Overview of Session

• Introduction
• Classical approaches to media communications
• The encoding / decoding approach
• Practical exercises
• Conclusion
Introduction

• Objectives
  – Illustrate how media products can be interpreted in different ways
  – Provide understanding of different « moments » of communication
  – Provide understanding of how media messages and their interpretation(s) are « socially located »
Introduction

• Understanding media texts
  – What is the meaning of this message?
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Introduction

• Understanding media texts
  – What is the meaning of this message?
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Une initiative de la Fondation Émergence
Classical approaches to media communication

- Communication as a linear process

Sender → Message → Receiver
Classical approaches to media communication

- Communication as a linear process
- « Hypodermic needle theory »
Classical approaches to media communication

- Communication as a linear process

« Magic bullet theory »
Classical approaches to media communication

• Communication as a (relatively) linear process
  – The media "effects" approach
  – The "uses and gratifications" approach
The encoding / decoding approach

- Elements of context
  - 1960s /70s Britain / British academia
  - Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (The « Birmingham School »)
  - Culture, politics, and communication
  - Stuart Hall
    - Encoding /decoding
The encoding / decoding approach

• Turning point in media communication theory
• Conclusive break with
  – Dominant (American) models
  – Aesthetics
  – Idea of audiences as passive consumers
The encoding / decoding approach

- Every « moment » in the process of communication has its own determinants
  - Encoding (the original composition of the message)
  - Decoding (the point at which the message is « read » and understood)
The encoding / decoding approach

- Production and consumption are determined by a range of influences:
  - Discourses of the medium
  - Discursive contexts of composition and consumption
  - Technologies used

There is nothing natural about communication
The encoding / decoding approach

There is nothing natural about communication

- Messages have to be constructed before they can be sent
- Construction and reception are active, social events
The encoding / decoding approach

• The audience is not a single undifferentiated mass

  – There is bound to be a lack of fit between some aspects of production and reception of messages
The encoding / decoding approach

• Potential for misunderstanding is limited by communication systems

  – Many « codes » used in media messages appear to be natural because they have become completely normalized
The encoding / decoding approach

« French aircrash disaster inquiry shock »
The encoding / decoding approach

• Messages are polysemic, but not totally pluralistic
  – Not predetermined, but composed within a system dominated by accepted codes
  – Dominant meanings are « preferred »
The encoding / decoding approach

• « Encoding » media messages attempts to set up some of the limits of interpretation
  – Works to enforce and command the « dominant » understanding of the message
The encoding / decoding approach

• Three « hypothetical » positions from which media texts can be understood

  1. Dominant / « preferred » position
  2. Negotiated position
  3. Oppositional position
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