

J388 Communication Theory and Criticism

Fall 2001

Instructor: Bybee

Media Criticism Paper: Due in Class on Nov. 29

Complete an original analysis of a media text (details below) drawing on the following terms from Hall's chapter "The Work of Representation" (representation, sign, signifier/signified, langue/parole/ structuralist, semiotics, connotation, denotation, myth, discourse, hegemony, power/knowledge, discursive formation, historicizing discourse, and subject position) and from Hall's chapter "The Spectacle of the 'Other'" (other, commodity racism, preferred meaning, difference, inter-textuality, non-neutral binary oppositions, dialogic, spectacle, scientific racism, culture/nature, naturalization, signifying racial difference, staging racial difference, stereotyping/splitting/power, symbolic violence, Foucault/Gramsci/power, power and fantasy, fetishism/disavowal, trans-coding, contesting representations from within). As you answer the questions below, you will not be expected to use all of these terms. Use the terms most appropriate to developing your interpretation.

Your analysis should be about 5-6 word processed pages (1,000 - 1,250 words) in length. One letter grade will be deducted for each incomplete sentence. Remember that this is a very small amount of space to develop your presentation and arguments. You will need to be organized and succinct in your answers. Be sure to make it clear you understand the meanings of the terms/concepts you are using and provide evidence from your analysis to substantiate your arguments.

In writing your analysis, follow the guidelines below:

1. Be clear about which terms, concepts and insights you intend to use and how you see them as interconnected.
2. Choose a magazine that you are familiar with or one which has intrigued you in terms of their editorial or marketing or political goals. Since the focus of this interpretive exercise is to consider how "otherness" is produced, be sure that the magazine you choose has some interesting examples of "otherness". Look at advertising as well as editorial content. For the purposes of this assignment, you are expected to choose magazines that give you the specific opportunity to study the constructed "otherness" of people from the Middle East.
3. Organize your essay around the following questions taken from Hall (of course if you have chosen an "otherness" that is not about race, adjust the questions accordingly):
 - 3.1 Through which representational practices are racial and ethnic 'difference and 'otherness' signified in your example text/magazine? Here you should begin with identifying signs, signifiers and signifieds relevant to your topic. Also begin to consider their interrelationships. For instance, what binary oppositions are invoked and to what effect? Also consider the levels of signs operating from denotative to connotative to mythic and their interrelationships.

3.2 What are the 'discursive formations', the repertoires or regimes of representation, on which the media are drawing when they represent 'difference' of the constructed 'otherness' you are examining in your example text/magazine? Each magazine offers up a particular subject-position from which the reader is invited to understand the world.

3.3 In what ways is one dimension of difference - e.g. 'race' - crossed by other dimensions, such as sexuality, gender and class?

3.4 And how is the representation of 'difference' in your linked with questions of power? (Here in addition to focusing on the material in your chosen text/magazine, it will prove useful to consider the ownership of the magazine and the organizational goals of that ownership, as well as information concerning the relative status in terms of social and economic power of the 'other' you are examining.)

3.5 How might the 'regime of representation' which you have analyzed be contested or should it be, according to Hall?, According to you?

4. As you develop your interpretation, provide specific evidence/illustrations to support your arguments.

5. Indicate whether or not you would be willing to have your paper posted on a J388 website as an example analysis.

6. Turn in a copy of the magazine you have analyzed.