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BA English Honours | Semester VI | ENG6CJ305

Introducing Cultural Studies

Module 3: Ideology, Hegemony, and the Encoding/Decoding Paradigm • Comprehensive Notes

Chapter 3: Hegemony, Ideology, and Reception Politics

How do dominant socio-economic classes maintain power without relying primarily on physical military force? Cultural Studies synthesizes structuralist Marxism and Italian revolutionary theory to demonstrate that culture and media are the primary terrains wherein social consensus and ideological hegemony are negotiated.

3.1 Antonio Gramsci: Cultural Hegemony

Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci formulated the theory of **Cultural Hegemony**. The ruling class maintains dominance through a dual apparatus: the coercive state (police, military, courts) and civil society (schools, church, media, families). Hegemony is the process whereby ruling-class values are universalized as the "common sense" of the entire population, secured through spontaneous consent rather than sheer coercion.

3.2 Louis Althusser: Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs)

French philosopher Louis Althusser distinguished between Repressive State Apparatuses (RSAs, operating by violence) and **Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs)**—schools, religious institutions, media, and art—which operate by ideology. Althusser demonstrated that ideology "interpolates" or hails concrete individuals as obedient subjects, making social subordination feel natural and voluntary.

3.3 Stuart Hall's Encoding / Decoding Model (1973)

Stuart Hall dismantled simplistic linear communication models (Sender → Message → Receiver) by formulating the **Encoding/Decoding** paradigm. Media texts are encoded with preferred institutional meanings, but audiences decode them through three distinct interpretive positions:

- **Dominant-Hegemonic Position:** The viewer decodes the message directly within the terms in which it was encoded, unreservedly accepting its ideological claims.
- **Negotiated Position:** The viewer acknowledges the legitimacy of the dominant hegemonic framework in general terms, but makes local exceptions reflecting their personal socio-economic conditions.
- **Oppositional Position:** The viewer completely demystifies the preferred code, decoding the message contrary to institutional intentions (e.g., viewing an official national security broadcast as imperialist propaganda).

Advanced Critical Theory, Hermeneutics & Literary Praxis

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2. Historiographical Context and Reception Theory

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3. Comparative Aesthetic and Thematic Matrix

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