Lévi-Strauss: the construction of binary oppositions in online media

Read and make notes on the following discussion:

Claude Lévi-Strauss was interested in the structures that stories use to create meaning. He analysed traditional myths and legends in an attempt to uncover the essential ingredients, or universal laws, of **story structure**. Lévi-Strauss concluded that all stories need some level of **conflict** in order to **produce meaning**. He also came to the conclusion that the conflicts covered in stories tell audiences something about the kinds of ideas and beliefs society ought to adopt.

Lévi-Strauss' ideas are readily applicable to media products. Indeed, Batman wouldn't be interesting unless he fought the Joker. Heroes need villains in order to demonstrate their heroism. Similarly, newspapers construct conflict in order to entertain and prompt their readerships to take sides. Strauss called these conflicts '**binary oppositions**'.

At their simplest, binary oppositions give us stories in which **good battles evil**, but there are countless other formulations of conflict found in media products: humanity versus technology, age versus youth, brawn versus intelligence.

Importantly, Lévi-Strauss tells us that binary oppositions also **construct ideological positioning**. Ideology, in this sense, refers to how stories reflect the values and beliefs of society. The conflicts presented in Star Wars, for instance, tell us that the greed and exploitation of Darth Vader are bad, whilst Skywalker's bravery and team working skills are positive traits.

The key to unlocking the real meaning of a narrative, its **ideological meaning or subtext**, is to examine the conflicts presented within a text. Invariably, those conflicts aren't presented evenly. Sides are taken, and in doing so, **media products assume an ideological stance**.

In its numerous stories that deal with homophobia and LGBT intolerance, Attitude readily engages in the construction of binary oppositions. **Freedom to choose one's sexuality battles social ignorance and intolerance**. Attitude's longstanding ideological position is clear and obvious within its stories. It **seeks to champion LGBT rights globally.**

DesiMag's use of binary oppositions is less obvious. Stories quite often trace the destructive effects of Islamic extremism whilst positioning moderate and tolerant Islamic people as heroic. Embroidered within its celebrity obsessed editorial mix is an ideological position that embraces celebrity culture whilst also rooting itself in Asian tradition and identity.