

Media/Theory Group Presentation: Working Paper on:

The Ideological dimension of media messages.

I want to start by posing some questions about the concept of ideology as such, in order, then, to try to get a clearer sense, and perhaps common agreement, on what I understand by the ideological instance of the message. On the other hand, I have neither the intention nor pretension to solve any of the substantive problems of this delicate field of sociology, and I certainly cannot offer a theory of ideology. I'll pick up here and there the bits and pieces which I have found useful when dealing with ideological content of the media. I'm sure that, even in such a modest undertaking, we will find points of disagreement, which can be taken up in discussion.

To try and link the phenomena of mass communication with the sociological problematic of ideologies is a very delicate and difficult enterprise. However I am convinced that, when we establish the relation between both fields and clear up some of the problems implicit in trying to establish this relation, we will have achieved a very positive step towards a reconceptualisation of the sociology of communication. The introduction of a relatively complex model of ideology will give firmer theoretical basis to the investigations on mass communication. On the other hand, the profound technological transformations of the structures of communication in urban-industrial societies seem to require a revision of the classical sociological methodology for the study of ideological processes. As usual in these cases, the difficulties begin when we have to decide what exactly we understand by 'ideology' and 'ideological'.

What the classical sociology of knowledge called 'ideology' is not the same thing which this term denotes in more recent work in, say, the sociology of 'public opinion' or political science. A change has occurred in the problematic, so that the definition of the concepts which determine the two fields are not the same. For example, the attempt to identify the concept of 'ideology' with that of 'opinion' dilutes the notion of dominance which was always there in the more classical approach. In current political science, the sociologist who examines ideological material works with opinions, usually those given in interview, which are responses to very precise questions, such as: what party do you vote for? why? etc. These opinion researchers have moved from the comprehensive concept of ideology to a far more limited concept of 'opinion' - i.e. from the study of the philosophy of ideas and culture to the opinions of the man in the street. This appears as more 'operational', and it can certainly be more easily quantified: but it tends to take the whole framework of ideas within which individuals express 'opinions' as given, and neutral, and therefore unproblematic: all that requires pin-pointing is where individuals position themselves inside this framework, or how their position has changed as a result of exposure to certain 'stimuli'. Thus, the shift in the theoretical perspective has also been followed by a methodological change, leading to the introduction of new techniques of research and modern ways of measuring effects and attitudes. In a way, these new techniques support a completely new perspective in the analysis of cultural phenomena from that indicated by the concept, 'ideology'. This change can itself be seen as 'ideological', since, by taking the ideological framework in which opinions are ranked as 'neutral', it proceeded to analyse the field as if 'ideological communication' in the more classical sense could not exist at all. That is - it produced, as its result, a new state of things, already operating inside its problematic: the 'ideology of the 'end-of-ideologies'.

This process could lead us to discuss the related sociological mythology of 'mass society', this peculiar social system where ideologies seem to have become invisible, but where, in fact, far from having disappeared, ideologies now impregnate all the fields of social communication, and its self-reflection in communication research.

In marxist analysis and in other recent developments in the sociology of knowledge, what is called the 'ideological forms' covers a very extensive area; in works of the young Marx, it tends practically to coincide with the concept of superstructure as such, i.e. it comprehends the basic aspects which usually classify the cultural contents of a society or social formation. This idea no doubt brings many problems with it: but what we mean here is that, according to Marx, the theory of ideology (which he unfortunately never finished) should include all of what we would call today the 'sociology of culture'. This comprehensive intention has been very much reduced in later developments in positivistic sociology, and the area has split into various specialized disciplines, such as the sociology of art, the sociology of literature, of religion, etc. where the notion of ideology, linked to a global model of culture and the productive system is no longer in evidence. Nowadays, the concept of 'ideology' is limited to the field of political science, though the marxist model didn't imply that the notion of ideology was more significant in the area of political ideas than in other areas of culture.

The important point is that, in marxist analysis, though the account of the system of dominant ideas, as developed say in the German Ideology is highly abstract, it is also very far reaching and comprehends the whole general interpretation of social reality and aspects of culture in history available in a particular society. Currently, the contents which seem to interest the sociologist are much reduced: they no longer form an inclusive totality or 'mental horizon'. They are limited to very specific and limited aspects of social reality. The great bulk of current research in, for example, political sociology and opinion formation, measures merely the degree of acceptance or refusal of the ideological content of particular messages, with respect to quite specific beliefs or issues. In short, the link between 'ideology' and 'communication' has already been made in current mainstream positivistic research, but it has been incorrectly formulated - formulated in such a way as to disguise the problem or conceal its real dimensions. The fundamental difference between this kind of research and a marxist analysis is that the latter, when studying ideological systems, sets out to uncover the conditions and rules of organization of the 'representations' of individuals. Two things are involved here: (1) the idea that social processes, conflicts, the social relations of production etc. are only appropriated by social individuals via the forms in which they are 'represented' (2) The fact that, though these 'representations' freely and openly circulate, the 'conditions and rules' which allow them to be generated never appear on the level of consciousness. These representations are produced by social processes. We can say that they are the 'manifest forms' of these processes. These 'manifest forms' - what Marx called the "phenomenal forms of the appearance" of social processes - determine the "spontaneous perceptions" which individuals have of these processes. These perceptions are 'spontaneous' in the sense that they seem to be the 'natural' ways in which processes are to be understood. They constitute our 'common sense awareness' or 'consciousness' of social processes. However, since some part of the content of these processes are, at the same time, hidden or concealed in our spontaneous perceptions of them, they serve both to show, and to obscure what is going on, and our relation to it. Spontaneous perceptions constitute our everyday consciousness of social processes. When these spontaneous perceptions

are socially objectivated, and extended into the form of a discourse, then we may say that we have arrived at the 'ideological instance'.

Althusser defines ideology as "a 'representation' of the imaginary relationships of individuals to their real conditions of existence." (Ideology and the State, p.153, NLB) Of course, the imaginary character of this relation determines and explains the distorting character of ideology. According to Poulantzas (Political Power and Social Classes), p. 207:

"This social-imaginary relation, which performs a real practical-social function, cannot be reduced to the problematic of alienation and false consciousness.

It follows that through its constitution ideology is involved in the functioning of this social-imaginary relation, and is therefore necessarily false; its social function is not to give agents a true knowledge of the social structure but simply to insert them as it were into their practical activities supporting this structure. Precisely because it is determined by its structure, at the level of experience the social whole remains opaque to the agents."

Marx shows that the fundamental basis of the capitalist economic structure (i.e. surplus value) 'hides' itself completely from the consciousness of the agents of production (i.e. capitalists and workers). From this it is assumed that the agents of production necessarily have a false and distorted perception of the economic process. We must insist that this distortion (ideological) cannot be explained by way of a type of 'bad conscience' or 'wish to cheat' of the dominant classes, but is due to the necessary obscuring of the social realities. In short, our 'spontaneous perceptions', which take off from the distorted level (where 'surplus value' is hidden, must, themselves be distorted. There is, therefore, a level of 'deep structure', which is 'invisible' and 'unconscious', which continually structures our immediate conscious perceptions in this distorted way. This is why, in ideological analysis, we must go to the structuring level of messages, not just to their surface forms - that is, to the level where the distortions are coded. It is also why we need a scientific analysis - which Marx said must penetrate from the 'phenomenal forms' to the 'real relations' below, in order to disclose what has been 'hidden', or expressed only in a distorted form.

In For Marx, Althusser agrees:

"It is customary to suggest that ideology belongs to the region of 'consciousness'. We must not be misled by this appellation which is still contaminated by the idealist problematic that preceded Marx. In truth, ideology has very little to do with 'consciousness', even supposing this term to have an unambiguous meaning. It is profoundly unconscious, even when it presents itself in a reflected form (as in pre-Marxist 'philosophy'). Ideology is indeed a system of representations, but in the majority of cases these representations have nothing to do with 'consciousness': they are usually images and occasionally concepts, but it is above all as structures that they impose on the vast majority of men, not via their 'consciousness'."

"So ideology is a matter of the lived relation between men and their world. This relation, that only appears as 'conscious' on condition that it is unconscious, in the same way only seems to be simple on condition that it is complex, that it is not a simple relation but a relation between relations, a second degree relation.



In ideology men do indeed express, not the relation between them and their conditions of existence, but the way they live the relations between them and their conditions of existence: this presupposes both a real relation and an 'imaginary', 'lived' relation. Ideology, then, is the expression of the relation between men and their 'world', that is the (overdetermined) unity of the real relation and the imaginary relation between them and their real conditions of existence."

We will take up this question of the 'unconscious' level of ideology and its relation to 'code' and 'structure' in a moment. But first there is another aspect of the Marxist notion of ideology which needs further clarification. This is the question of ideology as 'dominant' - and of the role of ideology in maintaining the dominance or hegemony of particular social classes.

In some recent marxist analysis we find that the role of integrating and unifying, the function of the cohesion of social forms, is precisely attributed to the ideological instance. In such cases, ideology is the level which has the function of preserving the unity of the whole social system (i.e. the status quo). This position sees the ideological level as the over-determining instance in the process of social formations. In this case, ideology is, by definition, 'dominant' - a distortion: hence the important distinction is not between dominant and dominated ideologies, but between ideology, as such and theory, or science. Much of Althusser's references to ideology in For Marx make use of this ideology/science distinction.

In other places, and especially in later formulations, Althusser seems to have reformulated his position. There can be a theory of ideology 'in general', which tells us about the "mechanism" of ideology, and which is thus "abstract with respect to every real ideological formation". In this sense, ideology is, like Freud's unconscious, "eternal" and "without a history", since its structure and function is similar whenever and wherever it appears. This usage is not very clear, and Althusser himself is tentative about it (p152): in so far as we understand it, it refers to the functions which ideology (singular) always serves, whatever its historical location. There can be, second, a theory of particular ideologies (plural). These are always specific, always "express class positions" (p152), always "depend in the last resort on the history of social formations, and thus of the modes of production combined in the social formations and of the class struggle which develop in them," What there cannot be is a theory of ideologies (plural) in general. For this would be to assume that there was a common content, or common characteristics to the different, historically-determined ideologies: and this would be to falsely abstract some 'universal core' to all ideologies, and rob them of their historicity. It is clear, especially from the PS to Ideology and The State, which he added to clarify matters after Poulantzas's criticism, that Althusser does not conceive of a dominant ideology ruling throughout without contradiction. On the contrary, he insists: (see quote pp171-2 NLB(?))

Barthes, in his last book Le Plaisir Du Texte, says (my translation): "It is said currently: 'dominant ideology'. This expression is incongruous. Because after all, what is ideology? It is precisely the idea as long as it dominates: ideology cannot be anything else but dominant. As much as it is justifiable to speak of ideology of dominant class because there actually exists a dominated class, it is inconsequent to speak of 'dominant ideology' because there is no dominated ideology: on the side of the 'dominated' there is nothing, no ideology - and it is the last degree of alienation - the ideology which they are obliged (to symbolise, therefore to live) to borrow from the class which dominates. The social struggle cannot be reduced to the struggle of two rival ideologies: it is the subversion of all ideologies which is in cause."

But in the same passage, Barthes himself is quite ambiguous about the non-existence of other ideological significations apart from those emitted by the 'dominant ideology'.

"Some people want a text (art, a painting) without any shadow, cut out from the 'dominant ideology'; but that is to want a text without fertility, unproductive, a sterile text (...) The text needs its own shadow: that shadow is a bit of ideology (...) subversion must produce its own clear-obscure."

Well, I would ask, doesn't this clair-obscure in fact point to some sort of oppositional ideology? Veron, commenting on the above quotation of Althusser's ("Ideology is indeed a system of representations ..... they are usually images and occasionally concepts but it is above all as structures that they impose on the vast majority of men,") says: ....

"....if ideologies are structures in the sense structuralism uses this expression then, they are not 'images' nor 'concepts' (we can say, they are not contents) but are sets of rules which determine an organization and the functioning of images and concepts."

We can here already see the first foundations for the introduction of the notion of code.

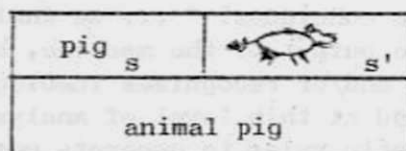
"Ideology is a system of coding reality and not a determined set of coded messages with this system (...) This way ideology becomes autonomous in relation to the consciousness or intention of its agents: these may be conscious of their points of view about social forms, but not of the semantic conditions (rules and categories of codification) which make possible those points of view." (my translation) ("Semanticization of Violence")

In another text Veron illustrates his point with an analogy: he imagines that there was a computer prepared to receive as input a certain type of message and to emit as output a classification of each message as consistent or not with a certain ideology. He concludes: "... we shall call the ideological system, not the input or the output of the machine, but the programme according to which the computer emits and/or recognizes ideological systems. From this point of view, then, and at this level of analysis an 'ideology' may be defined as a system of semantic rules to generate messages." (Ideologia y Comunicacion De Masas - my translation.) In many ways this perspective coincides with Eco's, when he writes about ideological meanings. Eco understands ideology to be the 'universe of knowledge of the receiver and of the group to which he belongs'. He thus makes ideology more or less coterminous with his 'culture in the anthropological sense'. Before this

universe of knowledge is communicated, semiological analysis will not be able to detect it; it will therefore be necessary for it first to be "reduced to a system of communicative conventions." "However, to achieve this, it is necessary that the system of knowledge becomes a system of signs: the ideology is recognisable when, once socialized, it becomes a code." (La Struttura Assente - my transl.)



From this observation Veron develops his argument: "Ideology is not a particular type of message, or a class of social discourses, but it is one of the many levels of organization of the messages, from the point of view of its semantic properties. Ideology is therefore a level of signification which can be present in any type of message, even in the scientific discourse. Any material of social communication is susceptible to an ideological reading." For Veron, this ideological reading "consists in the discovery of the implicit or non-manifest organization of the message." For the analysis of this latent organization it would be necessary to study the mechanisms of that organization - that is, of selection and combination. "From this perspective we can ~~st~~ define ideology (...) as a system of semantic rules which express a certain level of organization of messages." It would be only through the disentangling of these semantic rules that we can get to the core of a message. However, in the analysis of the ideological meanings, the 'core' does not refer only to the content of the message or its 'non-manifest organization'. When a message is emitted, it isn't only what is said that has a signification but also the way it is said, and what is not said and could be said. The significations in a message are established by means of a code and it is this code which permits the message to be organized, i.e. permits the selections and combination of the signs which actually constitute the message. The coding and decoding of a message implies the usage of the same code; that is, in cases where a message is organized and emitted in one code to a group which receives it and decodes it using a different code, the meaning of the message will differ completely. This is what Eco calls 'aberrant decoding'. These assertions refer to the denotative meanings which are the ones that defined by the code in general, while the connotative meanings are given by subcodes or lexicons, common to certain groups and not to others.

Barthes in Elements of Semiology, referring to Hjelmslev, observes that signification consists of a plane of expression also called signifier and a plane of content or signified, and that the signification is the relation of the two planes: ERC. This first system of signification is the plane of denotation. For example when in the system the work/pig/signifier has the content of the notion, "a useful animal that produces meat, bacon, etc." (signified), the relation between the signifier/pig/and the signified "very useful animal that produces meat", gives us the signification "animal, pig". In Saussure, it is not the morpheme/pig/, nor the actual animal in the farmyard, but the relating of the two together - signifier/signified - which gives us this sign.





At a second level, the above relation between signifier and signified, i.e. the whole system of denoted meaning, becomes the plane of expression or the signifier of a second system. For instance, in the context of the North American black movement the word pig does not mean the relation

between the material object (animal) and what it signifies, but becomes the signifier of a new sign: policeman. This level is that of connotation.

pig	
animal pig	concept: pigness
'pig'	

As we said above the connotative meanings are defined by lexicons or subcodes used in certain contexts within certain groups. We have seen that though a message might be emitted and received in a common code, the connotations in this message would be decoded according to the lexicons of the receivers. This means that a connotation can be decoded originating different significations. For example, the same denotative system pig is the signifier of a second system where again the signified is the concept of pigness which originated the signification of our previous example: pig-policeman; now, read in the context of women's movement, this same animal + quality of pigness connotes male-chauvinist quality in men.

pig	
animal pig	concept: pigness
(male chauvinist) 'pig'	

Another level of signification is called metalanguage. We may say that this level is parallel to that of connotation because, again, we have the whole first system (denotation) performing the role of just one element of the total meaning. But this time the whole denotative meaning fills in the box of the signified - rather than the signifier - of the second system.

	s	s'
S	s	S'
S'		

This second system, derived as above, is called metalanguage. Metalanguage is a discourse about other systems which provide its content: it is communication about communication. Semiology is a metalanguage, since it 'talks' about what it signifies.

Another type of second-order system is what Barthes calls myth. We suggest that myth should be thought of as a special type of connotation. This is because, according to Barthes, the mythical system is generated in the same way as connotation. The real soldier saluting the flag (signified) + the photograph of him saluting (signifier) gives us the denotation = negro saluting flag (sign). At the second level, this sign (negro saluting flag) + the concept of French imperialism gives us the second order connotation which is 'France is a great empire, and all her sons without colour discrimination faithfully serve under her flag.' Barthes does not make it



clear why this second order meaning, which he calls myth, is different from, rather than a special case, of connotation. We would like to suggest that the difference between myth and connotation depends on the amplitude of the lexicons from which the concepts are drawn. The connoted meaning in 'pig-policeman' and in 'pig-malechauvinist' are clearly linked to the lexicons of identifiable sub-groups. By contrast, myth seems identifiable with the lexicons of very ample groups, if not of the society as a whole. Myth therefore differs from connotation at the moment at which it attempts to universalize to the whole society meanings which are special to particular groups. In the process of universalizing its meaning, these meanings, which in the last instance are particular to a certain group, assume the amplitude of reality itself and are therefore naturalized. Thus, we might say, myths are connotations which have become dominant-hegemonic.

In our paper for the journal (WPCS3) we emphasized quite emphatically that the ideological level always refers to the connotative meanings of the message. This was one of the strong criticisms raised by T. Lovell in her review of WPCS3 for Screen, so I would like to discuss this point again.

To start with, I think one misunderstanding could be due to our failure in explaining with more detail the concept of denotation. In my paper and in Stuart's as well, though he dedicates a whole level of signification to what he calls 'formal-denotative', the concept of denotation was not made thoroughly clear. Barthes, in the 'Elements of Semiology' dismissed denotation simply in terms of a first system of signification which generates a second system ("wider than the first") which is the plane of connotation.

I think that, in part, the problem is to define what exactly is understood by level of signification. Veron observes: "... ideology is a level of signification which operates by connotation and not by denotation." (my emphasis) The fact that we, following Veron, asserted that ideology operates by connotation inside the message, was probably one of the reasons why Lovell assumed that we thought there was a pre-ideological, neutral, state of the message, which she identified with denotation. To this argument, Stuart replied that to retain the denotation/connotation distinction is not the same thing as thinking the denotative levels was 'pre-ideological'. The denotative process cannot be identified with a 'neutral state'; there can be no 'neutral' state because denotation, also, must be produced by the operation of a code. Thus we cannot be accused of searching for, or subscribing to, Barthes' idea of an 'empty text'. The distinction denotation/connotation is, however, not only useful but indispensable, since the second can only exist through the first. This doesn't mean that there is no ideology at all in the process of denotation. I do not subscribe to the idea of a 'zero degree writing' nor to a text absolutely free of any ideological meaning; but I can see that there is a moment, like our first encounter with the message, where we have the impression of the absence of ideological meanings even though to decipher this message we are using a code, which is already ideological. If we can imagine such a moment where there are only denotative meanings, that in fact would be the moment where connotation is present at its minimum, tending to zero. This minimum, however, is present through the fact that ideology is a code, i.e. not a code in the sense of the immanent universe of the message, but a codified system of social reality. In this sense ideology is beyond and involves the whole universe of the sign as such - denotative or connotative. It is inside the coded sign that a distinction can be maintained, between denotation and connotation. And at this level of the analysis of the message, "the connotative/denotative distinction (...) remains pivotal". In Stuart's reply to Lovell, this point is made more clearly: "I believe the method requires a distinction between the level of organization of the sign, at



which, by means of a certain signifying codes, the sign can be produced at all (and a minimum level of perceptual recognition guaranteed - (...)) : and the ideological level of organization, where the sign is given a privileged reading within the larger ideological syntagms of meaning." (Reply to Lovell, stencilled C.C.S.).

Barthes, himself, in S/Z (p.16) elaborates his concept of denotation from the definitions he offered in Elements of Semiology: "Denotation is not the first sense, but it pretends to be. Under this illusion in the end it is nothing but the last of connotation (where the reading is at the same time grounded and enclosed) the superior myth thanks to which the text pretends to return to the nature of language (...) we must keep denotation, old vigilant deity, crafty, theatrical, appointed to represent the collective innocence of language." The semiologists contest the hierarchy of the denotation and connotation, saying that any language, with its dictionary and syntax is a system just like all others and therefore there is no reason for reserving denotation as a privileged first level neutral in itself, which originates all the others. Barthes however justifies his adoption of the distinction in an argument based primarily on Hjelmslev, a fact which demonstrates his loyalty to linguistics, at least as far as the Elements period was concerned: " ... nous sommes encore soumis au prestige de la linguistique.."

The destruction of the connotation/denotation distinction is made through the identification of denotation with connotation and the fact that ideological meanings are present in both processes. Baudrillard, in Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign, also does this; though he distinguishes the different degree of ideological interference in each instance, he refuses the general distinction as it is usually used. "Denotation is totally supported by the myth of 'objectivity' (either concerning the linguistic sign, the analogous photographique, iconic sign, etc.) the direct adequacy of a signifier and a precise reality" (my bad translation, see p.190). And further on: " ... denotation is distinct from other significations (connoted) by its singular function of effacing the traces of the ideological process in restoring it to the universal and the 'objective' innocence. Far from being the objective term to which connotation is opposed as the ideological term, denotation is thus, because it naturalizes this ideological process, the more ideological term" ... (my translation).

Though using arguments which appear to defend Semiology, I think Lovell's criticisms about our lack of scientific rigour, 'pace Barthes', is very close to the linguist's type of attack on Barthesian researchers, though mounted from a much more traditional sociological position. What I mean is that she doesn't argue based on the traditional linguistic distinction between semiology of communication and semiology of signification (distinction which I have never been fully able to understand) and she definitely does not accept the distinction denotation/connotation. But on the other hand she suggests that semiology should limit itself to the study of the structural organization of language, "how it is coded" (semiology of communication???) and leave sociology to sort out "the very meaning of ideological artefacts" (semiology of signification???) In one way or the other, Lovell's attack, which is made in terms of our 'non-scientificity', is really mounted in the name of the 'non-ideological science' of sociology - a position which I am very sceptical about.

Linguistics has always refused to be ideologically compromised and claims to be the only possibility to scientifically study language processes. As a "social science, linguistics should study, prior to anything else,

the status of language itself in society; its role in the class struggle, its ideological determinations, etc. However, it contents itself to study language as a closed system, as one studies a mechanism, once again because the phonological model weighs heavily on it. The current impasse of linguistics with respect to semantics is proof that this model of language as a closed system is inadequate. But at the same time linguistics appears to be an enterprise which ideologically bleaches the language: treated simply as a communication instrument, linguistics will regard language as a neutral 'instrument', excluded from the field of social and political relations, the field of class conflict." (my translation, R. Barthes, Louis-Jean Calvet)

Once agreed that the ideological instance refers to the connotative meanings of the message, our problem is how to detect it. In Barthes this preoccupation with the connotative-ideological instance is constant, and this is one of the reasons we find him extremely useful (in spite of his 'fortuitous genius'). According to Calvet: "... this hunt for false evidence is what constitutes the continuity of Barthes' thought, this wish to unveil (...) the historical commitment (i.e. political) of all discourse ..." Barthes' project of unmasking false appearances (which he says is the function of the mythologist of today) implies a description of the situation tomorrow and therefore implies a political position. "The unveiling which it carries out is therefore a political fact: founded on a responsible idea of language, mythology thereby postulates the freedom of the latter." ("Myth Today" in Mythologies, p.156)

For Barthes, ideology and rhetoric are closely associated. Both of these concepts lead us to readings at the level of connotation. It is through the analysis of the rhetoric that we reach the ideological level. "This common domain of the signifieds of connotation is that of ideology, which can only be unique for a given society and history, whatever may be the signifiers of connotation on which it draws. There are signifiers of connotation which correspond to general ideology and which are specified according to the substance chosen. We shall call these signifiers connoters, and the set of these connoters a rhetoric: the rhetoric thus appears as the signifying aspect of ideology," (Rhetoric of the image).

In Eco the couplet, rhetoric/ideology, is also basic to the process of 'poetic decoding'. For him, ideology is hidden under the rhetorical apparatus of the author of the message. Usually a code corresponds to an ideology; and, in many cases, a rhetoric is formally incorporated in a certain type of ideological information. The example he gives is the phrase: 'workers should remain in their posts'. This could, technically, be 'read' from two different lexicons; but in practice it would be rather unusual to find it in a revolutionary newspaper and quite commonplace to find it in a conservative newspaper. The fact that a rhetorical phrase fits one lexicon better than another happens because "a certain way of using the language is identified with a certain way of 'thinking' society. Ideology has generated a rhetorical premise which has assumed a styled and recognisable form." (my translation, La Struttura Assente)

Veron emphasizes that the key to understand the ideological dimension of the message lies in the organization of the semantic rules of these messages and not in their explicit content. This non-manifest character of the message does not result from the intentional hiding of a certain content. When these contents are communicated directly, or when the organization of the message is manifest, Veron prefers to talk about propaganda, and not ideology. The manifest function of the messages should not be confounded with their ideological function.



This non-manifest, hidden or veiled content and organization of the message refers to what we have been calling the ideological level of signification.

In this paper, we have been working, broadly, within a semiological framework. The paper is not intended as a defence of semiology as such, about which we have many criticisms. Apart from more detailed criticisms, semiology is often presented simply as a 'technical' kind of linguistic analysis: and, very often, it treats language and communication too 'linguistically' - as closed, formal systems, requiring an immanent analysis. It tends to abolish the historical dimension. For the purposes of this seminar, the detailed defence or critique of semiological methods is not what is really at issue. There is, however, something basic and central, which semiology as a method does clearly bring into view, and this question is worth arguing about. Ideology is often understood essentially as the free floating, and biased ideas which float about in society, and which skew things in favour of the ruling class. This suggests that it is this free-floating 'thing' which we really need to analyse: and that it is only occasionally, and incidentally, that these ideas take root in language and communication. From the perspective of this paper, ideology is only present in so far as it can be shown to exist in and through the way language and communication is structured and produced. Ideology is not hiding inside language - ideology is the name we give to the structuring which language and communication undergoes. It is a dimension of, or better, an instance of all social communication. We can only grasp it, analyse and unmask it, because we can pin-point its 'mechanisms' in the production of meaning through language - that is, fundamentally, at the level at which language requires the operation of social codes to be produced. Whatever are the shortcomings of semiology, or semiologies, as a method, this outlook is basic to it, and distinguishes it from most other types of ideological analysis. It is in this sense, above all, that the paper is 'semiological in its basic perspective.

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