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RELEVANCE THEORY AND THE ANALYSIS OF AUDIENCE RESPONSE: A PRAGMATIC APPROACH TO MEDIA STUDIES

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ABSTRACT

This thesis focusses on variability in audience interpretation of a television programme, and aims to problematise and investigate the reception of broadcast communication by applying the pragmatic theory of relevance (Sperber and Wilson 1986) to an empirical study of audience response. This aim is achieved using the following method:

In Chapter Two I consider the scope of pragmatic theories of *inferencing* and conclude that relevance theory offers the only account which can both accommodate and provide the basis for an explanation of variation in interpretation. I also assert that for relevance theory to be able to show why an audience interprets a text in a specific way the cultural background of that audience has to be considered. In Chapter Three I show how existing studies of audience response which adopt a critical cultural studies approach require a more sophisticated model of communication than they currently assume if they are to realise their aim of relating audience response to socio-political structures. My contention is that the inferential model proposed by Sperber and Wilson can provide such an account. Chapters Four and Five describe, and report the results of, an empirical study I carry out based on a methodology premised on relevance theory. The study consists of two separate

interviews with audiences who have distinct cultural backgrounds in each of which I show a video recording of a television programme and then question the interviewees on their understanding of the text of the programme. In Chapters Six and Seven I discuss the results of the study in relation to relevance theory and media studies.

The results of my study indicate that a methodology based on relevance theory can make explicit, and show the significance of, processes involved in audience interpretation of a media text which have not previously been open to analysis. Building on Sperber and Wilson's claim (1986:15) that the context of an utterance is a psychological construct, and is a sub-set of the set of assumptions available to the hearer of a given utterance, the results make explicit (a) relevant aspects of the encyclopaedic knowledge of two distinct audiences; (b) the contexts these audiences produce in response to a television text; (c) how these contexts are related to the audience's encyclopaedic knowledge; (d) how these contexts affect the disambiguation and enrichment of information linguistically encoded in the text (e) the contextual implications, or interpretations, the audience draw from a synthesis of the information encoded in text and the contexts the audiences apply.

My findings are particularly pertinent for the critical cultural approach to audience studies as they

indicate how it is possible to make explicit the relationship between response and cultural background by showing how the existing knowledge of an audience affects interpretation and indicating moreover how this knowledge can be related to social determinants. The results of my study also contribute to pragmatic theory in that they show how relevance theory can be used to explain why interpretation may vary.

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Chapter One

INTRODUCTION

1 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND, FOCUS AND AIMS OF THESIS

This thesis focusses on audience interpretation of broadcast texts. My aim is to consider whether the pragmatic theory of relevance outlined by Sperber and Wilson (1986) can contribute to studies of audience response to broadcast communication and if so what it has to offer. I address this aim in the following way: I discuss in Chapter Two the inferential model of communication posited by Sperber and Wilson by comparing it with the code model commonly assumed by pragmaticists; in Chapter Three I survey existing methods of analysing audience response which tend to draw on adaptations of the code model of language and hypothesize ways in which an inferential model could serve the aims of these studies better; in Chapter Four I propose a methodology for eliciting and analysing audience response based on Sperber and Wilson's relevance theory; I carry out and then discuss, in Chapters Five and Six, an audience study using this methodology; and in Chapter Seven I consider the implications of applying this methodology to the analysis of audience response.

A major finding of the audience study I carry out, and which is described in Chapters Four and Five, is that the respondents who take part show significant differences in the way they interpret the television

text they have been asked to comment on. The specific types of variation in interpretation which occur raise questions both for pragmatics and media studies, and therefore this thesis draws on, and aims to contibute to, both these fields of study.

1.1 Pragmatics and variability in interpretation

The variation in interpretation I record is an issue for pragmatics for two reasons. Firstly, although the pragmatics framework incorporates a number of accounts of language understanding, and should therefore be able to provide an adequate explanation of the interpretations which occur in my study, most pragmatic theory can not easily accommodate the data I record in Chapter Five. One reason for this is that pragmatics is generally based on the assumption that an utterance has a single appropriate interpretation which is determined by its unique context. As a result there is little, if any, investigation into the processes which would lead to varied interpretations. The data examined in this thesis is therefore a challenge for most pragmatic theories in their present form.

A second reason why my findings are an issue for pragmatics is that, although there is one account, that of Sperber and Wilson's relevance theory, which could potentially accommodate and also provide the basis for an explanation of the results of my study,

the theory has not in the past been used to address this type of issue. Sperber and Wilson are primarily concerned to give a cognitive account of communication and their theory has not previously been used as part of an empirical study of interpretations produced by socially situated individuals. Although the theory can potentially provide both a description and an explanation of <u>how</u> varied interpretations occur therefore, it does not offer an account of <u>why</u> they should occur.

It is my contention that in order to provide an account of why interpretation may vary between audience members it is necessary to address the cultural background of audience members. One aim of this thesis is therefore to consider how this extra dimension might supplement the explanatory power of relevance theory in order to be able to account for the results of my study.

1.2 <u>Media Studies and variation in interpretation</u>

In choosing to examine broadcast communication my aims are similar to those of media researchers working within the critical cultural studies approach. Ang (1989:101) states that the aim of the approach is to consider the way in which interpretations made by audiences are connected to 'social and political structures and processes'. In recent years there has been an increasing interest in how audiences respond

to mediated communication, and how variations in this response might be explained in terms of cultural differences.

In the past a particular motivation for the interest in audience response has been the desire to explain the hegemonic effect of media products. Although the approach has maintained a political agenda, since the problematisation in the early 1980s of the 'dominant ideology thesis' which informed this notion of hegemony (Collins 1990), and the increasing awareness of 'audience activity', an enduring problem for the critical cultural studies approach has been (a) how to account for media hegemony given the differences in response recorded in empirical studies of audience activity and (b) how to explain these differences in response in terms of an audience's cultural background

In this thesis I open up the terms of the debates surrounding these issues by arguing that in order to account for either the hegemonic effect of the media or the relationship between cultural background and audience response, it is necessary to first consider the process of interpretation. For either issue to be adequately addressed, each needs to be premised on a more precise account of audience activity, which would make explicit the source of any variation in interpretation.

Although this argument has been put forward in the past (see Corner 1991) there have been no empirical studies which have achieved a sufficiently explicit account of why a given audience should produce a given interpretation. In applying a methodology based on a form of relevance theory, but which also has a cultural dimension, to the study of audience interpretation I hope to indicate how this connection might be made explicit. I also aim to show how the findings of my study allow a set of questions to be addressed which differ from the issues that have concerned media studies in the past.

In order to introduce the specific concerns of this thesis, in this chapter I draw on an example of a broadcast text which has been differentially interpreted by an audience and make some preliminary suggestions about how such interpretations might be explained. Before doing so however I define my usage of some of the terms which recur in this thesis.

2. DEFINITIONS OF THE TERMS 'BROADCAST COMMUNICATION', 'TEXT' AND 'AUDIENCE'

Although in this study I focus primarily on the reception of television, when I use the term 'broadcast' I refer to the broader sense of the adjective which describes a message as one designed for a mass audience, rather than to the specific notion of broadcasting as 'electronic transmission'

such as radio or television. According to the usage I adopt therefore 'broadcast' is a superordinate term which would incoporate messages transmitted via these media.

The term 'communication' is more complex in that it generally denotes a process in which a message has both been sent out and received. For example, when Sperber and Wilson (1986) posit an 'inferential model of communication' they are referring to the process whereby a set of assumptions are linguistically encoded by a speaker as well as to the way in which those assumptions are inferred by the hearer. However a basic assumption of this thesis is that the reception of a specific message is not necessarily entailed by the mere fact of that message being sent out, and my aim is indeed to problematise the notion of reception.

In order to be able to do this it is necessary to work with two notions of 'communication': I need to refer to the intentional 'sending out' of a set of assumptions by a speaker, but I also want to stress that the reception of these assumptions is not entailed by that act. To negotiate this problem I have used the verb 'to communicate' to imply some form of reception while the noun phrase, 'a communication' will refer solely to the imparting of a message without entailing its reception.

The issues involved here will be discussed more fully in Chapter Two, but as a working definition in advance of this discussion I use the noun phrase 'broadcast communication' to refer to the visual or linguistic instantiation of a message which is intended for a mass audience.

I use the term 'text' in this thesis to refer to the instantiation of any form of intentional communication, and in this sense the medium of communication could be visual, spoken, written, or any combination of these. Where the medium is specifically linguistic I also use the term 'utterance' to denote this instantiation. By analogy with this wide field of reference for the term 'text', the term 'audience' refers to the person or persons who receive the text in whatever form. In this sense the term 'audience' can be synonymous with 'reader', 'hearer' or 'viewer'.

This particularly broad use of the terms 'text' and 'audience' arises from the claims of Sperber and Wilson (1986), addressed more fully in Chapter Two below, that the theory of interpretation they offer is a general account of the cognitive apprehension of all forms of intentional communication. In this thesis I extrapolate from, and to some extent problematise, their general claims about the 'hearer's' interpretative processes, to cover the specific

processes involved in interpreting a television programme.

3 FEATURES OF BROADCAST COMMUNICATION AND ITS RECEPTION

A central hypothesis of this thesis is that, because it is axiomatic to the notion of broadcast communication that a message designed for this medium is intended for a mass audience, it is highly unlikely, given the heterogeneous nature of British society, that all members of the audience who receive a given message will perceive it to have the same meaning. In this sense broadcast communication and its interpretation differs from, for example, face to face dialogue, which is designed for a much more specific and homogeneous audience.

The assumptions behind this hypothesis, which draw on the implications of relevance theory, will be made explicit in Chapter Two below but in order to illustrate how variation in interpretation can occur I will draw on an example from the empirical study I carry out as part of this investigation.

In my audience study I asked some women to view a video recording of a television programme entitled The Politics of Experience in which three female presenters talked about their involvement in a range of political activities. I then focussed on a particular part of the programme in which the

Conservative M.P. Emma Nicholson is shown walking past, and then entering, the grounds of the Houses of Parliament. A voice-over, in which Nicholson recounts the following anecdote, accompanies this visual image:

> I remember when I was a child going into the Carlton Club to find my father and I walked in at the front door and I looked left and saw my father, my uncle, who was Lord Chancellor, another uncle who was a Member of Parliament, all sitting together in a lovely room. And I just went through that door to say 'Hello, here I am'. All three rose to their feet and my father rushed forward and they all shouted 'Get out, get out. This is men only'

After reshowing this part of the programme I then asked my audiences what 'this' in the final sentence referred to. The responses were extremely varied and covered such vague spatial referents as:

Example One:

(M) Only men are allowed in this room...

Example Two:

(J) I was thinking they meant some kind of boardroom

and Example Three:

(E) The setting - the place they're in.

They also covered vague references to the activity of the men:

Example Four:

(J) It means that what's going on here is/

(M) Is only for men/

(J) Right/

and Example Five:

(G) I thought what they were talking about was men only - politics - you know - part of - whatever they were involved in.

The responses also covered more specific spatial

referents:

Example Six:

(K) Well it was in Parliament wasn't it?

Just one respondent drew a specific referent from the co-text:

(L) I would have thought the Carlton Club...

What such responses indicate is how the audience has to work to produce a meaning from a broadcast communication. Drawing on relevance theory I argue in this thesis that the particular features of broadcast communication and its reception lead to audiences producing a wider range of interpretations than might be expected in the process of, for example, face to face dialogue. These issues will be addressed more fully in Chapter Four section 5 below, but I indicate briefly below how the communicative and interpretative processes required by the two media might differ.

One significant feature of the process of broadcast communication results from the particular relationship which this form of communication presupposes will hold between the speaker and the audience. Given that a speaker who employs broadcast communication, in comparison to a speaker involved in face to face dialogue, does not have as strong an

awareness of the knowledge the audience will be likely to have, the broadcast speaker has less idea of what would constitute the optimum linguistic means for communicating a specific set of assumptions. Choices about what information to include, what to leave out, and which terms to use are therefore more speculative in broadcast communication than those involved, for example, in face to face dialogue where the audience's knowledge can be established by questioning.

In the above case it might be that Nicholson believes that her audience will know that the Carlton Club excludes women, and so in making choices about the form and content of her utterance, does not explicitly include this information. However, whether it is because she assumes her audience have knowledge which they do not all in fact have, or whether there is another cause, the meaning of Nicholson's final sentence is not obvious to the majority of my respondents. As a result they are required to engage in a series of speculations if the meaning of her anecdote is to be made explicit. As I shall assert in the following chapters, this level of speculation is more marked in interpretations of broadcast communication such as radio or television than in interpretations of other forms of communication.

A second effect, specific to the interpretation of broadcast communication, is the comparatively wide range of potentially relevant evidence the audience

draws on in this speculative process. The examples above show the audience using a range of evidence to produce a referent for 'this'. The range of evidence employed covers visual perceptions such as the image of Nicholson walking into Parliament; linguistic perceptions such as the co-text; and extra-linguistic knowledge such as assumptions about settings which exclude women.

Again, I would argue that the particular breadth of this range, is more marked in the interpretation of television than other media. Perhaps because of the speed of the communication of information on television, and because, as I have suggested above, actual audience knowledge sometimes does not coincide with assumed audience knowledge, the meaning of an utterance is not always evident to an audience.

This uncertainty is compounded by the co-presence, in the case of television, of visual images, whose relationship to the spoken text is implied by their very existence, but whose significance is not always clear. For example, to extend the point made above about assumptions about the audience's existing knowledge: the editors of the programme presumably believe that all audiences know that there is no part of Parliament which formally excludes women, and therefore would not have predicted that the visual image of Nicholson walking through the gates of

Westminster could be a potential referent of Nicholson's utterance.

However, the fact that at least one of my respondents thought that the phrase 'This is men only' could refer to 'somewhere in Parliament' shows that where the meaning of a communication is unclear visual evidence may be employed to make sense of an utterance. And where the knowledge an audience has does not coincide with the knowledge the programme makers assume them to have, unforeseen interpretations may result.

In this chapter I have shown that variation in the interpretation of a broadcast communication can occur, and have argued that, because of the nature of this process, variation is indeed likely to occur. I have put forward some speculative suggestions about the communicative and interpretative processes which might account for this likelihood: (a) the specific knowledge of an audience cannot be accounted for in a speaker's choice of the linguistic form of an utterance; and (b) as a result of this a high degree of speculation is involved in producing an interpretation which is compounded by the multiple nature of the evidence offered by television. These claims are premised on a specific set of assumptions about what it is 'to communicate' and these assumptions will be made explicit in the following chapter and substantiated in the course of this

thesis. I begin however by addressing the question of how variation in interpretation of the type illustrated above might generally be explained by pragmatic theory.

Chapter Two

ACCOUNTS OF VARIATION IN INTERPRETATION IN LINGUISTIC THEORY

1. INTRODUCTION

The area of linguistic theory which should be able to account for variation in interpretation is pragmatics, in that amongst other things it purports to be a study which relates context (i.e. potentially significant features which can be linguistic or extra-linguistic) to language understanding. Levinson's (1983) account avoids giving a precise definition of 'pragmatics' but implies that its scope falls somewhere within the parameters of the following two definitions: (a) Pragmatics is the study of 'those aspects of the relationship between language and context that are relevant to the writing of grammars' (p.9) and (b) Pragmatics is the study of 'the relations between language and context that are basic to an account of language understanding' (p.21)

Although the field of pragmatics addresses a wide range of issues there does not at present appear to be a coherent pragmatic theory which can accommodate the type of data exemplified in the previous chapter: i.e. a theory which can produce both a description of the range of processes involved in interpretation, and an explanation of why certain interpretations should occur rather than others. In the brief review which follows, after outlining the aims of two orientations in pragmatic theory, I therefore evaluate their usefulness

and their limitations in describing and explaining variation in interpretation.

Since my data suggests a gap between a linguistic stimulus and the sense an audience makes of it, my thesis is concerned primarily with only one aspect of pragmatics: those theories which offer an account of inferencing. As a working definition, in advance of the discussion below, I take the term 'inferencing' to refer to the formation of hypotheses from given premises. In the current chapter I aim to contextualise the role of this phenomenon within a broader pragmatic theory.

Locating an appropriate theory of inferencing is problematic however in that, as Levinson's above account indicates, pragmatics as a discipline is constantly being redefined, and the questions it addresses vary according to the definition invoked. For example, pragmatics has been defined in opposition to semantics in that semantics is concerned with sentence meaning and pragmatics with speaker meaning (Leech 1983), Pragmatics has also been defined as a theory of utterance interpretation (Sperber and Wilson 1981).

The following discussion of the role of inferencing in pragmatic theories will be organised around the distinction between the aim of pragmatics as being either an explanation of speaker meaning or of utterance interpretation. Although inferencing

processes are invoked by both types of theory, they are required to account for different phenomena in each. I set out below what is required of a theory of inferencing within these two paradigms by focussing on a specific work from each. A controversy already exists between the authors I have selected, and their debate is therefore a useful starting point for isolating those issues most relevant for an explanation of variation in interpretation.

2. PRAGMATICS AS AN ACCOUNT OF SPEAKER MEANING: THE MUTUAL KNOWLEDGE HYPOTHESIS

Pragmatic theorists who focus on speaker meaning are generally those who assert that communication is dependent upon the existence of 'mutual knowledge' between interlocutors (e.g. Bach and Harnish 1979; Gibbs 1987). The work of Herbert H. Clark, and his various associates has focussed on and developed this assumption (e.g. Clark and Marshall 1981; Clark and Carlson 1982), and an analysis which is specifically based on the notion of mutual knowledge is that of Clark and Murphy (1982). In this section I will give an account of Clark and Murphy's theory and go on to evaluate it in terms of its usefulness for explaining variation in interpretation.

2.1 An account of Clark and Murphy (1982)

In Clark and Murphy's 1982 article, 'Audience design in meaning and reference' the comprehension of utterances containing anaphora, definite reference, and word meaning are theorised in terms of a 'design assumption'. The 'design assumption' is defined as an assumption made by the hearer that the speaker has designed her or his utterance according to the belief that the hearer will be able to make the necessary inferences. The design assumption is therefore posited as a mutually known premise which forms the basis of a logical deduction which the hearer will apply in arriving at the required referent.

Although the hearer is invoked to the extent that an inferential process is referred to, the structure of the utterance itself and the speaker's intention are the focus of this argument. It is implied that the mutual beliefs intrinsic to the design assumption are sufficient to ensure comprehension, and the hearer's process of inferencing is left unanalysed. In this and later work, Clark and his associates hold that these mutual beliefs are inferred from certain co-presence heuristics, a notion developed in Clark and Marshall (1981). This inferential process is based on three main sources of information: community membership, and both physical and linguistic co-presence.

Empirical evidence which supports the claim for a design assumption, as well as a co-presence heuristics

is offered in Clark, Schreuder and Buttrick (1983) who carried out an experiment in which students from Stanford University were shown photographs of President Reagan with his then director of the budget David Stockman. The students were asked one of the following two questions:

(a) You know who this man is, don't you?

(b) Do you know who this man is?

The results showed that none of the students who were asked question (a) perceived the referent for 'this man' to be Stockman. The results were taken to indicate that the presuppositions inscribed in the questions, together with the community knowledge that Reagan was better known than Stockman, led the students to produce the anticipated referent.

2.2 An evaluation of Clark and Murphy's account

In focussing on just one aspect, the solution of anaphora, a number of problems become evident in the explanatory and descriptive power of the mutual knowledge theory. Clark and Murphy account for anaphora solution by positing their design assumption to be in force. They assert that the hearer always assumes that the speaker has designed an utterance on the basis that the hearer can retrieve the relevant referent, and the hearer accordingly bases his or her inferences on this assumption.

Although it is possible that this may be a feature of the hearer's interpretation process, even if we ignore the inexhaustible philosophical debates on the feasibility of the mutual knowledge hypothesis (see for example Smith 1982, and Sperber and Wilson 1987), it is of limited value either as a description or an explanation of the data provided by the studies carried out as part of this thesis. This is not to deny the usefulness of Clark et al's empirical evidence but rather to indicate the limits of the theoretical approach they adopt.

The limitations of the theory posited by Clark and Murphy can be seen in its application to the evidence of variation in interpretation given in Chapter One above. Only one of the respondents in my study produced the 'correct' co-referent for an instance of anaphora in the broadcast text. Although in the text the term 'this' is preceded by 'The Carlton Club', the respondents perceived the co-referent of 'this' to be: 'what's going on here', 'a boardroom' and 'Parliament'.

Within Clark and Murphy's paradigm the aim of analysis is to explain successful communication (i.e. the 'appropriate' reception of an utterance). If there is an apparent failure to retrieve the correct referent, 'communication' has not taken place, and it would be of little interest to Clark and Murphy to pursue the question further. Yet it is manifestly not the case that the broadcast text I use in my study has

communicated nothing. What might have been communicated and how it is explained is not something that theories based on mutual knowledge address, and yet, it could be argued, apparent communicative 'failures' such as this make up the majority of speech events - particularly broadcast speech events.

Analyses which focus on speaker meaning, in general aim only to account for perfect communication in that they focus on the desired result and theorise the processes which will produce this end. To this extent, although pragmatics is ostensibly about language use, these analyses work within a notion of competence which excludes a massive area of performance - such as the interpretative behaviour which this thesis focusses on.

The goal of a pragmatic theory which will account for the inferences made in the data recorded in Chapter Five below needs to be an account of 'interpretation' then, rather than an account of the perfect 'comprehension' of an utterance. As I have argued, theories which focus on speaker meaning have little to say about variation in interpretation. In criticisms by Sperber and Wilson (1986) this shortcoming is accounted for in terms of the fact that the model of communication which the mutual knowledge hypothesis is called on to explain, is a code model.

2.3 The code model of communication

Sperber and Wilson argue that the code model is based on the assumption that 'communication' involves the exact reproduction in the hearer of the thoughts the speaker wanted to convey. They distinguish between the code model and an inferential model of communication in that decoding is the recovery of a message by an association of signal and message, while inferencing is the process of working from a premise through logic to reach a conclusion.

Sperber and Wilson (1987) argue that the code model is lacking in descriptive power, in that although communication within this paradigm is seen to occur through the association of signal and message, it is also generally acknowledged by code theorists that the context-independent semantic representation of a sentence often 'falls short of determining the interpretation of an utterance of that sentence in context' (p698). This then begs the question of what extra process is required to fill the gap between potential meaning and the interpreted meaning. It is this gap that the code model has difficulty filling. Sperber and Wilson state the issue thus:

> To justify the code model of verbal communication, it would have to be shown that the interpretation of utterances in context can be accounted for by adding an extra pragmatic level of decoding to the linguistic level provided by the grammar (p.698).

Although some theorists such as Gazdar (1979) have addressed communication predominantly in terms of a

code, and have theorised an extra pragmatic level of decoding, pragmaticists generally have accounted for the fact that the linguistic features of an utterance underdetermine its meaning by positing a level of inferencing. Clark and Murphy's 'design assumption' is one example of how a code model can incorporate a level of inferencing as a sub-part.

However, as Sperber and Wilson (1986:14) have demonstrated, for an inferential process to work as a part of a decoding process both speaker and hearer (a) must mutually know the premises of that inference, (b) must mutually know which inferencing rule is to be used and (c) must use only those premises and that rule and no other available rules or premises. Within a code model of communication then, for a set of assumptions to be received by a hearer, both speaker and hearer must share a common set of premises.

The rigidity of the process assumed by this theory does not take into account the speculative processes made evident in the anaphora solution carried out by my respondents. Moreover the theory also assumes 'communication' to only have taken place when all these conditions have produced a complete comprehension of an utterance. Sperber and Wilson's own thesis, that reception is primarily inferential, allows a more flexible definition of communication. This will be discussed in section 2 below.

A final example of the limitations of theories premised on mutual knowledge is their lack of a cognitive notion of context. i.e. they do not subscribe to the notion that context is what is perceived rather than simply what exists. My respondents' solution of anaphora cited above indicates that even context in the form of linguistic co-text is a mental construct rather than an objective 'fact': the linguistic context of 'The Carlton Club' is undeniably there in an objective sense, in that it is referred to verbally and can be traced in the transcript of Emma Nicholson's speech. Clearly, however, it is not inevitably perceived by the respondents when asked to produce a referent for 'this'. Again, the issue of context will be discussed more fully in section 3 as part of my account of Sperber and Wilson's theory of relevance.

2.4 Summary of the Mutual Knowledge Hypothesis

I have argued that there are three features of those analyses premised on the mutual knowledge hypothesis which indicate that both the descriptive and explanatory power of the theory is limited in respect to interpretation:

(1) The focus on perfect comprehension which precludes any attempt to explain other forms of interpretation.

(2) The assumption of a code model which cannot offer a sufficient description of the interpretative process.

(3) The assumption of a pre-determined context which does not allow a focus on context selection.

In the next section I look at how theories which focus on the hearer's interpretation processes account for phenomena which the above theories do not.

3. PRAGMATICS AS AN ACCOUNT OF INTERPRETATION: SPERBER AND WILSON'S RELEVANCE THEORY

Theories which focus on interpretation generally draw on cognitive accounts of linguistic processing (e.g. Andor 1985; Graesser and Bower 1990). Such accounts are generally concerned with describing the mechanisms by which the linguistically underdetermined meaning of an utterance is interpreted by a hearer. Theorists working within this field draw on cognitive notions such as 'frames' (Minsky 1977) and 'scripts' (Schank and Abelson 1977). These notions constitute the potential 'context' of an utterance and are called on to explain how certain inferences occur rather than others when a hearer interprets an utterance.

For example, a frame, which is a 'stereotyped situation' (Andor 1985), might be a restaurant scene. Where the term 'restaurant' occurs in an utterance a specific mental representation, which incorporates the features of what would normally consitute a restaurant

scene, is generated by the mind of the hearer. This mental representation then provides a context within which any ambiguities in the utterance are resolved.

In the past these theories have lacked a way of explaining why one frame rather than another is selected by a hearer. For example the sentence 'Karen painted her car' could potentially produce a frame which consisted of a car respraying scene or equally a frame which consisted of a scene involving a canvas and oil paints. Sperber and Wilson's theory of relevance attempts to fill this gap by positing a specific criterion which is used in disambiguation.

I set out below a brief outline of Sperber and Wilson's argument since it is the most coherent attempt to formalise the inferencing process, and then consider its applicability as a theoretical framework for explaining variation in interpretation. The account is somewhat detailed in that it refers to a number of features which can be usefully applied to the data arising from the empirical study I carry out, and these features will be drawn on throughout the following chapters.

3.1 Sperber and Wilson's relevance theory

Sperber and Wilson (1986) propose a theory of communication compatible with psychological accounts of information processing as well as with generative grammar. They do this by taking it as axiomatic that

syntax and semantics are encoded elements of language but that these are subservient to a general inferencing model of communication, this latter model being grounded in current theories of cognition.

What is significant about Sperber and Wilson's account from the perspective of this thesis is that within this paradigm linguistic encoding is seen as just one of a number of pieces of evidence provided by the speaker which the hearer uses to make sense of an utterance, and therefore (a) communication is perceived as involving an element of risk and (b) the focus of the theory is the hearer's interpretative processes. The implications of these features are discussed in section 3.5 following this brief account of Sperber and Wilson's claims.

The authors structure their introduction to relevance theory by considering:

1 What human communication is
2 What human beings communicate
3 How communication works

The following summary retains this structure.

3.2 What communication is

The major claim in this section is that communication is not simply a matter of the speaker encoding and the hearer decoding a message. Sperber and Wilson argue that although this may adequately describe the processing of the syntactic and semantic elements of language, it leaves a great deal of intentional

linguistic communication unaccounted for. The processing required to understand an utterance such as their example: 'Betsy's gift made her very happy' (p.10) is seen to indicate the limitations of the code model in that the linguistic meaning here falls short of encoding what the speaker means (for example it is not encoded whether the referent for 'gift' is a particular talent or whether it is a birthday present).

This leads to the claim that a coding-decoding process is subservient to an ostensive-inferential process of communication. Ostensive-inferential communication is defined as follows:

> Inferential communication and ostension are one and the same process, but seen from two different points of view: that of the communicator who is involved in ostension and that of the audience who is involved in inference (p.54).

I set out below a brief description of the two processes before going on to outline what it is that ostension is seen to communicate.

3.2.1 Ostension

Ostension is posited as the communicator's behaviour which makes manifest the intention to make something manifest. It is therefore behaviour which provides two layers of information to be picked up by an audience. A non-encoded example of ostension which Sperber and Wilson give is of a woman on holiday coming out of a hotel in light summer clothing, and being met by a man who grimaces and points to the sky which is full of rain clouds. The two layers of information are (a) the

evidence that it is going to rain and (b) the intention to communicate that evidence. Both layers are needed to avoid the first (the evidence) being missed by the audience. In the case where communication takes the form of language, the encoded elements of syntax and semantics constitute some part of the evidence contained in the first layer.

3.2.2 Inference

Sperber and Wilson's account of what inferencing actually involves is dealt with more fully in their later argument of how the process of communication works, but a brief description would be that inferencing is the hypotheses a hearer makes about a speaker's intended meaning. This process is based on the assumption by the audience that in claiming their attention in the first place through ostension, the communicator believes that it is in the audience's interest to make these hypotheses (i.e. that the evidence is 'relevant'). In the above example of ostension, the woman coming out of the hotel and seeing the behaviour of the man, makes a hypothesis about his meaning (that it is going to rain) on the basis of her assumptions about his intention (that he wants to indicate something to her).

Sperber and Wilson summarise this process as follows, and introduce the notion of 'relevance' as the organising principle behind it.

> Ostensive behaviour provides evidence of one's thoughts. It succeeds in doing so because it implies a guarantee of relevance. It implies such a guarantee because humans automatically turn their attention to what seems most relevant to them (p.50).

Before going on to say how this process works, they focus on what is communicated.

3.3 What is communicated:

Sperber and Wilson distinguish their own theory from other pragmatic theories in that they argue that pragmaticists assume that what is communicated by an utterance is the speaker's meaning. Moreover, communication is only perceived in terms of either success or failure to transfer this meaning, which is posited as the transference of certain attitudes to certain propositions.

The difference between explicit content and implicatures in these theories is accounted for only in terms of the MEANS by which they are communicated - inferencing being used in the case of implicatures or decoding in the case of explicit content. In both cases communication is seen to occur either fully or not at all. Where Sperber and Wilson differ is that they argue that the reception of both explicit and implicit meaning requires the hearer to utilise inferences, and depending on the type of evidence the communicator uses there is also a difference in WHAT gets communicated. Within this paradigm communication is therefore a matter of degree.

Their claim that communication occurs in varying strengths is explained more fully when they distinguish between 'communication' and 'meaning'. For example, something can be 'communicated' without strictly having been 'meant' as in the implications of Mary's response in the following exchange.

Peter: What do you intend to do today?
Mary: I have a terrible headache

As Sperber and Wilson argue, there would be no precise assumption, apart from the one explicitly expressed, which Mary can be said to have intended Peter to share. And yet she clearly intends Peter to draw certain conclusions from her utterance.

> Instead of treating an assumption as either communicated or not communicated we have a set of assumptions which as a result of communications become manifest or more manifest to varying degrees (p.59).

This notion that communication is a matter of degree is based on Sperber and Wilson's assumption that the communicator's informative intention is not to modify the thoughts, but to modify the 'cognitive environment' of the audience. The cognitive environment of the audience is described as the set of facts that are manifest to them, that is, facts which they are capable of representing mentally and accepting as true or probably true.

In aiming to modify the cognitive environment of an audience the speaker can use a mixture of coded and non-encoded elements of language. Sperber and Wilson's argument is that the speaker will choose the

degree of inference required according to how precisely the speaker wants to affect the audience. 'Weak' communication, where there is little linguistic encoding, is sometimes sufficient, or even preferable in face saving situations.

Before going on to describe how ostensive-inferential communication works, I will summarise briefly the main points of Sperber and Wilson's argument so far:

(1) Human beings use two different modes of communication:

  (a) coded communication

  (b) ostensive-inferential communication

(2) They use the two modes in different ways:

  (a) ostensive-inferential communciation can be used on its own, and sometimes is.

  (b) coded communication is only used as a means of strengthening ostensive-inferential communication

(3) Communication is a matter of degree:

  (a) the communicator's behaviour is used as evidence by the audience in the construction of assumptions

  (b) The strength of the communication depends partly on the type of evidence the communicator uses.

A description of the principle of 'relevance' and its role in the communication process is given in the following section, after a brief account of how Sperber and Wilson explain human inferential abilities

3.4 How communication works

Sperber and Wilson describe the inferential process as a series of assumptions the hearer makes about the speaker's meaning. This is seen to be a goal-oriented process in that the aim of the inferencing process is to modify and improve the hearer's 'representation of the world'. The individual's representation of the world is defined as a stock of factual assumptions with some internal organisation. The new assumptions which result from an act of inferencing are added to this stock.

The improvements to the individual's representation of the world are traced, Sperber and Wilson argue, via the workings of a 'deductive device'. The deductive device they posit functions in the same way as a formal model of generative grammar in that the model is perceived to be capable of operating without recourse to any intuitions on the part of the user. Their system is intended to model the system used by human beings in spontaneous inference.

An analysis of the intricacies of the deductive device are outside the scope of this thesis, but there are two basic claims which Sperber and Wilson make which appear to be crucial to their account of communication. One is that this deductive device contains only elimination rules for a concept, that is rules which apply 'only to sets of premises in which there is a specified occurrence of that concept, and

yield only conclusions from which that occurrence has been removed' (p86). The other is that assumptions have different strengths (an assumption being the output of the device) and that the strength of an assumption is a by-product of the way it is deductively processed. The first claim is crucial to the extent that it constrains the production of inferences to those which are non-trivial, and the second is crucial to the extent that it allows a way of speaking of degrees of communication.

Sperber and Wilson assert that inferences are made up of a combination of assumptions. These assumptions have varying strengths depending on their source. Four potential sources are given by Sperber and Wilson, three of which are perceptual: visual, auditory, or linguistic perception, and the fourth source is via the deductive device - part of the central thought processing system.

In claiming that inferences are made up of assumptions whose source can be perceptual as well as being the output of the deductive device, Sperber and Wilson distinguish between 'new' and 'old' information: perceptual information consitutes new information while the assumptions which the deductive device has processed and stored in encylopaedic memory is 'old' information. These two types of assumption being brought together as inputs of the deductive device are seen to produce 'contextual implications'.

Deductions based on the union of new information {P} with old information {C} as premises, are classified as a 'contextualisation of {P} in the context {C}' (p.108). To this extent, the old, encyclopaedic information contextualises the new information. This contextualisation may yield new conclusions not derivable from either premise alone. These new conclusions are termed 'contextual implications'.

The more contextual implications the device yields the more the new information will improve the individual's existing representation of the world. To modify or improve a context is to have some effect on that context. Sperber and Wilson argue that it is possible for a new assumption to either strengthen or weaken an existing assumption. Contextual implications are 'contextual effects' which strengthen the existing assumptions which constitute the individual's representation of the world.

Contextual effects can also weaken existing assumptions if the new information contradicts these old assumptions. Another way of describing this process is to say that the more contextual effects the device yields as a result of new information, the more relevant the new information is. At this point of the argument the significance of Sperber and Wilson's notion of 'relevance' becomes apparent.

As the authors suggest in their description of ostensive-inferential communication, human beings automatically turn their attention to what seems most relevant to them. The concept of relevance is described in terms of its ability to improve the individual's representation of the world. A communicator's use of ostension, it is argued, guarantees that what he or she wishes to communicate will have this effect on the intended audience. As a result the audience approaches an utterance with the assumption of its relevance as a basic premise of any inferences they will make.

To this extent, the hearer's belief that what is being said will be relevant is axiomatic to any act of communication - and the following example of how relevance theory differs from other pragmatic theories which assume a notion of relevance indicates the significance of this claim.

In other pragmatic theories such as those which follow Grice, Sperber and Wilson (1986:182) argue, it is assumed that within an act of communication, first of all the context is determined, then the interpretation process takes place, then relevance is assessed. In their own version of the process, Sperber and Wilson claim that first of all the individual hopes that the assumption being processed is relevant, then s/he tries to select a context which will justify that hope.

A crucial difference between their own and previous theories therefore is that the context of an utterance is not an a priori feature of that utterance: in the former process relevance is a variable to be assessed in function of a pre-determined context, while in the latter, relevance is a given, and context is a variable. This raises the question of how, if the context is not predetermined, the individual assesses the relevance of an assumption - that is how does the audience select a context (from either encyclopaedic memory, previous utterances, or from the immediate environment) which will make an utterance fulfil its guarantee of relevance?

As with their notion of communication, the assessment of relevance is also approached in terms of degrees. In accordance with their theoretical framework, Sperber and Wilson assume a model of cognition which operates according to the principle of producing maximum effects for the minimum effort. Relevance to an individual is therefore defined in terms of 'extent conditions' which balance the effect and effort of the process:

> Extent condition 1: an assumption is relevant to the extent that the contextual effects achieved when it is optimally processed are large
> Extent condition 2: an assumption is relevant to an individual to the extent that the effort required to process it is small (p145).

The audience's selection of a context which will make an utterance fulfill its guarantee of relevance is therefore accounted for in terms of maximum contextual

effects for least processing effort. The ease with which a context can be found, which will produce these contextual effects and therefore modify the hearer's representation of the world, is an indication of the extent to which an utterance is relevant. If the hearer cannot provide a context which will produce any contextual effects then the utterance is not relevant to him or her.

As well as having to infer the context of a given utterance as part of the process of producing contextual effects, according to Sperber and Wilson's account, it is also necessary for the hearer to apply contextual assumptions as part of an anterior process: that of identifying the propositional form of an utterance. Their argument is that the information linguistically encoded in an utterance has to be enriched and disambiguaged by a hearer before it can be assigned an appropriate propositional form. The act of interpretation posited by Sperber and Wilson therefore entails two sets of inferences: the initial stage involves the assignment of an appropriate propositional form to the utterance, inferred on the basis of the linguistically encoded information and relevant contextual assumptions; and the second involves the production of a contextual implication, inferred on the basis of a relevant context and the assigned propostional form. This process is made apparent in the analysis of the results of my empirical study and

will be addressed more fully in Chapter Six in the light of my data.

The significance of Sperber and Wilson's model of communication in terms of an explanation of variation in interpretation will be considered in the next section.

3.5 An evaluation of Sperber and Wilson's theory of relevance

In terms of the ability to explain variation in interpretation, the most significant difference between Sperber and Wilson's approach and that of Clark *et al*, is that relevance theory focusses largely on what the hearer does with an utterance rather than on the utterance itself.

This focus is an effect of the model of communication Sperber and Wilson posit. The argument that the code model is capable of only partially describing what occurs in linguistic communication, and the positing instead of a predominantly inferential model of communication, requires a modification of the hypothesis that communication, by definition, consists of the hearer's recovery of the speaker's intention. If there is no direct match between signal and message, communication comes to be seen as involving an element of risk, and inferencing becomes a more problematic concept, requiring an explanation which utterance-focussed approaches do not have to furnish.

Within Sperber and Wilson's approach, the hearer utilises a wide range of evidence in interpreting an utterance - of which the encoded elements of syntax and semantics are just one part - and it is therefore the hearer's selection and organisation of this range of evidence that is the focus of their theory. A consideration of one of the major differences between their theory and that posited by Clark et al may unpack the issues involved.

Because Clark's theory assumes that the context chronologically pre-exists an utterance, in that it is what is already mutually known by the interlocutors, it is also taken to be an a priori element of the utterance. To this extent the theory does not offer an account of context selection. The context is inseparable from the utterance in that its existence is what makes a sentence into an utterance.

Sperber and Wilson agree with Clark's approach to the extent that they assume that certain information must be shared if any degree of communication is to take place. They posit however a 'mutual cognitive environment' rather than a concept of 'mutual knowledge'. These two concepts differ both in terms of their definition, and their role in the inferencing process.

In defining the notion of a 'cognitive environment' Sperber and Wilson argue that it is a weaker notion than that of 'knowledge'. The cognitive

environment of an individual is the set of facts that s/he is capable of mentally representing at a given time as true or probably true. It is therefore a potential rather than an existing state of knowledge.

The difference between the role of mutuality in the two theories is that for Sperber and Wilson, the context of an utterance is selected from the cognitive environment the hearer assumes s/he shares with the speaker. It is therefore a subset of any actual cognitive environment they might share. This subset, the context, is moreover the result of an inferencing process rather than an initial, fixed, mutually known premise as in the type of inferencing process the mutual knowledge hypothesis posits. The difference then is that, within the model proposed by relevance theory, when an individual is faced with linguistic stimuli, the assumption of what information is mutual to the interlocutors, comes at the end rather than at the beginning of the inferencing process.

Sperber and Wilson's model therefore requires an explicit account of how the hearer selects a context, and to this extent it can accommodate variation in interpretation. Since it is the perameters of the hearer's cognitive environment (what the hearer is capable of mentally representing) which determine the selection of a context for a given utterance, and as the cognitive environment of individuals can differ, then so too can the selected context. Moreover since

the context is used a) to enrich and disambiguate the information linguistically encoded in an utterance during the process of assigning an appropriate propositional form; and b) as a premise used in drawing any further inferences via the deductive device, it is possible for the interpretation of an utterance to vary between individuals.

To recap then: in assuming the encoded element of language to be just one piece of evidence among many which the audience will use in interpreting an utterance, the model allows questions to be asked about what other evidence is called upon in the inferencing process, and how this other evidence influences the interpretation of the utterance.

An explanation of variation in interpretation is also given scope by the second corollary of the lack of a direct match between signal and message: that communication involves an element of risk. Although the inferences the hearer makes are directed towards recovering the speaker's intended meaning, there can be no sure means for the hearer to be certain that the speaker's intention has been recovered. Since the inferences the hearer makes are based on a range of evidence, the encoded elements of an utterance as well as contextual features such as previously held assumptions, and since these assumptions can have varying strengths depending on their source, it also

becomes possible to talk of the existence of degrees of communication.

Sperber and Wilson describe this in terms of the extent of the explicitness of an utterance - that is the extent to which the logical form of an assumption is encoded in the utterance. The more contextual features needed by the audience to produce the logical form of an utterance, the less explicit it is. Although this is not specifically addressed by Sperber and Wilson, an implication of this view of explicitness is that an audience faced with an utterance which does not appear to them to have a high degree of linguistically encoded logical form will enrich it with contextual features. To the extent that these contextual features can vary between individuals I would argue that interpretation can vary. How far this extension of the theory is licensed by Sperber and Wilson's model is open to question however, and will be considered in the following account of the limitations of relevance theory.

In summary then, I have considered three features of the theory which allow an explanation of variation in interpretation to be drawn from Sperber and Wilson's account of communication:

1) Sperber and Wilson focus on the processes of interpretation and this allows different types of variation between interpretations to be addressed.

2) The authors focus on the variety of evidence used in inference production which brings in the audience's existing encyclopaedic knowledge, therefore positing a way of describing variation between individuals.

3) The authors assume that communication is a matter of degree - which offers a means of accounting for the specific difficulties involved in interpreting broadcast communication.

3.6 Limitations of relevance theory

The claim made above, that the degree to which an utterance is perceived to encode the logical form of an assumption can vary between audiences, is the first of two limitations of the theory in terms of its applicability to the data of my case studies. I should add however that the limitations are more a matter of what the theory is currently used to explain rather than of what it is capable of explaining.

In incorporating the concept of a code Sperber and Wilson imply that there is a certain level of shared knowledge between interlocutors - that of the semantics and syntax of a language. I would argue however that to the extent that groups of individuals can have very different types of knowledge, this will be reflected in their semantic knowledge, and there will therefore be differences in the semantic field a given term will cover for different individuals.

Sperber and Wilson argue that an assumption is 'strongly' communicated when an utterance contains a high degree of linguistically encoded information, and it is 'weak' when the assumptions are implied rather than encoded. However I would argue that whether an utterance contains a high level of linguistic encoding is not simply a fact that can be retrieved from the utterance itself, but that, particularly in the case of the interpretation of broadcast texts, the level of linguistic encoding in an utterance is a subjective perception.

If different degrees of semantic knowledge exist in different audiences then the extent to which an assumption is 'strongly' communicated is dependent upon an audience's perception of the semantic field of a given term. If the intended meaning of a term is one with which the hearer is not familiar, then the process of assigning a propositional form to the utterance will require more inferential activity than where the hearer is familiar with the intended meaning. I would argue that particularly in the case of broadcast communication and its interpretration, instead of locating the degree of encoding within an utterance, it needs to be located in the perception of the audience. This claim will be addressed more fully in Chapter Six section 2 in the light of the data from my empirical study.

This notion of variation between the perceptions of an audience requires a concept of individuals as existing in society, in that the type of knowledge which informs those perceptions is culturally acquired, and it is here that the second limitation of relevance theory becomes evident. Although Sperber and Wilson attempt to account for the principle which governs the behaviour of individuals they do not look at the behaviour itself. Neither do they take into account the influences of the social background of the individual, and the implications this has for linguistic behaviour (see for example the findings of Frazer 1987).

One aim of this thesis is therefore to draw out the implications of Sperber and Wilson's claim that the encyclopaedic knowledge of a hearer is one source of the potential context which will be applied in the interpretation of an utterance. By drawing out differences between the encyclopaedic knowledge of different audience members, I aim to show how such differences will produce variation in interpretation. In doing so my intention is to build on relevance theory's existing ability to explain HOW a specific interpretation is produced to be able to argue WHY an interpretation is produced, and to locate that explanation in the cultural background of an audience.

4 SUMMARY

In this chapter I have argued that context can affect the interpretation of discourse. I have argued that this investigation requires a specific notion of context: that of context as a mental construct which is a subset of an individual's knowledge store. Sperber and Wilson assert that this knowledge includes the encyclopaedic knowledge which an audience bring with them to an utterance, and that this is crucial to any interpretation an individual makes. I draw out the implications of this assertion to claim that the theory of relevance can both accommodate, and provide the basis for an explanation of, variation in interpretation. This claim is based on the premise that individuals whose cultural background is radically different can have different types of encyclopaedic knowledge, and therefore may provide different contexts for any given utterance, which may in turn lead to the production of different interpretations.

While more recent accounts of relevance theory (e.g. Smith and Wilson 1992:3) have implied that this may occur, there are no studies at present which actually draw out the full implications of the tenets of relevance theory by addressing actual interpretations of utterances. I would argue however that without this type of data relevance theory cannot be truly explanatory in that it cannot say why certain interpretations should be made rather than others.

In this thesis I therefore draw on the implications of the tenets of relevance theory outlined in this chapter to produce a methodology for the anslysis of audience reception of broadcast communication which will focus on and draw out the effects of differences between audience members. In order to be able to consider the usefulness of such a methodology I will first, in Chapter Three, review existing methods of analysing audience reception.

Chapter Three

'INTERPRETATION' IN THE ANALYSIS OF BROADCAST COMMUNICATION

1 INTRODUCTION

In Chapter Two I argued that linguistic theories which assume a code model do not focus on variation in interpretation. Their approach is exclusively focussed on the question of how successful communication is achieved: anything other than full comprehension of an utterance is perceived as a failure and is therefore not an issue. In contrast the inferential model of language developed in Sperber and Wilson's theory of relevance builds on the premise, shared by both models, that that the linguistic structure of an utterance underdetermines its interpretation. To the extent that Sperber and Wilson's aim is to describe and explain the inferences made by the hearer in selecting the appropriate interpretation, the model can, I asserted, both accommodate, and provide the basis for an explanation of, variation in interpretation.

Sperber and Wilson's focus is primarily cognitive and theoretical however and they therefore aim to explain the mechanisms and criteria involved in producing inferences rather than focussing on and explaining the actual inferential behaviour of individuals. I have argued that an explanation of actual behaviour requires a sociological dimension and one aim of this thesis is to explore this dimension in

relation to variation in audience interpretation of media texts.

In this chapter, since my practical study is concerned with the interpretation of a television programme, I survey recent work in media analysis which addresses audience reception. My intention is to consider the model of communication assumed by researchers in this field and the effect of this model on the selection and explanation of data. Bearing in mind the arguments of the previous chapter, I specifically consider the usefulness of approaching audience reception of media texts with the explicit assumption that communication is primarily an inferential process. Given the role of context in the inferential model, its definition as a subset of the hearer's knowledge store, and my claim that an implication of this is that differences between audiences will lead to different contexts being supplied, my particular aim in the survey which follows is to focus on those reception studies which already assume that differences between audiences will lead to variation in interpretation. In the process I hope to distinguish the areas where I perceive an application of the inferential model of language posited by Sperber and Wilson to be of most use.

Since the early 1980s, and, according to some scholars specifically since the publication of David Morley's (1980) study of the Nationwide audience, it

has become a commonplace in works of media analysis to acknowledge that the social background of an individual will affect her or his interpretation of broadcast texts (see for example Gledhill 1988:67; Seiter 1989:3; Corner, Richardson and Fenton 1990:2; Curran and Sparks 1991:221). However, although it has become traditional for authors to repeat this acknowledgement, the extent to which it actually affects their work is not always apparent in that often the focus is still solely on the text. The trend of textual analysis which, although acknowledging that there is a gap between textual potential and audience reception, posits an implied reader (i.e. Gledhill 1988), while raising many interesting issues, will not be included in this survey.

In this chapter I shall limit my review to those fields of research which focus on actual audience response to the media. In the following section I consider in general terms how two distinct approaches to audience response account for variation in audience interpretation of media products, with particular emphasis on developments in critical cultural studies; in section 3 I consider in more depth three empirical studies which aim to explain and explore variation in audience response to interpretation within the paradigm of critical cultural studies; in section 4 I consider the extent to which these studies are predicated on a vague notion of the code model of language which

restricts their explanatory power and then go on to address the question of whether the systematized inferential model of language outlined in relevance theory can contribute to studies of audience response within the critical cultural studies paradigm, and if so what it has to offer.

2 APPROACHES TO AUDIENCE RESPONSE

Since the early 1980s there has been a growth in qualitative audience studies which focus on responses to television (See for example Hobson 1982; Ang 1985; Lull 1988) Although this qualitative approach does not exactly adopt the methodology of its anthropological namesake, it has been termed 'ethnographic' in that the approach shares ethnography's 'basic interest in an empirical investigation of cultural practices as lived experiences' (Seiter et al 1989:227). Within the field of audience studies this form of empirical investigation generally consists of case studies of specific groups of people from whom data, in the form of their responses to media communication, is elicited by means of an interview.

Ien Ang (1989) argues that although in recent years this approach has been adopted in a wide range of audience studies, it functions very differently according to the aims of the research which is being carried out. In her argument Ang identifies two

orientations in studies of audience response to the media which she terms 'critical', and 'mainstream'.

The mainstream approach, Ang argues, typified by the 'uses and gratifications' model, aims to dissect audience activity into variables and categories in order to be able to study them one by one and produce a formal 'map' of all dimensions of audience activity. In contrast the aim of critical cultural studies, (originating largely in the theories developed during the 1970s at the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies) is 'to arrive at a more historicized insight into the ways in which "audience activity" is related to social and political structures and processes'.(Ang 1989:101)

The approaches are distinct then in terms of their epistemological assumptions: for mainstream research the knowledge which arises from audience studies has the status of 'scientific knowledge', while for critical cultural studies this knowledge is perceived as inevitably partial and temporary. They are also distinct in terms of their focus: critical cultural studies looks to social phenomena for an explanation of variation, while a mapping of the variation is often an end in itself for mainstream approaches.

In order to relate the aims of my own audience study to those of existing studies I shall use Ang's distinction between critical and mainstream approaches to structure the following brief survey of recent

developments in research into audience response to the media. However, as will become clear in the remainder of this chapter, this thesis is primarily concerned with the application of the tenets of relevance theory to the critical approach.

2.1 The mainstream approach: uses and gratifications

Research which is categorized as applying a uses and gratifications framework covers a wide body of work and is not an integrated approach. There are however certain aims and assumptions which are common to work in this area, and Rubins (1986) argues that a basic tenet of all uses and gratifications research is

> that individuals differentially select and use communication vehicles to gratify or satisfy their felt needs (1986:281).

Studies based on this assumption first arose in America as a reaction to the pessimism of the Frankfurt school with its 'hypodermic' model of media effects (see section 2.2 below). Uses and gratifications researchers did not assume that the media was uninfluential, but rather that it was just one source of potential influence amongst many other sources. Early studies emphasized the pluralist nature of American society which countered any effects the media message might have. Morley argues, for example, that the approach 'stressed the barriers "protecting" the audience from the potential effects of the message' and goes on to cite Katz's (1959) assertion that:

> even the most potent of mass media content cannot ordinarily influence an individual who has no "uses" for it in the social and psychological context in which he lives. The "uses" approach assumes that people's values, their interests...associations...social roles, are pre-potent, and that people selectively fashion what they see and hear (quoted in Morley 1989:16).

Although this could be seen as an improvement on the hypodermic model in that it acknowledges that audience response to the media can vary, the uses and gratifications approach has been criticized for being asociological and ahistorical, reducing all responses to the level of variations between individual psychologies (Morley 1989:17, Patterson 1987:227). The approach has also been criticized for its fragmentary nature and Rubin (1986) describes a series of uses and gratifications studies which aim to address these criticisms.

Rubin's own work has attempted to develop concepts introduced by Greenberg (1974) in the investigation of television use by British children and adolescents, with the aim of countering the accusations of fragmentariness by maintaining a coherent approach over a period of time. I give below a brief account of this work in order to indicate why the insights into the interpretation process afforded by relevance theory would not be most usefully exploited in the context of such studies.

Greenberg (1974) analysed a range of reasons for watching television and produced a set of categories of the motives behind children and adolescents' use of

television. These categories included uses such as learning, habit and relaxation. Greenberg then compared the demographic features of viewers with these categories, and found age to be the the most significant demographic correlate.

Various other studies were carried out during the 1970s which applied this set of 'television use scales' together with measurements of viewing behaviours (level of viewing and programme preferences), television attitudes (perceived realism and television affinity) and sociodemographic characteristics. These measurements were then linked to television content and a typical example of the findings was that:

> habitual or pastime viewing was linked negatively to watching news/public affairs programs and positively to television affinity and watching comedy programs (Rubin 1986:291).

Later studies were extended to cover a range of factors which might influence media consumption such as social activity, life satisfaction and personality traits.

A basic assumption of this work therefore is that depending on certain features intrinsic to a viewer, that viewer will actively use different aspects of the media to gratify certain needs and the aim of studies in this field is to correlate the variables involved. As Fisher (1978:159) states: the primary purpose of uses and gratifications research is to consider:

> what purposes or functions the media serve for a body of active viewers (quoted in Rubin 1986).

It is with this particular understanding of the viewer as 'active' that proponents of the critical cultural studies approach most strongly take issue. Ang (1989) exemplifies this criticism in her reference to

> ...the rather triumphant liberal-pluralist conlusion, often expressed by gratificationists that media consumers are "free" or even "powerful" - a conclusion which allegedly undercuts the idea of "media hegemony" (1989:100).

Her argument, and that of Morley (1980:15) is that the apparent freedom of the audience assumed by uses and gratifications researchers is circumscribed by the shared set of codes which the audience and the media 'inhabit'. Morley's arguments will be described more fully in the following section, but to conclude this account of the uses and gratifications approach, I consider the significance attributed to audience activity from the perspective of the contribution relevance theory could make to the approach.

To some extent the uses and gratifications approach appears to be compatible with the model of language outlined in relevance theory, in that the analyses of audience response implicitly assume that what a spectator perceives as relevant will depend upon her or his existing knowledge. However the focus of the approach is somewhat general in terms of the assumed relationship between specific television programmes and how an audience perceives them. The studies do not aim, for example, to draw out the

different meanings a particular programme can generate, but rather set out to account for variation solely in terms of audience features.

Analyses within the uses and gratifications approach do not therefore focus specifically on inferences arising from the television text. This would imply that within this paradigm the text is either seen to be transparent or else not considered to be a relevant contributory factor to any variation in response. My claim in this thesis, which will be developed in the following chapters, is that the value of relevance theory lies in its ability to account for the sources of variation in terms of text, audience activity, and audience background. Given the narrower aims of the uses and gratifications approach, therefore, a methodology based on relevance theory would not be most usefully exploited in this context. In the following section I describe in more detail the body of research in which, I argue, relevance theory might be more usefully applied.

2.2 The critical cultural studies approach

Early examples of the critical approach have been described as versions of the 'hypodermic model' of media effects. Within this paradigm the media were seen to cause audiences to be politically quiescent, taking on some form of false consciousness; the audience moreover were undifferentiated and were

assumed to be passive recipients of the ideological effects of the media message. (See Morley's 1980 account p.1)

In an article which comments on the development and current scope of media studies Collins (1990) refers to the prevalence of this set of assumptions in cultural studies in the 1970s as the 'dominant ideology thesis'. He describes the media at this point as 'customarily understood to be at least a major agency, and often the decisive agency, in the propagation and reproduction of ideology' (1990:3). The significance afforded the media as a result of this set of assumptions, although strongly critiqued in later years, was generally accepted in cultural analyses of this period. Collins accounts for this in terms of its compatibility with the 'tendency in twentieth-century political theory to emphasize the role of ideas rather than force in holding society together' (1990:3).

Gramsci's theory of 'hegemony', the basis for this premise, is the impetus behind a series of studies whose aim was to account for the role of the media in preserving what Raymond Williams had previously described as:

> an order in which a certain way of life and thought is dominant, in which one concept of reality is diffused throughout society in all its institutional and private manifestations, informing with its spirit all taste, morality, customs, religious and political principles, and all social relations, particularly in their intellectual and moral connotations (Williams 1960:587; quoted in Press 1991:16).

Such studies generally consisted of textual analyses which theorised the extent to which the dominant ideology was inscribed in media texts. This trend culminated in the late 1970s in Screen theory which drew on the work of Althusser and Lacan to develop a sophisticated account of the hegemonic effect of the media by explaining the construction of the social subject in terms of the textual positioning of the reader or viewer (e.g. Heath and Skirrow 1977). Although very influential for over a decade in textual analyses (See for example many of the articles in Pribram 1988), this account has been criticized by Morley (1989:19), amongst others, as an ahistorical, asocial, generalist conception of television spectatorship. Most significantly, from the perspective of this thesis, the theory also denied space for variation in interpretation to be addressed: the audience were seen to be prisoners of the text.

Since Morley's (1980) survey of audience response to the news programme Nationwide, which problematised and developed many of the assumptions of Screen theory, the audience/text relationship has been generally perceived as dialogic. Morley's survey, which will be considered in more detail in the following section, is taken by many scholars to have provided empirical evidence for the argument that the meanings an audience draws from the text are not inevitably determined by the text itself and should be perceived instead as

'negotiated'. In the remainder of this section I consider the implications for critical cultural studies of the development of the notion that the relationship between the text and audience is dialogic.

Charlotte Brunsdon (1989) argues that this development originated in part in the 'redemptive' readings of the late 1970s. Although in these analyses the media message was still seen to be aimed at perpetuating the dominant ethos, a critical stance allowed a non-dominant reading:

> The redemptive reading ....starts with an acceptance of the uncongenial politics of whatever cultural text - for it is primarily a political reading - and then finds, at the least, incoherences and contradiction, and at the most fully articulated subtexts of revolt (Brunsdon 1989:121).

The specific problems of accommodating the theoretical implications of textual polysemy of the form described by Brunsdon above, in a paradigm which assumes that the media work hegemonically, is addressed in Chapter Seven in the light of the data from this thesis. At this point however my aim is to trace the developments in the field which resulted from the growing recognition that audience response can vary significantly.

According to Brunsdon the textual practice of uncovering oppositional meanings led to a skepticism on the part of some researchers about whether redemptive reading was what 'real' readers did. This in turn led to a testing out of textual hypotheses, of which Morley's survey is an example. A major problem for

critical cultural studies at this time (see my discussion of Hall 1980 in Chapter Seven) was how earlier assumptions about the workings of hegemony could accommodate the recognition that audiences are 'active'. If the audience are not the passive recipients of the ideological message inscribed in the text how then might the hegemonic effect of the media be theorised?

This problem was compounded by a growing critique of the notion of a single 'dominant ideology'. Feminist studies of this period which claimed the existence of 'contradictory subcultures' added to the developing argument that 'there is no single dominant ideology but rather that society is animated by a plurality of distinct belief systems' (Collins 1990:6)

The implications of this argument are drawn out in Brunsdon's (1981) article on soap opera where she develops the idea that the interpretation of a text is determined by the cultural competence of the audiences who inhabit these subcultures, and goes on to theorise the types of knowledge required to understand soap opera:

> I am thus arguing that Crossroads textually implies a feminine viewer to the extent that its textual discontinuities, in order to make sense require a viewer competent within the ideological and moral frameworks (the rules) of romance, marriage and family life (Brunsdon 1983:81, reprinted).

This notion that it is the skill or abilities of the audience which produce the text as meaningful or

enjoyable was developed further and given substance in Hobson's (1982) study of actual audience reception of the soap opera Crossroads. Hobson's survey showed that while the programme itself was perceived as valueless by most people, the meanings invested in the text by its audience nevertheless imbued it with a value for that audience.

Although in some ways an extension of Brunsdon's argument about cultural competence, Hobson's approach to audience response differs radically in that the problems of accommodating ideological determination with textual polysemy and audience differentiation are not addressed. Where Brunsdon attempts to work within the earlier cultural studies problematic by accounting for the meaning of a programme in terms of both the text and the cultural competence of an audience situated in society, Hobson focusses primarily on evidence of the audience's abilities to produce the text as meaningful and enjoyable. To this extent textual hegemony is still an issue in Brunsdon's theoretical account while it is not in Hobson's empirical study.

McGuigan (1992:127) argues that this move away from a preoccupation with hegemony in cultural studies has led to an 'uncritical populist drift', particularly in later studies such as those of Taylor and Mullan (1986) and Fiske (1987) which 'celebrate popular television from an active audience viewpoint'.

McGuigan sees this approach, referred to as 'new revisionism', as having gone so far as to actually invert the dominant ideology thesis in that by extolling the existence of a 'semiotic democracy' Fiske in particular 'suppresses questions of material inequality in the cultural field' (McGuigan 1992:159).

One way of treating the apparent incompatibility of notions of textual hegemony with evidence of variation in audience response has been therefore to cease addressing the notion of textually determined effects at all and focus solely on the potential range of meanings produced by the audience. However as a series of commentators have pointed out this approach lacks any critical engagement with the media product itself. Curran and Sparks for example argue that:

> Growing recognition that audiences are far from passive and that media content has no fixed meaning has led to an increasingly uncritical celebration of what is popular in the market place (Curran and Sparks 1991:216).

Whilst acknowledging that analysts can no longer make the assumptions about textual determination that were prevalent in the seventies, in order to address lacunae of the type indicated by Curran and Sparks, there have been a number of calls for a return to the text as focus. Brunsdon argues, for example, that to focus on the audience alone precludes a consideration of the quality of television programmes:

> What we find, very frequently, in audience data, is that the audience is making the best of a bad job. The problem of working always with what people are, of necessity, watching, is that we

> don't really ever address that something else - what people might like to watch (Brunsdon 1989:126).

Brunsdon's argument, like that of Curran and Sparks is that such a focus leads to an uncritical acceptance of what the media offer.

Although a focus on the audience solely as the creators of meaning has led to a series of critiques which have called for a qualified return to the issues of textual and social determination of audience reception, (See Morley 1991; Collins 1990; McGuigan 1992) there is no clear indication of how the relationship between text and audience might be adequately approached within critical cultural studies. In order to make explicit the difficulties involved I focus on three examples of audience studies which have set out to record and explain variation in audience response in terms of the relationship between textual polysemy, audience agency and hegemonic effect. My aim is ultimately to consider how far the difficulties which these studies encounter are the result of the linguistic assumptions they employ, and to ask specifically whether adopting a methodology based on relevance theory might better serve their aims.

3 THREE EXAMPLES OF ANALYSES OF AUDIENCE RESPONSE

In the previous section I argued that a problem for critical cultural studies has been to account for the hegemonic effect of the media once audiences are no longer perceived as passive, and texts are no longer seen to have a single fixed meaning. In the three studies I consider, a crucial issue is how, if the unsatisfactory accounts of textual interpretation offered by Screen theory and new revisionism are to be rejected, might the evidence of audience activity and variation in response which these studies set out to record be best described and explained? In order to answer this question the studies explicitly attempt to accommodate theories of textual determination with evidence of audience activity.

One of the primary means of accommodating these apparently conflicting notions has been to perceive evidence of audience activity in terms of 'resistance' to the 'preferred reading' of a text. The notion of resistance has been a useful compromise for critical cultural studies to the extent that it allows both the text and the audience a certain amount of power. However, as I shall argue in the following evaluation of Morley (1980) and Bobo (1988) who employ this notion, although their empirical studies offer interesting data, the partial nature of this view of audience activity does not produce an adequate description of how the text and audience interact, and

the gaps in information this leads to have an adverse effect on the explanatory power of their theories. The data from my empirical study has a particular bearing on this issue, and so I shall discuss Stuart Hall's (1980) development of the theoretical framework in greater detail in Chapter Seven in the light of my findings.

An alternative solution to the problem of accommodating textual determination and audience activity, offered by Press (1991), is to argue that variation in audience response can be accounted for in terms of a differentiated hegemonic effect which alters according to the class position of the audience. Again, although producing a wealth of interesting data, Press's analysis cannot provide an adequate description of how the text relates to the interpretations of her interviewees, nor an adequate account of how the variation can be explained.

As I have asserted in Chapter One section 1.2, any account of either media hegemony, or the relationship between audience response and cultural background, requires a more precise account of how interpretations occur than has been offered in the past. In this section I describe the methodology employed by the three studies cited above in order to make more explicit how their difficulties are at least in part caused by their lack of an adequate model of language.

3.1 Morley, D (1980) "The Nationwide Audience"

In his study of the Nationwide audience Morley distinguishes his own work from existing research in terms of three predominant issues. In response to a range of 'effects' research which he surveys, he argues (a) against the notion of a passive and undifferentiated audience and (b) against the notion that the media message has only one meaning; he also (c) takes issue with uses and gratifications, and other forms of 'interpretative' audience research for their asociological approach. Accordingly he describes his point of departure in these terms:

> What is needed here is an approach which links differential interpretations to the socio-economic structure of society, showing how members of different groups and classes, sharing different "cultural codes" will interpret a given message differently, not just at the personal, idiosyncratic level, but in a way "systematically related" to their socio-economic position (1980:14).

Morley's work does not however, constitute a complete break with previous research: his argument is not that media effects do not occur, but rather that they can only occur once a message has been 'decoded' by the audience. Moreover he is not claiming that a media message can have just any meaning, but rather that the message is 'a structured polysemy' containing a 'preferred reading'.(1) His focus is therefore on certain moments in the communication process - first, the moment of 'encoding' where the message 'is structured in dominance by the preferred reading'

(p.12) and second, the moment of decoding by the audience. The former moment is the focus of an earler work (Brunsdon and Morley 1978), while the latter is the subject of Morley's (1980) project, which he defines thus:

> The problem which this project was designed to explore was that of the extent to which decodings take place within the limits of the preferred (or dominant) manner in which the message has been initially encoded (1980:18).

Morley carried out this exploration by setting up a series of interviews with people from pre-existing groups who were required to watch an episode of the news programme Nationwide, and then discuss their responses. His choice of interviewees was determined by the variation in interpretation the different groups would be likely to offer. Features which were expected to affect 'decoding' consisted of (a) basic socio-demographic factors, such as sex, age, class (b) involvement in various cultural frameworks, such as higher education or trade unionism and (c) direct or indirect experience of the topics addresed by the programme.

Morley's hypothesis was that there would be some systematic relationship between the different groups of respondents and the decodings they produced. As a framework for the different types of decodings, Morley draws on Hall's (1973) development of Parkin's (1973) theory that there are three 'meaning systems' within which a message can be read: dominant, negotiated, and

oppositional. This framework is also discussed in section 3.2 below, as well as in Chapter Seven in the light of the data from my empirical study, but as a brief indication of its range: a decoding within a dominant meaning system would accept the 'preferred reading' of a message, a negotiated reading would question the text but not the ideology behind it while an oppositional reading would reject the preferred reading.

The types of interpretation which Morley elicits in his interviews appear to fall into two categories. In the first instance, the data records the extent to which the groups are conscious of the programme as a 'product', consisting of comments on their perception of (a) the programme's targetted audience, (b) the intentions of the presenters, and (c) the construction of the programme. Within this category is also included comments which indicate the respondents' consciousness of bias in the programme (ie as being 'right or left wing').

The second category incorporates comments on what the items 'mean'. For example the 'preferred reading' of an item on a consumer affairs figure, Ralph Nader, appeared to be that his credibility was somewhat suspect (p.59). The interpretations of this item varied from an acceptance of this point of view, often in spite of a perceived bias in the programme's presentation of the man, to a rejection of this

negative view of Nader. It is significant however that readings which do not coincide with the preferred reading of the programme are perceived primarily as examples of 'resistance', indicating that an initial feature of the decoding process is a uniform apprehension of the text's message.

This can be seen in Morley's analysis of his data where he argues that oppositional readings require a conscious rejection of a message's assumptions by the audience as well as the ability to put another set of assumptions in their place. For example an oppositional reading of a 'Budget Special' episode of Nationwide, which focussed solely on the effects of taxation implemented by the then Labour Government, was articulated by a respondent from a Trade Unionist group who first summarised the programme's message and then indicated a consciousness of an alternative perspective:

> There was no mention in all this run up against "taxation's bad" and "you shouldn't have to pay this sort of level", that there are those people that, through no fault of their own, are so lowly paid that they have to have it bumped up by somewhere else, which has to come out of the tax system... (1980:115).

Throughout the work, Morley refers to communication entirely in terms of a code model - although it could be argued that the model is extended well beyond its scope in linguistic terms (see Chapter Two section 2.3). Moreover the inadequacies of the descriptive power of the code model are compounded in

this study by the claim that any decoding which does not meet with the 'preferred reading' of a message is referred to as having been 'decoded in a different framework of meaning from that in which it was encoded' (p.11) - a process whose workings are never quite made explicit.

Morley's study has been widely criticized since its publication, both in his own later work and in that of other researchers in the field of critical cultural studies. It should be said however that the continuing interest in this work results predominantly from the general recognition that it is a particularly significant piece of research which has been very influential. However, with the development of more sophisticated theories of communication in recent years, I would argue that it has become possible to perceive the limiting effects of methodologies which are premised on a code model of communication (see for example Corner 1986) and to problematize more fully the interpretation process.

For example, although Morley asserts that the aim of his project is to 'explore the extent to which decodings take place within the limits of the preferred (or dominant) manner in which the message has been initially encoded' (p.18), as I shall argue below, the assumptions of the code model actually lead to his analysis only picking up on those 'decodings' which take place within the limits of a preferred reading.

His linguistic assumptions do not allow, and therefore his study is not designed to provide, evidence of readings which do not at some level engage with the preferred reading.

The use of the terms 'negotiation' and 'opposition' to denote readings which do not concur with the preferred reading imply, as does the focus of Morley's analysis, that variation in response consists initially of a decoding which is in line with the preferred reading followed by a conscious re-assessment of the meaning by the audience. This is made explicit in Morley's argument that while for certain members of the audience the dominant meanings encoded in the programme 'may well "fit" and be accepted' (p.159) for other members they may not:

> For other sections of the audience the meanings and definitions encoded in a programme like Nationwide will jar to a greater or lesser extent with those produced by other institutions and discourse in which they are involved - trade unions or "deviant" subcultures for example - and as a result the dominant meanings will be "negotiated" or resisted (1980:159).

Although, therefore, it is Morley's declared intention to focus on 'the moment of decoding' (p.11) it is the second stage of this process, that of the re-assessment of the dominant meaning that he actually appears to analyse when focussing on responses which do not accept the preferred reading.

Wren-Lewis (1983:195) sees this confusion as the result of Morley's use of group interviews. I would argue however, that the confusion arises primarily out

of the linguistic model assumed by Morley in that it determines the questions the interviewees are asked and the aspects of their responses which are analysed. In Morley's analysis, because there is no recognition that an initial inference can be unconscious as well as 'oppositional' this aspect of the communication process is not focussed on.

Morley's methodology, based as it is on the notion of resistance to, or acceptance of a 'preferred reading' which is inscribed in the text leads him to focus primarily on the articulation of the respondents' consciousness of that reading (2). The search for this conscious resistance to a preferred reading tends to preclude Morley's analysis focussing on the question of whether what he would term an 'oppositional' or 'negotiated' reading could also be unconscious. The implication is that any respondent who produces a 'non-intended' decoding must be aware of the conflict.

Morley's methodology thus 'filters out' any non-conscious readings of this type because the respondents themselves do not foreground these readings in the same way as they might where they had actually perceived conflict between their own belief system and that of the television programme. And it is almost solely these conscious conflicts which are picked up by Morley in his analysis of the data, his assumption being that a non-conscious reading implies acceptance of the preferred reading.

Morley's location of variation in response within a secondary process of resistance therefore leads to a somewhat partial account of the phenomenon. This is at least in part an effect of his adoption of a code model of language. In assuming that a basis for all interpretation is the uniform apprehension of a literal meaning immanent in the text, the actual cause of variation - i.e. how the audience comes to make the inferences which lead to the variation he records - is not an issue.

As an example of the type of information Morley's analysis does not generally pick up on there is one record of variation at what might approximate more to 'the moment of decoding' which it is Morley's actual aim to focus on. This is where two responses differ over the assumed referents in an item where a 'tax expert' on the programme is considering the benefits of a recent budget. A group of black, working class, FE students perceive the speaker as referring to his own income (p.120) while a group of white, upper middle class, European management trainees perceive the speaker to be making a generalisation about the economy (p.125).

The fact that the variation is made explicit at the point of reference assignment here means that it might be possible in this case to begin to consider in more precise terms how an understanding of the text's 'message' actually occurs. It provides evidence, for

example, of the grounds that could lead to one respondent rejecting and another accepting the preferred reading Morley posits. This level of variation is not foregrounded in Morley's analysis however and in general it is never very clear whether the audience as a whole has in fact taken the apparent 'preferred' meaning of a specific item and then gone on to either consciously negotiate or reject it, or whether it is at the point of initial inferences such as that of reference assignments made by the audience that variation occurs. Because Morley's data does not provide evidence of how the different readings are produced, the descriptive power of his study is less than adequate and his explanations more speculative than necessary.

In order to be able to discuss in more detail, in section 4, the lacunae which result from adopting an inadequate linguistic model in audience studies, and how a methodology based on relevance theory might avoid these problems, I consider two examples of more recent studies of audience response which fall within the critical cultural studies paradigm and have been influenced by Morley's approach.

3.2 Bobo, Jacqueline (1988) 'The Colour Purple: Black women as cultural readers'

Jacqueline Bobo's work is a study of the response of a black female audience to the film version of The Colour Purple. Her study arises out of a disparity she had

noted between the mainly negative responses of critics to the Spielberg film version of Alice Walker's novel and the popularity of the film with black female audiences. The critical response, particularly from black male reviewers, was that black people were portrayed in a clichéd manner, that black men were depicted in a particularly harsh light and that the film was generally reactionary. Bobo set out to account for the disparity between the black female audience reaction to the film and that of the black male critics.

Bobo's method was to elicit the responses of a black female audience to events in the film. In the course of the interview, one woman's comment on the growth of Celie, the main character in the film, was: 'The lady was a strong lady, like I am. And she hung in there and overcame' (p.93). From responses such as this it became apparent, Bobo argues, that the audience were ignoring the reactionary aspects of the film and engaging actively with those aspects of the film they perceived as positive.

Bobo then set out to account for the apparently selective nature of the audience response, and to look for an explanation of why it should differ so radically from the responses of male critics. The theoretical framework she applies is more or less that used by Morley: (a) it is assumed that audiences have different social backgrounds; (b) it is assumed that differences

in background will lead to differences in interpretation; and (c) the explanation is in terms of Parkin's (1973) theory of differentiated systems of meaning. Bobo describes Parkin's model as follows:

> This theory delineates three potential responses to a media message: dominant, negotiated or oppositional. A dominant (or preferred) reading of a text accepts the content of the cultural product without question. A negotiated reading questions parts of the content of the text but does not question the dominant ideology which underlies the production of the text. An oppositional response to a cultural product is one in which the recipient of the text understands that the system that produced the text is one with which she/he is fundamentally at odds (Bobo 1988:95).

As with Morley's study, Bobo therefore assumes that a mainstream text would be primarily hegemonic in effect, but that certain audiences can resist this because of their cultural background. Bobo asserts that although it is not a deliberate act, makers of mainstream media products inevitably work within the dominant ideology, and as such their products reinforce this ethos. Thus Spielberg, in spite of having previously articulated the aim of avoiding stereotypes in the film, ends up depicting characters from Walker's novel in a clichéd way, i.e. as savage, naive and childlike. Bobo attributes this to his own 'culturally acquired conceptions of how black people are and how they should act' (p.97), conceptions which she traces to earlier cinematic depictions of black people.

Bobo thus argues that the film embodies a negative message about black people (pp.99-100). In terms of

Parkin's model of differentiated systems of meaning

Bobo argues that it would be expected that the black audience would take an oppositional stance to the film. Bobo states the issue thus

> Given the similarities of The Colour Purple to past films that have portrayed Black people negatively, Black women's positive reaction to the film seems inconceivable. However their stated comments and published reports prove that Black women not only like the film but have formed a strong attachment to it. The film is significant in their lives (198:101).

Bobo dismisses the notion of a 'false consciousness' as an explanation of their reaction - she insists that black women are aware of 'the oppression and harm that comes from a negative media history'. This awareness would normally, she argues, prohibit a positive engagement with mainstream films such as the Spielberg product. Nevertheless the responses of the black female audience of Bobo's study would indicate that they had apparently been 'interpellated' by the film. Bobo introduces the concept of interpellation by giving John Fiske's somewhat sanitised account of it as a form of 'hailing' as in the act of hailing a cab:

> The viewer is hailed by a particular work; if she/he gives a co-operative response to the beckoning then not only are they constructed as a subject, but the text then becomes a text, in the sense that the subject begins to construct meaning from the work and is constructed by the work (1988:102).

The construction of meaning is explained in terms of Pecheux's notion of 'interdiscourse' - and here Bobo cites David Morley's account of it as 'the moment when

subjects bring their histories to bear on meaning production in a text' (p.102).

In the case of her black female audience Bobo claims that their history is constituted partly by the relatively recent tradition of black women's writing, and it is this which allows them to be interpellated by the apparently alien text of the Spielberg film. The relevance of this development in black women's writing which is seen to be 'more in keeping with their experiences, their history and with the daily lives of other black women' (p.103) is explained thus:

> ...Black women, as cultural consumers, are receptive to these works. This intertextual cultural knowledge is forming Black women's store of decoding strategies for films that are about them. This is the cultural competency that Black women brought to their favourable readings of The Colour Purple (1988:103).

Bobo emphasises that it is only in conjunction with this specific cultural background that a mainstream film such as Spielberg's can be perceived positively by a marginalised audience such as that of her respondents. If that cultural tradition is not sustained the perspective will be lost.

Bobo's methodology is somewhat different to Morley's, in spite of the fact that the same terms recur in both analyses. Both paradigms are somewhat deterministic - Bobo's analysis arises from and is based on the premise that texts are strongly deterministic. If this was not the case, the disparity between the audience and the critics' view of the

Spielberg production would simply be explicable in terms of a difference of opinion. However, one major difference between her own and Morley's approach is the latter's aim of focussing on the 'moment of decoding'.

Although, as I have argued above, Morley's analysis does not appear to achieve his declared aim, his study is nevertheless designed to be more specific in attempting to connect message, interpretation and audience background. Bobo refers to her respondents' 'decoding strategies' and makes a series of very plausible hypotheses about how her audiences' cultural backgrounds relate to these strategies. However her study does not set out to show how these processes are actually connected to produce the responses she records. For example it is unclear in her account whether the 'decoding strategies' Bobo imputes are conscious reassessments of a uniform apprehension of the film's message or whether the events of the film are actually perceived differently by the different audiences she refers to.

Although she never explicitly addresses this point, if Bobo is taking Parkin's model then the assumption is that an essential component of an oppositional reading is that the strategies are conscious: the audience perceives the negative images of black people, but 'understands that the system that produced the text is one with which she/he is fundamentally at odds' (p.95). The audience then

apparently goes on to 'decode' the text in an system of meaning which is opposed to that which produced the text.

It is not clear from the data that this was in fact the case, indeed in invoking the notion of 'interpellation', the implication is that Bobo does not see the process as occurring in this conscious way at all - which leaves the question of where Parkin's model fits in. I would argue that his theories have a determining effect on the focus of Bobo's study in that her adoption of the framework leads to her asking certain questions and not others. However, the theory does not in fact appear to contribute to the explanation she offers, and indeed is inconsistent with her explanation in terms of the degree of consciousness she assumes to be involved in the 'decoding' process.

Bobo's theoretical framework is highly eclectic, calling on a range of somewhat contradictory reworkings of the original Screen theoretical framework, as well as notions of 'cultural competence'. The uneasy fit between these theories results in a treatment of both the text and the audience which does not, I would argue, allow an adequate description or explanation of the processes which lead to the variation in response Bobo's study records. An example would be Bobo's employment of the term 'interpellation' which results in a somewhat inconsistent treatment of her interviewees' responses.

In choosing to apply Fiske's reworking of Althusser's notion of interpellation it is possible for Bobo to account for the response of her black female audience as some kind of an 'oppositional interpellation' in that within Fiske's reworking of the theory <u>any</u> identification with <u>any</u> text can be perceived as an 'interpellation'. However where that leaves her underlying premise that texts are deterministic is unclear, since within this framework the text can produce any number of effects depending on how the audience approach it. While it is possible that this may be an accurate account of the process, for Bobo to adopt this approach in her study begs the question of what role she sees the text as playing in the process - if the text has no hegemonic power why is 'reading against the grain' (p.96) an issue?

Although Bobo argues that the 'dominant reading' of the film is that black people are 'savage' 'oversexed' or 'childlike' (p.100) both male and female audiences produce responses which are 'oppositional' in that neither group simply accepts the negative message. However there is a major difference between the responses: the male reviewers explicitly recognise and reject the film's message about black people, and their response is therefore consistent with the notion of an oppositional reading. However, as I have indicated above, to the extent that Bobo is claiming that the female audience in general are 'interpellated' by the

film, their response appears to consist of a different process which does not necessarily include a process of recognition and rejection.

Bobo is thus working with two different notions of interpretation here which are never quite reconciled. On the one hand the male interpretation is perceived as being primarily determined by the text, while on the other an entirely different female interpretation is perceived as having been produced through the conjunction of the same text and a set of 'cultural competencies'. Bobo explains this variation by hypothesizing that the different interpretations arise because her female audience choose to focus on different aspects of the text. However Bobo's study does not actually offer direct evidence of this, and the explanation is moreover somewhat inconsistent with her theoretical assumptions in that it assumes a level of activity and a lack of textual determinism in the case of the female response which is at odds with Bobo's account of the male response. This leads to the question that if it is possible in one case to 'filter out' (p.101) the negative elements of the text how can the text also be perceived as deterministic?

Bobo's argument is that her black female audience produce their specific form of oppositional reading because of their cultural background:

> An audience member from a marginalized group (people of colour, women, the poor, and so on) has an oppositional stance as they participate in mainstream media (1988:96).

However having stated that simply belonging to such a group will lead an audience to produce an oppositional reading of a mainstream film, Bobo then goes on to analyse the specific cultural background which, she hypothesizes, has led to her interviewees producing the readings she records. This unproblematised transition in Bobo's argument implies that any audience which falls into the set of both 'people of colour' and 'women' will share this background. Whilst I would not dispute that Bobo's analysis is quite probably an accurate depiction of the background to the responses her particular female audience provide, my main contention is that her study does not actually show that these were the assumptions which led to the responses. Neither does it show, as she continually implies, that all black women necessarily share these assumptions.

I would argue that the lack of an adequate model of communication leads to Bobo's explanation of the variation in response she records remaining at the level of the hypothetical. Because her methodology does not specifically address how her audience's responses are connected with her assumptions about either their cultural background or the text, her study is not designed to provide evidence that the audiences did actually focus on different aspects of the film to produce their readings, and neither is it designed to show that the assumptions she attributes to her black

female audiences did actually inform their readings. As a result her descriptions of the processes, which she assumes have produced the variation in response she records, are inconsistent and her explanation unnecessariy speculative.

These aspects of Bobo's analysis will be addressed more fully in section 4 after a further example of audience research which focusses on variation in interpretation - this time according to class divisions.

3.3 Press, Andrea (1991) "Women Watching Television"

In the introduction to her work Andrea Press situates her study of women's responses to television within American cultural and gender studies as well as within British cultural studies:

> I respond to the tension between hegemonic analyses of texts and reception and the emphasis on audience resistance which one finds to differing degrees and in distinct configurations in each of these traditions (1991:26).

Premising her work on both the notion of hegemony and the notion of an 'active' audience Press aims to explore the role of the media in the formation of female identity. She argues that the formation of an individual's sense of self occurs 'within a massive sea of various and conflicting images of gender, many of which are propagated in the mass media' (p.6). She also asserts that since the 1950s there have been a

series of contradictory developments in how

'femininity' is generally perceived and goes on to ask:

> How do the mass media represent these developments to women? How do women themselves conceptualize this confusion? Do the mass media have an impact on the way women are responding to these ideological developments? (1991:5).

Press sets out to achieve her aim of exploring the effect of the mass media on women's sense of self by uncovering women's resistance to or acceptance of the hegemonic messages of the television text. Her argument is that the mass media in general perpetuate both class and gender oppression by their unwillingness to address the difficulties that are an intrinsic feature of many women's lives. In order to illustrate the way in which the media mask women's oppression Press outlines a number of discrepancies between women's experience and their representation on

television:

> On television, all single mothers are middle-class or wealthier and almost half of all families are at least upper-middle-class; there are no poor families. This contrasts with our society, in which 69 percent of all homes headed by women are poor, and the annual median income for a family with two working parents is just over 30,000 dollars. Also, more than half of all television children in single-parent families live with their fathers, who experience few financial difficulties in being a single parent; in society, on the other hand, 90 percent of all children in single-parent families live with their mothers, whose average annual income is under 9,000 dollars (1991:28).

Press outlines three moments in the representation of women on television: Prefeminist, feminist and postfeminist. Her argument is that women's lives are (mis)represented differently in each of these periods

and she illustrates features which make the representations distinct. For example, in prefeminist family television it is quite normal to see some solidarity between women characters in opposition to male characters (Press gives I love Lucy as an example) while in the post-feminist period this does not occur.

Press gives as an example of the type of hegemonic effect produced by postfeminist television programmes a message which The Cosby Show contains. The character of Clair Huxtable in the show, Press argues, is presented as unproblematically fulfilling both the domestic role of wife and mother and the professional role of lawyer:

> Conflicts between Clair's roles are minimized, although for real women today such conflicts prohibit, in most instances, the fulfillment of both. .... Clair Huxtable's role on the Cosby Show illustrates well the hegemonic view that families need not change to accommodate working wives and mothers (1991:80).

Although she analyses the specific hegemonic messages in a series of programmes, Press argues that these messages do not simply 'position' a female audience, in the sense of automatically producing in them a specific sense of identity, but that the messages are mediated by the class position of an audience.

Basing her argument on a series of interviews with working and middle class women which focus on how they perceive a range of light entertainment programmes Press asserts that both class and gender affect the formation of a woman's identity (p.64). However the

mass media play a crucial role in this process in that it is Press's hypothesis that according to their class position different audiences apply different criteria to their judgement of television programmes: a television programme will have a specific hegemonic effect on a woman's identity formation according to the extent to which a programme meets these criteria.

For example Press argues that her data shows that for working class women the primary criterion employed in their judgement about a programme is whether it offers a realistic representation of a situation, while for middle class women a major criterion for enjoyment is the ease with which they find it possible to identify with a character. Press's argument is that the application of these distinct criteria lead audiences to receive the hegemonic message of a text differently. She claims for example that a perceived lack of realism prevents working class women from identifying with many television characters. For middle class women however, whether a character is realistic or not is rarely an issue, and a lack of realism does not prevent them from identifying with a character. (p.175)

An audience's 'identification' with a character and their perception of a programme as 'realistic' are the two primary mechanisms of hegemony which Press focusses on. Her argument is that middle class women, in tending towards identification, are 'vulnerable in a

deplorably direct way to the set of representations that constitues the feminine in our culture' (p.96). She does however record an instance of middle class 'identification' with a character which is not perceived as hegemonic in effect. Press describes the character of Lucy in the I love Lucy show as having 'feminist qualities' and argues that her middle class respondents 'pick up on the power within the family which Lucy appropriates from her husband' (p.77).

In contrast working class women, who search for realism, are resistant to the mechanism of identification, but are instead susceptible to hegemonic effects of another form, in that the criterion of 'realism' they apply is not a judgement based on their own experience but a judgment about how closely a programme approximates a set of beliefs which perpetuate the class system. For example a working class respondent perceived a depiction of a television character who was both a waitress and a 'strong person' as unrealistic and argued that in real life such a woman '...would start her own restaurant, she would go out and do something different, go to night school' (p.117). Press sums up her findings thus:

> In large part, working class women criticize television content for its lack of reality; yet the concept of reality used here corresponds to television's portrayal of middle class life. The potential resistant thrust of their critique therefore is blunted by television's hegemonic impact itself (1991:175).

In her analysis Press accounts for the variation in response she records primarily in terms of variation in audience expectation. Within her analysis a television programme appears to contain a range of hegemonic effects, only some of which will be successful, and the variable controlling which effects will actually succeed is the existing class position of the audience. To this extent Press manages to accommodate the notion of textual determination as well as evidence of varied response. However in order to accommodate these notions Press has to address both the text and the audience at such a general level, avoiding questions about how communication works, that her explanations remain at the level of hypothesis.

For example her approach to the television text is particularly vague. Although Press produces a series of interesting and very convincing analyses in which the hegemonic messages of certain light entertainment programmes are made explicit, her subsequent use of these analyses as representing the hegemonic messages contained in a whole genre of programmes over a decade or more assumes television to be of a somewhat monolithic nature. To go on from this hypothesis to make claims about how television programmes interact with the audience when the programmes are dealt with so generally is, I would argue, very problematic and is reflected in the ambivalent findings Press often comes up with:

> For middle-class women, therefore, television is both a source of feminist resistance to the status quo and at the same time a source for the reinforcement of many of the status quo's partriarchal values (1991:96).

Her summing up begs the question of why television should have these diametrically opposed effects. Is this caused by variation in the television message or in the background of the women? Without holding one variable constant it is questionable how far it could be argued for example whether it is aspects of the text or aspects of the audience which are producing variation in response. The lack of explicitness in Press's work does not allow this question to be answered.

The generality of Press's approach again arises, I would argue, out of an inadequate model of linguistic processing. Because her study implies, but does not explicitly confront, the notion that language is polysemic the questions she asks in her interviews do not allow for the possibility that a single term may have a range of referents. For example one piece of evidence upon which Press bases her argument that working class women tend to accept television images as more representative of reality than their own experience is the responses to the following question on the character of Alexis in Dynasty:

> Interviewer: Do you think there are women like Alexis?....

> Yes I'm sure there are (Seline)....
>
> No-one could be like an Alexis (Estelle) (1991:112).

The generality of this question does not acknowledge that the term 'Alexis' may have such a wide field of reference that the respondents whose replies Press quotes in order to corroborate her argument may in actuality be answering two very different questions. The former response, which is from a working class woman, may be implying that she believes that there are women who are as rich and who dress as extravagantly as the character of Alexis, while the latter, middle class, response may be implying that the character's behaviour is unrealistic. Without more explicit questioning however it is not possible to arrive at such a distinction.

Press often describes her findings as contradictory in some way, and I would argue that this again results from her unanalysed approach to the process of interpretation. For example in summing up her account of her middle class respondents she states:

> It is paradoxical that middle-class women both speak more distantly of television than do working-class women and, at the same time, seem to identify more closely than working-class women with many of television's images of women (1991:96).

This could well be the result of a linguistic problem which Press acknowledges but without an adequate model of communication does not seem able to resolve:

> Sometimes even the very language involved in my questions - asking women whether they "identify with" or "relate to" specific television characters - seemed confusing to members of both groups which caused me to wonder whether the meaning of these terms was actually different for different groups of women (1991:95).

Without a more sensitive way of approaching both text and audience Press's aim of addressing the hegemonic effect of television on the construction of female identity, while raising a number of interesting issues, cannot provide the evidence which would make her account explanatory.

In the following section I will summarize the problems which result from assuming an inadequate model of communication and go on to address the question of whether a methodology based on an inferential model of language can avoid the shortcomings of Press's approach.

4 LANGUAGE IN MEDIA ANALYSIS

4.1 The effects of linguistic assumptions on the collection of data

The question I address in this section is whether the model of language which is assumed by the above three studies, and which to some extent determines the data they have produced, actually facilitates the aims of the authors. Each study addresses the process of communication with varying degrees of explicitness: Bobo and Morley attempt to adapt a code model of

communication, while Press leaves the issue of how communication works largely unanalysed.

In the case of each study I have argued that the aim of making explicit a link between audience background and the responses recorded has not been met and that this can be related to the lack of an adequate model of communication. While the correlations between audience groupings and variation in interpretation are usefully made evident in their fieldwork, the links that are made by Press, Bobo and Morley to explain these correlations can only be viewed as hypothetical or partial using the restricted data they offer.

Bobo's data for example might well indicate the interesting fact that her interviewees resisted the negative portrayal of black people in the film of <u>The Colour Purple</u>, and while her theoretical explanation might be quite correct, it is not actually possible to either dispute or agree with her analysis in that her study is not specifically designed to provide evidence of the links she hypothesises, and therefore does not contain the relevant information. As a result her data does not actualy show that her audiences are calling on the cultural assumptions she theorizes, nor does it show that different aspects of the texts are instrumental in producing the responses she records.

I would argue that this lack of evidence is the effect of a methodology which implicitly assumes a code model in that the resulting approach does not aim at

the collection of empirical data showing either variation in the audience's immediate understanding of the text or the factors which actually produced that variation. One reason for this is that a corollary of the code model is that a text will contain an immanent literal meaning. An approach based on the code model would be likely, therefore, to focus on variation in the audience's responses to an assumed uniform meaning rather than on the actual process of textual intepretation carried out by the audience.

I have argued that the way this affects Morley's study is to be seen in the tendency in his analysis to 'filter out' any non-conscious readings which vary from the 'preferred reading'. I indicated that this was both because (a) Morley's theoretical assumptions do not predict that a reading could be both non-conscious and 'oppositional' and therefore he is not actually looking for evidence of such a reading; and (b) the respondents themselves do not foreground these readings in the same way as they might where they had actually perceived conflict between their own belief system and that of the television programme. As a result Morley's analysis tends to focus on variation by contrasting readings which accept the preferred meaning with those which are consciously critical of it.

In Press's study, the confusion which arises from a lack of acknowledgement that linguistic terms can have a range of meanings also appears to result from assuming a code model of communication in that language is seen to be 'transparent' in her account. As a result her interview questions are not designed to avoid problems such as those she encounters over the term 'identification'. Moreover her questions are not sufficiently precise to ensure that when she is making comparisons between responses her respondents are actually referring to the same aspect of a programme.

In this section I have argued that the model of language assumed by a researcher will have an effect on the data which s/he sets out to collect. I have further argued that although the studies I have focussed on set out to explain the link between the social background of an audience and the varying interpretations they make of a media text, the data collected using methodologies which assume a code model of language does not provide the sufficient basis for an explanation that will produce that link.

I have noted above that one of the major difficulties in accounting for variation in audience response is the attempt to accommodate textual polysemy with residual assumptions about communication as a process of encoding and decoding. There have been studies which have aimed to move on from this impasse by rejecting the code model. Without an adequate model

of communication to work with however, these studies, whose theoretical assumptions are also opposed to the notion that the meanings the audience takes from the text are unconstrained, are still unable to offer a sufficient account of variation in response. For example, Curran and Sparks (1991) oppose the relativist position adopted by new revisionism and argue that within that paradigm 'understanding' is often confused with 'interpretation'. They go on to state:

> There are two quite distinct enquiries to pursue. One is whether the audience understands the material that is put before it.....The other is what it makes of the material. This is the difference between comprehension and interpretation (1991:227)

In this the authors, writing in 1991, are echoing a similar argument to those put forward over the space of the previous decade by Morley (1981:10), and Corner, Richardson and Fenton (1990:50). Yet although this issue has constantly been on the agenda of reception studies it has never been adequately dealt with. For example, in order to illustrate their argument Curran and Sparks posit a reading of the newspaper headline 'British Police Kill IRA Gang in Gibralter' by a hypothetical pair of readers: English and Irish, with different 'interpretative frameworks'. In this reading however they still hypothesise a uniform comprehension and address variation in terms of the readers' 'interpretation'. Although they acknowledge that variation at what they term the level of

'comprehension' can occur they do not address its significance, or posit the effect it might have.

The difficulty for analysts has been how to address the notion of 'comprehension' without merely coming up with the predictable answer that some people understand a text and some people do not. The significance of variation in audience comprehension has never been fully explored, although analysts continually acknowledge that it is a crucial issue. Corner, Richardson and Fenton (1990) for example, in their study of audience reception of a range of programmes which focus on the nuclear energy debate, make the point that comprehension and interpretation work incrementally:

> In practice, there is often a kind of "to and fro" incrementalism at work by which meanings which have been processed into responses by viewers then "act back" to constitute the reading frame for the reception of subsequent "primary" understandings (1990:50).

However, although they acknowledge that variation in comprehension can be crucial the authors state that they do not, in their study, attempt to isolate the two processes. I would argue that this is at least in part because of the difficulties involved in carrying out such an enterprise, as well as the fact that the full effects of such an analysis have yet to be realised. One of the aims of this thesis is to consider whether, given the insights into the communication process afforded by relevance theory this distinction between

'comprehension' and 'interpretation' can now be made evident and its usefulness explored.

In the final section of this chapter I will therefore indicate how a methodology based on an inferential model of communication which focuses on how an audience's understanding of a media text is produced by the evidence of the text together with their own encylopaedic knowledge may offer a solution to the difficulties faced by audience studies which I have outlined above.

4.2 Relevance theory and media analysis

In Chapter Two I quoted Sperber and Wilson's argument that the difference between a code and inferential model of communication is that decoding is the recovery of a message by an association of signal and message, while inferencing is the process of working from a premise through logic to reach a conclusion. Sperber and Wilson's thesis is that the assumption of an association between signal and message can not provide a tenable account of how communication works, in that even the syntactic and semantic information encoded in an utterance must be interpreted via an inferential process.

Sperber and Wilson's argument is that in interpreting an utterance a hearer has first to assign an appropriate propositional form to the utterance by enriching and disambiguating the encoded information.

This activity calls on an inferred context, and because the context supplied by a hearer is contingent upon his or her existing encyclopaedic knowledge, a major implication of Sperber and Wilson's theory, as I have argued in Chapter Two section 3.4, is that variation can potentially occur at two levels: (a) at the stage of the audience's assignment of propositional form to an utterance (i.e. at the moment of an audience's 'comprehension' of an utterance) and (b) at the stage of attributing relevance to an utterance (i.e. at the audience's 'interpretation' of that utterance which is based on the initial assignment of propositional form)

I would argue that a methodology for analysing audience response based on the above assumptions would focus on quite distinct issues from a methodology based on a code model. Since a basic assumption of relevance theory is that it is not possible to speak of the meaning of an utterance as though it was an effect of that utterance alone, while within a code model this would be a possibility, both text and audience would be analysed and treated differently.

One way in which an approach based on relevance theory would affect the study of audience response would be the focus on extra-linguistic knowledge. As I have asserted above, audience studies which have aimed at explaining variation in response using a code model, and even those who have tried to avoid the pitfalls of this model, tend to focus on variation at the level of

what Curran and Sparks term 'interpretation' rather than 'comprehension'. However, the implications which I draw from relevance theory would predict the possibility of variation at both these levels in that both require a contextual input. To speak of a text's 'meaning' within relevance theory would therefore necessarily involve some assumption about what extralinguistic information is being added to an utterance. This in turn would lead to the question of what that extralinguistic information might consist of, and how certain individuals and not others have access to specific knowledge.

As well as having an effect on the way in which audience and text are perceived, relevance theory also has an effect on the way they can be analysed. In breaking down the process of communication, Sperber and Wilson isolate the notion of context as a mental construct consisting of a selection from a range of data. They also describe the process of reaching an interpretation as producing a 'contextual implication'. This process by definition incorporates the role of context and therefore allows an analysis of exactly where interpretations can differ.

It is in this regard that audience research based on an unproblematised notion of the code model differs most distinctly from that based on an inferential model of communication which assumes an organising mechanism such as 'relevance' to be in force: the aim of the

latter is both to record the inferences the audience makes as well as to locate the evidence which the audience has used in producing the inferences.

Bearing in mind Sperber and Wilson's argument that where an inference has been made, relevance is assumed to be a constant while the context of the utterance is variable, the aim of audience research within this paradigm would be to locate those features of context which have affected the inference, including assumptions the audience makes about the speaker's intentions, the ease with which the audience can produce a context for the utterance, and what that context might be. While the audience is aware of little, if any, of the process involved, I would argue that there are parts of this process which could be retrievable in studies of audience response.

In focussing on the process of interpretation I aim to show how a more precise account of audience activity might be useful for a critical cultural approach to audience studies. I begin by considering in Chapter Four how the tenets of relevance theory might be applied to a practical study of audience interpretation.

FOOTNOTES: CHAPTER THREE

1 The point is made by Wren-Lewis (1983:184) that Morley is to this extent not disputing the notion of 'positioning' outlined in Screen theory, but simply disputing its effectivity. Wren-Lewis's argument is that signification is inevitably a result of the reading process and that a readerless text has no meaning - a stance which is therefore diametrically opposed to Morley's argument for a 'preferred reading' inscribed in the text. Wren-Lewis's much cited criticism of Morley's work is addressed at the issues surrounding the debate over the location of meaning. Later critics of Morley have rejected Wren-Lewis's relativistic approach (e.g Richardson and Corner (1986).

2 It is interesting that although Morley addresses the notion that, contrary to his initial hypothesis, consciousness of bias does not inevitably imply that the audience will reject the 'preferred reading', he does not go on to address whether a non-conscious rejection of the 'preferred reading' is possible. It is only at the level of 'blanking out' by respondents who do not engage at all with the text that this type of unconscious opposition is addressed.

Chapter Four

METHODOLOGY

1 INTRODUCTION: AIMS OF STUDY

In this chapter I outline the background to the study of audience response I carry out and the method used in eliciting the responses. I begin by focussing on the aims of the study and how they relate to the two fields of debate which I have outlined in the preceding chapters.

1.1 Pragmatic theories of interpretation

In Chapter Two I argued that a pragmatic theory which would account for variation in interpretation would need to provide a description of the processes involved in an audience's encounter with an utterance as well as providing an explanation of those processes which would indicate why certain interpretations should occur rather than others.

I claimed that the inferential model of language theorised by Sperber and Wilson (1986), which they take to be governed by the principle of relevance, came closest to providing this comprehensive account in that it is axiomatic to the theory that communication involves a degree of risk, and that any explanation must therefore focus on the audience's interpretative process. I went on to argue that an as yet unexplored implication of relevance theory is that it is possible for audiences with different types of encyclopaedic

knowledge to produce different interpretations of a given broadcast utterance.

The theory of relevance in its present form is limited however in that it does not explore, through empirical study, the extent to which inferences may systematically vary. Also, because the theory does not focus on the incidence of actual inferences, although it can explain <u>how</u> different inferences can occur it does not offer an explicit account of <u>why</u> such differences should occur.

In the first instance then my aim in this study is to produce data consisting of inferences made by actual audiences in order to test out the implications I draw from Sperber and Wilson's theory of relevance regarding the potential occurrence of variation in interpretation. My immediate objective is to produce evidence that would indicate whether different audiences do provide different contexts for understanding a media text, and whether this correlates with a difference in interpretation.

1.2 <u>Audience Studies</u>

In Chapter Three I considered the extent to which the assumption of variation in interpretation is already widely accepted in media analysis. I argued however that those analyses which employ empirical studies of audience response do not elicit data which would allow a satisfactory explanation of why different

interpretations should occur. This is because these empirical studies are often based on an inadequate notion of linguistic communication.

In the second instance therefore my aim is to develop the insights provided by Sperber and Wilson's relevance theory into a method of eliciting inferences which would be the basis of an explanation of the source of variation in terms of the critical cultural studies paradigm of media analysis. My objective here is to produce data consisting of the interpretations given and the contexts offered by an audience which can then be related to pertinent features of audience background.

1.3 Outline of interview method

In the study my aim is to elicit data which will shed light on both the above debates. A brief description of my method for collecting this data is as follows: I contacted two groups of women with distinct differences in education and interest, and arranged for each group separately to watch a television programme which I had previously video recorded. Immediately after watching the recording I asked each group a set of questions which focussed on their understanding of the text of the programme. The responses to this interview are reported in Chapter Five and discussed in Chapters Six and Seven.

In the remainder of this chapter I describe in greater detail the methodology which informs the interviews. In the section which follows I outline the content and format of the television programme which I use in the study, in section three I describe the selection of the respondents who took part, in section four I describe the interview procedure and in section five I focus on the questions the respondents were asked.

2 THE TELEVISION PROGRAMME

Before describing the television programme I use in the study it is essential to stress that the outline I give should be read primarily as an indication of my own perception of the programme arising from repeated close viewings, and not as an objective statement of the programme's 'meaning' against which the respondents' interpretations are to be measured as 'correct' or 'incorrect'. My perception of the programme is, of course, significant in that it clearly affected my approach to the study and determined the issues I focus on in the interviews. It is included here primarily to make that process of determination explicit, and to provide a point of departure for later discussion. As the data in the following chapter will indicate, my perception of the events of the programme is not necessarily shared by any of my respondents.

Within the terms of relevance theory, this difference in perception would be accounted for as the result of differences in the context which I and my respondents supply in our interpretation of the utterances which constitute the programme. Since one of the aims of the study is to elicit what those differences are it is necessary to make as explicit as possible the contexts which I apply in my reading of the text. However, before expanding on this by giving concrete examples of the effect of the context I supply it is useful to briefly describe the programme.

2.1 An outline of the format of the television programme

In early 1990 Channel Four screened six half-hour programmes under the series title Ordinary People which asked the question 'What makes ordinary people feminist?' Each of the weekly programmes focussed on a specific issue such as art, work, or education, and each programme comprised individual presentations by three different women of their experience of the chosen issue in connection with gender. The particular episode which I use in my case studies is entitled The Politics of Experience.

In the programme which I focus on three women individually describe their involvement with politics: (1) a British M.P., Emma Nicholson, who talks about her career in the Conservative Party and the gender issues she works on in Parliament; (2) a British woman, Helen

Steven, who talks about her spiritual beliefs and her experiences in campaigning for nuclear disarmament; and (3) Eugenia Piza Lopez, a South American woman whose work politicizes the personal experience of women through consciousness raising techniques including the use of film.

The format of the programme is somewhat fragmentary: each woman's presentation consists of a series of two to three minute slots which are interspersed with those of the other women, so although each presentation forms a relatively continuous narrative it is regularly interrupted by the other two presentations. Each presentation cuts between direct to camera speeches by the women and shots of action (such as Emma Nicholson walking past the Palace of Westminster, or women drawing water from a well) with a voice-over continuing their speech. To this extent the presentations are perceptibly edited.

For reference a transcript of the programme can be found in the appendix, but I will briefly summarise and quote the aspects of the programme I focus on in order to contextualize the questions I ask my respondents, and which I outline in section 5.

Because my aim in the study was specifically to draw out variation in the interpretation of the issues raised by the programme, I focus primarily on the presentation by Eugenia Piza Lopez, as I perceive this

to contain the most controversial set of assumptions. This claim will be expanded on in section 2.3.

2.2 An outline of the content of the programme

The programme opens with a series of three individual direct to camera speeches by the presenters. I will quote these in full as they introduce the political concerns of each woman's presentation.

[Opening music. The title ORDINARY PEOPLE is displayed]

[Emma Nicholson speaks direct to camera]

> Yes I was born into a political family of many, many generations. I understand that one of my forebears, a direct forebear, was in fact a part of the very first parliament in the United Kingdom which was in about 1290 and was a gathering in Scotland in a field. And that was the beginning of British parliament. And right down the line, from then on in, one or more of my direct ancestors has been a Member of Parliament either of the House of Commons or of the House of Lords.

[Helen Steven speaks direct to camera]

> I was brought up as a Presbyterian and was brought up with I suppose a very deep notion of sin um that I was born with original sin, that we were fallen creatures and we had to be saved. And my new understanding of sin is coming to mean that where I was told that sin was pride, um, sin was very much to do with our pride and that we had to abase ourselves and be humble and full of humility, well I think that may be right: for men. Whereas for women, I think too often we have failed to have recognized our potential.

[Eugenia Piza Lopez speaks direct to camera]

> When women get into power they get into a patriarchal structure. They, they have to fight so hard to survive that they have to waste a lot of time just doing that: surviving in the organization. It is also very difficult for them to put on the agenda demands which will benefit women because the agenda is not a women's agenda

['THE POLITICS OF EXPERIENCE' is then displayed against a black background]

[An opening shot of the tower of Big Ben pans down to show Nicholson walking past, and then entering the grounds of, the Palace of Westminster while a voice over gives the following text]

> I remember when I was a child going into the Carlton Club to find my father and I walked in at the front door and I looked left and saw my father, my uncle who was Lord Chancellor, another uncle who was a Member of Parliament, all sitting together in a lovely room. And I just went through that door to say 'Hello, here I am'. All three rose to their feet and my father rushed forward and they all shouted 'Get out, Get out. This is men only'

Lopez's second slot then begins. I will restrict my description to a brief account of the remainder of her presentations at this point as the text will be quoted more fully in section 5 of this chapter.

Lopez describes herself as the the daughter of intellectuals, whose questioning of society was wide but did not extend to issues of gender. She gives as an example of this limitation her mother's dedication to the preservation of her daughter's virginity. This obsession with virginity led Lopez to begin to question certain dominant assumptions about gender - which in turn led to the development of her perception of gender as a political issue.

For a while Lopez became involved in party politics but grew to feel that she and other party workers were being exploited because they were women. Eventually Lopez began working with women in an unspecified area of rural South America where she made a film of the endless working day of these women in

order to raise their awareness of the value of their work.

Lopez then tells of the women's desire to show the film to their local community and of an old man's response to the film as one of shock that his wife had worked so hard and that he had been completely unaware of the extent of her labour.

2.3 The context of my reading of the text

In as much as I perceive the television programme to be about issues of gender, the context I am most conscious of activating in my interpretation consists of a particular 'feminist' set of assumptions. To facilitate discussion I offer a working definition of the feminism which I apply as an approach which 'locates gender relations as a site of struggle' (Ang 1989:109).

Although it would be problematic to talk of feminist assumptions as though they formed a coherent perspective from which a whole television progamme is viewed, I would argue that at certain points in the text it is posible to make explicit how the particular feminist context I supply informs my interpretation of specific parts of the programme. It is at these junctures that I focus the attention of my respondents in the interviews, with the aim of drawing out potential differences in the provision of context, and the resulting interpretation.

I outline below in section 5 the specific areas I focus on in the interviews and the reasons for doing so. At this point however, I will address one such juncture in order to consider the issues involved.

2.4 An example of how context affects interpretation

My precis of Lopez's presentation is the result of a series of inferences I have made based on my own assumptions about gender politics and the text of her speech. For example, I am assuming a series of causal connections which are only implied in the text. I will try to draw out what is at issue here by focussing on this quote which follows Lopez's description of her mother's obsession with the former's virginity.

> And it really alienated my understanding of my own body and my sexuality because it made me feel that there was something wrong with it. There's something wrong with being the owner of your own body. Your body is not yours. It is for somebody else who will eventually indulge it when you get married. And it got to a point where I felt as a woman and not exclusively as a human being, but as a woman, there are a number of things I want to say. There are a number of things I want to struggle for.

In my own understanding of her message Lopez is referring to her emergence into gender politics, and moreover I am assuming that she is stating that this development of her political awareness was at least in part caused by the attitude to virginity which she had encountered. In order to make these inferences however I have had to solve a number of ambiguities in the text. I will focus on just one at this point.

Where Lopez states in the above quotation '..and it got to the point where I felt as a woman..' the conjunction 'and' has a number of possible functions. For example it could be there (a) simply to list a series of distinct phenomena; (b) to imply a temporal connection between two phenomena: in which case it could be alternatively stated as 'and then'; or (c) it could imply a causal connection which could be alternatively stated as 'and therefore'. My own understanding of the text assumes the latter function - that a causal connection is being made.

What I want to draw out here is the way in which the meaning of the text is open to interpretation, and how my own existing assumptions lead to my (not normally conscious) selection of one rather than another interpretation. Because I supply a context which contains the assumption that the emphasis given to female virginity is an effect of gendered power relations I infer that there is a relationship between Lopez's experience of her mother's obsession and the direction of her later political involvement. My hypothesis, based on the tenets of relevance theory, is that an audience whose encyclopaedic knowledge does not contain the assumption which I have just outlined would not produce the interpretation that the two events Lopez describes are causally connected.

3 THE RESPONDENTS

In order to produce data which would test out the above hypothesis I set out to find two audiences who would be likely to provide distinct contexts for the utterances which constitute the television programme. The process of selecting the audiences was influenced by three decisions I had made earlier (1) that I would focus on female audiences, (2) that a distinguishing feature between the groups would be the extent of their formal education and (3) that I would hold group interviews. I set out below the motivation for these decisions and then go on to describe the actual audiences who took part in the study.

3.1 The selection criteria

My decision to focus on female audiences was motivated by the assumption often implied in media analysis (e.g. Moss 1985:158 and Kippax 1988:5) that women constitute a homogeneous class. In this study my intention was to draw out differences resulting from information processing which will add to the growing body of work which stresses women's heterogeneity.

My decision to distinguish between the groups in terms of formal education resulted from my own perception of Lopez's presentation as drawing on a set of assumptions which are shared only within specific circles. As an example, to use the illustration I give above, the assumption that an obsession with female

virginity is an effect of gendered power relations, is not, I would argue, an assumption which is shared by a large part of the population of Britain. One group of people I have encountered who do share this assumption are those college educated women who have knowledge of a particular form of feminism which politicizes personal experience. This is not to say that there are no other groups of people whose encyclopaedic knowledge contains this assumption, but rather that certain women who had participated in higher education were one such (accessible) group.

I then set out to find an audience whose encyclopaedic knowledge probably would not contain the particular form of feminist assumptions I perceived Lopez's presentation to be drawing on. As a contrast to the higher education group I selected a group of women who had left formal education at an early age, and who did not appear to have come across this specific set of assumptions. The significance of the differences between the two groups will be discussed in greater detail in section 3.4 following a description of the respondents in sections 3.2 and 3.3.

My decision to study the responses in group rather than individual interviews was motivated by two considerations. Since I was intending to interview women who had had no direct previous experience of being asked the types of questions I had prepared, my first consideration was that they should not feel

intimidated. A group interview in the home of one of the respondents seemed the best way of avoiding this.

I also felt that this form of interview would lead to discussion between the respondents which would draw out fine points of interpretation within each group's terms of reference, and which if initiated by the interviewer might have been counter-productive.

3.2 Group One

The first group of women I contacted were an already existing friendship group who lived on the same housing estate, and who regularly met socially in each other's houses. The group consisted of four women who had all left formal education at the age of sixteen, and their ages ranged between 28 and 35. They were all married with young children, and their occupations were full time housewife, part-time bar maid, fork-lift truck driver and catering production worker.

I had come into contact previously with the group through knowing one of the women. Although I had never discussed my research with them, I was relatively certain before the interview that although these women may have had feminist sympathies to the extent, for example, that they had a sense of female solidarity, they had no knowledge of the specific type of feminist theory which I perceive to be a premiss of Lopez's presentation. Prior to selecting the group for interview I had inferred from their general

conversation that these women had not come across the notion that gender relations generally involve structures of power and are therefore political.

3.3 Group Two

The second group of women I contacted were also an already existing friendship group. These were three women who were, at the time of the interview, taking part in a taught postgraduate course at a local university. As a result of meeting on the course they had begun to meet socially outside the academic environment. They were aged between twenty five and forty years old and two were married with children.

As with the first group, I already knew one of the women, and it was through her that the remainder of this group was contacted. Without (I hope) probing too deeply, I had already established from general conversation with my contact that each member of the group had at some time in her career encountered theories of feminism (whether or not the women accepted these theories was not an issue in my selection of respondents). To this extent I anticipated that this group would approach the text from a perspective which shared many of the premises of Lopez's presentation in that the premises constituted part of their encyclopaedic knowledge.

3.4 Representativeness of the groups

Although the respondents were selected because of the similarity of their education within the groups and the difference in education between the groups, it should be stressed that the two groups should not be perceived as approximating to a homogeneity of viewpoint, nor as representative samples of a population. There is however a sense in which representativeness is almost inevitably implied in the application of an empirical methodology, and I shall therefore address this issue in relation to the particular aims of this study.

It could be argued that the groups who take part in the interviews differ from each other in terms of class, higher education or even geographical location. However I would argue that it would be misleading to treat these categories as relevant distinguishing features in advance of the data produced in the interviews. This is because although I selected the groups on the assumption that there was a difference in their encyclopaedic knowledge, the extent and specificity of this difference would become evident only as a result of data collection. Therefore the relationship between the groups' responses and their demographic features could only be addressed once the data existed.

3.5 Naming the groups

While arguing that an a priori categorisation of the groups is inappropriate, the issues I raise above do however cause difficulties in terms of future reference to the two groups within this work. The pertinent distinguishing feature of the groups for this study is the presence or absence of a specific type of knowledge for which no adequate terminology exists. The term 'radical feminist', for example may describe one form of feminism invoked by Lopez which I assume the higher education group to have knowledge of, but it would be misleading as a description of the group in that to label them thus would imply that they hold these beliefs. It is however only the existence of certain assumptions in the encyclopaedic knowledge of the second group which distinguishes them from the first, not necessarily their beliefs about the assumptions.

To avoid the misleading inferences that a term such as 'radical feminist' could engender, the full description of the distinguishing feature of the second group would have to be: 'women who have a knowledge of a set of feminist assumptions which includes those of radical feminism'. The contrasting group would moreover need to be described in terms of their lack of this wider knowledge of feminist assumptions. These are somewhat inadequate as titles for the two groups.

As a compromise therefore I have selected the term 'feminist' for the group of women from higher

education, a term which should be taken to mean that the distinguishing feature of this group is their comparatively wider knowledge of feminist assumptions. In order to avoid using a negative term for the contrasting group I have selected the term 'mainstream' in that I am assuming that the particular knowledge which the feminist group have is outside of the mainstream.

It should not be inferred from this terminology that the 'mainstream' group are representative of the set of all other people who do not have a feminist perspective, any more than that the 'feminist' group are representative of all feminists. As I shall argue in Chapter Seven, such claims can only be discussed in the light of more data.

3.6 Setting up the interviews

In each case I asked the member of the group I was already in contact with if she would find out if her friends would take part in an interview in which I would play a video recording of a television programme and then ask the group questions about it. Both groups agreed to be interviewed.

In arranging the two interviews, again it was the two contacts who organised the time and place with the rest of their group. In both cases an evening meeting was arranged at the home of one of the women in the group.

4 THE INTERVIEW PROCEDURE

In this section I give the format of each interview. On each occasion, once the group had arrived at the specified meeting place, I set up the video equipment and an audio tape recorder and introduced myself, making the following points:

1 Introduction

1a I'm carrying out research on how people process language
1b This is one of two studies
1c Part of my research is to record how different people understand what is being said on television.

I then described the procedure of the interview in the following terms:

2. Procedure

2a What I'm going to do is to play a recording of a programme televised some time last year about women and politics. Then I'm going to ask some questions about what you think the speakers in the programme mean when they say certain things.

2b Don't worry if your concentration goes while you're watching the programme - I'll replay the relevant bits of the programme before you give your answers.

2c The last point I want to make is that if you don't know the answer to any of the questions I ask - just say so - this isn't a test of your memory or intelligence. Part of my research is to look at how effective programmes like this are at communicating information - so if you don't think you can answer one of my questions it may be because the speaker hasn't made her meaning clear. So don't worry about saying that you don't know the answer.
Also on this same point - if someone answers a question, and you would have answered it differently, I'd like you to say so.

2d Any questions?

I then played the video recording of the programme through once. After a brief pause for drinks to be replenished I then asked the questions in the order given in section 5, replaying the relevant pieces of text once or more where necessary. At the end of the interview I turned off the tape recorder and had a general discussion with the groups about the programme and my research.

5 THE QUESTIONS

In this section I give details of the questions I asked in the two interviews, giving the rationale behind each and quoting the text from the programme where necessary. In general the rationale behind the interview was (a) to draw out the extent to which variation in interpretation between the two groups would occur, and (b) to find evidence of the extent to which the contexts applied by the respondents systematically structure their inferences. Before focussing on individual questions however there are some general points to be made about the aim of the interview.

The methodology of the interview is premised on the tenets of relevance theory and is not specifically designed to test out the theory itself. Indeed one effect of my questions and the imperatives of the interview situation is to posit, to a certain extent,

that the text I use does have a relevance for the respondents. This need not have been the case. For example, had one of my respondents accidently come across the programme I use in the interview while looking for something relaxing to watch on television one evening she may not have perceived the presenters' remarks as relevant at all. In such a situation if a respondent's cognitive environment (the set of assumptions potentially available to her) did not provide a context in which the text is immediately relevant it is unlikely that she would persevere with the communication.

Sperber and Wilson argue that in as much as the addressees of an act of ostensive communication are the individuals whose cognitive environment the speaker is attempting to modify, broadcast communication is somewhat problematic. This is because the existing cognitive environments of members of an audience are inevitably, to some degree, an unknown quantity to the broadcast communicator. In one of the few comments they make on this form of communcation the authors imply that not all hearers will automatically assume that the speaker in this situation is addressing them:

> In broadcast communication, a stimulus can even be addressed to whoever finds it relevant. The communicator is then communicating her presumption of relevance to whoever is willing to entertain it (Sperber and Wilson 1986:158).

The implication here is that the audience will only engage with a text which appears to be relevant to them.

In this regard then the interview situation which I set up controls the responses to the extent that the audience are here strongly encouraged to perceive the remarks which constitute the programme to be relevant. The premise of relevance is however the only general assumption I have made about the text, and my aim has been to discover whether, given the axiom of relevance, the variables of context and interpretation would differ according to the existing encyclopaedic knowledge of the respondents.

In designing the questions I have attempted to ensure that it is only the notion of relevance which is imposed by the interview situation, and that the questions I ask do not have any unwanted determining effects. To test this out, question six attempts to impose on the respondents a specific piece of co-text as the relevant context of one of Lopez's remarks. The aim is to discover the degree to which the interview questions can in fact determine the respondents' interpretations. This issue will be expanded on in Chapter Six, section 1 in the light of the interview data.

One final general remark which should be made concerns the uneven hypotheses I make in the following discussion of the interview questions. Since I base

the questions largely on my understanding of the text, and have focussed on areas where I feel that the contextual assumptions I apply are specifically feminist, my hypotheses about the responses of the groups are inevitably one-sided: I can only make specific hypotheses on the likely responses of the group whose members, I presume, also have access to these assumptions. The likely responses of the mainstream group are not inferrable from my understanding of the text except to predict that they will be different.

QUESTION ONE

> The title of the programme was 'The Politics of Experience' Can you explain what you think the title of the programme means

RATIONALE

At this point in the interview the respondents will have viewed the programme once. My hypothesis is that the feminist group will understand the title to imply that the programme is about 'politics' in the sense of 'systematic power relations' and how this relates to 'experience' in the sense of 'everyday life' or 'consciousness' I also hypothesize that the mainstream group will produce alternative referents.

I anticipate that the response to this question should indicate the cognitive environment of the respondents, that is, the set of assumptions which are potentially available to the group members as evidence when interpreting the broadcast text. This evidence

includes the information linguistically encoded by the text as well as the existing encyclopaedic knowledge of the respondents. It is from this set of available assumptions which the context of an utterance will be drawn.

For example, I perceive Lopez's presentation to be premised on a notion of politics which holds that the consciousness of individuals is related to the power relations which exist in a society, that is, that she assumes in all her utterances that the 'personal is political'. If the cognitive environment of a respondent contains this particular notion of 'politics' then it should be evident in the answers to this first question.

QUESTION TWO

> At the end of this bit Emma Nicholson says 'This is men only' What does the word 'this' refer to?

TRANSCRIPT OF TEXT

Emma Nicholson:

> I remember when I was a child going into the Carlton Club to find my father and I walked in at the front door and I looked left and saw my father, my uncle who was Lord Chancellor, another uncle who was a Member of Parliament, all sitting together in a lovely room. And I just went through that door to say 'Hello, here I am'. All three rose to their feet and my father rushed forward and they all shouted 'Get out, Get out. This is men only'

RATIONALE

The purpose of this question is to (a) ease the respondents into their task by giving them a question that is not too daunting and (b) to discover whether

these inferences differ according to context rather than being automatic in their assignment of a co-referent.

If the inferences the respondents make differ then this would indicate that, as relevance theory posits, all inferences are based on a range of evidence which comes both from the text and encyclopaedic knowledge. This would imply that even context in the form of co-text should not be treated as a given in the analysis of broadcast communication.

QUESTION THREE

> When Eugenia Piza Lopez says 'they' here who is she referring to?

TRANSCRIPT OF TEXT

Eugenia Piza Lopez:

> I was the daughter of intellectuals, of people who had given me an opportunity to read, to think, to challenge, many things. But they didn't give me an opportunity to challenge my own being, my own essence as a woman. They gave me an opportunity to challenge other aspects which were beyond the everyday life.

RATIONALE

This question serves a similar function to that of question two. It is also intended to focus the respondents' attention on this particular piece of text in preparation for question four.

QUESTION FOUR

> When she talks about the 'everyday life' here what do you think she means? Can you explain what the last thing she says means?

TRANSCRIPT OF TEXT

As for question three

RATIONALE

With this question I aim to draw out any variation in interpretation arising from the different assumptions the groups hold (hopefully established by question one) about the significance of everyday experience. This variation should become apparent from the way the groups account for the relevance of Lopez's remarks.

The context which I am aware of applying in this case draws on my existing assumptions about consciousness raising: that to become aware of a situation allows one to challenge it, as well as my assumptions about gender relations. The contextual implication which I draw the synthesises (a) the context: my assumptions about consciousness raising; with (b) the text: Lopez's reference to her lack of encouragement to challenge her experience of being a woman. The contextual implication I draw is that Lopez is describing a period when she was not aware that the power relations which informed her everyday life could be challenged.

This implication makes Lopez's remark relevant for me in that it adds to my assumptions about the gradual development of her awareness that gendered power relations exist and can be disputed. To this extent I infer that Lopez's preceding reference to her 'own

essence as a woman' is hyponymically related to her reference to the 'everyday life' in that not being encouraged to question the former incorporates an acceptance of the latter.

My hypothesis is that those respondents who apply a context which incorporates a set of assumptions similar to my own will interpret 'everyday life' as being related in this way to Lopez's reference to 'my own being, my own essence as a woman'. I would also hypothesise that the mainstream group will not perceive 'everyday life' to have a particular significance, and that they will provide a much wider ranging set of inferences from this piece of the text.

QUESTION FIVE

When she says 'somebody else' here - who does she mean?

TRANSCRIPT OF TEXT

Eugenia Piza Lopez:

I think everything came together, and it didn't come together overnight, it took a rather long time to come together, but I was feeling that there was some reason why my mother, particularly, wanted so badly that I should be a virgin, for example. I mean that was her main concern. She was concerned about other things in my life, how good or bad a student I could be, but the main issue at home was my virginity.
And it really alienated my understanding of my own body and my sexuality because it made me feel that there was something wrong with it. There's something wrong with being the owner of your own body. Your body is not yours. It is for somebody else who will eventually indulge it when you get married. And it got to a point where I felt as a woman and not exclusively as a human being, but as a woman, there are a number of things I want to say. There are a number of things I want to struggle for.

RATIONALE

The aim of this question is to give the respondents a less demanding task, and to give them some familiarity with the text in preparation for question six

QUESTION SIX

What is the connection between the things she says about her virginity and the last sentence here?

TRANSCRIPT OF TEXT

Eugenia Piza Lopez

And it got to a point where I felt as a woman and not exclusively as a human being, but as a woman, there are a number of things I want to struggle for.

RATIONALE

As I discuss in section 2.4 of this chapter, and in my comments on the previous question, I take Lopez's remarks at this stage of her presentation to focus on her developing awareness of gendered power relations. The contextual implications which I draw synthesise (a) the context that Lopez's earlier remarks are about her political development and (b) the text: Lopez's utterances which describe her mother's obsession with her virginity . For me, the contextual implication which makes Lopez's remarks relevant is that there is a causal connection between her initial questioning of her mother's preoccupation with her virginity and her later realisation that 'as a woman' she wants to 'struggle' for certain things.

Within the terms of relevance theory, the context a respondent supplies in inferring the meaning of Lopez's remarks is dependent upon the range of possible assumptions which constitute her cognitive environment. With this question I am intervening in this process somewhat by suggesting that the respondents take Lopez's remarks about her 'struggles' as the context of her remarks on virginity. In doing so I am implying that the latter are relevant in the context of Lopez's development and I am asking the respondents to say how this is the case.

My aim is to discover whether both sets of respondents are able to perceive this context as relevant. For the respondents whose cognitive environment allows a feminist context to be accessed, I hypothesise that the relation between the utterance referring to virginity, and the co-text referring to Lopez's struggles will be causal, while for the mainstream group other connections will be posited.

QUESTION SEVEN

> In this section she talks about women's exploitation - what do you think she means?

TRANSCRIPT OF TEXT

Eugenia Piza Lopez:

> So we decided to get involved in producing a film about women. We wanted to show a day in the life of six women which starts at usually 3 or 4 in the morning and finishes usually at 10 or 11 at night. That without taking into account their wife's duties.

> One of the main issues about women's exploitation I feel is the lack of recognition of women's work. The lack of recognition by women themselves when you ask them what do you do. I don't work I am a housewife. What do you do when you work in the land. Well I am not working actually I am helping my husband. Um what do you do when you prepare the food. Oh well I am not working I am preparing the food for the kids. But so this total lack of value they give to their work and through that lack of value to their work a lack of value to themselves. Because they don't recognize themselves as human beings who are producing an enormous contribution to society, what they do is not important. they are paid less because they are women. They are paid less because they are not agricultural workers, because they are helping the husband. In many cases they are not paid at all.

RATIONALE

Lopez's use of the term 'exploitation' is somewhat ambiguous. She does not supply an agent, and who it is that is exploiting women is not made explicit. Moreover, because her syntax varies throughout this section, it is uncertain whether she is making a claim about the condition of the particular women she works with or about women in general. The aim of this question is to make explicit how these ambiguities will be solved according to the different contexts the respondents supply.

QUESTION EIGHT

> When she talks about when the women say to her 'I don't work, I am a housewife' what does she mean by work?

TRANSCRIPT OF TEXT

Eugenia Piza Lopez

> One of the main issues about women's exploitation I feel is the lack of recognition of women's work. The lack of recognition by women themselves when

you ask them what do you do. I don't work I am a housewife. What do you do when you work in the land. Well I am not working actually I am helping my husband. Um what do you do when you prepare the food. Oh well I am not working I am preparing the food for the kids.

RATIONALE

With this question I aim to elicit the variety of inferences engendered by the item 'work'. My general aim is to discover the extent to which the respondents differ in this. As a vague hypothesis I would say that both groups would infer that the women are saying that they do not do paid work. (ie the referent for 'work' is 'paid labour') I then want to compare it with the inferences they make after question nine. The significance of this variation will be addressed in question ten.

QUESTION NINE

At the end she talks about what an old man says after seeing the film - what does he mean by work?

TRANSCRIPT OF TEXT

Eugenia Piza Lopez

We wanted to know what was the best use of the film so we asked the women 'What do you want to do with this film?' and they said 'We want to show it at at home, we want to show it in the different communities where we come from'. We showed the film and a few minutes after the film was finished a man stood up nearly crying, an old man, and he said to us 'I didn't realise my wife worked so hard. How come I've been married for such a long time without acknowledging that what she does is work'

RATIONALE

As with the previous question, my aim here is to elicit the different definitions the groups offer for

the item 'work'. I would hypothesize that both groups would take the man to mean hard physical exertion.

QUESTION TEN

How did the film change the man's attitude?

RATIONALE

With this and the two previous questions I aim to discover whether either group has a systematic way of explaining the differences in their definition of the item 'work'. In the process of making explicit the changes the man is assumed to have experienced I hope to draw out the contexts the respondents apply in producing the man's comments in this anecdote as relevant.

QUESTION ELEVEN

Are the things this woman is interested in political?

RATIONALE

The aim of this question is to elicit the different inferences triggered by the term 'political' in the context of Eugenia Piza Lopez's activities. I would also like to discover whether as a result of having engaged quite intensely with the text of the programme the respondents give an alternative referent for the term 'politics' to that first given in their answers to question one.

Chapter five

THE RESPONSES OF THE MAINSTREAM AND FEMINIST GROUPS TO THE TELEVISION PROGRAMME

In this chapter I set out the responses of the two groups to the questions outlined in section five of the previous chapter. Each set of responses is reported and commented on separately at this stage with a comparison and discussion of the data to follow in Chapter Six. With the structure I adopt I hope to avoid the privileging of one group's terms of reference over the other. The sequence of the data follows that of the interviews, and for ease of reference juxtaposes the two sets of responses thus:

(a) The question
(b) Transcript of Mainstream Group's response
(c) Comment on Mainstream Group's response
(d) Transcript of Feminist Group's response
(e) Comment on Feminist Group's response

To the extent that the linguistic form of the responses is not itself the object of analysis I use just three codes in order to facilitate reading of the transcript:

(1) / denotes where an utterance has been interrupted
(2) ... denotes a pause
(3) - denotes a false start which may have been indicated vocally by a variety of devices.

Q1 THE TITLE OF THE PROGRAMME WAS 'THE POLITICS OF EXPERIENCE'. CAN YOU EXPLAIN WHAT YOU THINK THE TITLE OF THE PROGRAMME MEANS

Q.1 RESPONSES OF MAINSTREAM GROUP

(J) Well if someone said to me - if someone said you're going to see a programme about the politics of experience I would expect it to be/

(K) I'd expect to see someone like Ted Heath/

(J) Yeah - or not necessarily - Margaret Thatcher - I'd expect it to be about someone who knows yeah who's well into politics

(K) Or an older person who's been in politics a long time describing about their life - who's experienced

Q.1 COMMENT ON MAINSTREAM GROUP'S RESPONSES

The aim of this question was to elicit evidence which would indicate the paradigm within which the members of the group interpret the utterances I focus on during the interview. In invoking well known figures who have held governmental positions, the responses would indicate that for this group the referent for politics primarily covers parliamentary activities. 'Experience' here is perceived in terms of a knowledge or skill arising from a long acquaintance with those activities.

Q.1 RESPONSES OF FEMINIST GROUP

(L) Well I would think it was relating a bit to this idea of um the personal being political and that you don't need to think of politics only as party politics but just how you live your life and what your - what you do in your day to day decisions is actually sort of political things as well...so they're concentrating on these women - women's experience and calling it a political experience but not a party political experience

(E) Yeah I'd agree with that yeah it comes from your own experiences its sort of grown out of your own experience as opposed to the - accepting a dogma that's handed down

Q.1 COMMENT ON FEMINIST GROUP'S RESPONSES

In defining the term 'politics' L explicitly distinguishes between the narrow definition of 'party politics' and a wider notion of the concept which also has the potential to refer to 'how you live your life'. For E and L in this group, given this more general concept of politics, 'experience' in the sense of daily life is political. The group's perception of what constitutes politics is made more explicit in their responses to question eleven.

Q.2 AT THE END OF THIS BIT EMMA NICHOLSON SAYS 'THIS IS MEN ONLY' WHAT DOES THE WORD 'THIS' REFER TO?

Emma Nicholson:
I remember when I was a child going into the Carlton Club to find my father and I walked in at the front door and I looked left and saw my father, my uncle who was Lord Chancellor, another uncle who was a Member of Parliament, all sitting together in a lovely room. And I just went through that door to say 'Hello, here I am'. All three rose to their feet and my father rushed forward and they all shouted 'Get out, get out. This is men only'

Q.2 RESPONSES OF MAINSTREAM GROUP

(J) It means that what's going on here is/

(M) Is only for men/

(J) Right/

(M) Only men are allowed in this room

[Interviewer: You didn't get the bit at the beginning which said where it was?]

(K) Well it was in Parliament wasn't it?

(J) I was thinking they meant some kind of boardroom

Q.2 COMMENT ON MAINSTREAM GROUP'S RESPONSES

The aim of this question was to elicit evidence of how the respondents would differ in their production of apparently automatic inferences. Although the group clearly understand Nicholson to mean that the place or activity being referred to excluded women, the term 'this' had different co-referents for two of the members of this group, and none provided 'The Carlton Club' as a referent.

Q.2 RESPONSES OF FEMINIST GROUP

(E) The setting - the place they're in

(G) I thought what they were talking about was men only - politics - you know - part of - whatever they were involved in.

(L) I would have thought the Carlton Club...

(G) The Carlton Club? Is that um...

(L) I think thats what she said - she just said its called the Carlton Club....

Q.2 COMMENT ON FEMINIST GROUP'S RESPONSES

While all three respondents understand Nicholson to mean that women were not permitted to be present, each offers a different co-referent for 'this': L provides the exact co-referent given in the text, E provides a general spatial referent which potentially includes the Carlton Club, while G infers that it is the activity or discussion which the men are involved in which excludes women.

Q.3 WHEN EUGENIA PIZA LOPEZ SAYS 'THEY' HERE WHO IS SHE REFERRING TO?

Eugenia Piza Lopez:
I was the daughter of intellectuals, of people who had given me an opportunity to read, to think, to challenge, many things. But they didn't give me an opportunity to challenge my own being, my own essence as a woman. They gave me an opportunity to challenge other aspects which were beyond the everyday life.

Q.3 RESPONSES OF MAINSTREAM GROUP

(J) Her family

(M) Her parents

Q.3 COMMENT ON MAINSTREAM GROUP'S RESPONSES

This question serves a similar function to that of question two with the added intention of familiarizing the group with this particular piece of text in preparation for the next, more complex question. As with question two the responses indicated the extent to which an audience's establishment of co-reference in broadcast communication requires the selective use of evidence from the text. M, for example apparently bases her response on Lopez's reference to herself as 'the daughter of intellectuals' while J's may be based on Lopez's reference to 'people'.

Q.3 RESPONSES OF FEMINIST GROUP

(G) The intellectuals she was talking about - the crowd that she was brought up with - her family and friends - society round about her

[joint speech - difficult to transcribe]

(L) I would have thought parents

(E) I would have thought wider than that

Q.3 COMMENT ON FEMINIST GROUP'S RESPONSES

Each of the group come to slightly different conclusions based on the evidence of the text. E's provision of 'parents' as the co-referent for 'they' would appear to be inferred from Lopez's use of the term 'daughter', while the wider range of co-references given by the other two respondents draw perhaps on the term 'people'.

Q.4 WHEN SHE TALKS ABOUT THE 'EVERYDAY LIFE' HERE WHAT DO YOU THINK SHE MEANS? CAN YOU EXPLAIN WHAT THE LAST THING SHE SAYS MEANS?

[Transcript as for Q.3]

Q.4 RESPONSES OF MAINSTREAM GROUP

(K) The everyday life for them is like washing cleaning looking after the family....being married

(J) Well she said beyond/

(K) It wasn't being a politician yeah to do something out of the ordinary

(M) I thought she meant they were bringing her up the way they wanted her to think - they were thinking for her - you know

(J) Yeah

(M) They weren't giving her the chance to do the things she wanted to do they were putting - er - they were - er - they wanted her to do/

(L) They were putting words into her mouth

(J) What are you lot saying? Are you saying they didn't give her the chance to do/

(L) No they gave her the chance/

(K) They said to read/

(J) To do/

(K) To do things but normal things/

(J) No that's not it she said they gave her/

(K) That they'd already done not for her to get out and do things/

[Joint speech - difficult to understand]

(K) I interpret it as they let her do things like read and do things but deep down her parents wanted her to be/

(L) What they wanted her to be/

(K) A normal woman/

(L) Not what she wanted to be

(K) Where ever it is South Africa

(J) Well I get the impression that they/

(K) You know to get married

(J) I got the impression they wanted her to go into politics/

(K) No I didn't/

(J) By the way/

(K) They let her see from the outside - they let her read take in all this knowledge but deep down they wanted her to be what they wanted/

(L) Get married have kids blah blah blah

(J) Because they said they gave her the chance to do things out of everyday life

(K) Yeah but then she said they didn't give her the chance to challenge - deep down they didn't want her to do anything else

(J) I thought they said they did give her the chance to challenge things out of everyday life...what did she say? [directed at interviewer]

[Interviewer: I'll read it to you it says 'They gave me the opportunity to read to think to challenge many things but they didn't give me an opportunity to challenge my own being my own essence as a woman. They gave me the opportunity to challenge other aspects which were beyond the everyday life]

(M) So they didn't give her the opportunity to do what she feels/

(K) Herself

(J) Right

(M) They were all given the opportunity to read and write as an everyday thing

(K) But are they given that opportunity in Cuba? She's talking about women in general in South America isn't she so therefore generally women in South America wouldn't have an education they've been brought up to do the washing you see don't you you saw the young girls doing the washing then you know generally they get married and start the circle again.

(J) Yeah but I think she's making the point/

(K) So therefore she's had her opportunity to learn to read and write and do things but the normal people - like everybody else - they don't have that opportunity

Q.4 COMMENT ON MAINSTREAM GROUP'S RESPONSES

The aim of this question was to see whether either of the groups perceive there to be a hyponynmic relationship between Lopez's reference to (a) what she terms 'my own being, my own essence as a woman' and (b) her 'everyday life', and moreover, whether the respondents take both to be significant to the extent that they represent an area of power imbalance which Lopez was not encouraged to challenge. While this group connect the everyday life with being 'a normal woman' (K), there was a certain amount of controversy over Lopez's meaning which requires unpacking.

In general the syntax of Lopez's utterance appeared to lead to such confusion that the debate centred on (a) what would constitute 'the everyday

life' for the culture in which Lopez was brought up and (b) what it was that Lopez was encouraged or not encouraged to do. All members of the group appear to see Lopez as implying that her parents were imposing some form of behaviour on her which she objected to. Where that perceived conflict lay is differentially interpreted however. I summarise below the positions the different speakers take:

(1) For K Lopez is referring to a dichotomy between 'every-day life' and 'beyond' which in her words consists of:

everyday life = washing/cleaning/looking after a family/being married

beyond = being a politician/reading/ taking in knowledge

K generally takes Lopez to mean that despite giving her certain opportunities, 'deep down' her parents desired that she conform to the 'everyday life' of their specific culture and discouraged her from 'being a politician'.

(2) M's general interpretation, aided by L is that Lopez's parents were imposing their own ideas on their daughter.

(3) J tries continually to establish what it was that Lopez was not given the opportunity to do. She continually questions whether 'going into politics' falls into the category of 'beyond the everyday life' and therefore by implication,

according to Lopez's final sentence, something she was encouraged to do.

In summary then, although the group as a whole make a connection between 'everyday life' and the conventional notion of a woman's role, the contexts they are supplying result in the inferences they make differing from those I make. In explicating her perception of the relevance of Lopez's remarks, K for example draws on assumptions about cultural expectations in foreign countries (triggered presumably by her assumptions about Lopez's nationality) and infers that although Lopez was encouraged to 'read, take in all this knowledge' (things she perceives as outside the everyday life of that culture) 'deep down' her parents desired Lopez to take on the traditional role of housewife and mother.

J sees the the wording of the text as suggesting otherwise, but in attempting to decode Lopez's syntax more precisely finds it too difficult in this situation to articulate a context in which not being encouraged to challenge aspects of everyday life could be relevant.

Q.4 RESPONSES OF FEMINIST GROUP

(E) Everyday life I presume would be really be a life um - the sort of - the things that went on in her family and the domestic life I suppose

(G) I thought it was life in the family - in the house - I think that second time I heard her saying she was brought up by her parents - I didn't hear parents the first time

(L) Well I'm not quite sure what she was saying there but what - the sort of impression I got out of it was that her family would talk about intellectual things and sort of political things and she could discuss things in that area um yeah I'm - I'm not quite sure what your question was - but she couldn't talk about things to do with her everyday experience of being a woman or something

Q.4 COMMENT ON FEMINIST GROUP'S RESPONSES

L's response partly coincides with my hypothesis that this group would perceive the notions of 'everyday life' and Lopez's womanhood to be related. Given the context of a set of feminist assumptions, within my interpretation however the two notions are related to the extent that they constitute an area of power imbalance which Lopez was not encouraged to challenge. While linking the two notions in the sense that she refers to Lopez's 'everyday experience of being a woman' L's does not articulate the implications I had anticipated.

Q.5 WHEN SHE SAYS 'SOMEBODY ELSE' HERE - WHO DOES SHE MEAN?

Eugenia Piza Lopez:

I think everything came together, and it didn't come together overnight, it took a rather long time to come together, but I was feeling that there was some reason why my mother, particularly, wanted so badly that I should be a virgin, for example. I mean that was her main concern. She was concerned about other things in my life, how good or bad a student I could be, but the main issue at home was my virginity.
And it really alienated my understanding of my own body and my sexuality because it made me feel that there was something wrong with it. There's something wrong with being the owner of your own body. Your body is not yours. It is for somebody else who will eventually indulge it when you get married. And it got to a point where I felt as a

woman and not exclusively as a human being, but as a woman, there are a number of things I want to say. There are a number of things I want to struggle for.

Q.5 RESPONSES OF MAINSTREAM GROUP

(M) The husband

(J) But I mean her mother might have gave her those thoughts or whatever but if she was to go along with them believing those thoughts then she would be the fool eh?

[long discussion starts about mothers' attitudes to the virginity of their daughters]

Q.5 RESPONSES OF FEMINIST GROUP

(G) The husband intended for her

Q.5 COMMENT ON BOTH GROUPS' RESPONSES

The aim of this question was to provide a less demanding task for the respondents and to make them more familiar with the text in preparation for the following question. All the respondents who spoke perceived the same referent for the item 'somebody else', and none of the respondents disputed that it was her future husband. (J) in the mainstream group, however, initiated a discussion on the issue of virginity by drawing attention to the attitude of Lopez's mother. The discussion was somewhat overlong for inclusion here but consisted predominantly of a series of anecdotes about the attitudes of the respondents' own mothers.

Q.6 WHAT IS THE CONNECTION BETWEEN THE THINGS SHE SAYS ABOUT HER VIRGINITY AND THE LAST SENTENCE HERE?

Eugenia Piza Lopez

And it got to a point where I felt as a woman and not exclusively as a human being, but as a woman, there are a number of things I want to say. There are a number of things I want to struggle for.

Q.6 RESPONSES OF MAINSTREAM GROUP

(J) I think she's just basically - just I think she's trying to give you an idea of how - what they think like in that country - well her family are more concerned about that she doesn't sleep with anyone before she gets married instead of being concerned how she's spending the rest of her life in the sense of work or whatever if you know what I mean that's their first priority

(M) Losing her virginity

(J) Yeah like don't lose your virginity sort of thing

(K) And stick to one man

(L) She wanted to be able to do her own/

(J) I don't think she was saying that she wanted to sleep around or anything I think she was just trying to say that's what they thought sort of thing - how bad she thinks their priorities were

[Interviewer: And can you see any connection between that and her political involvement?]

(J) Well I think that she sort of seems like she's trying to think so much/

(K) I can't think of anything at all

Q.6 COMMENT ON MAINSTREAM GROUP'S RESPONSES

The aim of this question was to elicit the context within which the groups might perceive Lopez's remarks about virginity to have relevance. The context J applies in her interpretation of why the issue should be spoken of contains the assumption that Lopez's cultural background differs from her own: Lopez's aim is to indicate 'what they think like in that country'. The group do not attempt to relate Lopez's comments on

virginity to the co-text I suggest as context, and my later intervention which implies the potential political implications of Lopez's remarks are not taken up by J, and explicitly dismissed by K.

Q.6 RESPONSES OF FEMINIST GROUP

(G) She wanted to be the owner of her own body she didn't want to be the - I think as she was growing up she was probably a sort of servant of her mother and a servant of the church having to be a virgin and it's something outside of yourself ... but this coming to feel that she is a woman the owner of her own body that's what she's had - it is a struggle - after many years of oppression really 'cos that's what Catholicism to me has meant.

(L) Yeah I think she was just sort of really meaning that her awareness that she wasn't the owner of her own body was something that went along with her awareness of those other things that she was concerned about as well - it was part of her wider struggle for it.

(E) Yeah I mean for me its er the connection is that she was saying that the preoccupation for her wasn't just to do with you know being a virgin, but there were other things in life that mattered um that beyond that - that she wanted to be able to talk about and argue about and challenge - that was beyond that preoccupation.

[Interviewer - At the end when she was talking 'the things I want to struggle for' - did you get an idea of whether she meant politically or not politically

(G) No I thought she meant in her, in herself

(E) Because I feel she was being restricted - that she was bound within certain limits of which it was acceptable to be a woman - that there were certain things it was acceptable to have interests in but she wanted to sort of break beyond the bounds...thats quite a difficult one to get

(L) the other thing is - and I don't know if its so much as what she's saying or how much they've edited what she's said - because you know obviously the way its sort of - I mean I actually thought that it was quite difficult sometimes when they jumped about sometimes they had a woman's

voice coming in before you saw who it was that was talking again...you're sort of going 'what?' you know 'where are we here?' but thats an editing problem isn't it

Q.6 COMMENT ON FEMINIST GROUP'S RESPONSE

I anticipated that this group, drawing on a context containing a feminist set of assumptions, would see a causal connection between Lopez's remarks on the issue of virginity, and her later political activities. In the event however, the group indicated a range of contexts I had not considered.

The context which M activates in producing Lopez's remarks as relevant is a set of assumptions about Catholicism. The 'struggle' Lopez refers to, which I had taken to mean political activities, is perceived by M in terms of Lopez's personal attempt to overcome her experience of 'oppression' by the church.

Lopez's remarks on virginity, for E, also appear to refer to her personal growth. The context within which this respondent understands the relevance of virginity is apparently her assumptions about Lopez's wider concerns. The issue of virginity is relevant in this context in that it represents the limited area in which it is conventionally acceptable for a woman to have an interest, and therefore Lopez's development constitutes a break from such narrow preoccupations.

Although the context which L applies is not as explicit as in the other two responses, it apparently consists of a set of assumptions within which it would not be contradictory to connect Lopez's realizations

about the ownership of her body and the 'other things she was concerned about'. The relevance of Lopez's remarks on virginity to the 'wider struggle' she refers to is not explicitly causal in L's account. The two events are apparently part of a single process however in that L speaks of how one awareness 'went along with' other awarenesses.

To summarize then, Lopez's remarks on the issue of virginity, although perceived in terms of Lopez's personal development by all three respondents, are relevant for different reasons to each of the respondents because of the different contexts they apply in explaining this relevance: For G the virginity issue represents the power of the Catholic church, which Lopez 'struggles' to free herself from. For E the virginity issue represents the areas in which it is acceptable for women to show an interest, and Lopez's struggles are against the conventions which produce this restriction. For L the virginity issue is relevant in that Lopez's awareness that she was not the owner of her own body 'went along with' an awareness of other concerns.

L's final remarks on the problems of intepreting the programme will be addressed in the next chapter.

Q.7 IN THIS SECTION SHE TALKS ABOUT WOMEN'S EXPLOITATION - WHAT DO YOU THINK SHE MEANS?

Eugenia Piza Lopez:

So we decided to get involved in producing a film about women. We wanted to show a day in the life of six women which starts at usually 3 or 4 in the morning and finishes usually at 10 or 11 at night. That without taking into account their wife's duties.

One of the main issues about women's exploitation I feel is the lack of recognition of women's work. The lack of recognition by women themselves when you ask them 'What do you do?' 'I don't work I am a housewife'. 'What do you do when you work in the land?'. 'Well I am not working actually I am helping my husband'. 'Um what do you do when you prepare the food?'. 'Oh well I am not working I am preparing the food for the kids'. But so this total lack of value they give to their work and through that lack of value to their work a lack of value to themselves. Because they don't recognize themselves as human beings who are producing an enormous contribution to society, what they do is not important. they are paid less because they are women. They are paid less because they are not agricultural workers, because they are helping the husband. In many cases they are not paid at all.

Q7 RESPONSES OF MAINSTREAM GROUP

(M) What in that country?

[Interviewer: Well, anywhere]

(M) That's their obligations isn't it?

(K) She said they got up at three or four in the morning and finished at ten at night except for their women's duties

(L) She means sex

(J) Well that only takes a couple of minutes for Christ's sake what's the big deal?

Q.7 COMMENT ON MAINSTREAM GROUP'S RESPONSES

The term 'exploitation here is somewhat ambiguous in that (a) no agent is supplied, and (b) it is uncertain whether Lopez is referring to women in general or the particular women she works with. I anticipated that the definitions offered by the groups

would make explicit the context which informed their inferences about Lopez's use of the term and in doing so provide an indication of who they perceive the implied agent to be.

This group do not appear to be familiar with the term itself, and infer its meaning from the co-text. The group appear to understand Lopez to be using the term to mean the work that these particular women were doing, rather than understanding her to be making a statement about the general condition of women, in that K gives an outline of Lopez's description of their working day. K and M's use of the terms 'duties' and 'obligations' appears to indicate that although this work is not entirely voluntary, the imperative behind it comes from the women themselves rather than resulting from some form of external coercion.

Q7 RESPONSES OF FEMINIST GROUP

(E) Well she seemed to go on to explain it - well in the sense of the - I mean she talks about the long hours the women were working but how other people or - and also the women themselves didn't actually recognise that they were working it wasn't sort of a valid experience of work and so other people - and themselves - didn't sort of see that as being important

(G) Exploitation usually means somebody else is - like men exploiting women - somebody else doing it to someone else - but then she went on to explain that women were doing it to themselves - they were exploiting themselves by not valuing themselves and their own contribution

(L) Yes I think there is some difficulty with the word exploitation um because as you say it usually implies that there's someone exploiting somebody else and in that it was sort of like well the

whole of the society is exploiting women in some way but its not sort of perhaps the usual way we think about it.., one person...

(E) Because she was getting across the idea that women colluded in their own exploitation

(L) Yes that women aren't acknowledging the fact that they are exploited and if their husbands don't know that they're exploiting them then is that sort of normal exploitation? And she goes on to say later that this man was absolutely horrified to find out how hard his wife worked well that was sort of not normal exploitation

(E) Yes and also if you accept that as being normal then you don't feel exploited

Q.7 COMMENT ON FEMINIST GROUP'S RESPONSES

The context within which this group address Lopez's use of the term 'exploitation' includes a range of assumptions about the agency entailed in the conventional meaning of term. L remarks that 'it usually implies that there's someone exploiting somebody else'. However these assumptions are then problematised by the group in that they bring in the context of Lopez's reference to (a) the women's lack of recognition of their own value and (b) the men's lack of awareness of the work they did. All three members of the group draw on this context to indicate a problem with Lopez's use of term. As L puts it 'if their husbands don't know that they're exploiting them then is that sort of normal exploitation?'.

The group also move from referring to these particular women's situation ('the women themselves didn't actually recognise that they were working') to general statements about women's experience: '..she was

getting across the idea that women colluded in their own exploitation'

Q.8 WHEN SHE TALKS ABOUT WHAT THE WOMEN SAY TO HER 'I DON'T WORK, I AM A HOUSEWIFE' WHAT DOES SHE MEAN BY WORK?

Eugenia Piza Lopez
One of the main issues about women's exploitation I feel is the lack of recognition of women's work. The lack of recognition by women themselves when you ask them 'What do you do?' 'I don't work I am a housewife.' 'What do you do when you work in the land?' 'Well I am not working actually I am helping my husband.' 'Um what do you do when you prepare the food?' 'Oh well I am not working I am preparing the food for the kids.'

Q.8 RESPONSES OF MAINSTREAM GROUP

(J) She means she doesn't go out to work/

(M) To work outside the home

(J) As such

(K) Yeah

(J) But like these days people will say - say you're on a chat show or what ever 'What do you do for a living?' 'I'm a housewife' that's what people say they don't say 'I don't do nothing I'm a housewife' now do they?

(K) In this country there's more recognition of a housewife but in South American is there?

(J) A bit more

(L) Not that much more

(J) Well I would say in some houses not in my house there's not but in maybe your house there might be a bit more

(K) Generally there is more recognition of a housewife's work whereas in South America there isn't is there?

(M) Its taken for granted

(J) That's why that man stood up and cried because he couldn't believe it

(K) That's right

Q.8 COMMENT ON MAINSTREAM GROUP'S RESPONSES

The definition of work in this context is 'paid labour'. In the remarks which follow their initial definition however the group offer an alternative meaning for the term in that J points out that it is now thought that to be a housewife is to do something 'for a living'. These remarks will be discussed more fully after question ten.

Q.8 RESPONSES OF FEMINIST GROUP

(L) I don't do paid employment

(M) I'm not bringing money into the house

Q.8 COMMENT

The referent given for 'work' in this context is 'paid employment'.

Q.9 AT THE END SHE TALKS ABOUT WHAT AN OLD MAN SAYS AFTER SEEING THE FILM - WHAT DOES HE MEAN BY WORK?

Eugenia Piza Lopez

We wanted to know what was the best use of the film so we asked the women 'What do you want to do with this film?' and they said 'We want to show it at at home, we want to show it in the different communities where we come from'. We showed the film and a few minutes after the film was finished a man stood up nearly crying, an old man, and he said to us 'I didn't realise my wife worked so hard. How come I've been married for such a long time without acknowledging that what she does is work'.

Q.9 RESPONSES OF MAINSTREAM GROUP

(L) Housework

(M) He just took it for granted all those years that was her duties - she's expected to do these things

(L) He goes out to earn the money she stays at home and looks after the house

[Interviewer: but he didn't see it as work?]

(L) No

(J) He's some sicko to see it in half an hour - you know what I mean? to see in half an hour - Oh my god/

(L) All of a sudden/

(J) Oh bloody hell did my wife do all that?

Q.9 COMMENT ON MAINSTREAM GROUP'S RESPONSES

Here the definition of work is 'housework'. The respondents' subsequent remarks will be discussed after question ten.

Q.9 RESPONSES OF FEMINIST GROUP

(L) I think its more like sort of um the idea of physical effort - you know she's actually expending a lot of hard physical labour in her day

Q.9 COMMENT ON FEMINIST GROUP'S RESPONSES

Here the referent for 'work' is 'physical effort'

Q.10 HOW DID THE FILM CHANGE THE MAN'S ATTITUDE?

Q.10 RESPONSES OF MAINSTREAM GROUP

(K) It brought home to him what a woman's work was like

(J) Well I think in that country - I mean over here all of them know that anyway but they're still too pig-headed and chauvinist to say any different/

(M) I think its up to a woman over here to mould a man

(L) I think you get the chance to change the roles

(M) If I was weak Richard wouldn't do half of what he does I just get stuck in there and make him do it...I'm a working mother so I expect it and I expect half/

(J) Yeah too right

(K) Yeah but if you weren't working would you expect it?

(M) Not as much

(J) What if you wasn't working...

(M) Not as much but I'd still expect some I'd still expect him to look after the kids and give me a break and do the dishes after dinner things like that.

Q10 COMMENT ON MAINSTREAM GROUP'S RESPONSES

With this and the two previous questions I aimed to discover whether either group had a systematic way of explaining the differences in their definition of the item 'work'. I hoped this would become evident in the process of making explicit the changes the man is assumed to have experienced. I also hoped that the responses to this question would indicate any difference in context the groups apply and thereby offer different accounts of how the relevance of the man's comments in this anecdote might be explained.

K's account of the change attributed to the man was that he became aware of 'what a woman's work was like'. He could now see, as L in response to question nine indicates, that his wife did 'housework'. In producing the man's remarks as relevant the group draw on the context they have been regularly applying: that of cultural difference. Within this context they accept the possibility that housework was previously

invisible to the man, as opposed to 'over here' where as J remarks, men know what women's work is like but are 'still too pig headed and chauvinist to say any different'.

The discussion initiated by the above three questions, centres on how housework is 'taken for granted' more in South America than in Britain, with the implication that gender roles are more rigid 'in that country'. J's remarks explain the relevance of the man's comments in terms of this context: 'That's why that man stood up and cried because he couldn't believe it'. She also, however, expresses surprise that this change should have occurred so suddenly.

Q.10 RESPONSES OF FEMINIST GROUP

(G) I don't actually think that man existed (laughter) that's the kind of thing someone - she would say - maybe someone did have a passing comment as they went out of the hall and said 'Oh god my poor wife' but you know like kinda the story would get bigger and bigger and then it suits her - maybe I'm just being very sceptical

(L) I've forgot what your question was now - he's going to appreciate his wife more

(G) To run home and thank her for forty years of/

(L) No I was thinking probably just that he is out doing something else and doesn't know what she does at home - like you come in from work and you've got mended clean clothes and um a meal on the table but you can - he would imagine that that sort of - she rustled that up sort of five minutes before he came in - so it was a question of that he actually saw what she did with her time because its like this idea now that a housewife sits at home drinking coffee all day chatting.

(E) If you're at home you don't do anything - because that's what the man does at home - he doesn't do very much - so therefore thats what women must do at home

(L) They don't realise..

(E) But I mean that might change his awareness of what women are doing at home but it doesn't mean to say it actually changes what he does. Or how he reacts - as you say it might change his attitude it doesn't mean it changes his actions

(L) I would have just thought it changed his knowing about it - who knows whether that will change anything else.

Q.10 COMMENT ON FEMINIST GROUP'S RESPONSES

For this group, the change in the man's attitude is perceived in terms of his 'appreciation' (L) and 'his awareness' (E). The change is discussed by this group as relevant in the context of gender relations generally and is explained by both L and E as arising from what they see as men's perceptions. L mentions that the process of cleaning and cooking are not always evident when men's only experience is of the finished product, while E assumes that men extrapolate from their own experience of home as a site of leisure when judging what women do. In discussing these factors, both E and L move from the specific situation referred to by Lopez to a set of generalized situations: L posits a 'normative' male position of 'you come in from work and you've got mended clean clothes' and E sees men in a general sense as perceiving home as a site of leisure for themselves and 'therefore that's what women must do at home'.

Q.11 ARE THE THINGS THIS WOMAN IS INTERESTED IN POLITICAL?

Q.11 RESPONSES OF MAINSTREAM GROUP

(General) No

(K) To me its her attitude to their way of life

[Interviewer: So you don't think their way of life has got anything to do with our way of life over here?]

(General) No

(J) No its not as over the top as what it is over there

(M) Well when our mothers were young they would do all these things though wouldn't they?

(K) See out there they expect women to get married and raise a family they don't like women to go out to work do they? The men don't like it they like them to be at home

(J) Because they're not used to it are they?

(K) Whereas here, given the opportunity a man would say 'Yeah go to work get the extra money'

(J) Yeah but still look after the house and kids

(L) Yeah but you just get out there and you still do that as well though

(J) And like if we're allowed to work 'Yippee our husbands let us hooray'

(K) Yeah but out there they don't like it - they don't like women to work

(L) Well most of those countries you know mostly they don't allow their wives to go out do they?

(M) The Asian people that work with us most of their husband treat them like that

(K) But that's got nothing to do - to me- that's got nothing to do with politics

(J) Its not politics as we know it as in the cabinet and all that

(K) That's what I associate with politics

(J) I mean that's not what they talk about in the Cabinet is it? 'Oh shall we let the wives go out to work?'

(General laughter)

Q.11 COMMENT ON MAINSTREAM GROUP'S RESPONSES

As the final four responses indicate, the group perceive 'politics' in terms of the Cabinet and Parliament rather than Lopez's consciousness raising activities. My application of the term 'political' to Lopez's interests is explicitly repudiated by the group. Moreover, as J's final remark indicates, the group do not see any direct connection between conventional politics and their own everyday lives.

The context within which the group perceive Lopez's presentation as relevant is generally that of her foreignness. Within this paradigm Lopez's description of her own experiences, and of the women she refers to, is relevant as information about a culture foreign to that of the respondents. The group do not automatically take Lopez's remarks to have a general relevance to their own lives - although this is continually negotiated at some level by the group. Parallels and divergences between their own experience and those which Lopez describes are constantly being brought up or dismissed.

Q.11 RESPONSES OF FEMINIST GROUP

(G) In the sense that they involve people - politics is about people - political with a small p

(E) I'm not even sure that I understood exactly what she was involved in.. I mean she seemed to talk about a sort of vague notion of women's groups and

things but I don't really feel that I understood what she actually was doing or what her goal was or..

(L) I sort of felt she was sort of something to do with making films to raise people's consciousness about the position of women. And if that is what she was doing - I would say that was political

(E) Yeah politics to me is about power - I think/

(L) I suppose politics/

(E) or structures of power usually but they can also - politics with a small p can also include informal power relations and I think because she seemed to be working with women it would probably be more sort of in terms of the informal structures of power

(L) Yeah I think that its um - there is this notion in feminism that the personal is political - its something that we talk about - so from that perspective it is political - if you agree that - but if you only accept politics as being sort of to do with classical or even pwider things of power - like they would say its political to buy Ecover washing up liquid as opposed to something else because you are, you know, you're putting your money in a sort of - along the lines of saying I'm buying this because it was supposedly ecological - that would be political. But other people might not see that as being political - that decision.

Q.11 COMMENT ON FEMINIST GROUP'S RESPONSES

The feminist group, although coming away from their viewing of the programme with no clear idea of what Lopez was actually involved in, did make a series of connections which linked Lopez's interests with everyday acts of their own such as buying washing-up liquid and termed them both political.

Chapter Six

A DISCUSSION OF THE RESPONSES TO THE INTERVIEW

1 INTRODUCTION

In the interviews my aim has been to provide evidence which would (1) indicate whether different audiences provide different contexts when inferring the meaning of a media text and (2) show how differences in context correlate with the audience's interpretation of the text's meaning. This evidence is collected with the general intention of providing an account of variation in interpretation by making explicit the relationship between an audience member's prior knowledge and the inferences he or she makes. In order to assess the evidence made available by the data it would be useful to begin by discussing, specifically in the light of certain responses, which aspects of the data are particularly significant in achieving the aims I set out above.

As I state in Chapter Four section 5 the interview methodology is premised on, but does not specifically aim to test out, the tenets of relevance theory. I also state that an effect of the interview situation is to impose on the respondents an assumption of the relevance of the text which I use. While this may affect the data in that the respondents are encouraged to engage with a text which, left to their own devices, they might well have ignored, a basic premise of the methodology is that in spite of this the interview

questions would not affect the <u>way</u> in which the text might be relevant for the respondents.

Within the terms of relevance theory the way in which a text is relevant for a respondent depends on the contextual implications the respondent draws, and my general hypothesis is that contextual implications are constrained by the parameters of a respondent's pre-existing encyclopaedic knowledge. This hypothesis draws on two claims of relevance theory: (1) that contextual implications are a synthesis of (a) the context and (b) the linguistically encoded meaning of the text, and (2) that the selection of context is dependent on the set of assumptions the respondent assumes are mutually manifest to herself and the speaker.

Since the context a respondent supplies in interpreting an utterance is a subset of the set of assumptions which constitute her cognitive environment, the limitations of her cognitive environment set parameters on the available context. Clearly a respondent would not be able to provide a given context unless she could access the specific assumptions which constitute that context. Moreover since a respondent's cognitive environment is in part made up by her pre-existing encyclopaedic knowledge, the parameters of this prior knowledge are particularly significant in terms of the constraints they set on the respondent's ability to supply a context for an utterance, and

therefore in terms of the contextual implications which might be drawn.

It is evidence of variation between respondents in terms of such constraints which the interview focusses on. Specifically the questions are designed to elicit evidence of any variation between the ability of the two groups to provide a set of particular feminist contextual assumptions which I take to be the implicated premise of much of Lopez's presentation. This then raises the issue of whether the questions I ask actually achieve their intended effect or whether they in any way influence the respondents' selection of a context for the utterances they are required to focus on. Although this issue was raised prior to the presentation of the interview data in Chapter Four section 5, in the light of the responses to question six, this issue can now be discussed more fully.

As a means of testing out the degree to which the interview questions could in fact determine the response of the groups, I set out, in asking question six, to discover whether I might be able to impose a context, and hence the production of a specific contextual implication, on the respondents. I asked the groups to articulate what connection might exist between (a) Lopez's remarks on virginity and (b) a specific piece of co-text: that where she refers to her realization that as a woman there were a number of things she wanted to say and struggle for. The form of

this question attempts to foreclose on the respondents' selection of a context in that the question actually indicates which piece of the co-text should be taken as relevant.

The mainstream group's response in particular indicates that my questions, while implying that the respondents should take relevance as a given, do not appear to influence the actual context they select, nor do they influence the contextual implications the respondents draw. In the above instance, although the piece of text I quoted was a part of each respondent's cognitive environment in that it was perceptible to her, in their responses the mainstream group ignored the piece of text I had posited as relevant co-text and instead, as this extract from J's response indicates, talked of the general relevance of Lopez's remarks on virginity:

(J) I think she's just basically - just I think she's trying to give you an idea of how - what they think like in that country - well her family are more concerned about that she doesn't sleep with anyone before she gets married instead of being concerned how she's spending the rest of her life in the sense of work or whatever if you know what I mean that's their first priority

Even when I then imposed my reading of the text on the group and asked whether there was any connection between Lopez's remarks on her virginity and those on her 'political involvement', the only respondent who actually articulates an opinion simply dismisses the relevance of Lopez's remarks on virginity in this context:

[Interviewer: And can you see any connection between that and her political involvement?]

(K) I can't think of anything at all

Although the interview has an effect on the responses, to the extent that the format insists that relevance is axiomatic, the context within which the text is relevant for the respondents is always of their own, generally unconscious, selection. It is these specific choices of context then, together with the resulting contextual implications which constitute the significant information the interview process aims to make explicit.

In this chapter I compare the responses of the two groups within the terms of relevance theory outlined above, by focussing initially on issues of decoding and inferencing, I then discuss the distinction between the assumptions the two groups' hold about 'politics' and in the subsequent sections I focus on the implications of this distinction for the way the groups perceive specific features of Lopez's presentation.

2 ISSUES OF DECODING AND INFERENCE: QUESTIONS TWO, THREE AND FIVE

In this section I address the particular issue of audience decoding of a broadcast text and discuss, in the light of the data, whether it is possible to distinguish areas where the text of a programme is likely to be uniformly perceived by an audience. I

also argue that the 'degrees of communication' invoked by Sperber and Wilson (1986) are affected not only, as they suggest, by the extent to which a communicator employs linguistic encoding, but also by the medium of communication.

2.1 Linguistic encoding

Inferences, according to Relevance theory, are made up of assumptions whose source can be either (a) perceptual: ie acquired via visual, auditory or linguistic perception or (b) an output of the deductive device (see Chapter Two section 2.2). The former assumptions are 'new', while the latter are 'old' information. The inferencing process consists of a series of deductions in which new information {P} is united with old information {C}, and is described as the 'contextualisation of {P} in {C}' (Sperber and Wilson 1986:108). These two types of assumption, brought together as inputs of the deductive device, produce as the output 'contextual implications': ie new conclusions not derivable from either set of assumptions alone.

New information can take the form of unencoded or encoded data. Within the 'encoded' category Sperber and Wilson include the syntax and semantics of a language. To this extent then a certain uniformity of interpretation might be anticipated amongst, for example, native English speakers when an utterance is

produced in English. However, the encoded elements of language, according to relevance theory, only form the basis of a hearer's hypotheses about the intended meaning of an utterance within a general inferential process. To this extent the decoding process is subordinate to the inferential process which would imply, in contradiction to the expectation of uniformity, that variation in interpretation may occur.

Sperber and Wilson argue that pragmaticists who follow Grice assume, in opposition to their own thesis, that decoding and inferencing are two separate activities: explicit meaning is decoded while implicit meaning is inferred (Sperber and Wilson 1986:56, 182). This Gricean approach applied to the analysis of broadcast communication would suggest that certain aspects of interpretation could be predicted while others might be less certain. Questions two, three and five were included in the interview partially with the intention of problematising this distinction between the two processes and will be discussed at this point in order to consider whether it is possible to predict where variation in interpretation of broadcast utterances is likely to occur.

In question two I asked the respondents to produce a co-referent for the term 'this' used by Emma Nicholson in an anecdote about encountering a group of her male relatives in the Carlton Club (see 2.2 below for transcript). Within a conventional pragmatic

approach while the syntactic function, and semantic field of the pronoun could be described as encoded in the text, the audience's provision of a co-reference would require an inferential process. This was apparently the case in the responses to question three where a co-referent was requested for the term 'they' used in Lopez's description of her early life.

Q.3 WHEN EUGENIA PIZA LOPEZ SAYS 'THEY' HERE WHO IS SHE REFERRING TO?

Eugenia Piza Lopez:
I was the daughter of intellectuals, of people who had given me an opportunity to read, to think, to challenge, many things. But they didn't give me an opportunity to challenge my own being, my own essence as a woman. They gave me an opportunity to challenge other aspects which were beyond the everyday life.

Q.3 RESPONSES OF MAINSTREAM GROUP

(J) Her family

(M) Her parents

Q.3 RESPONSES OF FEMINIST GROUP

(G) The intellectuals she was talking about - the crowd that she was brought up with - her family and friends - society round about her

[joint speech - difficult to transcribe]

(L) I would have thought parents

(E) I would have thought wider than that

In each case, even though the actual choice of co-referent had to be inferred, the grammatical function and semantic field of these examples of anaphora were dealt with uniformly by the respondents in that they all offered a co-referent and moreover attributed an animate or inanimate co-referent where appropriate.

The responses to question five were also uniform in terms of the co-referent provided:

Q.5 WHEN SHE SAYS 'SOMEBODY ELSE' HERE - WHO DOES SHE MEAN?

Eugenia Piza Lopez:

> And it really alienated my understanding of my own body and my sexuality because it made me feel that there was something wrong with it. There's something wrong with being the owner of your own body. Your body is not yours. It is for somebody else who will eventually indulge it when you get married. And it got to a point where I felt as a woman and not exclusively as a human being, but as a woman, there are a number of things I want to say. There are a number of things I want to struggle for.

Q.5 RESPONSES OF MAINSTREAM GROUP

(M) The husband

Q.5 RESPONSES OF FEMINIST GROUP

(G) The husband intended for her

This level of uniformity of response would imply that this information was indeed decoded even though, as the responses to question three indicate, once the decoded information interacts with the respondents' existing knowledge different inferences might be made about the actual co-referent.

While initially this would appear to allow the analyst of a television programme a certain potential to predict how a text might be interpreted by an audience, further data indicates that this is not necessarily the case and emphasizes the importance of this level of empirical study. To what extent the syntactic and semantic aspects of an utterance can generally be taken to have been decoded by an audience

is particularly questionable in the case of a television broadcast. For example, I would argue that while the meaning of the term 'exploitation' (see question seven) used by Lopez in her account of women's work might be described as having been decoded by the feminist group this is not the case with the mainstream group in that the latter group do not seem to be familiar with the term. As a result they infer its meaning from the text:

(M) That's their obligations isn't it?

(K) She said they got up at three or four in the morning and finished at ten at night except for their women's duties

Even where the semantic field of a term is known, as is indicated in the responses of the feminist group, and the term could therefore be said to have been decoded, the subsequent discussion about Lopez's particular use of 'exploitation' indicates how the decoding process is subordinate to the inferential process:

(L) Yes I think there is some difficulty with the word exploitation um because as you say it usually implies that there's someone exploiting somebody else and in that it was sort of like well the whole of the society is exploiting women in some way but its not sort of perhaps the usual way we think about it

This particular response will be addressed more fully in section 5, but is used at this point to indicate how the interpretation of a television text cannot be pre-empted by an analyst even at the level of apparent decoding. It is rather the case that even the

assignment of propositional form to an utterance is contextually dependent in that the process in which a respondent disambiguates and enriches the encoded aspects of meaning in an utterance is inferential, calling on a range of evidence (see Chapter Two section 3.3). Moreover there can be no guarantee that a linguistically encoded meaning will be decoded at all - which is not necessarily to say that nothing will have been communicated. The data discussed in sections 4 and 5 of this chapter provides evidence of this.

The above data would indicate that to distinguish, in the absence of an empirical study, which elements of the language might be decoded and which inferred, and by extension to assume that certain elements would be uniformly and others differentially understood by an audience is not an appropriate exercise. Sections 3, 4 and 5 develop this claim through a discussion of the data which shows how the meaning linguistically encoded in the text is often subordinated to the inferences made by the two groups of respondents which derive from their existing assumptions about feminism.

Differences in knowledge between members of the audience of a television text, which make the status of a mutually manifest cognitive environment somewhat precarious, as well as features peculiar to broadcast communication such as the lack of feedback between speaker and hearer, indicate the extent to which mediated texts should be approached as distinct and

problematic forms of communication. The problematic nature of television interpretation is discussed more fully in the following section.

2.2 Degrees of communication

Sperber and Wilson argue that degrees of communication vary according to the extent to which an assumption is made manifest by the communicator. The strongest form of communication is that in which the communicator uses a linguistically encoded utterance, while a weaker form would be non-verbal communication, which in certain cases might be purely inferential. Given the difficulty, addressed in the previous section, of distinguishing whether for a particular audience the potential meaning of a term within a television text is in fact decoded from the semantic representation it would also appear that the mediation of an utterance by forms such as television may influence the degree of communication which occurs. Communication via the medium of television appears to be a more 'hazardous' process than other forms.

For example, when Emma Nicholson's speech is transcribed, and the text is therefore read rather than heard, intuitively it would appear to be a simple matter to retrieve the co-referent of 'this'. The responses of the two groups in my study would indicate however that while textual co-reference might occur automatically when reading, it would appear that

inference production generated by television texts is less automatic.

In questions two and three for example where my respondents were requested to provide a co-referent for a pronoun, both groups gave as a response a wide range of referents. This would indicate that anaphora solution was not simply text-related and automatic in this instance. The responses to question two consist of inferences which appear to draw on a variety of evidence which would indicate that extra-linguistic knowledge is involved at some level:

Q.2 AT THE END OF THIS BIT EMMA NICHOLSON SAYS 'THIS IS MEN ONLY' WHAT DOES THE WORD 'THIS' REFER TO?

Emma Nicholson:
I remember when I was a child going into the Carlton Club to find my father and I walked in at the front door and I looked left and saw my father, my uncle who was Lord Chancellor, another uncle who was a Member of Parliament, all sitting together in a lovely room. And I just went through that door to say 'Hello, here I am'. All three rose to their feet and my father rushed forward and they all shouted 'Get out, get out. This is men only'

Q.2 RESPONSES OF MAINSTREAM GROUP

(J) It means that what's going on here is/

(M) Is only for men/

(J) Right/

(M) Only men are allowed in this room...

[Interviewer: You didn't get the bit at the beginning which said where it was?]

(K) Well it was in Parliament wasn't it?

(J) I was thinking they meant some kind of boardroom

Q.2 RESPONSES OF FEMINIST GROUP

(E) The setting - the place they're in

(G) I thought what they were talking about was men only - politics - you know - part of - whatever they were involved in.

(L) I would have thought the Carlton Club...

(G) The Carlton Club? Is that um...

(L) I think thats what she said - she just said its called the Carlton Club....

Within the terms of relevance theory the evidence which provides the basis of a hearer's inferences are (a) assumptions about the speaker's intention (b) new information: ie visual, auditory and linguistic perceptions and (c) old information: the hearer's encyclopaedic knowledge. One of the many features of interpreting television which would distinguish this process from that of, for example, reading a text, is the simultaneous processing of verbal material and visual images. This feature might in part explain K's inference in that the text quoted above is a voice-over spoken by Nicholson while the screen shows her walking through the gates of the Houses of Parliament. G's response of 'politics - you know -part of - whatever they were involved in' or J's 'some kind of boardroom' would also indicate that evidence from outside of the linguistic elements of the text was being drawn on.

The responses indicate the difficulty of assessing the significance of the the co-text of a televised communication in attributing meaning to an utterance. They also give some indication of the level at which it

is reasonable to expect an audience to have engaged with a television programme. The existence of a piece of co-text does not necessarily imply that an audience will perceive it.

Judging by Sperber and Wilson's claims, it would appear then that the interpretation of a television text is a more complicated inferential process than other forms of communication. In face to face communication between individuals who have, in Sperber and Wilson's terms, a mutually manifest cognitive environment, an item may be approached as though the meaning was encoded. It would appear from the data however that because the mutuality of the speaker and hearer's cognitive environment is less manifest to the hearer of a broadcast utterance, a television audience is likely to have to make more inferences in order to interpret the meaning. Moreover inferences which appear to be text-related when speech is transcribed may become dependent upon a wider range of evidence when an audience is interpreting the various and fast moving stimuli of a television programme.

The problems of interpreting a television text faced by the respondents in this particular study are brought up by a member of the feminist group.:

(L) ...I actually thought that it was quite difficult sometimes when they jumped about...sometimes they had a woman's voice coming in before you saw who it was that was talking again...you're sort of going 'what?' you know 'where are we here?' but that's an editing problem isn't it

Although it could be the case that this was a particularly badly produced programme, L's remarks indicate the work an audience has to put into understanding a television text, and are an indication of the extent to which it would be misguided to assume that an analysis based on the close reading of the text of a programme bears any relation to a potential audience's perception of the text.

2.3 Summary

I have argued that communication via the medium of television is more 'hazardous', than that of other forms such as face to face conversation, in that an audience's assessment of what information might be mutually manifest, and therefore what might be the relevant context is more problematic. I have also argued that it is not possible to predict whether there will be areas of a television text which will be uniformly understood by different audiences in that what might be taken to be explicitly encoded elements of the text will ultimately be perceived according to the inferences an audience makes based on their existing knowledge. In the following section I expand on this in a discussion of how the semantic aspects of meaning encoded in the title of the programme were disambiguated by the respondents in the context of their existing assumptions about 'politics'.

3 EXISTING ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT 'POLITICS' IN THE ENCYLOPAEDIC KNOWLEDGE OF THE RESPONDENTS: QUESTIONS ONE AND ELEVEN

The distinguishing feature of the two groups of respondents when setting up this study, as I have argued in Chapter Four section 3, was the apparent difference in their existing assumptions about feminism. To the extent that it is a premise of certain forms of feminist thought that personal experience has political significance, one of the most pertinent implications of the difference between the groups' assumptions about feminism may be the corresponding assumptions which the groups hold about 'politics'. Questions one and eleven were designed to draw out any potential differences in this field.

Q.1 THE TITLE OF THE PROGRAMME WAS 'THE POLITICS OF EXPERIENCE'. CAN YOU EXPLAIN WHAT YOU THINK THE TITLE OF THE PROGRAMME MEANS?

The aim of this question was to elicit responses which would indicate any specific difference in the respondents' respective cognitive environments both between and within the groups. In the event the most significant difference occurred between the groups in that for those respondents in the mainstream group who offered an opinion 'politics' consisted of party politics and was related directly to Parliamentary figures and their activities, while for the speakers of the feminist group this constituted only one aspect of politics. For the feminist group 'politics' had the

potential to refer, in L's words, to 'how you live your life' as well as to party politics.

The term 'experience' in the title was also differentially interpreted. J and K in the mainstream group took 'experience' to refer to the 'knowledge' which well known figures have acquired in carrying out Parliamentary activities:

(K) ..an older person who's been in politics a long time describing about their life - who's experienced

In contrast, L in the feminist group took 'experience' to mean 'how you live your life and what your - what you do in your day to day decisions'.

It would appear then that there were specific differences in assumptions about 'politics' in the respective cognitive environments of the group members and my general hypothesis at this stage was that these would have an effect on the contextual assumptions the respondents produced when interpreting the various aspects of the programme I focus on in the interview. Much of the following discussion centres on the extent to which this hypothesis is supported by the data.

The claim that the groups had different assumptions about politics cannot be justified solely as a result of the responses to this first question. Since context is itself an inference within relevance theory it is not possible to judge, from these initial responses, whether the meaning of the term 'experience' was inferred in the context of what the groups took

'politics' to consist of, or whether the meaning of the term 'politics' was inferred in the context of their perception of 'experience'. Moreover it would be problematic to claim that because one group took 'experience' in this case to refer to 'day to day decisions' while the other group took it to refer to 'knowledge' that these alternative referents were not potentially available to both groups.

I am however making just such a claim in relation to the referents for the term 'politics'. My reason for claiming that both referents for 'politics' are not available to both groups is that subsequent responses throughout the interview reinforce the different perception of politics evident in the responses to the first question.

When question one was asked, the groups had watched the television programme once, and its events were therefore part of the cognitive environment of each respondent when the title was quoted. The events therefore constituted a potential context. Despite this potential it is only the feminist group who draw on the programme as a context for their interpretation of the title:

> (L) ...they're concentrating on these women - women's experience and calling it a political experience but not a party political experience'.

In contrast the mainstream group have expectations of the title which the programme does not fulfil, which

would imply that for them the programme does not offer a relevant context.

(K) I'd expect to see someone like Ted Heath/

(J) Yeah - or not necessarily - Margaret Thatcher - I'd expect it to be about someone who knows yeah who's well into politics

To this extent therefore it would appear that the events of the programme have not been perceived by the mainstream group to be about 'politics' at all. This is confirmed in their response to question eleven:

ARE THE THINGS THIS WOMAN IS INTERESTED IN POLITICAL?

(General) No

(K) To me its her attitude to their way of life

K here actually sets up a dichotomy between something which is 'political' and something which is about a 'way of life'. The implication that the two concepts are mutually exclusive is made even more explicit in K and J's later comments which follow a discussion about working wives:

(K) But that's got nothing to do - to me - that's got nothing to do with politics

(J) Its not politics as we know it as in the cabinet and all that

(K) That's what I associate with politics

(J) I mean that's not what they talk about in the Cabinet is it? 'Oh shall we let the wives go out to work?'

(General laughter)

The idea that politics has any connection with their own lives was ridiculous enough to provoke laughter for the mainstream group, who indicated a

strong sense of politics as a remote practice carried out by famous personalities. In contrast to this G, in the feminist group, invoked the notion of 'politics with a small p' in response to question eleven. For this group an everyday act of their own such as buying 'Ecover washing up liquid' (L) was potentially political.

The feminist group also translated aspects of Lopez's presentation into their own terms, such as 'consciousness raising' in order to indicate, in response to question eleven, in what way they saw her work as political:

(L) I sort of felt she was sort of something to do with making films to raise people's consciousness about the position of women. And if that is what she was doing - I would say that was political

(E) Yeah politics to me is about power - I think/

(L) I suppose politics/

(E) or structures of power usually but they can also - politics with a small p can also include informal power relations and I think because she seemed to be working with women it would probably be more sort of in terms of the informal structures of power

To summarise then, the above responses would indicate that the encyclopaedic knowledge of the two groups were quite distinct in terms of assumptions about politics. For the mainstream group 'politics' was specifically connected to Parliamentary activities while the encyclopaedic knowledge of the members of the feminist group contained both assumptions about politics as party politics as well as a wider ranging

set of assumptions relating power to consciousness and everyday actions.

As I asserted earlier, since, according to relevance theory, a respondent's encyclopaedic knowledge constitutes part of her cognitive environment when addressing the text of the programme, and since the potential context of the text must be drawn from the respondent's cognitive environment, it is possible that the selected context will differ in accordance with any difference in encyclopaedic knowledge which exists between respondents. In sections 4 and 5 below I discuss how the difference in encyclopaedic knowledge outlined above affected the respondents' provision of context for two specific areas of the text.

4 THE RELEVANCE OF AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL DETAIL IN LOPEZ'S PRESENTATION: QUESTIONS FOUR AND SIX

In section 2 of this chapter I discussed the status of new, perceptual information and how according to relevance theory this interacts with old, encyclopaedic knowledge to produce contextual implications. In the above section I asserted that the two groups of respondents had distinct notions of what the term 'politics' referred to. In this section I discuss how, given their difference in encyclopaedic knowledge, the (new) autobiographical information Lopez provides in her presentation interacted with the respondents' (old) assumptions about politics and feminism. Specifically

I consider how the contextual implications the respondents drew made Lopez's autobiographical remarks relevant to them. I begin with a discussion of question four.

I set out, in asking question four, to discover whether the respondents would perceive Lopez's reference to her 'everyday life' to be hyponymically related to her earlier reference to her experience of being a woman.

WHEN SHE TALKS ABOUT THE 'EVERYDAY LIFE' HERE WHAT DO YOU THINK SHE MEANS? CAN YOU EXPLAIN WHAT THE LAST THING SHE SAYS MEANS?

Eugenia Piza Lopez:

> I was the daughter of intellectuals, of people who had given me an opportunity to read, to think, to challenge, many things. But they didn't give me an opportunity to challenge my own being, my own essence as a woman. They gave me an opportunity to challenge other aspects which were beyond the everyday life.

My own reading of the text had led me to perceive that the items 'the everyday life' and 'my own essence as a woman' referred to two aspects of experience which Lopez was not encouraged to challenge. Moreover, based on my existing assumptions about the the effects of consciousness raising in contesting power relations (See Chapter Four section 5) I drew the contextual implication that Lopez is describing a period when she was not yet aware that the power relations which informed her everyday life could be called into question. The relevance of Lopez's remarks for me, given this contextual implication, are that they

supplement her autobiographical account by building a picture of her political development.

Neither group explicitly drew the same contextual implications as myself, and the responses of the mainstream group in particular were somewhat varied. The non-textual information which is explicitly referred to in their responses, and which would indicate the context the individual respondents tended to apply most regularly however, is the assumption that the life Lopez is describing is foreign to their own. This is particularly explicit in the following remarks made by K:

Example One:

(K) The everyday life <u>for them</u> is like washing cleaning looking after the family....being married [my emphasis]

Example Two:

(K) Where ever it is South Africa

Although the remainder of the group did not, in response to this particular question, articulate this context to the same degree, neither was it disputed. Indeed the group discussed the issues of Lopez's meaning unproblematically within these terms:

(M) They were all given the opportunity to read and write as an everyday thing

(K) But are they given that opportunity in Cuba? She's talking about women in general in South America isn't she so therefore generally women in South America wouldn't have an education they've been brought up to do the washing you see don't you you saw the young girls doing the washing then you know generally they get married and start the circle again.

The discussion revolved around what behaviour might be perceived as 'normal' in the particular but unspecified culture Lopez is referring to, with the aim of clarifying what it might be that Lopez was or was not being encouraged to challenge. Both J and K brought in the inferred context of Lopez's 'being a politician' and their dispute centred on whether this was what Lopez was discouraged from doing. In K's response, which uses contextual assumptions based on Lopez's nationality, the syntax of Lopez's remarks is subordinated to K's assumptions about a woman's place in this alien culture. The contextual implication which makes Lopez's remarks relevant to K appears to be that her parents had a 'hidden agenda' in that they did not really want Lopez to be, in K's words, 'a politician':

(K) I interpret it as they let her do things like read and do things but deep down her parents wanted her to be/

(L) What they wanted her to be/

(K) A normal woman/

(L) Not what she wanted to be/

(K) Where ever it is South Africa

J on the other hand attempted to decode Lopez's syntax more precisely but had great difficulty in providing a context in which it would be relevant. She constantly disputed K's interpretation of what Lopez was encouraged to do:

Example One:

(K) The everyday life for them is like washing cleaning looking after the family....being married

(J) Well she said beyond/

Example Two:

(J) What are you lot saying? Are you saying they didn't give her the chance to do/

Eventually J appealed to the interviewer for clarification but did not subsequently articulate an alternative interpretation to that put forward by K. Whether J would, given sufficient time, have come up with a relevant context is not evident from the data. The data would indicate however that Lopez's remarks were not immediately relevant for any member of this group within the context of Lopez's developing political awareness which I had assumed in my own understanding of the text, and that contextual assumptions based on Lopez's foreignness were accessed more readily for this group.

Assumptions about Lopez's nationality did not feature in the feminist group's responses to either question four or question six. In response to question four, members of this group paraphrased Lopez's utterance rather than offering, as I had hypothesized, an explicit contextual implication approximating to my own. However, L in the feminist group did link the two phenomena I had taken to be hyponymically related in the text quoted as part of question four:

Eugenia Piza Lopez

> But they didn't give me an opportunity to challenge my own being, my own essence as a woman. They gave me an opportunity to challenge other aspects which were beyond the everyday life.

L paraphrased it thus:

(L) ...she couldn't talk about things to do with her everyday experience of being a woman or something

Neither L nor the remainder of the feminist group offered any contextual implications which would indicate the relevance of Lopez's autobiographical detail at this point. Although the group did go on to do this in response to question six, each respondent focussed on a slightly different contextual implication of Lopez's autobiographical remarks.

Q.6 WHAT IS THE CONNECTION BETWEEN THE THINGS SHE SAYS ABOUT HER VIRGINITY AND THE LAST SENTENCE HERE?

Eugenia Piza Lopez

> And it got to a point where I felt as a woman and not exclusively as a human being, but as a woman, there are a number of things I want to say. There are a number of things I want to struggle for.

The context which G activated in response to Lopez's remarks on virginity consists of a set of assumptions about Catholicism. Moreover within this context she disambiguated the term 'struggle' as Lopez's personal attempt to overcome her experience of oppression by the church. The contextual implications which appear to make Lopez's remarks about virginity relevant for G are that they refer to Lopez becoming 'the owner of her own body....after many years of oppression...' by challenging the values of Catholicism.

The context E supplied consists of a set of assumptions about the range of issues it is traditionally acceptable for a woman to be concerned about. The implications which make Lopez's remarks on virginity relevant within this context are that being preoccupied with questions about virginity was a position Lopez wanted to move away from: 'there were other things in life that mattered um beyond that'. Within this context Lopez's remarks imply that her personal development constituted a move away from these traditonal concerns into a wider area:

(E) Because I feel she was being restricted - that she was bound within certain limits of which it was acceptable to be a woman - that there were certain things it was acceptable to have interests in but she wanted to sort of break beyond the bounds...

Unlike E, who addressed Lopez's remarks on virginity as indicating a break in terms of her development, L described them in terms of continuity:

(L) Yeah I think she was just sort of really meaning that her awareness that she wasn't the owner of her own body was something that went along with her awareness of those other things that she was concerned about as well - it was part of her wider struggle for it.

Although L did not specifically disambiguate the term 'struggle' as 'political struggle', and did not describe the connection between this and Lopez's earlier realizations about the issue of virginity as causal, she did refer to the the two events as elements of a single process: 'it was part of her wider struggle for it'. To this extent Lopez's remarks on virginity were taken by all three members of the feminist group

to have a relevance, albeit a varying relevance, in terms of the context of Lopez's remark that there things she wants to 'struggle for'.

For the feminist group then the stance of challenging the received view on female virginity had significant implications for Lopez's development. I would argue that this view is dependent upon assumptions about the political significance of everyday life which is a premise of a specific feminist perspective. It involves the assumption that the received view of virginity Lopez refers to represents some form of oppression and that to challenging such constraints on female behaviour will have on-going effects. In M's account these effects are described in terms of Lopez becoming 'the owner of her own body', while in E's account challenging the constraints enable progress:

(E) ...there were other things in life that mattered um beyond that that she wanted to be able to talk about and argue about and challenge - that was beyond that preoccupation.

In contrast the mainstream group addressed the received view of female virginity in more local terms. J and K both referred to the immediate implications of the convention:

(J) ...her family are more concerned about that she doesn't sleep with anyone before she gets married...

(K) ...stick to one man

J went on to infer that Lopez had challenged the received view and in doing so this respondent moved away from these immediate implications to add:

(J) I don't think she was saying that she wanted to sleep around or anything I think she was just trying to say that's what they thought sort of thing - how bad she thinks their priorities were

J's response indicates that she has inferred Lopez's meaning to be that to challenge the received view of female virginity relates to more than the desire to 'sleep around'. In contrast to the feminist group however J did not have access to contextual assumptions about the wider significance of the issue which might have allowed her to elaborate on this:

[Interviewer: And can you see any connection between that and her political involvement?]

(J) Well I think that she sort of seems like she's trying to think so much/

At this point she was interrupted by K, and to the extent that she did not attempt to continue, it would appear that the point was either too difficult to make in the context of the interview or that the connection was not apparent to her (particularly given that the question I posed drew on an alien notion of politics - a phrasing which with hindsight I consider should have been avoided). The context which J articulated in her initial response to question six does however appear to be the most relevant one for her to the extent that it was more accessible to her:

(J) I think she's just basically - just I think she's trying to give you an idea of how - what they think like in that country

In summary then, the encyclopaedic knowledge which each respondent drew on in her interpretation of the text would appear to have quite specific effects on the contextual implications she produced. In the absence of a set of assumptions about how autobiographical experience might have a wider significance the mainstream group offered contexts which drew on assumptions about Lopez's nationality. They indicated that they saw that Lopez was making certain claims about the issue of virginity but drew the contextual implication that Lopez was providing information about a foreign culture. The feminist group, drawing on their existing assumptions about gender politics, articulated the implication that Lopez's autobiographical remarks were relevant in a range of contexts which related to her developing consciousness of some form of 'oppression'.

5 THE RELEVANCE OF WOMEN'S WORK IN LOPEZ'S PRESENTATION

In the previous section I argued that the respondents' existing assumptions about gender politics led them to make different inferences about the relevance of Lopez's use of autobiographical detail. In this section I discuss the effect of these assumptions on the inferences the respondents made about the relevance of women's work in the following extract from Lopez's presentation:

Eugenia Piza Lopez:

> So we decided to get involved in producing a film about women. We wanted to show a day in the life of six women which starts at usually 3 or 4 in the morning and finishes usually at 10 or 11 at night. That without taking into account their wife's duties.
> One of the main issues about women's exploitation I feel is the lack of recognition of women's work. The lack of recognition by women themselves when you ask them 'What do you do?' 'I don't work I am a housewife'. 'What do you do when you work in the land?'. 'Well I am not working actually I am helping my husband'. 'Um what do you do when you prepare the food?'. 'Oh well I am not working I am preparing the food for the kids'.

In my own understanding of this part of Lopez's presentation, she is drawing on a set of Marxist feminist assumptions about the lack of value attributed to female labour. Within this set of assumptions is the premise that the traditional gendered division of labour causes a woman's domestic contribution to be generally perceived in terms other than 'work'. Work in this sense implies 'labour which is value producing' (See Smith 1978:201). A view which is based on this premise, and one which I understand Lopez to be drawing on, is that the lack of financial recompense, and the extent to which the domestic production of services draws on a woman's emotional response to her family, perpetuate the view, both in society in general and among the women involved, that it is not appropriate to view this form of labour in terms of economic worth. From this perspective women as a group are seen to be exploited in a society where their labour is not recognized as 'work' in that it is not sufficiently

valued either in terms of status or financial remuneration. The contextual implication I draw from a synthesis of these premises, and Lopez's description of the film she makes of the work carried out by a group of women, is that the film is an attempt to raise these women's awareness of the extent and value of their labour. A further implication I draw is that this change in consciousness is a step towards redressing the existing inequity.

In order to draw the contextual implications I make above, a respondent would presumably require a cognitive environment which contains a similar set of assumptions to those I have described. Questions seven to ten were designed to draw out any differences between the respondents' understanding of this part of Lopez's presentation given the differences in the context they are likely to supply. In initially asking the groups to make explicit the way in which they disambiguate the semantic representations 'work' and 'exploitation' in the part of the text I focus on I aimed to discover whether both groups saw the issue in question to be about the value of women's labour. In question ten I aimed to elicit details of the contexts within which the respondents understood how the production of the film related to this issue by asking for an explanation of the old man's remarks from the following anecdote:

Eugenia Piza Lopez

> We wanted to know what was the best use of the film so we asked the women 'What do you want to do with this film?' and they said 'We want to show it at at home, we want to show it in the different communities where we come from'. We showed the film and a few minutes after the film was finished a man stood up nearly crying, an old man, and he said to us 'I didn't realise my wife worked so hard. How come I've been married for such a long time without acknowledging that what she does is work'

There was a certain amount of uniformity in the responses in that both groups inferred that the relevant issue was the value of female domestic labour. However the mainstream group referred to the old man's response, and in addition the issue of the lack of value attached to female labour, as potentially relevant only in the type of culture Lopez describes, while the feminist group addressed his response in terms of its relevance within gender politics generally.

These differences would appear to correlate with the differences between the groups in terms of their existing assumptions about politics and feminism in that the contexts the two groups supplied are quite distinct. The feminist group drew on general feminist assumptions which explain gendered behaviour in their provision of a context for the man's remarks. In the absence of these assumptions the mainstream group again understood the issue in terms of the foreignness of the culture Lopez describes, although they did constantly relate the issue to their own experience.

The effects of differences in encyclopaedic knowledge on interpretation are particularly evident in the response to question seven. Here I asked what Lopez meant by the term 'exploitation' with the intention of eliciting whether both groups understood the term to refer to the same set of characters, and whether they had a concept of exploitation in a Marxist sense. The mainstream group did not appear to be familiar with the term and therefore, rather than decoding the meaning from the semantic representation, they inferred the meaning from the co-text:

Q.7 IN THIS SECTION SHE TALKS ABOUT WOMEN'S EXPLOITATION - WHAT DO YOU THINK SHE MEANS?

Q7 RESPONSES OF MAINSTREAM GROUP

(M) What in that country?

[Interviewer: Well, anywhere]

(M) That's their obligations isn't it?

(K) She said they got up at three or four in the morning and finished at ten at night except for their women's duties

(L) She means sex

The lack of familiarity with the term 'exploitation' would indicate that the members of the mainstream group did not have a set of pre-existing Marxist feminist assumptions, and as such they did not see Lopez's remarks to be related to the lack of value attached to women's domestic work at this point. In contrast the feminist group did perceive this to be the issue here: they decoded the term 'exploitation' in that the semantic representation triggered a specific

set of potential meanings. However the group indicated some difficulty in inferring Lopez's intention in using the term:

(G) Exploitation usually means somebody else is - like men exploiting women - somebody else doing it to someone else - but then she went on to explain that women were doing it to themselves - they were exploiting themselves by not valuing themselves and their own contribution

The feminist group drew on the context of what they saw exploitation to usually mean in relation to the value attached to work, but saw the issue as problematic in terms of the implication of the lack of consciousness of the characters involved:

(E) Because she was getting across the idea that women colluded in their own exploitation

(L) Yes that women aren't acknowledging the fact that they are exploited and if their husbands don't know that they're exploiting them then is that sort of normal exploitation? And she goes on to say later that this man was absolutely horrified to find out how hard his wife worked well that was sort of not normal exploitation

One effect of the difference in encyclopaedic knowledge therefore is that at this point the mainstream group have not perceived the issue to be the value of women's work, while the feminist group have done so and gone on to take up the notion of the role of consciousness in the issue.

By question nine both groups had indicated an understanding of the issue being focussed on. Each group disambiguated the term 'work' in similar terms to that of the other. They both inferred that the term meant 'paid labour' in the context of the women's

claim: 'I don't work I am a housewife'. In the old man's rhetorical question 'How come I've been married for such a long time without acknowledging that what she does is work?' the term is taken by both groups to mean the degree of physical effort involved in housework, which J paraphrases as:

(J) Oh bloody hell did my wife do all that?

To the extent that both groups indicated that the term 'work' should be disambiguated differently in the two phrases they both also saw the issue in question to be about the different status of domestic labour as opposed to paid labour. Moreover, members of both groups brought up the problematic status of being a housewife but there is a difference in their reason for doing so. Members of the mainstream group drew on their assumptions of what being a housewife implies in order to differentiate between cultures, while L in the feminist group drew on these assumptions in order to make a general statement about gendered divisions of labour.

In response to question eight the mainstream group began by discussing the changing status of housewives in this culture:

(J) But like these days people will say - say you're on a chat show or what ever 'What do you do for a living?' 'I'm a housewife' that's what people say they don't say 'I don't do nothing I'm a housewife' now do they?

....

(K) Generally there is more recognition of a housewife's work whereas in South America there isn't is there?

(M) It's taken for granted

(J) That's why that man stood up and cried because he couldn't believe it

Within the context the mainstream group supplied therefore the film has an effect on the old man only because he is part of a specific type of culture. This is developed in their response to question ten which specifically asked for an explanation of the old man's comments:

(K) It brought home to him what a woman's work was like

(J) Well I think in that country - I mean over here all of them know that anyway but they're still too pig-headed and chauvinist to say any different/

The implication here is that for the man's remarks to be relevant he has to be unaware of what his wife does all day. Within their own culture such a lack of awareness was not plausible for the members of this group. Although the group often discussed their own experience of the issues Lopez brings up, their own situation was almost always described in opposition to that which Lopez refers to:

(M) I think its up to a woman over here to mould a man

(L) I think you get the chance to change the roles

In contrast to this approach the feminist group did not explicitly differentiate between cultures. Their response to question ten indicates that for them the old man's remarks were relevant not only within the context of his own culture. L in particular explains

their relevance according to a set of connotations

which often adhere to the term 'housewife':

(L) ...it was a question of that he actually saw what she did with her time because its like this idea now that a housewife sits at home drinking coffee all day chatting.

Neither L nor E, in their explanation of why the old

man should have been ignorant of his wife's labour,

accounted for the situation in terms of cultural

difference but rather applied general assumptions about

gender to the specific situation Lopez has described:

(L) ....like you come in from work and you've got mended clean clothes and um a meal on the table but you can - he would imagine that that sort of - she rustled that up sort of five minutes before he came in ......

(E) If you're at home you don't do anything - because that's what the man does at home - he doesn't do very much - so therefore thats what women must do at home

In applying general feminist assumptions about home as a site of leisure for men while it is a site of work for women, as well as assumptions about the invisibility of the production process, this group did not make the cultural disinctions which were made by the mainstream group. The form of the feminist group's discussion also offers evidence of this in that their account moves between the specific ('he would imagine') and the general ('you come in from work').

The context the two groups supply is distinct therefore in that the mainstream group draw on a set of assumptions about the culture Lopez is describing while the feminist group draw on a set of assumptions about

traditional gender divisions of labour. Although there is a degree of difference within the groups, the significant difference lies between the contexts the two groups supply.

6 A SUMMARY OF DATA IN TERMS OF RELEVANCE THEORY

The data in general supports the hypothesis that variation in encyclopaedic knowledge will lead to the provision of different contexts for interpretation. In the first section of this chapter I drew on evidence from the interview to argue that neither co-text nor the interview situation could impose a context on a respondent if the required assumptions which would make that context relevant are not accessible to her. This claim was corroborated in sections 5 and 6 where I drew on the interview data to show that the contexts which the two groups supplied varied according to the differences in encyclopaedic knowledge made explicit in the responses to questions one and eleven and discussed in section 4 above. The feminist group generally supplied contexts which consisted of assumptions about gender politics while the contexts the mainstream group provided generally consisted of assumptions about the foreign culture Lopez is referring to.

These differences in the selection of context led to the groups drawing different contextual implications from the text. The contextual implication which

generally made Lopez's remarks relevant for the mainstream group was that each remark supplemented a description of a culture foreign to their own. J and K's response to question eleven confirm this general view of the relevance of Lopez's presentation:

Q.11 ARE THE THINGS THIS WOMAN IS INTERESTED IN POLITICAL?

(General) No

(K) To me its her attitude to their way of life

[Interviewer: So you don't think their way of life has got anything to do with our way of life over here?]

(General) No

(J) No its not as over the top as what it is over there

In contrast the feminist group drew the contextual implication that Lopez's presentation is relevant within the context of their assumptions about gender politics in that her utterances relate generally to a set of 'informal structures of power' (E) which were being challenged. Although in response to question eleven E did not initially have a strong sense of the coherence of Lopez's presentation, once L has articulated her understanding of the text E makes explicit a set of contextual implications which produce Lopez's utterances as relevant within a feminist context:

Q.11 ARE THE THINGS THIS WOMAN IS INTERESTED IN POLITICAL?

(G) In the sense that they involve people - politics is about people - political with a small p

(E) I'm not even sure that I understood exactly what she was involved in. I mean she seemed to talk about a sort of vague notion of women's groups and things but I don't really feel that I understood what she actually was doing or what her goal was or..

(L) I sort of felt she was sort of something to do with making films to raise people's consciousness about the position of women. And if that is what she was doing - I would say that was political

(E) Yeah politics to me is about power - I think/

(L) I suppose politics/

(E) or structures of power usually but they can also - politics with a small p can also include informal power relations and I think because she seemed to be working with women it would probably be more sort of in terms of the informal structures of power

It would appear then that the differences in the respondents' knowledge of feminism led them to provide different contexts and therefore to draw different contextual implications from the text of the television programme. Even where the meaning of individual words and propositions appeared to have been uniformly inferred across the groups the perceived significance of the propositions, why the speaker might be making certain claims, frequently varied between the groups. To this extent the data has shown that 'decoding' does not exhaust what can be said about utterance interpretation, but rather suggests the degree to which, particularly in the case of broadcast communication, the decoding process itself and interpretation generally, are highly context dependent.

From the data then there would appear to be two distinct ways in which the context activated by an

audience affects the resulting interpretation. Variation in context affects the way in which propositions are produced as the basis of the interpretation process as well as affecting the way in which those propositions function to produce the perceived relevance of an utterance. To this extent interpretation can vary on two levels: in terms of <u>what</u> a speaker is perceived to be saying, and in terms of <u>why</u> something is being said.

In interpreting what a speaker is saying the audience produce a semantically complete propositional form which is capable of being true or false (based on both the encoded linguistic evidence of the text and the context they themselves supply in the process of enriching and disambiguating this evidence - see Chapter 2 section 3.5); In interpreting why something is being said the audience look for a relationship between the inferred context and the previously assigned propositional form.

An example of the first type of variation would be the different propositional forms which would be likely to result, given the above evidence of differences in their encyclopaedic knowledge, from the two groups' understanding of a statement such as 'You are going to see a programme about the politics of experience'. A major difference at this level would be that if the two groups had heard this statement prior to being shown the programme which I use in the interview, the

resulting propositional form assigned by the mainstream group would have led them, after viewing the programme, to perceive the statement to have been false, while for the feminist group it would have been perceived as having been true.

An example of the second type of variation would be the difference between the two groups' inferences about the significance of Lopez's remarks about virginity - both groups understood Lopez to be indicating that she experienced conflict between her own and her mother's ideas of virginity - but the mainstream group inferred that Lopez's reason for giving this information was to highlight a cultural difference, while for the feminist group Lopez's intention was to account for her development.

This finding would appear to be predictable within the terms of relevance theory in that the interpretation of a text is actually referred to as a 'contextual implication' and therefore by definition incorporates features of context. The data suggests therefore that the tenets of relevance theory would appear to be particularly appropriate to a methodology which aims to analyse audience response, and highlights the problems of methodologies (discussed further in Chapter Seven below) based on a code model of language in that a corollary of this model is the assumption of an a priori context.

Although, as I have asserted, the effects of context on the production of contextual implications would appear to be predictable according to the tenets of relevance theory, the specific choice of context and how it relates to an audience's pre-existing encyclopaedic knowledge would not have been predicted by the theory in its present form. It would not explain why, for example, the issue of Lopez's foreignness was the context chosen by the mainstream group, and as there is a general lack of empirical data informing the theory it is also unlikely that such an issue would be addressed at all.

To this extent the data highlights the need for empirical study as a supplement to relevance theory and indicates moreover how the assumptions of critical cultural studies could make the theory more explanatory. For example the premise that a relationship exists between the demographic variables which consitute the audience and the responses they produce in interpreting a given text might allow a way of accounting for the selection of one context rather than another. In the past however the problem for critical cultural studies has been how to make this relationship explicit.

In the following section I discuss this problem and consider how relevance theory might be a useful means of relating cultural background to textual interpretation. In order to facilitate this discussion

I summarise below the two types of variation in interpretation which result from variation in context:

1. In the respondents' assignment of a propositional form to an utterance:
   a) Where the cognitive environment of one respondent differs sufficiently from that of another to result in the same term being decoded in one case and inferred in another. (e.g.'exploitation' in question seven)
   b) Where a term is disambiguated differently by respondents in that they supply different contexts resulting in a significant difference in the perceived semantic field of a term. (e.g. 'politics' in question one)
   c) Where different co-textual evidence is used to produce a referent (e.g. where respondents supply different co-referents for anaphora in response to questions two and three)

2) In the synthesis of a respondent's assigned propositional form and the inferred context to produce the utterance as relevant:

   Where the respondents' assignment of a propositional form to an utterance is relatively uniform (e.g. the respondents' perception of Lopez's mother's attitude to virginity) but the contextual implications vary between respondents (e.g. <u>why</u> Lopez brings up the issue of virginity).

Chapter Seven

CONCLUSION: THE IMPLICATIONS OF MY FINDINGS FOR AUDIENCE STUDIES

1 Introduction

My aim in this thesis has been to problematize and investigate the reception of broadcast communication. One of the premises of my study, stated in Chapter One, is that the heterogeneous nature of any mass audience has specific implications for the reception of broadcast texts, and my aim has been to consider how these might be addressed. I have shown that the close reading of a given text, and predictions about how an audience will 'decode' the linguistic stimuli which constitute that text, may have little to do with an actual audience's perception of the explicit meaning of the text. I have also argued that variation in interpretation is a likely occurrence in the reception of broadcast communication, and my claim throughout the thesis has been that any analysis of the meaning of a broadcast text therefore needs to draw on data from an empirical audience study.

I also claimed in Chapter One that audiences have to put in specific work to produce meaning from a broadcast text, and my study has aimed to show how Sperber and Wilson's relevance theory provides a useful way of describing that work. In Chapter Two I argued that for relevance theory to be able to show why certain interpretations are produced the theory would

need to be supplemented with a cultural dimension which would make the source of variation explicit, and in Chapter Four I indicated how this extra level of explanation might be incorporated in a specific methodology.

Given this additional dimension, my study has shown that relevance theory can provide a useful linguistic framework for a methodology for analysing audience response. The distinguishing features of the framework are: (a) relevance theory assumes communication is a matter of degree, varying in strength according to the amount of inferencing involved in a given interpretation, and this furnishes an explanation of why the reception of broadcast communication is likely to vary; (b) by isolating the processes involved in interpretation relevance theory allows different types of variation in interpretation to be made explicit; and (c) relevance theory allows a way of explicitly linking variation in interpretation to cultural differences.

The methodology I adopt and the results of my study have a number of implications for the way in which audience responses are accounted for, and also how demographic variables are theorised within a critical cultural studies paradigm. The aim of this chapter is consider these implications. I begin by discussing in section 2 the continued adherence to the notion of the 'preferred reading' of a text and

consider how this notion might be modified given the results of my study. In section 3 I suggest how adopting a methodology based on relevance theory might allow the links between the demographic features of an audience's background and the interpretations made by that audience, which critical cultural studies aims to uncover, to be made more explicit. And in section 4 I conclude by considering the implications my findings have for the way in which demographic variables and hegemony are addressed, and also the implications this study may have for future work in audience studies.

2 'PREFERRED READINGS'

As I have noted in Chapter Three, critical cultural studies has traditionally assumed, although not always made explicit, a code model of communication. I have further argued that those audience studies whose methodology is based on the assumption of a code model tend to assume that the literal meaning of a text is ultimately recoverable from the text alone, and to this extent employ the notion of a 'preferred reading' which is 'inscribed' in the text. In this section I address the notion of preferred readings in the light of my interview data.

In his article 'Changing paradigms in audience studies' David Morley (1989) acknowledges the problematic status of the preferred reading model in

that he questions whether such a reading is a property of the text, a meaning generated from the text by semiological analysis or a prediction about how an audience will read the text. In spite of this he goes on to defend a continued use of the model:

> However I would still want to defend the model's usefulness, in so far as it avoids sliding straight from the notion of a text as having a determinate meaning (which would necessarily impose itself in the same way on all members of the audience) to an equally absurd, and opposite position, in which it is assumed that the text is completely 'open' to the reader and is merely the site upon which the reader constructs meaning (Morley 1989:18).

The use of such a model is seen by Morley to be the best that can be achieved at present. This adherence to an unsatisfactory model is explained, I would argue, by the assumption, usually axiomatic to critical cultural studies, that media texts are generally hegemonic in effect. A corollary of this assumption is that readings of texts should be relatively uniform across audiences: for hegemony to be effective, the message inscribed in the text must be uniformly received by a range of audiences. Within critical cultural studies this uniformity has been predicated on the assumption that texts have a literal meaning which inheres in the language at a given point in history. This literal meaning inscribes the 'preferred reading' of the text and is generally accessible across audiences irrespective of whether or not those audiences agree about the significance or truth of the message the text contains.

As I have shown in Chapter Three, although a general consensus amongst analysts has existed for some time to the effect that the cultural background of an audience will affect their interpretation of a text, the difficulty for critical cultural studies has been to theorize a model of communication which would accommodate the apparently problematic assumption (for critical cultural studies) that meaning is produced by both text and audience. As Morley suggests above: if the text is completely 'open' then how might communication (and therefore hegemonic effects) occur at all, and conversely how, if a text's meaning is determinate, would variation in interpretation be accounted for?

If however it is acknowledged that both text and audience are involved in meaning production, how might the process be divided between the two? How, also, might hegemonic effects be explained? The notion of a preferred reading which would appear to allow a relative 'openness' was one answer to these problems and has been adopted more or less explicitly by a range of audience studies.

In the light of the empirical study presented in this thesis it would be useful at this point to return to a more detailed consideration of the preferred reading approach to media hegemony and to ask how far the question of hegemony could be accommodated within a less linguistically unsatisfactory model of

interpretation. In order to address this question I focus on Hall's (1980) account of the preferred reading model.

In developing the notion of preferred reading Hall accommodates the tension between the hegemonic assumptions of critical cultural studies and the need for a revised theory of meaning production by drawing on the semiological division between denotative and connotative meanings. Although Hall describes both types of meaning as 'ideological' to the extent that they each work to 'naturalize' linguistic categories, he distinguishes them by positing that denotative meaning is more 'fixed' while connotative meaning 'though bounded, is more open, subject to more active "transformations" which exploit its polysemic values' (Hall 1980:134).

Hall thus avoids the problems inherent in the two more extreme theories of communication, invoked by Morley above, by positing that textual meanings are not entirely 'open': varied decodings of the denotative meaning are not seen to be a possibility outside of being seen simply as 'misunderstandings'. However, since decodings at the connotative level can be disputed, variation in interpretation can be accommodated, thus avoiding the problems Morley describes if texts are theorised as having determinate meanings.

The connotative level is not open to just any interpretation however in that it is part of Hall's thesis that the 'connotative codes' are the product of a dominant cultural order which imbues them with 'preferred meanings':

> The domains of 'preferred meanings' have the whole social order embedded in them as a set of meanings, practices and beliefs: the everyday knowledge of social structures (Hall 1980: 134).

In spite of the relative closure indicated above it is at this level of connotation that variation is explained in Hall's theory. His argument is that given a certain 'decoding position' it is possible for a viewer to resist the 'preferred reading' of a text. It is significant however that any variation occurs <u>after</u> the viewer's initial acknowledgement of the preferred meaning and that this variation is dependent on some form of conscious resistance to the preferred meaning in that it indicates the extent to which Hall assumes a relative uniformity of apprehension of the text's meaning.

The decoding position within which the audience understands and accepts unquestioningly the preferred reading of a text is termed the 'dominant-hegemonic position' and described by Hall as constituting an acceptance of a given society's hegemonic viewpoint:

> The definition of a hegemonic viewpoint is (a) that it defines within its terms the mental horizon, the universe, of possible meanings, of a

> whole sector of relations in a society or culture; and (b) that it carries with it the stamp of legitimacy - it appears co-terminous with what is 'natural', 'inevitable', 'taken for granted' about the social order (Hall 1980:137).

The second decoding position, described as the 'negotiated version' takes on the literal meaning and accepts the above viewpoint 'while reserving the right to make a more negotiated application to "local conditions"' (p.137). The example Hall gives of this is the response of a worker who accepts the notion of 'national interest' which might be invoked in a text which defends an Industrial Relations Bill limiting the right to strike, but who may still consider a strike to be a justifiable means of obtaining his or her own demands.

The final decoding position, operating within what Hall refers to as an 'oppositional code', also assumes an initial 'literal' reading of the text:

> Finally, it is possible for a viewer perfectly to understand both the literal and the connotative inflection given by a discourse but to decode the message in a globally contrary way (1980:137).

Such a viewer would therefore, after initially perceiving a text to be referring to 'national interest' would then translate this as actually referring to 'class interest'.

Hall's model (1) is addressed here primarily in order to indicate how this influential theory, which has been the basis of much audience work carried out within a critical cultural studies paradigm, is premised on the notion of a message which is

retrievable from the text alone and that this message is the basis of a potential secondary process involving some form of resistance. To this extent a level of uniformity is assumed which the evidence of this thesis would call into question.

'Critical' readings, in which a viewer makes assumptions about the intended meaning of a text and then disputes the terms of that meaning, can no doubt occur. However, variation in interpretation does not necessarily entail this two stage process. Neither should variations in interpretation which are not the result of this 'critical' approach necessarily be dismissed as 'misunderstandings' (Hall, 1980:137).

My thesis has indicated that the audience of a programme can produce variations in interpretation while still believing themselves to have 'understood' the programme in question, and further, that these variations are all the result of the same interpretative process. It is not therefore, as Hall posits, differences in the process which lead to variation in interpretation (i.e. acceptance or acceptance plus resistance) but differences in the evidence used as part of this process.

Ultimately the assumption throughout Hall's account of his model is that the literal meaning of a text is recoverable from the language itself. To this extent variation is perceived more at the level of audience response to the text rather than at the level

of audience perception of what the text is 'saying'. As a result the model is not sensitive enough to distinguish between the two levels when applied to the analysis of audience reception of media texts and therefore, as I have argued in Chapter Three, an elision between these two aspects of interpretation occurs in studies whose genealogy can be traced back to the issues raised in Morley's (1980) work.

Given the argument that the existing knowledge of an audience plays an essential part in the production of semantically complete propositions, as well as in the process of drawing contextual implictions, clearly the notion of a preferred reading within Hall's terms of reference would be untenable within the terms of this thesis. However this would not be to say that an analysis of the 'intended' meaning of a text must be rejected as outside the scope of media studies, or that an intended meaning may not be shown to be implying a particular 'ideological' set of assumptions. However such a reading would have to acknowledge that while a close reading of a text might hypothesize what that text would mean within the context of a given set of assumptions, that interpretation need not, as my study has shown, necessarily coincide with the reading of an actual audience.

To this extent, to return to Morley's dilemma, the status of textual analyses of broadcast communication must be seen as partial, consisting only of hypotheses

about what the speaker might mean (given a specific context) rather than hypotheses about what the speaker might be communicating to an audience. This is not to say that in actuality a 'consensus' reading of a programme might not exist which would strongly coincide with the hypothesized 'intended meaning'. It is rather to say that, by assuming that the implicated premises of a text have to be supplied by the cultural knowledge of a reader, any hypothesis about the text's 'intended meaning' must acknowledge this extra-textual input. Moreover any variation or similarity in actual audience readings must be judged on the basis of empirical evidence which makes explicit their application of this extra-linguistic knowledge to the text.

Morley's concern about the need to work on the assumption that a text has a preferred reading in order to avoid the unhelpful consequences of assuming that texts are either 'open' or 'closed' would be resolved by applying a methodology based on relevance theory. Within such a framework the 'closure' results from both the syntactic and semantic information encoded in the text as well as from any coincidence in cognitive environment, while the 'openness' is accounted for in terms of difference in cognitive environment.

Given the claim that the meaning of a text for an audience is contigent upon the specific cognitive environment perceived by that audience, within the approach I adopt, the hegemonic effect of the media

must also, to some extent, be contingent upon the existing knowledge of an audience. This claim will be considered more fully in the context of a discussion in section 3 of the significance of demographic variables.

I have argued above that the assumption that meaning is ultimately recoverable from the text alone is challenged by my application of relevance theory to media analysis. The findings of my thesis have indicated the extent to which a reading of a text always requires a pragmatic input, and that this non-linguistic input relates to the existing knowledge of an audience. In the following section I discuss these findings in terms of the critical cultural studies' aim of relating the hegemonic effect of a text to the demographic variables of an audience, and argue how this aim might be better facilitated by adopting a methodology based on the premises of relevance theory.

3 DEMOGRAPHIC VARIABLES

Audience studies within a critical cultural studies paradigm assume and attempt to make explicit links between the audience as social subjects and their responses to media texts with the aim of accounting for hegemonic effect. In the studies I discussed in Chapter Three this link was perceived in a variety of ways none of which, I argued, were made sufficiently explicit by the methodology employed.

Jacqueline Bobo's study (discussed in Chapter Three section 3.2) attempts to account for differences in the response to the film version of Alice Walker's The Colour Purple by proposing, in opposition to the black male critics' approach to the film, a black female audience who have a 'wary viewing standpoint' (Bobo 1988:96). Her analysis is premised on a degree of textual determinacy in that Bobo implies that the film contains a 'dominant' reading in which black people are perceived to be savage and child-like, and her study centres on her audiences' resistance to this reading.

Although Bobo's claim is that her black female respondents were informed by a specific intertextual form of cultural knowledge, which allowed them to avoid this dominant reading, she does not make explicit how this knowledge led to these women's particular responses to the film. It is never made explicit, for example, whether specific aspects of the text are uniformly perceived and then differentially interpreted or whether they are differentially perceived by the two audiences she focusses on. Moreover it is uncertain whether Bobo is claiming that all black women are 'wary viewers' or whether only certain black women are.

I have argued that this uncertainty is a product of the methodology adopted by Bobo in that it does not allow an explicit link to be made between the cultural background of the audience and the responses they give.

Without this link the association of cultural knowledge with a particular reading must be speculative in that it can only show a correlation between the two phenomena which may be explained in any number of ways. Given Bobo's conflation of 'marginalized groups' (i.e. 'women' and 'women of colour') with people who have an 'oppositional stance' (1988:96) the question remains whether it is ultimately gender, race or political stance which leads to the difference in the film's effect on Bobo's two audiences. For her study to provide evidence for the claims she makes it would be necessary to have data which explicitly links cultural knowledge and response.

The evidence given in my own empirical study can, to the extent that it draws on relevance theory, make explicit a direct link between prior knowledge and interpretation. The methodology adopted in this thesis may therefore be able to make explicit aspects of audience studies which have previously remained at the level of supposition. By showing how prior knowledge interacts with information linguistically encoded in a text to produce meaning the methodology provides a more delicate instrument for approaching both text and audience.

An example of how the audience might be approached more sensitively is given in the following discussion of the difficulties encountered by Press (1991). As I have argued in Chapter Three the over-generalisations

found in Press's approach to both the text and her respondents lead to somewhat ambivalent findings:

> 'For middle-class women, therefore, television is both a source of feminist resistance to the status quo and at the same time a source for the reinforcement of many of the status quo's partriarchal values.'(Press 1991:96)

Her summing up begs the question of why television should have these diametrically opposed effects. I have argued that this is the result of insufficient data which in turn is the result of an inadequate model of language, and in Chapter Three gave as an example the question Press asks her respondents about the Dynasty character, Alexis. As I argued earlier, the item 'Alexis' may have had triggered completely different inferences for her respondents.

As well as failing to differentiate between which specific aspects of the television message her respondents are referring to Press does not sufficiently problematise the classification of her respondent's background and it may be this which specifically leads to her ambivalent findings. Press's paradoxic claim that (a) middle class women are in general 'vulnerable in a deplorably direct way to the set of representations that constitutes the feminine in our culture' while (b) 'middle-class women at times view television as a cultural source of images of female strength' (p.96) may be an effect of too broad a categorisation of her respondents.

It may be for example that it is not the same women who exhibit apparently contradictory behaviour. It may be the case that some middle class women (who are also feminist) perceive images of female strength while it is other middle class women (who are not feminist) who are the respondents who are vulnerable to feminine representations.

Ironically, Press's study does have the potential to make these distinctions explicit since the questionnaire cited in the appendix does show that the respondents were asked the question 'Are you a feminist' (p.193). This information is not drawn on in her analysis however. Moreover because of her tendency to quote responses without always attributing them to a specific respondent it is difficult to discern from Press's analysis whether the respondents who appear to be vulnerable to images of femininity are indeed the same women as those who see certain female characters as strong.

Without a more sensitive way of approaching both text and audience Press's aim of addressing the hegemonic effect of television on the construction of female identity, while raising a number of interesting issues, cannot provide the evidence which would make her account explanatory. As I have argued in Chapter Four section 3.4, explanations in terms of demographic features, such as class, which are shared by an

audience are not a sufficient distinction when accounting for variation in response.

A major claim of this study is that an audience's existing encyclopaedic knowledge plays a significant role in the choice of one rather than another context, and a category such as class does not necessarily constitute the most pertinent distinguishing feature between respondents. This is not to say that the relationship between a respondent's encyclopaedic knowledge and her class is unimportant but rather that it should not be taken as given.

For example, the type of knowledge which I initially took as the significant feature which distinguished the respondents in my own study, and which was the basis of the comparison I aimed to produce, was that of a specific form of feminism. It was only once the data had been collected that the extent of this difference became evident however. It is only in the act of interpretation, I would argue that such knowledge becomes evident. It is also only in the context of a demonstration of this type that the relevance of any specific demographic variables becomes evident.

Although the women who took part in my study differed in terms of education, class, geographical location, as well as their knowledge of feminism it is only once they have demonstrated a difference in that knowledge that questions can be asked which might

relate their responses to the other variables. How is it for example that only certain women have access to certain types of knowledge? How does class and education relate to this?

Although answers to these questions are outside the scope of this thesis in that they require a great deal more data, to approach variables such as class in terms of how they relate to a specific demonstration of knowledge seems to me more useful than approaching them as the unquestioned assumptions on which an audience study is based. With the methodology I adopt, demographic features become significant in the light of the data and are not a given feature of the audience as Press and Bobo's analyses assume.

4 CONCLUSION

Although, as I have argued connections between aspects such as class and encyclopaedic knowledge are yet to be made, given the information made explicit by a methodology based on relevance theory, the connections between demographic variables and an individual's knowledge store become easier to trace. Indeed it may be argued that the variable of 'class' is actually constituted by certain coincidences of encyclopaedic knowledge, and that these are produced by specific exclusions and experiences that are similar across groups of people who have been subject to

certain social practices and institutions such as education, work and family relations. The components of linguistic behaviour made visible by a methodology based on relevance theory would allow demographic variables to be approached in this way, and would therefore offer a more precise way of accounting for variation.

In this study I have assumed that the pertinence of a specific demographic variable is discernible only as a result of an empirical study. My approach has also assumed that questions of hegemonic effect can only be discussed in the light of empirical data. As I argued in section 2, if the meaning of a text is contingent upon an audience supplying a specific context, then to some degree the hegemonic effect of a broadcast communication must also be contingent upon an audience's existing knowledge.

As I have asserted, critical cultural studies has often assumed a hegemonic effect and then attempted to account for its success or failure. In this thesis I have attempted to change to terms according to which the issue is addressed by first attempting to describe and explain the interpretation of a specific broadcast text and only considering what can be said about hegemonic effect in the light of this data. In the remainder of this chapter I will consider what conclusions can be drawn from the evidence provided by my study.

I deliberately focussed on what I considered was a non-hegemonic text in my study because my aim was primarily to investigate how differences in interpretation and their relationship to cultural knowledge could be made explicit, and I felt that this information would be more accessible using a 'non-mainstream' text. I specifically perceive Lopez's presentation to be non-hegemonic in that she questions accepted notions of female sexuality, and the gendered division of labour.

The data shows that while the feminist group perceived that this was the subject of Lopez's presentation, the mainstream group perceived that Lopez was giving a primarily descriptive account of a culture foreign to their own. To this extent although the 'intended' meaning of Lopez's text was non-hegemonic, the mainstream group did not produce a meaning compatible with this intention. What this shows, in terms of hegemony, is that the existing knowledge of this specific audience led them to produce a hegemonic reading (i.e. one which did not question gender issues) from a non-hegemonic text (i.e. one which did question gender issues). The question then is: can we draw any general conlusions about hegemony from this finding?

I would argue that this finding is suggestive rather than conclusive. It shows how in this case the existing knowledge of a specific group of people obscured their apprehension of what I, and a second

group perceived to be the speaker's intended meaning. It would be possible to go on to argue that this therefore implies that if a hegemonic text is to have an effect on an audience then the assumptions which constitute that text's implicated premises must be part of a specific audience's encyclopaedic knowledge. For such an argument to be substantiated however would require further studies, of the type outlined in this thesis, but focussing on more hegemonic texts.

My study would suggest however that any textual effects would be dependent upon the audience having access to the specific set of assumptions which are the implicated premises of a broadcast communication. As my data indicates, if an audience do not have this knowledge, then they will not be able to provide the necessary context which would make the text relevant to them, they may therefore interpret the text using a set of assumptions quite different to those an analyst might perceive as constituting the implicated premises of the text.

It may be, of course, that the diversity of interpretations produced by my respondents resulted from focussing on a particularly badly produced programme, and are not an indication that all texts might be subject to varied interpretations. Rosalind Coward has referred to the 'uneasy equivocation between obscurantism and pedantry which has sometimes marked women's productions' (1987:104) and explains this in

terms of the problems feminist presenters have in targetting a television audience. It is possible therefore that The Politics of Experience was also beset by these difficulties.

Again, whether or not the particular diversity of interpretations I record results from focussing on a badly produced broadcast communication, or else on a non-hegemonic text, can only be clarified by further study. However, the controversial aspects of the text I focus on were useful in that they allowed an especially broad variation in interpretation to be addressed. Moreover, as my discussion of Morley's data shows (Chapter Three section 3.1), there is evidence in existing audience studies that differences in both 'comprehension' and 'interpretation' do take place even though this data is not analysed.

The recognition that the reception of a media text can vary in terms of both comprehension and interpretation has also recurred in a range of media analyses (e.g. Morley 1981, Curran and Sparks 1991, Corner, Richardson and Fenton 1990). As I have argued in Chapter Three section 4.1, the particular significance of why these two levels of variation should be distinguished and how they relate to one other has remained unexplored. Sperber and Wilson's development of relevance theory has allowed a means of exploring these issues, and the aim of this thesis has been to investigate how this might be done.

Clearly there is a great deal more to be said about hegemony and the reception of broadcast texts than the remarks made here. There are a number of issues which I have not addressed because they are outside the scope of this particular study. For example I have not been able to consider the particular constraints on the production of broadcast texts, nor on the domestic conditions of reception as outlined in Morley (1986). These are of course important factors which have a direct bearing on audience reception, but would require another thesis to relate them to the findings of this study.

It should also be acknowledge at this point that my own study differs radically in many ways from the audience studies by Bobo, Morley and Press which I have focussed on. I would argue however that my methodology and the claims I make have a general applicability which would increase the explanatory power of a range of audience studies: if claims about media hegemony are to be made, it is necessary to be able to isolate first of all how broadcast texts are received, and moreover if audience studies aim to relate response to an audience's social background then information of the type made explicit using my methodology is needed.

FOOTNOTE TO CHAPTER SEVEN

1: Hall's concept of a 'code' has been shown in Corner (1986) to be somewhat inconsistent in that it draws on both the semiological concept employed by Barthes (1972) as well as the Shannon and Weaver (1949) concept of encoding/decoding as the conversion of 'message' into 'signal' and reverse. It is thus difficult at times to isolate what distinguishes 'literal' or 'denotative' meaning from connotative meaning within Hall's argument. While it is not possible, at this point, to explore the full implications of this, it should be noted that Hall's concept is not to be equated unproblematically with the 'code model' opposed by relevance theory and addressed in Chapter Two of this thesis.

APPENDIX

TRANSCRIPT OF "THE POLITICS OF EXPERIENCE"

[Music and title]

[Emma Nicholson:]

Yes I was born into a political family of many, many generations. I understand that one of my forebears, a direct forebear, was in fact a part of the very first parliament in the United Kingdom which was in about 1290 and was a gathering in Scotland in a field. And that was the beginning of British parliament. And right down the line, from then on in, one or more of my direct ancestors has been a Member of Parliament either of the House of Commons or of the House of Lords.

[Helen Steven:]

I was brought up as a Presbyterian and was brought up with, I suppose, a very deep notion of sin, um that I was born with original sin, that we were fallen creatures and we had to be saved. And my new understanding of sin is coming to mean that where I was told that sin was pride, um, sin was very much to do with our pride and that we had to abase ourselves and be humble and full of humility, well I think that may be right - for men. Whereas for women, I think too often we have failed to have recognized our potential.

[Eugenia Piza Lopez]

When women get into power they get into a partiarchal structure. They, they have to fight so hard to survive that they have to waste a lot of time just doing that - surviving in the organization. It is also very difficult for them to put on the agenda demands which will benefit women because the agenda is not a women's agenda

['THE POLITICS OF EXPERIENCE' is flashed onto a blank screen]

[Emma Nicholson:]

I remember when I was a child going into the Carlton Club to find my father and I walked in at the front door and I looked left and saw my father, my uncle who was Lord Chancellor, another uncle who was a Member of Parliament, all sitting together in a corner in a lovely room. And I just went through that door to say 'Hello, here I am'. All three rose to their feet and my father rushed forward and they all shouted 'Get out, Get out. This is men only'

[Eugenia Piza Lopez:]

I was the daughter of intellectuals, of people who had given me an opportunity to read, to think, to challenge many things. But they didn't give me an opportunity to challenge my own being, my own essence as a woman.

They gave me an opportunity to challenge other aspects which were beyond the everyday life.

I think everything came together, and it didn't come together overnight, it took a rather long time to come together, but I was feeling that there was some reason why my mother, particularly, wanted so badly that I should be a virgin, for example. I mean that was her main concern. She was concerned about other things in my life, how good or bad a student I could be, but the main issue at home was my virginity.

And it really alienated my understanding of my own body and my sexuality because it made me feel that there was something wrong with it. There's something wrong with being the owner of your own body. Your body is not yours. It is for somebody else who will eventually indulge it when you get married. And it got to a point where I felt as a woman, and not exclusively as a human being, but as a woman, there are a number of things I want to say. There are a number of things I want to struggle for.

[Helen Steven:]

I suppose it was this almost passionate involvement with the mountains and the landscape of Scotland that led me straight into the peace movement. I've been to prison twice. The first time was in 1985 and that was for planting the potatoes inside the base of Faslane where the Polaris submarines are now and where the

Trident submarines will be deployed. We went inside the base and we planted a whole lot of potatoes as a sign of growing food rather than working for weapons of destruction.

When you say to people, you know, 'Well what were you arrested for?' and you say 'Planting potatoes' and they think 'Well what a stupid thing to do'. But it was the symbolism of it that was important, and feeling that that was a small thing we could do.

[Emma Nicholson:]

I decided to go into Parliament when I was about four, but it took me a long time to get there. When I left the Royal Academy of Music I went to Conservative Central Office and asked if I could work there. And the man said, who was interviewing me, the then director of Central Office, that he didn't know what I had to offer, I'd just left the Royal Academy of Music, but I should go away and do something for a year and come back. And I went away. And I went into the newest, most exciting field of activity I could find, which was computers, computer software. And I didn't emerge for ten years and when I did emerge, I emerged sideways into the Save the Children Fund and became one of their directors and I put in new business systems, worked very hard to get their fund raising side as business-like and well run as possible, on the grounds

that the least you spend on raising money the more there is for the children at the other end of the line.

[Helen Steven:]

I just can't imagine people with a basic belief not being involved in politics at every level. When one gets to the point of civil disobedience - that's when people begin to get critical and to say 'Well it's all very well doing these things and working within the democratic system but you shouldn't step outside the law'. And I feel that there are times when one has to step outside the law. That it's really important and in fact there are times when it is one's duty to do so.

And I suppose the obvious examples would have been in Nazi Germany where people had been blamed for not disobeying the law. The Nuremberg trials were because people - they were on trial because they did obey the law - they did what they were told and that was deemed to be no excuse. And I think most of the great changes in the law have came about precisely because people broke the law and if you look back through history, the Trade Unions came about because of people like the Tolpuddle Martyrs and womens' vote came about because of the suffragettes. And that I suppose is an example of the different forms of direct action. Not all the suffragettes broke the law. Some did. Some campaigned quietly in their own way.

[Eugenia Piza Lopez:]

Well I got involved in working with women for both political and personal reasons. I mean I was very involved with a political party, and as a member of that political party, I felt that I was treated in a different way. I was treated in a different way because I was a woman. Therefore my hands and my work was extremely useful, and my thinking as well. But not always.

And I was asked to do quite a lot of different things in order to support the ideals of the party: to hand out leaflets at four in the morning, to go to the factories, to go to the shanty town to talk to the people. And I was not invited to sit around making decisions of how to go about addressing a particular group.

On the one hand I was useful, I was working, I was a hard worker, and I was very strong in my beliefs. But on the other I was not really somebody to take considerably serious. And so this, this really made me feel very uncomfortable, and also made me feel that what I wanted to bring about was not only my feeling but the feeling of other women, particularly other young women in the party.

[Helen Steven:]

I really wasn't a feminist until quite late on in my life. I'm a late developer. And I suppose it wasn't

until I became involved with going to Greenham Common and went with some women from Glasgow to Greenham Common and held hands round the base. The thirty thousand women embracing the base. And I stayed the folliwing day and participated in the blockade. Which was the first time I had every actually broke the law.

And I had very very mixed feelings at Greenham Common. I still do. Every time I go to Greenham I come back with a whole load of questions and a tremendous amount of inspiration. To begin with I thought 'Well why does it have to be women only? Men are in the peace movement as well. And are just as concerned'. And I still believe that. I still believe that men must also be concerned and involved in the struggle. But I think what I saw at Greenham was women taking control and talking responsibility and making a unique contribution to the peace movement that I think only women could make.

[Eugenia Piza Lopez:]
The idea of women gaining control of their own lives and gaining control over social spaces as well is very threatening because its a revolution of the whole way in which society survives and lives because we talk about changing attitudes. We talk about changing the way in which we relate with our partners, we talk about the way in which we want our everyday life to be. We talk about sharing power. And that is very

threatening. That is very threatening because its, um, its a sense of loss that some people, not only men, who have been in power for many centuries. Its always difficult to give away a little bit of what you have.

[Emma Nicholson:]

Political parties, particularly the large old political parties such as the Conservative and the Labour party are very very old fashioned indeed. Women have complete political credibility in the eyes of the public, the great problem is being accepted into what is still a very masculine environment. And Margaret Thatcher has done a very great deal, an uncountable amount, in that respect.

It is tougher if you're a woman, coming into the selection process, because you tend to get asked questions that they don't ask a man. Sometimes if you're a woman you get asked particularly personal questions, largely because the selection committee is unclear about what the electorate really wants. The electorate is remarkably bias free, incidentally, but selection committees over-worry.

I remember one woman in the north, the chairman of the selection committee, saying to me very grumpily 'You're not married. If you can't come back again to your next interrview with a husband we won't interview again'. And I went out saying over my shoulder 'I'm not married because my ceiling of boredom is too low'

At which she got exceptionally angry and dismissed me. Mind you I was new. I would roll with that punch a little better now. But she asked the next woman, who was married, why she wasn't at home looking after her husband, because the electorate wouldn't like to see a married woman out as a parliamentary candidate.

[Eugenia Piza Lopez:]

So we decided to get involved in producing a film about women. We wanted to show a day in the life of six women which starts at usually 3 or 4 in the morning and finishes usually at 10 or 11 at night. That without taking into account their wife's duties.

One of the main issues about women's exploitation I feel is the lack of recognition of women's work. The lack of recognition by women themselves when you ask them 'What do you do?' 'I don't work I am a housewife.' 'What do you do when you work in the land?' 'Well I am not working actually I am helping my husband.' 'Um what do you do when you prepare the food?' 'Oh well I am not working I am preparing the food for the kids.'

But so this total lack of value they give to their work and through that lack of value to their work a lack of value to themselves. Because they don't recognize themselves as human beings who are producing an enormous contribution to society, what they do is not important. They are paid less because they are

women. They are paid less because they are not agricultural workers, because they are helping the husband. In many cases they are not paid at all.

We wanted to know what was the best use of the film so we asked the women: 'What do you want to do with this film?' and they said: 'We want to show it at at home, we want to show it in the different communities where we come from.' We showed the film and a few minutes after the film was finished a man stood up nearly crying, an old man, and he said to us 'I didn't realise my wife worked so hard. How come I've been married for such a long time without acknowledging that what she does is work'.

[Emma Nicholson:]

I think old-style marriages, many of which exist today, can be very inhibiting and narrowing for women. Because women are always traditionally meant to take the secondary position. I don't think any human being should be taking a secondary position in life automatically. I think each human being matters just as much as the next person. And should be in their own right someone of substance, someone of standing.

I found that through being Conservative Party Vice- Chairman for women that there was far more work still to be done for women in the political field than I ever dreamt. Of course it blended well with my work for the Save the Children Fund where I was employing

women, mothers with young children, perhaps there were no fathers. I could see at the sharp end the difficulty they were having. Creches perhaps weren't in existence. All sorts of things that mothers really need in order for them to be able to work, as well as care for their children. And make no mistake about it mothers need to work. They're not doing it just for pin money.

[Eugenia Piza Lopez:]

Many women are involved in what I would say is a feminist struggle. Though they don't call themselves feminists. And that is the case with very many poor women like the miners' wives or the Trade Union women in Brazil or the mothers of the Disappeared in Chille. Because women get involved because there is a sense of urgency. Right, in Bolivia in the case of the miners strike the miners were about to lose their jobs, right, they were on strike, women had to get involved in supporting their struggle for jobs, and they had to get involved in finding a job by themselves as well so they can support their families when their husbands were on on strike. And I find a lot of paralells between the miners' strike here in the U.K. and the miners' strike or other strikes in South America. Because women get involved and when women get involved women conquer the public domain.

[Emma Nicholson:]

Working for women in politics is not an easy thing to do. Its not seen as an acceptable political task. The scarceness of women in Parliament particularly means to me that a number of things, that matter very much to women, aren't debated at all or perhaps they're not debated as fully as they might be.

Lots of things that matter to women hardly come up on the agenda at all. And of course they won't until more women come in. Its no good standing outside and complaining that things that matter to you aren't being taken care of. You've got to come in and put those issues on the table.

[Helen Steven:]

People say to me in the Peace Movement: But I am ignorant, I don't have any knowledge, I don't know the statistics about nuclear missiles and I can't argue with scientists.' And I would want to say don't argue with scientists on the basis of scientific knowledge if you don't have it. Use your knowledge as a mother or your knowledge as a naturalist or whatever your particular concern or interest is. That's where your knowledge is. And that's where your strength is and you use the language from that experience. And that's where power is.

I was part of a delegation of church people who went from the Scottish Churches to the NATO

headquarters in Brussells. We were there for about three days. And during the whole of this we were very conscious and we became increasingly conscious that there were two, it was like two worlds. That NATO was in one world and we were in another. And each was accusing the other of being unrealistic and not living in the real world. And on the last night we were invited to the officers' mess at SHAPE. What's that - Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe. A very august occasion and we were sitting around the dinner table. And we said at the end of the meal that it was customary in Scotland to finish with a ceilidh - a bit of a sing song. And we suddenly changed the whole mood of the evening to singing songs and to reciting poetry and somehow moved from talk about weapons and missiles to talk about things of the heart and things that mattered. And things that were deep and personal. And as we were leaving, getting off the bus, the colonel was shaking hands with us all. And he shook hands with me and he was crying. He had tears pouring down his cheeks and he just kept saying 'I'm sorry, I'm really sorry.' And somehow it was as if we had reached across the divide to the humanity that was common to all of us.

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