

Power: Interpersonal, Organizational, and Global Dimensions

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TOPIC: Conclusion on postmodernism/ postmodernity, class discussion.

post-modernism = style/fashion in art, architecture, design

post-modernity = social formation, particular organization of social relations where we have interconnections, connections across time and space, distances in time/space have been collapsed because of technological changes that have produced certain cultural/social conditions

post-structuralism = [social] theories of knowledge that challenge notions of essential causes of determinacy and often argue for relativism, conditional knowledge (under specified conditions), may lead to a kind of nihilism (inability to determine a truth)

Post-structuralism is a reflection on the condition of post-modernity.

In post-modernity, **distances can also be created**, e.g. we are distanced from what we know/experience such that we get signs, messages, and language that gets excerpted out of everyday life, out of the lived/grounded necessities of our own lives. When we talk about technology, we get this notion of **perfectibility**, of possibilities. But we have this disconnect between what is *probable* from what is *possible*.

In the collapsing of distances, we get **circulation** of signs, messages, and people. Because of extensive and rapid circulation, because of technological capacity –we get this disconnect from lived experience.

perfectibility/possibility = signs, messages, language
probability = lived, grounded necessities

What is the connection between that which **circulates** and that which **governs** our everyday expectations, what a person *can* do, *should* do?

In this kind of a world, how do we know who we are, what we are? What are the most likely resources for exercising power? If what we know and expect comes not from interactions of daily life, how do we get an idea of what life is like? Our notion of what a human being is, what life is like, used to come from daily life – it was very limited and different regionally. For some time in 20th century, came from expert knowledge systems, professions. But now those **expectations are circulating through commercialized media**.

In the 1960s, the Canadian scholar Marshall McLuhan wrote *The Medium is the Message*.

For example, one of Professor's former students was interested in crime. She taped Boston's nightly news and edited out commercials and breaks to get continuous news. What did the news report? She found that over 50% of the stories about crime on the news appeared only once for 30 seconds or less. In those 30 seconds, there was no consistent subject, about any part of the process of criminal event, investigation, prosecution, etc. The other stories longer than 30

seconds also would never present a complete story of what happened. The majority of the time, crime was represented as being committed by minority population, inter-racial, about violence. The reality of the situation: inter-racial crime is not most common, most crimes not by minorities, most interpersonal, most numerous deal with prostitution, drug dealing, theft, and white-collar crime. Thus, the news created a picture of crime as an unmotivated event that could happen to anyone at any time, most likely a dark-skinned doing something to a lighter-skinned person. We can see that it has a direct effect – surveys of the American population show that people in categories that are least likely to be a victim still entertain fears along the lines of the portrait produced in these news shows. Crime is a highly patterned event too, the most common venues for interpersonal crime is in the family and on Friday/Saturday nights (drinking after work). 80% of violent crime is between people who know each other. But the news paints the picture of crime as random muggings, hold-ups, etc. We get the *idea* of random crime and internalize it as our reality even if it isn't upheld by daily experience.

How does the media shape reality so that it trumps experience?

Film: "Orwell Rolls Over in his Grave"

In 1984 Orwell predicted how our society would become totalitarian through our bureaucracies who would control what we thought because they would have created a new kind of language (e.g. changing signs). Orwell called this newspeak.

Can lies become truth? Global corporations have the ability to overwhelm all competing voices, are unanswerable to the people, buy politicians with campaign contributions.

Has mainstream media become an anti-democratic force in the United States?

Goebbels: a good media system is ostensibly diverse but fundamentally uniform - the greatest power is to create the illusion of choice.

Hitler: people's power of forgetting is enormous (therefore we need means to prevent forgetting: function of education, but what if we don't study history or rewrite it?)

Increasing reliance on "official" sources and "experts" as basis of legitimate journalism. What they want to talk about becomes news.

"Who controls the past controls the future...who controls the present controls the past." – Orwell

Media controls the means by which the public learns about political debates and issues. Example of deregulation of media beginning under Reagan culminating in current situation. Example of hearings before FCC virtually unreported. E.g. No longer require public interest representation on the airwaves.

Importance of ideas is now compromised. The media are interested in *politicians* rather than *politics*. Politicians gain visibility through media advertisements.

Reagan administration onwards saw **deregulation**. It was the creation of new rules but the rules changed to benefit industry and big companies, and this was called "deregulation" and trick the people into support of it.

Multi-national corporations with enormous **conflicts of interest** are controlling what the public

is exposed to – certain issues are not discussed when they compromise the companies. NBC is owned by GE. ABC is owned by Disney. Capitalism and corporations, the system *as a whole* is never questioned.

Bush's push to deregulate big media = see no evil, report no evil policy for Bush.

New York conservative movement to regulate media – ideological warfare, e.g. American Heritage Foundation. Money is spent to **convince the public that their interests and those of the corporations are the same.**