Stuart Hall: Encoding- Decoding

• “Though we know the television programme is not a behavioural input, like a tap on the knee cap, it seems almost impossible for traditional researchers to conceptualize the communicative process without lapsing into one or the other variant of low-flying behaviourism. We know, as Gerbner has remarked, that representations of violence on the TV screen are ‘not violence but messages about violence’ but we have continued to research the question of violence, for example, as if we were unable to comprehend this epistemological distinction.”

• (p. 131)

• Making meaning, in language and in television, is conducted through a series of known codes, such that they can be interpreted.

• Meaning takes place for instance within the rules of language (one form of a discursive code, the code governing sensible speech).

• But this discursive production, says Hall, also requires at the production end the material means and sets of social relations (the organization of social relations (combinations of practices within specific media apparatuses or institutions) to make this possible.
Stuart Hall: Encoding-Decoding

- **ENCODING** → program as ‘meaningful discourse-

- **DECODING**

- (meaning structures 1) (meaning structures 2)

- frameworks of knowledge
- relations of production
- technical infrastructure
Stuart Hall: Encoding- Decoding

- Hall is drawing and fusing 2 traditions of thought here (Marxism) and Semiotics...
- This process of meaning making is done in (articulated) linked, but distinct moments.
- Production (made)
- Circulation (disseminated by what means)
- Distribution/consumption (brought to viewing audiences and received; under what conditions of reception?)
- Reproduction (taken in and replicated by these audiences, and information given back to the producers)
- (Marx’s model: production, consumption, distribution and exchange)
Stuart Hall: Encoding- Decoding

• “While each of the moments in articulation, is necessary to the circuit as a whole, no one moment can fully guarantee that the next moment with which it is articulated.”

• ...

• “…each has its specific modality and condition of existence, each can constitute its own break or interruption of the ‘passage of forms; on whose continuity the flow of effective production (or reproduction) depends…”

• (129).
Stuart Hall: Encoding- Decoding

- The encoding decoding model is distinct from the transmission model because it looks at
discursive codes that govern the production of language; but could also include the various broadcasting codes by public and private broadcasters and regulatory bodies.

- institutional structures that in the case of television make broadcasting possible.
- These include their practices and network of production;
- Their organized relations of labour
- Their technical infrastructures

and while audiences are both source and receiver, it is emphasized that they exist in specific locations and social contexts... (connection to Ang’s article on Dallas in global contexts)

- Media have effects, but only as they pass through particular types of codes and there are perceptual, cognitive, emotional, ideological, and behavioural consequences to consider in understanding this process.
Stuart Hall: Encoding- Decoding

- The Codes of Realism: rely on iconic signs
- The television sign is a combination of visual and oral discourses. It is an iconic sign, because it possesses some of the properties of the thing that is represented.
- Iconic signs, signs which bear a strong relationship to the thing they represent are coded signs.
- What we call realism, or naturalism (think of nature shows, or the documentary tradition) are coded by conventions and are a part of a discursive practice.
- “There is no intelligible discourse without the operation of a code”
- “Reality exists outside of language, but it is constantly mediated by and through language: and what we can know and say has to be produced in and through discourse. Discursive knowledge is the product... of the articulation of language on real relations and conditions.” (131).
Stuart Hall: Encoding-Decoding

- Connotation and Denotation

- Denotation is a more literal description of reality. Connotation is a more associative meaning attributed to the sign.

- The connotative level is that place where a sign... intersect with the deep semantic codes of a culture and take on a more active ideological dimension.
Stuart Hall: Encoding-Decoding

• Modes of interpretation are in fact learned and therefore a part of a system of cultural interpretation, a way of decoding.

• Which brings us to hall’s main point... misunderstandings are not simply ‘systematically distorted communication.” They can be more profoundly a disagreement with the message.

• “To elaborate on this we offer a hypothetical analysis of some possible decoding positions, in order to reinforce the point of no necessary correspondence (between encoder and decoder).”

• **Reading or Interpretive Positions**
  - Hegemonic
  - Negotiated
  - Oppositional
Stuart Hall: Encoding-Decoding

• The dominant-hegemonic position.

• Operates in the dominant code that is being transmitted.

• “Indeed it serves to reproduce the dominant definitions precisely by bracketing their hegemonic quality and operating instead with displaced professional codings which foreground such apparently neutral-technical questions as visual quality, news and representational values, televisual quality and professionalism.”
Stuart Hall: Encoding-Decoding

• Negotiated position

• “At a more restricted or situational level it makes its own ground rules.”

• “It accords the privileged position to the dominant definition of events while reserving the right to make a more negotiated application to ‘local conditions.’

• This negotiated version is thus shot through with contradictions, which are only in some cases brought to full visibility...
Stuart Hall: Encoding-Decoding

• The oppositional code is one in which a viewer understands both the literal and the connotative inflection given by a discourse, but to decode the message in a globally contrary way.

• A message I put into another framework of values and logic. Wage limits are not in the national interest but in the interests of class.

• The University is not a place to learn or to be enlightened by to reproduce knowledge workers, or serve the interests of the governing elites.
Part of the trend in communication and cultural studies to examine audiences and the reception of media texts.

This tradition owes much to the theoretical paradigm shift in Hall’s encoding-decoding model.
Ien Ang

• Takes up how individuals interpret texts and identifies a range of interpretive positions in response to the dominant/hegemonic reading of Dallas in the Netherlands.

• Not just a subjective interpretation: she seeks to understand how ideologies are represented in various discourses (such as nationalism allied as it is to taste) and how viewers manage or respond to those positions.

• Unlike Hall, she engages with actual people.