

Chapter 3

Media and Ideology: Mutual Signifiers That Signify Each Other

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ABSTRACT

This chapter aims mainly to provide a framework towards the sophisticated relation between “media” and “ideology” by putting the key thinkers’ arguments, such as Marx, Gramsci, Althusser (and also Žižek’s and Hall’s complementary contributions), at the center. In order to fulfill this aim, the chapter will, firstly, elaborate on Marx’s conception of ideology, as Marx’s understanding of “ideology,” “human being,” and “the world” directly determines not only the direction and but also the content of the debates on media and ideology. Secondly, Gramsci’s theory of “hegemony” will be scrutinized. In this way, the view claiming that the primary function of media is to produce “hegemony” through which the capitalist class maintains its own privileged position in society will be discussed. Finally, the chapter will discuss Althusser’s notion of “ideology” and “ideological state apparatus.” Thus, the reader will notice the way how media and ideology mutually include each other.

INTRODUCTION

“I don’t want it to be essentially the same; I want it to be *exactly* the same.” Andy Warhol

Communication is a process in and through which social relations, intersubjectivity, the meaning, and even the subject him/herself are constantly produced and reproduced. Media, on the other hand, is not a neutral/passive apparatus to represent the world. As Stuart Hall puts it, media, as a medium both in between people and between the world and human being, does not simply reflect the world. On the contrary, media constructs the world in an ideological way. Critical paradigm in media studies basically posits that the world does not appear in media as it is; the world is indirectly represented in media in accordance with hegemonic ideology in society. Then the question is: In what way media constructs the world?

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-7998-3270-6.ch003

By following Marx's own thought, critical perspective asserts that, in modern-capitalist societies, media must be defined as "a means of mental production." What media produces is not concrete/material but an abstract commodity, i.e. "idea" or "consciousness." In this regard, media is instrumentalized by the ruling class in order to form or produce a certain type of "conscious" or "subject," i.e. "capitalist subject/conscious." For this reason, as Althusser argues, media becomes one of the most effective apparatus in the process of the formation of the subject. Therefore, the most effective way to reproduce the condition under which the ruling (capitalist) class strengthens its privileged-dominant position in a society is to control over the media, i.e. to construct or produce reality on the basis of its own ethos. In such a case, media productions/contents are grasped as ideological commodities. That also provides the reason behind the argument that communication is by its very nature ideological.

MARX: IDEOLOGY AS CAMERA OBSCURA

In order to illustrate the way how ideology operates, Marx himself chooses an optical device, i.e. *camera obscura*, as a metaphor. On Marx's account, ideology functions just like as camera obscura. Even this metaphor on its own, indeed, can be seen as a sufficient condition to make a strict connection between media and ideology. "Ideology" is a complicated notion having varieties of implication according to the different contexts. Historically, the term "ideology" was firstly used by French Enlightenment thinkers in 18th century on the purpose of naming their attempt to render the philosophy of mind more scientifically (or "physiologically") in accordance with the positivist understanding of science in that era. The use of the term ideology in English appeared for the first time in the translated texts of Destutt de Tracy, where he defined "ideology" as the "science of ideas" (Idea-Logos), in 1796. Afterwards, Napoleon Bonaparte overturned its meaning in a negative way and used the term in order to attack and to humiliate the advocates of Enlightenment values (Williams, 1985, pp. 154-155).

Marx also uses the concept of "ideology" in a negative sense but not as pejorative as Napoleon Bonaparte. For Marx, "ideology" refers to what he calls "false consciousness" in the sense that it is falsely believed that human consciousness determines the conditions of the material world, yet the truth is the opposite: Consciousness is directly and entirely determined by the conditions of reality. Marx states that "it is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness" (Marx, 1914, p. 12). According to him, ideology exists as a function or form in order to (mis)represent the world which means that it does not have any corporeal existence in reality. On the other hand, ideology does not reflect the world or reality as it is; it operates in an entirely different way: Ideology distorts the way how reality appears to us, or puts it in another way where it misrepresents the world in favor of the ruling class. Then, the question is "how is it possible that ideology can manipulate reality?" For Marx, the problem is not the world itself, but our perception or thoughts about the world. The world itself exists *ab initio* and *ipso facto* (i.e. as an ontological and objective fact). However, ideology, as a form of illusion, manipulates our way of seeing the world/reality. It serves us distorted or deformed opinions or judgments about the reality.

From these, another question inevitably arises: Why such a concept of ideology is needed? Or, what is the aim of such a function? Ideology, for Marx, signifies a certain type of form of thought which covers or hides "contradictions" or "class struggle." The term "class," in this regard, implies a certain type of a group of people which have common economic interest. As a result of ideology, working class, under the conditions of its own false-consciousness, misperceives or misinterprets the material world in favor

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