7: Political Ecologies of Media

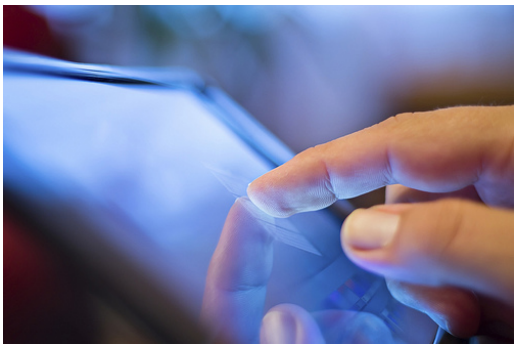
At the outset of this chapter, we defined political economy as the study of production, and subsequently considered what it means to study the production of media. Then we looked at how production reveals a set of political relationships which are far from ideologically neutral by looking at a range of issues pertaining to ownership, intellectual property, relationships to government, and funding mechanism. This was especially via advertising, and we considered in some detail how these factors can be understood to influence the content and messages commonly encountered within media texts. However, understanding the production of media and the political issues which arise from media to be limited to the ways in which meanings are generated by the texts which can be thought of as the outputs of media, neglects what could be considered a range of ethical and political issues which relate to the production, consumption and disposal of the technologies which are necessary for media systems to function.

Considering issues which arise from the design, production and sustainability of hardware systems has traditionally been considered outside the bounds of media studies as a discipline, which situated within the humanities has been focussed upon the cultural impacts of symbols and messages, rather than exploring the ethics of mining the metals and minerals needed to make cameras and computers, tablets and telephones. Indeed, early approaches to media and ecology explicitly stated that their goal was:

> To make people more conscious of the fact that human beings live in two different kinds of environments. One is the natural environment and consists of things like air, trees, rivers, and caterpillars. The other is the media environment, which consists of language, numbers, images, holograms, and all of the other symbols, techniques, and machinery that make us what we are. Postman 2000:11

3.8: Technologies

Introduction



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One of the features which distinguish media from other types of communication, is that processes of mediation necessarily involve some form of technology. Media technologies take many forms, ranging from the technological apparatus of a pen and paper, through printing presses, film, video, radio, television to digital technologies associated with the Internet. In each case, the technologies which are used involve a complex network of elements, whose role within the process of mediated communication has been a source of debate and contestation within media and cultural studies.

This chapter outlines a number of the debates which are central to thinking about technology and mediation, with each section exploring a different area within these debates. Central questions which will be considered from a number of perspectives will include: Can technology be considered an active agent, or are technology's impacts a result of the ways they are designed, implemented and legislated around? How does technology shape our perceptions of what it means to be human? What is the relationship between technology and the human body? What kinds of roles might technologies and processes of mediation play in constructions of time and space? Finally we will consider what kinds of relationship exist between technologies and politics?

3.9: Technology and Agency

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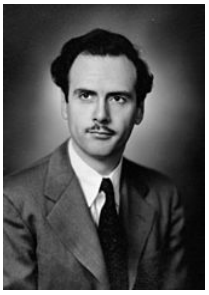
One of the questions which has been debated within media studies since the 1960's is the extent to which we can understand technology to be something which determines society, or whether technologies are themselves socially determined. Two important theorists who are often used to exemplify both ends of this spectrum are Marshall McLuhan and Raymond Williams.



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McLuhan was a Canadian theorist of media and technology who rose to prominence in the 1960s following the publication of *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, in which McLuhan argued that the vast majority of previous works which explored media effectively missed the point. Whereas traditional explorations of media considered the ways that content and production are shaped by ideological factors, which then condition the readings and meanings of texts, McLuhan argued that this focus upon the content of media was entirely misplaced, as the primary meaning or effect of 'any medium or technology, is the change of scale or pace or pattern that it introduces into human affairs' (1964:16). This leads to McLuhan's famous declaration that the 'message is the medium' and that 'our conventional response to all media, namely that it is how it is used that counts,' is merely 'the numb stance of the technological idiot.' (1964:26)

McLuhan argued that media and technologies in general were used by humans to extend their bodily capabilities into the environment, with different technologies augmenting the capacities of different sensory organs. For example McLuhan argues that the phonetic alphabet and subsequent technologies surrounding the printing press extended human vision, whilst numbing hearing as communication which had previously been verbal and involved listening had become based upon reading and sight. McLuhan additionally argues that the printing press, and the mode of standardising writing which it introduced was responsible for the rise of nationalism and centralised mode of governance and social organisation. This McLuhan contrasts with electric technologies, which he contends extends the human nervous system, and is necessarily decentralising. McLuhan's insistence that particular technologies necessarily have specific impacts which are direct results of their form exemplify a type of thought which is described as

technological determinism – as the technology is said to directly determine society. The link below is to McLuhan's seminal *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, and the first chapter provides a useful introduction to his influential mode of thought.

Marshall McLuhan – Understanding Media pp1-22 monoskop.org/images/4/47/McLu...ons_of_Man.pdf

While McLuhan's statements were initially very well received within both academia and popular culture, his arguments were subsequently critiqued by a range of scholars, the best known of which is the British cultural and literary theorist Raymond Williams.

CC Gwydion Madawc Williams

Williams writes from a Marxist position which is concerned with understanding the power relations which are implicit within forms of mediation, and how these power relations promote particular forms of social relationship which tend to support dominant ideological formations within society. Consequently, Williams was highly dismissive of McLuhan's notion that the ways that media are used is unimportant, arguing that:

The technical abstractions in their unnoticed projections into the social world, have the effect of cancelling all attention to existing and developing (and already challenged) social institutions If the effect of the medium is the same, whoever controls or uses it then we can forget ordinary political and cultural argument and let the technology run itself' (1974:131).

This would seem to resonate with how we think about media, whereby readers of the Australian tend to have a different understanding of politically charged issues such as climate change to people who get their news from ABC, and consequently are likely to act in very different ways as a result of their different understandings of the issue.If the technology itself was the primary message, then the differences in content which have been shown by empirical studies (eg Philo and Berry 2004) to affect whether or not people will support actions as important as overseas military interventions, are somehow relatively unimportant. Consequently Williams accuses McLuhan of reducing the effects of the social uses of technology which is designed, implemented, regulated and used in differing ways which have a multitude of impacts, to a simple technological essentialism which effectively ratifies the existing political system, as the crucial motor of social change is not human actions, but technological usage. In contrast to McLuhan's technological determinism, Williams position can be understood as social constructivism, whereby the impacts of technologies are socially and culturally constructed by the ways in which they are employed by humans. The link below presents Williams's extended critique of McLuhan.

Raymond Williams – The Technology and the Society pp1-23 www.qiu.ir/Files/110/Document...34a985994e.pdf

Whilst Williams's argument was largely seen to have refuted the claims of technological determinism within media and cultural studies, the societal shifts surrounding digital technologies and networked computing from the 1980's onwards have somewhat revitalised some of McLuhan's claims. The technological changes seemed to be creating some of the types of shift in terms of how we experience time and space. McLuhan was named the patron saint of Wired magazine, a publication which explores various issues surrounding digital technologies from a pro-technology and pro-capitalist perspective.

The issue with the straightforward determinism which McLuhan presented, however, was the claim that 'electricity does not centralise but decentralises' (McLuhan 1964:55)This was obviously not true in cases such as the use of national electricity grids or nuclear power stations.The simple deterministic consequences which McLuhan ascribes to particular technologies are overly simplistic, just as Williams's (1974:133) claim that 'We must reject technological determinism in all its forms' is equally an over-simplification. Recently there have been a range of approaches which attempt to construct alternative understandings of technology which suggest a form of soft determinism, whereby technology impacts and affects society, whilst society simultaneously affects and shapes technology (Bennett 2011, Terranova 2004, Steigler 1998, Braidotti 2013) Below is a link to Bruno Latour's

Reassembling the Social, a text which introduces the approach of Actor-Network Theory (ANT), which is a good example of a soft determinism.

Bruno Latour – Reassembling the Social, Introduction pp1-17 dss-edit.com/plu/Latour_Reassembling.pdf

In this section we have explored a number of theories which explore the relationships between that technology and agency, considering viewpoints which asks whether or to what extent technology and technological changes can be said to construct or determine society, and conversely exploring the range of ways that societies determine technologies. We finished by thinking about how some contemporary approaches have argued that technology and society are mutually co-constitutive, meaning that technology and society cannot be functionally separated and evolve together.

Discussion

1. Do you agree with McLuhan or Williams on the subject of technological determinism?
2. Do you think that technologies which have emerged during your lifetime, such as smartphones and tablets have changed the way that you live?

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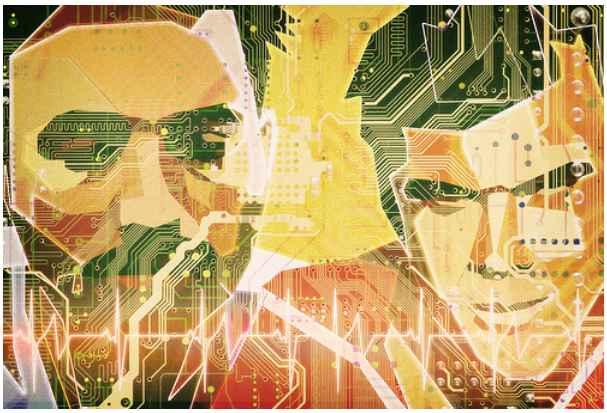
3.10: Technology and the Body



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A second body of literature surrounding technology and mediation relates to the ways in which technology can be understood to relate to the human body. As we saw in the previous section, one way that this relationship has been theorised is Marshall McLuhan's argument that technology extends the human body into the environment. This approach assumes that that was an essential human body which pre-exists technological relations, which can then be extended through technological prosthesis. The three approaches to technology and the body can be understood as challenging this assumption that being human can be separated from being technological, suggesting in quite different ways that humans and technology cannot be separated, and that being human is also about being technological.

This is quite different from the type of thought which has largely dominated Western philosophical thought for hundreds of years, in which nature, culture, humans and technology are understood as being incommensurate with one another. Inspired by the findings of the science of cybernetics and related systems theories such as chaos and complexity theory, writers like Donna Haraway, and artists such as Stelarc have explored how the couplings of contemporary technologies and the body break down the barriers between nature and culture, human and technology. The links below lead to Stelarc's online catalogue of performance art projects which visually and conceptually engage with a series of issues surrounding technology and body. The interview with Haraway presents some of the conceptual work around her notion that by the 1980s we had all become cyborgs – part human part machine – and how this alters our understandings of how technology and ethics can be approached.

CC BY NC SA transmediale

Stelarc – Projects http://stelarc.org/?catID=20247

You Are Cyborg – An Interview with Donna Haraway http://www.wired.com/wired/archive/5.02/ffharaway_pr.html

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Whilst Haraway and Stelarc provide ways of thinking about how technologies are incorporated into the body, there has been considerable interest recently in the emerging field of biotechnology, in which bodies are not merely augmented through technologies, but are instead modified and mediated at the design stage. Whilst you may be familiar with some of the debates surrounding the use of genetically modified food or the ethics of cloning, the two videos below demonstrate two different perspectives on contemporary usages of biotechnology. Ray Kurzweil provides an optimistic perspective on the variety of ways that biotechnology could be used to enhance various relationships, whilst Paul Root Wolpe examines some of the ethical quandaries which are raised through the possibilities which biotechnologies offers, questions which are going to become increasingly relevant as the technologies mature.

An interactive or media element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here: https://opentextbc.ca/mediastudies101/?p=60

CC BY TED

A final area surrounding technology and the body which has recently gained a lot of coverage in both academic writing and mainstream media, surrounds cognitive neuroscience and in particular the phenomena of neuroplasticity. It is now known that the human brain develops neural pathways according to the type of environment in which it exists. Humans are born with far more synaptic pathways than they will have as adults, as through a process called synaptogenesis the pathways which are not used disappear, whilst those which are used are strengthened. Whilst the traditional debate surrounding humans tended to oppose nature and nurture, we now know that human 'nature' is to be plastic, malleable and adaptable to the type of environment in which we find ourselves.

As the texts below from N Katherine Hayles and Nicholas Carr argue, a huge part of contemporary life is experienced through technological mediation. For example it is often thought that children today spend far more time with various forms of media than they do learning from their parents. Consequently, there have been a range of discussions considering what the implications are of this understanding that our relationships with our environment and technologies are altering the wiring of our brains. Both Hayles and Carr suggest that forms of attention are being modified through this process, and that broadly this can be characterised as a shift from sustained and deep engagement with singular texts to a shallow engagement with multiple forms of media, which Hayles terms hyper attention, and connects with the rise in cases of attention deficit disorder.

Nichols Carr – The Web Shatters Focus & Rewires Brains www.wired.com/magazine/2010/05/ff_nicholas_carr/

N Katherine Hayles – Deep and Hyper Attention: The Generational Divide in Cognitive Modes engl449_spring2010_01.commons.../11/hayles.pdf

Finally, this short video from the conference Paying Attention: Digital Media Cultures and Generational responsibilities highlights a range of ways that contemporary academics theorise the relationship between media technologies, neuroplasticity and economies of attention[S1] .

An interactive or media element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here: https://opentextbc.ca/mediastudies101/?p=60

Paying Attention – A conference concerning the Attention Economy from DCRC on Vimeo.

Video From Vimeo BY DCRC

Discussion

1. List some ways that technologies have impacted upon your body, or the bodies of people that you know
2. Consider what these changes have meant in terms of those people's capabilities – how have their lives been changed?
3. Do you agree with Donna Haraway's aim that we are all cyborgs (part biological part technology)?
4. If technology can change our bodies and shape our identities, what does this say about what it means to be human, or about human nature?

3.11: Technology, Time, and Space

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There is a long history exploring the relationship between technology and the ways that people experience time and space. Early theorists to explore this relationship include French philosopher Henri Bergson and German sociologist Georg Simmel. Writing at the start of the 20th Century, Simmel was particularly taken by how the invention of the pocketwatch was crucial to the structuring of time within the newly industrialised cities, how the pocketwatch had allowed time to be quantified in a far more precise way than previous technologies, and how this had ramifications for the emerging industrial economy. In a famous essay entitled *The Metropolis and Mental Life*, Simmel writes:

If all clocks and watches in Berlin would suddenly go wrong in different ways, even if only by one hour, all economic life and communication of the city would be disrupted for a long time. In addition an apparently mere external factor: long distances, would make all waiting and broken appointments result in an ill-afforded waste of time. Thus, the technique of metropolitan life is unimaginable without the most punctual integration of all activities and mutual relations into a stable and impersonal time schedule.

3.12: Technology and Politics

We are frequently exposed to claims that the contemporary media ecology is one in which audiences have been liberated from the passive age of mass media in which media consumption meant sitting down whilst watching and/or listening to material made by professional filmmakers, journalists and television broadcasters. In place of this passive mode of spectatorship, we are told that networked digital media turns audiences into prosumers; a portmanteau of producer and consumer which captures the notion that today's audiences are allegedly active participants within an interactive digital convergence culture.

Attached to these claims often come arguments that these qualities of interactivity and participation have made contemporary societies more democratic, accountable and open places, that is to say that digital technologies are proclaimed to have a profound effect upon politics. But how do we quantify these claims? What kinds of evidence exists that supports and contradicts these ideas, and what critiques exist which suggest that these claims might be ideologically motivated? This section seeks to introduce some historical and contemporary thought surrounding technology and politics so that we can begin to approach some of these questions.

As we have seen elsewhere in this book, there have been a plethora of ways that media and politics have been historically explored with regards to issues such as Ideology, Discourse, media effects, and the public sphere. Understanding technology's role in politics also means contemplating technology and agency – considering how and if technology acts as actant capable of setting limits and exerting pressures upon socio-political formation.

In contrast to Jurgen Habermas's claims that the mass media necessarily entailed the corruption of a public sphere informed by democratic debate, an argument was advanced in various forms at different times by Marxist theorists of media such as Bertold Brecht and Hans Magnus Enzensberger , and which suggested that the issue at hand was the type of technological assemblage available. Brecht explores the notion of political potentials which would be brought forth by a future form of the radio as a two-way mode of communication, which allowed the audience to speak back to the program, and therefore creating a participatory debate rather than a unilateral broadcast. Writing in the 1970s Enzensberger outlines a hypothetical communication network based on reversible circuits rather than centre to periphery broadcasting which would be a minimum precondition (although by no means an ensuring condition) of a socialist rather than a capitalist media structure.

Consequently, when the Internet and the World Wide Web were nascent technologies in the 1980s and 1990s respectively, there was a strand of neo-Frankfurt School media analysis which argued that this new model of many-to-many communication (as opposed to the one-to-many model of broadcast media) would facilitate democratic debate through interactivity and participation, and construct a form of mediated public sphere.

Computers are a potentially democratic technology. While broadcast communication tends to be one-way and unidirectional, computer communication is bi- or omni-directional. Where TV-watching is often passive, computer involvement can be interactive and participatory. Individuals can use computers to send email to communicate with other individuals, or can directly communicate via modems which use the telephone to link individuals with each other in interactive networks. Modems can tap into community bulletin boards, web sites, computer conference sites, or chat rooms, that make possible a new type of interactive public

communication. Democracy involves democratic participation and debate as well as voting. In the Big Media Age, most people were kept out of democratic discussion and were rendered by broadcast technologies passive consumers of infotainment. Access to media was controlled by big corporations and a limited range of voices and views were allowed to circulate.

In the Internet Age, everyone with access to a computer, modem, and Internet service can participate in discussion and debate, empowering large numbers of individuals and groups kept out of the democratic dialogue during the Big Media Age. Consequently, a technopolitics can unfold in the new public spheres of cyberspace and provide a supplement, though not a replacement, for intervening in face-to-face public debate and discussion. For instance, many computer bulletin boards and web sites have a political debate conference where individuals can type in their opinions and other individuals can read them and if they wish respond. Other sites have live real-time chat rooms where people can meet and interact. These forms of cyberdemocracy constitute a new form of public dialogue and interaction, and take place in new public spheres, thus expanding our conception of democracy. Douglas Kellner: Techno-Politics, New Technologies and the New Public Spheres http://pages.gseis.ucla.edu/faculty/kellner/Illumina%20Folder/kell32.htm

A similar perspective on the potential for the Internet to form new public spheres can be found in Mark Poster's interview with Wired magazine about the potential of the Internet to become a new public sphere.

An early activist attempt to create a communication infrastructure along these principles was Indymedia , [see also Aotearoa Indymedia] a movement which grew alongside the anti-globalisation/alter-globalisation movement of the late 1990s and early 2000s. Angered and frustrated by the corporate media's reporting of large scale protests and political events, whereby the perspectives of governments, police forces and corporations were regularly presented whilst those of the protesters themselves were rarely heard, an international community of media activists worked on creating a system that would allow people to post news to Indymedia websites themselves. Whilst this sounds somewhat mundane and ordinary now, only 15 years ago, the notion that news could be written by regular people rather than professional journalists was seen as a radical political gesture. Within a few years there were Indymedia collectives and websites in over 150 different countries spread across the globe and the idea that news was something which could be produced by citizens as well as journalists had taken off.

Indymedia, as an organisation formed along anarchist/autonomist lines, with an anti-hierarchical series of Principles of Unity, was hugely successful within activist circles. However, the lack of formal organisation often proved a handicap in making the platform more mainstream. As time went by, there were an increasing number of commercial platforms which enabled users to create their own news on sites like Blogger,Livejournal and WordPress. Unlike Indymedia these sites were not overtly political, but allowed users to curate their own sites or blogs on any topic they wished, and allowed users considerable control over the look, feel and function of their site without requiring the knowledge of any HTML or CSS (the languages used to write content and styles for web pages). Consequently, as the 2000s went on, user generated content moved away from being a radical political act, and became increasingly integrated into the ways that news and media are generated. Commercial outlets such as The Guardian or Stuff.co.nz's Stuff Nation incorporated user generated stories and comments into online platforms. Major UGC platforms such as Youtube and Blogger have been bought by larger corporations such as Google, and other platforms such as Facebook and Twitter have become multi-billion dollar corporations.

This could be understood as a case of what Brian Winston has described as the law of the suppression of radical potential, whereby the potential to create radically new socio-political relations inherent within new technologies are constrained and suppressed by the range of pre-existing institutions and conventions. These effectively work to re-integrate the technology into an altered but not radically transformed society. Consequently, we can understand that the rise of user generated content and citizen journalism has in numerous cases provided mechanisms for previously marginalised and unheard voices to be heard by millions, in some cases bringing about notable changes.

For example, during the G20 protests in London, Ian Tomlinson, a man unconnected to the protests died whilst walking home from work. The initial police account maintained that there had been no contact between Tomlinson and the riot police, and that an autopsy showed that he died of a heart attack. Four days later, it emerged that a witness had video footage showing Tomlinson suffering an unprovoked assaulted by a police officer, and falling violently to the ground. He walked away, but then later collapsed and died. A subsequent second autopsy revealed that Tomlinson died from internal bleeding. Had there not been the widespread diffusion of video cameras amongst the population, this evidence would not have been captured, and the initial (and factually inaccurate) police account would have stood.

However, whilst this and other examples can demonstrate how the diffusion of media production and publishing tools has made a tangible difference, the dominant modes of UGC and social media are far from the non-hierarchical and non-commercial model that Indymedia sought to introduce. Facebook, Youtube, Twitter, Pintrest and Instagram are all commercial entities which exist to

make a profit through collating user data which is willingly uploaded as content, and using this to sell highly targeted advertising. Whilst they evidence a departure from tradition media corporations, they have the same economic imperative and so the radical potential of the Internet – to provide a decentralised, non-commerical model of community-orientated communication – is suppressed and re-integrated into capitalism. As Jodi Dean powerfully argues, it can instead be considered an expression of neoliberal capitalism, whose emphasis on being an individual consumer (rather than part of a homogenised mass culture) mirrors the activity found within social media.

A YouTube element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here: https://opentextbc.ca/mediastudies101/?p=42

Dean's arguments about communicative capitalism (a term she applies to describe contemporary capitalism) are a huge departure from much of the cyber-utopian discourse which is regularly heard from places such as TED, Wired and mainstream media accounts of technology and politics. There we are more likely to hear that interactive technology has made society more open, accountable and democratic. That networked technology has made society a better, more connected and more enjoyable place for people to live in, rather than being used to maintain material inequalities and relations characterised by exploitation, immiseration and unsustainability. Typical of this type of pro-technology argument is Clay Shirky's work around social media as seen in the video below.

An interactive or media element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here: https://opentextbc.ca/mediastudies101/?p=42

CC BY NC ND TED

Shirky's position contrasts sharply with that of Evgeny Morozov, who explores ways that the technologies which Shirky evangelises about are used by governments around the world as tools for surveillance and spying upon their populations and others spread across the world. Indeed, the disclosures in 2013 from Edward Snowden, a former CIA employee who leaked a cache of top secret documents to the Guardian newspaper and fled the US as he felt morally compelled to inform the world about the extent of the US National Security Agency's online surveillance apparatus. There are undoubtedly elements of social media and user generated content which support democracy and allow democratic debate to emerge. However, these positive elements are regularly embellished and over-emphasised, as Morozov demonstrates in this extract which explores the use of social media in the failed Iranian revolution in 2009, which was dubbed the Twitter revolution in the West:

This was globalization at its worst: A simple email based on the premise that Twitter mattered in Iran, sent by an American diplomat in Washington to an American company in San Francisco, triggered a worldwide Internet panic and politicized all online activity, painting it in bright revolutionary colors and threatening to tighten online spaces and opportunities that were previously unregulated. Instead of finding ways to establish long-term relationships with Iranian bloggers and use their work to quietly push for social, cultural, and—at some distant point in the future—maybe even political change, the American foreign policy establishment went on the record and pronounced them to be more dangerous than Lenin and Che Guevara combined. As a result, many of these "dangerous revolutionaries" were jailed, many more were put under secret surveillance, and those poor Iranian activists who happened to be attending Internet trainings funded by the U.S. State Department during the election could not return home and had to apply for asylum. Evgeny Morozov – The Google Doctrine www.publicaffairsbooks.com/morozovch1.pdf

Consequently, we can see that there are a range of competing discourses surrounding (media) technology and politics. These range from claims that new technologies transform politics in ways that form more participatory, democratic and just societies, to those which see technologies as tools which are employed to continue centuries of exploitation and inequality.

Discussion:

1. What kinds of technologies can you think of that might enhance democratic participation?
2. What kinds of technologies can you think of that might inhibit democratic participation?
3. What relations do you think exist between participatory media and democracy?

3.13: Globalization and Convergence

Clocks by futureatlas.com/blog/

The Chinese takeaways at a corner of campus, the international aisle in the supermarket, American music imports in national charts, international experience in Europe, a term abroad in South America. It seems like the whole world is moving towards you and just waiting around the corner? Welcome to the benefits of globalisation. With activities focussed on international cooperation and relationships the world is becoming smaller as well as tightly interconnected. Convergence in general and also more specific in the media sector is one of the many effects assign to the globalisation.

3.14: Convergence

Convergence is understood as the “flow of content across multiple media platforms, the cooperation between multiple media industries, and the migratory behaviour of media audiences who will go almost anywhere in search of the kinds of entertainment experiences they want.” (Jenkins, 2006)

So what is it when we are talking about media convergence. First of all, convergence implies changes. These changes can appear within the media system or society affecting the channels and the way information is shared and presented. In a convergence culture one news story or a single piece of information is shared through various channels and across multiple media platforms. Multiple aspects of a topic are revealed in this way as different media types concentrate on different aspects and bring different facets to life.

The term convergence does not only refer to an idealized way of sharing information with a highly engaged and participating audience who shape the information to their own needs. It also refers to motions of concentration and economization within certain branches of the media industry.

Additional links

http://www.wisegeek.org/what-is-globalization.htm#slideshow

References

Jenkins, H. (2008). Convergence culture: where old and new media collide. New York: New York University Press.

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

4: Audiences and Identity

4.1: Audiences and Audience Research

This section discusses the different ways we think about receivers, audiences, and users, and how communication and media scholars might approach thinking about and studying audiences. It is worth breaking these concepts down into separate components to try to understand them. However, these concepts are artificial constructs, and the line between receivers, users, and audiences is becoming increasingly soft and blurred and they may have faded in their usefulness.

When dealing with one-to-one or one-to-few communication, we usually use the label of receiver to describe those whom the message targets. As articulated in the transmission models of communication, a receiver can also be a sender, but for now, it's easiest to start with the simplest articulation of a receiver, where a receiver can be defined as anyone targeted for or taking in information or communication. Leaving the reality that receivers often become senders aside, we can still regard receivers as not merely passive sponges of information – they can interpret material, bring to bear their own experiences, and 'read' messages in a number of different ways.

In terms of information received, we can generally say that information is decoded in three ways. There is the **dominant** reading, where the message intended is the message received. There is a **negotiated** reading, where the receiver accepts some of the intended message, and rejects other parts of it. Finally, there are **oppositional** readings, where the reader completely rejects the message intended. And of course, there is also the possibility that the message is not received – through miscommunication or a failure to communicate. It is also worth remembering here that communication is never ideologically neutral.

All of this forms the core of Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding model. Hall argued that any piece of information can be encoded in multiple ways, and every message has more than one meaning. We refer to this as the polysemy of messages – literally, the 'many meanings.' Therefore, communication is always subject to decisions made within the context and systems employed – meaning-making is not natural but cultural. There isn't such a thing as a 'right' way to read a message, only the preferred way within a particular context.

A YouTube element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here: https://opentextbc.ca/mediastudies101/?p=93

16 Rude and Interesting Gestures around the World – Standard Youtube License (Video uploaded by SkyscannerLtd)

The cultural aspect and interpretation of a message shows in the different non-verbal signs described in the video above. The depend on national, thus cultural backgrounds and might have different meanings in other cultures or might simply not be understood. Also, each gesture would only make sense in a certain context.

When thinking about mass communication, and broadcasting to a large number of people (many-to-many communication), we need to ask whether or not an audience is just an aggregate of receivers. Is there anything special about an audience?

It's a surprisingly difficult question. A very basic view might see the audience merely as a group of people who are receiving the same message at the same time, whether it be a musical performance or a TV show. But the breadth of communicative options these days quickly exposes the problems with such a simple definition. If one person records a show on MySky™, another downloads the show off a torrent, another watches it when it is first broadcast on 'free-to-air' TV, and another buys the DVD, are they collectively still an audience? They're all receiving the same text, but in different modes and at different times.

We might instead try to think about audiences both as cultural constructs and as responses to particular media or texts. We can define audiences in terms of location (such as the spectators at a rugby game), by population demographics (for example, children), by medium or channel (such as television or Youtube), or by message content (political speeches or soap operas), as well as by time of transmission or reception.

How we perceive audiences has also changed over time, from passive to active to fragmented. We started off in pre-modern times thinking about the audience in terms of the public. Publics, such as those at agora and fora, were generally constrained in time, space and culture. That is, they tended to be in the same place, at the same time, with participants sharing similar values and culture. It wasn't until the rise of the media and mass communication that audiences started to become more dispersed and hetereogeneous. It is this mass audience that is perhaps more relevant to media scholars.

The mass audience is an interesting phenomena, given how dispersed they are. For much of the 20th century, the mass audience was characterized by a lack of self-generated identity – only with a few rare texts, like certain bands, or shows or sports teams – did people share a common identity in belonging to that audience. For the most part, members of the mass audience, particularly the mediated mass audience, were dispersed across time, space, and culture. Furthermore, what identities they did have were classified by externally generated markers such as demographics, like age, gender (and perhaps most importantly in capitalist media markets,) economic profile.

This era of audience research was very much focused around marketing demographics. Leaving aside public service broadcasting for the moment, a lot of information captured about audiences, and indeed the language we used to describe audiences, came from marketers and program buyers, who determined which mass media texts made it into general circulation based on what kind of audience it would attract (children, housewives, retirees) and therefore what kind of advertising they could sell on it.

Is the idea of the audience still relevant for the 21st Century? A simple test might be to think about what you did last night? With an increasing plethora of channels, modes, and sources of information and entertainment, our existing notion of the mass audience is fractured more than ever.

While the audience still has some use as a concept, particularly as we define the demographics of our audience more tightly, a new concept has come to the fore in communication research. There are a few different labels given to similar concepts, so let's start with the idea of the user. A user has a number of definitions given the context, but to start with, we can define a user as an active agent who uses available tools to interact with information.

A user is of interest to us because they move through a number of different communicative positions simultaneously. They can be both senders and receivers, audiences and producers, engaged in interpersonal communication that is also public performance. Users form networks, and act as nodes which both pass on and reinterpret information taken in from multiple sources, often other users. Users interact with other users to form networks along which information is not only sent and received, but also modified and interpreted.

These messy networks quickly go beyond any simple, linear model that we might use for understanding audiences. The rise of the user in both the interpersonal and mass communication landscape has been enabled to a large extent by information communication technologies such as the internet and mobile phones. But a lot of the interplay between users that we've been seeing reflects other, small scale social networks, such as the pre-modern idea of the village. What has changed is the scale and speed of the network connections, and the idea of memory – an interpersonal network can subjectively remember things. In an electronic network, the exact words, content or message can often be recalled long after the interaction has ceased – a good demonstration of this is searching for yourself online (egosurfing) to find old posts and messages you had long forgotten.

As an aside, it is interesting to use the ritual view of communication as a lens through which to think about the social network of users as a group of communicators. If users can be both senders and receivers, produce and consume (and reproduce) texts, and always have, at least in theory, equal capacity of channel to play either sender or receiver, then the flow of cultural capital is not only sped up, it is also partially removed from the hands of capitalist content producers (i.e. those producing content to sell advertising around or for monetary gain). We're currently seeing the early shockwaves of this change playing out in the copyright battles of the TPPA, SOPA, PIPA, ACTA and s21a.)

Overall, audiences are a fascinatingly complex concept, and one we'll return to in the section on fandom. But now, it might be worth thinking how we approach audience research.

Discussion

1. Why has the internet changed the concept of audiences?
2. Find examples that state your theory.

4.2: Researching Audiences

Audience studies have been around as long as there has been commercial mass media – producers needed to prove to potential advertisers that their message was received by a certain number (and later on, a certain type) of people. As such, audience research has ties to ideas about consumer culture. But as metrics and other ways of gathering information grew more sophisticated the demographics continued to be refined. For example, these are the demographics that TVNZ currently keeps track of for its advertisers.

We can also investigate audiences from perspectives, rather than as mere commodities. For the mass media, a number of different tools are deployed by different groups – such as counting viewers to identify prime advertising space for advertisers. Focus groups are employed to see how the target demographic is receiving a particular text, and adjustments are made accordingly. In-depth research into a population, such as the bronies, attempts to understand the interplay between reception, consumption and community.

These methods have been refined throughout the history of mass media, however, new media presents new challenges. For example, modifications to existing methods, such as a media-use diary where audiences note their media consumption, has to cope with the challenges of a context where most people's media use hours exceed the hours in the day. This is a consequence of multitasking – for example, listening to music while reading Facebook. The technology itself can be employed to provide information about usage (eg: adwords in google). We can even employ systems, such as eyeball tracking, to identify audience viewing habits within a cluttered media landscape.

Despite these and other techniques, tracking changes in audience behaviour is a challenge. This is as much a consequence of changing concepts surrounding audiences as it is a result of changes in media itself. The idea of the audience must now take into account new concepts of the user and the prosumer, how these interrelate with existing notions of an active audience, and how these change the nature of how we understand texts, readings, and issues of consumption and (re)production.

Discussion

1. Discuss the relative merits of various methods of audience research such as focus groups, in-depth research, media use diaries, surveying population samples and 'hidden' online technologies.

4.3: Consumer Cultures

The term **consumer cultures** refers to a theory according to which modern human society is strongly subjected to consumerism and stresses the centrality of purchasing commodities and services (and along with them power) as a cultural practice that fosters social behaviors. The history of consumer cultures can be traced back and linked to particular periods of discontinuity. The international historiography tends to identify three different periods in the history of consumerism in the last three centuries:

- a first period starting in the 18th century England with the popularization of certain products such as exotic drinks and clothing;
- a second phase in the second half of the 19th century with the appearance of the first department stores where practices of shopping were initiated;
- a third phase starting in the 1950s with the achievement of a mass society, the construction of an Atlantic market and the beginning of the process of Americanization of culture.

Without rejecting the precision of the traditional periodization, the interest in the history and practice of consumption in the last decades by an increasing number of scholars has brought to light new interpretations of consumer cultures. These new perspectives consider the phenomenon in the context of continuity throughout a longer duration. According to these perspectives, it is possible to highlight an onset of consumer cultures in Europe from the period between the 17th and the18th centuries when a profound shift of the economic system occurred due to European colonial expansion.

The circulation of new products, such as sugar, tobacco and chocolate, not only brought a major change in the European mode of production but it also gave impulse to a process of appropriation of such goods as they were available on the market. The consumers approached the market in a variety of ways, strongly influenced by their geographical belonging, gender, social position, religious beliefs and cultural tendency. The consumer cultures that were initiated by the circulation and consumption of these new goods are the product of a process of production of everyday life where the main subjects are the consumers who appropriate the goods. Therefore, we can think about consumer cultures, in part, as contributing to the process of identity formation.

Here is a very precise account of how the consumption of coffee, introduced as a new commodity into Europe as well as elsewhere, has contributed to the creation of a certain intellectual and social culture centered on the space of coffee houses.

The interest in consumer cultures focuses on the aspect of production of everyday life as a source of cultural meaning and expression as well as the constant alteration of the symbolic universe through these practices of signification. However, the study of consumer cultures also engages the analysis of a macro sphere where consumer behaviors are strictly connected to economic and commercial aspects of production. In reference to the experience of consumer cultures in 18th and 19th century Europe, for example, the economic and commercial aspects of production involved the deportation of a labor force and the unrestrained exploitation of natural resources. This gave Europe a predominant position in the market. A similar reflection can be made with reference to consumer cultures in the era of mass society. The Americanization of culture in the aftermath of the Second World War placed America into a hegemonic economic and cultural position that influenced European political systems.

This said, it is impossible not to recognize that the formation of consumer cultures is strictly connected to a system of power that periodically redesigns the map of world relations.

Discussion

1. Can you think of any big brands or companies representing today's consumer culture?
2. Which one do you consider the most powerful?
3. Where do they originally come from?

4.4: Consumerism and Subjectivity

Researchers in the field of consumer cultures are interested in studying consumer choice and behavior from a social and cultural point of view, as opposed to an economical and psychological one.

In order to achieve an appropriate understanding of the processes of consumption, it is essential to consider and analyze the activity of the subjects who practice them. Moreover, it is essential to contextualize the activity of the subjects who perform their choices and behaviors inside a net of power relations that control and organize the availability of goods in the marketplace. Therefore, it is important to consider consumer practices and subjectivities as an autonomous social sphere, although strictly related to the sphere of production and commercialization.

Consumer culture researchers do not consider culture as a homogenous system of collectively shared meanings, values and ways of life. In fact, culture is characterized by a multiplicity of ways of production and distribution of meanings and values operated by different cultural groups. In this regard, the term “consumer culture” also points to conceptualizing a commercially produced system of images, texts and objects that different groups appropriate in different ways. They use these to make collective sense of their spaces, experiences and lives, communicating meanings that are often inaccessible to outsiders. Consumers become producers of culture and, in so doing, they also seek to make their own identity as individuals and as members of social groups. Therefore, the marketplace becomes a source of resources which people approach and re-signify to the extent that they can access or not access it as consumers. This opens up new possibilities of communication, as well as relationships to the commodity culture, offered by the marketplace.

In fact, as consumers actively rework and transform symbolic meanings made available by the marketplace, they can also construct their own selves and communities in opposition to commodity culture, by performing practices of consumers’ resistance. The ways through which specific consumers appropriate commercial brands or products to deliver messages of resistance are various and highlights the creative potential that can be involved in consumer practices. In this case we can talk of consumer subcultures that are often engaged in various forms of ‘guerrilla’ resistance in order to state their own ideas and consolidate their group identity. There are innumerable examples of guerrilla consumer resistance:

New Zealand resistance to GM food products is an ongoing example of consumer action. Although this particular issue is international, local resistance, allied to over seas market resistance, has succeeded in keeping GM crops from New Zealand. See “NZ’S GM stance reflects consumer resistance, markets’ needs“.

Consumer resistance can also express itself through the creative practices of everyday life and eventually consolidate in a way of living that is grounded, among other things, in the aesthetics of resistance and vehicles of new meanings.

Discussion

1. Search for any other local examples of consumer resistance in the media.
2. Consider the various points of view in the controversy and how the media portrays those stances. Balance the study across many media sources.

4.5: Identity and Fan Cultures

In other areas of this text, we have considered many different ways of thinking about communication – as exchange of symbols, as flows of information, as part of industries and relations of capital and power, and through the creation and consumption of texts. But communication isn't purely about transmission. It is also about the ritual of communication, about the ongoing socio-cultural interactions that form a core part of the communicative process. So this section looks at questions of identity performance between users in interactions, and starts to explore more deeply how we make and receive messages as social creatures.

To engage with these questions, there are a useful suite of theories and concepts that are known collectively as *symbolic interactionism*. Symbolic interactionism is concerned with the construction of identity within a social context – as such, it doesn't address the psychological or developmental aspects of identity, but rather how an identity is presented and re-presented within a given social or communicative situation. Symbolic interactionism fits in with ideas of identity as something we construct and reconstruct within different social contexts and base on our judgements of the nature and intention of the interaction.

There are a number of theories that fall under the banner of symbolic interactionism, but this section will focus on *impressions management*, the concept of the*looking-glass-self*, and *dramaturgy and performance*. As you shall see, these theories and concepts historically share a great deal in common, and there is significant overlap between them.

One of the key assumptions of a symbolic interactionist approach to communication is to regard society as something that is constructed and reconstructed through signs generated and agreed upon by interacting individuals. Or, as Mead noted, humans act towards things based on the meaning that those things have for them. This meaning is generated by 'playing the game' (Mead) where, by engaging with symbols, they become meaningful and help shape the 'me,' the organized, social aspect of the self. The self is constructed out of the I and the Me, or alternatively, the unstructured personality and the structured persona. The I and the Me alternate as we engage with the symbolic landscape we participate in and help create, to help reform not only society but the self.

With that in mind, let's look at some specific approaches within the symbolic interactionist tradition.

Discussion

1. Before moving on to some specific theoretical perspectives, can you note some symbols, signs, mannerisms etc that identify you, or your subjects, as a communicative member of a group, club, society or wider sub-culture?
2. Are these likely, or not, to be understood by anyone outside the group?

References

Mead, G.H. *Mind, Self and Society From the Standpoint of a Social Behaviorist.Vol. 1.* University of Chicago Press 1934, rev 1967.

4.6: Impressions Management

One theoretical tool that is frequently used to explore questions of new media and communication in particular is *impressions management*. Impressions management is a term used in fields such as communications, sociology, and in public relations theory, and it is used in roughly the same way, just in slightly different contexts.

Impressions management refers to the overt and the unconscious strategies we, as social individuals, deploy to try and influence how others perceive us. Impressions management can explain our clothes, our gestures, the ways we speak, the twitter username we choose, or the Facebook picture we pick for our profile. In deciding on which outwards signs to convey, we try to imagine how others would decode and relate to those signs, and thus choose signs (whether it be hairstyle or a 'selfie' on Facebook) which would generate the positive or desired decoding. By successfully managing impressions, an individual not only receives positive reaction from their peers or social group, and thus peer esteem, but it also allows for a consistent presentation of self – that is, an individual creates and maintains a consistent story of who "they" are – the story of "Kate the friend" or "Tama the student".

When we deploy impression management strategies in our face-to-face social networks, we often do so unconsciously. Your first thought when encountering idea of impressions management might have been 'that's very calculated' or 'I don't do that,' and it was only on second reflection that you realized that you do choose your clothes or make other decisions about yourself based on how others might see you. We are so enculturated to manage our impressions that we stop realizing that we're even doing it. How many times did you hear when you were younger 'stand up straight' or 'look nice' or 'behave, and make a good impression'? We do it automatically as part of the rituals and processes of everyday life within our society.

One of the best places to tease out these processes of encoding impressions management strategies is to look at how you manage your online persona in places such as Facebook. Online, where every communicative act is deliberate and the communication is stripped of non-verbal cues (and quite a few other cues besides), impressions management behaviours become foregrounded. We are quite deliberate and calculating (even if we're not explicit even to ourselves as to why we are deliberate and calculating) in selecting the impressions we put online. A great example of this is your Facebook photo albums – reflect on when and why you might delete or 'untag' photos of yourself that you think don't make you look "good"? That is impressions management in action.

This idea of understanding identity through trying to imagine how others see 'you' is a common one across the symbolic interactionist school of thought. Impressions management is closely linked with another concept known as the looking-glass self.

Discussion

1. We can begin by investigating how we, as individuals, employ impressions management to present ourselves to the world. However, is this equally as applicable in understanding corporate, retail and other institutional presence in all forms of media?
2. More specifically, do such bodies employ similar strategies to individuals in their use of Facebook as an advertising/information tool? If not, identify the techniques they do employ.

4.7: Looking-Glass Self

The looking-glass-self draws more deeply on psychological rather than sociological models of the self in society, but like impressions management, it approaches the dynamic self through that self's place in a social context, surrounded by other selves, other identities.

Drawing on psychological concepts of the self, the looking-glass-model sees the self as constantly reworking itself through a three-step process of imagining how we appear to others, and how others judge that appearance, and then developing the self in light of that (hypothetical) judgement. It is here you can see the strong ties between looking-glass-self and impressions management. The point of difference (and why this is a psychological rather than a sociological concept), is that this process is entirely in the mind of the individual. Whereas impressions management sees the self modifying itself as based on actual feedback from others (comments, criticisms, rebuffs), the looking-glass-self develops itself entirely on what it thinks the other perceives – it all takes place in the mind of the self. Mead, a leading scholar in symbolic interactionism, refers to this as "taking the role of the other," something that can begin as the young child passes the mirror stage and understands itself as being an entity or individual separate from other individuals. Charles Cooley, who coined the term 'looking-glass-self', spoke of "the thing that moves to pride or shame is not the mere mechanical reflection of ourselves, but an *imputed sentiment*, the imagined effect of this reflection upon another's mind" (Cooley, 1964, emphasis added).

The looking-glass-self is particularly interesting to think about in terms of mediated interactions, whether that be a letter, a talk-show, or a Reddit thread. Because mediated communication involves distance, the individual users become more or less isolated depending on the form of mediation, and the social relationship of interaction becomes stripped of some or many of the subconscious and non-verbal cues with which we often rely upon to moderate our reactions. Particularly in two-way, mediated exchanges, such as phone, text or chat, users often have to imagine the 'reflection' they are having on another's mind.

If we focus specifically on forms of two-way communication that place communication as part of social networks and communal ties, we can probably return to look at other forms of symbolic interactionism that focus more on the link between individuals as a site of identity meaning-making. Perhaps one of the most-relevant (and arguably most used) forms of symbolic interactionism are the dramaturgical perpectives of performance.

Discussion

1. Given the prevalence of phone, text, chat and numerous other technological forms of communication do you think such controlled forms of communicating are becoming normalised?
2. If so, is it possible that humanity is moving towards a preference for such controlled communication methods, and that we are becoming our own avatar for our imaginary audience. Try arguing this both ways.

References

Mead, G.H. *Mind, Self and Society From the Standpoint of a Social Behaviorist.Vol. 1.* University of Chicago Press 1934, rev 1967.

4.8: Dramaturgy

Dramaturgy is a sociological perspective on identity that employs a theatrical metaphor to explore issues of identity formation and reformation. As such, dramaturgy assumes a place, a moment, and an audience to whom the identity is being presented. This places identity formation both in a social context (such as a classroom, a chatroom, a family, etc) as well as at a particular point in time. This implies that identities can shift with varying contexts and moments.

The key aspect to dramaturgy, however, is the concept of the audience and an individual's relationship with that audience in that specific time and place. As with impressions management, the individual actor must control their presentation of self so as to evoke from this audience a desired reaction to that presentation. So you can probably start to see elements of both impressions management (reacting to audiences) and looking-glass self (imagining the audience) within dramaturgy.

However, dramaturgy extends the metaphor of the stage even further, and this is where things get particularly interesting. A key element of dramaturgy is the concept of the front- and backstage. In face-to-face interactions, the front- and backstage are two related but separate areas, where the front is the space in which the performance of self takes place, and the back is where that performance is prepared. For example, to borrow Goffman's own example (1997), for a waiter, the frontstage is the restaurant floor, where the waiter performs their identity as waiter for the diners. The backstage is the kitchen, where that identity is relaxed, until another order is up. As the waiter passes through the kitchen doors, they become the waiter once more, playing their assigned role.

It may be useful to look at one specific communicative arena, online social networking sites, from the perspective of dramaturgy, and ask the question, where is the backstage in an online performance of self? The internet blurs the line between frontstage and backstage, and thus problematizes it. An individual can be simultaneously front- and backstage – their World of Warcraft avatar, for example, can be performing to an audience, but at the same time you, as the extension of that avatar, can be alone in your room in front of the computer (maybe making snide comments about the people your avatar is talking to in a chat window). The backstage and the frontstage co-exist simultaneously instead of concurrently. Another good example of this is when the virtual boundaries between front and backstage break down – like when someone is chatting in two windows, and mistakenly sends a comment meant for one recipient to another, or when someone tries to send a friend a private message via Facebook Messenging, but ends up posting it on a public wall instead.

Whether online or off, the goal of a dramaturgical performance of self is the same – to project to a known audience a desired and desirable perception of self, and to maintain that dramatic portrayal in a consistent manner. Whether you are playing the role solo or in a team, these goals remain the same.

Dramaturgy acknowledges that identities are pluralistic – we have many identities that we put on and off as we move through time and space, and enter and exit different social contexts. As such, to achieve these goals, one has to be able to quickly switch and negotiate roles, or performative masks, as they move between different social contexts.

But as you can see, there is a lot of overlap between different forms of impressions management, and they are by no means mutually exclusive. In fact, they work best when applied as a suite of concepts to address questions of identity in social contexts. For example, in the next section, we'll apply some of these ideas to the area of fandom.

Discussion

1. In the theater actors routinely perform different roles. Do pubic figures, celebrities, political parties, or corporate bodies, in the media, alter their role playing according to the context or audience?
2. Find an example then describe, and give possible reasons for, each role your subject 'performs'.

Reference:

Goffman (1997). The presentation of self in everyday life. In Calhoun, C.; Gerteis, J.; Moody, J.; Pfaff, S.; Virk, I. (eds.). Contemporary sociological theory. Malden/Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell. pp.46-61.

4.9: Fandom

Having thought about the different ways we can think of and theorize the performance of identity, this section will now turn to look at how we can apply this to one type of identity – the fan.

Fans are those who identify with the enthusiastic engagement with a text. This text might be a book series, a tv show, a sporting team, or a fashion label. If we think about ways of theorizing identity, we can start to see that "fan" is an identity option that an individual can choose to deploy based on actual or perceived feedback from others. Fandom is often a shared identity performance. This section will take a look at one example of a media fandom, but it might be worth thinking about other fans you know (such as sporting fans) and see how many of these identity and reception roles they also adopt.

Bronies are adult fans of the animated series *My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic*. The term comes from the words 'bro' and 'pony.' Bronies are generally teens and older, usually male, usually educated. And they are a very active audience of this show.

Bronies as a fandom are interesting to look at for a number of reasons. One is that they conduct their own census, which is very handy for media researchers! Another is that Bronies fit a number of reception categories simultaneously.

Firstly, they are an audience in the sense of a mass audience. They watch the show. They buy DVDs and figurines. The producers of the show may not have set out to attract this particular demographic, but now that they have it, the show's producers cater to it as they are writing, producing, and even creating merchandise for the show.

Secondly, bronies are users. This status as users is part of their behavior as active fans, in that they exchange information, remix content, have their own websites and clearinghouses of information, and interact with each other. They form social and fan networks within which they share their passion for the ponies.

Thirdly, bronies are prosumers. Prosumer is a portmanteau of producer and consumer, and prosumers drive the remix culture. Remix is where users take existing content and texts, often mass produced texts, and pull them apart to use the pieces to construct new texts.

A favourite form of prosumer text is the fanvid. Texts such as fanvids reconstruct the object of fandom not only through the lense of that fandom (which emerges from the collective experience of the fan network), but also within the wider cultural contexts in which these fans exist. Take for example this *My Little Pony*fanvid which remixes or 'mashes' My Little Ponies as a fandom object with another favourite media text of this demographic, the film *The Watchmen* (which is not a text likely to be popular with the original pre-teen target audience of *My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic.*)

Prosumers take the idea of the active audience to a whole new level. In the age of the mass audience, the active audience was seen as someone yelling back at the screen, or talking about what they had seen or heard over the watercooler at work or school the next morning. And that still happens. But now, thinking of audiences also as an aggregate of users means that the active audiences not only talk back to the screen – they use screens to construct their own texts in a process of *bricolage* and re-consumption. In this case – taking pieces of *My Little Pony: Friendship Is Magic* and marrying them to pieces of a completely different pop culture text that also appeals to this audience demographic to create something that is both the product of and speaks directly to themselves as audiences and users, and as fans.

Discussion

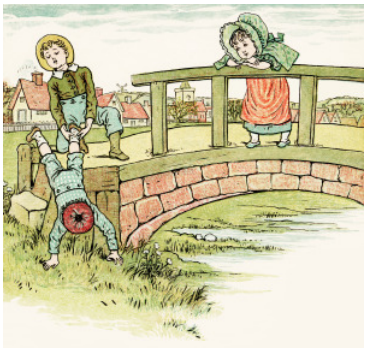
1. Given the broad definition of what a fan is, and the activities they are involved in, is it possible we are 'fans' and members of a 'fandom' more often than we think, unknown to us, and that this occurs within our everyday lives.
2. Are you a fan of something? Do you recognize the roles of audience, user, and prosumer in your fandom activity?

4.10: Postcolonialism Race and Ethnicity

This section is yet to be hacked – feel free to contribute content.

4.11: Gender

When we talk about gender, we usually refer mistakenly to the biological sex of the person. However, gender refers to socio-cultural constructs that lead us to think of men and women in a particular way. Gender not only defines people by their biological sex, but it consequently influences our behaviour regarding what is expected of us. Judith Butler, in particular, placed emphasis on gender as a social construction of behaviours determined by culture rather than by biological differences between sexes. As a man or woman, a person is often expected to behave in a certain way and is 'naturally' attributed certain characteristics. Instead of being 'natural', gender is, on the contrary constructed, produced and reproduced within society and culture. When we refer to 'gender issues' we usually refer to issues that differ according to the gender of the person. The majority of these characteristics are arbitrarily attributed to people according to their sex . For example, the idea that little girls like pink and want to be princesses and little boys like blue and want to be war heroes. This idea is promulgated across media, such as children's books, and impacts on people's later view of themselves.



Under the Window, by Kate Greenaway, p.30.

In the image here, boys are portrayed as active and adventurous while the girl appears as a passive and admiring observer. Women have stereotypically been placed in an inferior hierarchical position than men. Media of all sorts, such as films, magazines, news, advertisements, speeches and books, like the one above, produce and transmit ideas about gender which impact on our own view of men and women and ultimately lead to discrimination and hierarchies.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q0RtU...Yk&w=560&h=315

Masculinity and femininity are defined in opposition to each other. This DB ad makes use of 'cheesy' music and images to, supposedly, appeal to their idea of a 'feminine sensibility.' Not only does it sell the idea that the only interest in women's lives is men, it also repeatedly confines women into domesticity and emotions. In an intertextual image referring to *American Beauty*, the beer replaces the woman in the film, in order to indicate that men here are not dreaming about women but about beer. For that matter, it reproduces the traditional association between men and beer and conveys a preconception of masculinity as partying, fun and uninterested in commitment, while women are supposed to aspire to it!

Discussion:

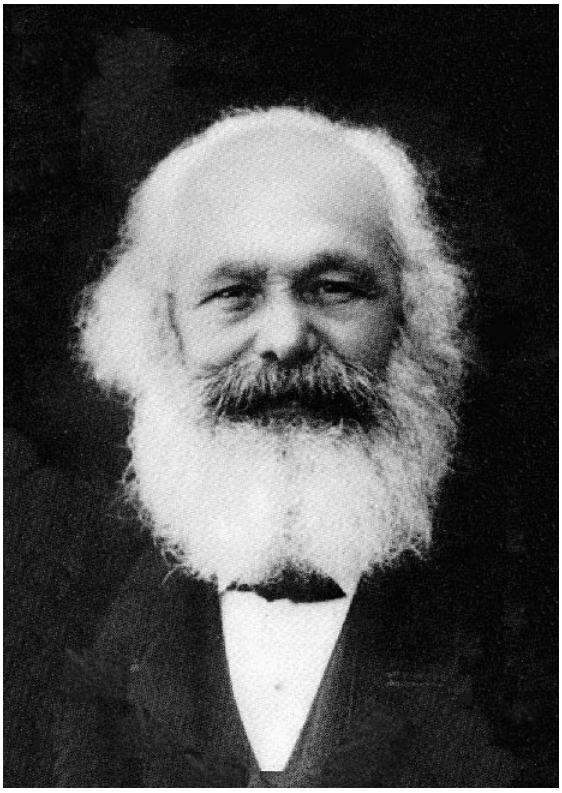
1. What typical attributes of male and female gender roles on TV can you think of? How do the differ in context, i.e. on the job, in the family, at different ages?
2. Compare TV programmes and ads. Do roles and stereotypes differ?
3. Do they differ according to genres?

Reference:

Butler, Judith P. (1990) *Gender trouble: feminism and the subversion of identity*. New York: Routledge.

4.12: A History of Modern Political Economy

The history of modern political economy traces back to the works of Adam Smith and Dave Ricardo, who writing in the 18th and 19th Century outlined a model which was broadly supportive of the developments of economic markets and free trade, and was based upon a labour theory of value, which suggested that the value of the goods and commodities produced is directly related to the amount of labour which goes into making that product. Smith and Ricardo's work was taken up in the mid 19th century by Karl Marx who in 1867 published Capital: Critique of Political Economy, which functioned as a critique of the emergent political economy of capitalism during the industrial revolution. Marx's major contentions are worth exploring here, as his work remains a foundation for studies of PE, and the basic concepts and categories he proposed are still commonly employed within media studies today, almost 150 years after he devised them.



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Marx begins Capital by identifying the commodity – a material entity which can be bought or sold – as the basic unit on which capitalist economies are built, and then proceeds to distinguish between the use-value and exchange value of a commodity. Whereas use-value relates to the value inherent in the way that a good is used, be it to feed someone, provide primary resources for manufacturing or provide information or entertainment to someone, exchange value refers to the fluctuating value which is attached to those goods. Indeed, during the time of the industrial revolution when Marx was writing, the spatial distribution of goods and markets meant that financial speculators were able to amass vast sums (by the standards of the period) by purchasing goods in one location and moving them to another location before selling them at greatly increased prices. Whilst the use-value of these goods remained constant – they would be used in the same way in both areas – their exchange-value varied considerably, allowing a particular privileged class of people (those with the financial resources to buy large quantities of goods and transport them to another city) to exploit the productive labour of others (those who actually produced the goods in the first place) in order to further entrench their wealth. This is a crucial point, as it reveals that Marx's approach to political economy reveals ways that capitalism is dependent upon a system whereby the productive labour of one social group is exploited by another, wealthier class who effectively own the means of production and can further entrench their elite financial status through financial speculation which the working class who create the commodities themselves cannot participate in. Pivotal to Marx's work then, were the social relations between different classes within the emergent capitalist society of which he was a part, and the ways in which privileged classes, which he terms the bourgeoisie, exploit the labour of the working classes, whom Marx calls the proletariat.

Marx builds upon the notion of a labour-theory of value, contending that all exchange value is effectively derived from the amount of time someone had to spend working to create a commodity. This quantifiable temporal unit, however, is itself approached as something which is dynamic and changes depending on social development and structuring. Marx uses examples drawn from the changes to the textile industry within the industrial revolution, in which the introduction of a range of new technologies such as the power-loom – which effectively halved the time that was required to weave a given length of yarn into cloth – transformed the socially accepted amount of time required to produce commodities. Whilst there were still artisans hand weaving after the invention of the power-loom, they only received half the wage they had done previously.

Another important distinction which Marx makes with respect to value, is the introduction of the concept of surplus-value. Whereas the use-value of a commodity relates to the work of the labourer in producing it, under capitalism, Marx posits that the exchange value cannot merely be a direct representation of use-value, as in addition to the work of producing the commodity itself, capitalists (factory owners and merchants) are required to add value to the commodity in order to extract profits from its sale and subsequent circulation within markets. These added costs to the exchange value of commodities are what Marx terms surplus value. This again is used by Marx to suggest that capitalism is an inherently exploitative socio-economic system, as this means that it is predicated upon the capitalist classes from extracting value which is removed from the use-value of goods, and this is what allows them to make a profit.

Furthermore, in a social situation in which advances in science and technology frequently involve the insertion of machines which can reduce the amount of labour required to produce commodities – a process which is still very much relevant to a contemporary situation where digital technologies such as non-linear editing software, digital cameras and cloud-based server systems can allow the production of media with dwindling amounts of labour time – the tendency over time is for the tendency of the rate of profit to fall. This basically states that because technology advances over time, equal quantities of commodities can be produced in diminishing temporal durations, which entails that their exchange value will depreciate if all else is equal. Consequently, Marx argues that in order to maintain and grow profits, capitalists have to enact more and more repressive conditions within the workplace to counteract the tendency of the rate of profit to fall.

Philosophically, Marx inverts G.W. Hegel's idealist perspective, contending that:

'The mode of production of material life conditions the general process of social, political and intellectual life. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness' Marx, 1859 p4

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