

## 9 The ideological dimension of media messages\*

Marina Camargo Heck 1980

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 (over-determined) unity of the real relation and the imaginary relation between them and their real conditions of existence.<sup>3</sup>

Veron, commenting on the passage from Althusser quoted above, 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.<sup>4</sup>

We can here already see the first foundation 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.<sup>5</sup>

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.<sup>6</sup>

In many ways this perspective coincides with Eco's. Eco understands ideology to be the 'universe of knowledge of the receiver and of the group to which he belongs'.<sup>7</sup> He thus makes ideology more or less coterminous with '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 recognizable when, once socialized, it becomes a code.<sup>8</sup>

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

Althusser defines ideology as 'a "representation" of the imaginary relationships of individuals to their real conditions of existence'.<sup>1</sup> The 'imaginary' character of this relation references the distorting character of ideology. According to Poulantzas:

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 if 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.<sup>2</sup>

This ideological effect cannot be attributed to 'false consciousness' or a will-to-cheat by the dominant classes, but to the necessary obscuring of 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 – that is, to the level where the discourse is *coded* – not just to their surface forms.

In *For Marx* Althusser argues:

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

\* This article is an edited extract from 'The Ideological Dimension of Media Messages', CCCS Stencilled Paper no. 10.



signification'. By referring to a 'formal-denotative' level, we were employing the term as an *analytic concept*, useful for distinguishing between different levels of the organization of meanings. Veron, for example, has observed that 'ideology is a level of signification which operates by connotation'. Because of our lack of clarity on this point, Lowell assumed that we therefore subscribed to the idea that 'denotation' represented a pre-ideological or 'neutral' state of the message. But, in our view, the denotative level *cannot* be identified with a 'neutral state of language': there can be no 'neutral state' because denotations also *must be produced by the operation of a code*. To distinguish between different levels of the operation of codes is not, therefore, to imply that messages can be produced without a code (see pages 133-4 below).

This point has been subject to further confusion because in the texts which followed *Elements of Semiology* (and to some extent already in *Writing Degree Zero*) Barthes appeared to subscribe to the notion of a 'zero degree of writing' and to the idea of an 'empty text'.<sup>14</sup> But whatever the metaphorical status of these concepts, we cannot subscribe to the idea that there is a level of 'denoted' meaning which is free of any ideological operation. In this sense, ideology is beyond and involves the whole universe of the sign as such — denotative *and* connotative. It is *inside* the coded sign that an analytic distinction can be usefully made between 'denotation' and 'connotation'. At *this* level of the message, however, the analytic distinction is important. Distinguishing two levels of analysis, or two levels of operation in the functioning of codes, does not require us to find these distinctions empirically observable in any concrete instance, since each instance will always be the product of the 'over-determination' of both levels of operation. Nevertheless, we believe that the method requires an *operational* distinction between two levels of organization of the sign'. From this point of view, a distinction can be made between those aspects of a sign where the meaning, produced through the operation of a code, has been *fixed* in conventional usage and is widely and *apparently* 'naturally' employed within a language community, and more fluid and open-ended significations which, through the operation of alternative codes, can be more fully exploited for their ideological signifying value. In *this* sense 'denotation' is nothing more than a useful rule for distinguishing, in any particular instance or operation, those connotations which have become *naturalized* and those which, not being so fixed, provide the opportunity for more extensive ideological re-presentations.

Barthes himself, in *S/Z*,<sup>15</sup> expands his concept of denotation from the definitions he offered in *Elements of Semiology*, and usefully clarifies it:

Denotation is not the first sense, but it *pretends to be* [our italics]. 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.

Semiotologists contest the hierarchy of denotation and connotation, saying that any language, with its dictionary and syntax, is a system just like all others and that 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.

The destruction by semiologists of the connotation/denotation distinction in its traditional linguistic sense 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' (whether concerning the linguistic sign, the analogous photographic or iconic sign, etc.), the direct adequacy of a signifier and a precise reality'.<sup>16</sup> 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 . . . . [our italics].<sup>17</sup>

It is principally the verbal discourse which accomplishes the classification of activists, a classification which separates out the legitimate and acceptable activists from the illegitimate and unacceptable. As we have already suggested, these classifications are the effects of the adoption of a certain political perspective: that is, a certain way of understanding already given political positions. Any classification of positions is possible only on the condition that a system of classification already exists. The system of classification by which television news identified and placed the forces involved in the economic struggles of the last few years did not spring uniquely from the broadcasters' professional 'know-how'. Nor did it emerge 'from the outside', a wholly independent perspective. It is, rather, the reproduction of a system of classification already ingrained in the institutional procedures for the management of the clash of opposing activists.

The perspective adopted by the news bulletins was, as we have said, that of the Government and the TUC in as much as they were its principal advocates. The adoption and reproduction of this perspective did not result, however, from a conspiracy between broadcasting, the state and the hegemonic organs of civil society, such as the TUC. Television journalists do not have to be explicitly instructed, as a rule, in how to classify appropriately the protagonists of a given situation and the positions they advance. As we have seen, the Government's interpretation of the causes of inflation was accepted without question. It was a premise of the coverage, and the proposed solution, wage restraint or the lowering of 'real' wages, was thus made to appear a 'natural' consequence. Only the opposed interpretations were questioned and made to appear 'unreasonable', the product of 'militant' self-interest. In part, the unqualified acceptance of the Government's logic proceeded from its status as the 'elected representatives of the people'. But this is not a sufficient condition: the Government's handling of inflation was questioned and probed, especially in the current affairs programmes, though not in a fundamental way. Its position was accepted, principally, because the broadcasters shared its logic. For both broadcasters and the Government it seemed 'obvious' that the prices of commodities are determined or regulated by wages. It was the acceptance of this 'antiquated fallacy' which placed the broadcasters, the Government and the TUC on the same side.

## 12 Recent developments in theories of language and ideology: a critical note\* Stuart Hall

In recent years the two journals *Screen* and *Screen/Educational* (sponsored by the Society for Education in Film and Television) have provided the base for the development of a set of challenging hypotheses about the relationship between language, ideology and 'the subject'. Though principally relating to film texts and practices, this theory has far-reaching implications for the analysis of all signifying practices, as well as for the debates on the problem of language/ideology and representation. This body of work (hereinafter, for convenience, 'screen theory') draws extensively on recent French theoretical writing in a number of different fields: film theory (early semiotics, the work of Christian Metz, the debates between the journals *Cahiers du Cinéma* and *Cinéma*), the theory of ideology (Althusser), the psychoanalytic writings of the Lacan group, and recent theories of language and discourse (Julia Kristeva, the 'Tel Quel' group, Foucault). It has also been strongly influenced by the critique of 'realism', defined as the dominant filmic practice in the cinema: this critique originates in Brecht's work and the Brecht-Lukács debate and, to some extent, in the Russian formalists. It has recently much developed in both the theory and the practice of *avant-garde* cinema. 'Screen theory' has reworked and expanded these theories through a series of wide-ranging articles. The problematic which they have been elaborating now constitutes the dominant point of departure in film studies and in the debates around the relation of discourse and ideology.

'Screen theory' originates in the break which the structural linguistics of Saussure first made with earlier theories of language and which was developed into a general paradigm for the study of signifying systems by Lévi-Strauss and the early Barthes. This is the point of departure for early semiotics. But the real theoretical distinctiveness of 'screen theory' arises from the further break between what, for convenience, may be called semiotics 1 and semiotics 2 (for an elaboration of this distinction, see pages 36-7). Crudely, the argument is that semiotics 1 was correct in its attempts to identify signification as a practice for the production of meaning, as against earlier theories which assumed that 'reality' was somehow transparently reflected in language. It also advanced the field considerably by dethroning the position of the integral Cartesian subject - the authorial 'I', assumed to be both the source and the guarantor of the 'truth' of any enunciated statement - in favour of an analysis

\* This article is based on a forthcoming critique of recent theoretical developments by the Media Group, 1977-8.

It is principally the verbal discourse which accomplishes the classification of activists, a classification which separates out the legitimate and acceptable activists from the illegitimate and unacceptable. As we have already suggested, these classifications are the effects of the adoption of a certain political perspective: that is, a certain way of understanding already given political positions. Any classification of positions is possible only on the condition that a system of classification already exists. The system of classification by which television news identified and placed the forces involved in the economic struggles of the last few years did not spring uniquely from the broadcasters' professional 'know-how'. Nor did it emerge 'from the outside', a wholly independent perspective. It is, rather, the reproduction of a system of classification already ingrained in the institutional procedures for the management of the clash of opposing activists.

The perspective adopted by the news bulletins was, as we have said, that of the Government and the TUC in as much as they were its principal advocates. The adoption and reproduction of this perspective did not result, however, from a conspiracy between broadcasting, the state and the hegemonic organs of civil society, such as the TUC. Television journalists do not have to be explicitly instructed, as a rule, in how to classify appropriately the protagonists of a given situation and the positions they advance. As we have seen, the Government's interpretation of the causes of inflation was accepted without question. It was a premise of the coverage, and the proposed solution, wage restraint or the lowering of 'real' wages, was thus made to appear a 'natural' consequence. Only the opposed interpretations were questioned and made to appear 'unreasonable', the product of 'militant' self-interestness. In part, the unqualified acceptance of the Government's logic proceeded from its status as the 'elected representatives of the people'. But this is not a sufficient condition, the Government's handling of inflation was questioned and probed, especially in the current affairs programmes, though not in a fundamental way. Its position was accepted, principally, because the broadcasters *shared* its logic. For both broadcasters and the Government it seemed 'obvious' that the prices of commodities are determined or regulated by wages. It was the acceptance of this 'antiquated fallacy' which placed the broadcasters, the Government and the TUC on the same side.

## 12 Recent developments in theories of language and ideology: a critical note\*

Stuart Hall

In recent years the two journals *Screen* and *Screen Education* (sponsored by the Society for Education in Film and Television) have provided the base for the development of a set of challenging hypotheses about the relationship between language, ideology and 'the subject'. Though principally relating to film texts and practices, this theory has far-reaching implications for the analysis of all signifying practices, as well as for the debates on the problem of language/ideology and representation. This body of work (hereinafter, for convenience, 'screen theory') draws extensively on recent French theoretical writing, in a number of different fields: film theory (early semiotics, the work of Christian Metz, the debates between the journals *Cahiers du Cinéma* and *Cinématique*), the theory of ideology (Althusser), the psychoanalytic writings of the Lacan group, and recent theories of language and discourse (Julia Kristeva, the 'Tel Quel' group, Foucault). It has also been strongly influenced by the critique of 'realism', defined as the dominant filmic practice in the cinema: this critique originates in Brecht's work and the Brecht-Lukács debate and, to some extent, in the Russian formalists. It has recently much developed in both the theory and the practice of *avant-garde* cinema. 'Screen theory' has reworked and expanded these theories through a series of wide-ranging articles. The problematic which they have been elaborating now constitutes the dominant point of departure in film studies and in the debates around the relation of discourse and ideology.

'Screen theory' originates in the break which the structural linguistics of Saussure first made with earlier theories of language and which was developed into a general paradigm for the study of signifying systems by Lévi-Strauss and the early Barthes. This is the point of departure for early semiotics. But the real theoretical distinctiveness of 'screen theory' arises from the further break between what, for convenience, may be called semiotics 1 and semiotics 2 (for an elaboration of this distinction, see pages 36-7). Crudely, the argument is that semiotics 1 was correct in its attempts to identify signification as a practice for the production of meaning, as against earlier theories which assumed that 'reality' was somehow transparently reflected in language. It also advanced the field considerably by dethroning the position of the integral Cartesian subject - the authorial 'I', assumed to be both the source and the guarantor of the 'truth' of any enunciative statement - in favour of an analysis

\*This article is based on a forthcoming critique of recent theoretical developments by the Media Group, 1977-8.

pitched at the level of the relations between elements and the rules governing their combination in signifying systems themselves (Saussure's *Langue*). However, 'screen theory' argues that, in itself, this break with empiricist theories of language is inadequate, since (in Lévi-Strauss's 'myth', Barthes's 'codes' and Althusser's theories of ideology) the whole question of 'the subject' is left as an empty space. The Cartesian subject has been displaced, but what replaces it has not been adequately theorized.

In semiotics 2 this gap is filled by drawing extensively on the psychoanalytic writings of Lacan. Three converging lines of argument sustain this attempt to deploy Lacan to rectify the inadequacies of semiotics 1. First, Lévi-Strauss made much of the 'entry into culture' as the founding moment of signification and symbolic representation, but he located this outside 'the subject', in the cultural and social system itself. Lacan's work retains the structure of Lévi-Strauss's explanation but now locates this as the entry into the 'symbolic' – the moment when 'the subject' enters into/s is constituted in language, the network of signifiers. In Lacan the moment of the 'symbolic' is given a psychoanalytic interpretation, based on a re-reading of Freud and linked with the unconscious processes and stages through which the unformed infant becomes a 'subject', as these are outlined in Freud's work. This, however, is no longer the integral and homogeneous 'subject' of Descartes, since it is constituted by unconscious processes; it is not the unitary individual but a set of contradictory 'positions', fixed by those processes in a certain relation to knowledge and language.

Second, these propositions were substantially reinforced by Althusser's later writing on ideology, especially where (in the 'Ideological State Apparatuses' essay) he argues that all ideologies 'work' by and through the constitution of the subject and then gives to the process by which ideological discourses constitute and 'hail' subjects the term 'interpellation' – a concept which has an ambiguous provenance in Lacan.

The third element is harder to pin down exactly, but it arises from the fact that in Lacan's reading Freud's theory of the formation of 'the subject' is a highly linguistic one, and the processes of that formation are especially linked with visual analogues (for example, the 'mirror phase', narcissism, voyeurism, Lacan's work on the 'look' and the 'gaze', the castration complex as a 'scenario of vision', founded on the presence/absence and the 'recognition'/denial through which it is resolved and so on). These have made it especially easy and tenable to forge a connection between the 'primary' psychoanalytic processes through which subjects-as-such are constituted and the related processes of representation and identification in visual discourses and texts (especially those of the cinema). Metz's article 'The imaginary signifier' is a *locus classicus* of this move from semiotics 1 to a Lacanian psychoanalytic framework, and its republication in *Screen* marked the passage of that journal from the earlier debates on 'realism' to a full-blown Lacanian position.<sup>2</sup> It ought to be said that 'screen theory' is far more than an attempt to supplement existing theories of language, representation and ideology by developing the neglected area of 'the subject'. In effect, all preceding theories have been substantively

reworked and/or displaced by the deployment of Lacan's propositions. The premises of historical materialism, for example, which attempt to relate ideologies to political and economic practices, to their functioning and effectivity in specific social formations and in specific historical conjunctures, have been translated on to the terrain of 'the subject'. We would argue that this is accomplished through a series of reductions: the unconscious process through which 'the subject' is constituted is also – it is proposed – the process which constitutes 'the subject' in language. It is also the same as that which constitutes 'the subject' for ideology. First a series of homologues, then a series of identities give these apparently distinct (if related) levels a single and common source and foundation. The 'politics' of ideological struggle thus becomes exclusively a problem of and around 'subjectivity' in the Lacanian sense.

'Screen theory' is therefore a very ambitious theoretical construct indeed – for it aims to account for how biological individuals become social subjects, and for how those subjects are fixed in positions of knowledge in relation to language and representation, and for how they are interpellated in specific ideological discourses. This theory is then lopped back to the earlier concerns with 'realism'. Most filmic texts are held to operate within the conventions and practices of 'realism': they are said to be governed by the rules of *the* classic realist text (in the singular). The classic realist text sets the viewers in a position of transparent and unproblematic knowledge in relation to their representations of 'the real', which they actually produce but which they appear only (naturally) to reflect. They therefore depend on an empiricist relation to knowledge. But – so the argument runs – this is because the rules and conventions of the classic realist text recapitulate and replay the basic positions of 'the subject', already fixed by unconscious processes in the early stages of its formation.

This theory gives texts a central place. Texts do not express a meaning (which resides elsewhere) or 'reflect reality': they produce a representation of 'the real' which the viewer is positioned to take as a mirror reflection of the real world: this is the 'productivity of the text', discussed more fully below. However, this 'productivity' no longer depends in any way on the ideological effectivity of the representations produced, nor on the ideological problematics within which the discourse is operating, nor on the social, political or historical practices with which it is articulated. Its 'productivity' is defined exclusively in terms of the capacity of the text to set the viewer 'in place' in a position of unproblematic identification/knowledge. And that, in turn, is founded on: the process of the formation of the subject. Within this framework, then, the functioning of language, the practices of representation and the operations of ideology are all explained by reference to Lacanian psychoanalytic theory. It follows that all ideological struggle must take place, also, at the level of 'the subject' (since this is where the relation of 'the subject' to ideology is constituted and is the mechanism through which ideology functions) and is confined to disrupting the forms of the discourse which recapitulate those primary positions.

This ambitious theory, with its aim to resolve a host of problems unsatisfactorily

dealt with in classical Marxist theory, has been forcefully advanced and expounded with considerable sophistication. Nevertheless, it is open to a number of criticisms which have not so far been adequately met. These may be briefly summarized as follows.

- 1 The theory is substantiated by, first, establishing a series of homologies – 'ideology is structured like a language', 'the unconscious is structured like a language' and so on – which are then declared to be not just 'like' each other but actually 'the same': constituted in the same moment by the same unconscious mechanisms. This movement from homology to identity is a dubious procedure and has not so far been adequately defended.
- 2 These processes are all declared to be 'the same'. But *one* of them is given exclusive explanatory power over all the others. It is the psychoanalytic process by which 'the subject' is constituted in the 'symbolic' which explains 'how language/representation function (in any/every other instance). Specific discourses or representations appear to require no other conditions of existence or further premises to be explained and have no other determinate effectivity. But this form of psychoanalytic reductionism seems to 'resolve' the problems of semiotics I simply by inverting them. What in Saussure was explained by practices wholly exclusive of 'the subject' is now – by a simple inversion – explained exclusively at the level of 'the subject'. Except in a largely ritual sense, any substantive reference to social formation has been made to disappear. This gives 'the subject' an all-inclusive place and Lacanian psychoanalysis an exclusive, privileged, explanatory claim.
- 3 This relates to the 'in-general' form of the argument. The mechanisms which Freud and Lacan identify are, of course, universal. All 'subjects' in all societies at all times are unconsciously constituted in this way. The formation of 'the subject' in this sense is trans-historical and trans-social. It is a theory of the universal 'contradictory' subject – different from 'the subject' of classical philosophy in being intersected by contradiction and unconsciously constituted, but similar to it in the transcendental/universal form in which it is predicated. It is, of course, difficult, if not impossible, to square this universal form of argument with the premises of historical materialism, which requires us always to attend to the pertinent differences – Marx's *differentia specifica*, which *differentiate* one modality of individualism from another – which historicizes the different forms of subjectivity and which needs a reference to specific modes of production, to definite societies at historically specific moments and conjunctures. The two kinds of theory are conceptually incompatible in the form of their argument. This has not prevented 'screen theory' from claiming that its theory of 'the subject' is a 'materialistic' one and satisfactorily resolves the problems posed by historical materialism.
- 4 Further, suppose that we were to accept the validity of Lacan's theory of the constitution of the subject, as well as the 'screen theory' argument that we cannot

have an adequate theory of language/ideology without taking the functioning of 'the subject' into account. It does not follow that a theory of how the 'subject-in-general' is formed offers, *in itself*, without further determinations, an adequate explanation of how historically specific subjects, already 'positioned' in language-in-general, function in relation to particular discourses or historically specific ideologies in definite social formations. The theory of 'the subject' as advanced by 'screen theory' may be a necessary part, but it is *not yet a sufficient explanation* of particular discourses or specific ideologies and their functioning. The practices of language, discourse and ideologies may have other determinations, only some of which can be fixed at the level of 'the subject'. Thus other premises, relating to further conditions of existence and having determinate effects, would have to be introduced in order to move the explanation – as historical materialism requires – from the level of the 'in-general' (compare 'production-in-general' – what Marx described as 'a chaotic abstraction') to the more concrete, historically determinate level (that is, specific modes of production under determinate conditions). 'Screen theory' seems here to have fallen prey to the temptation to treat the most abstract/universal level of abstraction as the most pertinent – indeed, the only 'truly theoretical' – level of explanation.

In its present, all-embracing form 'screen theory' refuses to countenance any propositions about discourse or ideology which are not reducible to, and explicable by, the Lacanian theory of 'the subject'. Thus it claims to explain how 'the subject' is positioned in relation to patriarchal ideology-in-general. But it cannot explain the pertinent differences between different patriarchal ideologies in different social formations at different times. Even less can it explain how patriarchal ideologies may be broken, interrupted or contravened: since, according to the theory, 'the subject' cannot help but enter the 'symbolic' under the patriarchal sign, for it is this which, in imposing the 'Law of Culture' (the 'Law of the Symbolic'), establishes the rule of difference on which language itself is founded. 'The subject' is then, by definition, always already inside patriarchal language/ideology. Thus all ideology is, by definition, the dominant ideology – the *doxa*. This reproduces all the problems earlier identified in the 'functionalism' of Althusser's 'Ideological State Apparatuses' essay; only now the 'functionalism' of the dominant ideology appears to be given, not at the level of social formation, but at the level of 'the subject'.

- 5 It is, therefore, conceptually impossible to construct, from this position, an adequate concept of struggle in ideology, since (for example) struggle against patriarchal ideology would be a struggle against the very repressive conditions in which language as such is itself constituted. No alternative model has been proposed as to how 'the subject' might be positioned in language without also being positioned in patriarchal ideology. 'Screen theory' has attempted to deal with this problem by advancing the strategy of 'deconstruction' (for example, deconstructing the practices and positionings of classical realism). But although deconstruction may provide a significant strategy of resistance, especially for the unmasking and interruption of dominant discourses, it certainly does not identify the conditions for the production

of alternative languages and discourses. What it appears to do is to establish a simple affirmation between being 'in language' (and therefore, inescapably, in ideology) or 'against language'. But a non-patriarchal language cannot be conceptualized in terms of a revolution against language *as such*: this is a contradiction in terms. One effect of this, however, has been that a rather simple and unproblematic identity has been forged between the practices of struggle in ideology and the practices of the *gaze*. Julia Kristeva has taken this implied premise to its logical conclusion in her *Theory of the Revolution in Language*. But this has not proved an adequate resolution of the problem, which arises because the argument has collapsed a theory of the functioning of specific ideologies into a theory of the conditions for language as such.

6 We have taken patriarchal ideologies as our example in the foregoing criticism because 'screen theory' has advanced particularly strong claims in this area (in contrast to classical Marxism), has been deeply influential for feminist theory and film practice – and yet seems to encounter particular difficulties precisely on this ground. For in Lacan the differences and distinctions which make language and representation possible (a condition of the 'symbolic') are rooted in the marking of sexual difference – the latter providing the paradigm for, as well as the supporting structure of, the former. But the key mechanism which sustains this passage into the 'symbolic' is the resolution of the castration complex. However, this is a highly phallogocentric theory, and its effect appears to be to consign women, not just in this culture but forever – and as a condition of having access to representation at all – to a negative entry into language, which is already and always marked by patriarchal dominance. If the 'Law of Culture' is, by definition and always, the 'Law of the Father', and this is the condition of language and the 'symbolic', then it is difficult to see why patriarchy is not – psychoanalytically rather than biologically – a woman's necessary and irreversible destiny.

These debates are by no means yet resolved: they have been vigorously and often contentiously pursued; and they continue to define a central terrain of theorization and argument in this area of work. Consequently, in 1977–8 the Media Group spent the year making itself familiar with this difficult body of work and with the bodies of theory on which it is based. It attempted to identify the central thesis and premises of the 'screen theory' problematic, as well as demystifying a little the forbiddingly arcane language and abstract formulations in which a great deal of the transcriptions from French theory have been cast. It attempted to develop a serious critique of 'screen theory', at the same time revaluing its own premises and practices in the light of that work. This critique is due to be published in its longer form. What follows (pages 163–73) is an extract from that longer argument, referring specifically to the question of how to think the relations between texts, subjects and readers/viewers. It develops a particular critique of 'screen theory' positions on this theme (similar points have begun to be formulated recently in the pages of *Screen* itself) and begins to advance alternative propositions, which, however, significantly modify earlier arguments as a result of the encounter.

## 13 Texts, readers, subjects\*

Dave Morley

One major problem with the dominant theoretical position advanced by *Screen* is that it operates with what Neale has characterized as an 'abstract text-subject relationship'.<sup>1</sup> The subject is not conceived as already constituted in other discursive formations and social relations. Also, it is treated in relation to only one text at a time (or, alternatively, all texts are assumed to function according to the rules of a single 'classic realist text'). This is then explicated by reference to the universal, primary psychoanalytic processes (Oedipus complex, 'mirror phase', castration complex and its resolution and so on), through which, according to Lacan's reading of Freud, 'the subject' is constituted. The text is understood as reproducing or replaying this primary positioning, which is the foundation of any reading.

Now, apart from the difficulty of trying to explain a specific instance of the text/reader relationship in terms of a universalist theory of the formation of subjects-in-general, this proposition also serves to isolate the encounter of text and reader from all social and historical structures *and* from other texts. To conceptualize the moment of reading/viewing in this way is to ignore the constant intervention of other texts and discourses, which *also* position 'the subject'. At the moment of textual encounter other discourses are always in play besides those of the particular text in focus – discourses which depend on other discursive formations, brought into play through 'the subject's' placing in other practices – cultural, educational, institutional. And these other discourses will set some of the terms in which any particular text is engaged and evaluated. 'Screen theory' may be assumed to justify its neglect of the interplay of other discourses on the text/reader encounter by virtue of its assumption that all texts depend on the same set of subject positions, constituted in the formation of the subject, and therefore that they need be accorded no other distinctive effectivity of their own. Here, however, we wish to put in question this assumption that all specific discursive effects can be reduced to, and explained by, the functioning of a single, universal set of psychic mechanisms.

Pêcheux has provided us with the useful and important concept of *interdiscourse*.<sup>2</sup> As explicated by Woods, he argues that:

The constitution of subjects is always specific in respect of each subject . . . and this

\*This article was originally based on work undertaken with Charlotte Brunsdon to extend the theoretical terms of the argument in *Everyday Television: 'Nationwide'* (BFI 1978), particularly in relation to the problem of audiences. This version incorporates material from the 1977–8 Media Group's longer, forthcoming critique on recent theories of discourse and ideology. It also incorporates comments from Dorothy Hobson, Adam MBEK and Alan O'Shea, and was extensively revised for publication. —Stuart Hall.