

# Signs and Signifiers



'What does that sign say?'  
'It says nothing - it needs to be read.'

A sign can be a physical form to which we give meaning. The signifier is the physical form which we can see or hear - i.e. words, diagram, picture, music, siren. The signified is the meaning which we attach to the signifier - i.e. Learner driver, no entry, Nazi etc. The real world referent is the actual 'real life' object - i.e. a real rabbit.



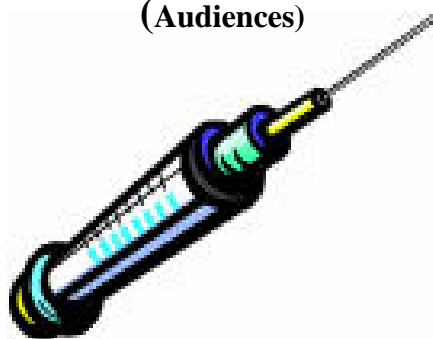
*rabbit*

Signs cannot be combined purely at random if they are to mean anything. Our understanding of them depends on our social and cultural background.

We can anchor a sign by using words or pictures - i.e. text on a poster, a caption under a newspaper splash, text on an advert, a voiceover on a film.

# Hypodermic Syringe Theory

(Audiences)

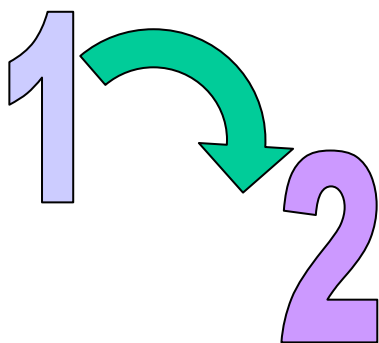


The hypodermic syringe theory is that the media is like a syringe which injects ideas, attitudes and beliefs into the audience.

In some cases this may work, but the problem is that people are affected in different ways by the media - films, advertising, newspapers, television etc. The 'audience' are also now much more critically aware of the media and having ideas 'injected' into them.

However, this theory still has uses - i.e. watching violent crimes can make you violent, for example the Jamie Bulger killers, copycat crimes, the 'Power Rangers' fighting in play grounds.

# Two Step Flow (Audiences)



The two-step flow theory suggests:

- We are much more likely to be affected by the media if we discuss it with others.
- Our opinions are affected by the way our friends etc have viewed the media, i.e. discussions on Eastenders - Cat and Zoe, views on documentaries etc. The people we discuss our ideas with are called 'opinion leaders'.
- This is another theory where the James Bulger case has been cited - apparently one boy talked to his friend about a film he had watched and apparently influenced the other's behaviour.

# Uses and Gratifications Theory



According to uses and gratification theory we all have different uses for the media and we make choices over what we want to watch. We are expecting something from our use of the media.

1. **Information** - we may want to find out about society and the world. We want to satisfy our curiosity.
2. **Personal Identity** - we may watch television for models for our behaviour. For instance - we may identify with soap characters or their situations.
3. **Integration and Social Interaction** - we use the media to find out more about the circumstances of other people perhaps through empathy or sympathy.
4. **Entertainment** - enjoyment, relaxation, fill the time.

## CRITICISMS

- You don't always choose what media you use - you may be a secondary or tertiary user. Your mum has the remote control! You have no control over what posters you see on your way to school.