Media Studies - Classical Theorists

Summary Knowledge Mat

Tzvetan Todorov

Paul Gilroy

Stuart Hall

Roland Barthes

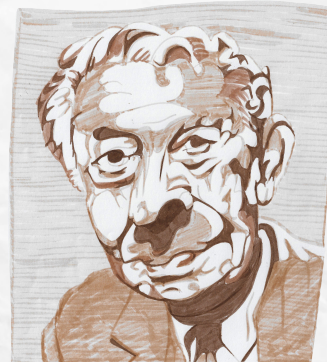James Curran

Clay Shirky

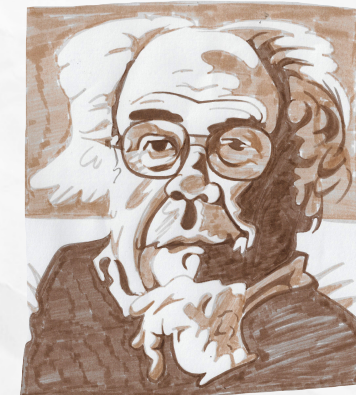**PiXL Media Studies**

Jean Seaton

George Gerbnet

Albert Bandura

Jean Baudrillard

Classical Theorists Knowledge Mat

Theorist: Roland Barthes

Theory: Semiotics

Key terms: Preferred Readings, Signs and Signifiers

In a nutshell: Barthes explored the notion that our culture is saturated with images that all have meanings associated with them, these meanings have the potential to shape the audience's views and ideologies. He also created the 5 narrative codes: Enigma, Action, Semantic, Symbolic and Referential codes, which act as signifiers to the audience.

Theorist: Claude Levi Strauss

Theory: Narrative theory

Key terms: Binary Oppositions, Structuralism

In a nutshell: Levi Strauss argued that narratives are driven forward by opposing forces, known as binary oppositions, that can be found across all cultures. He argued that humans behave in a certain way due to the structure of the human mind.

Theorist: Tzvetan Todorov

Theory: Narrative Structure

Key terms: Equilbrium, disruption, Resolution

In a nutshell: A follower of Roland Barthes, Todorov became prominent in the 70s for his work on structuralism that focuses on recurring patterns. He is often cited for his writings on narrative structure and the identification of the classic Hollywood narrative structure.

Theorist: Jean Baudrillard

Theory: Postmodernism

Key terms: Simulacra, inter-textuality and hyper-reality

In a nutshell: Baudrillard was a French sociologist (amongst other titles) who was interested in developing Barthe's and Saussure's writings on semiology, whilst exploring the power of the media on its audience and society in general. He coined two terms, simulacra and hyper-reality, which refer to the notion that the media shapes society through offering simulations of real-life which in turn shape the world they are appearing to reflect.

Theorist: Albert Bandura

Theory: Social Learning Theory

Key terms: Behaviourist and cognitive learning, media effects

In a nutshell: Social learning theory explores the idea that audiences/people learn by observing others. Working in the 1960s Bandura's social learning theory explains how people learn new behaviours, values, and attitudes through their consumption of media texts and representations.

Theorist: George Gerbner

Theory: Cultivation Theory

Key terms: Mean World Syndrome, impact of heavy media consumption, symbolic cultural environments

In a nutshell: George Gerbner played a major role in the development of communication theory and research. He researched the impact of the messages and images that media industries produce, exploring their cultural and social impact. Specialising in TV violence, he argued the more a person is exposed to negative representations within the media, the more likely they are to develop a negative view towards their society and groups within it.

Theorist: Paul Gilroy

Theory: Ethnicity and post-Colonialism

Key terms: Diasporas, race, racism, British culture and identity

In a nutshell: Working within the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at Birmingham University, Gilroy worked closely with Stuart Hall exploring how the media represented different cultures and ethnicities, and how these representations served to repress certain groups within society. His writing around race, racism and culture were influential in shaping the cultural and political movement of black British people during the 1990s.

Theorists: Curran & Seaton

Theory: Power and Control within the Media

Key terms: Globalisation, agents of control

In a nutshell: Curran and Seaton explore the link between owners of media institutions and systems of values and beliefs in a society. In their seminal book 'Power Without Responsibility' first published in 1981, they explore the relationship between the press and political parties, and how ideologies are created and circulated within the media, and more recently the role of digital media within society.

Theorist: Stuart Hall

Theory: Reception Theory

Key terms: Encoding/Decoding, Preferred, Negotiated, Oppositional Reading, Representation

In a nutshell: Working at the Centre for Cultural Studies at the University of Birmingham, Stuart Hall created the encoding/decoding model of communication, he explored the notion that media audiences are presented with messages encoded into media texts, these are then decoded based on the audience's cultural background. Unlike the Effects model, this saw the audience as an active body that brought their own beliefs and values to a media text.

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