Code and poetry 9/8: depth and surface

* Readings as anchors throughout the history of this tradition
* Goal of this class is to find new language/vocabulary for discussion
* Tradition is materialism/Marxism
  + Marxism: not idealism – definite relations, actual relations of physical objects (pp. 5)
    - “In the social production of their existence, men inevitably enter into definite relations, which are independent of their will, namely relations of production appropriate to a given stage in the development of their material forces of production. The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which arises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions the general process of social, political and intellectual life*. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness*. At a certain stage of development, the material productive forces of society come into conflict with the existing relations of production or – this merely expresses the same thing in legal terms – with the property relations within the framework of which they have operated hitherto. From forms of development of the productive forces these elations turn into their fetters. Then begins an era of social revolution. The changes in the economic foundation lead sooner or later to the transformation of the whole immense superstructure.”
    - Base and superstructure (similar to Freudian structure id and ego) determines human history and everyday interactions
      * Base – relations of production (business, capital, the way we work, ideas of capital and ownership, contracts, physical structure of production)
      * Super – everything else (social consciousness – art, philosophy, politics, food, family, everything you believe in shared through acculturation)
    - Marx’s materialism: Marx took the material substratum of life to be the primary one
      * Pressures put upon worker to make him come to work everyday, who’s the boss, how does the bread find its way from factory to table
        + We look at how idea goes from author to text – how does text come into your hands? The materialism of literature/literary production (who printed text? Who translated it? How much did it cost? Who controls the production and distribution?)

How can we actively be involved in process?

“In studying such transformations it is always necessary to distinguish between the material transformation of the economic conditions of production, which can be determined with the precision of natural science, and the legal, political, religious, artistic or philosophic – in short, ideological forms in which men become conscious of this conflict and fight it out. Just as one does not judge an individual by what he thinks about himself, so one cannot judge such a period of transformation by its consciousness, but, on the contrary, this consciousness must be explained from the contradictions of material life, from the conflict existing between the social forces of production and the relations of production. No social order is ever destroyed before all the productive forces for which it is sufficient have been developed, and new superior relations of production never replace older ones before the material conditions for their existence have matured within the framework of the old society.” (pp 6)

Have to effect change on the level of production

Until the base changes, you can work on the superstructure all you want, but society will never change

Transformation of ideas, but just new ways of laboring/buying/entering into contracts

Hegel: society is developing toward something (like an organ) – teleology; movement through history leads to the development of the spirit (we don’t know what that means)

Marx: claims by spirit Hegel means base – movement is toward communism/socialism

What makes Marx’s writing privileged? It’s run its course as a viable alternative – is Marxism still a source of inspiration for protest movements? It seems not. Why has it run its course?

Partially because of its historical instantiation in USSR, China, but also leads to some dead ends in thought

* + Freud and Marx:
    - Something that is real and hidden that has to be uncovered (the true cause: base and id), something that is unreal/unimportant (super and ego)
    - Marcus: reaction against privileged position of whoever is doing the analysis/finding the real/hidden – what gives Marxist/psychoanalyst the authority?
      * Looking for hidden structures in the text that aren’t there. Let’s instead confront what’s immediately on the surface. The privileged position just keeps those in this position in a job (allows them to continually interpret and reinterpret)
    - Other argument against Marxism: you haven’t reached the base – you publish scholarship that is expensive/inaccessible, discrediting you as a Marxist thinker (because you don’t know the process of typesetting/book production and its exploitative nature). You claim to be a materialist, but you’re still just in the realm of words.
    - Maker culture/maker movement: diy – instead of purchasing something you’re going to learn to make your own. Offers you an outside on the level of production – once considered a viable political alternative to just talking. In reality just feeds back into the existing marketplace (3D printer: who owns/makes the printer and the polymer? Are you just making more plastic crap?)
    - Amazon.com: has done a lot for self-publishing – cutting out the publishing company, bookstore. One entity that controls the keys to reading/writing – what does this do to public discourse? What should it do? How should it be legislated?
      * Amazon.com: has done a lot for self-publishing – cutting out the publishing company, bookstore. One entity that controls the keys to reading/writing – what does this do to public discourse? What should it do? How should it be legislated?
  + Social media: can look at the relation between protestors in real time – much more difficult to do in nondigital form.
    - Some argue that twitter as a protest platform isn’t that interesting – it’s a private company that works with security, censorship – the platform of protest is the public square, but the public square is owned by a private company
    - Instead, focus on little protest in our daily interaction with computers, texts, emails, but this is more difficult than the bigger forms of protest. Have to give up comforts of life to reclaim some measure of control over our computing/knowledge process
      * You actively shape – are no longer cut out of chain of production/decisions
* Hayles:
  + Media specific analysis from 2004
  + Major voice in turn toward materiality
  + Text has always been a network
  + “Perhaps now, after the linguistic turn has yielded so many important insights, it is time to turn again to a careful consideration of what difference the medium makes” (68)
  + In “As We May Think” by Bush (1954), he discusses the increasing problem we have with management (in the office)
    - Anthropology of texts in a hospital/law office/etc.
    - Innovation in this is in business schools
    - Microfish: take tiny picture of a page, put on roll of film, magnify when you want to read, store documents easily
    - Also thinking about Memex: proto-hypertext – connecting microfish
    - Reading practices change dramatically due to hypertext (space where you’re reading multiple texts)
  + Barthes – not materialist – just looking at language without the physicality – author wrote this thing, so it is yours.
    - But language itself doesn’t belong to you – you were influenced/taught to write words; thought is social
    - You’re working as a scrapbook artist when using language (making a montage) – taking little things from other people and splicing them together to make something new which is constantly referencing other things and networking
  + Tradition of antilinearity – related to hypertext
    - But to some extent our brains naturally create linear narratives, so the change in the way hypertext has made us think only went so far. Linear narratives haven’t gone away.
* NOTE: bring laptop for Wednesday, install stuff in advance to prepare for lab