

Key Themes in Media Theory (Notes) By Dan Laughey

Open University Press; 1 edition (Oct 1 2007)

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Spread of Western imperialism in the 16<sup>th</sup> century

"Modernist art, literature and criticism are centered on the idea that individual creativity is threatened by a hostile environment of oppressive politics, advanced economics, technologies and other social forces, including mass media" (Laughey p.31).

"The authentic, poetic voice of what T.S. Eliot (1951) – another modernist – called the 'individual talent' has been usurped by the profit-seeking motives of capitalist-driven media corporations" (p.42).

"Nonetheless, the power to decide what stories, ideas, tastes and values are offered to use via media communications is structured unequally in favour of some interests (the ruling ones) rather than others (the interests of the silent majority)" (p.55).

"Althusser (1971) argued that individuals in capitalist societies are governed by ideological state apparatuses (ISAs), including schools, legal systems, religious institutions, media communications, and so on" (p.60).

"As such, individuals...unaware that their lives are repressed by the very institutions that represent and serve them" (p.60).  
(Louis Althusser)

"The advertising industry, [Judith] Williamson suggests, is a highly pervasive ISA in advanced capitalist societies" (p.67).

"Nonetheless, the ideology of ads can only work its ulterior motives – to mask class differences, to present a world of glamour and happiness."

"Ads pretend to empower us but only in ways that they would wish us to be empowered" (p.69).

"The 'people' represented by ads are typically white, affluent, relatively young and physically attractive but these shiny, happy people are hardly a typical cross-section of society" (p.69).

"The 'ideal' types in ads, moreover, are stereotypes that conform to dominant ideological representations of what 'success' and 'happiness' look like" (p.69).

"Essentially, a subculture is an understood set of practices – usually working-class in character – that try to resist surveillance by the dominant culture (e.g. police) as well as incorporation into mainstream cultures" (p.71).

"A subculture ceases to exist when it becomes incorporated, manufactured and packaged by commercial interests" (p.71).

\*Jeremy Bentham – Panopticon

\*Foucault – Compulsory visibility

\*Goffman – Theory of self-presentation

\*Meyrowitz's theory of placelessness: "In which he proposes that people are no longer defined by physical boundaries or places..." (p.85).

"[T]elevision and other electronic media can be regarded as important resources for social and political change in pursuit of banishing social inequalities" (p.85).

"...the media shape and influence the course of events and, indeed, create events that would not have existed in their absence" (p.89).

\*Stan Cohen's *Folk Devils and Moral Panics*

\*Deviance Amplification Model

According to Anthony Giddens: "Narcissism is a symptomatic trait of self-identity in the phase of modernity. Consumer capitalism perpetuates the flawed project of self-love which encourages individualism and discourages 'giving to others' (p.98).

## **Radical Feminism**

"Men are rapists, batterers, plunderers, killers" (Dworkin 1981:48) (p.101).

"Pornography perpetuates the masculine-inflected ideology that women are prostitutes subject to men's sexual domination" (p.101).

"The pleasure of the male requires the annihilation of women's sexual integrity" (Dworkin 1981:47) (p.101).

- Andrea Dworkin

\*Fundamental weakness in Dworkin's argument according to Laughey, fails due to the hypodermic needle treatment of pornography and male violence. Men don't view pornography and become automatically conditioned to respond in similar actions.

"[T]heory of the male gaze claims that male characters are 'bearers' of the look 'which is aimed – far more often than not – at physically desirable, sexually submissive female characters."

-Laura Mulvey

\*Men desiring heterosexual pleasures

\*Modern male subject to female gaze?

\*Male chauvinism and sexual promiscuity

"...postfeminists assume that equality has been more or less achieved and women are no longer victimized by a patriarchal order" (p.115).

"Everywhere you look, you see individual women who are freer and more powerful than women have ever been" (Walter 1999:1) (p.115).

-Natasha Walter

\*Postfeminism or third wave or "popular feminism"

"Girl power" = Strong, but sexy women

Is that true liberation?

According to Germaine Greer the postfeminist woman is "nothing but a sexual being" (Greer 2000: 411) (p.116).

\*Riot Grrl movement (third wave feminism)

\*Narcissistic, image-driven male

"Men are expected to be in control of their jobs, their partners, their families, their finances and themselves – and these high social expectations lead some men down the unhealthy path of low self-esteem, stress and depression" (p.117).

"Like political economy theory, postcolonialism cites white, Western capitalism as the dominant framework for global media power" (p.122).

"The products of the culture industry, moreover, possess ulterior motives to repress imagination and render 'the masses' socially and politically inactive" (p.123). – Theodor Adorno and Horkheimer

"Standardization results in the liquidation of individuals – like commodities to mere statistics and classificatory labels: 'There is nothing left for the consumer to classify. Producers have done it for him' (Adorno and Horkheimer 1973: 125).

"To explain this paradoxical situation it is argued that the mundane, workaday routines of the masses dull their sense of creativity and enthusiasm so severely that, during those brief intervals of leisure afforded to them, is a song or film or any other medium of entertainment is 'to remain a pleasure it must not demand any effort...No independent thinking must be expected from the audience: the product prescribes every reaction" (Adorno and Horkheimer 1973: 137) (p.124).

"The culture industry serves the ideological interests of economic and politic powers by producing music, films and other sentimental novelties designed to make people cathartic, amused, satisfied with their lot, sleep and – after a good night's sleep – re-charged for tomorrow's chores at the office, farm or factory" (p.125).

### **Media and Cultural Imperialism**

\*Herbert Schiller: Cultural homogenization in U.S. now threatens to overtake the globe

\*Gramsci