

# Closed Texts and Passive Masses

## An Examination of the Television Host as 'Re-encoder'

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## Introduction

In 1935, Rudolf Arnheim writes of television that, “if we succeed in mastering the new medium it will enrich us. But it can also put our mind to sleep” (Arnheim, 195). Arnheim anticipates from the onset of television broadcasting that audiences might become an informed and active public through the medium, but could also be rendered a domesticated and passive mass. These polarized outcomes have come to define the field of reception studies within television studies. Theorists, such as those of the Frankfurt School or the ‘New Left’ have been suspicious of television’s use in society. Max Horkheimer understands the “pleasure in the mastery of machinery” and its power to consolidate the individual into society as replacing “the joy of making personal decisions, of cultural development, and of the free exercise of imagination” (Miller, 112). John Hartley, instead, sees a convergence in ‘knowledge-production’ and ‘audience-consumption’ making television, “a two-way communication, interactive practice of meaning-exchange where you cannot watch TV passively at the semiotic level” (Hartley, 135). Umberto Eco, introduced the semiotic concept of ‘aberrant decoding’ to describe a process of audience decoding which is relatively unaware of the meaning encoded into the text. How can the host/presenter of television programs become a ‘pivot’ for the two schools of thought regarding audience reception?<sup>1</sup> Semiotic analysis of ‘encoding/decoding’ processes can reveal the television host as a mediator/intermediary, who “re-encodes” meaning in the flow of information. This paper intends to show that ‘re-encoding’ by the television host renders the audience aware of preferred readings which in turn functions to hermeneutically close the text. The host renders a text closed through denying ‘aberrant decoding’ by the audience –

interpretation has restrictions through the host making aware the preferred reading originally encoded. The television host as intermediary restricts audience choice which I hope to demonstrate through two case studies – an interview with television host, Fred ‘Fearless’ Kennedy and a second interview with television producer, Jonas Bell-Pasht.\* When choice is restricted at the semiotic level through the presence of the host, television experience can render the audience a passive mass much in the way that Arnheim fears at the medium’s birth in the 1930s.

### **‘TELEVISION AS TEACHING’**

#### ***“Camp Fear”***

Much of television studies’ discourse has been interested in questions of cultural decline, commercial exploitation, political danger and social reform (Hartley, 129). John Hartley uses the example of NTSC television formatting’s international spread over the “superior” PAL formatting as making evident that, “the first television generation was culturally American” (Hartley, 57). This potentially teleological claim is informed by Hartley’s contextualization of international television cultures.<sup>2</sup> Hartley notes that Great Britain’s BBC had its public mandate curtailed by government sponsorship and intervention, while Germany was utilizing early television for propaganda during the Nazi regime (Hartley, Chp. 7).<sup>3</sup> World War II itself interrupted broadcasting, stunting European television culture at a time when the United States was not affected in the same way. As a result, European television culture was prevented from “developing its own style, its own literacy, its own autonomy” (Hartley, 86). Through the

examples of the BBC and Nazi television production and usage, it may not be surprising to understand that television studies developed “a tradition of denunciation” (Hartley, 66).

Hartley notes I.A. Richards, the ‘inventor’ of ‘practical criticism’, as fostering a tradition of textual criticism that is premised on an anxiety about qualified opinion defying the preferences of the majority (Hartley, 66). The result of this tradition of criticism has been to deny the potential for popular culture to operate through forms of teaching (Hartley, 66). For Hartley, the main charge against this tradition is that in organizing its perspective from the position of observer, the alternative perspectival position of user is downgraded to a passive subject both conjuring and reacting to effects from television use (Hartley, 132). Hartley posits ‘New Left’ theorist/historian Raymond Williams as the ‘vector’ for this “virus of pessimistic adversarialism” (or “Camp Fear”)(Hartley, 150).<sup>4</sup> Hartley associates this ‘fear school’ with the mass-communications tradition – a social sciences approach to television studies (Hartley, 132). Hartley summarizes regarding the mass-communications tradition:

“What are the uses of television? It gives ‘society’ a way of talking to itself, about itself, in conditions where cross-demographic communication are mutually untranslatable, and inter-social knowledge is hearsay.”

(Hartley, 132)

### ***‘The Uselessness of Work’***

Franz Kafka writes:

“capitalism is a system of relationships, which go from inside to out, from outside to in, from above to below, and from below to above. Everything is relative, everything is in chains. Capitalism is a condition both of the world and of the soul”

This Kafkaian claim was best exemplified in television studies by the Critical Theory of the theorists working at the Institute for Social Research in the 1930s and 1950s – also known as the ‘Frankfurt School’. Max Horkheimer, a director of the institute, understands the world to have a duality in its social totality – a tension between economy and culture – which makes the world not ours but the world of capital (Tarr, 32).<sup>5</sup> Theodor Adorno writes, “the form of the total system requires everyone to respect the law of exchange if he [sic] does not wish to be destroyed” (Tarr, 164). This principle drives individuals toward being identical – to becoming a totality. For these thinkers, man [sic] is a social being prior to being an individual (Tarr, 162).<sup>6</sup> Horkheimer claims, “the human being is capable of realizing himself [sic] as an individual only in a just and humane society” (Tarr, 163).<sup>7</sup> The improbability for capitalism to forge a “just society” which would allow the individual to retain autonomy within a mass population led the Frankfurt School to ultimately pessimistic outlooks on popular culture and mass media (Tarr, 34).

Horkheimer writes, “liberal idealism, which expects salvation from the mere unfettering of thought in every human being... overlooks historical distinctions” (Horkheimer, 232). Adorno extends this argument against liberal idealism when claiming that its problem is rooted in “subjectivity that is ignorant of itself, that mistakes itself for objectivity” (Adorno & Horkheimer, 6). ‘Television as teaching’ would be construed by the Frankfurt School as work that is ignorant of itself – “the uselessness of work” (Adorno & Horkheimer, 13). Hartley’s concept of ‘television as teaching’ is predicated on a form of liberal idealism which the

Frankfurt School refutes as possible.<sup>8</sup> To understand the role of the television host will require a careful contextualization of the arguments regarding television's use and the composition and nature of television's audience.<sup>9</sup>

### **Television as *'Transmodern'***

John Hartley is concerned with media literacy – a major component of reception studies – which he addresses from the point-of-view of the 'reader' or audience. "There is a growing family resemblance between academic author and TV producer, between textbook and TV show, between student and audience", which leads Hartley to posit that television's primary use for society is as a platform and a forum for teaching (Hartley, 5). For Hartley, media is a site of re-convergence for the meaning-exchange of individuals and the knowledge-production of institutions (Hartley, 6).<sup>10</sup> The 'virtual' aspect of the television experience is what allows for the re-convergence of what was formerly disarticulated by modernity – institutions of government, media and education in the social life of individuals (Hartley, 7). Hartley concludes that, "television, in reuniting them, is thus a 'transmodern' medium – pre-modern and postmodern all at once" (Hartley, 7).

Television is modern in its advanced capitalist industrial model and commodified cultural form. Television is postmodern in the stylistics of its textuality and is part of mass media as opposed to high culture. Television is pre-modern in its cultural use which is prefigured by "socio-semiotic aspects of the first mass medium, the medieval Catholic church, and its phenomenal form" which "exploits pre-modern (oral) modes of communication based on family and a domestic setting" (Hartley, 41). TV replaces the oral mode of teaching from the

church while it is also situated in the home, adding a new mode to family teaching (Hartley, 42).<sup>11</sup> Television is transmodern and what it teaches is “modes of citizenship and self-knowledge based on culture and identity within a virtualized community of unparalleled size and diversity” (Hartley, 41). For Hartley, this is the ‘use’ of television – “television is a social institution of teaching in a ‘transmodern’, anthropological perspective” (Hartley, 26 & 41).

### ***‘Cross-demographic Communication’***

John Hartley’s concept of ‘television as transmodern teaching’ carries against theories which posit television as a mechanism utilized within ideologically-based power structures and state apparatuses (Hartley, 42). Hartley borrows from Birmingham School founder, Richard Hoggart, the idea of teaching as a “love of influencing” – a function not related to populism and control but as a positive form of ‘inter-generational’ communication (Hartley, 44). The form of communication which television mediates is better described through the Hoggartian term, ‘cross-demographic communication’ which understands teaching as a two-way communication process between society and institutions which mediate societal discourse (Hartley, 31).<sup>12</sup> Hartley suggests that cross-demographic communication can be teaching as opposed to ‘populist ideology’ (Hartley, 32). Hartley asks:

“Can cross-demographic communication be recuperated as a positive rather than negative social activity, on the model of teaching, which itself needs to be recuperated in the same way”

(Hartley, 32)

If reception studies can adopt Hartley's suggestion that television is a model of cross-demographic communication and a transmodern medium, then terms have to change. The audience is no longer a consumer and the text no longer a commodity. Television as teaching would understand TV producers as the 'knowledge class' of the re-converged "GEM-megalomere" of the government, media and education (Hartley, 45). The text of television – a program – would be understood as providing opportunities for transmodern media literacy<sup>13</sup>. For example, the recent surge of interest in televised mixed-martial arts tournaments and events (i.e. UFC) would be understood not as an inducement toward passivity for lower classes in the class power structure, but instead as a model for teaching 'good' violence from 'bad' violence (issues of sanctioning) and self-defence. This notion of television as teaching marks a clear shift away from 'Birminghamite' notions of power, hegemony and ideology (Hartley, 54).<sup>14</sup> For Hartley, earlier uses of television that evoke the question of power (i.e. early BBC regulation, Nazi propaganda broadcasting) are circumstantial given television's transmodern nature and that television had its philosophical and political pre-conditions for its invention as a social institution in written works dating as early as those of Thomas Hobbes in 1651 (Hartley, 62). Hartley concludes:

“...television has achieved its public profile in spite rather than because of the actual use made directly of it by those immediately involved in its production, regulation and viewing. I've already argued that television's reputation - its cultural 'image' – was established very early on, even before it was invented, by discourses that were about something other than television itself”

(Hartley, 129)



### **Television as *'Subliminal Communication'***

'Television as teaching' has had many challengers from what Hartley has dubbed, "Camp Fear" - primarily theorists and historians who assert that television is a form of entertainment and that the medium constructs a market for its 'consumer-audience'. Guy Lyon Playfair is known for his work in the area of parapsychology, but has also written a contentious text, "The Evil Eye" on the uses of television. For Playfair, TV personalities have a uniformity ("personality-cloning process") which renders the spectator to a state where familiarity precludes critical engagement and thus the possibility for teaching (Playfair, 21). Hence, television is entertainment and based in operations of passivity for its audience (Playfair, 28). In these terms, television is geared to produce collectivized thought which hampers the process of self-reflection essential to teaching and learning (Playfair, 41). Playfair's ideas about 'television as not-teaching' recall the Frankfurt School. Horkheimer purports that technology's role in contemporary society undergoes an "ethical and aesthetic mystification" (Horkheimer, 231). This 'mystification' seems to fit well with Playfair's understanding of "personality-cloning" in the mechanical reproduction of television programs. For Playfair, television is based in subliminal communication and the resistant viewer is an illusory construct (Playfair, 70).<sup>15</sup>

For Playfair, 'television as teaching' is a contradiction in terms.<sup>16</sup> Playfair forwards a concept which could be valuable in supporting his polemical claims - 'television as transmutation'.<sup>17</sup> For Playfair, everything on television has been 'transmuted' into television. That is to say, for example, that how to enjoy a cartoon through television is only how to enjoy

them on television and says nothing about how to enjoy them through other media forms (Playfair, 79). Playfair claims that television transmutes everything to an entertainment form of itself which would deny the possibility for 'television as teaching' (Playfair, 79). However, television transmuting information into content does not in itself negate the possibility that the content can then be learned or taught.<sup>18</sup> Playfair, does not provide enough support for his claims, however, a key challenge to 'television as teaching' is introduced which may intersect with findings from the semiotic analysis when examining the role of the television host.

## **Conclusion**

Umberto Eco writes, "television is the school book of modern adults, as much as it is the only authoritative school book for our children" (Eco 1979, 16 & 22).<sup>19</sup> Hoggart believes television to be a "moderator of manners" (Hoggart 1960, 41) and that the working class finds empowerment through media in its capacity to educate (Owen, 3).<sup>20</sup> This optimistic thrust in reception studies seems to inform Hartley's project for proving the 'television as teaching' model. Admittedly, Hartley's ideas seem to hinge on a liberal idealism which understands television use as an open hermeneutical, two-way communication between 'reader' and 'author' (audience and producer, respectively).<sup>21</sup> He finds support for this claim through showing that television is a transmodern medium operating through cross-demographic communication.<sup>22</sup>

However, Playfair introduces the concept of 'television as transmutation' – the transmutation of information into television content as an entertainment form. Playfair's argument suggests that the audience is constructed as a passive mass through the ideology of

entertainment regulated by the institution of media. The role of the host may provide evidence that a ‘transmutation’ of some kind does take place between organizing information and broadcasting it on television. However, I suggest in this paper that this transmutation is not directly concerned with content and form (its by-product), but with the semiotics of encoding/decoding that dictate the manner in which the content and form are interpreted by audiences.

## **THE TELEVISION HOST**

### **The ‘*Sociable*’ Host**

The proliferation of television channels, the growth of pay service and the shift to digital broadcasting has increased host-led programs because they are cheaper to produce than dramas (Bonner, 3). For Frances Bonner, the host/presenter, is the one who leads the program and guides the program to viewers and viewers to it (Bonner, 3). Hosts can be understood as ‘cultural intermediaries’ who teach the “art of living” (Bourdieu, 359).<sup>23</sup> John Langer argues that hosts are ‘personalities’ and, not ‘stars’ (Bonner, 8). Hosts as personalities can be characterized as regular and predictable, intimate and immediate, and above all familiar (Bonner, 8). Paddy Scannell believes, “presenters are the hinge around which the sociable relationship with television operates” (Bonner, 10).<sup>24</sup> Scannell understands ‘sociability’ as “talk for talk’s sake” and that it is, “the most fundamental characteristic of broadcasting’s communicative ethos” (Bonner, 14). Scannell’s condition for broadcast intelligibility is authenticity of the host (Bonner, 58). Richard Dyer understands authenticity in television as established in media texts by, “the use of markers that indicate lack of control, lack of premeditation and privacy” (Bonner 58). For

Langer, the host exemplifies a “will to ordinariness” which if consistent in performance can lead to a sense of sincerity (Bonner, 28 & 58).<sup>25</sup> The host is often determined by their appearance, technical speaking skills and specialized knowledge (Bonner, 33).<sup>26</sup> The evaluations of sincerity, authenticity and appearance are made through audience reception. I would suggest through this summary, that the host is a highly independent figure in television, especially in the semiotic sense and through the ‘personal’ relationships which the host fosters with the audience and the professional relationships with networks/producers which determine maintenance and proper operation of the host position.

### ***‘Host as Teacher’***

Hartley, in formulating his model of ‘television as teaching’, claims that the first ‘lesson’ for the audience is that of how to continue to watch television. Generic and semiotic devices promote this ‘re-consumption’ – series, news, serials and casting, location, dialogue and plot all work to teach cultural literacy and thus promote audience identity and choice (Hartley, 156).<sup>27</sup> Identity and choice is what constitutes the ‘DIY citizenship’ of audiences as opposed to their realization as a passive mass (Hartley, 186). The ideal television host has been claimed to be “warm, outgoing and likeable – someone the viewer would like to have as a friend” (Blum & Lindheim, 16).<sup>28</sup> The host both chooses and is chosen-by the audience which complicates some aspects of DIY citizenship.<sup>29</sup> Scheduling theory is based on the principle of low entropy which sees the average television viewer as preferring to make as few choices as possible (Blum & Lindheim, 133).<sup>30</sup> I would suggest that the host can ‘stand-in’ as the active ‘choice-maker’ for the audience. The ‘friendship’, ‘guidance’ and ‘choice-making’ of the host are arguably very

similar to the function of a traditional teacher.<sup>31</sup> However, Hartley's 'television as teaching' thesis is predicated on the teaching of DIY citizenship which entails the audience as having autonomous identity and full range of hermeneutical choice. The operational role of the host would seem to refute Hartley's thesis.

### ***'Host as Expert'***

Annette Hill's work in reception studies has interrogated the relationship of television producers and the audiences for their programs. Hill finds that 'expertise' of the host/presenter is rejected if producer 'interference' is perceived by audiences (Palmer, 11). Gareth Palmer notes that this finding implies a "pedagogical drive" to lifestyle television programs (Palmer, 11). The 'triadic' relationship of *producer-host-audience*, as well as, qualities of sincerity and authenticity for hosts could suggest that more generally this 'pedagogical drive' pertains to most host-led television programs (but certainly those with 'host as expert').<sup>32</sup> However, Biressi and Nunn contend that the 'host as expert' is an "intervener" that "smuggles in transformative experience which unmakes and remakes the self through a regime of life change" (Biressi & Nunn, Chp. 2). Biressi and Nunn's argument recalls The Frankfurt School's definition of social totality. The expert host as 'intervener' in this way is one who induces a kind of hypnotic trance for audiences as they waver between a presence and absence of understanding how the television program information can alter their sense of self. This tension in understanding seems congruent with the Frankfurt School's claims that tension in social totality ultimately results in an absence of individual consciousness in lieu of mass identification. Guy Redden notes that this transformative process for the audience through the role of the expert host is

indeed paradoxical as it implies that the audience does not simply view as themselves, but as an “inferior” version of themselves – a point of recognition prompted by the host. Redden writes:

“Life transformation is not a developmental model of progress. It requires a rupture. It requires that in order to live a good life an ordinary person must break with their past, leave it behind to be their best self.”

(Redden, 141)

Hill and Palmer note a relatively open hermeneutic system through the triadic relationship of producer-host-audience while Biressi & Nunn and Redden consider the expert host as prompting a transformative process which closes elements of interpretation, identification and choice – a process arguably conditioning the audience as a passive mass. Semiotic analysis can potentially help ‘sort out’ these oppositional conceptions of the aforementioned triadic relationship.

### ***‘Host as Entertainer’***

For Playfair, television creates a personality-cloning process whereby, “to appear on television... [is] to be squeezed dry and discarded” (Playfair, 20).<sup>33</sup> Bernard Timberg provides a somewhat alternate view, tying ‘host as entertainer’ to the concept of ‘fresh talk’ (Timberg, 357). ‘Fresh talk’ is talk that is not scripted, but is generated moment to moment. Fresh talk is always constructed through a form of direct address to the audience and is always in the present tense (Timberg, 358-359). The operating principles of fresh talk (i.e. intimacy,

immediacy and liveness) dictate all 'television talk' for host-led television programs (Timberg, 359).<sup>34</sup> Timberg writes:

“From a production point of view, the host is frequently the managing editor of the show. From a marketing point of view, the host is the label that sells the product.”

(Timberg, 359)

Timberg theorizes the host as an 'agent' of the producers/networks. However, how can semiotic analysis inform these claims? Lee Siegel understands television hosts as, “chimeras of ahistorical calm” and that audiences do not engage television to teach and be taught, but to have emotions aroused and then cathartically released through self-reflection and closure (Siegel, 226-227). For Siegel, the host arouses an emotion in the viewer and then shares that emotion with the viewer. I would suggest that as provoking as these 'chimeras' might sound they do live up to their 'hybrid' nature in explaining the role of the host. That is to say, Siegel is describing the function and role of the host in terms that intersect Frankfurtian concepts of social totality and Hartleyian ideas about open hermeneutics in the triadic relationship of television meaning-production.

### ***'Host as Petite Bourgeoisie'***

Pierre Bourdieu in his book *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste* (1979 & 1984) argues for an understanding of the television host as “petite bourgeoisie” (Bourdieu, 365). The 'petite bourgeoisie' is a seller of words and not things, with the audience geared as consumers of those words. Television becomes a site for cultural facilitation through “gentle

manipulation” (Bourdieu, 366). The ‘host as petite bourgeoisie’ operates through a “spirit of new auto-didacticism” creating passion in areas of knowledge overlooked or excluded from the educational system (Bourdieu, 77).<sup>35</sup> For Bourdieu, ‘television as teaching’ is moot as a concept if used to inform an understanding of the nature of the television audience. For Bourdieu, even traditional modes of teaching promote knowledge as a product, and students as a consumer of that product (Bourdieu, 328). The ‘host as petite bourgeoisie’ is a cultural entrepreneur – a distributor of media’s manufactured products to the viewing consumer.<sup>36</sup> For Gareth Palmer, the host teaches through believing in the market to which they are a distributor and by becoming consultants for lessons of consumerism (Palmer, 6).<sup>37</sup> From a semiotic standpoint, this conception of the host allows for an open hermeneutic system in the triadic relationship of producer-host-audience, but, it also implies a passivity of that audience – Eco’s concept of aberrant decoding cannot amend or be included in Bourdieu’s theories.

## **Conclusion**

Through an analysis of the function of the host, it would seem that there is a plurality of explanations for that role.<sup>38</sup> In all cases examined here, the television host constructs a triadic relationship of meaning-production. Semiotic analysis may sort out the relationship between the host and the audience in a manner which would suggest whether the audience experiences host-led television as active participants or as a passive mass.

## **SEMIOTICS AND HERMENEUTICS**



Post-structuralism considers the meaning of a text (semiotics) to be in its interpretation (hermeneutics)(Creeber, 28). Roland Barthes writes, “in the text, only the reader speaks” and “writing is not the communication of a message which starts from the author and proceeds to the reader; it is specifically the voice of reading itself” (Barthes, *S/Z*, 151). Therefore, a text is a process and a system (synergy) where coding is guaranteed and where decoding is guaranteed through encoding. For Marshall McLuhan, television is “cool media” which allows for more participation and has a lower intensity of information than “hot media” such as film and radio (Ellis, 14). For Jim Collins, television is a site of “semiotic excess” emerging in part from the proliferation of channels and opportunities for interactivity (Creeber, 35). This ‘semiotic excess’ creates textual fragmentation which determines an open hermeneutic system - television creates unique ‘reading positions’ for an audience.<sup>39</sup> Hartley writes:

“Television came into a world which was already intensely and complicatedly semiotic, seething with discourses, ‘traditions’ of understanding, semiotic regimes and really venerable institutions of knowledge. All this caused television to mean something specific at every point and in every detail of its invention, throughout the process and subsequently as it became established as a cultural form.”

(Hartley, 65)

### **Encoding/Decoding**

Birmingham School’s Stuart Hall introduced the semiotic concept of ‘encoding/decoding’ which explains the operations of the hermeneutic system when reading a text.<sup>40</sup> Hall explains that through encoding a text with a particular set of meanings and

messages, the reader decodes those messages/meanings in a variety of possible ways – preferred readings, oppositional readings, negotiated readings (Hills, 96 & Hall, 62).<sup>41</sup> Encoding/decoding creates and produces a message, but both processes also give that message certain meanings. The encoding of meanings may or may not be conscious or intentional (Casey *et al.*, 81). In television, meaning is constructed through interpretation, but the ‘proper’ transmission requires knowledge of the codes (Hall, 3). Hall states, “meaning is a dialogue – always only partially understood, always an unequal exchange” (Hall, 4). For Hall, “codes fix the relationship between concepts and signs”, but “because meanings are always changing and slipping, codes operate more like social conventions than like fixed laws or unbreakable rules” (Hall, 21). That is to say, codes can change and decoding will involve a kind of ‘unraveling’ of meaning only partially connected to the intentional meaning encoded in the text. Preferred readings could be easily substituted by oppositional and negotiated readings (which both imply an acknowledgement by the reader of the preferred reading) but can also be replaced by ‘aberrant’ readings.

### **Institutional Context**

“The ‘agency’ of readers, their freedom to make meanings or determine their own lives, is constrained by the structures of texts, of television institutions and of societies. Thus, understanding of viewers’ readings... might best be balanced by study of the institutional contexts of both production and reception.”

(Robin Nelson, 79)

The institutional model of television understands that networks/producers engage in a process of ‘agenda-setting’. This process is often considered to be covert (Casey *et al.*, 7) implying a

power structure in textual encoding practices and in the construction of preferred readings (Hills, 96). David Barker understands the communicative ability of television texts to function largely through production techniques (Barker, 170). These techniques create methods of controlling the encoding of meaning. For Joshua Meyrowitz, institutions encode meaning into texts with concern for different 'modes' of media literacy (Meyrowitz, 429). Meyrowitz writes, "producers generally want audiences to be aware of content elements, but not to be aware of grammar elements" (Meyrowitz, 432). The producers thus create a 'conscious' and 'unconscious' layering within the encoding process which will alter audience's perceptions of message content. Cultivation theory understands messages to be singularly controlled by institutions which produce them. James Shanahan and Michael Morgan write, "data which show congruence between audience beliefs and television messages are functionally interpreted as serving needs and desires of the institutions which control messages. Audience 'activity' does not need to enter into this equation at all" (Shanahan & Morgan, 38). I would suggest that specifically through the re-encoding of messages by the host, the triadic relationship of meaning-production in television experience situates 'control' at the level of the host and not the producer.

### ***'Aberrant Decoding'***

Barthes determines that polysemy and closure in texts is dependent upon the "cultural competence" of the viewer, reader or listener (Casey *et al.*, 168).<sup>42</sup> This would imply that the 'culture of production' and 'culture of reception' operate with different codes, leading to audiences decoding a meaning separate from the preferred ones encoded into a text. Umberto

Eco named this process, 'aberrant decoding'. Aberrant decoding is an integral part of Eco's semiotic methodology which sees the reader as having maximum flexibility and responsibility (Caesar, 4).<sup>43</sup> In television, Eco sees the power struggle for meaning to exist at the point of reception and not at the source of the message (Caesar, 45).<sup>44</sup> Michael Caesar notes that aberrant decoding implies that encoded "instructions" for decoding were ambiguous (Caesar, 118).<sup>45</sup> This understanding is critical to my thesis – if television viewing necessarily involves aberrant decoding and therefore ambiguous instructions, it is difficult to claim that television is a model of/for teaching. In his book, *The Island of the Day Before* (1994) Eco writes, "...interpretation is indefinite. The attempt to look for a final, unattainable meaning leads to the acceptance of a never-ending drift or slide of meaning" (Eco, *TlotDB*, 32). For Eco, preferred readings are merely "pretended meanings" and aberrant readings are the only legitimate methods for decoding of texts (Caesar, 147).<sup>46</sup> Eco holds that aberrant decoding implies a kind of personal hallucinatory experience, but that this is necessary when reading an open text (Eco, *RofR*, 40).<sup>47</sup> I suggest that the re-encoding of messages by the host hermeneutically closes the text and denies aberrant decoding.

## **Conclusion**

There is a plurality of 'kinds of readers' – of audience types. James Anderson claims, "the notion of audience is a discursive product – a social construction that makes meaningful our claim about it" (Anderson, 91). Jhally and Lewis argue that textual decoding necessarily involves encoding, or what I would like to call "re-encoding" – instructing while being instructed (Jhally & Lewis, 442). This concept recalls Barthes's "death of the author" whereby the reader is

the 'real' author of the text. Barthes writes, "the reader is the very space in which are inscribed, without any of them being lost, all the citations out of which a writing is made; the unity of a text is not in its origin but in its destination..." (Barthes, *TRoL*, 54). Henry Jenkins also notes this "re-encoding" when examining 'fan-text-poaching'. Jenkins writes about the decoding process as one where, "consumption becomes production; reading becomes writing; spectator culture becomes participatory culture" (Jenkins, 490).<sup>48</sup> 'Learning as production of knowledge' realizes the 'host as learning entrepreneur' – re-encoding messages to direct audiences to the design of the messages themselves (Hartley, *RHaCS*, 154). This understanding implies that 'television as teaching' is congruent with the 'host as re-encoder' or 'host as learning entrepreneur', but counter to Hartley's ideas, the host would then necessarily be hermeneutically closing the texts for the audience while also denying the possibility for Eco's concept of 'aberrant decoding'. 'Television as teaching' cannot also include the teaching of DIY citizenship (premised on autonomy and choice) which Hartley formulates. Susan Sontag has argued against hermeneutics in textual analysis, claiming that interpretation is what blocks our access to the sensuous, formal, qualities of the work (Caesar, 156). The 'host as re-encoder' may be realizing some of Sontag's critiques through re-encoding at the semiotic level, teaching (learning entrepreneurship) at the level of transmission (knowledge-production) and reinforcing the inducement of assent (through the semiotic and pedagogical drives) by aesthetic devices such as liveness ('fresh talk'), intimacy (direct address) and immediacy (sociability). I argue here, that the closing of the hermeneutic system through the television host is reinforced by the "sensuous" qualities of the host's personality.

## CONCLUSION

Lee Siegel considers the host as a mediator between different constructions of public life – namely, those which define the audience in idealized terms of spectatorship and those which are defined by the actual experience of audiences (Siegel, 258). Through Siegel’s terms, the host is a “return of the repressed” as the audience realizes a kind of rupture between competing constructions of the spectator’s identity and experience.<sup>49</sup> I suggest that the triadic relationship of producer-host-audience is a site of rupture in semiotic terms, where the host actively re-encodes messages of the producer and upon presenting the re-encoded message to audiences makes them aware of the original encoding. Aberrant readings are in effect blocked as the audience is aware of the encoding process through the re-encoding by the host.<sup>50</sup> Host-led television programs become hermeneutically closed texts. Eco believed that a teacher has a duty to say ‘only trust me within reason’ (Hartley, 152). The host as a ‘re-encoder’ of messages creates an implied trust by the audiences and producers which defies reasonable interpretation and semiotic self-determination. The meaning of the message through the host becomes contingent on the host’s personality – their ‘body language’ and appearance; sincerity and consistency; their authenticity and management of their private life in the public’s eye.<sup>51</sup> The host has a ‘gatekeeper’ role and can shape the text accordingly (Casey *et al.*, 7). John Corner holds that the host seeks to align their gaze with that of the audience in order to encourage assent (Corner, 65). Chiara Ferrari claims that the host can even reify national identity through the management of their persona and through ‘aligning’ the gazes of the triadic relationship by means of re-encoding messages (Ferrari, 128-147). The findings of this paper provide important critiques of reception studies and mass media studies through positioning the role of the

television host into the broader media context from which they operate. Ferrari's research suggests that my own research could explore the role and function of the host in the international culture of television as issues of nationalism and identity might seek to conform semiotic processes of re-encoding.

\*The interviews come as appendices in this paper and are not necessary to be reviewed for the grading process. The interviews highlight some of the issues dealt with in this paper while also providing 'clues' to how I was guided in the development of my thesis.

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<sup>1</sup> These two school being the social sciences' mass communications tradition to which the Frankfurt School is affiliated and the other being the humanities' Cultural Studies approach to which the Birmingham School is affiliated.

<sup>2</sup> The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development determined that the USA watches at least double the hours of television daily than any other Western nation (average of 7.5 hrs between 1997-2005). (Miller, 17)

<sup>3</sup> For Hartley, television required a certain type of domestic setting which Europe could not provide at first. "Television was invented not as a mass medium, but a domestic one" (Hartley, 99) To develop an ideology of domesticity required a refrigerator. Attallah's work shows that the fridge transformed the home from a place of production to one of consumption (Hartley, 99)

<sup>4</sup> Stuart Hall believes that Raymond Williams's equation of working class culture with mass commercial culture produces "damaging results" (Hall, *RHaCS*, 21)

<sup>5</sup> The Frankfurt School was concerned with the totality of society in a dialectic sense, dealing with continuity and not change, where 'ought to be' wasn't important (Tarr, 141-145).

<sup>6</sup> The Frankfurt School also understood leadership to not manifest itself among the masses as leadership is defined by "deeper insight" which cannot be fostered in a mass social context.

<sup>7</sup> For these thinkers, such ideas about individuals and the mass are known historically, leading the Frankfurt School to define its Critical Theory as a form of positivist sociology (Tarr, 37 & 138).

<sup>8</sup> For the Frankfurt School, society is not humane and thus human beings are not realized as individuals. The result of this is that in mass culture, the individual is made identical to others in society and technologies such as media are permeated by ideology which maintains the organization of the mass, necessarily bereft of real individuality among its members.

<sup>9</sup> Matt Hills contends that reception studies in TV studies has "simplistically" depicted a bifurcation of methodologies – qualitative and quantitative, arts/humanities and social science researchers. This has had the effect of "falsely" turning audience studies into a kind of "gladiatorial struggle" (Hills, 94)

<sup>10</sup> For Hartley, the public part of the self had been "ex-somatized" and socialized into institutions, but in the postmodern context there is now a re-convergence situated primarily in media (Hartley, 7)

<sup>11</sup> Hartley notes that literacy created an antagonism with the Catholic church at the time of the Reformation. Digital literacy presents similar tensions as it is a medium of letters and oral communication (Hartley, 42)

<sup>12</sup> Traditionally, cross-demographic communication has been interrogated as subordinate to ideology and populism (class and economy) and has been subsumed by the concept of capitalist communication (Hartley, 31).

<sup>13</sup> After the 'effects school' (Frankfurt School and others) and prior to Cultural Studies was the "uses and gratifications" approach which implied passivity on the part of the television audience, but a "joyful passivity". In a manner of speaking, this tradition saw the audience as the 'consumed' and the television as the 'consumer'. (Miller, 124)

<sup>14</sup> The outcome of 'television as teaching' is both "literacy in audio-visuality and citizenship of media" (Hartley, 46).

<sup>15</sup> Raymond Williams argues that because television is permeated by ideology, the viewer is rendered passive and 'choice' is a mere semblance. The choice that does appear for audiences through the television experience simply serves a "subliminal programme" within the ideological base of the media state apparatus (Williams, *TaCF*, 135-145)

<sup>16</sup> Playfair uses behavioural studies and cognitive science experiments to support his claims. Playfair's argument that television, "suppresses personal progress by its destruction of natural learning processes" and that "educational TV is a contradiction in terms" rely on a particular confirmation bias of vague definition (Playfair, 57 &



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172). He fails to define the character of subliminal communication and the “natural” aspects of learning processes. The Harvard experiment (one of many that he cites) may have shown that learning was more efficient through reading a book than watching TV, but it did also conclude that there was indeed learning through the television experience. Clearly, television is not strictly a site for ‘not-teaching’ and ‘non-learning’.

<sup>17</sup> We can take ‘transmutation’ in this case to mean ‘changing forms’ or ‘changing nature’.

<sup>18</sup> A possible limitation to Playfair’s claim is through Bolter and Grusin’s concept of remediation. Television may not only be transmuting information into content which is medium specific but may also be transmuting information that has already been remediated through another media form or may be transmuting information to remediate another media form. Whether this is happening, does not exclude Playfair’s point about television potentially rendering all televised content into an entertainment form, but it does complicate the argument if one is to consider remediation. In addition, Bonner recognizes that traditionally most television hosts have backgrounds in radio and stage (Bonner, 34)

<sup>19</sup> Hartley believes that writing is catching up with reading and that “media literacy is merely following the historical pattern set by print literacy” (Hartley, *RHaCS*, 138)

<sup>20</sup> Hoggart feared, however, that the lessons taught through television may challenge formal education and produce “tamed helots” out of its audiences. Susan Owen understands television to be outpacing formal schooling in its promotion of digital literacy (Owen, 15).

<sup>21</sup> Peter Bondanella categorizes ‘apocalyptic intellectuals’ (negative toward mass culture) from ‘integrated intellectuals’ (positive toward mass/pop culture. (Bondanella, 212-213). The use of the term ‘apocalyptic’ implies a kind of idealism perhaps in both “camps”.

<sup>22</sup> For Hartley, television’s use is seen as not being dictated by power structures where audiences are a passive mass subjugated to production and re-production of ideology through their experience of the medium.

<sup>23</sup> The first television host was X. Marcel Boulestin who presented a cooking show on the BBC in 1937 (Bonner 14). From the inception of the television host to the medium, one can appreciate that a host need not always be an expert in the topic of the program, but that often they are.

<sup>24</sup> Bonner does not exclude the possibility of more perverse relationships between host and audience where pleasure exists in the disliking of the host (Bonner, 10)

<sup>25</sup> Bonner notes that hosts can be intellectuals, but must generally be self-deprecating in how they parade their intelligence. Hosts can also be un-social, but must be construed by audiences as eccentrics. These hosts are most suited to genres where “entertainment is a by-product” (Bonner, 62-63)

<sup>26</sup> For Langer, longevity is a key term in understanding the nature of the host. Langer states, “the longer [the host] remains within television, the more likely their judgments, pronouncements and behaviour will be accorded some kind of serious attention” (Bonner, 66).

<sup>27</sup> Raymond Williams argues that ‘television as teaching’ is problematic because true experts on television makes for “boring television” but that quasi-experts who pander to entertainment aspects of the medium negate the possibility for television having educational value. For Williams, it is an issue of ideology – that ideologically education and entertainment strategies are at odds with each other (Williams, 140-142)

<sup>28</sup> Hoggart in his essay “Teaching with Style” remarks on the strength of his Leeds University professor, Bonamy Dobree’s teaching as being rooted in entertainment. Hoggart writes, “vivacity informed his lectures. They were exciting and stimulating rather than comprehensive or exhaustive. He deliberately moved across the formal boundaries of specialism. He laced his lectures with side-comments, odd aperçus from other disciplines, sudden changes of level, irruptions into contemporary affairs” (Hoggart, *STEO*, 212) This assessment of Hoggart’s might suggest that the host as both teacher and entertainer is no dilemma.

<sup>29</sup> In this case, ‘DIY’ is the familiar acronym for ‘do-it-yourself’. If the host is involved in the process of choice (such as re-encoding producer’s messages) then the audience is not completely “doing it” themselves.

<sup>30</sup> Scheduling theory is concerned with target audiences, block programming and counter-programming and these categories guide programmer’s decisions (Blum & Lindheim, 134).

<sup>31</sup> Rob Turnock sees sociability in the host as creating uneven relationships with audiences. For Turnock the sociability is structured. Horton and Wohl also understand a lack of reciprocity in the relationship of host and audience leading them to label the relationship a “para-social interaction”. Both sets of theorists present that the

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sociability of the host is in fact more like a teacher in the traditional sense, than that of a family relationship or a friendship (Bonner 17)

<sup>32</sup> Bonner notes that when the host is accompanied by an expert, it is the host who addresses the audience and not the expert (Bonner, 21)

<sup>33</sup> Television performance is geared to deceive, according to Playfair, who understands television as a purely entertainment-oriented media form (Playfair, 97).

<sup>34</sup> Scannell would understand ‘fresh talk’ to be part of sociability of the host – that which creates precedent for engagement between audiences and television programs. Scannell’s ‘sociability’ and Timberg’s ‘fresh talk’ operate through liveness (presence), intimacy (direct address) and immediacy (spontaneity)

<sup>35</sup> Adam Phillips, in his book *Missing Out* (2012) introduces a provocative concept of the “unlived lives”. Phillips writes, “we share our lives with the people we have failed to be”. Perhaps the television host is simply providing points of self-reflection on this phenomenon. The transfer of knowledge provides experience of what might-have-been but was-not. (Phillips, xii).

<sup>36</sup> Bourdieu is primarily concerned with the relegation of ‘real’ intellectuals. From a 1996 lecture, he states, “for very understandable reasons, the cleverest intellectuals have a tendency to withdraw to their Ivory Tower, because they have been burned in their confrontation with the cultural intermediaries, with the media in general, and having retired into the Ivory Tower, they deprive ordinary mortals of their knowledge, their competence and their values” (Bonner, 20)

<sup>37</sup> Bonner states, “speaking of television programmes ‘instructing’ viewers seems a little too didactic for contemporary television, except perhaps for parenting shows like *Supernanny*” (Bonner, 135). Contemporary television hosts follow a gentler approach of offering advice.

<sup>38</sup> Bonner remarks, “the [host] is an important analytic variable, albeit a difficult one to interrogate” (Bonner, *ELT*, 35).

<sup>39</sup> This semiotic/hermeneutic understanding of television led to the foundation of cultural studies (starting with the Birmingham School) as an approach to mass media studies which turned away from the effects-driven, passive-mass tenets of the social sciences mass-communications tradition, represented primarily by the Frankfurt School (Casey *et al.*, 18).

<sup>40</sup> Hall states that in the semiotic approach, not only words and images function as signifiers in the production of meaning, but also objects themselves. (Hall, 37) By that token, the host can be conceived of as a textual object.

<sup>41</sup> Henrietta Lidchi holds that the preferred reading is a result of an “economy of meaning” within the process of encoding and decoding which is a process that “translates, de-exoticizes and transfers what is alien into that which is comprehensible” (Lidchi, 166)

<sup>42</sup> To understand a television program as being ‘readable’ in a variety of ways would lead to Barthes’s concept of the text as polysemous (having multiple meanings simultaneously).

<sup>43</sup> Hartley writes that in the knowledge economy, “inventions are not complete until explored, extended or even reinvented by users” (Hartley, *RHaCS*, 143)

<sup>44</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin and Valentin Volosinov argue that language is heteroglot – the creation of texts reflects “multiple voices”. They also contend that reception or reading of a text involves ‘multiple voices’. Communication has a dialogic quality. Janet Maybin writes, “a speaker may explicitly or implicitly report or appropriate other voices: from written texts, authoritative figures, or a comment earlier in the conversation. The content and evaluative viewpoint of a voice, and the way in which the speaker reproduces or frames it, is an important part of the speaker’s construction of meaning” (Maybin 66-69 & 70) Dialogism implies that the receiver is not passive while ‘multiple voices’ in decoding could imply that host re-encoding does not hermeneutically close a text, allow Gramsci and Bourdieu’s ideas about organic intellectuals and cultural facilitators, respectively, complicate the issue. It would seem that potentially ‘multiple voices’ in the encoding/decoding process could effectively limit themselves to being moot when a host as mediator/intermediary re-encodes the message.

<sup>45</sup> In recognizing that encoded meaning is ambiguous, Eco concludes that decoding is a kind of “semiotic guerilla warfare” that has the struggle for meaning at the point of reception and not the source. (Caesar, 45)

<sup>46</sup> This claim by Eco is supported through his explanation of “the Ultimate Secret of Hermetic Initiation” which claims that everything is secret when encoded and that to be able decode the secret is pretentious and false, but also that to encode the secret truly is also false.

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<sup>47</sup> Eco contends that there are three kinds of openness in the text from a reader's perspective – openness due to incompleteness of the text, openness due to uniqueness of multiple readings of a text and openness in the unlimited interpretations of a single reading of a text. (Caesar, 18) The hallucinatory experience may in fact have some conversation points with Adam Phillips's concept of "unlived lives" in that the openness of texts presents readings of self and readings of otherness at the same time. This might be the source of the hallucinatory quality of engaging in a particular reading of an open text – similar to vision, what is central and peripheral are still perceived but with different focus.

<sup>48</sup> Hartley writes, "knowledge is networked. Consumption is increasingly co-production; it is active not passive, making not taking, using not behaving. And while learning is a fundamental requirement of innovation it cannot be confined to the elite organization or research centre. Learning becomes a porous, distributed system, and innovation becomes an open network." (Hartley, *RHaCS*, 143)

<sup>49</sup> Sean Nixon notes that the direct address of television hosts has moral implications. Hosts can "corrupt" encoding which is seen to have a variety of effects on audiences (Nixon, *RHC&C*, 128)

<sup>50</sup> Antonio Gramsci argues that critical self-consciousness requires organic intellectuals. For Gramsci, new modes of production create organic intellectuals who act as deputies or agents in organizing the hegemony of its society and dominating it ideologically through state apparatuses. (Simon, 93-98) If television hosts render audiences into passive masses through re-encoding in the triadic relationship then perhaps there is some congruence with Gramsci's concept of organic intellectuals. Something to consider for a later time.

<sup>51</sup> Bonner states that television hosts, "are not just the information they impart" (Bonner, 177)

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## Interview with 'Fearless' Fred Kennedy, host of *Fred at Night* on Teletoon

Fred's first job as a host was part-time overnights for an AM station in Nova Scotia, working from midnight until 6am serving a small market. He recalls the relaxed work environment fondly. For the first two months, Fred introduced the 'morning guy' by the wrong name. Nobody cared. Shortly after making the correct adjustments, Fred found himself promoted to the weekend FM station. Moving from his hometown of Edmonton to Nova Scotia was turning out to be fortuitous. It wasn't many years after that when Fred segued his radio work into a television gig. He was hired by Teletoon in the summer of 2010 having been contracted by the production company, Corus Entertainment. His first broadcast for Teletoon was in October of that year. Fred tells an amusing and revealing story about his audition for the job. He met with the top brass and not knowing what to expect... he lucked out. They talked for an hour about cartoons, which Fred relays as being a rather one-sided conversation given his passion for animation and comic books.

Contemplating his days in radio allows Fred to situate the differences between the two mediums where he has hosted. He asserts, "radio is so much freer. I write my own content. I don't have to go through anyone". At the same time Fred recognizes that television involves a lot more planning than radio. There are many steps and he has found himself frustrated when his ideas are filtered out during the process of pre-production and production. Fred hosts an interstitial segment on Teletoon which has a variety of content, but often focuses on relaying the latest prime-time lineup for the network through direct address and a minimal set. Fred comments that television can be restrictive because of rigid time limits on segments, but that his segments are integral for providing audiences with reasons to tune-in. Fred's segments are two-pronged where information about network programming is relayed to audiences, but also where audiences are able to be exposed to additional content designed and development by Fred and his team.

Fred has two production meetings each week – one with the production brass and another with the channel director. The meetings are a time and place to plan and figure out steps in producing the content of Fred's segments. Fred comments, "you have to be on-point. What is most important for the segments is to educate people about what's on our station". Fred recognizes that there is a clear ideology for Teletoon operating around their programming of cartoons for adults. "I think that TV can be a teaching tool," adds Fred in revealing that his goals and that of the station have to work together. Fred attempts to implement creative elements to his segments in order to make the content more informative and entertaining. 'Television as teaching' has significance in Fred's personal opinions on television's use because as a TV viewer he was most interested in watching documentaries. Fred frets about the redistribution of documentaries on television. He comments, "The Internet is killing television.

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There are far-reaching effects of downloading we are only starting to feel.” Fred recognizes that reality TV is taking over network slates because production values and sunk costs are low. Even Fred’s segment has felt the effects of P2P-based media spectatorship as the crew for his segment has been reduced several times since Teletoon’s launch in 1998. “It’s the elephant in the room,” comments Fred, as he somberly notes that producers are fully aware of online issues. He adds, “you don’t talk about it, like you don’t talk about death... because there is nothing you can do about it.”

The beat goes on and so does Fred on his segment “Fred at Night” airing on Teletoon every Sunday at 10pm ET/PT. Fred has a positive relationship with the producers/network. Their expectations of him are that he must be an ‘ideas guy’ and that he be active in writing his content. The scripts that he produces are read, reviewed and edited by members of the Teletoon ‘family’. Online people, sales people, social media people provide input and streamline the process of creating innovative, interesting and informative content each week. They run a tight ship. Fred has a very different but equally valuable relationship with his audience. He admits, “the audience sometime gets it and sometimes doesn’t. They get half of what you said, but they feel they heard the whole thing”. I joked with Fred about the Cary Grant quip, “I improve on misquotation”. Fred comments candidly, “people are only listening for what they want to hear. But, conversation isn’t divisible, you have to take it as a whole.” For Fred, investment is everything. He adds, “if one audience member engages in content they get something completely different from another who is only partially engaged.” The pay-off though is when the audience ‘gets’ what Fred is doing with his segment. Fred understands that when his segment does engage spectator’s focus, he gets to affect their media experience. What he talks about means something to him when it means something to his audience.

I posed Fred a seemingly simple question which he aptly revealed to be an extremely complex one when answered. What is Fred doing when he is host? Fred claims that most of the time he is telling people to read. His segment allows him to talk about new comics, cartoons, video games and the like, but his ‘message’ to his audience about print literacy is his priority based on a well-formulated personal ethos. Part of turning his audience onto new content is to turn them onto reading specifically. Fred claims that the network doesn’t feel this is a diversion from their ‘message’ because he is attending to the demographics. Fred provocatively proclaims, “for our products to work, I have to be in bed with the audience. I have to share with them.” This implies a communicative intimacy at the heart of Fred’s ideals for being a host as well as being a prerogative for the effectiveness of his segment in drawing in viewers to the network. Fred confirms that he trades in messages through the craft of communication. That is what he is doing.

Fred copes with a variety of communicative issues rooted in both his relationship with the audience and with the network. There can be a resistance from both sides and Fred urges that, “you have to choose your words wisely” in order to combat “sound-byte society”. He also has to attend to strict time limits of the segment which narrow his tailoring of content when trying to include personal emphasis is the delivery of that content. When discussing the ‘code’ of communication that allows messages to hold meaning, Fred affirms, “I play a role in that... I help to code the message.” For Fred, he understands this role to be in re-encoding the message with elements of teaching. After an hour of communicating with Fred and allowing him to teach

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me about what he does, I was effectively convinced as to the autonomy of his role as a television host. I wish Fred all the best in life and hope that he continues having opportunities to spread his message to people.

### **Interview with Jonas Bell-Pasht, producer of *How I Rock It* on the Esquire network**

Jonas has just launched a flagship television show on Esquire magazine's new network channel. The channel launched in September, 2013 and Jonas's produced show *How I Rock It* has launched just two months later. Jonas comments, "I don't watch a lot of television, but I happen to work in television. I'm just a producer with a very eclectic and diverse slate of projects." Jonas is a graduate of the AFI and prior to that was a good ol' Canadian boy rising like many stars in the entertainment world from out of Ryerson University's constellation of technically-based programs. He recalls 'stumbling' into the role of being a "show-runner" prior to really knowing what that role necessarily entailed. As a TV show producer or 'show-runner', Jonas oversees and drives the development, selling, packaging, producing and releasing of the television shows which are very often his own brainchild.

Jonas recalls his first TV producer job where he executive producer a TV show special titled *Ultimate Aquariums* which documented the designing, construction, installation and sale of lavish custom aquariums. He was the co-creator of that show and it was originally a project on a wider slate of shows that Jonas was trying to sell. The creative team partnered with a more senior production company, Intuitive Entertainment which specialized in packaging reality TV shows. Jonas jokes about how originally he was labelled in the industry as a 'baby-producer'. From his position of nascent reputation, he shot a 'sizzle reel' or test pilot for the show. Intuitive Entertainment controlled production and Jonas became an executive producer which he claims is a relatively passive role. He was there to learn, but was fortunate to receive a senior credit. As co-creator, Jonas retained control of the idea itself. Jonas comments, "If you have control over the idea, you have the leverage."

*Ultimate Aquariums* is a 'follow-doc' with talent/stars, but no host. The show has no direct address as the experts concern themselves with their relationships with the clients. Jonas feels that some TV shows are better suited to particular formats or approaches to format based on the need to convey information, to provide proper context and to tease out content in an entertaining way. The host can provide leverage, as Jonas sees it, but a show like *Ultimate...* would have had a huge format departure if becoming a host-led show. For Jonas, in *Ultimate...* the audience doesn't need a host and he claims that they simply want to follow onscreen relationships unobtrusively.

Jonas has a different relationship with the networks and one which changes radically once he begins producing a TV show for them. Jonas refers to the relationship as "exclusive". For his latest production gig for the new Esquire channel, Jonas notes that the network was looking for content that was stylish and cool, but they also wanted major celebrity presence. The network makes demands and a producer must seek to accommodate. Jonas remarks that conflicts arise but, "it can't be nasty because they are the bosses. They put up all the money.

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They put up 100% of the production budget and assume all the risk.” For Jonas, the art of being a TV producer is in communication – both with the networks and then with the audiences.

Jonas started in the entertainment industry through cinema and notes that there is a significantly differently understanding of the audience between the two mediums. The studios and networks also have a different understanding of the audience. Jonas comments, “in television, networks are slaves to advertisers as the advertisers won’t buy into certain content.” These industry constraints beg certain practical questions. Who is the audience for the network and for the show? This question determines both the decision to create a show as one that is led by a host and that of what profile the host will have if the show is to be host-led.

Jonas comments, “‘host’ is a broad term and means many things”. He explains that some hosts are very interactive and involved in the show and others are mere segues for segments in the program. For Jonas, the host is someone who can speak to the audience effectively and who is both likeable and watchable. Jonas asserts that a host has certain idiosyncracies in their appearance and performance. These qualities of the host must mesh with the audience’s expectations and interests in the show. For *How I Rock It*, Jonas decided on a host. The show was about style and not fashion. Jonas wasn’t looking for a fashion ‘insider’ as he felt this would render the show too opinionated, judgmental and flamboyant. He wanted the host to appeal to a larger audience and decided that a professional athlete would work best. Jonas hired NBA star, Baron Davis to host the show. Jonas comments, “Baron is also a producer on the show. He has some creative input, but he doesn’t script. He does have latitude to make changes.” Jonas wants Baron to be authentic and to stick to his ‘brand’. This authenticity often emerges unscripted. Jonas asserts, “Baron is encourage to be active, to find the sweet spot in developing his onscreen persona”.

Jonas claims that *How I Rock It* is a show which explores self-expression. For Jonas, self-expression is all about storytelling. As a communicative form in a communicative format and medium, Jonas sees messages as flowing from all sides. We discussed coding of messages at some length. Jonas insightfully commented, “in some ways I am the audience decoding what the style-makers message is. Learning the story behind the style.” Jonas then adds that his contribution to coding the message is in keeping it ‘fresh’ as he seeks to present audiences with “portraits being painted of people by people”. This mantra of fresh self-expression requires audience feedback which Jonas actively invites and endorses as necessary to his show being a success. I think that it would be safe to say that Jonas and I agreed that television is passive to the extent that you surrender to the experience of it, but that it is still artistic and thus built on active interpretation by the audience. A paradox of sorts perhaps, but one which professional roles such as producer and host seek to sort out. For Jonas, misinterpretation in media is pretty common, but he claims, “I take responsibility for when an audience doesn’t understand something.” He contends, “if someone doesn’t laugh at comedy or scream at suspense, you can’t say they didn’t understand it”. For Jonas, messages need to be communicated clearly, which is all the more important in television where advertising needs to be secured. Jonas has a sophisticated philosophy of media which bodes well for his sophisticated endeavors in the entertainment industry. I wish my friend all the success that he has rightfully earned through his hard work and determination, insight and execution.

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