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Selected Definitions for Work in Communication and Media Studies & Selected Bibliography of Publications in Comparative Media Studies

<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweblibrary/mediacommstudiesdefinitions>>

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Note: Terms in the glossary are from various sources, including Mick Underwood's *CCMS: Communication, Cultural and Media Studies* <<http://www.ccms-infobase.com/>> (inactive).

Actuality: The term used in the media to refer to footage/film/tape of events as they happen. Semioticians see actuality as a key device for anchoring the preferred reading on the supposed "facts" presented "as they happened." (Underwood)

Anchorage: A term used by Barthes to describe the interaction of words and visual texts. A photograph, according to Barthes is polysemic (i.e., open to a range of possible meanings). Ordinarily text is added, perhaps in the form of a caption or an advertising slogan, to "anchor" the meaning, to lead the reader towards the preferred reading of the visual text. More broadly, anchorage of an image's meaning can occur not only through words, but, say, through the juxtaposition of two images. (Underwood)

Audience and Audience Studies: Audience in culture is defined as an individual's or a group of persons' cerebral and/or sensory and/or tactile intake/reception and/or perception of a culture product(s). Culture is defined as a system of communicative action(s) with several sub-systems of such communicative actions including all types of communication in all media. The field of scholarship where audience is studied is commonly designated as Audience Studies, aimed at the observation and analysis of individuals and their behavior with regard to his/her or their intake of a particular culture product(s) presented in a medium or media. In this definition, areas of communicative action such as the readership of literature, radio audience, television viewership, music concert audience, theater audience/spectatorship, museum viewing, multimedia, the world wide web, etc., are all understood as constituting audience. Thus, audience is an umbrella designation with regard to all types and ways of exclusive or mixed sensory (visual, auditory, tactile, etc.) and/or cerebral perception(s) and reception of culture product(s) in the context of communicative action(s). Audience studies is about the what, when, where, who, why, and how of a culture product or products (see Tötösy de Zepetnek, Steven. "Toward a Framework of Audience Studies in Comparative Cultural Studies." *Library Series, CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweblibrary/audiencestudies>>).

Audience(s): What an audience is and what audience members are may seem fairly straightforward. Certainly, the huge amounts of money which are ploughed into commercial and other research into audiences' media usage and behavior seems to suggest that media producers believe that we know what audiences are and how to measure them. However, when you look back over the history of the conceptualizations of audiences and research into them, it pretty soon becomes evident that "audience" has always been a rather woolly concept. In the popular imagination, media corporations and advertising agencies conduct intensive research into audiences. They identify the audience members' socio-economic class, lifestyles, motivation, disposable income, fantasies etc. and that knowledge enables them to "target" their audience precisely. In fact, though, as Fiske points out, "The advertising industry is undoubtedly successful at persuading manufacturers and distributors to buy its services: its success in persuading consumers to buy particular products is much more open to question -- between 80 and 90 per cent of new products fail despite extensive advertising. To take another example, many films fail to recover even their promotional costs at the box office" (Fiske 1989). And "Because it's a mass audience -- it's an unimaginably large audience -- the audience tastes are so diffused and so general that you've got to be guessing. You can work off precedents about what's worked on TV before. You can work off whatever smattering of sociological information you gleaned from whatever sources. You can let your personal judgments enter into it to some extent ... But you never really know" (Scott Siegler, former CBS vice-president for drama development, qtd. in Ang 1990). We have access to huge amounts of statistical data about audiences, but the audience remembers remain "statistics with skins" (Tracey 1988, cited in Jeffrey 1996). "Watching television" is not necessarily the same activity for you as it is for me. In fact, my "watching television" is probably not the same for me today as it was yesterday. Our use of the media is closely tied up with the rest of our daily lives and will be conditioned by what we want to get out of it, who we're with, who we discuss it with, where we happen to be and so on. The statistics tell us very little about that. In fact, As Ang expresses it: "in a multitude of ways, sometimes routine, sometimes exceptional, television plays an intimate rôle in shaping our day-to-day practices and experiences ... However, our understanding of what all these practices and experiences mean, what they imply and implicate, has remained scant. ... Given television's conspicuousness in contemporary culture and society, this poverty of discourse, this lack of understanding is rather embarrassing indeed, if not downright scandalous" (1990). With new methods of accessing TV (satellite, cable, video rental, "time-shifting" using the VCR and so on), audience research is not simply a problem for academic researchers, but a burning issue for media professionals who need to be able to persuade advertisers that they are getting value for money. (Underwood)

Audience Positioning (Interpellation / Appellation / Hailing): This term (or any of its synonyms) is taken from the French philosopher Louis Althusser. It is the process whereby ideology "hails" an individual as its subject; a "subject-position" is constructed for the audience member by the way in which the text interpellates him/her. Thus, for example, the discourse of free-market capitalism interpellates the subject as the rational, self-interested consumer of classical economics. (Underwood)

Bardic Television: A term introduced by Fiske and Hartley (1978) to emphasize the active and productive signifying work done by television. Rather than merely 'reflecting' society, television, similarly to the rôle played by Celtic bards, mediate between the rulers and patrons who pay them on the one hand and society as a whole on the other. In this way, the bard (television), once its role is established, has an important function in dealing with social change and conflict. It determines what is within the bounds of common sense and what is outside it (see ideology). (Underwood)

Catharsis (or Cathartic Effect): The idea originated with the ancient Greek philosopher, Aristotle, who believed that the experience of watching tragedy is cathartic, i.e. it purges the spectator of certain strong emotions. As a result mainly of experiments by Feshbach and Singer, this idea has been developed in media effects research. Watching aggressive media output, it is proposed, does not make viewers more aggressive; quite the contrary -- since the vicarious aggression experienced through the media purges the viewer of aggression, the result of watching violence is less aggression. The same argument is sometimes adduced in defense of pornography. Some researchers have taken the example of Japan, where there is far more violent sex in the media than in Europe, yet a much lower incidence of violent sex crime, to support the view that media experience can be cathartic. (Underwood)

Closure: 1) In Gestalt psychology the term refers to the way that we fill in gaps where there is missing information in a stimulus; 2) In the analysis of texts, the term refers to ideological closure, which means the strategies used in the text to lead the reader to make sense of the text according to a particular ideological framework. The idea of ideological closure is useful because it leads us to examine how a text has been constructed to lead to a particular reading and exclude other possible readings. (Underwood)

Communication: While the definitions of communication vary according to the theoretical frames of reference employed and the stress placed upon certain aspects of the total process, they all include five fundamental factors: an initiator, a recipient, a mode or vehicle, a message, and an effect. Simply expressed, the communication process begins when a message is conceived by a sender. It is then encoded (translated into a signal or sequence of signals) and transmitted via a particular medium or channel to a receiver who then decodes it and interprets the message, returning a signal in some way that the message has or has not been understood. (Watson and Hill 38)

Comparative Communication and Media Studies: Parallel to the notion of comparative cultural studies (see below), comparative communication and media studies aims at the study and research of the field of communication and media studies in an international and global context in both theory and practice. (Tötösy)

Comparative Cultural Studies: A new field of study where the notion of "comparative" is added to the field of cultural studies from the basic premises of the field of comparative literature meaning that the study of culture (including but not restricted to literature, communication, media, art, etc.) is to be performed in a global and international context with a plurality of methods and approaches. In particular, processes and the "how" of processes is focused on, thus including, for instance, audience studies (for an elaboration of the field of comparative cultural studies see Tötösy de Zepetnek, Steven. "From Comparative Literature Today Toward Comparative Cultural Studies." *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 1.3 [1999]: <<http://dx.doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.1041>>).

Consensus: The word means a generally shared agreement. The term is used in particular by Marxist critics of the media, who argue that the media operate to create a consensus in society (or at least an illusion of consensus) that the norms, laws and rules in our society are the only 'right' ones, which any right-thinking member of our society must accept. Thus, for example, those who might operate outside the consensus, such as union "activists" or "terrorists" do not normally have their ideas and views presented by the media as if they are "reasonable." In order to strengthen the consensus the media periodically whip up moral panics against those deviants ("folk devils") who are deemed to lie outside the central cultural system, e.g., "welfare scroungers," "union activists," "travelers," etc. (Underwood)

Conspiracy Theory: With particular reference to the mass media, this view assumes that a small and powerful, and often hidden, élite are able to use the mass media to condition and persuade passive audiences into conforming to the powerful élite's wishes. It depends very much on the notion of all-powerful media and easily duped audiences. It is difficult to find evidence that the media really are that powerful and "conspiracy theory" is often dismissed because you would otherwise sound like some kook who takes the *X-Files* literally. Nevertheless, it is something close to this that underlies much left-wing criticism of the media. (Underwood)

Construction of Reality: In communication and media studies, this idea emphasizes that there is no single "reality," rather a range of definitions of "reality." Reality as presented by the mass media is therefore not a picture or reflection of "reality," but, rather, a constructed interpretation of reality. In the view of "radical" critics of the media in particular, the mass media play a crucial role in "constructing reality." In the view of many representatives of post-structuralism and post-modernism, just about every aspect of reality seems to be considered a social construction. (Underwood)

Content Analysis: The statistical analysis of a range of texts. The results are usually compared with a different set of results from the same range of texts -- e.g., what proportion of reports about men in the tabloid press represents men as victims and what proportion represents women as victims? -- or with some "objective" standard, such as official statistics -- e.g., what proportion of women in soaps is shown as housewives as against the proportion of women in the population who are housewives. The most serious problem with content analysis is the initial selection of categories. The second most serious problem is where to find your objective standard. (Underwood)

Copycat Effect: A concept also referred to as Contagion Effect or Imitation Effect -- the supposed power of the media to create an "epidemic" of behavior based on that witnessed in the media. The idea is by no means new; the

eighteenth-century novel *Die Leiden des jungen Werther* by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, was accused of having led to a wave of suicides amongst the young. More recently, the media have been blamed for the 1981 riots which hit British cities; later in the eighties, for a spate of prison rioting; in the early nineties, police in Wales asked the media not to report details of suicides involving carbon monoxide poisoning from exhaust fumes because they believed that suicides were imitating the suicides in press reports; in 1999, doctors researching the effect of medical soaps reported that after a 1996 episode of "Casualty" portraying with a paracetamol overdose actual cases rose by 20% and doubled amongst people who had seen the episode. It seems to be generally agreed amongst media researchers that it is very difficult to find any clear evidence for the copycat effect, but the doctors in the BMA study were firmly convinced. One of them, Christopher Bulstrode, Professor of Orthopaedics at the John Radcliffe Hospital in Oxford, commented: "We were expecting a fall in overdoses because it was a horrid scene. What we got was a 20% increase, and we were gobsmacked. One of the reasons we have been so slow in publishing was we didn't believe it. We have gone back over and over and over again. It really happened." (Underwood)

Cultural Dopes: The view that the readers of media texts are the more or less willing dupes of the media producers. This view is now not widely accepted, since greater emphasis is placed by media researchers on the active meaning-producing work of readers. A more modern view of audiences is presented by Fiske: "A homogeneous, externally produced culture cannot be sold ready -- made to the masses: culture simply does not work like that. Nor do the people behave or live like the masses, an aggregation of alienated, one-dimensional persons whose only consciousness is false, whose only relationship to the system that enslaves them is one of unwitting (if not willing) dupes. Popular culture is made by the people, not produced by the culture industry. All the culture industries can do is produce a repertoire of texts or cultural resources for the various formations of the people to use or reject in the ongoing process of producing their popular culture" (1989). (Underwood)

Cultural Imperialism or Media Imperialism: The thesis that "Western" (especially American) cultural values are being forced on non-Western societies, to which they are spread most especially by the mass media. Herbert Schiller argues forcefully that the US-inspired spread of "free trade" and "free speech" since the Second World War has, in view of the imbalance of economic power, worked to the advantage of the US. He quotes a number of official sources which make it clear that the establishment of US economic, military, and cultural hegemony was deliberate US policy, which would depend crucially on US dominance of global communications. Schiller argues that the (mostly US-based) transnational media and communications corporations which now span the globe have reached the point where they pose a distinct threat to the sovereignty of the weaker nation states. Clearly the US are dominant in the export of media products, as well as in the control of news agencies, and, even where the US originals are not purchased, the genres of US TV are closely copied. However, recent reception studies suggest that we cannot simply deduce the acceptance of US-American values from the prevalence of US media products. (Underwood)

Cultural Participation: An umbrella term to denote the activities of individuals and groups in their interaction(s) with cultural products and processes such as the reading of written texts, media offerings such as radio, television, the listening to music, the use of the world wide web, etc., that is, interaction in some way with the sources, processes, and results of culture in its widest definition (see, e.g., the categories in audience research in Tötösy de Zepetnek, Steven. "Toward a Framework of Audience Studies in Comparative Cultural Studies." *Library Series, CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweblibrary/audiencestudies>>).

Deviance: Deviance is a form of behavior which is considered to violate society's norms and therefore to be unacceptable. Many critics of the media would argue that the apparent consensus as regards those norms is in part manufactured by the media by the process of labelling certain groups' or individuals' behaviour as deviant and then duly reacting to it with moral outrage on behalf of "ordinary, decent people." Thus the media serve to legitimate the dominant ideology, which in fact serves the interests of the powerful groups in society. (Underwood)

Deviance Amplification: The process whereby activity labeled as deviant is "amplified" by a broad reaction in society which is coordinated mainly by the mass media. The development is seen more or less as a spiral: the initial behavior is labeled "deviant"; information is relayed from primary definers to the media and hence to the wider society; there is a negative social reaction; consequently, the deviant groups become isolated and react by resisting the consensus view and possibly becoming more actively deviant; the increased "deviance" leads to increased social control and at this point the whole spiral starts all over again. (Underwood)

Intertextuality: Any text depends on a host of prior conventions, codes, other texts. The term is sometimes used to refer to the unavoidable multiplicity of references in any text (see also infinite semiosis below); sometimes it is used to refer to deliberate references, quotations or pastiches. In the first of these senses, the intertext of *Independence Day* includes all other films featuring alien attack, the *Prince of Bel-Air*, Hollywood blockbusters foregrounding special effects etc. In the second sense, *The Untouchables* features a conscious quotation from the *Odessa Steps* sequence in Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin*, Brian de Palma's *Dressed to Kill* features a series of conscious references to Hitchcock's *Psycho*, etc. The term hypertextuality is used to refer to example such as the latter two, as well as pastiches (e.g., *Gentlemen Wear Plaid*'s pastiche of film noir) and remakes. (Underwood)

Knowledge Gap: The knowledge gap hypothesis states that as the infusion of mass media information into a social system increases, segments of the population with higher socio-economic status tend to acquire this information at a faster rate than the lower status segments, so that the gap in knowledge between these segments tends to increase rather than decrease. (Underwood)

Mass Society Theory: The view that the mass media address a mass audience who are doped by the media. This view of the media audience (in the singular) as a passive, undifferentiated mass informs the hypodermic needle model media effects, as well as some aspects of the concern with cultural effects. (Underwood)

"The medium is the message": One of those obscure sayings of media scholar Marshall McLuhan. McLuhan argues that no medium is neutral and what is said is profoundly affected by the medium in which it is said. The saying may also be taken to imply, in a sense, that the medium is "more important" than the message. If interpreted in this way, then the saying can be seen to be close to the contemporary post-modern pre-occupation with the over-production of signs, the superficiality of media communication and the "implosion of meaning" (Baudrillard). (Underwood)

News Management: This term is normally used to describe the way that individuals or organizations attempt to

control the flow of news to the media and to "set the agenda" for the media. This might involve issuing a press release which is embargoed, holding press conferences times to make the lunch-time and early-evening news, or staging an event which is big enough or unusual enough to grab the media's attention. (Underwood)

Public Service Broadcasting: A term which is not easy to define. The essential notion here is that broadcasting's function is not simply to satisfy commercial interests by giving the public what they want in an attempt to maximize audience figures, but, rather, to inform, educate and entertain the public, the notion of "quality" being central. Examples are: that broadcasters are legally required to be impartial in their coverage of news and current affairs; that broadcasters must carry a certain proportion of educational programmes; that broadcasters must broadcast a certain proportion of current affairs during prime time -- and so on. (Underwood)

Reception Analysis: Research which focuses on the way that individuals make meanings for media messages (artistic products, news, etc.). Reception Analysis has some similarity with uses and gratifications research, but is much more likely to use an ethnographic approach involving in-depth interviews, participant observation etc. Reception Analysis has developed particularly since the early to mid-1980s. It tends generally to be associated with the view that audiences are active and is generally associated with the notion of resistive readings of media texts, associated with Michel de Certeau. A great deal of recent work has focused on the way that audiences resist the constructions of reality preferred by the mass media and construct their own, often oppositional, meanings for media texts. Since much of this work is concerned with detailed investigation of the audience's reception of media messages, it is generally known as reception analysis. In reception analysis, audiences are seen, as Fiske and de Certeau suggest, as active producers of meaning, not consumers of media meanings. They decode media texts in ways which are related to their social and cultural circumstances and the ways that they individually experience those circumstances. The new emphasis on this approach has led to its being called the New Audience Research. Rather than using solely the questionnaire technique generally used in uses and gratifications research, reception researchers will normally also use qualitative methods on a smaller scale. For example, in-depth interviews and group interviews as a means of uncovering the meanings which small groups of readers generate for media texts, focusing on the audience's "situatedness" within a particular socio-historical context. Broadly speaking, reception analysis has developed from a combination of traditional qualitative research strategies in sociology with some of the ideas of reader response theory in literary criticism. From the area of literary criticism Fish's understanding of the interpretive community seems to have been quite fruitful. The focus on interpretive communities means that the researchers in this vein examine issues far beyond the media text itself. Over the past few years, as reception analysis has come to reveal more of the fine detail of our reception of media messages, an ethnographic approach to audience studies has become steadily more popular, using interviews and participant observation, a methodology owing much to the research of David Morley, and Michel de Certeau's theorizing on the practices of everyday life, both in the early 1980s. (Underwood)

Two-step Flow: The term used by Katz and Lazarsfeld to describe their observation that media messages flow from the media to opinion leaders to the rest of the audience. The important point is that their research demonstrated that media effects are mediated by the pattern of our social contacts. They concluded that the media have limited effects. (Underwood)

Uses and Gratifications Approaches: Emphasis on the active use made of media by audience members to seek gratification of a variety of needs. The standard adage is that, where effects research asks "what do the media do to audiences?," the uses and gratifications approach asks "what do audiences do with the media?" Audiences are said to use the media to gratify needs. The needs most commonly identified are: surveillance (i.e., monitoring what's going on in the world), personal relationships, personal identity and diversion (i.e., entertainment and escapism). (Underwood)

"War of the Worlds": A science-fiction story by H.G. Wells. Adapted for radio by the young Orson Welles, the story of the Martian invasion (suitably transferred to the USA) was spread across a series of mock news bulletins on American radio in 1938. It caused widespread panic. According to some reports, around a quarter of the six million listeners believed what they heard; many who lived near the site of the supposed invasion fled from the area; many are said to have reported that they had actually seen the alien invaders. (Underwood)

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