

WELLY,

INTERPRETING MEDIA

YOU THERE!

No, not you.



*this is a free publication, to be circulated in the University of Nottingham, Malaysia*

1

***EDITOR'S NOTE:  
INTERPELLATED:  
INTERPRETING MEDIA?***

2

***RACING WITH THE SUN***

by NUHA HALIM

3

***ALTERNATIVE MEDIA:  
CAN THE INTERNET  
LEAD THE WAY TOWARDS  
MEDIA FREEDOM?***

by CHALANI RANWALA

4

***MEDIUM, MEDIUMS,  
MEDIA, MEDIAS: NOTE  
ON MEDIA STUDIES***

by TAN ZI HAO

5

***INTERNATIONAL  
COMMUNICATIONS  
STUDIES OF STUDENTS***

by TS

**EDITOR'S  
LIST**



EDITOR'S NOTE:

# INTERPELLATED: INTERPRETING MEDIA?

Once a reader reads, s/he begins to interpret and to be interpellated. Contrary to the proclaimed “death of author”, or *authority*, the ideology remains irrepressible since the process of interpreting necessitates the reproduction of status quo.

Interpretation therefore immunises ideology. It is Althusser’s hailing (Hey, you there!): an existing authority must first be recognised, to make sense of the reading-self in relation to the text.

This ineluctable framework could shed some lights to the study of media (or medium[s]?): if mass communication takes place in mass media, the media is all that we require ourselves to recognise, to be able to make sense of our reading-selves in relation to the world. We must then, and already, presupposed the material existence of media as politically meaningful, furnished and purposive.

Is “Interpreting Media” hypocritical then? – to dedicate a whole literature to the ideology of media?

We may start asking, what are we actually doing when we are interpreting? We reproduce meanings, we set limits with a working definition and we recognise a particular discourse of power – recognition precipitates interpretation. Thus, the interpreter is “*always already* subjects”.

Interpreter interpellated!

How should one escape this “Paris strangler” (no pun intended) since the recognition of discourse is inevitable? Perhaps one can attempt at *misrecognition*: committed to interpellation, nonetheless, to misrepresent the notion of self. This isn’t new; as exemplified in the irony of pastiche and humour, where the modernist linearity of interpretation is challenged. And it is precisely this worthlessness of self, such sense of being/becoming, which we can appreciate in the following articles.

As a subtle reflection on the process of reasoning, Nuha Halim’s *Racing with The Sun* contained many polarities, which are potential thresholds for misrepresentation and misrecognition, i.e.: thought vs. action, theory vs. practice, reason vs. unreason, young vs. old, victory vs. defeat, cen-

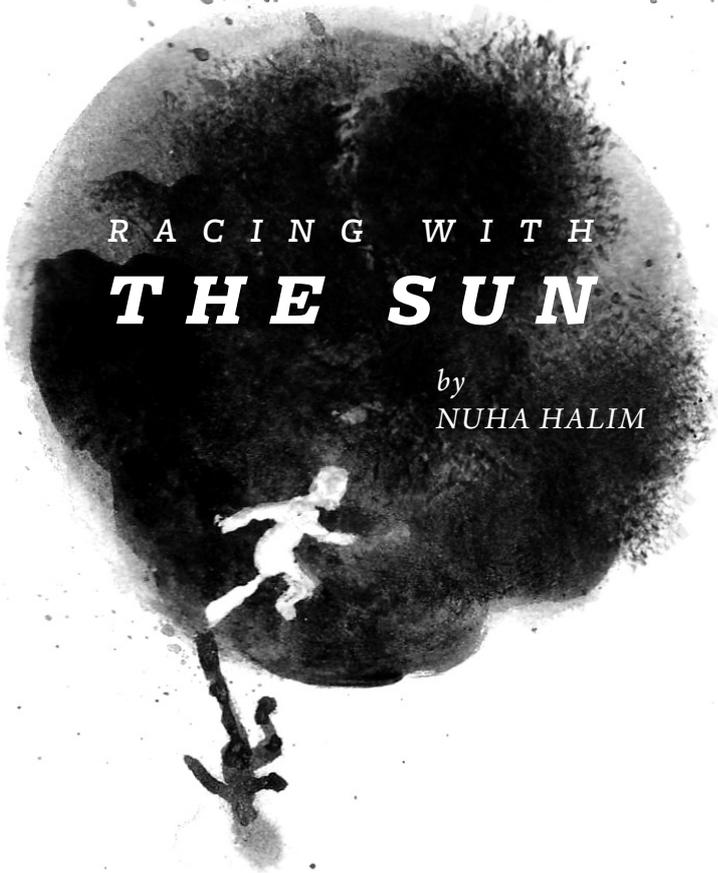
tre (the Sun) vs. periphery (Africa) and so on. A partial chicken-and-egg critique over the procreation of idea, this fiction can also be interpreted as a dialogic critique against the linear process of rationalisation, and rather slyly too, leading us to questioning the determinism of “communication theory”.

Chalani Ranwala wrote about the responsibility of alternative media while questioning its legitimacy. Important questions are raised: is alternative media necessarily objective? If not, should we support biased alternative media? Is alternative media the lesser evil? Her quest should not be underestimated as it seeks to challenge the foundation of journalism ethics.

In the third article, Tan Zi Hao undertakes the mission to provide an alternative reading of “media”. He complicates these interrelated words: medium, mediums, media and *medias*. Like a *décollage*, it defaces “media studies” through the politicisation and re-historicisation of those words. Never shy away from his postcolonial misbehaviour (misrecognition?), to the extent of pluralising “media(s)” to destabilise the politically (and grammatically) righteous.

Less convoluted, the last article has a playful title: *International Communications Studies of Students*, as opposed to, say, *Students of International Communications Studies* (ICS). TS repositioned himself, as a student of ICS, to write about his communication experience in UNMC. Expect no clear-cut definition – should be applauded – TS offered interesting snippets of life in UNMC. Yet, some of his narrative should encourage questions about the impact of media and communication: Are we mere products of media? How do media stereotypes restrict our imagination? How could this be challenged? His response is democratic and participatory.

Lastly, it must be reminded that an editor’s note is always a misrecognition in varying degrees. While the writer-interpreters could misrepresent themselves to escape the strangler, the editor must not, in any attempt to re-interpret the text, to re-interpellate the writer-interpreters into the discourse of “Interpreting Media” per se. I must renounce my role as the ideological editor, and your reading must thus continue.



RACING WITH  
**THE SUN**

by  
NUHA HALIM

**T**he wind not only blows, but it also *sings*. Yes, it sings in synchronized choruses, the maestro being that of the gaseous particles in the air. The wind never stops singing. It whistles, it howls, gently, colliding against all objects. We are all dancing with the singing wind. The wind entwines with our fingers and carries us into this unorthodox dance without the knowledge of our very own conscious mind. In the vast desert plains of Africa, the winds were holding onto the hands of a running young boy not older than ten, grasping his palms, slipping away like chiffon along his fingers.

Back straight, eyes scanning the area as he ran, collarbone and ribs arched vividly against the skin of the boy. His movements ever so fast, one could have almost mistaken him as a cheetah in the plains beyond the border of his village. The sand moves with him, the wind dances in a fast tempo with him, he knows it and recognizes them; he feels them. His arms are wide open whenever he ran as a gesture welcoming the wind's embrace. His feet acted as lips that kissed the ground below, as though the wind and the sands were spirits that cheered for him as he raced against his enormous, blazing rival – the sun. As he ran faster and faster, he could feel the splashing rays of the sun jeering at him entirely from head to toe. Again and again, he had lost the race to the sun. He cursed loudly and fell against his back on the shadows of a nearby tree, where another occupant sat and watched him with a bemused and amused expression. Naengop's panting was audible as he grasped on his sides, cursing the sun again as his roasted hazelnut eyes squinted at the blue skies. The occupant chuckled slightly, a kind playing smile stretched across his face.

“Child! I have been watching you for several days now! And all I see is you running and running, always running! Aren’t your legs tired? Why do you run, boy?”

Naengop stood up, obviously annoyed by the old man. “I run because I want to escape the sun. It is everywhere! I do not like the sun! It is hot; it is fast. I do not like it at all! Ever since I was five, I’ve been racing with it but it always wins! My race begins from the tree eight hundred meters away to here. Oh, I hate the sun so much!” He said rather crossly.

The old man began to laugh heartily. “Oh, child, how determined you are! I like you, boy. You have a spirit; you have the heart, very rare in such a young boy like you. My dear boy, has it not occurred to you that you can never win? The sun is everywhere. This is Africa, son!”

The boy snorted loudly. “I don’t care! I will keep on racing with the sun until I die!”

“Rather a dramatic statement from one of your age,” chuckled the old man. He then began to laugh again and pat the foolish boy’s head. The old man frowned a little, and Naengop watched him with curiosity. “Ah... what if, there is after all, a way to win a race with the sun?” Naengop’s face was a readable delight. “When does the sun appear, young one?”

He scratched his head and answered, “In the morning, sir, when dawn comes in.”

“Have you ever run at dawn?”

He scratched his head again and answered, “No, sir, I have not.”

As the old man smiled a toothy smile, the answer was clear. Oh, yes, the answer was as clear as crystal indeed.

The wind was an audience once again the very next day. It whispered words of support to Naengop who stood, perched at the same spot, where the vast desert was widely opened, as though they were doors welcoming the familiar visitor. He smiled and began to rub his feet. He breathed in the air around him deeply, and as he stomped on the sandy ground and looked northwards, he knew that it would only be a few minutes for the sun to rise. He had enough time, he thought to himself. Chuckling slightly, he sprinted forwards. It was time to run again [1].



**Notes:**

[1] “Action is preceded by thinking. Thinking is to deliberate beforehand over future action and to reflect afterwards upon past action. Thinking and acting are inseparable. Every action is always based on a definite idea about causal relations. He who thinks a causal relation thinks a theorem. Action without thinking, practice without theory are unimaginable. The reasoning may be faulty and the theory incorrect; but thinking and theorizing are not lacking in any action. On the other hand thinking is always thinking of a potential action. Even he who thinks of a pure theory assumes that the theory is correct, i.e., that action complying with its content would result in an effect to be expected from its teachings. It is of no relevance for logic whether such action is feasible or not.” See Ludwig Von Mises. 2007. Chapter 9: The Role of Ideas. In: *Human Action: A Treatise on Economics*. 4th ed. Fox & Wilkers: California.



# ALTERNATIVE MEDIA



## *Can The Internet Lead The Way Towards Media Freedom?*

by CHALANI RANWALA



Quite recently a friend and a fellow classmate of mine asked me a simple yet thought-provoking question: “Would you support an alternative media?” My mind immediately wandered to the long battle against state media control, political influence and the lack of freedom of expression in my country, Sri Lanka. The hesitation behind my immediate response to the question came about when my friend asked me whether I would still support the alternative media if it was biased.

In my two years at university studying the areas of global media and internet censorship, I do not fail to analyse Sri Lanka’s crumbling media freedom every chance I get to. With a long-standing history of violence, intimidation and restrictions towards the independent media, it is no surprise that I have become one of the many who have lost faith in the state media. Without hesitation I began to support the alternative media in an effort to look for solutions to the loopholes in Sri Lankan media. The word “alternative” itself paints a good enough picture - if one source proves redundant, we encourage the society to turn towards a better and more independent source of information. However, it is my friend who opened up my mind to the idea that alternative media has the potential to be as biased as any traditional state media. Does that mean that I should wholeheartedly support it?

My opinion on the matter was quite straightforward. Web-based media, including blogging and online news sites are merely a medium, or source through which information is posted and shared. This alternate medium of communication has become not only an option, but an essential part of the democratic process. In recent

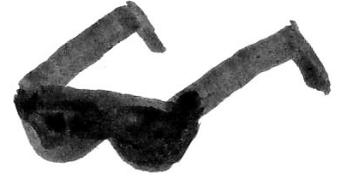
years Sri Lankan mainstream media has become biased towards the opposition parties and strives to portray only a clean, linear image of the government in power, hiding and at times distorting actual events pertaining to the country’s civil conflicts and political activities. Bringing in alternative media through the internet has widened the angle through which news is received by the general public.

Hence whether or not this new medium of communication will become biased over time becomes irrelevant – what is important is that it exists. Malaysia has been more successful than Sri Lanka in the recent years with regard to maintaining an alternative medium of communication through the internet. Meanwhile, Sri Lanka continues to experience internet censorship put forth by the government, including the sudden ban of online news sites in late 2011. Contents deemed too critical of the government are removed, leaving little room for fearless political debate. Nonetheless, online media is far more difficult to control than traditional print media due to the sheer size and volume of information available on the internet; if one link proves to be a dead end, one can merely obtain information from a different source at the click of a button.

Hence, in the long run, the alternative media will only provide solutions to the continuing struggle for media freedom in countries like Sri Lanka – whether it is rational or biased will depend on how well it is used as a medium and how well it can work around state control and manipulation.



**One**



***objective media***

**or**



***multiple***

***biased media***



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# Medium, Mediums, Media, Medias: Note On Media Studies

by TAN ZI HAO

## Medium–Mediums–Media

*Medium* is the agent of exchange like blood as the medium of gas exchange or currency as the medium of economic exchange. The word *mediums* is the plural counterpart of medium, but it does not usually refer to the same comprehensive themes of exchange like its singular equivalent, instead, connotes otherworldly exchange beyond the worldly economy, peculiar to the transcendentals. *Media* can be said to be composed of medium(s), a mass noun but holistic, a container of plural entity but encompassing general categories to impersonate the singular “medium”. However, “media” rarely refers to the multitude of mediums (otherworldliness) but only the general plurality of medium (worldliness), thus redeeming the quality of worldly exchange – a precarious position.

Media is sometimes understood as the “mass media”, but this undertaking restricts its imagination for it commits to an exclusive world-view that of the communication and technological industry detached from the otherworldly mediums. This preferred meaning of media had, through scholarly perusals, claimed independence, earned by discrediting the spiritual notion of “mediums”, blossomed into various institutions, mythic enclaves notwithstanding if not realistically construed, proved worthy of capital and power.

It is against this superficial expedition, inevitably colonial and capitalist, found predominantly in the study of media – especially in Media and Communication Studies [1] or other related fields – where I wish to introduce a minor anarchy.

As the word “media” is closely adhered to “medium” but assumes an indifferent role towards “mediums”, its meaning embarks on the same quest. Subsequently, the communicative quality of mediums has come to represent “spiritual” exchange unfit for the scholarship of Media and Communication Studies. When we speak of mediums, we speak of superstitions; when we speak of media, we speak of scientism and Enlightenment.

The mad man speaking is not a man communicating; the aboriginal ritual – despite being a communication avenue of mediums – is not a concern within media studies [2]. But a civilised man speaking is a *real* man communicating and making valuable exchange.

By casting out “mediums” from the general meaning of “medium”, the study of “media” (derived from the worldly “plurality of medium”) justified its remissness towards the minority [3]. The minority is exotic, magical and unscientific, thus unworthy. The study of communication and media – burdened by this historical condition – laid the minority to rest in the subaltern.

## Medias

Pluralising a mass noun such as “medias” is incorrect. But to propose an imagination for the minor anarchy, grammatical wrong must be appropriated to accelerate the production of subjectivity. *Medias*, a plural form of media, or perhaps a concoction of the worldliness and the otherworldliness of media/medium and mediums, suggests a global agent of exchange, a super ecology embodying the micro and the macro, realist or spiritual.

The imaginative “medias” is like the Taoist or the Spinozan infinitude – everything is part of a larger whole; here is where everything becomes a medium [4]. There is no limit to medias because they are the imaginatives, thus know not the finite worldliness.

Medias will not be an extension of man (according to McLuhan), but as man himself, like a cyborg, like Starlarc – man is medium. The man becomes the medium that sublates into an economy of nomadic units. The economy, too, must then become a man and not another pious extension. Indeed, a man within a man, like a spiritual being in a physical body, this is the medias (other)world-view.

Medias are not categorical explanations representing reality. It bears no traces of realism but only exist imagined. Like symbiotic clusters, a super ecology: a medium contains another medium, and is itself within another medium, forming a collective: mediums. The media is then an enclave of mediums.

Imagine an individual driving a car: his nervous system becomes a medium of his thought and his performative; his body becomes a medium of nutritional exchange and of metabolism that generate sufficient energy to allow the communication between thought and performative (driving); so as the food he consumed which functioned as a medium of energy; his safety consciousness is an imaginative medium between his unconscious readiness for accident and the conscious psychomotor to prevent one; his thoughts on family, friends, or God is a medium between past experience and destiny, between chaotic realism and a calm haven; the road is a medium between

origin and destination; the car is a medium between the man and his destination; so as the burning fuel in the car, similar to his food, a medium of energy; while the car is the medium for the man, the man is a medium for the car, he who controls the car is controlled in return [5], so on and so forth. A list of medias for this performative of “driving” is inexhaustible for it stretches to infinity; the micro gets smaller while the macro bigger. There are infinitesimal networks in medias, coexisting: the infinite mediums – imaginary and spiritual; the finite media/medium – economic and scientific.

Every object becomes a bridge to another, possessing information, a thick message and a rich history. In this super ecology, Jameson’s postmodernist argument of the weakening of historicity encountered a reversal – every object is capable of exchange and affords a narrative. This minor anarchy is necessary to emancipate the minority; to postulate an alternative reading of media, everything becomes interconnected and inclusive.

Within infinity and the otherworldly, irrelevance is irrelevant. And if this minor anarchy could one day be realised, hope is the minority will secure a more respectable position in the study of medium(s) and media.



#### Notes:

[1] John Fiske attributed the origin of Communication Studies to Shannon and Weaver’s Mathematical Theory of Communication (1949). The study outlined terminology that has today becomes the direction of studies in communication. An unfortunate exploit; communication is restricted to human communication and communication scholars restrict their studies to what is considered “human”. This discourse formation is of course politically selective, since the preferred notion of “human” is usually colonial. The inhuman (Foucault’s mad man, Deleuze and Guattari’s becoming-machine, Frankenstein or Oriental bodies etc.) is incompetent, handicapped and incapable of communication. Communication Studies is a post-war product that concerned only the “civilised”. The inhuman communication is negligible – Communication Studies do not highlight the communication to God(s), spiritual beings, nature, even to self (monologue or madness).

Hereby I also wish to make a few remarks regarding the BA International Communications Studies (BAICS), an undergraduate programme offered by the School of Modern Languages and Cultures in the University of Nottingham in Malaysia (UNMC). While UNMC has privileged from a diverse classroom, the subjects offered in BAICS remained grounded in a monotone Occidental theoretical debate. One

could have questioned: what does the “International” in BAICS represent? How are the subjects being taught deemed inter-national when it failed to include the communicational history of some students, who despite being eloquent communicators themselves (ourselves) remained patronised by the myth of Occidental theories.

I must also make clear that I am not in opposition to learning theories, wherever they derived from. I even wished to avoid the simplistic binary of Occident-Orient. But when an educational course being offered has an obvious imbalance of emphasis, injustice persists where one (myself) may find the needs to resort to simplistic binary for activist expression, as Martin Luther King, Jr. stated, shameful conditions need to be dramatised.

[2] One could argue that Anthropology has included the study of otherworldly communication. But this posed another problem of legitimacy: to study “mediums” under Anthropology is similar to viewing the subject in museums, it is objectified and commoditised, again relinquishing its politics in the dominant discourse. In Psychology too, where the politics of “mediums” or the “mad man” are justified but only reinforced through the science of a universal mind, the communicational aspect of “mediums” is still not recognised.

[3] The “minority” is not to be understood quantitatively, but from the perspective of power and political mileage. Even the greater number can be the minority.

[4] One can also read this as the consequence of quantification since the emergence of industrial capitalism. The emphasis on exchange value over use value in free market resulted in speculative activities, in turn, begets more opportunities of exchange (thus “everything becomes a medium”), for instance, currency in exchange for further currency.

This speculation is broader than mere financial, it crept into the everyday life. Speculation in this sense is productive nevertheless unsustainable, that which seeks to alienate production via the division of labour, to make convenient valorisation where every process of exchange is to be counted as an end product – the transaction as an end. As demonstrated in the service industry: queue as a process of production is today valorised by the provision of express lane for those willing to pay extra (use of capital to legitimise queue-cutting). The queue is thus singled out from the production cycle to become itself a medium of its own (a medium between origin and destination). If every transaction is deemed profitable, everything can be made a medium for the exploitation of exchange value.

[5] For example: Car drivers can be easily angered by another ruthless driver; car drivers maintain a distance with the other cars. These are examples on the embodiment of self – the car becomes the body (the cyborg). Baudrillard viewed this as a “transformation of the subject himself into a driving computer”. A car driver is wired by his car. Refer Jean Baudrillard, *The Ecstasy of Communication* (New York: Semiotext(e) Foreign Agents Series, 1988), pp.12-14.

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# INTERNATIONAL COMMUNICATIONS STUDIES OF STUDENTS

by TS

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Communication,  
the word that has raised me many questions and efforts  
in trying to define it. So would you, if you are studying  
communication in UNMC, no?

Well I did!



When asked by friends the title of my course, my response was the affirmative “International Communication Studies”. How I wish the response given was equally affirmative. However, as this term is generally *alien speak* to my science stream friends, I was rewarded with quizzical stares, with hands itching to scratch their heads: “what the heck?”. Attributes were then flung over me; from images of tangled telephone wires and call centres to public speaking where students spend all day polishing their speeches and appearances. They began to ponder: if I am an abler communicator, a better speaker or a social genie.

“No, we study about MEDIA” is a plain and rather absurd explanation because they know what media is! With my lack of ability to enlighten them (which is quite ironic, considering my course!), they remain puzzled. Then I began to scheme my own definition of communication and here I will offer my science counterparts a little tidbit of what we are studying and ENJOYING in our classes.

The reason why there is communication between individuals is we do not live alone, we connect with those around us. We cannot be silent and frozen as statues. We express our feelings, convey our thoughts and ideas, and show our needs through a communicative medium. So what is that medium? Well it is, for our everyday life communication, the language. Then what is language? It is a tool of communication which contains coded messages that can be understood by senders and receivers. So long as there is a mutual understanding, it is effectively communicated.

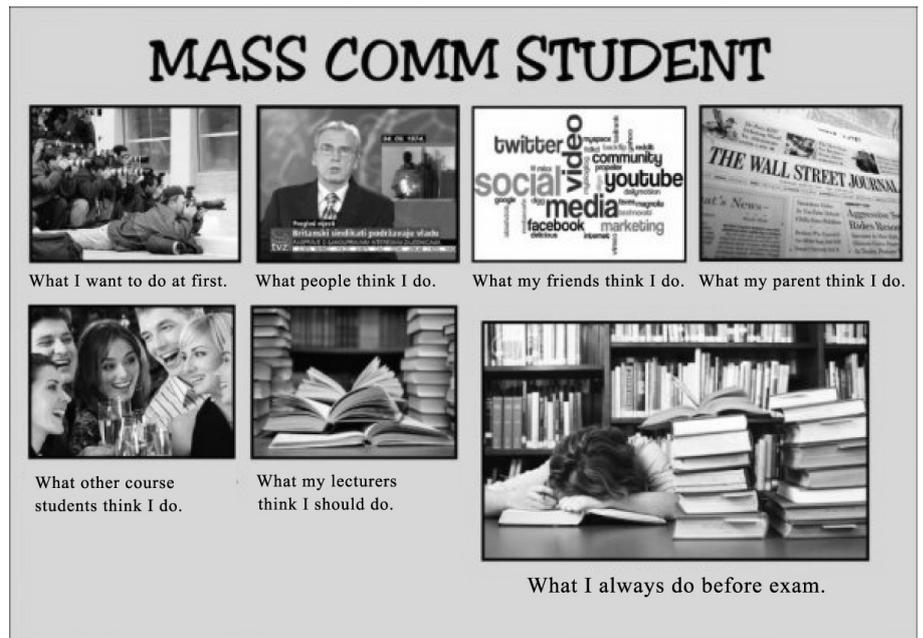
Whether it is verbal or non-verbal (i.e.: with words or the body language), there is a need for an effective communication. I personally believe that to be good at communication, we should be able to handle the language medium tactfully. But to be able to do that doesn’t mean we need to have a very good command of that language, for example, English, the one we use in our university. Instead, the key to effective communication is flexibility based on context and to be aware of the audience or the listener.

“ “Midvalley, 2”  
is a better message than  
“2 tickets to  
Midvalley please!”

For example, when buying tickets to escape from the university jungle into the bustling KL – where we poor souls find solace from the unchanging life of UNMC – saying “Midvalley, 2” is a better message than “2 tickets to Midvalley please!”. It is precise, contains vital information and avoids ambiguity, which can lead to misunderstanding. Well it does save some seconds if you happen to be trapped in a station with a long array of fellow travellers. There is the same situation where most of us pick up articles from magazines. We ordinary people love to go for the simpler and the wittier ones rather than the highbrow and heavily jargon-laden writings. A friend once said to me, “Why do we write something that no one bothers to read!” Well, if we are writing for something like the FYP, we need to sound like the intellectuals, but not so if we are aiming for the general audience.

intimidating but still quite fun and interesting to learn.

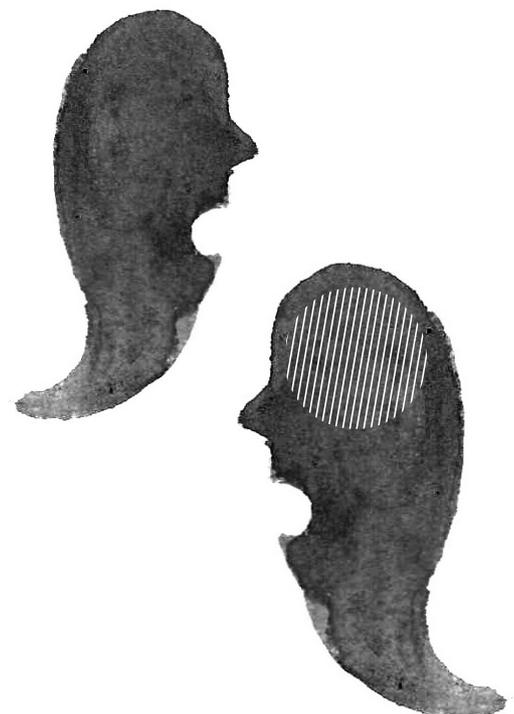
Our school SMLC welcomes interlopers and our classes are composed of students from diverse cultural backgrounds. So, if you science and engineering people have free time, do join our fascinating classes taught by some very good looking lecturers, we have testimonies from outsiders falling in love with our courses.



Stereotypes? What say you?

Communication in the wider context goes through multiple-mediums, the media. Radio transmissions, visual images on television, entertainment on music and films, countless information on the internet are what serve as the intermediaries between the source and its target. If the media is reaching to a mass audience, we term it “mass media”. The products created by the media are called cultural products, because they shape cultures. To give a few examples: songs, movies, podcasts, TV programmes, DVD, advertisements, paintings etc. are all cultural products dispersed throughout the global community.

What we study in class is our relation to the media and their products, and how they affect us. We explore the various theories of famous dudes such as Karl Marx, Antonio Gramsci and those gentlemen from Frankfurt School whom we as first year students dreaded of, and in second year, found out that they were just trying to make things complicated. We explore everyday human life in relation to power, capitalism, class struggle, hegemony, ideology and state! ;) All of which sound





You are *not* interpellated.