

Ideological Analysis

1. Defining ideology + characteristics of ideologies.
 - a. Ideology can be defined in a number of ways
 - i. A system of beliefs characteristic of a particular class or group
 - ii. A system of illusory beliefs—false ideas or false consciousness—which can be contrasted with true or scientific knowledge
 - iii. The general process of the production of meanings and idea
 - b. Ideology is a conceptual framework “through which men interpret, make sense of, experience and ‘live’ the material conditions in which they find themselves.” (Hall)
 - i. “Ideologies do not consist of isolated and separate concepts, but in the **articulation** of different elements into a distinctive set or chain of meanings.”
 - ii. “Ideological statements are made by individuals: but ideologies are not the product of individual consciousness or intention. Rather we formulate our intentions *within ideology*...The transformation of ideologies is thus a collective process and practice, not an individual one...Ideologies produce different forms of social consciousness, rather than being produced by them.”
 - iii. “Ideologies ‘work’ by constructing for their subjects (individual and collective) positions of identification and knowledge which allow them to ‘utter’ ideological truths as if they were their authentic authors...we find ourselves mirrored in the positions at the centre of the discourses from which the statements we formulate ‘make sense.’ Thus the same ‘subjects’ (e.g. economic classes or ethnic groups) can be differently constructed in different ideologies.”
2. Ideology and representation are connected as follows:
 - a. The conceptual frameworks mentioned above are formed through representation, especially through language.
 - i. By language, I mean both the structure of the language itself, e.g. of English; and the different technical or specific languages within it—e.g. poetry is a kind of language, the novel another, legal discourse another, science another—basically the different genres of representation
 - ii. So, crucially the words we choose to describe the world matter—calling an event “an uprising” instead of a “riot”; calling women “chicks” or “ladies” instead of “women”; saying “pro-life” rather than “anti-abortion”.
 - iii. Ideologies provide conceptual languages, vocabularies for interpreting the world.
 - b. Ideology is seen as what the other person does because it carries a basic taint of mis-representation of reality.
 - i. In its Marxist formulation—ideology is a mis-representation of reality such that it ensures social control of all groups by one small group.
 - ii. But, we can also see ideology as something inescapable—we are all subject to ideologies because we all have conceptual frameworks we use.
 - c. However, ideologies plural rather than Ideology singular suggests that there is struggle over meaning, contradiction and our sense of self is shaped between and in these differences. Thus there is always a possibility of change and resistance to ideology.
 - d. The media are an important site of ideological *production* and perform important ideological *labor*: “What they ‘produce’ is, precisely, representations of the social world, images, descriptions, explanations and frames for understanding how the world is and why it works as it is said and shown to work.”

3. Ideology is a concept from Marxism and has different meanings in different types of Marxist thought
 - a. Classical Marxism: Classical Marxist theory sees society in terms of a base/superstructure model:
 - i. Marxist approach sees society as a complex interrelationship among different practices and institutions.
 - ii. Classical Marxist theory sees society in terms of a base/superstructure model.
 1. The material or economic base is the primary and crucial organizing factor of a human society (its mode of production), Fundamental class identities, alliances, material interest are established at this level of social organization—who controls, owns, profits from, works within the basic mode of production→class divisions
 2. The superstructure is determined by this base. It includes the arrangement of political and legal systems, culture, ideology or belief systems like philosophy, religion, morals. The superstructure is not only organized in line with the interests of the ruling class but also functions to sustain and perpetuate the dominant mode of production.
 - iii. So, cultural artifacts are seen as primarily reflecting dominant class interests.
 1. All readers/viewers/consumers of cultural artifacts are exposed to these interests and agree to them no matter what their own position in society.
 2. Other sets of meanings and beliefs are rarely if ever aired.
 3. Everyone is fluent in dominant ideology whether or not it serves their interests.
 - iv. Usefulness as an analytic tool
 1. A classical Marxist approach is not very helpful, since in this view, changes in meanings would require change in modes of production because culture is purely determined by the material base—the only model of change is revolution: overthrow of the ruling class and taking control of the means of production.
 2. It takes only class as an analytic category—does not directly account for race, gender, sexuality, culture etc.
 3. Classical Marxism also has a hard time accounting for the pleasure that people find in cultural texts without dismissing them as “cultural dupes” or victims of false consciousness.
 - b. Althusser and Gramsci’s revision of classical Marxism
 - i. Alternatives to classical Marxism are more useful since these stress the existence of:
 1. Contradictions within society
 2. Multiple, competing, contradictory ideologies
 3. Complex processes by which individuals assume different positions/roles in relation to their social world, e.g. hailing/interpellation, identification etc..
 4. The relative autonomy of culture (superstructure) from the economic (base)
 - ii. Alternative methods of ideological analysis that stress contradiction lead us to focus on audiences rather than just producers, and to ask if a particular cultural text is an open text or a closed text.
 - iii. The concept of hegemony:
 1. Does account for resistance to dominant ideologies.
 2. Sees societies as sites of struggle for power, not its imposition
 3. Hegemony, dominant bloc, consent, “common sense”:
 - a. The move from capital/labor to dominant/subordinated
 - i. can look at something other than class
 - b. victories and losses are temporary
 - i. constant process of re-winning consent and negotiation
 - ii. positions and identities are temporary and are the result of articulation
 - iv. Popular culture as an important site for struggle

4. The goals of ideological analysis are:
 - a. “Ideological criticism is concerned with the ways in which cultural practices and artifacts produce particular knowledges and positions for their users. It is based on the assumption that cultural artifacts—literature, film, television etc.—are produced in specific historical contexts, by and for specific social groups. These cultural artifacts are seen as expressing and promoting values, beliefs, and ideas in relation to the contexts in which they are produced, distributed, and received. Ideological analysis aims to understand how a cultural text specifically embodies and enacts a particular range of values, beliefs, and ideas.”
 - b. Ideological analysis aims at lifting the blinders of false consciousness to enable people to understand the way the system—that they live in and perhaps enjoy—helps perpetuate their own oppression.
 - c. The goal of ideological analysis is to connect up the internal dynamics of textual structuring with the dynamics of larger social formations.
 - d. Ideological analysis argues that:
 - i. Cultural artifacts are primarily reflects dominant class interests.
 - ii. All readers/viewers/consumers of cultural artifacts are exposed to these interests and agree to them no matter what their own position in society. In other words, everyone is “fluent” in dominant ideology whether or not it serves their interests.
 - iii. Other sets of meanings and beliefs are rarely if ever aired.
 - e. Ideological analysis looks at
 - i. How semiotic conventions and codes serve to naturalize/normalize certain ideologies by making certain systems of representation seem perfectly natural.
 1. How texts produce positions/roles for us to identify with and which position us within the terms of reference of a particular ideology (or more than one ideology).
 2. The nature and range of issues raised and *how* they are raised (in terms of the systems of representation used/not used).
 - ii. The use of generic conventions to contain and regulate diversity of beliefs, characters, practices.
 1. Generic characteristics like closure allow potential disturbance to be introduced without causing change.
 2. In debates, when choices are offered they are a) limited and circumscribed and b) an explicit or implicit hierarchy of preference accompanies them.
 - iii. How the meanings and pleasures generated express specific social, material, class interests
 - iv. How meaning is produced by contradictions between visual and narrative strategies.
 - v. One of the key insights of cultural Marxism is that ideology works by naturalizing itself or by making a certain system of representation seem perfectly natural (e.g. realism in cinema). The goal of ideological analysis is to connect up the internal dynamics of textual structuring with the dynamics of larger social formations.
5. Stuart Hall’s encoding/decoding model:
 - a. characterizes polysemic readings into 3 positions
 - i. dominant/hegemonic/preferred: what you are supposed to get
 - ii. negotiated: most likely position, accept global assumptions but reject local instances of this overarching ideology
 - iii. oppositional: viewer completely rejects the dominant ideology
 - b. The importance of articulation to ideological analysis.
 - c. The concept of negotiation
6. Key terms in ideological analysis
 - a. Ideology: ideology, false consciousness, hegemony, dominant ideology
 - b. Ideological analysis: ideological problematic, uneven development, determination/structuration,
 - c. Representation: polysemy, articulation, discourse, self-reflexivity, heterogeneous unity
 - d. Social power: hegemony, consent, common sense, struggle over meaning, negotiation, relative autonomy,
 - e. Viewers/subjects: interpellation, hailing, subject position, subjectivity, reading against the grain, negotiation