

The Dialectic Encoding/Decoding Model

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Introduction

Stuart Hall's preferred reading model (or encoding/decoding model) has become a structure of seminal significance in the field of communication research. I offer a comprehensive revision of that model through my *dialectic* version of the model which also carefully considers how John Fiske and Umberto Eco developed Hall's original model. The dialectic model involves a bifurcation within the encoding and decoding process whereby the encoder and decoder each utilize both a 'private' and 'public' code in order to complete a communication circuit and render the meaning of the message both personal and practical. In turn, just as Hall's model has been criticized and reworked over the decades by a surfeit of theorists and researchers, the dialectic model must be accountable to these scholarly developments. Finally, the work of David Morley on television reception provides a basis for rejecting traditional definitions of 'public' and 'private' and reconceptualising them based on their social and psychological valence for import to the dialectic encoding/decoding model.

The Private of the Public

Stuart Hall's 'preferred reading' model is a four-stage theory of communication, distinguishing production, circulation, use and reproduction (Hall, 507). Each stage is relatively autonomous; the coding of a message does control its reception, but not transparently. Each stage has its own determining limits and possibilities. Hall contends that messages have a complex structure of dominance and that encoding is a willful act reflecting the interests in dominance of the institutions that encode meaning. A product of communication (production stage) becomes part of discourse through language (a transformative process) allowing the message to be circulated. The discourse must then be translated (a second transformation)

into social practices to complete the communication circuit, making the message effective. Hall writes, “...if the meaning is not articulated in practice, it has no effect.” (Hall, 508). The transformative processes – one for psychological consumption and the other for social production – are not guaranteed to operate effectively and each stage modulates the message through specific mechanisms in order to properly transmit the message through the circuit. The circuit of communication is mediated through semiotics (the first transformation for psychological consumption) and mediated through sociology (the second transformation for social production).

The production stage of communication is itself mediated internally, within its institution, determined by an array of ideological-based factors¹. However, production is also mediated by use and reproduction (ie. reception) as well as by other discourses - this renders communication rife with interpretative potential. Interpretation emerges from the asymmetry between the codes of the source and the codes of the receiver, however, Hall argues, that the message is meaningless if the asymmetry causes distortions along the communication circuit in such a manner that the transformations do not occur (Hall, 510). In this respect, messages are relatively autonomous because they can be distorted along the circuit through transformations, but they are also determinate because a message only completes the circuit if it is integrated meaningfully at each stage.

I would like to suggest that communication is a *dialectic* process² articulated through public and private work of the encoder (producer of the message) and decoder (reader of the message). The “use” stage of Hall’s model should refer to the psychological/individualist/private work of the reader as they decode the message and make sense of its meaning at a personal level. This, in effect, produces the ‘antithesis’ for the message’s meaning (the encoded message being the ‘thesis’) and if the circuit were to terminate at this stage, then it would be incomplete and the message would not be a meaningful communication, despite having a meaning for the reader. I would suggest that this form of abbreviated or limited meaning fits well with Umberto Eco’s concept of ‘aberrant decoding’. The “reproduction” stage of Hall’s model would refer to the social/collectivist/public work of the reader as they encode (or re-

encode) the message and make sense of its meaning at a practical level. This becomes the ‘synthesis’ for the message’s meaning and represents the completion of the communication circuit marking the message as a meaningful communication between source and receiver.

There is nothing about my dialectic version of the ‘preferred reading model’³ (or encoding/decoding model) that isn’t already suggested by Stuart Hall. In fact, Hall’s anxiety about the machinations of ideology within the communication circuit fits well with the dialectic version proposed here and its distinction of public and private work of the reader. I am breaking from the traditional notions of ‘public’ and ‘private’ in media studies as our contemporary environment for the consumption of media messages renders those spatial-based definitions quite anachronistic. I will hopefully demonstrate this point effectively through brief analysis of Morley’s work on families and television spectatorship.

Discourse is meaningful through language, and language mediates through code. Language always represents and is never the referent to what is signified. Hall states, “there is no degree zero in language” (Hall, 511). Language as a medium mediating mediums, leads to its underlying codes being naturalized. Naturalizing code has an ideological effect of concealing the practices of coding and this means that a code for naturalizing language will have enfolded ideological effects – it is concealing the practice of concealing the practice of coding. The detrimental effects of naturalizing language is that denoted meaning can become fixed and not open to disagreement, where ideology presents denotation as being “common sense”⁴ meaning. At the same time, the connotative meanings are culturally-based and socially-constructed. For Hall, there is an inherent conflict with language because of ideology such that institutions limit people’s modes of meaning-production and reduce the possibility for challenging the code of language. I would suggest that Hall’s cautions are overwrought⁵ and that there are two language codes – private and public – used when reading/interpreting, which account for and recognize ideology, allowing the reader to integrate ideology into communication appropriately as determined by their individualist and social sensibilities. The private/individualist and public/collectivist codes mediate each other where the private code will decode a message in order to fit it meaningfully within individual psychology and the

public code will encode that message in order to fit it meaningfully within society. The private code produces personal meaning while the public code produces practical meaning, all from the same message.

The bifurcated private and public code for reception is paralleled with a private and public code for production of messages. The encoder of the original message has a private code operating within its institutions (see first footnote) where the message must be meaningfully encoded with respect to the units/components which constitute that institution. The encoding institution also has a public code where the message is engineered to have relevant meaning for individuals of society, and society as a whole. Hall affirms that the goal of the encoder is “perfect transparent communication”, however, the bifurcation of private and public code in the encoding process suggests that perfect transparent communication is an ideal, sooner than a goal per se (Hall, 514). Hall refers to the private code of the institution as the “professional code” and claims, “the professional code is relatively independent of the dominant code, in that it applies criteria and transformational operations of its own, especially those of a technicopractical nature” (Hall, 515). This statement indicates that Hall understands the private code to be about self-regulation and standards which exist independent of particular messages. However, every message encoded still has to check itself for coherence through the private code – if already coherent the message has been produced through an awareness of the private code of the institution (ie. Hall’s professional code) and if not yet coherent, will be modified by the private code prior to being sent along the circuit. This process strikes me as anything but “relatively independent” and instead the private code of the institution is integral to the public code of the institution in producing a message – they mediate each other, necessarily. If the message were to be sent without both codes, then it would represent a broken circuit and the message would be a product not of the institution but simply of a mechanism of the institution – the mechanism that handles sending a message for circulation.

Hall considers the nature of the private and public code of the encoder, but refers to it as a “complex matter” which appears to lie outside his immediate concerns (Hall, 516). Instead, Hall offers a pared-down structure for understanding media communication. Hall’s circuit of communication only

involves a public code for the encoder and a public code for the decoder – the private work is conflated and flattened with public work in order to distinguish a simple set of decoding practices. The decoding practices recognized by Hall are the dominant code, negotiated code and oppositional code readings. The dominant code is based in grand totalisations and leads to preferred readings, the negotiated code presents exceptions to the totalities of the hegemonic dominant code, and the oppositional code is a violation to those totalities - detotalising the message of the dominant code. Worth noting, is that the negotiated code, as explained by Hall, considers situational or local level understandings, which I would argue are a private code of the reader. Therefore, the most succinct way to marry my dialectic version with Hall's encoding/decoding model would be to claim that the private decoding practice is always a negotiated code, where that meaning will then be encoded through the public code as falling somewhere on a continuum between dominant code and oppositional code. Hall's model ironically suffers from the same conditions that he seeks to expose as problematic, namely that systems can be totalising for their subjects – in Hall's model, the private work of the reader is subsumed by the public work of the institution and **all** interpretations refer back to a dominant code from the hegemonic order established through ideological mechanisms.

The Public of the Private

Hall's model considers messages to be communicated by ideologically-closed media where Althusserian interpellation (or hailing) through ideological mechanisms encodes the message with the dominant code then imposing a preferred reading. John Fiske understands reception to take place within groups and subcultures, where for a message to be popular it must be 'polysemic' – it must have a surfeit of meaning (Fiske, 391). Messages inherently produce contradictions and openness as opposed to unity and closure. Fiske sees the failure of Hall's structural model lying in its lack of praxis and empirical evidence to substantiate its claims. Fiske cites Morley's empirical-based studies in audience reception

which revealed a wide range of interpretive frameworks that suited the individual's social positions (Fiske, 392). For Fiske, the encoder is subsumed by the decoder through the message's innate polysemy. The encoder can direct the production of a message to reflect a dominant code, but a message is rife with meaning that can be interpreted in a variety of ways by divergent and resistant subcultures to that dominant code. Fiske understands that the text is not anarchically open and that different readings will reference the dominant code and ideology. Fiske writes, "the structure of meanings in a text is a miniaturization of the structure of subcultures in society – both exist in a network of power relations, and the textual struggle for meaning is the precise equivalent of the social struggle for power" (ibid.). Fiske's theories on polysemy are underpinned by the work of semiotician Mikhail Bakhtin and linguist Valentin Voloshinov on communication systems.

Through Bakhtin and Voloshinov, Fiske claims that messages are innately polysemic because communication systems are heteroglot and dialogic (Fiske, 393). The heteroglot nature of a communication system is a top-to-bottom process whereby ideological structures contradict each other. In effect, and for my purposes, the heteroglot aspect of communication would constitute the public code of both encoding and decoding. The dialogic nature of a communication system is a bottom-to-top process whereby specific exchanges produce contradictions because of internalized dialects. Again, for my purposes, the dialogic would refer to the private code of encoding and decoding messages. Language mediates the ideology and dialects, which are plural in a message, and often contradictory.

One of the weaknesses of Fiske's theories on media communication and audience reception through the concept of polysemy, is that it shares with Hall's model (although inverted) the tendency toward totalising structures. With Fiske's theories, the public code is subsumed by the private code – a spectator only understands the dominant code through its contradictions of being resisted by oppositional code. The problem, as I see it, is that the private code is no longer actually private per se, and instead of a message being decoded in a psychologically individualist way it is decoded with a kind of collectivist-social imprint. The danger of this system is that the individual's private decoding practices are

automatized and the only private work in decoding is to automatically recognize the practical implications of the message and internalize them. It is an impersonal mode for producing meaning, yet is proposed as being performed by individuals psychologically. The weakness of this conception becomes apparent when Fiske does close textual analysis of an episode of the 1980s television series, *Hart to Hart*.

A poorly written joke, in one episode of *Hart to Hart*, juxtaposes a porthole window in a ship's cabin with the laundry machine at a laundromat. Fiske claims that 'porthole' is "technical" language and therefore masculine whereas 'laundromat' is "domestic" language and therefore feminine, forming a gendered stereotype underlying the punchline of the joke. The dominant code of the joke is geared to reproduce traditional, heteronormative, patriarchal values, however, a feminist spectator can access innate contradictions that produce oppositional code and interpret the joke through subaltern discursive formations. Of course, Fiske takes for granted that all interpretation must be consistent with the social implications of encoded meanings. What this loses sight of is that a staunch feminist who works on a ship, or a traditional housewife that goes on many cruises (and vice-versa), will likely not interpret 'porthole' as technical-masculine language. Is "window" or "sliding door" technical language? It likely would be considered technical language to someone who had been living in a cave their entire life. The issue lies in personal exposure, and individualist-based personal meaning will determine if 'porthole' is a technical term. To the single, unlucky-in-love male, a laundromat may not be associated with the domestic realm at all and instead be part of the burden of a lifestyle that does not involve family. To that seemingly hapless male, "laundromat" may be the farthest thing from feminine language because of his personal and psychologically-based experiences with laundromats and the meanings which have been produced through those experiences internally. Finally, for me (as a screenwriting hobbyist), the joke evoked nothing political or ideological per se, but instead caused me to recall some early screenwriting lessons about avoiding dialogue that is too 'on-the-nose' and reminding me of how a writer can sometimes fish for dialogue filler in the *mise-en-scene* because it seems inherently relevant to the scenario. The great strength of pastiche-specialist auteurs such as Quentin Tarantino is that they seldom exploit the obvious in

such a way. Fiske's analysis proscribes that the public code of the encoder is subsumed by the decoder, but he conflates the public and private code of the decoder so that the private reading has no personal qualities and only serves to be publicly practical and socially relevant. The limitations in Fiske's theories are not all that surprising given that his project is to define *popularity* in media communication, which requires focus on commonality of ideological frames and thus puts a primacy on the practical and social subsuming (and controlling) the personal and psychological.

The Public or the Private

Hall's model identified negotiated code as being reflective of exception to the rules of dominant code while I suggested that in the *dialectic encoding/decoding model* negotiated code represents the private code of the decoder. If the communication circuit ends only with negotiated code then it is incomplete and this could be considered an "aberrant decoding". Semiotician, Umberto Eco, explains that aberrant decoding occurs when the decoder superimposes their own code on the message (Eco, 238). Through examples cited by Eco, aberrant decoding appears to have a distinct spatiotemporal register. Aberrant decoding occurs when the decoder finds the encoder's code foreign (synchronic-spatial⁶), when the decoder is of a different culture than the encoder (diachronic-spatial), when the decoder is of a different generation than the encoder (synchronic-temporal), and when the decoder has different cultural traditions than the encoder (diachronic-temporal)(*ibid.*). My reasoning in breaking down Eco's examples into a spatiotemporal framework is that cultures are formed dynamically which suggest diachrony (Eco examples: different culture, different cultural tradition) and the examples that I have labelled through consideration of synchrony have a situational character (Eco examples: foreignness and generational difference) – through the examples provided by Eco, a spatiotemporal framework for categorization seems intuitive in understanding the concept of 'aberrant decoding'. Aberrant decoding is described by Eco as being a highly personalized mode of interpretation.

For Eco, decoding is not merely a social practice producing practical meaning, but also has an ethical and psychological component (Eco, 239). In fact, aberrant decoding can create “new ethics”, which through my model suggests that the reader has broken the communication circuit by not encoding the private code into a public code through the meaning of the encoded message, but instead the decoder has encoded with a public code that is independent from the public code of the encoder. In this situation, the decoder has produced meaning that is complete, but the communication circuit is still broken through a disavowal of the encoder’s meaning for the message. Eco writes, “...a message can have different levels of meaning” where each level can be decoded to reveal separate code (Eco, 241). As much as Eco’s conceptualization of aberrant decoding reveals the important differences between the private code and the public code of the decoder, Eco also seems satisfied that the decoder either chooses to have only a private code (with the potential for ‘new ethics’ public code) **or** a public code which answers back to the encoder to complete the ‘intended’ communication circuit.

The dialectic model reimagines Hall’s model whereby negotiated code is necessary as a private code of both the encoder and decoder, and where the public code of encoder and decoder exists on a continuum between dominant code and oppositional code. Eco also suggests this structure through defining “subcode” as a result of transforming denotation to connotation (Eco, 242). For Eco, all messages have polysemous meaning because they have code and subcode. The code works with uncontested denoted meaning in a message while the subcode converts the denoted meaning into contestable meaning through connotation. The decoder’s ‘knowledge’ (used for applying code and subcode to messages to determine and decide their meaning) is based in ideological, ethical and religious standpoints (arguably, public/collectivist/social) and psychological attitudes, tastes and value systems (arguably, private/individualist/ psychological) (Eco, 246). Eco seems to be confirming the public and private categories of the dialectic model I have offered, at least at the level of decoding. He also confirms the bifurcation of public and private work at the level of encoding, when he writes, “the transmitting organization and the technical interpreter codify the message on the basis of their own framework of

cultural reference: they select the meanings they want to communicate, why, for whom, and how they should be arranged by means of the different levels of the message” (Eco, 247). In this case, the “transmitting organization” is the institution which does the public work to produce a message ready for circulation while the “technical interpreter” represents the professional code – the components of the institution – that does private work to prepare the message for production.

For Hall, the anxiety around formulating the structural basis of communication lies in ideology pervading the encoding process such that the decoding process experiences significant limitation. Fiske sees polysemy as more-or-less negating these limitations – ideology has the power to make compelling suggestions only and the audience can remain enfranchised in how they decode. Eco, on the other hand, sees ideology as limiting meaning through its capacity for reducing the range of codes and subcodes that can be used in decoding – polysemy is guaranteed, but limited through ideology. For Eco, there is no dialectic per se, but a dynamic exists in the message establishing its meaning as either obvious (negotiated code transforms to something on the continuum of dominant-oppositional code) **or** improbable (“new ethics”). The latter represents an instance of aberrant decoding which fundamentally restructures the message. I would suggest that aberrant decoding may exist as Eco proposes, but that it is not a proper example of meaningful communication because the circuit is broken through the restructuring at the level of the decoder’s public code. Aberrant decoding is likely an outlier in communication, but as Eco aptly notes, “the semiotic inquiry is only one aspect of research into the process of communication” and empirical evidence is necessary to determine the relationships between intentions of the sender, structures of the message and reactions of the addressee (Eco, 238; 248).

The Depth of Code

I have suggested the dialectic version for Hall’s encoding/decoding model of communication and compared Hall’s model with Fiske’s concept of polysemy as a modifier to the former, as well as, Eco’s

concept of aberrant decoding as a formal restructuring of Hall's model. This comparative analysis has demonstrated that the encoder and decoder each utilize a private and public code when determining and deciding the meaning of a message. However, I would be remiss in not noting theoretical debates and arguments that have reconceptualised Hall's model in such a way that my dialectic version would have to be accountable to that knowledge in order to also be valid and useful as a working theoretical model.

N. Katherine Hayles presents a materialist argument for understanding the underlying code of media communication. For Hayles, code is fundamentally altered between media that have a different material base. The crux of Hayles's project is to demonstrate that print text and electronic hypertext are encoded and decoded differently because the materiality determines the use of different codes. Hayles's approach is materially-deterministic and she is keyed-in on medium specificity, noting that it is specious logic to apply the codes of one medium to another – as her primary example, literary analysis should not be the basis for the analysis of digital media (Hayles *a*, 67). A medium must be understood on its own terms, which has been circumvented in theory and practice for several centuries, as demonstrated through copyright law debates (Hayles *a*, 70). The material of a medium signifies beyond the signification of the messages it produces, carries, circulates and transmits. Hayles argues that materiality is, “the interplay between a text's physical characteristics and its signifying strategies.” (Hayles *a*, 72). For Hayles, materiality is a dynamic, emergent quality of the medium making medium-specific analysis essential. As a result of interplay of the material's signifying practices and the message's signifying practices, code is conceptualized as “deep”.

For my dialectic model, the notion that code is deep through the medium's materiality would determine that the private code be deep. When a film producer intends to create a compelling war epic, the professional code of the encoding institution addresses the medium specifics of cinema and determines how to prepare the message with consideration to the specific medium. Similarly, when a spectator watches that movie, the private code that decodes the meaning considers the medium – seeing war in a movie will be made personal very differently than reading of war in a book, playing as a soldier

in a video game or watching documentary footage of an actual battle. However, the public code of the decoder will put into practice a social understanding of the message that transcends the medium specifics in many ways. The spectator will make sense of the representations of war as signifying war in general, but can still qualify this public encoded practical meaning with a consideration of the medium used to transmit the message. A movie is often considered to have “done a good job” at representing what the audience already has an idea of⁷.

The *deepness* of code seems to suggest that the private code of the encoder and decoder has its own dialectic processes⁸. In fact, Hayles explains that the medium (her example is the computer) has its own code independent of the code which underlies language and allows us to produce meaning from a message (Hayles *b*, 136). Therefore, communication consists of two sets of codes – that of the medium and that of the producer/receiver. The languages emerging from these codes interact dynamically. Where Hall and Fiske didn't see overt breaks in communication circuits which are actually decoded, Eco understood a break through aberrant decoding. Their models were based on only the semiotic-based layer of language-based code. Hayles's multilayered framework for communication sees a potential break between the material-based layer of code and the semiotic-based layer. Communication can complete the circuit through either layer, however if there is a break in one of the layers, this can lead to trauma – a rupture in signification⁹. Hayles imagines trauma as liberating, but the rupture or break seems to suggest a communication similar to Eco's aberrant decoding – the circuit is completed despite completeness through encoding processes. In this respect, Hayles's trauma could be conceived of as an aberrant decoding of an aberrant decoding – it does not produce new ethics because there is only a break in one layer of the communication circuit and the circuit can still be completed. Therefore, trauma is an aberrant decoding within a communication circuit that is complete through its encoded processes. This would seem to suggest that trauma in communication is not liberating per se¹⁰, but is simply another possibility of modification to the communication (perhaps another process of transformation in Hall's sense). Trauma may be a stimulus for the prolific production of non-sequiturs at the level of signification and in this way

its potential to produce a form of anarchy could be construed by some as liberating, but by others as perniciously limiting. The trauma would be resolved through the private code of the encoder and decoder.

The Public and Private Code of the Decoder

The Hayles concept of trauma in communication emerging through layered code (ie. deep code) is contextualized by Benjamin Mako Hill. Hill's materialist approach emphasizes affordances and constraints of a medium such that trauma can arise from either in the form of "errors". The material code is afforded invisibility during communication however an error can produce a constraint that renders that layer of code visible. Mark Nunes writes, "... error reveals not only a system's failure, but also its operational logic" (Nunes, 3). In this way, the visibility can produce a trauma through the encoder or decoder noticing it thus threatening a break in communication, or it can facilitate the completion of a communication circuit through affording the encoder and decoder access to the previously hidden layer. Hill provides an example of how eyeglasses, like all "good" tools, are intended to be invisible, but that a crack or smudge on the lens can make the glasses visible and obvious (Hill, 27). Similarly, I offer that the crack on the lens can indicate that the lens prescription is inadequate and stimulate a response to remedy the situation. An error in the material-based code can be a trauma to the communication circuit (for example, the worn VHS or cassette tape's warping of visual and audio information) or it can facilitate the completion of a particular communication that is traumatic at the layer of language-based semiotic code (for example, radio dubs for censoring offensive language – an 'intended' error as it were, that allows communication to continue despite the ideological constraints of mediating institutions).

Adrienne Shaw also understands media to potentially impede or ameliorate correspondence between encoder and decoder through the affordances of the material's code (based in the technology and platforms) which can be made perceptible, hidden or false¹¹ (Shaw, 594). The three affordances can be understood as three layers of the material's code which may encourage or reinforce particular readings –

for example, the perceptible affordances of the material encourage and reinforce the dominant reading (this recalls Screen theory in film studies of the 1970s¹²). Shaw's framework becomes most interesting when considering how there could be discrepancy between the affordances of the material code and the particular reading codes (based in Hall's model, as Shaw intended). Would discrepancy (perhaps through error) stimulate aberrant decoding and compel breaks in communication and intended reception? A "misuse" of technology in this way could still be productive for completing a communication circuit or alternatively for forging separate meaning divorced from the encoder and the ideology which guided the formation of the encoder's message¹³. Shaw, much like Hayles, theorizes the deepness of code through its liberating potential by virtue of errors, constraints and discrepancy.

For the dialectic encoding/decoding model, error-trauma could emphasize aberrant decoding (broken communication) when the error-trauma is resolved through private code without public code being encoded by the decoder¹⁴, or error-trauma could impose certain ideologies in order to assist in completing a communication circuit whereby the private code already imagines the practical meaning and assumes it at the level of the personal. Hill understands error-trauma similarly to Hayles, in that it is a form of liberation¹⁵ through its revealing of hidden mediation and impositions of power by constraints that had been rendered invisible until the site of error-trauma emerged (Hill, 31). I would suggest that error-trauma can also stimulate constraint and limitation for the decoder who is intent on completing the intended communication circuit¹⁶. For the decoder intent on completion, the removal of the error is a *poiesis* – the bringing into being a communication bereft of the constraints of producing new ethics or disavowal of the encoder, and free from the psychological hardship of realizing and experiencing broken communication. Therefore, the private code is a mechanism of **control**¹⁷ servicing the individual's personal interests and needs. An error-trauma provides feedback on that control rendering the decoding process to a political practice through individualist sensibilities. The private code can facilitate broken communication through aberrant decoding, the production of new ethics, and deviation from intended endpoint when error-trauma presents a possibility for a more desired personal meaning than what is

possible from the most efficient means of achieving predetermined outcomes (ie. negotiated code to continuum of dominant-oppositional code). However, the private code can also control a remedying of error in order to achieve, what Nunes refers to as, “predetermined outcomes” (in Hall this is preferred readings, but in the dialectic model it would constitute completing the intended communication circuit through the decoder encoding a practical meaning from code falling somewhere on the dominant-oppositional continuum)(Nunes, 6).

The decoder will control, through the private code, a determination of whether error-trauma is deviation (therefore a completion of the communication circuit is realized) or “wandering”¹⁸ (therefore a break in the communication circuit occurs). Nunes poses a question – “is there not something seductive in error precisely because it draws us off our path of intention, interrupting the course of goals, objectives and outcomes and pulling us toward the unintended and unforeseen?” (Nunes, 14). I would certainly agree with Nunes that the tension between wandering and deviation is indeed seductive and this is why the private code exercises a significant degree of control in managing those seductions keeping personal interests balanced between the practical (which will come from the public code encoding and completing communication) and the passionate (which will come from the new ethics formed through aberrant decoding and the breaking of communication)¹⁹.

The Public and Private Code of the Encoder

Poonam Pillai recognizes a major flaw in the legacy of Hall’s encoding/decoding model - namely that there is a problematic equivalence between ‘preferred meaning’ and ‘preferred reading’ (Pillai, 221). Both terms are conflated with the notion of dominant ideology such that the concept of transparent communication becomes a viable possibility in practice. Pillai explains that ‘preferred meaning’ is a property of the text (encoder) and that ‘preferred reading’ is a property of the reader (decoder) (Pillai, 222). This conflation limits the proper understanding of the work of the encoder in producing a message

as being reflective of both a private code (professional code decoding relevant meaning and preparing a message) and public code (the institution encoding prepared meaning to produce a message). Janice Radway remarks on how the work of reception studies was short-sighted in its post-structuralist ‘fever’ with respect to denying the author ‘authority’. Radway explains that cultural studies and reception studies shifted from textual exegesis that did not challenge the author as authoritarian to the linguistic/hermeneutic turn which understood all readers to be the authorities behind the process of interpretation (Radway, 335). For Radway, this post-structuralist turn occluded marginalized authors from being re-discovered as authoritative.

Radway, argues, that through post-structuralist-based reception studies, the reader (decoder) can only be conceived as either interpellated by the ideology of the text (or the message) or actively resistant to its incitements (Radway, 337). As a result, Radway finds that reading is not a generative activity. The public and private code of the encoder in producing a message actualizes a kind of subjectivity for the author (or producer/encoder) that situates the reader (decoder) as a subject enabled and afforded the authority to interpret. To deny the encoder the dialectic process necessary to encode a message with meaning is to deny them subjectivity and thus preclude the logical possibility of subjectivity for the decoder throughout the communication circuit. Therefore, subjectivity is a transferable quality of a message only guaranteed when a communication circuit is complete. Radway sees a major impediment in the practical-social implementation of a message’s meaning when the original author is denied recognition of the dynamic social process by which the message was produced. Radway’s argument strongly supports the dialectic encoding/decoding model’s assertion that the encoder also uses a public and private code in order to generate personal and practical significance for the message. Worth noting, however is that I also agree with Radway that the “control” is exerted by the decoder through use of private code. Radway explains this by claiming that some aspects of social life cannot be integrated into the process of reading because they cannot conform to the structure (ie. structure arranged through

encoding) and that the context must be able to always conform the structure (arguably, through the use of private code) (Radway, 338).

Dialectic or Multidimensional?

The dialectic encoding/decoding model proposes that there are four visible codes in the communication circuit: private-encoder (a decoding process), public-encoder, private-decoder, public-decoder (encoding process). The primary dialectic relationship exists in the public-encoder code producing a message circulated as a thesis, the private-decoder code decoding the message as being an antithesis to that thesis (based on the contradiction and tension of personal and practical meaning), and that the synthesis emerges from the public-decoder code encoding the message with practical social meaning and completing the communication circuit. In addition, error-trauma, aberrant decoding and the ability to produce meaning through a broken communication circuit makes visible, layered codes of the material base of the specific medium used to communicate. Kim Christian Schroder addresses the complexities of reception and the bifurcation of public and private codes through the development of a multidimensional model of audience discourse. The model has six dimensions: motivation, comprehension, discrimination, position, evaluation and implementation (Schroder, 233). This model presents dimensions of reception as well as dimension of the research of reception.

In crafting a multidimensional model, Schroder explicates the dynamic process of decoding. He writes, "... any decoding, even that of a skilled textual analyst, is always already another encoding, that is, a product of the decoder's cultural and communicative repertoires, and therefore marginally or substantially different from all other readings." (Schroder, 241). Schroder is pushing back on the notion, privileged in Hall's model, that a preferred reading is a master interpretation of the message. Schroder's model is non-processual and has four reading dimensions (decoding) articulated to each other creating affordances, and two implication dimensions (encoding) situating meaning through socio-ideological

formations (Schroder, 243). In examining the multidimensional model, it is worth noting that Schroder conceives of the implication dimensions as being only relevant to the analyst, but for my purposes it would be most productive to consider all readers as analysts, in order to properly compare the dialectic and multidimensional models.

There is much agreement between the multidimensional and dialectic models. Schroder contends that polysemy is part of the reading/decoding process and that opposition is part of the implication/encoding process – positions have to be acknowledged prior to being rejected. Therefore, the private code of the decoder would handle the polysemous meaning of the message (tending toward aberration/wandering or conformity/integration) while the public code of the decoder would encode practical meaning from the message along the continuum of dominant-oppositional decoding. In the multidimensional model, the two implication dimensions (encoding) involve an ideological struggle for hegemony (evaluation) and the reader’s political practice (implementation) (Schroder, 243). The dialectic model would have to include a third and fourth dimension of ‘reflection’ and ‘integration’ whereby the reader’s political practice and ideological struggle necessarily consider the personal meaning decoded and how it could be shifted or altered based on the public code encoding process of the decoder. The integration dimension involves either integrating or rejecting the evaluation, implementation and reflection. A rejection corresponds to the old adage that someone’s “heart wasn’t in it”. That is to say, communication can be a complete circuit with personal and practical meaning determined and yet there lacks a commitment to sustaining that meaning through a rejection of how the meaning formed. It is a matter of dis-/satisfaction where satisfaction can be an irrational affective state, therefore, integration is a dimension potentially subjected to irrational reasoning.

Perhaps, these added dimensions I offer provide a strong warning against adopting a multidimensional model for audience reception. Meaning-production is a profoundly recursive process involving many stages of introspection and self-reflection. Within that process is the inevitable obstacle of encountering irrational modes of reasoning that present the possibility of moving forward through the

communication circuit despite inconsistencies and contradictions. Humans have a compulsion to judge because it is necessary for survival however judging a situation with limited knowledge is irrational. When we watch a movie, read a book, or play a video game we are quick to judge the quality and the content of the media text and its messages, however, our ability to judge quickly could indicate that we depend on irrational reasoning for expeditious analysis. It is difficult to imagine visiting a theatre to watch a play or a concert hall to listen to a symphony and not judge the works in order to produce significant meaning from a completed communication circuit. We might be disturbed by someone who walked out of the theatre or hall and offered no opinion of the work and performance but was satisfied to cogitate and reflect introspectively – “they who hesitate are lost”. Yet, this pensive contemplation may represent the banishing of irrational reasoning prior to completing a communication circuit.

Therefore, the encoding dimensions for the decoder provided by the multidimensional model potentially overlook the vacillation of rational and irrational reasoning that characterize a dominant in how humans produce personal and practical meaning, and thus the model suffers from a conflation of ‘analysis’ and ‘encoding’. Analysis can be based in irrational reasoning whereas encoding cannot. The practical meaning encoded by the decoder to complete the communication circuit cannot be irrational otherwise it would signify a break in the communication when considering that the encoder could only have circulated a message through it being rationally-formed. If the encoder’s message was not rationally formed, then the decoder would perceive it as glossolalia – gibberish in its signification and there would be no motivation to engage with the message.

There are additional problems with the multidimensional model through its conception of reading dimensions (decoding)²⁰, however in all fairness, the deconstruction of the model would require a separate paper devoted to the task because of the model’s complexities through confluences and liberal use of continuums. In fact, Schroder admits, “I offer this model fully aware of the inevitable reductionism and terminological inconsistencies involved in setting it up” (Schroder, 254). The model is offered in order to provide conceptual tools for understanding everyday encounters with media. The multiple uses of

continuums in the multidimensional model (all of the reader decoding dimensions are plotted as continuums) attempt at a theory of contexts as described by Jennifer Daryl Slack in her cultural studies theory of articulation, yet Schroder's model may be seen as holding onto a structural base (ironically through continuums) squandering an opportunity for its consistent implementation as a research analysis methodology.

Slack explains that articulation sees structures in their fragmented components, foregrounding relations in the discourse – the components don't shape the structure, but instead the relations between components shape the context (Slack, 113). In effect, with articulation there is no structure and instead articulation splays out contextual features for analysis through an examination and interrogation of the relations that form the discursive network of phenomena. Articulation is about positionality and not position²¹ (Slack, 121). However, the use of continuums is to structure a relation as **given** in a discourse – there is no 'maybeness', but instead it is simply a matter of determining where on the continuum there has been articulation for a phenomenon's relations in the discourse. Articulation is a theory of performance through meaning-production practices and Schroder's multidimensional model is geared to explain reception as a performative endeavor, which therefore puts a primacy on its social/collectivist/public implications. Where the multidimensional model seeks to direct the individual toward social integration through decoding practices, the dialectic model retains the integrity of individual-based and social-based decoding practices that result in every message having both a personal and practical meaning.

History of 'Public' and 'Private'

In Morley's broad historical survey of communications research and theory, he notes that there was always an impulse to distinguish the psychological and social contexts for reception of messages (Morley *a*, 46-51). The hypodermic model based on a proposition of straight, unmediated effect of the message (ie. Frankfurt School) understood the receiver to exert no psychological-based agency over the

process of interpretation – there is no private code and everything ‘private’ belongs to the encoder’s public code that is reproduced succinctly and directly through the decoder’s public code. By the 1950s, communications theorists were becoming more optimistic and relying on quantitative methods of analysis²² (ie. radio audience research). There was an emphasis on understanding psychological-based modes of interpretation through examination of behavioural effects. By the 1980s, there was a transition from structural-functional theories to post-structural-contextual ones, with the latter focused on social meanings through the public code of the decoder. The ‘uses and gratifications’ school sought to blend or overlap the private and public codes of the decoder to explain that interpretation is based on satisfying disparate but immediate needs of the receiver of media messages (Morley, 49). This marked a shift from behavioural analysis to cognitive analysis, focused on understanding how media is used by the receiver as opposed to how media uses the receiver.

Stuart Hall, among other theorists, noted that the uses and gratifications school issued agency to the receiver in an overdetermined way and he contended that interpretation was guided more by availability of codes than selection of codes (Morley, 52). Althusserian interpellation (psychoanalytic tradition) guided much neo-/post-Marxist thought regarding audience reception (ie. 1970s Screen Theory). I offer a flexible analogy in tracing developments of communication theory based on Althusserian interpellation. Interpellation implies an ideal subject position that through ideology will hail individuals into assuming that position and which seeks to occlude from the individual recognition of the conscious space as providing other positions to inhabit. In effect, the individual receiver of messages (hereafter, ‘subject’) is placed in a ‘chair’ which is ideally situated for transmission of the encoder’s message. Michel Pecheux suggests *interdiscourse* which understands the chair to be used by ideological apparatuses of institutions, but where the chair itself is ever-shifting in form, conforming itself to the unique values and beliefs of the subject (in effect the chair is imagined more as a driver’s seat) (Morley, 64). Ernesto Laclau understands interpellation as revealing its machinations making the subject aware of the ideal subject position. To extend the analogy of the chair, Laclau would be suggesting that the subject

resists being placed in the chair, and begins a political struggle based on questioning the nature of the chair, ownership of the chair and whether the chair is even desired or necessary (theory of disarticulation)(ibid.). Nevertheless, readings/interpretation is done only in the chair and determines the relationship of text to subject. Morley rejects these neo-/post-Marxist conceptions as lacking a temporal/historical framework, noting that (like my chair analogy) interpellation is a spatially-based configuration. Morley argues that “past interpellations affect present ones” (ibid.).

Hall’s preferred reading model liberates the subject from the chair and interpretation becomes based on interpellation and the introspective analysis of the subject. In effect, the subject is now window-shopping in an introspectively-constructed arcade of the consciousness. Ideology compels the subject to stop in front of the furniture store that has a chair in its showcase window. The store window (in Hall’s model) has multiple chairs, with the ‘dominant code’ chair being placed more prominently to garner the most focused attention. The ‘negotiated code’ chair is any chair in the window apart from the dominant code chair whereas the ‘oppositional code’ chair is in fact the bench across from the store. Morley still finds Hall’s model limited for providing only a few set positions in time and space. To extend the analogy a little bit further, Morley would be suggesting that the arcade is nothing but furniture stores with chairs in their showcase windows and benches lined-up along the concourse. The multiplicity ensures contradictory subjectivities – any park bench may be sat at, have been sat at or will be sat at in the future. Chairs in the showcase windows may appear in other stores at different times, configuring themselves in new arrangements. Morley emphasizes the historical reality of subject positions which constitute the text-reader relationship. Without attempting to be cute, Eco’s aberrant decoding could be understood as when a smudge or crack on the glass of the showcase window obscures the view of a chair and stimulates shifting attention for the subject. Morley cites the work of Hardy, Johnston and Willemen (1976) on interlocking subjectivities which through my analogy would explain that a subject has a familiar association with several chairs in different windows and different benches in front of different stores which all form a network of subjectivity – subject position is a social formation (Morley, 68). Morley

writes that the subject of media messages is, “situated within the complex field of communication, and is involved in a process of decoding media material in which one set of messages or discourses feeds into, or is deflected by, another” (Morley, 77). The subject position is psychologically-based but implies a social relevance contextually, thus ‘public’ and ‘private’ are distinct concepts in the process of communication, but are also dynamically related through configurations which employ both psychological and social sensibilities and produce personal and practical meaning.

Throughout this paper, I have defined ‘public’ and ‘private’ with respect to social and psychological dimensions, respectively, which is also a clear break from the history of communication theory and research. In the past, ‘public’ and ‘private’ have both served to define an aspect of social existence, with ‘public’ usually describing political-based relationships for individuals in society, and ‘private’ usually describing family-based relationships for individuals in their domestic setting. Thus, a CNN news broadcast is of public relevance whereas a cooking show is of private relevance. Prior to arguing about how these definitions are anachronistic and irrelevant to analyzing the contemporary moment, it is also worth noting that there is a ‘bleeding effect’ whereby the news broadcast has private relevance based on the domestic setting where the news information is received. This would not be the case in ancient times where news information might have only been accessible directly through public address in the town square. In addition, is a children’s book of the public or private realm? Accessing the book as media appears to be part of the family-based domestic setting, however, the content of much of children’s literature seek to provide information that reinforces political-based constructs such as the Social Contract. Media studies’ historical distinction of public and private realms or domains suffers from a significant measure of ambiguity that renders it difficult to distinguish the nature of its hybridizing.

The traditional definition of “public” in media studies (among other fields) is very much concerned with class leading to outdated notions, such as the black working class don’t know opera code or the white upper class don’t know reggae code (Morley, 87). In the contemporary moment, it seems evident that media access through P2P torrent networks, marketplaces like iTunes, etc. vanquishes much

of these class distinctions. People of many more classes now have access to the codes of any genre of music through digital media piracy or affordable online formats (whether they appreciate and develop those codes is a different matter altogether). The culture of music in the contemporary moment is not as determined by live performance as it once was which had led many researchers to noting problematic cases such as the black working class could not afford going to the opera as often as the white upper class. Contemporary society through digital media provides more codes and expands the repertoires for many more individuals - factors which hint at how the definitions of public and private must be updated²³.

Richard Dyer sums up the problem of spatial-based definitions of public and private when stating, “one cannot conclude from a person’s class, race, gender, sexual orientation and so on, how she or he will read a given text... it is also a question of how she or he thinks and feels about living her/his social situation” (Dyer 1977 quoted in Morley, 136). Arguably, meaning-production is even more about psychological struggles than Dyer is acknowledging – there is no basis for contending that the autonomous self is a less significant life experience from the social self, and even if language mediates meaning-production and is itself a social construct, it requires psychological composure to deny a drift from recognizing agreed upon meaning to rendering that meaning to glossolalia. The autonomous self must submit to a social situation – no altering of social situations will halt schizophrenia, for example. Therefore, public and private should be reclaimed and redefined through their denoted meaning – private is internal, and public involves the external - in order to provide meaning-based definitions as opposed to spatial-based definitions. In this way, the hazards of de-emphasizing the individual’s psychological experience are removed. Morley even writes, “... to argue that individual readings or messages must be seen in their social context is by no means to opt for a mode of determinist explanation in which individual consciousness is directly explained by social position” (Morley, 118). The outdated spatial-based definitions of public and private more-or-less developed from a clash in methodology between the schools which developed uses and gratifications and those which adopted neo-/post-Marxist concepts of interpellation. The ascension of the latter in humanities and social sciences provided for an

overdetermined definition of ‘private’ through conceiving of its social implications as paramount to its modes of meaning-production.

The spatial-based definitions of public and private conflated the private-personal (individual sensibility) and private-practical (social relevance). Morley defined the domestic sphere as the central social space within which individuality is expressed (Morley, 225). He underestimated the development of individualized media delivery systems in the household and public space. Morley writes, “as long as there is a main set in the most comfortable room, the question of what to watch will remain a subject fraught with conflict requiring delicate negotiation skills on the part of different household members, so the unit of consumption remains the household, not the individual...” (Morley, 215). At the time of his Family Television project, Morley failed to anticipate the cell phone as a computer or the laptop as a mobile ‘main set’²⁴. Family members have an array of media participation options today that were not available even twenty years ago. The household as a major unit of media purveyance and consumption, as well as a major market force has become increasingly fragmented. Youtube and Facebook advertising algorithms are now keyed-in on the registered and logged-in user without consideration for the “patriarch” of the household, or any other household member for that matter. As a result, private consumption of media messages becomes more embedded in the individual’s psychological and cognitive systems of meaning-production.

The dialectic encoding/decoding model is not a multidimensional model precisely because the media environment remains radically unhinged to any stable technological base. There are no more tube-televisions sold in stores and increasingly video games are released without single-player campaign modes. The media landscape is reflecting the development of new modes of individual and collective expression facilitated through innovation, remediation and obsolescence of technology²⁵. Media messages carry the patina of these shifts and a multidimensional model may risk reading the superficial layers as more permanent than they really are²⁶. The dialectic model marks out general distinctions between the private and public work of the audience that generate personal and practical meaning from a message –

categories of mental labour and modes of human expression which have a stable base, historically. The plurality and polysemy of communication emerge in the interstitial region between the discourses of public and private where utilization of code can facilitate affordances and articulations in the contextualized happenings of people's lives when communicating. Therefore, the dialectic model is offered as a structural tool²⁷ for organizing an understanding of the contextual-based trends, tendencies and habits of audiences when engaged in producing meaning from media messages.

¹ Hall provides a non-exhaustive list of factors: networks of production, practices of broadcasting, organized relations, and technical infrastructures are made meaningful through discursive formations (forming through ideology) such as knowledge of routines, historically-defined technical skills, professional ideologies, definitions and assumptions (Hall, 509)

² Hegelian dialectic involves three stages of development; a 'thesis', gives rise to its reaction, an 'antithesis'. The antithesis contradicts or negates the thesis. This tension is resolved through a 'synthesis'

³ I am using "preferred reading" to describe the model vis-à-vis Morley's work, however, an informed reader can simply substitute the conventional "encoding/decoding" to describe the model.

⁴ Ideology in discourse defines common sense in such a way that meaning becomes organised hierarchically and where readings or interpretations that challenge the dominant discourse must still reference the common sense meaning in order to be considered anything other than a non-sequitur.

⁵ Hall argues that the denotative level of the sign is closed (Hall, 513). Morley, on the other hand, sees the denotative meaning as being contestable.

⁶ Here I am making liberal use of Ferdinand de Saussure's concepts of synchrony and diachronic in language. I am applying them as ways to categorize code. Synchrony is to consider the workings and meaning of code in a single moment (the moment in which there is articulation) and diachrony is to consider the workings and meaning of code within a developing, evolving and historical-based framework. Synchrony is static and diachrony is dynamic.

Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, trans. Roy Harris. New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013.

⁷ This speaks to Bolter and Grusin's theory of remediation and how media inherently reference each other through hypermediacy.

Bolter, Jay David, and Richard Grusin. *Remediation: understanding new media*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2003.

⁸ This recalls Sergei Eisenstein's film theory on the dialectic relationship between shots in a film (editing and cinematography) and the dialectic within the actual composition of the shots themselves (mise-en-scene and cinematography). The shot is a "cell" (from Eisenstein's 1929 "The Cinematographic Principle and the Ideogram" trans. By Jay Leyda).

⁹ Hayles's theory of trauma breaks from psychoanalytic tradition which sees a rupture as being unable to be articulated. Due to the multilayered structure of communication that Hayles is conceptualizing, trauma can be articulated through one of the layers then completing a circuit of communication that has a break on another layer.

¹⁰ Hayles writes of, "... the crucial role of code in allowing trauma to be released from the grip of obsessive repetition, emotional disconnection, and aconscious re-enactment so that it can achieve narrative expression" (Hayles *b*, 145). Hayles seems intent on remediating the definition of trauma from psychoanalytic canon which may in effect create the exact limitation to liberty that she was trying to avoid. To borrow, rework or remediate concepts and terminology in theory is arguably a profoundly limiting process even if it is sound practice.

¹¹ Shaw borrows the three affordances from William Gaver matching them up with Hall's three reading codes: perceptible-dominant, hidden-negotiated, oppositional-false. The affordances correspond only to the material's code presenting three distinct invisible layers that may be available to the reader.

¹² Affordance is a framework and method for structuring context without the use of an actual fixed structure. Shaw cites Costall and Richards (2013) who explain that affordances account for meaning that can exist prior to the development of language, symbolization, and categorization (Shaw, 599). For myself, the rejection of structure is hazardous as humans are indeed beings that exist meaningfully only through language, symbolization and categorization. Our biological perceptual and sensory equipment precludes the possibility of making meaning otherwise. If post-structuralists had such fervour for rejecting the universal notion that there is a referent for a thing perceived (the shift from Platonic cave allegory to Baudrillardian simulacra), and if the very philosophy of post-structuralism became underpinned by a hermeneutic of suspicion for referents, then why do post-structuralists also present affordances as a framework that can explain the referential of context? If context requires no referent – no universal truth – then we don't need affordances to explain context. Nothing should explain context. The shadow-bird on Plato's cave wall had a referent of a real bird, and suggested that there is a truth of bird, but post-structuralism through notions of Baudrillardian simulacra purports the concept of precession as requiring phenomena to have no referent and that seeking a universal truth of bird is misleading. Affordances - at least in my mind - are to deflect the argument and to suggest that the shadow-bird has a referent in the interplay of fire and light casting shadows – the fire affords shadows. Thus, the shadow-bird has a referent not in the object that it suggests but in the process that afforded its creation. And so, the fire and light become a universal truth for referring to shadow-birds. But how do you describe the referent for fire and light? It is a slippery slope where the post-structuralist all-too conveniently reify the materials that they need when they need them to serve proof of something else while then disavowing those same materials when the ontology of those materials must be interrogated. This could be described as an epistemological fallacy because knowledge is attained through a process of disavowals and fetishes (illogical processes of determination). These comments are less of an indictment and more of an inquiry into the logic of post-structuralist-based theories such as affordance and articulation.

¹³ Wendy H.K. Chun is particularly concerned with the discrepancy between visible and hidden layers of communication through the materialist base of media. I would suggest that her claims are more of a side-note to my development of the dialectic encoding/decoding model, however, are worth going over here.

For Chun, the computer fosters visual culture and transparency through the affordances of software which ideologically constructs an invisible system of visibility (Chun, 27). I offer an analogy in explaining some of my problems with Chun's materialist phenomenology. Software is like a restaurant menu: the scripts of the software are pages of the menu, the functions are courses, and the objects are items. The work of the menu is to make visible what the machine (computer hardware or kitchen hardware) can produce. It isn't an issue of "hiding", but more that "too many cooks in the kitchen" is a real problem. Users are limited access to the kitchen as a result. Chun states that software is iterable, repeatable and reusable – much like how menu items reveal a list of ingredients that can be present in multiple items on the menu and allow for new items to be created that aren't yet on the menu. Chun is concerned that automation in commands through software has hidden the complex systems of power and privilege which define the structure of the hardware and she remarks on how historically prior to the advent of software, such structures were visible through the interactions of human technicians (Chun, 30). For the analogy, Chun could be understood as being concerned with how the head chef may or may not be 'abusing' the line cooks, servers, etc. and that the meal we receive is a product of not just ingredients and cooking, but also systems of oppression and privilege. It only takes a few minutes of watching Gordon Ramsey destroying the morale of aspiring master chefs on his television shows to understand where Chun is articulating her anxieties from.

One issue I have with the emphasis on software as an analog to ideology is that our commands are not rendered into visibility just simply to conceal the oppressive hegemonic structures enabled through ideology, but also as a heuristic device which the user requires in order to make a single decision that doesn't require hundreds of checks and balances. 'Users' cannot 'use' if paralyzed by onerous command structures which must interrogate every entry for compliance with every user sensibility. Even a small part of this notion is obvious in game lag, where the internet protocol verifications and checks on transferred data packets can totally degrade the user experience and render a game unplayable. Chun fallaciously conflates the human need for heuristics (to avoid paralysis) with "causal pleasure" as explored through Lev Manovich concept of "user amplification" (Chun, 41). The conflation renders heuristics to an act of frivolity through the desire to construct narrative sequences out of unitary operations.

With respect to my dialectic encoding/decoding model, Chun's theories on software as functional analog to ideology claim that control is invisible in order to achieve fluid communication across interfaces and between media, however, the dialectic model sees control only existing in the decoder's private code and this control is exerted with agency by the individual in a personal way. Ideology is checked for during the decoder's use of public code as they encode, from the personal, meaning in the message for practical use and social implementation, thus completing the 'intended' communication circuit. The connection to the encoder is not necessarily obfuscated through the machinations of ideology if the decoder aberrantly decodes the message or uses error-trauma to break the communication circuit.

¹⁴ This form of broken communication could lead to what I would call "schizophrenic" decoding. Schizophrenic decoding would be interpretation where the personal meaning determines a reinterpretation of practical meaning directly through the encoder's message, violating the practical meaning of the encoder. This is different from private decoding that determines a different practical meaning from one shared with the encoder (ie. Eco new ethics, through aberrant decoding that is also a form of broken communication). In schizophrenic decoding, the decoder completes a communication circuit which the encoder would disavow and find a non-sequitur in signification. In aberrant decoding, the decoder doesn't complete a communication circuit through the disavowal of the encoder's practical meaning encoded. In aberrant decoding, the encoder has produced a non-sequitur for the decoder, whereas in schizophrenic decoding the decoder has produced a non-sequitur for the encoder.

¹⁵ Nunes remarks, "in its failure to communicate, error signals a path of escape from the predictable confines of informatics control: an opening, a virtuality, a *poiesis*" (Nunes, 3)

¹⁶ I believe it would be spurious to apply moral and ethical judgment against those who desire completing intended communication circuits which revealed inherent constraints through the appearance of error-trauma. I believe that it could be effectively argued that modes of aberrant decoding (liberation of error-trauma) are psychologically disturbing for many who would prefer to adopt an ideology (perhaps not even in their social best interest) in order to resolve a communication and maintain psychological comfort. There is no possible means to produce an effective, logical, rational and reasonable argument that shows people are better off putting their social interests above their individual needs. Human beings have

both an individualist and collectivist sense, related dynamically without inherent power impositions. The power impositions can exist, however, producing at the extremes, sociopaths and martyrs.

Some further notes recall the 'red pill' turn in grassroots philosophy whereby it is claimed that many people who have been serviced well by particular media seek to eliminate errors that would expose that media's potential nefarious machinations and abuses of its users. In the Wachowski's *The Matrix* (1999), the character, Ciphher, becomes a turncoat against the Zionist liberation movement in order to reclaim an errorless existence because he feels that it is psychologically comforting. In the era of "fake news", the qualifier "fake" denotes a source of information that is psychologically disturbing and this is significantly separate from the connoted meanings of false information, which may or may not be the case. Errors can be liberating for some in particular situations and instances, but for others those errors would be exceedingly limiting. This recalls film apparatus theorist Jean-Louis Comolli's radical proposal that movies be watched in a well-lit theatre so as to avoid the apparatus's interpellative capacity for pervading ideology at an unconscious level. Of course, it only takes a moment to realize that this arrangement would be psychologically disturbing for many simply because a well-lit theatre would create a distraction of visual stimuli breaking and then straining focus for the spectator. The strain of focus is far from liberating for many, but is instead psychological work that is arduous and often felt as unnecessary. Many would prefer psychological comfort at the expense of awareness of the workings of ideology and as much as this in itself might disturb others in society, the social needs of an individual do not outweigh the individual needs of an individual (withstanding that the needs of society may outweigh the needs of the individual depending on a particular Marxist or Benthamite philosophy).

¹⁷ Mark Poster's theory of *underdetermination* would seek to refute that the subject can exert a consolidated agency for control over meaning in the new media landscape of our postmodern historical context (ie. "simulacral cultures" in the Baudrillardian sense and through Foucauldian notions of power relations and the archaeology of discourse). Poster writes that simulacral cultures through new media strengthen subjects by constructing new objects (without referents), and constructing new multiple and diffuse subject positions (which are subjects through their performative positionality) (Poster, 15). In this respect, control could not be exerted through the agency of a subject alone – for Poster, subjects are configurations within discourse (Poster, 17). The plurality of subjects and objects through new media communication, as well as the uncertainty arising from that plurality foregrounds the relational network which in effect reduces the agency of the subject over the network and at the same time *underdetermines* the objects themselves. The sense of 'anything might happen' in the network of interactions between subject and object was once conceived historically as an "overdetermination" for objects (a sense of 'too much has happened'), but Poster argues that it is correctly understood as underdetermined because all positionality implies a surfeit of possibility for positioning in the future. The notion of overdetermination dates back historically to a structuralist philosophy that understands subjects and objects taking up positions spatiotemporally. Underdetermination is a poststructuralist concept following the hermeneutic turn and performative turn which understands subjects and objects as having positionality in discourse – a dynamic and fluid positioning with coordinates constantly in flux running oppositional to Cartesian notions of location, vector and movement.

This raises an important dilemma regarding cause and effect in poststructuralist philosophy: did a hermeneutic of suspicion which denies referents a universal quality give rise to a culture of new media that fragments subjects and underdetermines objects, or did new media's formats, platforms and discourses develop a culture of fragmented subjects which makes a hermeneutic of suspicion a natural and inevitable effect? Poster, thusly, understands subjects to be reinforced through discourses and agency only exists through the relations of subject to object within the discourse. Poster's theory would run counter the dialectic model in that encoding and decoding must be flattened into a single process – in effect, the material code encodes the decoder. The theory requires a hermeneutic of suspicion regarding referents (hence Poster's many citations of Jean Baudrillard).

The dialectic encoding/decoding model holds that the subject is holistic with respect to the external world yet sundered psychologically between conscious and unconscious. The only "power relations" or power struggles that exist in the process of communication are between the conscious and unconscious which vie for dominance in defining personal interests of the individual (all other relations external to the individual are 'power fetish relations' based on the disavowal of the trauma of a sundered personality). Although, it would be important to explain the full scope of my humble psychoanalytic theories, if the reader can accept a subject as having agency over the generation of personal meaning in the communication process then they might still engage with the dialectic encoding/decoding model. A staunch post-structuralist will likely reject the dialectic model based on its assertion that a subject has spatiotemporal position as well as discursive positionality, and that objects belong to an archive of referentiality that constitute their ontology. In fact, Poonam Pillai examines how Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding model shifted from structuralist sensibilities regarding subject position to post-structuralist sensibilities

emphasizing articulation and discursive positionality. I would hope that there is room in every sound philosophical method for structure and context, position and positionality, subject-object and becoming.

¹⁸ Nunes cites historian David Bates when distinguishing aimlessness/wandering from aberration/deviation. The former is considered liberating and the latter is limiting. For Nunes, error as deviation serves the dominant system but error as wandering challenges the dominance of the system (Nunes, 12).

¹⁹ Note that I conceive of practicality and passion as non-mutually exclusive. There is passion in the practical (ie. “workaholism”) and there is practicality in the passionate (ie. the production of art and philosophy).

²⁰ Motivation is a reading dimension of the multidimensional model which describes, on a continuum of high-to-low, how much a reader wants to be involved/engaged with a message. However, low motivation would imply lack of engagement which would indicate a break in the communication circuit. How is, let’s say, medium motivation different from high motivation in completing a communication circuit? Instead, if motivation is to be a dimension then it is simply a matter of ‘on’ or ‘off’. If it is ‘off’ then the communication is not completed and this disturbs Schroder’s claim that the model’s dimensions are processual and not sequential or linear – surely sufficient motivation is necessary prior to taking on position (acceptance/rejection) or discrimination (awareness of constructedness) which are other reading dimensions in the model. How can communication be completed if there is no motivation to decode the meaning of the message? (Schroder 244-249)

²¹ I read this conception cautiously as it immediately recalls the nature of pointers in linear programming. Pointers replace position with positionality in order to optimize the performance of a program. Instead, of having to iterate a data member at each step of a program’s operation, a pointer can reference that data member from its class, function or array for use somewhere else in the program. A pointer denotes a central structure and a pointer cannot be significant as a result of emergent properties of running code – a pointer must reference a pre-existing structure in order to ‘contextualize’ a later function into the program. Articulation theory’s Marxist roots (especially through the work of Ernesto Laclau) affirm the rejection of structure dogmatically as structure is understood as purveying institutional ideology. In this manner, articulation theory generates a teleology where structure is rendered to a ‘maybeness’ – if something never happened then it does not define a thing. However, a ball is an object that can be thrown and an apple is an object that can be consumed regardless of whether people have never thrown a ball or eaten an apple. To follow articulation theory for the apple is to allow the ontology of the apple to exclude a structure of being food based on no person ever having eaten one. This would not only be false for the apple but it would also preclude the possibility of understanding how the apple is related to other foods in that structured category ‘food’ that have already been consumed. Through articulation theory we can only know that the apple is food or not through trying to consume it, whereas with confirmation of a structure and category ‘food’ then we may actually deduce that apple is a food by virtue of its related properties to other fruits or seeds. Those deductions may stimulate the ‘trying’ to consume (or understand) which otherwise might not have happened spontaneously through contextual happenings and actual events.

²² Morley argues that the passive ‘people-meter’ as a method of quantitative measurement of media “watching” could not constitute a theory because there is no reference to mechanisms or processes to explain the relationship among variables (Morley, 174).

²³In addition, I find it worth mentioning that the traditional definitions of public and private necessarily having social valence becomes problematic when considering nebulous experience common to virtually all humans. Are nightmares experienced as less terrifying by the white upper class than the black working class? Are they less disturbing to a mercenary or a plutocrat? It would be unfair to diminish the psychological and individual experiences of terror of one person compared with another based on ascribing them ‘privilege’ through class. We should all know that rape is just as terrifying to the victim regardless of their social standing, economic worth, political power, level of education, or any superficial markers that might seek to identify them. To believe otherwise is to dehumanize individuals based on social criteria and such a process cannot be justified – in a word, it is fascism.

²⁴ Morley later recognized the “de-domestication” of media, but holds that it is merely part of a “redesign” on media consumption that still retains its domestic base (Morley *b*, 104).

²⁵ Morley notes that technological determinism is problematic however technological eras do indeed impact reception of media. Morley, cites Dominique Pasquier (2003), who theorizes that “reception frames” may be an important consideration in audience reception and the frames are determined by technological formats as much as through media programs (Morley *b*, 115)

²⁶ Morley notes that the boom of ethnographies guided by the spirit of multidimensional models has recently become regarded as misguided and pointless populism (Morley *b*, 102). Morley further comments that ethnography runs the risk of anecdotalism where examples are taken as having general applicability. Extrapolation from ethnographic example must be carefully executed (Morley *b*, 106).

²⁷ Morley writes, “... I am very aware that too much context can sometimes be a highly dangerous thing” and cites Andy Ruddock (2000) in remarking that the “traditional methods” may serve better on occasion (Morley *b*, 107).

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