

CHAPTER 2

MARXIST ANALYSIS

Until a few decades or so ago, there was rather little Marxist analysis in “mainstream” American literary and social thought. This is not to say that there were no Marxists; rather, the Marxists were always “voices crying in the wilderness”—not very many people paid heed to these voices or took them seriously. This has been changing in recent years, and there are now increasing numbers of Marxist historians, political scientists, economists, and critics.

The situation is complicated by the fact that there are a variety of kinds, or schools, of Marxism, and Marxist thought seems to be changing rapidly. In the pages that follow I offer a discussion of some of the more fundamental concepts of Marxism that can be applied to media and popular culture. Ironically, Marxism today often seems to have more interesting things to say about culture, consciousness, and related problems than it does about economics.

The discussion that follows leans heavily on the work of Erich Fromm, who has argued that Marx was a humanist whose argument was essentially a moral one. I might point out, in passing, that many Marxists do not approve of the societies created in Marx’s name that pervert his doctrine, such as those found in the former Soviet Union, Eastern Europe, Cuba, China, and elsewhere. For all practical purposes, communism is dead. Many countries that were Marxist, such as Russia and many Eastern European nations, have rejected Marxist doctrines and now are firmly in the capitalist market economy camp. China is nominally a communist country, and so is Vietnam, but in reality both have market-oriented capitalist economies. The only country that remains true to Marxist ideology, it seems, is Cuba, and many scholars predict that when Fidel Castro dies, Cuba, too, will abandon Marxism. It should be pointed out, however, that one can be a Marxist—and, for our purposes, a Marxist critic of the media—without being a communist and without believing in the necessity of revolution and the establishment of a classless society by violent means.

What follows is an outline of some of the most fundamental principles of Marxism—principles that are most useful for the media analyst. My goal here is to provide readers with a basic understanding of Marxism so that they can apply Marxist concepts to the public art forms the media carries. Readers who find that this kind of analysis offers them valuable new perspectives and leads to new insights can pursue study of the subject further (for instance, by examining the

books listed in the annotated bibliography that accompanies this chapter). I cite a number of helpful texts in the following discussion, but, because of the limitations of space, this chapter can form no more than an introduction to Marxist thought that readers can use to make applied Marxist analyses of media.

MATERIALISM

When we talk about Marxist thought being *materialistic*, we are using the term in a special way—not as it is traditionally used in the United States, where it suggests a craving for money and the things that money can buy. For Marxists, materialism refers to a conception of history and the way society organizes itself. Let me start here with some quotations of crucial importance from Marx's (1964) "Preface to a Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy," as published in his *Selected Writings in Sociology and Social Philosophy*. First, his discussion of the relationship that exists between society and consciousness,

In the social production which men carry on they enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will; these relations of production correspond to a definite state of development of their material powers of production. The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society—the real foundation, on which legal and political superstructures arise and to which definite forms of social consciousness correspond. The mode of production of material life determines the general character of the social, political and spiritual processes of life. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being determines their consciousness. (p. 51)

The mode of production (economic relationships), then, is the base or the "determinant element" in our thoughts—although the relationship between our thoughts and society is a complicated one. The preceding passage suggests that beneath the superficial randomness of things there is a kind of inner logic at work. Everything is shaped, ultimately, by the economic system of a society, which, in subtle ways, affects the ideas that individuals have, ideas that are instrumental in determining the kinds of arrangements people will make with one another, the institutions they will establish, and so on.

Marx (1964) also wrote, in "The German Ideology":

The production of ideas, of conceptions, of consciousness, is at first directly interwoven with the material activity and the material intercourse of men,

the language of real life. Conceiving, thinking, the mental intercourse of men, appear at this stage as the direct efflux from their material behavior. The same applies to mental production as expressed in the language of politics, laws, morality, religion, and metaphysics of a people. Men are the producers of their conceptions, ideas, etc.—real, active men, as they are conditioned by the definite development of their productive forces and of the intercourse corresponding to these, up to its furthest forms. Consciousness can never be anything else than conscious existence. (pp. 74–75)

This passage is important because it brings people into the picture and suggests that although consciousness is socially produced, it is always filtered through the minds of real, live, active men and women and is not something that works automatically. There is always the possibility of individuals' gaining an understanding of their situation and doing something about it. But more about this shortly. We have, now, our first important insight—namely, that “our” ideas are not entirely our own, that knowledge is social.

With all of the previous discussion in mind, there are some questions we might ask now:

1. What social, political, and economic arrangements characterize the society in which the media are being analyzed?
2. Who owns, controls, and operates the media?
3. What roles do the various media play in the society where the media are being analyzed? And what are the functions of the various popular art forms the media carries?
4. What ideas, values, notions, concepts, beliefs, and so on do the media spread, and what ideas, values, and so on do the media neglect? Why? Do the media “manipulate” people and shape their behavior, or do people have the capacity to use the media for their own purposes?
5. How have the Internet and sites such as YouTube and Twitter changed things? What impact has the Internet had on traditional media such as newspapers and magazines?
6. How do the patterns of ownership and control of the media affect writers, artists, actors, and other creative people?
7. How do characters in mass-mediated texts reflect and, as some would say, indoctrinate viewers and listeners with capitalist ideology? How does growing up in capitalist societies shape the values and beliefs of those exposed to mass-mediated culture?

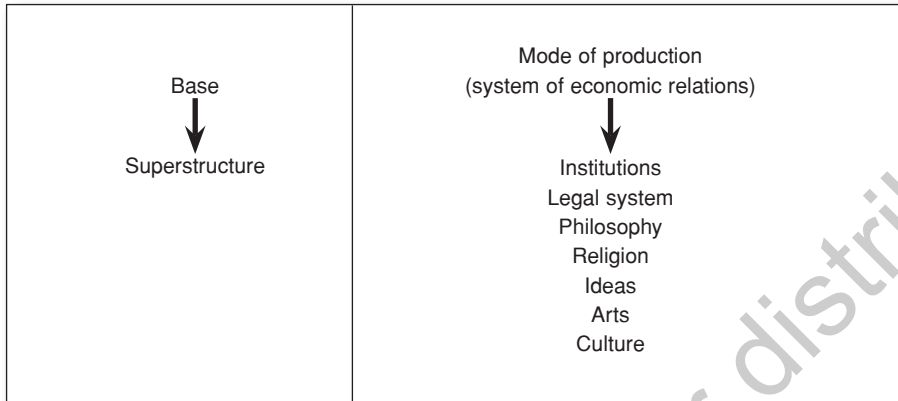
THE BASE AND THE SUPERSTRUCTURE

In this section I begin to develop ideas found in the passages quoted earlier. What Marx has described as the “base” represents the economic system found in a given society. This economic system, or mode of production, influences, in profound and complicated ways, the “superstructure,” or institutions and values, of a given society. Here is a relevant quotation from Friedrich Engels’s (1972) “Socialism: Utopian and Scientific” on this matter:

The new facts made imperative a new examination of all past history. Then it was seen that *all* past history, with the exception of its primitive stages, was the history of class struggles; that these warring classes of society are always the products of the modes of production and of exchange—in a word, of the *economic* conditions of their time; that the economic structure of society always furnishes the real basis, starting from which we can alone work out the ultimate explanation of the whole superstructure of juridical and political institutions as well as of the religious, philosophical, and other ideas of a given historical period. Hegel had freed history from metaphysics—he had made it dialectical; but his conception of history was essentially idealistic. But now idealism was driven from its last refuge, the philosophy of history; now a materialistic treatment of history was propounded, and a method found of explaining man’s “knowing” by his “being” instead of, as heretofore, his “being” by his “knowing.” (p. 621)

What this passage offers is an explanation of how ideas are transmitted to human beings: through the institutions, philosophical systems, religious organizations, and arts found in a given society at a given time—that is, through the superstructure. Capitalism is not only an economic system but also something that affects attitudes, values, personality types, and culture in general.

How the base affects the superstructure is a problem that has caused Marxists a considerable amount of aggravation. Economic relations may be the ultimately determining ones, but they are not the only ones, and it is a great oversimplification to say that the superstructure is automatically shaped by the base and is nothing but a reflection of it—a position sometimes described as “vulgar Marxism.” This point of view fails to recognize that an economic system is dynamic and always in a state of change—as is a given superstructure—and that people, leading real lives and capable of all kinds of actions, are involved also. In the following discussion of superstructure I focus on the public arts and the mass media, institutions that many Marxists claim

Figure 2.1 Influences on the Superstructure

are crucial to the understanding of how consciousness is determined, shaped, and manipulated.

Figure 2.1 displays the ideas just discussed, in diagrammatic form. All of this might seem rather abstract and irrelevant until one recognizes that the consciousness of people has important social, economic, and political implications.

FALSE CONSCIOUSNESS

It is important for the ruling class to affect people's consciousness by giving them certain ideas; in this way the wealthy, who benefit most from the social arrangements in a capitalist country, maintain the status quo. Marx (1964) explains how the ruling class operates:

The ideas of the ruling class are, in every age, the ruling ideas: i.e., the class which is the dominant *material* force in society is at the same time its dominant *intellectual* force. The class which has the means of material production at its disposal, has control at the same time over the means of mental production, so that in consequence the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are, in general, subject to it. The dominant ideas are nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant material relationships, the dominant material relationships grasped as ideas, and thus of the relationships which make one class the ruling one; they are consequently the ideas of its dominance. The individuals composing the ruling class possess among other things consciousness, and therefore

think. Insofar, therefore, as they rule as a class and determine the whole extent of an epoch, it is self-evident that they do this in their whole range and thus, among other things, rule also as thinkers, as producers of ideas, and regulate the production and distribution of the ideas of their age. Consequently their ideas are the ruling ideas of their age. (p. 78)

According to this thesis, the ideas of a given age are those promulgated and popularized by the ruling class in its own interest. Generally speaking, then, the ideas people have are the ideas that the ruling class wants them to have.

The ruling class, we must recognize, believes its own messages. This is because it has within itself a group of conceptualizing ideologists who, as Marx (1964) puts it, “make it their chief source of livelihood to develop and perfect the illusions of the class about itself” (p. 79). By *ideology*, I mean any system of logically coherent and widely applicable sociopolitical beliefs. The ruling class, according to this theory, propagates an ideology that justifies its status and makes it difficult for ordinary people to recognize that they are being exploited and victimized.

This notion—that the ruling class manipulates and exploits the masses of people—is one of the central arguments of modern Marxist cultural analysis. As Donald Lazere (1977) notes,

Applied to any aspect of culture, Marxist method seeks to explicate the manifest and latent or coded reflections of modes of material production, ideological values, class relations and structures of social power—racial or sexual as well as politico-economic—or the state of consciousness of people in a precise historical or socio-economic situation. . . . The Marxist method, recently in varying degrees of combination with structuralism and semiology, has provided an incisive analytic tool for studying the political signification in every facet of contemporary culture, including popular entertainment in TV and films, music, mass circulation books, newspaper and magazine features, comics, fashion, tourism, sports and games, as well as such acculturating institutions as education, religion, the family and child-rearing, social and sexual relations between men and women—all the patterns of work, play, and other customs of everyday life. . . . The most frequent theme in Marxist cultural criticism is the way the prevalent mode of production and the ideology of the ruling class in any society dominate every phase of culture, and at present, the way capitalist production and ideology dominate American culture, along with that of the rest of the world that American business and culture have colonized. This domination is perpetuated both through overt propaganda in political rhetoric, news reporting, advertising and public

relations, and through the often unconscious absorption of capitalistic values by creators and consumers in all the above aspects of the culture of everyday life. (pp. 755–756)

This passage suggests the all-encompassing nature of the Marxist approach and some of the most important objects of its attention. Quite obviously, the mass media and popular culture are centrally important in the spread of false consciousness, in leading people to believe that “whatever is, is right.” From this perspective the mass media and popular culture constitute a crucial link between the institutions of society (and the superstructure in general) and individual consciousness.

German media theorist Hans Magnus Enzenberger (1974) has attacked the notion of manipulation as being useful but perhaps a bit dated:

The New Left of the sixties has reduced the development of the media to a single concept—that of manipulation. This concept was originally extremely useful for heuristic purposes and has made possible a great many individual analytical investigations, but it now threatens to degenerate into a mere slogan which conceals more than it is able to illuminate, and therefore itself requires analysis. (pp. 100–101)

Enzenberger argues that the notion of manipulation is ultimately grounded on the assumption (the unspoken premise) that “there is such a thing as pure, unmanipulated truth,” a notion he finds questionable, and one that is too limited. Ultimately, he argues, the left’s antagonism toward mass media benefits capitalism.

Enzenberger’s hope is, perhaps, somewhat utopian. His notion is that all media manipulate; it is in the very nature of media:

There is no such thing as unmanipulated writing, filming, or broadcasting. The question is therefore not whether the media are manipulated, but who manipulates them. A revolutionary plan should not require the manipulators to disappear; on the contrary, it must make everyone a manipulator. (p. 104)

At this point we have moved away from analysis per se, and I will not pursue Enzenberger’s thought any further. It may be that the theory of manipulation has deficiencies and drawbacks, but it still remains a central concept of Marxist media analysis for the simple reason that, as Marxists view society, the media are tools of manipulation. (The same argument about media manipulation can be used against socialist and communist countries, although Marxist critics as a rule do not like to concern themselves with such matters.)

IDEOLOGY

Karl Mannheim's (1936) *Ideology and Utopia*, a classic work in political theory, offers us an interesting insight into the nature of ideology. Mannheim writes:

The concept "ideology" reflects the one discovery which has emerged from political conflict, namely, that ruling groups can in their thinking become so intensively interest-bound to a situation that they are simply no longer able to see certain facts which would undermine their sense of domination. There is implicit in the word "ideology" the insight that in certain situations the collective unconscious of certain groups obscures the real condition of society both to itself and to others and thereby stabilizes it. (p. 40)

Opposing the ideologists, for Mannheim, are people he describes as "utopians" who are drawn from groups that see only the bad things in society. Ideologists, we may say, see no evil and utopians see no good. Both are mistaken, for most societies have a combination of good and bad things about them.

A more contemporary discussion of the concept of ideology is found in the Introduction to Meenakshi Gigi Durham and Douglas M. Kellner's (2001) *Media and Cultural Studies: Key Works*:

The concept of *ideology* forces readers to perceive that all cultural texts have the distinct biases, interests, and embedded values, reproducing the point of view of their producers and often the values of the dominant social groups. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels coined the term "ideology" in the 1840s to describe the dominant ideas and representations in a given social order . . . During the capitalist era, values of individualism, profit, competition, and the market became dominant, articulating the ideology of the new bourgeois class which was consolidating its class power. Today, in our high tech and global capitalism, ideas that promote globalization, new technologies, and an unrestrained market economy are becoming the prevailing ideas—conceptions that further the interests of the new governing elites in the global economy . . . Ideologies appear natural, they seem to be common sense, and thus are often invisible and elude criticism. Marx and Engels began a critique of ideology, attempting to show how ruling ideas reproduce dominant social interests trying to naturalize, idealize, and legitimate the existing society and its institutions and values. (p. 6)

If we direct our analysis of ideology to the media, we find that popular culture or mass-mediated culture found in capitalist nations has a mythologizing function. The media are owned and controlled by the ruling class and are used to generate false consciousness in the masses, or in Marxist terms, the proletariat. People generally are not aware that they hold ideological beliefs because they seem so natural and they are so all pervasive. Ideology pervades the films, television programs, newspapers, magazines, and books found in bourgeois societies and while people don't recognize that ideology and false consciousness shapes their thinking, this does not mean the masses aren't affected by ideology. They haven't brought the ideologies they hold to consciousness and may not be able to articulate the ideological beliefs they have, but from a Marxist perspective, most people in bourgeois societies have ideological beliefs that shape their thinking and behavior. The Frankfurt School, discussed in the next section, offered a comprehensive Marxist critique of American media and culture that influenced many media critics over the years.



THE FRANKFURT SCHOOL

In Germany in the 1930s, a number of media theorists, known as “the Frankfurt School,” applied Marxist theories to the study of media and culture. They came to the United States in the 1940s, escaping from Nazi Germany, and became very influential. Among them were thinkers such as Theodor W. Adorno, Herbert Marcuse, and Max Horkheimer. They believed that the mass media in the United States functioned as a means of generating false consciousness in the American people and thus prevented history from playing out as it should have, according to Marxist theory. The media distracted working-class Americans from recognizing the degree to which they were exploited by the ruling class and revolting against them. The ruling classes, according to the Frankfurt School, distracted the masses with mindless entertainments and bought them off by getting them involved with consumer culture.

Adorno (1957) offers a typical example of the Frankfurt School's perspectives on the mass media and mass culture:

Rigid institutionalization transforms modern mass culture into a medium of undreamed psychological control. The repetitiveness, the selfsameness,

and the ubiquity of modern mass culture tend to make for automatized reactions and to weaken the forces of individual resistance. . . . The increasing strength of modern mass culture is further enhanced by changes in the sociological structure of the audience. The old cultured elite does not exist anymore, the modern intelligentsia only partially corresponds to it. At the same time, huge strata of the population formerly unacquainted with art have become cultural consumers. (p. 476)

The Frankfurt School has been criticized as being elitist. Some scholars have suggested that the Frankfurt School's hostility to popular culture and the "masses" was a result of their status loss and the shock of coming from hierarchical societies in Europe to an egalitarian one in the United States. There may also have been an element of nostalgia in members of the Frankfurt School for a period when members of cultural elites were awarded high status and treated with great deference, in contrast to the situation in the United States where economic elites are awarded high status. Whatever the case, the Frankfurt School did offer an important, though perhaps somewhat extreme, critique of the media and popular culture. Now, with the development of the Internet and everything connected with it, the robotic "mass man" the members of the Frankfurt School wrote about seems to have disappeared and been replaced by an anarchic multitude of bloggers and video makers.

In his book, *Media Culture: Cultural Studies, Identity and Politics Between the Modern and Postmodern*, Douglas Kellner (1995) offers an assessment and critique of the Frankfurt School. He writes:

Adorno's analysis of popular music, Lowenthal's studies of popular literature and magazines, Herzog's studies of radio soap operas, and the perspectives and critiques of mass culture developed in Horkheimer and Adorno's famous study of the culture industries (1972) provided many examples of the usefulness of the Frankfurt School's approach. Moreover, in their theories of the culture industries and critiques of mass culture, they were the first to systematically analyze and criticize mass-mediated culture and communications within critical social theory. . . . Yet there are serious flaws in the original program of critical theory which requires a radical reconstruction of the classical model of the culture industries. . . . Overcoming the limitations of the classical model would include: more concrete analysis of the political economy of the media and the processes of the production of culture; more empirical and historical research into the construction of media industries and their interaction with other

social institutions; more studies of audience reception and media effects; and the incorporation of new cultural theories and methods into a reconstructed critical theory of culture and the media. (p. 29)

We must remember that the Frankfurt School flourished many years ago and despite its flaws, Kellner (1995) concludes, “Although the Frankfurt School approach is partial and one-sided, it does provide tools to criticize the ideological and debased forms of media culture and the ways that it reinforces ideologies which legitimate forms of oppression” (p. 30).

CLASS CONFLICT

For Marx, history is based on unending class conflict—unending, that is, until the establishment of a communist society, in which classes disappear and, with them, conflict. Marx (1964) writes:

The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles. Freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, guild-master and journeyman, in a word oppressor and oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another, carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight, a fight that each time ended either in a revolutionary reconstitution of society at large, or in the common ruin of the contending classes. (p. 200)

The two classes that Marx talks about are the bourgeoisie, who own the factories and corporations and form the ruling class, and the proletariat, the huge mass of workers who are exploited by this ruling class and whose condition becomes increasingly more desperate.

The bourgeoisie, according to this theory, avert class conflict by indoctrinating the proletariat with “ruling-class ideas,” such as the notion of “the self-made man” and the idea that the social and economic arrangements in a given society are “natural” and not “historical.” If social arrangements are natural, they cannot be modified; thus one must accept a given order as inevitable. Marxists argue that the social and economic arrangements found in a given society at a given time are historical—created by people and therefore capable of being changed by people. The bourgeoisie try to convince everyone that capitalism is natural and therefore eternal, but this idea, say the Marxists, is patently false, and it is the duty of Marxist analysts to demonstrate this.

One of the approaches the ruling class uses is to convince people that there are no classes in a given society or that class is somehow incidental and irrelevant.

Thus in the United States we have the myth of a “classless” society because we have not had a hereditary aristocracy and because members of the upper class tend to be friendly in social encounters. The president of a major corporation might call the doorman or janitor by his first name, but this, to the Marxists, is a means of camouflaging the real social relations that exist—although the United States, with its large middle class, does present special problems to Marxist analysts, as the likelihood of a revolution seems rather distant.

Nevertheless, the mass media still perform their job of distracting people from the realities of U.S. society (poverty, racism, sexism, and so on) and of “clouding their minds” with ideas that the ruling class wishes them to have. In some cases, the media offer heroes who reflect the bourgeois, ruling-class line and who reinforce and indoctrinate the masses who follow their activities in books, television programs, films, and so on. Generally speaking, the media serve either to mask class differences or to act as apologists for the ruling class in an effort to avert class conflict and prevent changes in the political order.

But the fact remains that for Marxists, classes exist, and members of opposing classes are locked into hostile and mutually destructive relationships. As Marx (1964) has written, “Society as a whole is more and more splitting up into two great hostile camps, into two great classes directly facing each other—bourgeoisie and proletariat” (p. 201). The resolution of this dialectic is, for Marxists, inevitable, even though the media controlled by the ruling class or bourgeoisie may temporarily prevent members of the proletariat from attaining true consciousness of their situation.



HENRI LEFEBVRE

Henri Lefebvre (1968/1984), a French Marxist, has taken the concept of class conflict and manipulation and developed it into the notion that people living in capitalist societies are living in a state of “terror.” He explains this notion as follows. First, any society with radical class differences, with a small privileged class at the top and a mass of people living in poverty, has to be maintained through compulsion and persuasion. Second, such a class-stratified society is bound to become overly repressive and must develop sophisticated ways of masking repression and making unsuspecting individuals the instruments of their own repression and the repression of others. Finally, we arrive at the “terrorist” society, in which

compulsion and the illusion of freedom converge; unacknowledged compulsions besiege the lives of communities (and of their individual members) and organize them according to a general strategy. . . . In a terrorist

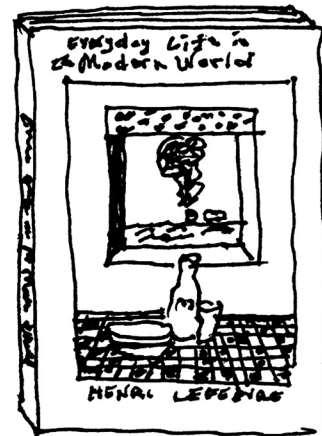
society terror is diffuse, violence is always latent, pressure is exerted from all sides on its members, who can only avoid it and shift its weight by a super-human effort; each member is a terrorist because he wants to be in power (if only briefly). . . . [t]he “system” . . . has a hold on every member separately and submits every member to the whole, that is, to a strategy, a hidden end, objectives unknown to all but those in power, and that no one questions. (p. 147)

This notion that people who live in capitalist societies are living in a state of terror may seem extreme at first, but it may help to explain why many Americans feel pressured and anxious about their lives and their prospects for the future.

Lefebvre first wrote the book containing the preceding quote in 1968, when Marxism seemed to have answers for people and when the critiques it made of bourgeois societies seemed terribly telling. Marxists spoke from a sense of moral superiority when they criticized class-ridden capitalist societies, full of exploited workers and impoverished people.

The events that took place in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union in the 1990s showed that the Marxist-Leninist governments in these states only pretended to rule in the people’s interest. They were class-ridden and corrupt, and grossly inefficient as well. The rapid decline of communism as a viable form of government has cast a dark shadow on Lefebvre’s criticisms of capitalist societies. In reality, it could be argued that it was the communist societies that were terrorist, both overtly (in their use of military power and the secret police) and in terms of their impact on the psyches of their citizens.

And yet it strikes me that Lefebvre’s argument has some merit, and that his notion that people who live in bourgeois capitalist societies live in a state of psychological terror has some currency. In our everyday lives, we are under constant “attack” (by print advertisements, radio and television commercials, and programs carried by the mass media) even though we may not recognize that we are being besieged or may not be able to articulate our feelings. (The terrors raised by these attacks may include growing old in a youth-crazed culture, being fat in a thin-crazed culture, being poor in a wealth-obsessed culture, being a person of color in a white-dominated culture, being a woman in a male-dominated culture, always being told or shown that we are suffering from deprivation, whether relative or absolute, and so on, endlessly.)



Whether these pressures (if you don't want to use the word *terror*) we feel are primarily the result of living in complex, modern urban societies or of our specific social, economic, and political arrangements is a question that has yet to be answered. For Lefebvre, the answer is clear.

ALIENATION

The term *alienation* suggests separation and distance; it contains within it the word *alien*, a stranger in a society who has no connections with others, no ties, no "liens" of any sort. This notion is of central importance to an understanding of Marxism, which derives alienation from the capitalist economic system. Capitalism may be able to produce goods and materialist abundance for large numbers of people (although, ultimately, at the expense of others), but it necessarily generates alienation, and all classes suffer from this, whether they recognize it or not.

There is a link between alienation and consciousness. People who live in a state of alienation (or condition of alienation) suffer from "false consciousness"—a consciousness that takes the form of the ideology that dominates their thinking. But in addition to this false consciousness, alienation may be said to be unconscious, in that people do not recognize that they are, in fact, alienated. One reason for this may be that alienation is so all-pervasive that it is invisible and hard to take hold of.

For Fromm and for many other interpreters of Marx, it is alienation that is the core of Marx's theory. As Fromm (1962) has noted,

The concept of alienation has become increasingly the focus of the discussion of Marx's ideas in England, France, Germany and the U.S.A. . . . The majority of those involved in this debate . . . take a position that alienation and the task of overcoming it is the center of Marx's socialist humanism and the aim of socialism; furthermore that there is a complete continuity between the young and the mature Marx, in spite of changes in terminology and emphasis. (pp. 43–44)

This is a debatable position, Fromm adds. Whatever the case, the concept of alienation is very useful to analysts of popular culture.

The following quotation from Marx (1964) serves to illustrate his views on alienation:

In what does this alienation of labour consist? First, that the work is *external* to the worker, that it is not a part of his nature, that consequently he does not fulfill himself in his work but denies himself, has a

feeling of misery, not of wellbeing, does not develop freely a physical and mental energy, but is physically exhausted and mentally debased. The worker therefore feels himself at home only during his leisure, whereas at work he feels homeless. His work is not voluntary but imposed, *forced labour*. It is not the satisfaction of a need, but only a *means* for satisfying other needs. Its alien character is clearly shown by the fact that as soon as there is no physical or other compulsion it is avoided like the plague. Finally, the alienated character of work for the worker appears in the fact that it is not his work but work for someone else, that in work he does not belong to himself but to another person. . . .

The *alienation* of the worker in his product means not only that his labour becomes an object, takes on its own existence, but that it exists outside him, independently, and alien to him, and that it stands opposed to him as an autonomous power. The life which he has given to the object sets itself against him as an alien and hostile force. (pp. 169–170)

Thus people become separated or estranged from their work, from friends, from themselves, and from life. A person's work, which is central to identity and sense of self, becomes separated from him or her and ends up, actually, as a destructive force. Workers experience themselves as objects, things that are acted upon, and not as subjects, active forces in the world. The things people produce become "commodities," objects separated, somehow, from the workers' labor. As people become increasingly more alienated, they become the prisoners of their alienated needs and end up, as Marx puts it, "the *self-conscious* and *self-acting* commodity" (qtd. in Fromm, 1962, p. 51).

In this situation the mass media play a crucial role. They provide momentary gratifications for the alienated spirit, they distract the alienated individual from his or her misery (and from consciousness of the objective facts of his or her situation), and, with the institution of advertising, they stimulate desire, leading people to work harder and harder. There is a kind of vicious cycle here: If, as Marx argues, work in capitalist societies alienates people, then the more people work, the more they become alienated. In order to find some means of escaping their alienation (which they do not recognize as a condition, but the symptoms of which they feel), they engage in various forms of consumption, all of which cost money, so that they are forced to work increasingly hard to escape from the effects of their work. Advertising has replaced the Puritan ethic as the chief means of motivating Americans to work hard; thus advertising must be seen as occupying a central role in advanced capitalist societies.

There is a debate among Marxist critics about the status of Franz Kafka, author of *The Trial*, *The Castle*, and many other important works. Kafka's



writings, critics suggest, show characters struggling with vast, anonymous bureaucracies and reflect the alienation that is so dominant in capitalist societies. The central question many critics argue about is whether it was Kafka's intent to suggest that alienation is a universal condition (and not just tied to capitalism).

Conservative Marxist critics attack Kafka for arguing that alienation is an inevitable condition of human beings and not recognizing that it could be overcome in socialist countries. Kafka did not understand, these critics argue, that alienation is historical, not natural, and he failed to suggest or to show in his stories how alienation might be overcome—through the establishment of socialist societies (i.e., classless ones ruled by communists). Liberal

Marxist critics, in contrast, assert that Kafka's work shows that alienation can persist even in socialist countries (which are characterized by enormous bureaucracies), and that it is valuable because it points that out. Kafka's stories make people aware of this alienation, and this ultimately suggests that changes should be made and that alienation can be eradicated.

In his book, *Alienation and Modern Man*, Fritz Pappenheim (1967), a German Marxist, discusses alienation in the work of Franz Kafka and considers the impact of alienation in American culture and society. As he explains,

Man's alienation and his anonymous way of existing have been described with methodic and terrifying precision by Kafka, who wrote of himself: "I am separated from all things by a hollow space, and I do not even reach to its boundaries." The main characters in the novels *The Trial* and *The Castle* are completely depersonalized and reduced to mere masks. This loss of identity leads to a state of radical anonymity, which the author symbolizes by not using a name but merely a letter of the alphabet to refer to them.

American novelists also have described man's fate of alienation and homelessness. We shall mention only Thomas Wolfe, who devotes much of his work to recording the painful experiences of the uprooted man, the nostalgic exile and wanderer. . . . Many individuals have found their own lives portrayed in Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*. It shows Willy Loman, the "other-directed man" personified—striving all his life to be popular and "liked" but remaining absolutely lonesome and irrelevant, forever dreaming that "personality always wins the day" but in reality, destined, as his wife fears, "to fall into his grave like an old dog." (p. 34)

One reason *Death of a Salesman* has such an impact on American audiences is that people can see that, in many respects, they are like Willy Loman and like him suffer from alienation. And now, tragically, for a variety of reasons, increasing numbers of American actually suffer from homelessness.

This critical debate about Kafka and alienation, let me suggest, has been settled by history. Today, very few people take seriously the notion that only “socialist realism” is acceptable in art and literature, and “socialist realist” criticism has all but disappeared. But our sense that we all suffer from alienation remains with us and is even stronger as the institutions we developed to help us deal with our sense of isolation are weakening.



THE CONSUMER SOCIETY

Advertising, as I have suggested, is an essential institution in advanced capitalist societies because it is necessary to motivate people to work hard so that they can accumulate money, which they can then use to buy things. But in addition, people must be driven to consume, must be made crazy to consume, for it is consumption that maintains the economic system. Thus the alienation a capitalist system generates is functional, for the anxieties and miseries such a system generates tend to be assuaged by impulsive consumption. As Marx has written about the effects of capitalism,

Every man speculates upon creating a *new* need in another in order to force him to a new sacrifice, to place him in a new dependence, and to entice him into a new kind of pleasure and thereby into economic ruin. Everyone tries to establish over others an *alien* power in order to find there the satisfaction of his own egoistic need. (qtd. in Fromm, 1962, p. 50)

Advertising generates anxieties, creates dissatisfactions, and, in general, feeds on the alienation present in capitalist societies to maintain the consumer culture.

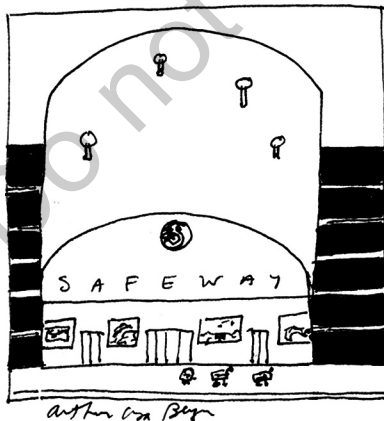
There is nothing that advertising will not do, use, or co-opt to achieve its goals. If it has to debase sexuality, co-opt the women’s rights movement, merchandise cancer (via cigarettes), seduce children, terrorize the masses, or employ any other tactics, it will. One thing that advertising does is divert people’s attention from social and political concerns and steer that attention toward narcissistic and private concerns. Through advertising, individual

self-gratification is developed into obsession, and thus alienation is strengthened and the sense of community weakened.

Thus advertising is more than a merchandising tool; it takes control of everyday life and dominates social relationships. At the same time, advertising leads people to turn inward and to separate themselves from one another. It also imposes on society a collective form of taste. Advertising is a kind of popular art the mass media carries, an art form that persuades and convinces and thus has both an immediate mission and a long-range mission. The immediate mission is to sell goods; the long-range mission is to maintain the class system. In order to sell goods, advertising has to change attitudes, lifestyles, customs, habits, and preferences while at the same time maintaining the economic system that benefits from these changes.

Wolfgang Fritz Haug, a German Marxist, has developed a concept relevant to this discussion. Haug suggests that those who control the industries in capitalist societies have learned to fuse sexuality onto commodities and thus have gained greater control of that aspect of people's lives that is of most interest to the ruling classes—the purchasing of goods and services. In his book *Critique of Commodity Aesthetics: Appearance, Sexuality, and Advertising in Capitalist Society*, Haug (1986) argues that the advertising industry, the servant of capitalist interests, has learned how to mold and exploit human sexuality, to alter human need and instinct structures. In his postscript to the eighth German edition of the book, he writes:

It would be particularly absurd in the case of commodity aesthetics to ignore the fact that its current dominant form is the aesthetics of the monopoly-commodity, i.e., the form in which transnational enterprises in particular intervene directly in the collective imagination of cultures. (p. 11)



Thus this power to use the appearance of products as a means of stimulating desire for them (the aestheticization of commodities) is now a worldwide phenomenon, and people in many different countries are affected by it as it “intervenes” in their cultures by capturing, so to speak, people's imaginations. People have the illusion that they make their own decisions about what to purchase and what to do, but, according to Haug, these decisions are made for them to a remarkable degree. Their acts turn out to be almost automatic responses to “stimuli” generated by advertisers and the commodities themselves.

On the cover of *Critique of Commodity Aesthetics* is a remarkable photograph of pigeons in St. Mark's

Square in Venice. The photo, taken from a height, shows that the pigeons are arranged so that they spell out *Coca-Cola*. To get this effect, workers scattered birdseed to form the lettering, and the birds flocked to the seed. As Haug explains,

The pigeons did not gather with the intention of forming the trademark but to satisfy their hunger. But equally the seed was not scattered to feed the pigeons but to employ them on its tracks as extras. The arrangement is totally alien and external to pigeons. While they are consuming their feed, capital is subsuming, and consuming, them. This picture, a triumph of capitalist advertising technique, symbolizes a fundamental aspect of capitalism. (p. 118)

This photograph is most instructive. We (human beings living in societies dominated by capitalism and commodity aesthetics) are like the pigeons in the photograph; we fly to the things we want to consume under the illusion that we are making individual choices and decisions, whereas in reality we are being motivated and manipulated by forces beyond our control.

In a later book titled *Commodity Aesthetics, Ideology, and Culture*, Haug (1987) modified his views somewhat, arguing for a paradigm shift from what was essentially an economic reading of Marx, which derived ideology, everyday life, and mass culture fairly directly from economic conditions. Haug's new perspective focuses on the development of action "from below" and the capacity people have to resist domination and manipulation in the spheres of culture and economics, which he now sees as separate and distinct.

Nevertheless, the photograph of the pigeons strikes a chord. It shows how our actions can seem to be motivated purely by personal desire and interest, yet in reality be shaped and controlled by others, for their own purposes. The main instruments of this manipulation of people (as of the pigeons) are advertising and the mass media, along with allied industries such as industrial design.

In his book *The Mechanical Bride: Folklore of Industrial Man*, Marshall McLuhan (1951/1967) analyzes advertisements (and comics) as cultural indicators and offers a number of brilliant insights into what specific advertisements reveal about American culture. In a chapter titled "Love-Goddess Assembly Line," he compares Hollywood and advertising:

So Hollywood is like the ad agencies in constantly striving to enter and control the unconscious minds of a vast public, not in order to understand it or to present these minds, as the serious novelist does, but in order to



exploit them for profit. . . . The ad agencies and Hollywood, in their different ways, are always trying to get inside the public mind in order to impose their collective dreams on that inner stage. (p. 97)

The irony is that we are all convinced of our freedom to make our own choices, because we believe our minds are “inviolable,” when in fact our choices have been imposed on us, in subtle ways, by the advertising industry. This illusion of autonomy makes us all the more susceptible to manipulation and exploitation.

Advertising is part of what Enzenberger (1974) has called “the consciousness industry” or “the mind industry.” In a chapter titled “The Industrialization of the Mind,” he has described the ultimate selling job done by advertising and the media:

The mind industry’s main business and concern is not to sell its product: it is to “sell” the existing order, to perpetuate the prevailing pattern of man’s domination by man, no matter who runs the society, and by what means. Its main task is to expand and train our consciousness—in order to exploit it. (p. 10)



Advertising can be seen as an industry that uses radical methods for conservative reasons. There is, then, a special irony to the famous phrase used in the advertising industry, “Let’s run it up the flagpole and see if anyone salutes.” This is meant to be a testimony to advertising’s pragmatism and openness to new ideas. What people are “saluting” when they do salute, however, is the old order.

In the “So Neiman Marcus” advertisement, we see a beautiful woman, shown in profile, wearing what looks like gold jewelry, and a red dress. She represents, for many women, an ideal that they wish to emulate and to which they can aspire, and, as John Berger explains, of whom women can be envious. Woman, it is suggested, can transform themselves by patronizing Neiman Marcus and purchasing David Yurman products.

JOHN BERGER ON ADVERTISING

John Berger is an English Marxist who made a television series about advertising and consumer culture and also wrote an influential book, *Ways of Seeing*, based on the series. He offers an important insight into the way advertising, which he calls publicity, works. Berger (1972) writes:

Publicity is not merely an assembly of competing messages: it is a language in itself, which is always being used to make the same general proposal. Within publicity choices are offered . . . but publicity as a system only makes a single proposal.

It proposes to each of us that we transform ourselves, or our lives, by buying something more.

This more, it proposes, will make us in some way richer—even though we will be poorer by having spent our money.

Publicity persuades us of such a transformation by showing us people who have apparently been transformed and are, as a result, enviable. The state of being envied is what constitutes glamour. And publicity is the process of manufacturing glamour. . . . Publicity is never a celebration of pleasure-in-itself. Publicity is always about the future buyer. It offers him an image of himself made glamorous by the product or opportunity it is trying to sell. The image then makes him envious of himself as he might be. Yet what makes the self-which-he-might-be enviable? The envy of others. Publicity is about social relations, not objects. (p. 131)

Berger's notion that advertising focuses on being envied and our being envious about ourselves if we purchase the right product or service explains a great deal about how advertising works. We must recognize that, ultimately, it is the sign value of the things we buy that is crucial—not their supposed functions.

BOURGEOIS HEROES

A great deal of media analysis involves dealing with heroic figures—men, women, animals, robots—who have a number of different functions in films, television series, comic books, commercials, and other dramatic forms. For some people, heroes and heroines—and I am using these terms in the sense of characters who are important to dramas and other public art forms (so that villains must also be considered)—reflect their ages and societies. For others, heroes “shape” their ages and help transform their societies. In addition, heroes offer people models to imitate and thus help them attain identities. At times these models are “deviant,” so some heroes and heroines disturb whatever equilibrium society has obtained.

For Marxists, bourgeois heroes and heroines function to maintain the status quo by “peddling” capitalist ideology in disguised form and by helping keep consumer lust at a high pitch. One of the ideas bourgeois heroes sell is that of individualism, a value that takes many different forms (the self-made man, the

American dream, the “me generation,” and so on) but is always connected to alienation, although few people see the connection. One of the early English Marxists, Christopher Caudwell, discusses heroes in his book *Studies and Further Studies in a Dying Culture*. In his chapter on T. E. Lawrence, Caudwell (1971) writes:

If any culture produced heroes, it should surely be bourgeois culture. For the hero is an outstanding individual and bourgeoisdom is the creed of individualism. . . . Indeed, bourgeois history, for bourgeois schools, is simply the struggles of heroes with their antagonists and difficulties. (p. 21)

This view of heroism, according to Caudwell, is naive, because it does not recognize that heroes are connected, intimately, to their societies and social and economic phenomena. He continues:

What is it that constitutes heroism? Personality? No; men with the flattest and simplest personalities have become heroes. Is it courage? A man can do no more than risk and perhaps lose his life, and millions did that in the Great War. Is it success—the utilization of events to fulfill a purpose, something brilliant and dazzling in the execution, a kind of luring and forcing Fortune to obey one, as with that type of all heroes, Julius Caesar? (p. 21)

None of the characteristics Caudwell mentions here is adequate for heroism, as he sees it, for heroism is independent of people’s motives and is based on the “social significance” of people’s acts. The heroes we tend to celebrate are what Caudwell calls “charlatans,” who “have power over men but not over matter.” Charlatans lack a societal reference and exist as alienated and alienating curiosities. “Society,” Marx (1964) has noted, “is not merely an aggregate of individuals; it is the sum of the relations in which these individuals stand to one another” (p. 96). Thus the hero, for the Marxist, is the man or woman who understands this and who fights for a new social order—one in which the bourgeois values of individualism, consumer lust, and upper-class domination are smashed.

HEGEMONY

Raymond Williams (1977) has described the development of the concept of hegemony as “one of the major turning points in Marxist cultural theory” (p. 108). In common usage, *hegemony* means domination or rule by one state or nation over another. Marxists use the term in a different manner: Rule is based on overt power and, at times, on coercion, but hegemony is subtler and more pervasive. As Williams explains, rule is political and, in critical times, is

based on coercion or force (p. 108). Hegemony, on the other hand, is a complicated intermeshing of forces of a political, social, and cultural nature. Hegemony transcends (but also includes) two other concepts: culture, which is how we shape our lives, and ideology, which, from a Marxist perspective, expresses and is a projection of specific class interests.

Hegemony transcends culture as a concept because culture can be seen as being tied to “specific distributions of power and influence,” or the mode of production and relations that stem from it. And hegemony transcends ideology as a concept because ideology is limited to systematized and formalized meanings that are more or less conscious. Ideology may be masked and camouflaged in films and television programs and other works carried by mass media, but the discerning Marxist can elicit these ideologies and point them out.

This is valuable, but only to a point, because ideological analysis does not cover enough territory, does not lead to the kind of profound analysis that hegemonic analysis makes possible. Williams (1977) explains this as follows, saying about hegemony:

It is distinct in its refusal to equate consciousness with the articulate formal system which can be and ordinarily is abstracted as “ideology.” It of course does not exclude the articulate and formal meanings, values and beliefs which a dominant class develops and propagates. But it does not equate these with consciousness, or rather it does not reduce consciousness to them. Instead it sees the relations of dominance and subordination, in their forms as practical consciousness, as in effect a saturation of the whole process of living—not only of political and economic activity, nor only of manifest social activity, but of the whole substance of lived identities and relationships, to such a depth that the pressures and limits of what can ultimately be seen as a specific economic, political and cultural system seem to most of us the pressures and limits of simple experience and common sense. Hegemony is then not only the articulate upper level of “ideology,” nor are its forms of control only those ordinarily seen as “manipulation” or “indoctrination.” It is a whole body of practices and expectations, over the whole of living: our senses, our assignments of energy, our shaping perceptions of ourselves and our world. It is a lived system of meanings and values—constitutive and constituting—which as they are experienced as practices appear as reciprocally confirming. It thus constitutes a sense of reality for most people in the society, a sense of the absolute because



RAYMOND WILLIAMS

experienced reality beyond which it is very difficult for most members of the society to move, in most areas of their lives. (pp. 109–110)

Hegemony thus is what might be described as “that which goes without saying,” or the givens or commonsense realities of the world, which, it turns out, serve an ultimate purpose—that of maintaining the dominance of the ruling class. The concept of hegemonial ideological domination was originally developed by an Italian Marxist, Antonio Gramsci.



The works carried by the mass media can be seen, then, not merely as carriers of ideology that manipulate and indoctrinate people with certain views. The media, as unwitting instruments of hegemonic domination, have a much broader and deeper influence—they shape people’s very ideas of themselves and the world; they shape people’s worldviews. A Chilean Marxist, Ariel Dorfman, offers us a good example of how this process works. In his book *The Empire’s Old Clothes: What the Lone Ranger, Babar, and Other Innocent Heroes do to Our Minds* Dorfman (1983) writes:

[CAP]

Once you have penetrated the invisible network of everyday domination which lurks behind the genres and characters analyzed here (children’s mass literature of assorted varieties, superheroes, the infantilization of knowledge in magazines such as *Reader’s Digest*) you are left with something far more valuable than a mere guidebook on how to read popular culture. What unfolds before us is a veritable black-and-blueprint of the ways in which men and women repress themselves in contemporary society, the way they transform reality’s unsettling questions into docile, comforting, bland answers. (p. 7).

For Dorfman, who is the coauthor of the book *How to Read Donald Duck*, the mass media and popular culture have hidden social and political messages; these turn our attention away from real problems found in capitalist societies and lead to quietism and acceptance.

When we use the concept of hegemony we must look very deeply into the work we are analyzing and elicit from it not only its ideological content but also its even more fundamental (and perhaps more insidious) ethnological, worldview-generating, content. We might think of hegemonic analysis as analogous to the work psychoanalysts do when they probe beneath symptoms to underlying root causes in the personality structure of patients. Williams says that hegemonic analysis is “cultural,” but in a special sense, in that it connects culture to the patterns of subordination and domination that exist in a given society.

Table 2.1 Comparison of Paradigm and Hegemony

Law	Popular arts
Theory	Ideology
Paradigm	Hegemony
Science	Media analysis

Let me offer another analogy that might be useful here. The concept of hegemony is similar to that of paradigm, as used by philosophers of science. The term *paradigm* refers to an entire system of thought characterizing a historical period and plays a major role in shaping the kind of science found in an era. Paradigm shifts occur in science every hundred years or so (or perhaps even less often), and with each paradigm shift, scientists see the world in new ways and work accordingly. Table 2.1 provides a comparison of *hegemony* and *paradigm*:

In both cases, the ultimate determinant of thought and behavior is not recognized, because it is so all-pervasive and fundamental. And just as the theory “explains” the law (or the event in nature that can be explained by law), so the paradigm encompasses all the theories that are held. Likewise, the concept of hegemony encompasses all that exists in a society—ideological notions, works of popular art carried by the media, and so forth. And this makes the analysis of media difficult, because it is hard to put one’s finger on all the things one takes for granted and assumes are simply part of reality. We are, all too often, captives of the categories of bourgeois thought—the very thought we hope to expose as the instrument of our own domination.

THE PROBLEM OF MEDIA CONSOLIDATION

One of the topics of most concern to Marxist critics of the media (and many non-Marxist critics as well) is that of the increasing global consolidation of the media. If the media have the ability to shape the consciousness of large numbers of people—and media organizations claim they have that power when they sell advertising space or time—then the fact that a relatively small number of people control the media (and thus have enormous power) is alarming.

As Ben Bagdikian, who was for many years dean of the School of Journalism at the University of California, Berkeley, noted in a 1987 article:

In 1982, when I completed research for my book [*The Media Monopoly*], 50 corporations controlled half or more of the media business. By December 1986, when I finished revision for a second edition, the 50 had shrunk to 29. The last time I counted, it was down to 26. (para. 4)

Currently, something like half a dozen giant corporations dominate the media all over the world. Table 2.2 shows the largest of these corporations and their sales in 2016, adapted from Statista.com (Statista, 2017).

These giant organizations continue to consolidate their power through alliances with other media corporations.

Media giants such as those listed in Table 2.2 are concerned primarily not with the public interest but with profits. They also often have political agendas, such as favoring the election of politicians who will be friendly to them and pass laws that will be favorable to their interests. Thus, for example, the major media corporations favored a recent change in Federal Communications Commission policy that made it possible for them to purchase television stations in certain markets where they already owned media outlets, making it possible for them to consolidate their power further.

In recent years, Lawrence Lessig (2002) has pointed out that our media are now dominated by a small number of giant corporations. In recent years, with the development of Facebook, Twitter, and other social media, the situation has changed and now new technological developments are threatening the power of the television networks, the music industry, the newspaper industry, the

Table 2.2 Media Consolidation in the United States

Company	Revenues
Comcast	64.7 Billion
Disney	45 Billion
Time Warner	29.8 Billion
21st Century Fox	27.7 Billion
CBS	15.3 Billion
Omnicom	14.58 Billion
Viacom	13.8 Billion
News Corporation	8.89 Billion

book publishing industry, the magazine industry, and many other non-Internet mass media. New corporations, such as Apple, Facebook, Twitter, and Google are now major players in the media world.

THE SOCIETY OF THE SPECTACLE

In 1970, Guy Debord's *The Society of the Spectacle* was translated and published in an "unauthorized translation" by Black & Red in Detroit. Originally published in France in 1967, it is a collection of 221 paragraphs, of varying lengths, on the role that spectacle has in contemporary mass societies. Debord, a Marxist, writes about many different aspects of spectacle and argues that representations are now more important than the real things. He offers a quotation from Feuerbach's "Preface to the second edition of *The Essence of Christianity*" at the beginning of the book which makes Debord's (1970) central argument. Feuerbach writes:

And without doubt our epoch . . . prefers the image to the thing, the copy to the original, the representation to the reality, appearance to being . . . What is sacred for it is only *illusion*, but what is profane is *truth*. More than that, the sacred grows in its eyes to the extent that truth diminishes and illusion increases, to such an extent that the *peak of illusion* is for it *the peak of the sacred*. (p. 1)

Feuerbach's focus on the dominance of images, representations, and appearances in life could have been written by contemporary media theorists such as Baudrillard. But he wrote his book in 1841, 200 years before contemporary scholars started thinking about the power of images and representations in our lives.

Let me quote a couple of passages from *Society of the Spectacle* that offer some of Debord's main insights. The book has no page numbers, only the numbers of his thoughts.

The entire life of societies in which modern conditions of production reign announces itself as an immense accumulation of *spectacles*. Everything that was directly lived has moved way into a representation. . . .

The spectacle, understood in its totality, is simultaneously the result and the product of the existing mode of production. It is not a supplement to the real world, its added decoration. It is the heart of the unrealism or the real society. In all its specific forms, as information or propaganda, advertisement or direct consumption of entertainments, the spectacle is the present *model* of socially dominant life.

In their *Dictionary of Cultural Theorists*, Ellis Cashmore and Chris Rojek (1999) offer an appraisal of Debord's ideas and impact:

Debord's most widely known and influential thesis is that of the "Spectacle." This term is used in Debord's writing to designate the hegemonic power of capitalism in and through the mechanism of representation (advertising, for example). Such a view maintains that mainstream culture (and indeed, culture in general) is the culture of the Spectacle, which, as a manifestation of capitalism, is ultimately repressive and alienating, as well as endlessly ingenious in its guises and mutations. . . . Debord's writings directly influenced many of the central tenets of postmodernism, particularly as they appear in the writings of Jean Baudrillard. (p. 112)

Debord's theories, then, use Marxist concepts in a creative and imaginative manner and have influenced many media theorists over the years.

THE DANGER OF BEING DOCTRINAIRE

Marxism in general, and Marxist media analysis in particular, has a great deal of appeal, especially to people with a strong sense of social justice and a desire for a more egalitarian, more humane world. Despite the awesome complexity that often characterizes Marxist thought, for Marxists the world is basically divided into two camps: the bourgeoisie, who own the instruments of production and are ultimately responsible for alienation and a host of other ills from which all of society suffers, and the proletariat and their allies, who want to save themselves and society. This is a great oversimplification, of course, but it also has a grain of truth, and in any fight between "good guys" and "bad guys," it is only natural to root for the good guys.

In its best form, Marxism is a humanistic system of thought that seeks to make it possible for all people to lead productive, useful lives. However, Marxism also is an ideology that explains everything (or nearly everything) in the world on the basis of certain axioms or beliefs from which everything else follows. And that is its danger.

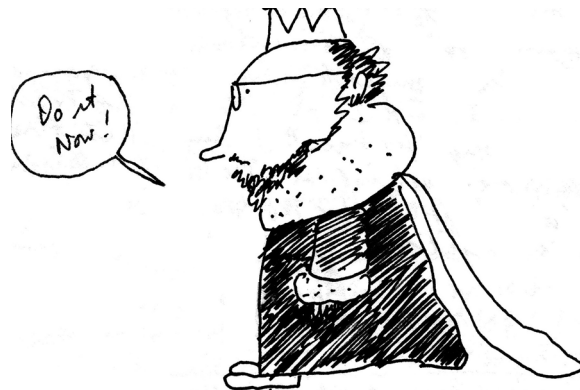
The danger for Marxist media analysts is that they know the answers *before* they ask the questions. That is, Marxists are also prisoners of the categories of their thought, and the questions they ask of a work of popular art carried by the media are often rather limited. Like the proverbial Frenchman (or Freudian) who sees sex in everything, the Marxist media analyst tends to see alienation, manipulation, and ideological exploitation in all of the public arts, and tends to treat art of all kinds primarily in terms of its ideological content. Such analysis is terribly limiting, and it cannot do justice to most works of art.

Thus for the Marxist analyst there is a terrible danger of being doctrinaire, of seeing works of popular culture (or anything else) *only* in terms of Marxist concepts and notions. This is not to say that there is no ideological dimension to much or most (or all, many Marxists would argue) of the material produced for the mass media—there is, and media analysts must be mindful of it. But analysts must not neglect other aspects of these works—their psychological, moral, and aesthetic components, for example—and should not attempt to fit the material the media carries into a Procrustean bed of Marxist notions.

There is also, of course, the possibility that Marx was wrong, and that his notions about the economic system's relation to culture are not correct or are too simplistic to be worth much. There is something destructive about a great deal of utopian idealism, and Marx's fantasies of a communist society may ultimately do a great deal of damage to people who do not recognize that the best is often the enemy of the good. Marx (1964) has written:

For as soon as the division of labor begins, each man has a particular, exclusive sphere of activity, which is forced upon him and from which he cannot escape. He is a hunter, a fisherman, a shepherd, or a critic, and must remain so if he does not want to lose his means of livelihood; whereas in communist society, where nobody has one exclusive sphere of activity, but each can become accomplished in any branch he wishes, production as a whole is regulated by society, thus making it possible for me to do one thing today and another tomorrow, to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticize after dinner, in accordance with my inclination, without ever becoming hunter, fisherman, shepherd or critic. (p. 97)

In the name of achieving this kind of society, however, most of the allegedly socialist Marxist states set up repressive societies in which the media were used for manipulation to a much greater degree than in Western bourgeois societies. If Marxist media analysts are to be taken seriously as they point out the ways in which soap operas indoctrinate people into bourgeois values and mystify alienated housewives, this is an irony they must explain.



GRID-GROUP ANALYSIS

Aaron Wildavsky, who taught political science at the University of California in Berkeley for many years, offers us an introduction to grid-group analysis. As Wildavsky (1982) wrote in “Conditions for a Pluralist Democracy or Cultural Pluralism Means More Than One Political Culture in a Country”:

What matters to people is how they should live with other people. The great questions of social life are “Who am I?” (To what kind of a group do I belong?) and “What should I do?” (Are there many or few prescriptions I am expected to obey?). Groups are strong or weak according to whether they have boundaries separating them from others. Decisions are taken either for the group as a whole (strong boundaries) or for individuals or families (weak boundaries). Prescriptions are few or many indicating the individual internalizes a large or a small number of behavioral norms to which he or she is bound. By combining boundaries with prescriptions . . . the most general answers to the questions of social life can be combined to form four different political cultures. (p. 7)



In Table 2.3, I take these two dimensions, grid and group, and show how they lead to four different political culture or lifestyles, the term some grid-group theorists use, depending on the strength or weakness of the group boundaries and number of rules and prescriptions.

Different theorists have given these lifestyles different names, but the names all suggest what it is that characterizes the political culture or lifestyle. In their book *Cultural Theory*, Michael Thompson, Richard Ellis, and Aaron Wildavsky (1990) explore the ways which political cultures are formed. In the book they

Table 2.3 Four Lifestyles According to Grid-Group Theory

Way of Life	Group Boundaries	Numbers and Kinds of Prescriptions
Hierarchical elitist	Strong	Numerous and varied
Egalitarian	Strong	Few
Competitive individualist	Weak	Few
Fatalist	Weak	Numerous and varied

Mary Douglas On Shopping

We have to make a radical shift away from thinking about consumption as a manifestation of individual choices. Culture itself is the result of myriads of individual choices, not primarily between commodities but between kinds of relationships. The basic choice that a rational individual has to make is the choice about what kind of society to live in. According to that choice, the rest follows. Artefacts are selected to demonstrate the choice. Food is eaten, clothes are worn, cinema, books, music, holidays, all the rest are choices that conform with the initial choice for a form of society.

SOURCE: Douglas, Mary. (1997). In defence of shopping. In P. Falk & C. Campbell (Eds.), *The Shopping Experience*. London: Sage (pp. 15–30).

discuss the ideas of Mary Douglas, a British social anthropologist, who was most responsible for developing grid-group theory. Thompson and his colleagues discuss the main points that Douglas makes in her presentation of this theory:

She argues that the variability of an individual's involvement in social life can be adequately captured by two dimensions of sociality: group and grid. *Group* refers to the extent to which an individual is incorporated into bounded units. The greater the incorporation, the more individual choice is subject to group determination. *Grid* denotes the degree to which an individual's life is circumscribed by externally imposed prescriptions. The more binding and extensive the scope of the prescriptions, the less of life that is open to individual negotiation. (p. 5)

Thompson and his colleagues describe how this grid-group typology generates four political cultures or ways of life, what Douglas calls "lifestyles":

Strong group boundaries coupled with minimal prescriptions produce social relations that are egalitarian. . . . When an individual's social environment is characterized by strong group boundaries and binding prescriptions, the resulting social relations are hierarchical. . . . Individuals who are bound by neither group incorporation nor prescribed roles inhabit an individualistic social context. In such an environment all boundaries are provisional and subject to negotiation. . . . People who find themselves subject to binding prescriptions and are excluded from group membership exemplify the fatalistic way of life. Fatalists are controlled from without. (pp. 6–7)

Each of these different ways of life is in conflict with the others, yet they all need one another. *Hierarchical elitists* believe in stratification and in the responsibility of those at the top to look after those below them. *Individualists* are interested primarily in themselves and want the freedom to compete fairly protected by the government. *Egalitarians* stress that people are equal in terms of their needs and that differences between people are social and not natural and should be played down. *Fatalists* believe in luck and opt out of the political system. All four groups are locked into complementary relationships, and all are necessary for the political order.

If we take the two dimensions—group membership (weak or strong) and grid aspects (few or many rules and prescriptions)—we can see how they generate the four ways of life or political cultures, as shown in Table 2.3.

As Thompson and colleagues (1990) note, social scientists are always looking for latent or hidden aspects of social phenomena. The authors use this insight to offer a comment on the Marxist view of societies:

Things are never as they seem in class societies, Marx tells us, because exploitation must be disguised for the social order to be sustained. Since rulers do not like to think of themselves as exploiters, benefiting unjustly from the labor of others, and the exploited must be kept ignorant of their subjection lest they revolt, the truth must be kept from both rulers and ruled alike. (p. 149)

Marx, they argue, ties mystification to the capitalist economic system, whereas they suggest that mystification pervades every aspect and all ways of life, and it is the task of the social scientist to explore and explain this mystification. We can see that egalitarians are similar to Marxists in stressing that everyone should be treated the same way and have the same needs. But what Marx didn't recognize, Thompson and fellow authors assert, is that egalitarianism can function as a useful critique of social relationships and arrangements only when it is out of power. If Marx had analyzed egalitarian political cultures as well as hierarchist and fatalist ones (read here as "bourgeois" and "proletarian"), these authors suggest, he would have developed different theories about socio-political institutions and the need for revolution.

As Thompson et al. (1990) explain,

As a theorist, Marx's major deficiency is that he never gave the same searching scrutiny to the biases of egalitarianism that he gave to those of individualism, hierarchy, and fatalism. Had he analyzed the conditions and behaviors that an egalitarian way of life needs to sustain itself with

only half the insight he brought to bear on the question of individualism's viability, he might have seen the flaw in his future communist utopia. Had he, and his followers, understood the dynamics of the egalitarian way of life, they would have seen that its coherence depends on being out of power and that its adherents certainly could not rule alone. (p. 158)

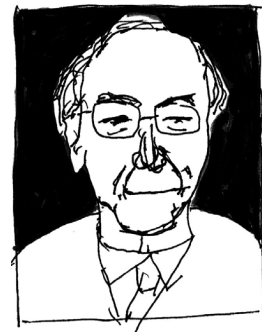
Marx didn't recognize that every way of life has limitations and, as grid-group theorists argue, that all four lifestyles are needed (even though they are antithetical) if a society is to flourish. Egalitarians function primarily as critics of the establishment which means they must always remain out of power. When they are in power, the abuses found in many communist societies take place.

Grid-group theory has direct applications to the media. Our media preferences are shaped, in good measure, by two things: a desire to *reinforce* our basic values and beliefs by watching television programs, going to films, reading books, and so forth that support these values and beliefs, and second, a desire to *avoid cognitive dissonance* by not going to films or watching television shows that challenge our belief systems. Let me suggest, then, that the four political cultures and lifestyles shape our media choices, though we generally are not conscious of this, and we can use the four political cultures or lifestyles to figure out what members of each of these groups, if they were consistent and logical, would prefer. You can use grid-group theory and apply it to the media in the game, "playing Aron Wildavsky," that can be found in the Appendix.

MARXIST CRITICISM IN THE POSTMODERN WORLD

Whether Marxism is the best—or even a credible—philosophy to use as a basis for analyzing and criticizing culture and the mass media is a question that continues to be debated. Ironically, it may be that the United States will turn out to be one of the few places where Marxism is taken seriously. More precisely, it is only in some departments in some American universities that Marxist theories—especially as they relate to the media and other sociocultural phenomena—have many adherents.

In the postmodern world there is some question about whether any logically coherent philosophy, such as Marxism, is widely accepted anymore. In his book *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, Jean-François Lyotard (1984), a French scholar, offers one of the most widely quoted definitions of *postmodern*:



Lyotard

Simplifying to the extreme, I define *postmodern* as incredulity toward metanarratives. . . . To the obsolescence of the metanarrative apparatus of legitimation corresponds, most notably, the crisis of metaphysical philosophy and of the university institution which in the past relied on it. (p. xxiv)

Liotard suggests that most people no longer accept the old overarching philosophical systems and metanarratives that helped individuals make sense of the world in the past. These metanarratives, which were found in religions and in political ideologies, no longer dominate our thinking. What we have now, Lyotard asserts, are competing narratives and ways of making sense of the world, and this has led to what might be called a crisis of legitimation. That is, it's hard to know what's right and what's wrong. To push matters to an extreme, postmodernist theorists assert that nobody knows what to believe, and many of these theorists argue further that it doesn't make any difference: It really doesn't matter what a person believes.

Postmodernism, whatever it may be (and there are many debates about that matter), is generally held to have replaced modernism around 1960, when there was a major cultural shift and the values and beliefs that characterized modernism—a belief in metanarratives, in rationality, in grand theories, suddenly were rejected. Let me suggest some of the differences between postmodernism and modernism. If modernism involves differentiation between the elite arts and popular culture, postmodernism breaks down the barriers between them and revels joyfully in mass culture. Modernism involves a “high seriousness” towards life while postmodernism involves an element of game playing and an ironic stance as well as a kind of playfulness. People in postmodernist societies “play” with their identities and change them when they feel bored with their old ones.

Modernism involves stylistic purity, as found in modernist architecture, with its slabs of steel, concrete, and glass, while postmodernism involves stylistic eclecticism and variety in architecture. In postmodernism, the pastiche is the dominant art form. Modernists believe we can know reality while postmodernists suggest that we are all confounded by illusions and hyperreality. Postmodernism is the realm of consumer culture, in contrast to what we might describe as a production culture of modernism. The great heroes of modernism are businessmen and statesmen while the heroes of postmodernism tend to be celebrities and entertainment figures, whose tastes and consumption habits are held up as models to us all. It is because postmodernist thought has had such an impact on our lives that we are so interested in it.

Fredric Jameson, one of the most important theorists of postmodernism, describes it in his book *Postmodernism; or, the Cultural Logic of Late*

Capitalism, while discussing media and pop culture as it related to postmodernism. Jameson (1991) offers the following description of postmodern pop culture:

This whole “degraded” landscape of schlock and kitsch, of TV series and *Reader’s Digest* culture, of advertising and motels, of the late show and grade-B Hollywood films, of so-called paraliterature, with its airport paperback categories of the gothic and the romance, the popular biography, the murder mystery, and even the science fiction or fantasy novel. (pp. 2–3)

Jameson, I should add, argues that postmodernism is just another name of a new form of capitalism and is tied intimately to consumer culture.

Ultimately, each of us has to decide whether Marxism still makes sense as a basis on which to analyze the mass media. If analysts find the concepts of Marxism useful and believe that they explain things better than other perspectives, or offer insights that are useful, they should use them. If not, they approach media analysis from another viewpoint. Philosophies don’t really die—they are abandoned when people turn their attention elsewhere. Whether Marxism will ultimately be dumped on the ash heap of history remains to be seen.

ANALYZING A TEXT FROM A MARXIST PERSPECTIVE

In the following exercise, imagine you are appointed a writer for a publication, *Comrades: Marxism and Society*. Apply Marxist concepts such as alienation, false consciousness, class conflict, bourgeois heroes, and hegemonial domination (and others) to the text assigned by your instructor, or one that you choose if that is acceptable to your instructor. Then, write a paper offering your Marxist interpretation of the text. I also suggest a text that lends itself beautifully to Marxist analysis, an episode of *The Prisoner* called “The General,” which is available with all the episodes of *The Prisoner* on YouTube.

STUDY QUESTIONS AND TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What is meant by dialectical materialism?
2. Explain how the base relates to the superstructure.
3. What errors do “vulgar Marxists” make?

4. What is an ideology? How are ideologies related to false consciousness?
5. Why are the ideas of the ruling class the ideas of the masses?
6. How do all of the topics raised in questions 1 through 5 above relate to the matter of class conflict? To alienation? To consumer lust?
7. What are the basic attributes of bourgeois heroes and heroines? How do these heroes differ from Marxist ones?
8. When Marxists do cultural analysis, what topics do they address?
9. What has been said about advertising in this chapter?
10. What are some of the problems associated with Marxist analysis?
11. To which of the four lifestyles do you belong? How has this lifestyle affected your consumption choices, your taste in media, and other choices you have made?

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Sigmund Freud

While psychoanalysis is a therapeutic technique, it is also a form of inquiry that has been applied to many areas—politics, anthropology, media studies, and literary criticism, to name a few. The results that psychoanalytic inquiry yields are interesting, but they are also generally controversial. This chapter explores the most significant aspects of psychoanalytic theory and shows how the principles of psychoanalytic thought can be used to explain the hidden significance of cigarette lighters and *Hamlet*, among other things.