CHAPTER 10

Culture, the Media, and the "Ideological Effect"

Culture has its roots in what Marx, in *The German Ideology*, called man's "double relation": to nature and to other men. Men, Marx argued, intervene in nature and, with the help of certain instruments and tools, use nature to reproduce the material conditions of their existence. But, from a very early point in the history of human development, this intervention in nature through labor is *socially* organized. Men collaborate with one another—at first, through the collective use of simple tools, the rudimentary division of labor, and the exchange of goods—for the more effective reproduction of their material conditions. This is the beginning of social organization, and of human history. From this point forward, man's relation to nature becomes socially mediated. The reproduction of human society, in increasingly complex and extended forms, and the reproduction of material existence are fundamentally linked: in effect, the adaptation of nature to man's material needs is effected only through the forms which his social collaboration with other men assumes. Men, then, reproduce themselves as "social individuals" through the social forms which their material production assumes. No matter how infinitely complex and extended are the social forms which men then successively develop, the relations surrounding the material reproduction of their existence forms the determining instance of all these other structures. From this given matrix—the forces and relations of production, and the manner in which they are socially organized, in different historical epochs—arise all the more elaborate forms of social structure, the division of labor,

the development of the distinction between different types of society, new ways of applying human skill and knowledge to the modification of material circumstances, the forms of civil and political association, the different types of family and the state, men's beliefs, ideas, and theoretical constructions, and the types of social consciousness appropriate to or "corresponding to" them. This is the basis for a *materialist* understanding of social development and human history; it must also be the basis of any materialist or non-idealist definition of culture. Marx, in fact, argued that there is no "labor" or production in *general* (Marx, *Grundrisse*). Production always assumes specific historical forms, under determinate conditions. The types of society, social relationship, and human culture which arise under these specific historical conditions will also assume a determinate form. One type of production differs fundamentally from another: and since each stage in the development of material production will give rise to different forms of social cooperation, a distinct type of technical and material production, and different kinds of political and civil organization, human history is divided, through the developing modes of production, into distinctive and historically specific *stages* or *epochs*. Once material production and its corresponding forms of social organization reach a complex stage of development, it will require considerable analysis to establish precisely how the relationship between these levels can be conceptualized. Precisely *how* to think this relationship between material and social production and the rest of a developed social formation constitutes perhaps the most difficult aspect of a materialist theory. We shall return to this question in a moment. But a materialist account must, by definition, encompass some concrete way of thinking this relationship originating (normally referred to, within Marxist analyses, by way of the metaphor of "base" and "the superstructures") if it is not to desert the ground of its premise emphasizing that the foundation of human culture lies in labor and material production. Marx's "materialism" adds to this premise at least one other requirement: that the relationship must be thought within determinate historical conditions. It must be made *historically specific*. It is this second requirement which distinguishes a historical materialist theory of human society and culture from, say, a materialism grounded in the simple fact of man's physical nature (a "vulgar," or as Marx calls it, an undialectical materialism) or one which gives the determining instance to technological development alone. What Karl Korsch, among others, has called "the principle of historical specificity" in Marx's materialism is clearly enunciated in *The German Ideology* (where Marx's theory becomes, for the first time, fully "historical")

and afterward in his mature work. "The fact is . . . that *definite* individuals who are productively active in a *definite* way enter into these *definite* social and political relations. Empirical observation must in each separate instance bring out empirically and without any mystification and speculation, the connection of the social and political structure with production" (Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*; our emphasis). To this basis, or "anatomy," Marx also relates "the production of ideas, of conceptions, of consciousness"—the sphere of "mental production." For Marx, the relations which govern the social organization of material production are specific—"definite"—for each phase or stage: each constitutes its own "mode." The social and cultural superstructures which "correspond" to each mode of production will, likewise, be historically specific. For Marx, each of the major modes of production in human history to date has been based fundamentally on one type of the exploitation of the labor of some by others. Modes of production—however complex, developed, and productive they become—are therefore founded on a root antagonistic contradiction. But this contradiction, the social forms in which it is institutionalized, the theoretical laws which "explain" it, and the forms of "consciousness" in which the antagonism is lived and experienced, is worked out in, again, definite and historically specific ways. Most of Marx and Engels's work was devoted to analyzing the historically determinate "laws and tendencies" governing the *capitalist* mode of production: and in analyzing the different superstructural and ideological forms appropriate to this stage in society's material development. It was consonant with their theory that this mode, and the corresponding social forms, exhibited its own specific laws and tendencies; that these were founded on a specific type of contradiction, between how labor was expended and goods produced, and the way the value of labor was expropriated; and that this dynamic, expansive phase of material development was historically finite—destined to evolve and expand through a series of transformations, reach the outer limits of its potential development, and be superseded by another stage in human history—impelled, not by external force but by "inner connection" (Marx, *Capital, Vol. I*). Indeed, Marx saw each mode of production as driven to develop, through its higher stages, precisely by the "overcoming" of the contradictions intrinsic to its lower stages; reproducing these antagonisms on a more advanced level; and hence destined to disappear through this development of contradictions. This analysis, worked out at the level of economic forms and processes, constituted the subject matter of *Capital*.

Now, since each mode of material and social organization was historically specific, so the forms of social life corresponding to it was bound to assume a "definite" and historically distinct shape and form. "This mode of production must not be considered simply as being the reproduction of the physical existence of the individuals. Rather, it is a definite form of activity of these individuals, a definite form of expressing their life, a definite *mode of life* on their part. As individuals express their life, so they are. What they are, therefore, coincides with their production, both with *what* they produce and with *how* they produce it" (Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*). The social and material forms of production, the way labor was organized and combined with tools to produce, the level of technical development, the institutions through which goods circulated and value was realized, the types of civil association, of family life and of the state appropriate to it—this ensemble of relations and structures exhibited an identifiable configuration, a pattern, a "mode of living" for the social individuals and groups within it. This patterning was, so to speak, the result of the interconnections between the different levels of social practice. The pattern also expressed how the combined result of these interconnecting levels was "lived," as a totality, by its "bearers." This seems to be the best way of grasping, within a materialist theory (in which the term itself plays no insignificant part), where precisely *culture* arises. To put it metaphorically, "culture" refers us to the arrangement—the *forms*—assumed by social existence under determinate historical conditions. Provided the metaphor is understood as of heuristic value only, we might say that if the term "social" refers to the *content* of the relationships into which men involuntarily enter in any social formation, then "culture" refers to the forms which those relationships assume. (The form/content distinction is not, however, one which we can push very far. It should also be borne in mind that Marx, who gives considerable attention to the *forms* which value assumes in the capitalist mode of production, uses the term differently from the way it has been employed above.) At the risk of conflating two divergent theoretical discourses, we might bear in mind here a point which Roger Poole makes of Lévi-Strauss in the introduction to the latter's work on *Totemism*. "Instead of asking for the hundredth time '*What* is totemism,' he asks us for the first time . . . 'How are totemic phenomena arranged?' The move from 'what' to 'how,' from the substantive to the adjectival attitude, is the first radically different thing, the first 'structural' thing, to notice about the work before us." "Culture," in this sense, does not refer to something

substantively different from "social": it refers to a different *aspect* of essentially the same phenomena.

Culture, in this meaning of the term, is the objectivated design to human existence when "definite men under definite conditions" "appropriate nature's productions in a form adapted to his own wants" and "stamps that labour as exclusively human." This is very close to what we might call the "anthropological" definition of culture. (In their different ways, the theoretical work of Raymond Williams [*The Long Revolution*], the modification of Williams by Thompson, and, in the very different context provided by its basic functionalism, the studies of "material culture and social structure" of primitive or colonial peoples by social anthropologists belong to this tradition.)

However, Marx and, more especially, Engels rarely use "culture" or its cognates in this simply descriptive sense. They use it more dynamically and more developmentally—as a decisive material or *productive force*. Human culture is the result and the record of man's developing mastery over nature, his capacity to modify nature to his use. This is a form of human knowledge, perfected through social labor, which forms the basis for every new stage in man's productive and historical life. This is not a "knowledge" which is abstractly stored in the head. It is materialized in production, embodied in social organization, advanced through the development of practical as well as theoretical technique, above all, preserved in and transmitted through *language*. In *The German Ideology* Marx speaks of "a material result, a sum of productive forces, a historically created relation of individuals to nature and to one another, which is handed down to each generation from its predecessor . . . is, indeed, modified by the new generation, but also . . . prescribes for it its conditions of life and gives it a definite development, a specific character." It is this which distinguishes men from the animal kingdom. Engels (in his "Labour in the Transition from Ape to Man") accords the dynamic elements in this process "first" to "labour, after it and then with it, speech. . . . The reaction on labour and speech of the development of the brain and its attendant senses, of the increasing clarity of consciousness, power of abstraction and of judgement, gave both labour and speech an ever-renewed impulse to further development." Marx in a famous passage in the first volume of *Capital*, compares favorably "the worst of architects" with the "best of bees" in this: "that the architect raises his structure in imagination before he erects it in reality. . . . He not only effects a change of form . . . but he also realizes a purpose of his own that gives the law to his *modus operandi*." Earlier, Marx and Engels had identified language, the principal me-

dium through which this knowledge of man's appropriation and adaptation of nature is elaborated, stored, transmitted, and applied, as a form of "practical consciousness" arising "from the need, the necessity of intercourse with other men" (*The German Ideology*). Later, Marx describes how this accumulated knowledge can be expropriated from the practical labor and skill of the worker, applied as a distinct productive force to modern industry for its further development, and thus pressed "into the service of capital" (*Capital, Vol. I*). Here, *culture* is the accumulated growth of man's power over nature, materialized in the instruments and practice of labor and in the medium of signs, thought, knowledge, and language through which it is passed on from generation to generation as man's "second nature."

Now *The German Ideology*—on which many of these seminal formulations depend—is the text in which Marx and Engels insist that history cannot be read as the sum of the consciousness of mankind. Ideas, conceptions, etc. arise "in thought" but must be explained in terms of material practice, not the other way around. This is perfectly consistent with the general proposition that culture, knowledge, and language have their basis in social and material life and are not independent or autonomous of it. Generally speaking, however, Marx and Engels in this text saw material needs fairly straightforwardly and transparently reflected in the sphere of thought, ideas, and language; the latter changing when, and in keeping with how, their "basis" changes. A social formation is not thought of as consisting of a set of "relatively autonomous" practices, but as an expressive totality; in which the "needs" or tendencies of the determining base are mediated in a homologous way at the other levels; and where everything stems from "real, active men" and their "active life process," their historical *praxis* "under definite material limits, presupposes and conditions independent of their will." In a related but slightly different formulation, we would then expect each of the practices concerned to reveal "surprising correspondences," each being understood as so many forms of "human energy." (As in Williams's *The Long Revolution*.)

The problem is how to account for the fact that, in the realm of ideas, meaning, value, conceptions, and consciousness, men can "experience" themselves in ways which do not fully correspond with their real situation. How can men be said to have a "false" consciousness of how they stand or relate to the real conditions of their life and production? Can language, the medium through which human culture in the "anthropological sense" is transmitted, *also* become the instrument through which it is "distorted"? (See Thompson's response to *The Long Revolution*.) Can language become the instrument by

which men elaborate accounts and explanations, make sense of and become conscious of their "world," which also binds and fetters, rather than frees them? How can thought conceal aspects of their real conditions rather than clarify them? In short, how can we account for the fact that "in all ideology," men (who are the "producers of their consciousness, ideas, etc.") and their circumstances are mystified, "appear upside down as in a *camera obscura*"? The reason, fundamentally, is offered in the second half of the same sentence from *The German Ideology*: it is essentially because these men are "conditioned by a definite development of their productive forces and of the intercourse corresponding to these." It is because men are, so to speak, *decentered* by the determinate conditions under which they live and produce, and depend on circumstances and conditions which are not of their making and which they enter involuntarily, that they cannot, in any full and uncontradictory sense, be the collective *authors* of their actions. Their practice cannot "un-mediatedly" realize their goals and intentions. Hence the terms through which men "make sense" of their world, experience their objective situation as a subjective experience, and "come to consciousness" of who and what they are, are not in their own keeping and will not, consequently, transparently reflect their situation. Hence the fundamental *determinacy* of what Marx called "the superstructures"—the fact that practices in these domains are conditioned elsewhere, experienced and realized only in *ideology*.

The radically limiting concept of *ideology* has a decentering and displacing effect on the freely developing processes of "human culture." It opens up the need to "think" the radical and systematic disjunctives between the different levels of any social formation: between the material relations of production, the social practices in which class and other social relations are constituted (here Marx locates "the superstructures"—civil society, the family, the juridico-political forms, the state), and the level of "ideological forms"—ideas, meanings, conceptions, theories, beliefs, etc., and the forms of consciousness which are appropriate to them. (See at this point the formulation in Marx's famous "Preface" of 1859 collected in Bottomore and Rubel.) In *The German Ideology*—specifically devoted to the third "level" which, in German thought, had achieved a positively stratospheric autonomy from material life and, at the same time, in the form of Hegel's Absolute Spirit, had been installed as the very motor of the whole system—Marx and Engels offer a more detailed account of how these disjunctures arise. With the advancing division of labor (on which expanding material production depends) the distinction between mental and manual labor appears: each is installed in distinct

spheres, in different practices and institutions, indeed in different social strata (e.g., the rise of the intelligentsia, the professional ideologues): mental labor appears as wholly autonomous from its material and social base and is projected into an absolute realm, "emancipating itself from the real." But also, under the conditions of capitalist production, the means of mental labor are expropriated by the ruling classes. Hence we come, not simply to "ideology" as a necessary level of any capitalist social formation, but to the concept of *dominant* ideology—of "ruling ideas." "The class which is the ruling material force is at the same time [the] ruling intellectual force. . . . [It] has control over the means of mental production so that, generally speaking, the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it. . . . The ruling ideas are nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant material relationships." Those who rule are "the producer[s] of ideas"; they "regulate the production and distribution of the ideas of their age" (*The German Ideology*).

In what follows I shall be concentrating specifically on this ideological dimension. But it should be said at once that the term "culture" continues to have an ambiguous and unspecified relation to the model outlined here. There appears to be a theoretical discontinuity between the problematic in which the term "culture" has been developed and the terms of classical Marxist theory. The ambiguity arises because, if we transpose it into a Marxist framework, "culture" now appears to refer to at least *two* levels, which are closely related but which, considered under the single rubric, "culture," tend to be uneasily collapsed. The capitalist mode of production depends upon the "combination" of those who own the means of production and those who have only their labor to sell, together with the tools and instruments of production. In this relation ("relations of/forces of production") labor is *the* commodity which has the capacity to produce a value greater than the materials on which it works; and that surplus which is left over when the laborer is paid his upkeep (wages) is expropriated by those who own the means of production, and realized through commodity exchange on the market. This relation, at the level of the mode of production, then produces the constituted classes of capitalism in the field of class practice and relations ("the superstructures"); and through its own peculiar mechanisms and effects, in the field of ideologies and consciousness. Now the conditions under which the working class lives its social practice will exhibit a distinctive shape; and that practice will, to some extent, be shaped by that class (in practice and struggle with other classes)—and these shapes can be said to constitute the ways they

organize themselves socially: the forms of working class *culture*. (Works like Hoggart's *Uses of Literacy* and Robert Roberts's *Classic Slum* point to some of the ways in which the "culture" of the working class, in particular periods, registers its peculiar modes of material and social existence.)

These social class practices and relations will embody certain characteristic values and meanings of the class, so that its "culture" is *lived*. But there is also the distinct area in which classes "experience" their own practice, make a certain kind of sense of it, give accounts of it and use ideas to bring to it a certain imaginary coherence—the level of what we might call *ideology proper*. Its principal medium of elaboration is the practice of language and consciousness, for it is through language that meaning is given. These "meanings" which we attribute to our relations and by means of which we grasp, in consciousness, how we live and what we practice, are not simply the theoretical and ideological projections of individuals. To "give sense" in this way is, fundamentally, to locate oneself and one's experience, one's conditions, in the already objectivated ideological *discourses*, the sets of ready-made and preconstituted "experiencings" displayed and arranged through language which fill out the ideological sphere. And this domain of ideology and consciousness is frequently, and confusingly, *also* called "culture": though, as we have already seen, we may find either an accurate or a distorted reflection of practice in ideology, and there is no necessary correspondence of transparency between them. Marx himself has partly contributed to this conflation by calling both the spheres of social class practices and the field of ideologies by single terms—"the superstructures," and, even more confusingly, "the ideological forms." But how can both the lived practices of class relations and the mental representations, images, and themes which render them intelligible, ideologically, be both "ideological forms"? This question is made even more obscure because we now commonly, and mistakenly, interpret the term "ideology" to mean *false*—imaginary conceits, phantom beliefs about things which appear to exist but are not real. The ideas we have about our conditions *may* be "unreal"; but how can social practices be "unreal"? To clarify the question, let us rephrase it on the basis of a different aspect of Marx's theory: one which contains the germ, the outline, of that more developed theory of ideology which succeeds the one we have been outlining (Mepham, "The Theory of Ideology in *Capital*"; and Geras, "Marx and the Critique of Political Economy"). For Marx, capitalism is the most dynamic and rapidly expanding mode of production so far to be seen in human history. One consequence of its dynamic but antagonistic movement is that, within its logic, production comes pro-

gressively to depend on the increasing "socialization" or interdependence of labor. At this level, capitalism contributes to the further development and transformation of man's productive powers. But this continuing all-sided interdependence of labor in the sphere of production is, at every moment under capitalism, realized in and organized through *the market*. And in the market, men's all-sided interdependence, the basis of their "sociality," is experienced as "something alien and objective, confronting the individual, not as their relation to one another, but as their subordination to relations which subsist independently of them, and which arise out of collisions between mutually indifferent individuals" (*Grundrisse*). So the progressively social character of production appears as a condition of mutual unconnectedness and indifference. Thus *both* the "socialization" of labor and its opposite—the sale of labor as an individual commodity, the private appropriation of its products, its fragmentation through the market and commodity exchange—are true: that is, the contradictory nature, and the structurally antagonistic character of its production under the determinate conditions of capitalism. We must begin to grasp the fundamentally antagonistic nature of culture under capitalist conditions in an analogous way.

We can discover a number of critical points about how this might be done by following for a moment the way Marx handles this contradiction between the social character of labor and the individual nature of its realization under capitalism. What accomplishes this dislocation, from social production to individual realization, is commodity exchange in the market. The market of course, *really exists*. It is not the figment of anyone's imagination. It is a *mediation* which enables one kind of relation (social) to appear (i.e., *really* to appear) as another kind of relation (individual) (*Grundrisse*). This second relation is not "false" in the sense that it does not exist: but it is "false" in the sense that, within its limits, it cannot express and embody the full social relation on which the system ultimately rests. The market re-presents a system which requires both production and exchange as if it consisted of exchange only. That of course was the key premise of much of political economy. It therefore has the function, at one and the same time, of: (a) transforming one relation into its opposite—the "*camera obscura*"; (b) making the latter, which is *part of* the relations of production and exchange under capitalism, appear as, or *stand for*, the whole—this is the theory of *fetishism*, developed in the first chapter of the first volume of *Capital*; (c) and also making the latter—the real foundations of capitalist society, in production—*disappear from view*, the effect of *concealment*. Hence, we can only "see" that labor

and production are realized through the market: we can no longer "see" that it is in production that labor is exploited and the surplus value extracted. These three "functions" make market relationships under capitalism, simultaneously, "real" and *ideological*. They are ideological, not because they are a fantasy, but because there is a structural dislocation between what Marx calls the levels of "real relations," where capitalism conducts its business, and the form of appearance, the ideological structures and relations—what he calls the "phenomenal forms"—through which that business is accomplished. This distinction between "real relations" and *how they appear* is the absolute pivot of the "theory of ideology" which is contained—but in an implicit and untheorized manner—in Marx's later and more mature work. It can be seen that, far from there being a *homologous* relationship between the material basis of practice, in capitalism, and how it *appears*, these now have to be thought, rigorously, as two related but systematically dislocated articulations of a capitalist social formation. They relate, but through their systematic differences—through a necessary series of *transformations*. The level of ideology, of consciousness, and of experiencing must be thought in terms of this decentering of material practice *through* ideological forms and relations. There must be distinct levels of practice corresponding to these two sites of the social formation. To understand the role of ideology, we must also be able to account for the mechanisms which consistently sustain, in reality, a set of representations which are not so much false to, as a *false inflection* of, the "real relations" on which, in fact, they depend. (Let us remember that, since the market does exist and people buy and sell things, market *ideologies* are materialized in market practices.)

We can take this one step further. For not only does socially interdependent labor *appear*, in the sphere of the market, as a set of mutually independent and indifferent relations: but this second level of ideological relations gives rise to a whole set of theories, images, representations, and discourses which *fill it out*. The various discourses of wages, and prices, of the "individual buyer and seller," of the "consumer," of "the labor contract"; or the elaborate contract theories of property enshrined in the legal system; or the theories of possessive individualism, of individual "rights and duties," of "free agents," of the "rights of man" and of "representative democracy"—in short, the whole enormously complex sphere of legal, political, economic, and philosophical discourses which compose the dense ideological complex of a modern capitalist society, all stem from or are rooted in the same premises

upon which the market and the ideas of a "market society" and of "market rationality" are founded. Marx makes this connection clear in a telling passage in *Capital* where he takes leave of "this noisy sphere where everything takes place on the surface and in view of all men," and follows the capitalist process into "the hidden abode of production." The latter sphere—the sphere of exchange—he remarks, "is in fact a very Eden of the innate rights of man. There alone rule Freedom, Equality, Property and Bentham. Freedom because both buyer and seller of a commodity . . . are [i.e., appear to be] constrained by their own free will. . . . Equality because each enters [appears to enter] into relation with the other as with a simple owner of commodities. . . . Property because each disposes [appears to dispose] only of what is his own. . . . And Bentham because each looks [appears to look] only to himself. . . . Each looks to himself only, and no one troubles himself about the rest, and just because they do so, do they all, in accordance with the pre-established harmony of things, or under the auspices of an all-shrewd providence, work together to their mutual advantage, for the common weal and in the interest of all" (*Capital*, *Vol. I*; and *Grundrisse*, for various clarifications). It is crucial to the whole force of this ironic passage that the discourses both of everyday life and of high political, economic, or legal theory arise from, not the ideological relation of the market exchange only, but (to put it clumsily but necessarily) from the way the real relations of production are *made to appear* in the form of the ideological or "imaginary" relations of market exchange. It is also crucial that "ideology" is now understood not as what is hidden and concealed, but precisely as what is most open, apparent, manifest—what "takes place on the surface and in view of all men." What is hidden, repressed, or inflected out of sight are its real foundations. This is the source or site of its *unconsciousness*.

This point is of the utmost importance: but it is not easy to grasp. For how can the realm in which we think, talk, reason, explain, and experience ourselves—the activities of consciousness—be unconscious? We may think here of the most obvious and "transparent" forms of consciousness which operate in our everyday experience and ordinary language: common sense. What passes for "common sense" in our society—the residue of absolutely basic and commonly agreed, consensual wisdoms—helps us to classify the world in simple but meaningful terms. Precisely, common sense does not require reasoning, argument, logic, thought: it is spontaneously available, thoroughly recognizable, widely shared. It *feels*, indeed, as if it has always been there, the sedimented, bedrock wisdom of "the race," a form of "natural"

wisdom, the content of which has changed hardly at all with time. However, common sense does have *a content*, and a history. As Geoffrey Nowell-Smith reminds us ("Common Sense"), when Robinson Crusoe was left entirely on his own in his natural state on a desert island, what he "spontaneously" developed was not universally common ideas but a distinctly "primitive capitalist" mentality. In the same way, contemporary forms of common sense are shot through with the debris and traces of previous, more developed ideological systems; and their reference point is to what passes, without exception, as the wisdom of *our* particular age and society, overcast with the glow of traditionalism. It is precisely its "spontaneous" quality, its transparency, its "naturalness," its refusal to be made to examine the premises on which it is founded, its resistance to change or to correction, its effect of instant recognition, and the closed circle in which it moves which makes common sense, at one and the same time, "spontaneous," ideological, *and unconscious*. You cannot learn, through common sense, *how things are*: you can only discover *where they fit* into the existing scheme of things. In this way, its very taken-for-grantedness is what establishes it as a medium in which its own premises and presuppositions are being rendered *invisible* by its apparent transparency. (See Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*.) It was in this general sense that Marx talked about the ideological forms in which men "become conscious"—treating the process of *becoming conscious* (in either an active, revolutionary or a passive, commonsense way) as a distinct process, with its own logic, mechanisms, and "effects"; not to be condensed or collapsed into other social practices. It is also in this general sense that Althusser speaks of ideology as "that new form of specific unconsciousness called 'consciousness'" ("Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses"). Althusser argues that, though ideologies usually consist of systems of representations, images, and concepts, "it is above all as structures that they impose on the vast majority of men. They are perceived-accepted-suffered cultural objects and they act functionally on men via a process that escapes them." Ideologies are, therefore, the sphere of the *lived*—the sphere of *experiencing*, rather than of "thinking."

> In ideology men do indeed express, not the relation between them and their conditions of existence [e.g., the socialization of labor under capitalism] but *the way* they "live" the relation between them and their conditions of existence [i.e., the way we live, through market relationships, the real conditions of capitalist production] . . . the expression of the relation between men and their "world" . . . the (overdetermined) unity of the real

> relation and the imaginary relation between them and the real conditions of existence. ("Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses")

This is a crucial reformulation.

We can see that this way of conceptualizing culture and ideology implies a very different way of "thinking" the relationship between the material basis and the complex superstructures than that which seems to lie at the heart of *The German Ideology*. Althusser and his "school" have been principally responsible for criticizing the "humanist-historicist" manner in which the different levels of social practice are conceptualized and related in that text, and in subsequent theorists which follow on from it. He calls it "Hegelian," because, though society is seen as full of contradictions, mediations, and dialectical movement, the social formation is nevertheless, in the end, reducible to a *simple* structure, with "one principle of internal unity," which "unrolls" evenly throughout all the different levels. This is the conception of a social formation as an "expressive totality." When this manner of thinking a society is brought within the scope of Marx's "determination in the last instance by the economic," then every other level of the social formation—civil life, the forms of the state, political, ideological, and theoretical practices—are all, ultimately, "expressive of, and therefore reducible to, a single contradiction." They are "moved by the simple play of a principle of *simple* contradiction" ("Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses").

From this "base," cultural and ideological forms appear simply as so many reflexive objectivations of a single, undifferentiated, *human praxis*—which, under conditions of capitalist production, becomes reified and alienated: its "one principle of internal unity is itself only possible on the absolute condition of taking the whole concrete life of a people for the externalization-alienation of an internal spiritual principle." As against this, Althusser proposes that we must understand a social formation as "an ever pre-given structured complex whole." There is no simple essence, underlying or predating this structured complexity, to which any single practice—e.g., the production of ideology—can be effectively reduced. As Marx himself argued at length, "The simplest economic category . . . can only ever exist as the unilateral and abstract relation of a pre-given, living concrete whole" (*Grundrisse*). We must therefore "think" a society or social formation as ever and always constituted by a set of complex practices; each with its own specificity, its own modes of articulation; standing in an "uneven development" to other, related practices. Any relation within this structured

complexity will have its registration, its "effects," at all the other levels of the totality—economic, social, political, ideological; none can be reduced to or collapsed into the other. If, nevertheless, this social formation—now conceptualized not as an "economic basis" and its "reflexive superstructures" but rather as a structure-superstructure complex—is not to be conceptualized as a series of totally independent, autonomous, and unrelated practices, then this relatedness must be "thought" *through* the different mechanisms and articulations which connect one with another within the "whole"—articulations which do not proceed in an inevitable tandem, but which are linked through their *differences*, through the dislocations between them, rather than through their similarity, correspondence, or identity. (See Hall, "A 'Reading' of the '1857 Introduction.'") The principle of determinacy—which, as we saw, is fundamental to any materialist theory—must therefore be thought, not as the simple determination of one level (e.g., the economic) over all the others, but as the structured sum of the different determinations, the structure of their overall effects. Althusser gives to this double way of conceiving the "relative autonomy" of practices *and* their "determination in the last instance" the term *overdetermination*. When there is a fusion or "ruptural conjuncture" between all the different levels, this is not because the "economic" ("His Majesty, The Economy") has detached itself and "appeared" on its own as a naked principle of determination, but because the contradictions at the different levels have all *accumulated* within a single conjuncture. That conjuncture is then overdetermined by all the other instances and effects: it is "structured in dominance" (Althusser, *For Marx*).

We can now attempt to "cash" this distinctive way of thinking the interplay of practices and relations within a social formation by considering the level of "ideological practice" and its principal mediator—language. The production of various kinds of social knowledge takes place through the instrumentality of thinking, conceptualization, and symbolization. It operates primarily and principally through language—that set of objective signs and discourses which materially embody the processes of thought and mediate the communication of thought in society. Language is, as Saussure insisted, fundamentally *social*. The individual can only think and speak by first situating himself within the language system. That system is socially constructed and sustained: it cannot be elaborated from the individual speaker alone. Hence speech and the other discourses—including what Volosinov calls "inner speech"—constitute systems of signs which objectivate and intermediate "thinking": they *speak us* as much as we speak in and through them.

To express ourselves within this objectivated system of signs we must have access to the rules and conventions which govern speech and articulation; to the various *codes*—the precise number and disposition of the codes will vary from one linguistic and cultural community to another—through which social life is *classified out* in our culture.

Now in so far as all social life, every facet of social practice, is mediated by language (conceived as a system of signs and representations, arranged by codes and articulated through various discourses), it enters fully into material and social practice. Its distribution and usages will be fundamentally structured by all the other relations of the social formation which employ it. Volosinov observes that "the forms of signs are conditioned above all by the social organization of the participants involved and also by the immediate condition of their interaction." Lev Vygotsky, working in a similar field to Volosinov at the time, insisted that language, like all other social phenomena, is "subject to all the premises of historical materialism." Its usage will therefore reflect the class structuring of capitalist social relations. It will be dependent on the nature of the social relations in which it is embedded, the manner in which its users are socially organized together, the social and material contexts in which it is employed. At the same time, this "world of signs" and discourses has its own internal laws, rules, codes, and conventions, its own modes and mechanisms. The principal element in the articulation of language is the *sign*. Signs are the material registration of meaning. Signs communicate, not simply because they are social phenomena and are part of material reality, but because of the specific function which they have of *refracting* that reality of which they are a part. As the structural linguists have shown, a sign does not carry meaning by unilaterally standing for an object or event in the "real world." There is no such transparent, one-to-one relationship between sign, the thing to which it refers, and what that thing "means." Signs communicate meaning because of the way they are internally organized together within a specific language system or set of codes, articulating the way things are related together in the objective social world. "Signs," Barthes in *Elements of Semiology*, argues, "cut at one and the same time into two floating kingdoms." Thus, events and relations in the "real" world do not have a single natural, necessary and unambiguous meaning which is simply projected, through signs, into language. The same set of social relations can be differently organized to *have a meaning* within different linguistic and cultural systems. (Even at the simplest level, we know that the Eskimos have several different terms for what we call "snow.") And this disjuncture between the

different ways of classifying a domain of social life in different cultures is even more striking, when we move from the denotation of natural objects to the signification of complex social relations. Certain ideological domains will be fully inscribed ideologically in one social formation, thoroughly articulated in a complex field of ideological signs, while others will remain relatively "empty" and undeveloped. Rather than speaking of such relations as "having a meaning" we must think of language as *enabling things to mean*. This is the social practice of *signification*: the practice through which the "labor" of cultural and ideological representation is accomplished. It follows that the ways in which men come to understand their relation to their real conditions of existence, under capitalism, are subject to the *relay of language*. And it is this which makes possible ideological displacement or inflection, whereby the "real" relations can be culturally signified and ideologically inflected as a set of "imaginary lived relations." As Volosinov puts it:

> A sign does not simply exist as a part of reality—it reflects and refracts another reality. Therefore it may distort that reality or be true to it, or may perceive it from a special point of view, and so forth. Every sign is subject to the criteria of ideological evaluation. . . . The domain of ideology coincides with the domain of signs. They equate with one another. Wherever a sign is present, ideology is present too. Everything ideological possesses a semiotic value.

Volosinov recognizes that this sphere will, in any social formation, be organized into a complex *ideological field of discourses*, whose purpose is to endow the social relations which are grasped as "intelligible" within that particular field as having a certain, a "definite" *kind* of intelligibility:

> the domain of the artistic image, the religious symbol, the scientific formula and the judicial ruling, etc. Each field of ideological creativity has its own kind of orientation towards reality and each refracts reality in its own way. Each field commands its own special function within the unity of social life. But it is their semiotic character that places all ideological phenomena under the same general condition.

Nicos Poulantzas has recently attempted to lay out the various *regions* into which the dominant ideologies under capitalism are organized. He argues that, under capitalism, the *juridico-political* region of ideology will play a dominant role; its function being, in part, to hide or "mask" the determinant role which the level of the economic plays in this mode of production—so that "every-

thing takes place as if the centre of the dominant ideology is never in the place where real knowledge is to be sought"; and that other ideological regions—philosophic, religious, and moral ideologies—will tend to "borrow notions" from that instance which plays the dominant role (Poulantzas, *Political Power and Social Classes*). Whether we accept this particular résumé or not, it is of critical importance to understand that ideologies are not simply the "false understandings" of individuals; nor can the individual subject be conceptualized as the source or author of ideology. (We insist on this point, since one of the recent developments in materialist theory, which seeks to combine Marxism with Freudian psychoanalysis, sees the fundamental moment at which the individual subject "positions" himself or herself in ideology as occurring as an unconscious, individual, and trans-cultural process, at the moment when, via the Oedipus complex, men "enter culture.") Important as this line of theorizing is in accounting for the subjective moment of the entry into ideology, it is of critical importance to stress that ideology as a *social practice* consists of the "subject" positioning himself in the specific complex, the objectivated field of discourses and codes which are available to him in language and culture at a particular historical conjuncture—what C. Wright Mills calls "situated actions" and "vocabularies of motives" (Mills, *Power, Politics and People*).

As Umberto Eco has observed, "Semiology shows us the universe of ideologies arranged in codes and sub-codes within the universe of signs" ("Articulations of the Cinematic Code"). It is principally the nature of signs and the arrangement of signs into their various codes and sub-codes, ensembles and sub-ensembles, and what has been called the "intertextuality" of codes, which enable this "work" of cultural signification to be ceaselessly accomplished in societies. Connotative codes, above all, which enable a sign to "reference" a wide domain of social meanings, relations, and associations, are the means by which the widely distributed forms of social knowledge, social practices, the taken-for-granted knowledge which society's members possess of its institutions, beliefs, ideas, and legitimations are "brought within the horizon" of language and culture. These codes constitute the crisscrossing frames of reference, the sedimentations of meaning and connotation, which cover the face of social life and render it classifiable, intelligible, meaningful. (See Hall, "External/Internal Dialectic in Broadcasting"; and Hall, "Deviancy, Politics and the Media.") They constitute the "maps of meaning" of a culture. Barthes calls them "fragments of ideology." "These signifieds," he goes on, "have a very close communication with culture, knowledge and history and it is through them, so to speak, that the environmental world

invades the system [of language]." To each of these cultural lexicons "there corresponds . . . a corpus of practices and techniques; these collections imply on the part of system consumers . . . different degrees of knowledge (according to differences in their 'culture') which explains how the same lexis . . . can be deciphered differently according to the individual concerned without ceasing to belong to a given 'language'" (*Elements of Semiology*). The different areas of social life, the different levels and kinds of relation and practice, appear to be "held together" in social intelligibility by this web of preferred meanings. These networks are clustered into *domains*, which appear to *link*, naturally, certain things to certain other things, within a context, and to exclude others. These domains of meaning, then, have the whole social order and social practice refracted within their classifying schemes.

Marx however insisted, not merely that men live their relations to their real conditions of existence "in ideology," but that, in the capitalist mode of production, they will "think" those conditions, in general, within the limits of a *dominant* ideology; and that, generally, this will tend to be the ideology of the *dominant classes*. The fact that the proletariat "lives" the collective socialization of labor, under capitalism, through the fragmenting form of *the market*, and thinks this condition of its material life within the discourses which organize market practices ideologically (or that, under capitalism the proletariat "lives" the expropriation of surplus value in the "ideological form" of *wages*—a form giving rise to its own ideological discourses: wage bargaining, economism, what Lenin called "trade-union consciousness," "a fair day's wage for a fair day's work," etc.) is not, for Marx, simply a *descriptive* feature of capitalism. These ideological inflections perform a pivotal role in the maintenance of capitalist relations and in their continuing domination within the social formation. Before, then, considering what role the mass media play in relation to these processes, we must briefly examine *how* this notion of dominant ideology is to be understood. What relation does a dominant ideology have to the "dominant," and to the "dominated" classes? What functions does it perform for capital and for the continuation of capitalist relations? What are the mechanisms by which this "work" is accomplished?

Three Related Concepts of "Domination"

In a recent article, which represents a considerable modification of his earlier position, Raymond Williams argues that "in any particular period there is a central system of practices, meanings and values which we can properly

call dominant and effective . . . which are organized and lived." This is understood, not as a static structure—"the dry husks of ideology" ("Base and Superstructure")—but as a *process*: the process of incorporation. Williams cites the educational institutions as one of the principal agencies of this process. By means of it, certain of the available meanings and values through which the different classes of men live their conditions of life are "chosen for emphasis," others discarded. More crucially, the many meanings and values which lie outside of the selective and selecting emphases of this central core are continually "reinterpreted, diluted, or put into forms which support or at least do not contradict other elements within the effective dominant culture." The dominant system must therefore continually make and remake itself so as to contain those meanings, practices, and values which are oppositional to it. Williams therefore understands any society to contain many more systems of meaning and value than those incorporated in its "central system of practices, meanings and values"—"no mode of production and therefore no dominant society or order . . . and therefore no dominant culture in reality exhausts human practice, human energy, human intention." What then constitutes the "dominance" of these dominant meanings and practices are the mechanisms which allow it to select, incorporate, and therefore also exclude elements in what Williams understood as the full range of human practice (the selectivity of *tradition* plays a key role here). He identifies two classes of alternative meaning and practice. There are "residual" forms of alternative or oppositional culture, which consist of meanings and values which cannot find expression within the dominant structure, but which are principally drawn from the past. Ideas associated with the rural past and with "organic society" are examples of *residual* elements in our culture. They have often formed the basis (the English "culture-and-society" tradition is the best example) of a critique of existing cultural forms and tendencies: but they threaten it, so to speak, from the past. *Emergent* forms are the area of new practices, new meanings and values. Both residual and emergent forms of culture may, of course, be partially "incorporated" into the dominant structure: or they may be left as a deviation or enclave which varies from, without threatening, the central emphases.

Despite his continuing stress on experience and intention, this definition of "dominant culture" in Williams clearly owes a great deal to Gramsci's pivotal and commanding notion of *hegemony* (*Prison Notebooks*). Gramsci argued that "hegemony" exists when a ruling class (or, rather, an alliance of ruling class fractions, a "historical bloc") is able not only to coerce a subordinate

class to conform to its interests, but exerts a "total social authority" over those classes and the social formation as a whole. "Hegemony" is in operation when the dominant class fractions not only dominate but *direct* or lead: when they not only possess the power to coerce but actively organize so as to command and win the consent of the subordinated classes to their continuing sway. "Hegemony" thus depends on a combination of force and consent. But—Gramsci argues—in the liberal-capitalist state, consent is normally in the lead, operating behind "the armour of coercion." Hegemony, then, cannot be won in the productive and economic sphere alone: it must be organized at the level of the state, politics, and the superstructures—indeed the latter is the *terrain* on which "hegemony" is accomplished. In part, "hegemony" is achieved by the *containment* of the subordinate classes within the "superstructures": but crucially, these structures of "hegemony" work by *ideology*. This means that the "definitions of reality," favorable to the dominant class fractions, and institutionalized in the spheres of civil life and the state, come to constitute the primary "lived reality" as such for the subordinate classes. In this way ideology provides the "cement" in a social formation, "preserving the ideological unity of the entire social bloc." This operates, not because the dominant classes can prescribe and proscribe, in detail, the mental content of the lives of subordinate classes (they too "live" in their own ideologies), but because they strive and to a degree succeed in *framing* all competing definitions of reality *within their range*, bringing all alternatives within their horizon of thought. They set the limits—mental and structural—within which subordinate classes "live" and make sense of their subordination in such a way as to sustain the dominance of those ruling over them. Gramsci makes it plain that ideological hegemony must be won and sustained through the existing ideologies, and that at any time this will represent a complex *field* (not a single, univocal structure), bearing "traces" of previous ideological systems and sedimentations, and complex ideological notations referring to the present. "Hegemony" cannot be sustained by a single, unified "ruling class" but only by a particular conjunctural alliance of class fractions; thus the content of dominant ideology will reflect this complex interior formation of the dominant classes. Hegemony is accomplished through the agencies of the superstructures—the family, education system, the church, the media, and cultural institutions, as well as the coercive side of the state—the law, police, the army, which *also*, in part, "work through ideology." It is crucial to the concept that hegemony is not a "given" and permanent state of affairs, but has to be actively won and *secured*: it can also be lost. Gramsci was preoccupied

with Italian society, in which, for long periods, various alliances of the ruling classes had ruled through "force" without taking over an authoritative and legitimate *leadership* in the state. There is no *permanent* hegemony: it can only be established, and analyzed, in concrete historical conjunctures. The reverse side of this is that, even under hegemonic conditions, there can be no total incorporation or absorption of the subordinate classes (such as, for example, is foreseen in Marcuse's *One-Dimensional Man*). The dominated classes, which have their own objective basis in the system of productive relations, their own distinctive forms of social life and class practice, remain—often as a separate, distinct, dense, and cohesive structure—a *corporate* class culture which is nevertheless *contained*. When these subordinated classes are not strong or sufficiently organized to represent a "counter-hegemonic" force to the existing order, their own corporate structures and institutions can be used, by the dominant structure (hegemonized), as a means of enforcing their continued subordination. The trade unions, which arise as a defensive set of institutions in the working class, can nevertheless be used to provide a structure which perpetuates the *corporateness* of that class, confining its opposition within limits which the system can contain (e.g., "economism"). However, for Gramsci, this does not represent the total disappearance of a subordinate class into the culture of a hegemonic bloc, but the *achieved complementarity* between hegemonic and subordinate classes and their cultures. This complementarity—Gramsci calls it an unstable equilibrium—is the one moment of the class struggle which never disappears; but it can be more or less open, more or less contained, more or less oppositional. In general, then, "hegemony" achieves the establishment of a certain *equilibrium* in the class struggle so that, whatever are the concessions the ruling "bloc" is required to make to win consent and legitimacy, its fundamental basis will not be overturned. "In other words, the dominant group is coordinated concretely with the general interests of the subordinate groups, and the life of the state is conceived as a continuous process of formation and superseding of unstable equilibria . . . between the interests of the fundamental group and those subordinate groups—equilibria in which the interests of the dominant group prevail, but only up to a certain point, i.e. stopping short of narrowly corporate economic interests" (*Prison Notebooks*). For Gramsci, this often has a great deal to do with the manner in which, at the level of the superstructures and the state, particular interests can be represented as "general interests" in which all classes have an equal stake.

The immense theoretical revolution which Gramsci's concept of "hegemony" represents (over, for example, the much simpler and more mechanical formulations of many parts of *The German Ideology*) cannot be overstressed. Through this concept, Gramsci considerably enlarges the whole notion of domination. He places it fundamentally in "the relations between structure and superstructure which must be accurately posed and resolved if the forces which are active in a particular period are to be correctly analysed." In doing so, he sets the concept at a critical distance from all types of economic or mechanical reductionism, from both "economism" and conspiracy theory. He redefines the whole notion of *power* so as to give full weight to its non-coercive aspects. He also sets the notion of domination at a distance from the direct expression of narrow class interests. He understands that ideology is not "psychological or moralistic but structural and epistemological." Above all he allows us to begin to grasp the central role which the superstructures, the state and civil associations, politics and ideology, play in securing and cementing societies "structured in dominance," and in actively conforming the whole of social, ethical, mental, and moral life in their overall tendencies to the requirements of the productive system. This enlarged concept of class power and of ideology has provided one of the most advanced theoretical bases for elaborating a "regional" theory of the much-neglected and often reduced spheres of the superstructural and ideological complexes of capitalist societies.

The third concept of domination is also closely inspired by and elaborated from Gramsci, though it is critical of the traces of "historicism" in Gramsci's philosophical approach to materialism. This is the thesis, signaled in an exploratory manner in Althusser's important and influential essay, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses." "Ideological State Apparatuses" became known, for short, as "ISAs." This introduces the key notion of *reproduction* which has played an extremely important role in recent theorizing on these issues. Briefly, Althusser argues that capitalism as a productive system reproduces the conditions of production "on an expanded scale," and this must include *social reproduction*—the reproduction of labor-power and of the relations of production. This includes wages, without which labor-power cannot reproduce itself; skills, without which labor-power cannot reproduce itself as a developing "productive force"; and "appropriate ideas":

> a reproduction of its submission to the rules of the established order, i.e. a reproduction of submission to the ruling ideology for the workers, and a

> reproduction of the ability to manipulate the ruling ideology correctly for the agents of exploitation and repression . . . it is the forms and under the forms of ideological subjection that provision is made for the reproduction of the skills of labour power.

But this expanded notion of "social reproduction" precisely requires the agency of all those apparatuses which are apparently not directly linked in with production as such. The reproduction of labor-power through the wage requires *the family*; the reproduction of advanced skills and techniques requires the *education system*; the "reproduction of the submission to the ruling ideology" requires the *cultural institutions*, the *church* and the *mass media*, the *political apparatuses* and the overall management of the state, which, in advanced capitalism, increasingly takes all these other, "non-productive" apparatuses into its terrain. Since the state is the structure which ensures that this "social reproduction" is carried through (a) with the consent of the whole society, since the state is understood as "neutral," above class interests, and (b) in the long-term interests of the continued hegemony of capital and of the ruling class bloc, Althusser calls all the apparatuses involved in this process (whether or not they are strictly organized by the state) "ideological state apparatuses." (In fact, both Althusser and Poulantzas—who follows Althusser closely in this—exaggerate the role of the state and undervalue the role of other elements in the reproduction of capitalist social relations.) Unlike the coercive institutions of the state, these ISAs rule principally *through ideology*. Althusser recognizes that the ruling classes do not "rule" *directly* or in their own name and overt interests, but via the necessary displacements, examined earlier, through the "class neutral" structures of the state, and the complexly constructed field of ideologies. But the "diversity and contradictions" of these different spheres in which the different apparatuses function are nevertheless unified "beneath the ruling ideology." In this arena Althusser gives pride of place to what he calls "the School-Family" couple. He understands "ruling ideology" here in terms of his exposition (summarized earlier)—as the "system of ideas and representations" by means of which men understand and "live" an imaginary relation to their real conditions of existence: "What is represented in ideology is therefore not the system of the real relations which governs the existence of men, but the imaginary relation of those individuals to the real relations in which they live."

Althusser is, here, despite important differences in terminology and in theoretical perspective, moving very close to the terrain of Gramsci's work

(far closer than in the now acknowledgedly "over-theoreticist" formulations of some parts of *Reading Capital*): but with at least two significant differences of stress. First, Althusser insists that, since the terrain of ideologies is not simple but complex, and consists not simply of "ruling ideas" but of a field of ideological thematics constituted by *the relation* "in ideas" between dominant and subordinate classes, what the ISAs reproduce must be the ruling ideology "precisely in its contradictions." Ideological reproduction thus becomes "not only the stake but also the site of class struggle." Second, he insists that the form of the "unity" which the ISAs accomplish is closer to that of a "teeth-gritting harmony" than a functional "fit." But both these aspects of his self-styled "Notes"—the idea of continuing struggle and of a *contradictory* reproduction in the sphere of ideology—though actively insisted upon, appear, in fact, more marginal to the theoretical heart of his argument, which centers upon the concept of continuing reproduction of the social relations of a system. This has the effect (as compared with Gramsci) of making Althusser's outline more functionalist than he would clearly like.

What Does Ideology "Do" for the Dominant Capitalist Order?

Gramsci, following Marx, suggested that there were "two, great floors" to the superstructures—civil society and the state. (Marx, we recall, had called them both "ideological" or "phenomenal forms." Gramsci, it should be noted, is particularly confusing as to the distinction between the two, a matter made more complex because, in the conditions of advanced monopoly capitalism, the boundaries between these two "floors" are, in any case, shifting.) One way of thinking the general function of ideology, in relation to these two spheres, is in terms of what Poulantzas calls *separation and uniting*. In the sphere of market relations and of "egoistic private interest" (the sphere, preeminently, of "civil society") the productive classes *appear* or are represented as (a) individual economic units driven by private and egoistic interests alone, which are (b) bound by the multitude of invisible contracts—the "hidden hand" of capitalist exchange relations. As we have remarked, this re-presentation has the effect, first, of *shifting* emphasis and visibility from production to exchange, second of *fragmenting* classes into individuals, third of *binding* individuals into that "passive community" of consumers. Likewise, in the sphere of the state and of juridico-political ideology, the political classes and class relations are represented as individual

subjects (citizens, the voter, the sovereign individual in the eyes of the law and the representative system, etc.); and these individual political legal subjects are then "bound together" as members of a *nation*, united by the "social contract," and by their common and mutual "general interest." (Marx calls the general interest "precisely the generality of self-seeking interests.") Once again, the class nature of the state is masked: classes are redistributed into individual subjects: and these individuals are united within the imaginary coherence of the state, the nation, and the "national interest." It is surprising how many of the dominant ideological regions accomplish their characteristic inflections by way of this mechanism.

Poulantzas brings together a number of critical functions of ideology within this paradigmatic ideological *figure*. The first general ideological effect under capitalism appears to be that of *masking and displacing*. Class domination, the class-exploitative nature of the system, the source of this fundamental expropriation in the sphere of production, the determinacy in this mode of production of the economic—time and again the general manner in which the ideologies of the dominant culture function is to mask, conceal, or repress these antagonistic foundations of the system. The second general effect, then, is that of *fragmentation* or separation. The unity of the different spheres of the state are dispersed into the theory of the "separation of powers" ("Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses"). The collective interests of the working classes are fragmented into the internal oppositions between different strata of the class. The value which is collectively created is individually and privately appropriated. The "needs" of producers are represented as the "wants" of consumers—the two so separate that they can, in fact, be set against one another. In most of the dominant regions of this ideological field, the constituting category is what Poulantzas calls "individuals-persons." The moral, juridical, representational, and psychological lexicons of the dominant system of practices, values, and meanings could literally not be constituted at all without this thoroughly bourgeois category of "possessive individuals." (Hence Althusser's stress on ideology "interpellating the subject.") The third ideological "effect" is that of imposing an *imaginary unity or coherence* on the units so re-presented; and thus of replacing the real unity of the first level with the "imaginary lived relations" of the third. This consists of the reconstituting of individual person-subjects into the various ideological totalities—the "community," the "nation," "public opinion," "the consensus," the "general interest," the "popular will," "society," "ordinary consumers" (even Mr. Heath's great conglomerate, the "trade union of the nation"!). At

this level, unities are once again produced; but now in forms which mask and displace the level of class relations and economic contradictions and *represents* them as non-antagonistic totalities. This is Gramsci's hegemonic function of *consent and cohesion*.

One of the critical sites of this masking-fragmenting-uniting process is the state, especially under modern advanced capitalist conditions. We cannot elaborate on a Marxist theory of the state at this point. But the important fact about the state, for our purposes, is that it is the sphere, *par excellence*, where the *generalization* and *universalizing* of class interests into "the general interest" takes place. Hegemony is founded not only on force but on consent and leadership precisely because, within it, class interests are generalized in their passage through the mediation of the state: Gramsci refers to this process as "the decisive passage from the structure to the sphere of the complex superstructures" (*Prison Notebooks*). The state is necessary to ensure the conditions for the continued expansion of capital. But it also functions on behalf of capital—as what Engels called the "ideal total capitalist," often securing the long-term interests of capital against the narrow and immediate class interests of particular sections of the capitalist classes. In this lies its relative independence of any alliance of ruling classes. Rather than *ruling* the state, like Lenin's "executive committee," these classes must *rule through the mediation of* the state, where, precisely—through its different ideological discourses—class interests can assume the form of "the general interest" and (as Marx and Engels remarked in *The German Ideology*) are given "the form of universality and represent[ed] . . . as the only rational, universally valid ones." It is in this function, above all—secured not only by the dominant ideologies of the state but by its relations and structures—that the state imposes an "order which legalizes and perpetuates this [class] oppression by moderating the collision between the classes" (Lenin, *The State and Revolution*). It was Engels who remarked that "once the state has become an independent power vis-à-vis society, it produces forthwith a further ideology. It is indeed amongst professional politicians, theorists of public law and jurists of private law that the connection with economic facts gets lost for fair. . . . The interconnections between conceptions and their material conditions of existence become more and more complicated, more and more obscured by intermediary links" ("Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy").

The third arena of ideological effects which we must mention has to do, not with the process of ideological re-presentation, but with securing legitimacy and winning consent for these representations. The questions of legitimacy

and consent are crucial for Gramsci's concept of "hegemony," since it is through them that the dominant classes can use the field of ideologies positively to *construct* hegemony (what Gramsci calls the educative and ethical functions); but, also, because it is through them that the dominant system comes to win a certain *acceptance* from the dominated classes. The same processes of masking-fragmenting-uniting, commented on before, are to be found in this process of securing the legitimacy and assent of the subordinated to their subordination. Here, in the structures of political representation and of "separate powers" and of liberties and freedoms, which lie at the core of bourgeois-liberal formal democracy, both as superstructures and as lived ideologies, the operation of one class upon another in *shaping and producing consent* (through the selective forms of social knowledge made available) is rendered invisible: this exercise of ideological class domination is dispersed through the fragmentary agencies of a myriad of individual wills and opinions, separate powers; this fragmentation of opinion is then *reorganized* into an imaginary coherence in the mystical unity of "the consensus," into which free and sovereign individuals and their wills "spontaneously" flow. In this process, that consent-to-hegemony whose premises and preconditions are constantly structuring the sum of what individuals in society think, believe, and want, is represented, in appearance, as a freely given and "natural" coming together into a *consensus* which legitimates the exercise of power. This structuring and reshaping of consent and consensus—the reverse side of "hegemony"—is one of the principal kinds of work which the dominant ideologies perform.

Only at this point is it possible to attempt to situate, in the most general terms, the ideological role and effects sustained by the mass media in contemporary capitalist societies. The ideological role of the media is by no means their only or exclusive function. The modern forms of the media first appear decisively, though on a comparatively minor scale as compared with their present density, in the eighteenth century, with and alongside the transformation of England into an agrarian capitalist society. Here, for the first time, the artistic product becomes a commodity; artistic and literary work achieves its full realization as an exchange value in the literary market; and the institutions of a culture rooted in market relationships begin to appear: books, newspapers, and periodicals; booksellers and circulating libraries; reviews and reviewing; journalists and hacks; bestsellers and pot-boilers. The first new "medium"—the novel, intimately connected with the rise of the emergent bourgeois classes (Watt, *The Rise of the Novel*)—appears

in this period. This transformation of the relations of culture and of the means of cultural production and consumption also provokes the first major rupture in the problematic of "culture"—the first appearance of the modern "cultural debate." (See Lowenthal, *Literature, Popular Culture and Society*.) (It is one of those great ironies that the very historical moment when this is happening is the one which, retrospectively, was represented by the conservative parts of the culture-and-society tradition and its heirs, as the last gasp of the "organic community.") The evolution of the media, historically, cannot be traced here. But it is closely connected with the next profound transformation—that through which an agrarian capitalist society and culture becomes an industrial-urban capitalist one. This sets the scene, and provides the material basis and the social organization for the second great phase of change and expansion in the media of cultural production and distribution. The third phase coincides with the transformation from first-stage to second-stage industrial capitalism, or from laissez-faire to what is rather ambiguously called advanced "monopoly" capitalism. This "long," uneven, and in many ways uncompleted transition, lasting from about the 1880s—through popular imperialism (in which the new popular press took deep root); the "remaking" of English working-class culture (Stedman Jones, "Notes on the Remaking of a Class") and the rise of suburbia; the concentration and incorporation of capital; the reorganization of the capitalist division of labor; enormous productive and technological expansion; the organization of mass markets and of mass domestic consumption, etc.—to the present. This is the phase in which the modern mass media come into their own, massively expand and multiply, install themselves as the principal means and channels for the production and distribution of culture, and absorb more and more of the spheres of public communication into their orbit. It coincides with and is decisively connected with everything that we now understand as characterizing "monopoly" capitalism (and which was, for a very long period, ideologically misappropriated in the theory of "mass society"). In the later stages of this development, the media have penetrated right into the heart of the modern labor and productive process itself, grounded in the reorganization of capital and the state and marshaled within the same scale of mass organizations as other economic and technical parts of the system. These aspects of the growth and expansion of the media, historically, have to be left to one side by the exclusive attention given here to media as "ideological apparatuses."

Quantitatively and qualitatively, in twentieth-century advanced capitalism, the media have established a decisive and fundamental leadership in the cultural sphere. Simply in terms of economic, technical, social, and cultural resources, the mass media command a qualitatively greater slice than all the older, more traditional cultural channels which survive. Far more important is the manner in which the whole gigantic complex sphere of public information, intercommunication, and exchange—the production and consumption of "social knowledge" in societies of this type—depends upon the mediation of the modern means of communication. They have progressively *colonized* the cultural and ideological sphere. As social groups and classes live, if not in their productive then in their "social" relations, increasingly fragmented and sectionally differentiated lives, the mass media are more and more responsible (a) for providing the basis on which groups and classes construct an "image" of the lives, meanings, practices, and values of *other* groups and classes; (b) for providing the images, representations, and ideas around which the social totality, composed of all these separate and fragmented pieces, can be coherently grasped as a "*whole*." This is the first of the great cultural functions of the modern media: the provision and the selective construction of *social knowledge*, of social imagery, through which we perceive the "worlds," the "lived realities" of others, and imaginarily reconstruct their lives and ours into some intelligible "world-of-the-whole," some "lived totality."

As society under the conditions of modern capital and production grows more complex and multifaceted, so it is experienced as more "pluralistic" in form. In regions, classes and sub-classes, in cultures and subcultures, neighborhoods and communities, interest groups and associative minorities, *varieties* of life-patterns are composed and recomposed in bewildering complexity. So an apparent plurality, an infinite variety of ways of classifying and ordering social life offer themselves as "collective representations" in place of the great unitary ideological universe, the master "canopies of legitimation," of previous epochs. The second function of the modern media is to reflect and *reflect on this plurality* to provide a constant *inventory* of the lexicons, lifestyles, and ideologies which are objectivated there. Here the different types of "social knowledge" are classified and ranked and ordered, assigned to their referential contexts within the preferred "maps of problematic social reality" (Geertz, "Ideology as a Cultural System"). The media's function here, as Halloran has remarked, is "the provision of social realities where they did not exist before or the giving of new directions to tendencies already

present, in such a way that the adoption of the new attitude or form of behaviour is made a socially acceptable mode of conduct, whilst failure to adopt is represented as socially disapproved deviance" (Halloran, "The Social Effects of Television"). Here the social knowledge which the media selectively circulate is ranked and arranged within the great normative and evaluative classifications, within the *preferred* meanings and interpretations. Since, as we argued earlier, there is no unitary ideological discourse into which all of this selective social knowledge can be programmed, and since many more "worlds" than that of a unitary "ruling class" must be selectively represented and classified in the media's apparently open and diverse manner, this assignment of social relations to their classifying schemes and contexts is, indeed, the site of an enormous *ideological labor*, of ideological *work*: establishing the "rules" of each domain, actively ruling in and ruling out certain realities, offering the maps and codes which mark out territories and assign problematic events and relations to explanatory contexts, helping us not simply to *know more* about "the world" but to *make sense of it*. Here the line, amid all its contradictions, in conditions of struggle and contradiction, between *preferred* and *excluded* explanations and rationales, between permitted and deviant behaviors, between the "meaningless" and the "meaningful," between the incorporated practices, meanings, and values and the oppositional ones, is ceaselessly drawn and redrawn, defended and negotiated: indeed, the "site and stake" of struggle. "Class," Volosinov observed,

> does not coincide with the sign community, i.e. with the community which is the totality of users of the same set of signs for ideological communication. Thus various different classes will use one and the same language. As a result, differently oriented accents intersect in every ideological sign. Sign becomes the arena of the class struggle. This social *multi-accentuality* of the ideological sign is a very crucial aspect. By and large, it is thanks to this intersecting of accents that a sign maintains its vitality and dynamism. . . . A sign that has been withdrawn from the pressures of the social struggle—which, so to speak, crosses beyond the pale of the class struggle—inevitably loses force, degenerating into allegory and becoming the object not of a live social intelligibility but of philological comprehension. (*Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*)

The third function of the media, from this point of view, is to organize, orchestrate, and *bring together* that which it has selectively represented and selectively classified. Here, however fragmentary and "plurally," some degree

of integration and cohesion, some imaginary coherence and unities must begin to be constructed. What has been made visible and classified begins to shake into an *acknowledged order*: a complex order, to be sure, in which the direct and naked intervention of the *real* unities (of class, power, exploitation, and interest) are forever held somewhat at bay through the more neutral and integrative coherence of public opinion. From this difficult and delicate negotiatory work, the problematic areas of *consensus and consent* begin to emerge. In the interplay of opinions, freely given and exchanged, to which the idea of consensus always makes its ritual bow, *some* voices and opinions exhibit greater weight, resonance, defining and limiting power—for the pure consensus of classical liberal-democratic theory has long since given way to the reality of the more shaped and structured consensus, constructed in the unequal exchange between the unorganized masses and the great organizing centers of power and opinion—the consensus of the "big battalions," so to speak. Nevertheless, in its own way and time, room must be found for other voices, for "minority" opinions, for "contrary" views, so that a shape, to which all reasonable men can begin to attach themselves, emerges. This forms the great unifying and consolidating level of the media's ideological work: the generative structure beneath the media's massive investment in the surface immediacy, the phenomenal multiplicity, of the social worlds in which it traffics. The production of consensus, the construction of legitimacy—not so much the finished article itself, but the whole process of argument, exchange, debate, consultation, and speculation by which it emerges—is the third key aspect of the media's ideological effect.

Finally, what are the actual *mechanisms* which enable the mass media to perform this "ideological work"? In the class democracies, the media are not, on the whole, directly commanded and organized by the state (though, as in the case of British broadcasting, the links may be very close). They are not directly subverted by a section of the "ruling class" speaking in its own voice. They cannot be directly colonized by one of the ruling-class parties: no major interest of capital can exercise its access to the channels of communication without some "countervailing" voice. In their day-to-day administration and practices, the media are set to work within the framework of an impartial professional-technical set of working ideologies (e.g., the "neutral" structure of news values, applied, like the rule of law, "equally" to all sides); though the configurations which they offer are strikingly selective, drawn from an extremely limited *repertoire*, the open operation of "bias" is the exception

rather than the rule. How, then, do the discourses of the media become systematically penetrated and inflected by dominant ideologies?

We can only refer here to some of the mechanisms, taking television here as the paradigm instance, by which the media achieve their ideological effects. The media, as we have suggested, are socially, economically, and technically organized apparatuses, for the production of messages, signs arranged in complex discourses: symbolic "goods." The production of symbolic messages cannot be accomplished without passing through the relay of language, broadly understood as the systems of signs which signify meaning. Events on their own cannot, as we have tried to show, signify: they must be *made intelligible*; and the process of social intelligibility consists precisely in those practices which translate "real" events (whether drawn from actuality or fictionally constructed) into symbolic form. This is the process we have called *encoding*. But encoding (Hall, "Encoding and Decoding") means precisely that—selecting the codes which assign meanings to events, placing events in a referential context which attribute meaning to them. (Fictional codes perform this work too; it is not limited to the codes of "actuality" and naturalism.) There are significantly different ways in which events—especially problematic or troubling events, which breach our normal, commonsense expectations, or run counter to the given tendency of things or threaten the status quo in some way—can be encoded. The selection of codes, those which are the *preferred* codes in the different domains, and which appear to embody the "natural" explanations which most members of the society would accept (that is, which appear naturally to incarnate the "rationality" of our particular society), casts these problematic events, consensually, somewhere within the *repertoire* of the dominant ideologies. We must remember that this is not a single, unitary, but a plurality of dominant discourses: that they are not deliberately selected by encoders to "reproduce events within the horizon of the dominant ideology," but constitute the *field* of meanings within which they must choose. Precisely because they have become "universalized and naturalized," they appear to be the only forms of intelligibility available; they have become sedimented as "the only rational, universally valid ones" (*The German Ideology*). The premises and preconditions which sustain their rationalities have been rendered invisible by the process of ideological masking and taking-for-granted we earlier described. They seem to be, even to those who employ and manipulate them for the purposes of encoding, simply the "sum of what we already know." That they contain premises, that these premises embody the dominant definitions of the situation, and represent

or refract the existing structures of power, wealth, and domination, hence that they *structure* every event they signify, and *accent* them in a manner which reproduces the given ideological structures—this process has become unconscious, even for the encoders. It is masked, frequently, by the intervention of the professional ideologies—those practical-technical routinizations of practice (news values, news sense, lively presentation, "exciting pictures," good stories, hot news, etc.) which, at the phenomenal level, structure the everyday practices of encoding, and set the encoder within the bracket of a professional-technical neutrality which, in any case, distances him or her effectively from the ideological content of the material s/he is handling and the ideological inflections of the codes s/he is employing. Hence, though events will not be systematically encoded in a single way, they will tend, systematically, to draw on a very limited ideological or explanatory repertoire; and that repertoire (though in each case it requires ideological "work" to bring new events within its horizon) will have the overall tendency of making things "mean" within the sphere of the dominant ideology. Further, since the encoder wants to enforce the explanatory reach, the credibility and the effectiveness of the "sense" which s/he is making of events, s/he will employ the whole repertoire of encodings (visual, verbal, presentations, performance) to "win consent" in the audience; not for his or her own "biased" way of interpreting events, but for the legitimacy of the *range or limits* within which his encodings are operating. These "points of identification" make the preferred reading of events credible and forceful: they sustain its preferences through the *accenting* of the ideological field. Volosinov would say that they exploit the sign's ideological flux. They aim to "win the consent" of the audience, and hence structure the manner in which the receiver of these signs will decode the message. We have tried to show, elsewhere (Hall, "Encoding and Decoding"; Morley, "Reconceptualizing the Media Audience"), that audiences, whose decodings will inevitably reflect their own material and social conditions, will not necessarily decode events within the same ideological structures as those in which they have been encoded. But the overall intention of "effective communication" must, certainly, be to "win the consent" of the audience to the *preferred reading*, and hence to get him/her to decode within the hegemonic framework. Even when decodings are not made, through a "perfect transmission," within the hegemonic framework, the great range of decodings will tend to be "negotiations" *within* the dominant codes—giving them a more situational inflection—rather than systematically decoding them in a *counter*-hegemonic way. "Negotiated" decodings, which allow

wide "exceptions" to be made in terms of the way the audience situates itself within the hegemonic field of ideologies, but which also legitimate the wider reach, the inclusive reference, the greater overall coherence of the dominant encodings, reflect and are based upon what we called, earlier, the structured complementarity of the classes. That is, the areas for negotiation within the hegemonic codes provide precisely those necessary *spaces* in the discourse where corporate and subordinate classes insert themselves. Since the media not only are widely and diffusely distributed throughout the classes, but bring them within the grid of social communication, and must continually reproduce their own popular legitimacy for commanding that ideological territory, these negotiated spaces and inflections, which permit the subordinate readings to be contained within the larger ideological syntagmas of the dominant codes, are absolutely pivotal to media legitimacy, and give that legitimacy a popular basis. The construction of a "consensus" basis for media work is how, in part, this work of legitimation is realized.

The legitimation for this process of ideological construction and deconstruction which structures the processes of encoding and decoding is underpinned by the position of the media apparatuses. These are not, as we have suggested, by and large in our kinds of society, directly owned and organized by the state. But there is a crucial sense (it may be this which enabled Althusser to call them, nevertheless, "Ideological *State* Apparatuses") in which it must be said that the media relate to the ruling class alliances, not directly but indirectly; and hence they have some of the characteristics—the "relative autonomy"—of the state apparatuses themselves. Broadcasting, for example, functions, like the law, and the governmental bureaucracies, under the rubric of the "separation of powers." Not only can it not be commandeered by any single class or class party directly; but this direct and explicit command (like its reverse, a deliberate inclination toward them, or "bias," on the part of the communicators) would immediately destroy the basis of their legitimacy—since it would reveal an open complicity with ruling-class power. The media, then, like other state complexes in the modern stage of capitalist development, absolutely depend on their "relative autonomy" from ruling-class power in the narrow sense. These are enshrined in the operational principles of broadcasting—"objectivity," "neutrality," "impartiality," and "balance": or, rather, these are the practices through which broadcasting's "relative neutrality" is realized (Hall, "External/Internal Dialectic in Broadcasting"; and Hall, "Determinations of News Photographs"). Balance, for example, ensures that there will always be a two-sided dialogue, and thus always more than one

definition of the situation available to the audience. In the political sphere, broadcasting here reproduces with remarkable exactness the forms of parliamentary democracy, and of "democratic debate," on which other parts of the system—the political apparatuses, for example—are constituted. The ideological "work" of the media, in these conditions, does *not*, then, regularly and routinely, depend on *subverting* the discourse for the direct support of one or another of the major *positions* within the dominant ideologies: it depends on the underwiring and underpinning of that *structured ideological field* in which the positions play, and over which, so to speak, they "contend." For though the major political parties sharply disagree about this or that aspect of policy, there are fundamental agreements which bind the opposing positions into a complex unity: all the presuppositions, the limits to the argument, the terms of reference, etc. which those elements within the system must *share* in order to "disagree." It is this underlying "unity" which the media underwrite and reproduce: and it is in this sense that the ideological inflection of media discourses are best understood, not as "partisan" but as fundamentally oriented "within the mode of reality of the state." The role of shaping and organizing *consensus*, which is necessarily a complex not a simple entity, is critical here. What constitutes this, not simply as a field, but as a field which is "structured in dominance," is the way its limits operate—to rule certain kinds of interpretation "in" or "out," to effect its systematic *inclusions* (for example, those "definitions of the situation" which regularly, of necessity, and legitimately "have access" to the structuring of any controversial topic) and *exclusions* (for example, those groups, interpretations, positions, aspects of the reality of the system which are regularly "ruled out of court" as "extremist," "irrational," "meaningless," "utopian," "impractical," etc.) (Hall, "The Structured Communication of Events"; and Connell, Curti, and Hall, "The 'Unity' of Current Affairs TV").

Inevitably we have had to confine ourselves here to very broad mechanisms and processes, in order to give some substance to the general proposition advanced. This proposition can now be stated in a simple way, against the background of the theoretical and analytic framework established in the essay. The media serve, in societies like ours, ceaselessly to perform the critical ideological work of "classifying out the world" within the discourses of the dominant ideologies. This is neither simply, nor conscious, "work": it is *contradictory work*—in part because of the internal contradictions between those different ideologies which constitute the dominant terrain, but even more because these ideologies struggle and contend for dominance in the field of class practices and class

struggle. Hence there is no way in which the "work" can be carried through without, to a considerable degree, also reproducing the contradictions which structure its field. Thus we must say that the work of "ideological reproduction" which they perform is by definition work in which counteracting tendencies—Gramsci's "unstable equilibria"—will constantly be manifested. We can speak, then, only of the *tendency* of the media—but it is a systematic tendency, not an incidental feature—to reproduce the ideological field of a society in such a way as to reproduce, also, its structure of domination.

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