

## COMM 10: Introduction to Communication

### Keywords

#### Communication

We can define communication in two main ways: as shared ideas, information or meaning; and as the sending and receiving of goods and information. The definition of communication as shared meaning can be described as a cultural view or model of communication. The definition of communication as sending and receiving of information is a transmission view or model of communication. Our study of communication can change significantly based on how we define it.

When used in the plural, the word “communications” generally refers to the means of communication including different kinds of technology and, especially, the mass media.

*Relevant course text: Raymond Williams. See also, pages 10-11 in Czitrom’s book.*

#### Mediation

This term refers to the act of intervening between two things, persons or groups. It is related to the terms *medium*, and *media*. A medium is something or someone that intervenes in between two things, persons or groups. Media is simply the plural form of medium. The mass media are therefore the institutions that intervene in the communication process between large groups (or masses) of people and those who wish to communicate to them, for example politicians, advertisers and entertainers.

Mediation is an important term in the study of communication because it occurs in all communication processes. Communication is almost always mediated whether it occurs intrapersonally, interpersonally, intra-group or inter-group, or at the society-wide level. Communication is mediated by language – whether this is the language of words, colors, clothing, musical notations, mathematical symbols or hand gestures (for example, American Sign Language). Communication is also mediated by technologies like telephones and the Internet. Finally, communication is mediated by the institutions that we refer to as the mass media, and by the products that we refer to as popular culture.

*Relevant course text: Raymond Williams*

#### The Self

George Mead uses this term to refer specifically to the self in the “reflexive” sense. In this sense, the self is an object to itself, and it is able to reflect on itself in the same way that others can. According to Mead, this ability (of the self to be an object to itself) is only possible through social experience: that is, by being around other people. It also occurs through communication. Communication with others is therefore essential to the development of a self that can be an

object to itself.

*Relevant course text: George Mead*

### **Significant Symbols**

This is how Mead defines the kind of communication needed in order to have a self that can be an object to itself. Significant symbols are signs that have the same meaning for the hearer as they do for the speaker

*Relevant course text: George Mead*

### **Social identity**

*A term used to refer to the different social groups to which people belong. A social identity may be based on nationality, race, gender, sexuality, class, age, ability and a range of other factors. People may identify themselves with such groups or they may be identified by others as belonging to such groups. For example, a person of Indian descent living in Britain may be identified by others as Asian but may identify herself as Black. This example shows that such categories are not always based on legal status (e.g. citizenship) or biological features (e.g. having a female body). They are also often social, economic, political and cultural:*

- **Race:** *The term “race” is used to distinguish different groups from each other on the basis of physical appearance, particularly skin color. Although scientific research has shown that there is very little variation between races, racial differences have been used as a basis for creating hierarchies between different groups of people. In the U.S. this has translated into social and political systems that have treated non-White groups as inferior to White (based on K. Murji’s discussion of race in New Keywords: A Revised Vocabulary of Culture and Society edited by Tony Bennett, Lawrence Grossberg & Meaghan Morris, Malden MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2005).*
- **White Privilege:** *this is a term that is helpful in understanding race in societies like the U.S. where race is an important social identity. It is also helpful for understanding Dwight McBride’s argument in “Why I Hate Abercrombie and Fitch). Frances Kendall defines white privilege as, “...an institutional, rather than personal, set of benefits granted to those of us who, by race, resemble the people who hold the power positions in our institutions” (Kendall, Frances E. Understanding White Privilege: Creating Pathways to Authentic Relationships Across Race New York: Routledge, 2006).*
- **Gender:** *Julie D’Acci tells us that this has been defined as, “the social and cultural meanings or representations assigned to biologically sexed bodies.” She also notes challenges to the conceptualization of gender on the basis of male and female and refers to the work of Judith Butler who has argued to gender as “performative.” That is,*

*gender identity exists on a continuum and is not fixed.*

*Relevant course texts: Robin Lakoff, Geneva Smitherman, Gloria Anzaldua, Scott Kiesling, Dwight McBride, Dick Hebdige, Julie D'Acci.*

## **Culture**

The concept of culture can be defined in a number of different ways:

- “The best that has been thought and said” in a society
- Distinctive features of a social group – including beliefs, rituals, clothing and food.
- The music art, entertainment, leisure activities etc of ‘ordinary people’ i.e, *popular culture*
- The process by which meanings are produced and exchanged. This occurs through *representation* in the constructionist sense. This is why when we think of communication as shared meaning, we describe it as a cultural approach.

*Relevant course texts: Stuart Hall and Daniel Czitrom (chp. 2 on motion pictures).*

## **Language**

A collection or system of signs/symbols through which communication occurs. We can therefore say that language is a system of representation – that is, a system or *mechanism* through which representation occurs. Marcel Danesi defines language as

Language is not only used for communication between individuals and groups, but also serves to mark a person or group’s social identity. Ideas about citizenship, race and gender are partly based on the ways in which people use language.

*Relevant course texts: Marcel Danesi, Stuart Hall, Robin Lakoff, Geneva Smitherman, Gloria Anzaldua, and Scott Kiesling.*

## **The Micropolitics and Macropolitics of Language**

Robin Lakoff uses this term to refer to the different levels of society at which we see the political aspect of language. **Macropolitical** language has to do with the political dimensions of language between groups while **micropolitical** language occurs between individuals.

This distinction is helpful for understanding the way that power operates in the use of language between people who have different social identities. In Geneva Smitherman’s article about Black English, for example, she argues that the debate about Black English fails to take into account what Lakoff might call the macropolitics of language: that is, the fact that Black English is the kind of language that emerges from the encounter between an oppressing and oppressed group.

*Relevant course text: Robin Lakoff. Although they do not use these terms, we can also see the*

## **Representation**

Like culture, representation can be defined in a number of different ways:

- In the reflective sense, a representation is an accurate or distorted reflection of something that is "out there." For example, we can say that a painting of Denzel Washington is accurate or distorted depending on how it represents his features.
- In the intentional sense, a representation is the meaning intended by a speaker (or artist).
- In the *constructionist* sense advanced by scholars like Stuart Hall, representation means the process by which we *produce* meaning. In this sense, meaning is not something out there that we can all agree on but something that we create through language. (This refers to language in the broadest sense, for example the language of gestures and clothing). Language is only useful when there is agreement on what the signs within the language mean. By agreeing on what signs mean, a social group represents reality in a particular way. This is especially evident in the case of denotative meanings which are specific to particular cultures. Language thus functions as a *system of representation* – that is, a *means or mechanism* through which representation occurs.

*Relevant course text: Stuart Hall*

## **Semiotics**

This is the study of language as a system of signs. According to Stuart Hall this approach to the study of representation (through language) "is concerned with the *how* of representation, with how language produces meaning..." (1997:6).

Each sign has three dimensions:

1. Signifier – the physical appearance of the sign itself – whether it is made up of letters or drawings
2. Signified – the object or idea that the signifier refers to
3. Meaning – there are two main kinds of meanings: *denotative* (literal) and *connotative* (implied meanings that change from one social group to another).

We can identify three main kinds of signs:

1. Indexical – a sign that works by indicating the location of something, for example, words like "up" and "down" or a drawing of an arrow.
2. Iconic – a sign that imitates the thing it refers to for example a drawing of a ball, or the word "buzz."
3. Symbolic – a sign that has no obvious connection to the thing it refers to, for example, a drawing of a fish to refer to Christianity. If the same drawing were used to refer to an actual fish, it would be an iconic sign.

Each sign also has two kinds of structure:

1. Paradigmatic – based on what it is different from
2. Syntagmatic – based on what it is similar to

*Relevant course texts: Marcel Danesi and Stuart Hall*

## **Discourse**

This is a concept that is useful in understanding the relationship between representations and power. Hall defines discourses as “ways of referring to or constructing knowledge about a particular topic of practice: a cluster (or *formation*) of ideas, images and practices, which provide ways of talking about, forms of knowledge and conduct associated with, a particular topic, social activity or institutional site in society” (1997: 6). We can summarize this by saying that a discourse is a *set of representations that are linked together* and present a particular view of reality.

Scott Kiesling uses the term “cultural Discourse” to differentiate between this sense of the word and the linguistic sense of the word. In the linguistic sense, discourse means “talk-in-interaction” and can refer to all or part of a speech or conversation or lecture etc. According to Stuart Hall the *discursive* approach (or studying representation through discourse) “is concerned with the *effects and consequences* of representation – its ‘politics’” (1997:6).

According to French scholar, Michel Foucault, the important thing about discourses is not whether they are true or false but rather the ways in which they are related to the exercise of power and control. For example, discourses that describe women as mentally or physically weak or inferior serve to justify a subordinate social position for women. In the 1950s, even though women’s labor force participation increased, television programming reflected discourses that describe women as homemakers and men as breadwinners.

Scholars like Scott Kiesling distinguish between discourse and ideology because it is easy to confuse the two. The value of using the concept of discourse rather than ideology is that it makes it easier to conceive of resistance and change. First of all, unlike ideologies (in the Marxist sense), discourses are not true or false. Rather they are hegemonic (or dominant) or they are counter-hegemonic (or resistant). In addition to this, discourses are unstable and constantly changing.

Discourse is also a useful concept for helping us to understand the ways that power operates without the use of direct force or coercion. In other words, it helps us to understand the *hegemonic* operation of power.

*Relevant readings: Stuart Hall, Scott Kiesling and Dwight McBride*

## **Ideology**

This term is used in several different ways. We can identify a few of these in Lawrence

Grossberg's discussion of the word in *New Keywords: A Revised Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (edited by Tony Bennett, Lawrence Grossberg & Meaghan Morris, Malden MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2005):

- In Marxist thinking, ideology is distorted knowledge that presents a false view of reality. In this sense the term is often used to refer to knowledge that serves to keep the ruling class in power. This is how Scott Kiesling uses the term in his discussion of the word "dude" (see Note 1 on p. 19 of Kiesling's article).
- The term is also used to refer to a set of ideas that is specific to a social group and expresses that group's material conditions and interests.
- A set of political beliefs, e.g. liberalism, conservatism etc. This is how we often hear the term used in everyday language – especially in an election year.

*Relevant course text: Scott Kiesling*

### **Hegemony**

Hegemony is domination by means that are not primarily coercive but operate through the consent of those who are dominated. For example, when Scott Kiesling refers to "hegemonic masculinity" he means ideas of masculinity that are dominant in a society not because people are forced to accept those ideas but because they agree with those ideas. The hegemonic status of certain kinds of masculinity only becomes clear when we begin to consider other kinds of masculinity and ask ourselves why it is that these are not encouraged or accepted.

The concept comes from the work of the Italian thinker, Antonio Gramsci, in which he sought to expand on Marxist ideas of dominance. Hegemony operates through ideology or discourse, when dominated groups accept dominant ideas and come to accept them and see them as their own, even when those ideas work against their interests.

*Relevant course text: Scott Kiesling*

### **Technological determinism**

This is the view that technologies shape society. It is regarded as an extreme view. Instead, scholars often point to the fact that technologies and their impact are related to the historical conditions within which they emerge. As Daniel Bell puts it, "Technology does not determine social change; technology provides instrumentalities and potentialities. The ways that these are used are social choices."

*Relevant course texts: Elizabeth Eisenstein, Daniel Czitrom (chps. 1-3), Daniel Bell*

### **Space, Time, and Media**

According to Harold Innis, we can distinguish between media based on whether they emphasize time or space. Media that emphasize time tend to be durable, like clay tablets and parchment. Media that emphasize space tend to be light, like paper. Innis was of the view that while all civilizations had both kinds of media, one tended to be more dominant in each civilization.

As communications media become more complex, it is more difficult to rank them absolutely in terms of time and space. Thus one of the claims made for the telegraph, in the mid-19th century, was that it would compress or “annihilate” both time and space.

*Relevant course text: Czitrom (especially chp. 6)*

### **Pseudo-environment**

This is a term that Walter Lippmann described as “a representation of the environment which is in lesser or greater degree made by man himself,” and as “pictures made by himself or given to him.” In Lippmann’s view, people acted in the real environment not based on the true nature of that environment or true knowledge of that environment but rather based on pseudo-environments. Lippmann saw this as an obstacle to citizens’ ability to make the sound decisions needed to ensure a healthy democracy.

### **Critical Political Economy**

This is an area of research that draws on Marxist theory. Such theory analyzes society on the basis of the relations of production. Power is linked to one’s location in those relations, and in a capitalist society, power is in the hands of those who own the means of production, while those who sell their labor as workers have little power.

Critical research is research that analyzes whatever it examines in relation to broader social structures - especially power structures. Several scholars in this tradition draw on Marxist theory including the Marxist concepts of “base” and “superstructure.” Critical researchers include the scholars of the “Frankfurt School” who established what is known as **critical theory**.

Scholars of the Frankfurt School included Max Adorno and Theodor Horkheimer, and their essay, “The Culture Industry,” is an example of critical theory. They analyze the culture industry based on the relations of production in the capitalist society of the U.S. They view the structures of cultural production as linked to the structures of economic production. They argue that, in the same way that factories produce standardized goods that are identical to each other, the culture industry produces goods (like films) that are virtually identical. In addition, Adorno and Horkheimer view those standardized cultural products as helping to keep workers content with their lot instead of challenging the system that oppresses them by exploiting their labor.

### **Base and Superstructure**

This is a term used by Marxist scholars to analyze the relationship between the “base” of the economy and the “superstructure” of other social forms. The superstructure includes the state, the family structure and the kinds of ideology in a society. In Marxist theory, the nature of the superstructure is determined by the nature of the base. We see this in Adorno and Horkheimer’s analysis of the culture industry, where the superstructure of culture is linked to the base of economic production.

Some scholars have tried to come up with a less determinist conception of the relation between

base and superstructure. One of those scholars is Todd Gitlin, who draws on Gramsci's idea of hegemony in order to modify the base/superstructure model of analysis. This is because we can have both hegemonic ideologies and counterhegemonic ideologies. If we compare Gitlin's analysis of news media to Adorno and Horkheimer's analysis of the culture industry, we see that Gitlin's approach allows more for challenges to the dominant or hegemonic ideology (in the superstructure). In Adorno and Horkheimer's analysis, however, they leave no scope for challenges to the dominant ideology – it is completely determined by the base.

### **Propaganda, Bias and Frames in the Media**

Media scholars, G. Jowett and V. O'Donnell, define propaganda as “the deliberate, systematic attempt to shape perceptions, manipulate cognitions, and direct behavior to achieve a response that furthers the desired intent of the propagandist.” Another scholar, Harold Lasswell, defined propaganda as “the control of opinions by significant symbols...by stories, rumors, reports, pictures, and other forms of social communication.”

While the definitions are similar, “propaganda” is typically used to refer to the actions of governments (and their armies), and is stronger than bias.

As Michael Schudson defines it, bias “means that the reporter, editor, or news institution owner knows what the real event looks like, but will color it to advance a political economic or ideological aim.” Schudson argues that journalists in the U.S. are unlikely to be *intentionally* biased in their work because of their professional codes which emphasize principles like objectivity. However, Schudson notes that *unintentional* bias can occur because of other factors. These include the focus on negative events – like crimes and hurricanes – and on the activities and statements of prominent people.

The concept of media frames helps us to understand how bias occurs in the media even where journalists operate under principles of objectivity. Todd Gitlin defines frames as “persistent patterns of cognition, interpretation, and presentation, of selection, emphasis and exclusion, by which symbol handlers routinely organize discourse, whether verbal or visual.” It is those patterns and their routine application (rather than any deliberate intent) that lead to media bias.

### **Symbolic Annihilation**

This is the view that the exclusion or marginalization by the media of a group or class of people amounts to their symbolic annihilation. The concept comes from the work of communication scholar, George Gerbner, and is used by Gaye Tuchman to analyze the ways that women are represented in the media. Quoting Gerbner, Tuchman states that “representation in the mass media announces to audience members that [a certain] kind of family (or social characteristic) is valued and approved. Conversely, we may say that either condemnation, trivialization, or ‘absence means symbolic annihilation’” (Gaye Tuchman “Introduction: The Symbolic Annihilation of Women by the Mass Media” in Gaye Tuchman, Arlene Kaplan Daniels and James Benét (eds.) *Hearth and Home: Images of Women in the Mass Media* New York: New York University Press, 1978).



In her overview of the history of communication research on women in advertising, Vickie Rutledge Shields identifies “symbolic annihilation” as one approach to such research. Others include studies that use perspectives from semiotics, and from the concept of the male gaze.

### **The Male Gaze**

This is an important concept that comes from Laura Mulvey’s essay, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema.” It refers to the means by which women are controlled through the way they are portrayed in mainstream movies, particularly, and in popular culture and society generally. Mulvey brings together ideas from radical feminism and Freudian psychoanalysis in her concept of the male gaze.

There are different ways that feminist scholars explain women’s oppression. Radical feminists use the term “**patriarchy**” to refer to all systems of male dominance, and they consider that dominance to be pervasive throughout society. In radical feminism, women’s oppression is a result of patriarchy.

In Freudian psychoanalysis the phallus is the basis of power, and gender identity is based on the possession or lack of a phallus. Men have power because of the phallus, and women lack power because of their lack of a phallus. This analysis of gender identity and power is referred to as **phallocentrism**. Due to their lack of a phallus, women also represent the threat of castration.

The concept of the male gaze also draws on the following ideas from psychoanalysis: the sexual pleasure that comes from looking (**scopophilia**), and the sense of an ideal self (or **ego ideal**). Scopophilia has two aspects: pleasure in looking at oneself (or **narcissism**), and pleasure in looking at others (or **voyeurism**). Women in movies are presented as objects that satisfy the pleasure of the male hero’s gaze. Men in the audience identify with the male hero as their ego ideal and therefore share in his gaze. Since women represent the threat of castration, the gaze also serves to control that threat. It is thus a *controlling* gaze. The male gaze reinforces the patriarchal system of dominance.

We see in bell hooks’ essay that the gaze is not only gendered, but also racialized (the racial nature of the gaze is also evident in the skin color standards used in color film). Further, the gaze can be challenged, in what hooks calls an “**oppositional gaze**.”

### **Realism**

In the context of film, this refers to films that claim to portray reality exactly as it is. Feminist film scholars have challenged this because they see it as belonging to the hegemonic mode of mainstream film-making, and they also see it as naïve when it is used by feminists.

Additional critiques of realism in film-making come from the field of ethnographic documentaries where film is used in the study of different societies. According to Bill Nichols, claims of reality can reveal more about the film-maker or scholar's own biases than they reveal about the society being studied. In her film, *Reassemblage: From the Firelight to the Screen*, Trinh T. Minh-ha demonstrates an alternative to mainstream ethnographic film-making.

### **Globalization**

Many scholars trace the current phase of globalization to the journeys of exploration begun by Portuguese navigators in the 1400s, while some trace it to the industrial revolution of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In either case, globalization can be defined in David Held and Anthony McGrew's words as: "A shift or transformation in the scale of human social organization that links distant communities and expands the reach of power across the world's major regions and continents."

### **Center and Periphery**

In the 1970s, a number of economists argued that the world was made up of a "center" (or "core") a "periphery," with the economies of the nations at the periphery being dependent on the economies of the nations at the center. This way of conceptualizing global economic relations was also known as "Dependency Theory."

The center-periphery framework has been adopted by communication scholars. The view that industrialized nations dominated the flow of information and communication reflected this framework and led to calls by non-aligned nations for a New World Information and Communication Order. Many of those demands were made at meetings of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), and in 1983 the United States left the organization partly in protest at those calls. Non-aligned nations were those nations that did not align themselves politically with Western European and North American capitalist nations or with the Soviet Union and other communist nations. They came to be known as the **Third World** (with Western industrialized nations as the **First World**, and communist nations as the **Second World**). Third World nations were also described as "developing" nations.

In center-periphery models of communication, the Western industrialized nations (especially the U.S.) are viewed as dominating a one-way flow of communication in which their media products flow freely into nations at the periphery without a similar flow from nations at the periphery to nations at the center. Developments in technology (like Direct Broadcast Satellite or DBS technology) amplified such concerns. Marxist communication scholars (like Herb Schiller, who helped to establish this department,) have referred to the dominance of communication products from the US and other Western nations as **cultural imperialism**.

### **Cultural Homogeneity**

This is the idea that all cultures are becoming the same under globalization. This phenomenon is sometimes referred to as "MacDonaldization" because the culture of the U.S. is seen as dominating all others.

## **Cultural Heterogeneity**

Cultural heterogeneity is the view that rather than all cultures becoming the same, globalization enables us to experience several different cultures. For example, in most major U.S. cities there is a lot of cultural heterogeneity in the kinds of restaurants you can find, and cultures take on new forms as they expand to new locations. In another example, the meals at MacDonalds restaurants are very different in different locations around the world.

## **Landscapes of Global Cultural Flows**

Arjun Appadurai offers these landscapes as an alternative to **center-periphery** ideas of globalization that place industrialized nations at the center and all other nations at the edge or periphery. Instead of a one-way flow from the center to the periphery, Appadurai suggests that there are at least five kinds (or landscapes) of global cultural flows, and these go in multiple directions. Further, they are “disjunctive” that is, they often flow contrary to each other and it is impossible to predict what happens when they come together – or clash. The five landscapes are:

- **Ethnoscapes** – flows of people, like tourists, immigrants, refugees, exiles, immigrants;
- **Technoscapes** – technologies (and different kinds of technological skills, like Indian workers in Silicon Valley);
- **Financescapes** – flows of capital, linking different economic systems;
- **Mediascapes** – the electronic capabilities needed to produce media, and the images of the world created by those media (central to the circulation of representations and discourses);
- **Ideoscapes** – different kinds of ideologies (i.e. political ideas) like freedom rights, sovereignty, democracy.

## **Discourse, Ideology and Truth**

Both of these terms were defined in the first Keywords list. In “The West and the Rest” Stuart Hall makes an important distinction between them. He argues that ideologies often have the status of being true or false (we see this especially in the Marxist sense of ideology).

Discourses, however, are not true or false in and of themselves. Rather, they are *made* true or false based on their relation to power.