# **9** IDEOLOGY AND MEANINGS

**Signification and culture**

In chapter 5 we were looking at the two orders of signification. This deliberately left some questions unasked, some topics unopened. The most important of these questions is how do these second-order meanings fit with the culture within which they operate? Where do the myths and connotations arise?

We have shown that their meanings are not located in the text itself. Reading is not akin to using a can opener to reveal the meaning in the message. Meanings are produced in the interactions between text and audience. Meaning production is a dynamic act in which both elements contribute equally. When the text and the audience are members of a tightly knit culture or subculture, the interaction is smooth and effortless: the connotations and myths upon which the text draws fit closely, if not exactly, with those of the audience members.

In other cases, the meanings are produced with a much greater sense of strain. The preferred reading of the Notting Hill photograph may come easily to some, but for others it may be the cause of stress or disagreement. They may decode it by oppositional or negotiated codes, not by the dominant 'easy' one. In other words, their myths by which they understand the police, the blacks, youth, urban living, and violence, to name the main ones, are different from those that the *Observer* assumes to be held by the majority of its readers. In fact semioticians would go further than this. They would argue that the *Observer* is not merely assuming that its readers share these second-order meanings, but actively making its reader into a 'white liberal democrat'. It is inviting the reader

to assume this social identity in order to be able to decode the picture according to the dominant codes, or, to put it another way, to be able to arrive at the meanings that the picture itself prefers. The reader and the text together produce the preferred meaning, and in this collaboration the reader is constituted as someone with a particular set of relationships to the dominant value system and to the rest of society. This is ideology at work.

## Ideology

There are a number of definitions of ideology. Different writers use the term differently, and it is not easy to be sure about its use in any one context. Raymond Williams (1977) finds three main uses:

1. A system of beliefs characteristic of a particular class or group.
2. A system of illusory beliefs—false ideas or false consciousness—which can be contrasted with true or scientific knowledge.
3. The general process of the production of meanings and ideas.

These are not necessarily contradictory, and any one use of the word may quite properly involve elements from the others. But they do, none the less, identify different foci of meanings. Let us take them consecutively.

*Use 1* This is closer to the psychologists' use of the word. Psychologists use 'ideology' to refer to the way that attitudes are organized into a coherent pattern. Let us take, for example, a man who holds a particular set of attitudes about young people. He believes that a couple of years' National Service will give them all a 'bit of backbone' and solve most of our social problems. We may confidently predict the sort of attitudes that such a man will hold on subjects like crime and punishment, class, race, and religion. If our predictions are correct, we will be able to say that he has a right-wing, authoritarian ideology. It is this that gives shape and coherence to his attitudes and that enables him to fit them satisfactorily into each other. Or, as Brockreide (1968) succinctly puts it, 'attitudes have homes in ideologies'.

What few psychologists go on to argue, however, is that ideology is determined by society, not by the individual's possibly unique set of attitudes and experiences. Marxists, who tend to regard the term as their particular property, always relate ideology to social relations. It is socially determined, not individualistic. And for Marxists, the social fact that determines ideology is class, the division of labour.

*Use 2* This leads us naturally on to Williams's second use of the term. Indeed, Williams suggests that in practice uses 1 and 2 will inevitably become conflated. Ideology, then, becomes the category of illusions and false consciousness by which the ruling class maintains its dominance over the working class. Because the ruling class controls the main means by which ideology is propagated and spread throughout society, it can then make the working class see its subordination as 'natural', and therefore right. Herein lies the falseness. These ideological media include the educational, political, and legal systems, and the mass media and publishing.

Such a reading of our Notting Hill photograph explains how the meanings of the photograph depend on the dominant ideology within which the photograph locates the reader. This ideology includes assumptions that the police are right, non-violent, defenders of our law and order, that they are *us*. The young blacks, on the other hand, are aggressive, anti-social, *them*. Taken on its own, as a unique, discrete text, this photograph might not necessarily seem to invite us to generate these meanings. But, of course, it cannot be taken on its own. It is part of our cultural experience: its reading is affected by readings of other photographs of police controlling demonstrators/riots. The meanings generated by any one text are determined partly by the meanings of other texts to which it appears similar. This is called 'intertextuality'. The reader of this book might well make a collection of portrayals of the police in these situations to see how the ideological force is clarified by the intertextuality of a number of photographs. Stuart Hall (1973b) gives a detailed and convincing analysis of a press photograph. It is of a policeman being kicked by a demonstrator during the anti-Vietnam War demonstrations in Grosvenor Square. Ideologically, his photograph and our photograph are identical.

*Use 3* This is the most overarching of the three. Indeed, the three uses might almost be modelled as Chinese boxes—1 is inside 2 which is inside 3. Ideology here is a term used to describe the social production of meanings. This is how Barthes uses it when he speaks of the connotators, that is the signifiers of connotation, as 'the rhetoric of ideology'. Ideology, used in this way, is the source of the second-order meanings. Myths and connoted values are what they are because of the ideology of which they are the usable manifestations.

### Signs: ideology: meanings

An example will help us to clarify how ideology works to produce meaning through signs. Fiske (1979) has analysed a schools television programme transmitted by the BBC on 1 March 1979. It is called *Food and Population,* and its central point is, in the words of the commentary, 'We now know how to produce enough food to feed a continually growing population, yet many are starving because the scientific solutions are not being put into practice.' This point is made by a film of Peru which constrasts the primitive agriculture of an Andean village with the advances of science and technology in the cities and the developed coastal strip. But this point is also ideological: the statement is meaningful only in so far as its maker and audience are members of a science-based culture. This programme is structured around certain manifest oppositions:

<div align="center">

agricultural science : traditional farming

market economy : subsistence economy

city : country

children as mouths to feed : children as hands to work

progress : stasis, cyclical culture

change : tradition

</div>

The deep binary opposition which structures the programme is, therefore, that between *science* and *non-science*. The deep structure of the programme, the ideological frame, may be expressed thus:

<div align="center">

*We* are to *them* as *science* is to *non-science*.

</div>

Plate 14 shows some of the manifestations of this structure in the programme. The programme is made by and for the culture on the left of the structure, the *we* and *science,* but it is primarily about those on the right, the *them* and *non-science*. In practice this is shown most clearly by devices like the way the commentary explains fully, if not a little patronizingly, the values and attributes of the non-science culture, while leaving those of the science culture assumed and taken for granted. This assumption that those values are so basic, so widely shared, so *natural* that they do not need referring to is what Barthes (1973) calls 'exnomination', and is ideology at work.

### The ideology of science

The ideology of science is what this programme is really about. Take
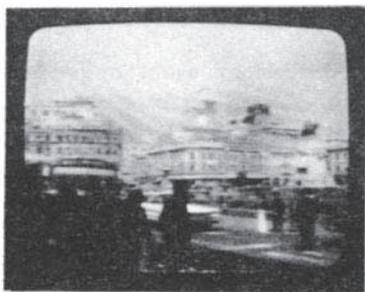
City



Country



Children: mouths to feed
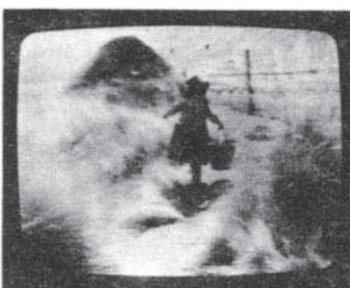


Children: hands to work



Women's work – city



Women's work – country

Plate 14 *Science:Non-science*
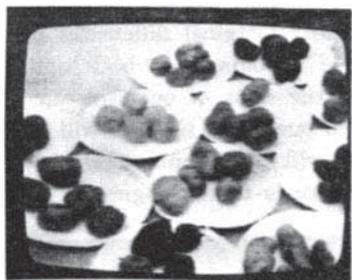
*Potatoes – specimens
in laboratory*



*Potatoes – crops drying
in the sun*
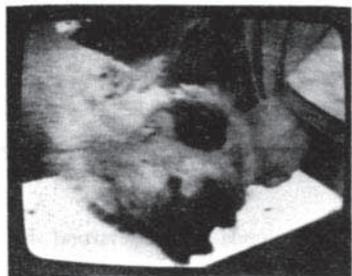






*Alpaca on operating table*
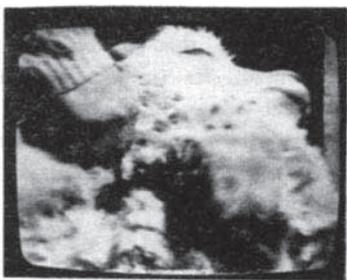


*Alpaca on shearing table*

plates 15a and 15b. They are different signifiers, but they have the same signified, the concept which we must already hold if we are to understand the signs of 'science'. There are obviously marginal differences in the signifiers, but the core of the signified is common to both signs. A member of the non-science culture to the right of our structure will inevitably have a different concept from ours. The signifier will be the same for both cultures, but the signified will differ significantly. And the difference in the signifieds is the difference in the ideologies.
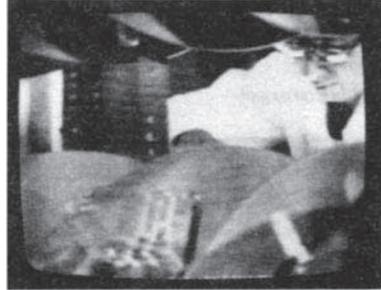


Plate 15a *'Science'*                    Plate 15b *'Science'*

In the second order of signification, science is understood by a Barthesean myth which includes concepts such as, that science is the ultimate problem solver, that science is the human ability to understand and dominate nature, that it increases our material prosperity and security, and that it represents one of the pinnacles of human achievement. Its connotations are, therefore, of positive moral and functional values: it is good and useful. There is, of course a counter-myth with appropriate counter-connotations current amongst the ecology/conservationist subculture, but our dominant myth contains the sort of concepts outlined above.

These second-order meanings of science are produced by the dominant ideology of our culture, which sees history as progress, change as inevitable and for the better, which gives high priority to the improvement of material prosperity, and which is, finally, capitalist and competitive. But for a traditional agricultural community, such as the one shown in the film, these signs of science may well connote alienness, the not-to-be-trusted. They may well activate a myth of science as 'their magic; powerful but not ours', and they may not fit at all into an ideology that rates most highly tried and tested ways, the authority of the elders and ancestors, the continuation of a community and a way of life rather than change and improvement, and that sees history as cyclical, not as a progressive development.
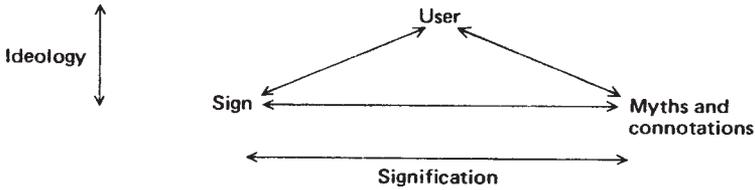
Figure 28

## Ideology and signification

This programme is not special or particularly biased. It is, like all other acts of communication, taking part in the normal ideological process of signification. Central to this process are the connoted values and myths common to the members of a culture. The only way their commonality can be established and maintained is by their frequent use in communication. Every time a sign is used it reinforces the life of its second-order meanings both in the culture and in the user. So we have a triangular model of interrelationships as in figure 28. The interrelationships indicated by the double-ended arrows all depend upon frequent use for their existence and development. The user of the sign keeps it in currency by using it, and maintains the myths and connoted values of the culture only by responding to their use in communication. The relationship between the sign and its myths and connotations, on the one hand, and the user, on the other, is an ideological one.

Signs give myths and values concrete form and in so doing both endorse them and make them public. In using the signs we maintain and give life to the ideology, but we are also formed by that ideology, and by our response to ideological signs. When signs make myths and values public, they enable them to perform their function of cultural identification: that is, they enable members of a culture to identify their membership of that culture through their acceptance of common, shared myths and values. I know that I am a member of my western culture because, to give one of many identifications, I understand science with the same myths and endow it with the same connoted values as the majority of other inhabitants of the western world. I share an ideology with my fellows. In concrete terms, I connote plates 15a and b with positive values, with high status and believability. I do not read (as is easily possible) the foregrounding of the scientific apparatus in 15b as connoting that science is overpowering man. My ideology determines the meanings which I find in my interaction with those signs. The connotators and myths are, in Barthes's phrase, 'the rhetoric of my ideology'.

Ideology, then, in this third use, is not a static set of values and ways of seeing, but a practice. Ideology constitutes me as a particular member of my western science-based culture by the very fact that I am able to use and respond appropriately to signs, connotations, and myths. In participating in the signifying practice of my culture I am the means by which ideology maintains itself. The meanings I find in a sign derive from the ideology within which the sign and I exist: by finding these meanings I define myself in relation to the ideology and in relation to my society.

This discussion of the ideology of science might be read to imply that all partake of it equally, that science is socially neutral, and that the benefits of a science-based society are equally distributed. This, of course, is not so. Science and technology are intimately bound up with patriarchal capitalism. It is not just that science is used to increase the profits of big business and the middle classes who benefit most from them, but that science is one of the ways of exercising a more indefinable social power. Scientists are trained by universities, and those who succeed best in the university system tend to come from middle-class families: the highly-educated not only become the dominant class; they come from it, too. So science helps to maintain the current power structure.

Science is active in gender politics as well as class politics. Far more men than women are scientists in our society: this has nothing to do with innate or natural differences between men and women, but is part of the social, and therefore ideological, differences between masculinity and femininity. Science is ultimately a means of exerting power over the physical world; so, in a society where men exert power in the social world, it seems 'natural' that this power should be extended to the physical as well. The dominant sense of the women scientists that there are (unless they are in 'caring' or 'nurturing' sciences such as medicine) is that they are unfeminine, or, at least, unusual. This is ideology at its work of making the existing distribution of power in society appear 'normal' and 'natural'.

This view of ideology as an active political force in society rather than a set of ideas or a way of thinking is taken up more fully in the next section. For while ideology *is* a way of making sense, the sense that it makes always has a social and political dimension. Ideology, in this view, is a social practice.

## Understanding ideology

The theory of ideology as a practice was developed by Louis Althusser

*Speak Semiotics you damn fool!*

(1971), a second-generation Marxist who had been influenced by the ideas of Saussure and Freud, and who thus brought theories of structure and of the unconscious to bear upon Marx's more economistic theories. For Marx, ideology was a relatively straightforward concept. It was the means by which the ideas of the ruling classes became accepted throughout society as natural and normal. All knowledge is class-based: it has inscribed within it its class origins and it works to prefer the interests of that class. Marx understood that the members of the subordinate class, that is the working class, were led to understand their social experience, their social relationships, and therefore themselves by means of a set of ideas that were not *theirs,* that came from a class whose economic, and therefore political and social, interests not only differed from theirs but were actively opposed to them.

According to Marx the ideology of the bourgeoisie kept the workers, or proletariat, in a state of *false consciousness.* People's consciousness of who they are, of how they relate to the rest of society, and therefore of the sense they make of their social experience is produced by society, not by nature or biology. Our consciousness is determined by the society we have been born into, not by our nature or individual psychology.

In the photograph of the clash between blacks and police in chapter 6 we can trace an example of this theory in practice. Members of the subordinated classes, whether black or white, who made sense of this photograph by the 'ideas of the ruling classes' (that is by white, middle-class myths) would have a 'false consciousness' not only of the photograph and the events it depicts but also of themselves and their social relations. These 'ruling-class ideas' propose that the meaning of the incident is to be found in the nature of young blacks–they are 'naturally' aggressive, disorderly, and unlawful–and that the police are the impartial agents of a law that is objective and equally fair to all classes in society. Their

consciousness is thus 'bourgeois', and the photograph 'produces' its readers as bourgeois subjects who accept their relationship to the socio-economic system as fair and natural, and who therefore make 'commonsense' meanings of social experience such as this incident. This is a false consciousness because it denies the 'true' meaning that such conflict is caused by social relationships, not by the nature of blacks: their bitterness is caused by their position in a society that consistently disadvantages them and privileges middle-class whites. This consciousness cannot see the police as they 'really' are–the agents of a law designed to preserve the interests of those with property and power and thus to maintain the status quo against any force of social change.

The concept of ideology as false consciousness was so important in Marx's theory because it appeared to explain why it was that the majority in capitalist societies accepted a social system that disadvantaged them. Marx believed, however, that economic 'reality' was more influential, at least in the long run, than ideology, and that inevitably the workers would overthrow the bourgeoisie and produce a society where one class did not dominate and exploit the majority and so would not need to keep them in a state of false consciousness. In a fair and equal society there is no need for ideology because everyone will have a 'true' consciousness of themselves and their social relations. The bitterness of the black youths would be seen in this theory as a sign that their socio-economic 'reality' was stronger than the attempt of the dominant ideology to make them accept it.

As the twentieth century progressed, however, it became more and more clear that capitalism was not going to be overthrown by internal revolution, and that the socialist revolution in Russia was not going to spread to the rest of Europe and the western world. Yet capitalism still disadvantaged the majority of its members and exploited them for the benefit of a minority. To help account for this, Marxist thinkers such as Althusser (1971) developed a more sophisticated theory of ideology that freed it from such a close cause-and-effect relationship with the economic base of society, and redefined it as an ongoing and all-pervasive set of practices in which all classes participate, rather than a set of ideas imposed by one class upon the other. The fact that all classes participate in these practices does not mean that the practices themselves no longer serve the interests of the dominant, for they most certainly do: what it means is that ideology is much more effective than Marx gave it credit for because it works from within rather than without–it is deeply inscribed in the ways of thinking and ways of living of all classes.

A pair of high-heel shoes, to take an example, does not impose upon

women from outside the ideas of the ruling gender (men); but wearing them is an ideological practice of patriarchy in which women participate, possibly even more than the ideology would require. Wearing them accentuates the parts of the female body that patriarchy has trained us into thinking of as attractive to men—the buttocks, thighs, and breasts. The woman thus participates in constructing herself as an attractive object for the male look, and therefore puts herself under the male power (of granting or withholding approval). Wearing them also limits her physical activity and strength—they hobble her and make her move precariously; so wearing them is practising the subordination of women in patriarchy. A woman in high heels is active in reproducing and recirculating the patriarchal meanings of gender that propose masculinity as stronger and more active, and femininity as weaker and more passive.

One of the most ubiquitous and insidious ideological practices is what Althusser calls 'interpellation' or 'hailing'. It is particularly relevant to this book because it is practised in every act of communication. All communication addresses someone, and in addressing them it places them in a social relationship. In recognizing ourself as the addressee and in responding to the communication, we participate in our own social, and therefore ideological, construction. If you hear in the street a shout 'Hey you!', you can either turn in the belief that you are being addressed or you can ignore it because you know that 'nobody, but *nobody*' speaks to you like that: you thus reject the relationship implicit in the call. All communication interpellates or hails us in some way: a pair of high-heel shoes, for example, hails the woman (or man) who 'answers' them by liking or wearing them as a patriarchal subject. The woman who recognizes 'herself as their addressee by wearing them positions herself submissively within gender relations; the man who likes to see her wearing them is equally but differently positioned—he is hailed as one with power.

Similarly, if we allow ourselves to be spoken to or hailed by the advertisement in plate 9 (p. 99) we adopt the social position of a masculine middle-class subject. Accepting the idea of the feminine as the pure and the masculine as the snake-like corruptor, and taking as 'common sense' that the man is the seducer and the woman the seducee, is a patriarchal practice. Using a sophisticated, exotic drink as a sign of one's role in this practice gives it a particular bourgeois inflection. The advertisement invites us, whether we are men or women, to identify with the masculine way of making sense of the snake, the alcohol, and the seduction, and therefore of ourselves: we thus become the reader hailed by the advertisement. This is an important point to make, for it shows that

interpellation can position us in an ideological category that may differ from our actual social one. So women can be positioned 'as men' to make masculine sense of themselves and their social relations, blacks can be positioned as whites, the working class as middle class, and so on. Communication is a social process and must therefore be ideological: interpellation is a key part of its ideological practice.

Althusser's theory of ideology as practice is a development of Marx's theory of it as false consciousness, but still emphasizes its role of maintaining the power of the minority over the majority by non-coercive means. Another European second-generation Marxist, Antonio Gramsci, introduced into this area another term—*hegemony*, which we might like to think of as ideology as struggle. Briefly, hegemony involves the constant winning and rewinning of the consent of the majority to the system that subordinates them. The two elements that Gramsci emphasizes more than Marx or Althusser are resistance and instability.

Hegemony is necessary, and has to work so hard, because the social experience of subordinated groups (whether by class, gender, race, age, or any other factor) constantly contradicts the picture that the dominant ideology paints for them of themselves and their social relations. In other words, the dominant ideology constantly meets resistances that it has to overcome in order to win people's consent to the social order that it is promoting. These resistances may be overcome, but they are never eliminated. So any hegemonic victory, any consent that it wins, is necessarily unstable; it can never be taken for granted, so it has to be constantly rewon and struggled over.

One of the key hegemonic strategies is the construction of 'common sense'. If the ideas of the ruling class can be accepted as *common* (i.e. not class-based) sense, then their ideological object is achieved and their ideological work is disguised. It is, for example, 'common sense' in our society that criminals are wicked or deficient individuals who need punishment or correction. Such common sense disguises the fact that lawbreakers are disproportionately men from disadvantaged or disempowered social groups—they are of the 'wrong' race, class, or age. Common sense thus rules out the possible sense that the causes of criminality are social rather than individual, that our society teaches men that their masculinity depends upon successful performance (which is typically measured by material rewards and social esteem), and then denies many of them the means of achieving this success. The 'law-abiding citizens', who 'happen', generally, to belong to those classes which have many avenues to socially successful performance, are thus relieved of the responsibility of thinking that criminality may be the

product of the system that provides them with so many advantages, and that the solution to the problem may involve them in forgoing some of their privileges. The common sense that criminality is a function of the wicked individual rather than the unfair society is thus part of bourgeois ideology, and, in so far as it is accepted by the subordinate (and even by the criminals themselves, who may well believe that they deserve their punishment and that the criminal justice system is therefore fair to all), it is hegemony at work. Their consent to the common wisdom is a hegemonic victory, if only a momentary one.

Ideological theories stress that all communication and all meanings have a socio-political dimension, and that they cannot be understood outside their social context. This ideological work always favours the status quo, for the classes with power dominate the production and distribution not only of goods but also of ideas and meanings. The economic system is organized in their interest, and the ideological system derives from it and works to promote, naturalize, and disguise it. Whatever their differences, all ideological theories agree that ideology works to maintain class domination; their differences lie in the ways in which this domination is exercised, the degree of its effectiveness, and the extent of the resistances it meets.

To summarize it briefly, we may say that Marx's theory of ideology as false consciousness tied it closely to the economic base of society and posited that its falseness to the material conditions of the working class would inevitably result in the overthrow of the economic order that produced it. He saw it as the imposition of the ideas of the dominant minority upon the subordinate majority. This majority must eventually see through this false consciousness and change the social order that imposes it upon them.

Althusser's theory of ideology as practice, however, appeared to see no limits to ideology, neither in its reach into every aspect of our lives, nor historically. Its power lay in its ability to engage the subordinate in its practices and thus to lead them to construct social identities or subjectivities for themselves that were complicit with it, and against their own socio-political interests. The logical conclusion of his theory is that there is no way of escaping ideology, for although our material social experience may contradict it, the only means we have of making sense of that experience are always ideologically loaded; so the only sense we can make of our selves, our social relations, and our social experience is one that is a practice of the dominant ideology.

Gramsci's theory of hegemony, or ideology as struggle, however, lays far greater emphasis on resistance. While in broad agreement with

Althusser that the subordinate may consent to the dominant ideology and thus participate in its propagation, his theory also insists that their material social conditions contradict that dominant sense, and thus produce resistances to it. His account of the structures of domination is as subtle and convincing as Althusser's; but because he lays greater stress on the resistances that ideology has to overcome, but can never eliminate, his theory is finally the more satisfying, for it takes into account more of the contradictions that go to make up our social experience. Gramsci's theory makes social change appear possible, Marx's makes it inevitable, and Althusser's improbable.

## Ideological analysis

Plate 16 is from the magazine *Seventeen,* which is aimed, in the words on its cover, at 'where the girl ends and the woman begins'. To assist its readers in crossing this boundary between girl and woman it circulates a set of meanings of femininity that are made to appear attractive and realistic to young women, yet finally serve the interests of those with power, that is middle-class men, a group whose interests are opposed to those of the readers addressed by this page.

Let us begin the analysis with the most obvious, for semiotics teaches us that what is most obvious and ordinary is where the greatest cultural significance lies: Althusser and Gramsci have both alerted us to the ideological work performed by 'common sense', a work performed by the phrase itself, for its sense is, of course, not 'common' but class-based, however well disguised its class origin in the ideas of the ruling class. The most obvious aspect of this page is its emphasis on appearance and domesticity and the linking of the two. What the page is saying is that women *are* what they look like, and what they look like is seen through the eyes of a man, ultimately a husband. Women are thus encouraged to see (make sense of) themselves through the eyes of another gender, the ruling gender. The central column of this page leads the eye down from a representation of the (ideal) family in a still from an early TV series *The Waltons,* through a cookbook of 'Mom-style' recipes to 'June Cleaver fever'—a young girl dressed in a traditional polka-dot fabric and a white frilly apron, but with a hint of sexual abandon in the 'loose' strands of hair and the thigh-revealing twirl of the hips. The words anchor the apron as the key sign in the photograph: 'Aprons aren't just for cooking any more. Aka [alias] pinafores, they're soft, flirty, and, well, very girlish.' The coy, hesitant commas reproduce the uncertainty and hesitancy of young women and hail the reader as a teenage girl. Pinafores and aprons

Plate 16 *Seventeen*

are the same garment, but a pinafore is its childish version, and apron its adult: it thus straddles the categories of girl and woman. Its function is to keep the female looking clean. (Boys are allowed to get dirty, for dirt goes with masculine activity and with not caring about appearance so much, for masculinity is defined by what boys *do,* not by what they look

like. Dirt is thus what males produce and females clean up). A pinafore keeps a girl clean from the dirt of play; an apron guards a woman from the dirt of work; but both preserve the clean appearance of the feminine, so girls' play slides easily into women's work (as it does on the cover of the cookbook). The girl thus 'naturally' becomes the woman whose work has produced the enormous amount of food necessary to feed the family in the top picture. This food will then be distributed by the man as though it were *his,* and woman's labour is thus made invisible: woman's work is what enables the man to preside over the family. The 'flirtiness' of the bottom picture is simply there to catch the man whom the woman will nurture and serve for the rest of her life.

In the left-hand column three young women define themselves by their appearance. Each presents herself for the camera, acknowledging it and her role, which is to be 'that which is photographed'; none of them is *doing* anything, but all are simply *being* their appearance. And this appearance is one of passivity, childishness, and submissiveness. Their facial features are reduced to eyes and mouths: the photograph at the bottom is lit so as to flatten out all other features, and the make-up and expression of all three models does the same. Emphasizing eyes and mouth is a way of 'infantilizing' the subject, just as 'cute' drawings of babies, puppies, kittens, calves, or baby bluebirds signify their helplessness by giving them huge eyes and cute mouths. Make-up and photographic conventions reproduce meanings of childishness upon the female face. The bodily postures do the same, for they all tilt or lower the body into what Goffman (1979), in his detailed analysis of gender portrayal in advertisements, characterizes as a submissive body cant. These postures address a powerful upright male from a position of submission.

The centre one is particularly infantilized. The 'Happy Face' badge is a childish drawing which, like the photographs, reduces the face to eyes and mouth, and the model is the youngest looking or most tomboyish of the three. The other two have signs of more mature sexuality grafted on to the basic childishness, so the 'play' fashion of the badges on the centre model slides into the more 'adult' fashion of the tie-dyed shirt in sheer fabric of the top one, and her childishly dishevelled hair becomes the sophisticatedly unkempt look of the bottom model. This reproduces the merging in the centre column of girl's play into women's work; so, the implication is, fashion (or appearance) *is* women's work–they need to nurture the vision of the male by looking stylish for him just as much as to nurture his body by cooking for him.

The right-hand column is more complex and contradictory. One of its ideological functions is to transfer the meanings of the title words

NATURAL AWARE TRUTH REAL to the meanings of femininity proposed by the other columns. The concern with ecology and pollution is being 'aware' of the 'real truth' of 'nature' (or of the 'true nature of reality' or the 'natural real truth'—it is the association of the concepts that matters, not their grammatical order). The unstated and repressed worry of the page is that some readers may consider that make-up and fashion are unnatural, and may even be thought to pollute the true, real female body. The potential concern that a reader might feel about this is *displaced* on to a concern for the environment. ('Displacement' is a term that ideological theories have borrowed from Freudian dream theory: when a topic or anxiety is repressed, either psychologically or ideologically, the concern for it can only be expressed by being *displaced* on to a legitimate, socially acceptable topic.) Concern for the environment is admirable, and its social acceptability is what makes it such an effective displacement. This displaced relationship between make-up and pollution underlies the 'I never wear make-up look' of the new sheer powders, for they are invisible and thus do not pollute the nature of the face—they are ecologically sound!

Another term used in ideological analysis is *incorporation*. This refers to the process by which the dominant classes take elements of resistance from the subordinate and use them to maintain the status quo, rather than to challenge it. They incorporate resistances into the dominant ideology and thus deprive them of their oppositionality. 'Don't worry, be hippie. The '60s attitude is back—in clothes, music, food, and social awareness' is an example of incorporation. The social movements of the 1960s, from the freedom rides against racism in the US South to the worldwide protests against the Vietnam War and the student anti-government demonstrations that swept Europe and the US, have all been reduced to fashion, musical style, and the safe, respectable social awareness of ecology. There is no sense here that the social awareness of the sixties, for instance, could result in the National Guard firing on an unarmed demonstration at Kent State University and killing four students. The political oppositionality of that decade has been defused and incorporated into the dominant ideology.

Rock and roll, too, often has oppositional meanings for its fans, but this, too, is defused as it is incorporated into the socially acceptable concerns of ecology and anti-pollution movements. By linking these social movements to a concern for nature, incorporation disguises or masks the political fact that it is capitalism that causes the pollution—something that the hippies in the sixties were well aware of, but which is significantly absent from the *Seventeen* page (*masking* and *significant*

*absences* are two other common terms in ideological analysis). The Grateful Dead, too, have been incorporated. To their original fans, and to most of their present ones, they were an oppositional band, promoting alternative lifestyles, oppositional values, and anti-capitalist meanings. For this page, however, unlike the culture of the sixties and the 'original' Grateful Dead that it refers to and incorporates, there is nothing wrong with capitalism: indeed, capitalism, far from being the problem, is the implied solution, for it is capitalism that produces the commodities a girl needs in order to turn her appearance (i.e. 'herself') from that of a girl to that of a woman, and which she will need in order to run a home for her husband and children, and thus to enable her to become the woman she 'really is'. Masking ecology under a concern for nature instead of mobilizing it as a protest against capitalism is another ideological practice of this page.

Yet another is commodification. Capitalism is the system that, above all others, produces commodities, so making commodities seem natural is at the heart of much ideological practice. We learn to understand our desires in terms of the commodities produced to meet them; we learn to think of our problems in terms of the commodities by which to solve them. So the problems of maturing from a girl to a woman are framed and solved in terms of commodities—apron, cookbooks, happy badges, hair styles, clothes, make-up. The problems of relating our artificial society to nature and thus making it appear natural are commodified—we sprinkle natural pearls, shells, or sea-horses on jewellery, and advertising (*the* commodity art form) serves ecology with television ads called 'Pollution Solutions'. The photograph from *The Waltons* defines the family by its commodities—the large, expensive table which expresses family unity by allowing them all to sit at once; the large, comfortable house; their respectable clothes; the flowers, plates, and silverware on the table—the whole sense of middle-class prosperity becomes essential to the meaning of family in capitalism. They are a family which *consumes;* they are a commodified family. (Taking the photograph out of its original context masks the fact that the series was set in the Depression and that one of its main themes was coping with poverty. The photograph works to deny politically oppositional readings of *The Waltons* and to incorporate the family into unproblematic commodity capitalism.)

The rest of the magazine is, of course, full of advertisements, fashion and make-up features, advice columns, and fiction that all promote commodities, and therefore the economic interests of those who produce and distribute them. Women's bodies and their lives are constructed as a set of problems for which there are commodities to provide solutions:

this page is a microcosm of the magazine. And the magazine is, of course, the most important commodity of all. Its strongly flagged concern for the interests of its young readers is actually a way of constructing those interests as ones that can be met by the appropriate commodities—itself included. So its young readers are led to construct its interests as theirs in much the same way that Marx argues that ideology made the workers adopt the consciousness of the bourgeoisie, or that Morley found that women adopted masculine values to disparage their own taste in television.

What Barthes calls the *myths* of femininity and family work, as do all myths, to turn history and society into nature. Thus the myths allow for no differences between the Waltons and a present-day family, no differences between today's reader and her parents' generation in the sixties, no differences between the daughter and mother on the cookbook, nor between the girls and women throughout this page. Nor, finally, do they allow for any difference of interests between the producers and readers of this page. Such differences are historically and socially produced, and they are thus masked by the way that myth naturalizes meanings. So the myth says that girls 'naturally' become women who 'naturally' become housewives, and thus it makes significantly absent any question of what sort of women they become and whose interests are served by this. Naturalizing the existing order makes it appear universal and therefore unchangeable (like nature); the problem is not how to change the social system, but how to insert oneself into it (with the aid of the right commodities) and thus how to maintain it.

Women's pleasures (of being flirty when young and maternal when older) and the commodities by which to achieve them are produced by the system of patriarchal capitalism that ensures the subordination of women; and in so far as women accept these commodified pleasures and experience them as real, they are actively promoting an ideology that is against their interests: they are participating in hegemony. By recognizing herself as the addressee 'hailed' by this page, the reader is practising patriarchal ideology; and by accepting the common sense of the representations of herself and her future, she is helping to win the consent of herself and others like her to a system that only middle-class men can benefit from in the long run.

## Resistances

This page from *Seventeen* is a good example of hegemony at work, but hegemony has to work so hard because so much of the day-to-day

experience of young women contradicts it. Hegemony is the means by which their consent to the system that disadvantages them is won, but its victories are never complete or stable: because of the contradictory experiences of everyday life the struggle is never over, and any ground won by the dominant ideology has to be constantly defended and actively held on to.

The ideological theories of Marx and Althusser are useful in revealing how ubiquitous and insidious the workings of the dominant ideology are, but this emphasis leads them to ignore or underestimate the extent of its struggle and the resistance it meets. Both theories tend to assume that ideological power is well-nigh irresistible. Ideological analysis, therefore, tends to focus on the coherence of texts, the way that all their elements come together to tell the same story, that of white, patriarchal capitalism. The theory of hegemony, however, extends this focus on the forces of domination by encouraging us to look for moments of weakness in texts, for contradictions in their ideological smoothness and coherence. While recognizing that these forces will always attempt to incorporate resistance, it doubts the final effectiveness of this strategy and argues that some traces of that resistance will necessarily remain. These contradictions and traces of resisting meanings may be identified by a hegemonic analysis of texts, but whether or not they are actually taken up and acted upon can be established only by ethnographic study.

The 'no make-up look' is a strategy to incorporate the resistance of many young women to the ideological practice of painting their faces. Many feel that making-up is selling out to the system and that in practising it they are selling themselves short by accepting a social identity or sense of self that is not theirs. Traces of this point of view, with its resistance to both capitalism and patriarchy, remain on the *Seventeen* page and are available to promote oppositional readings of it.

Similarly, the model in the top left-hand picture is wearing torn jeans. Torn jeans can be a sign of resistance to the dominant ideology—they are kept longer than normal so that the purchase of a new pair is delayed, a small but significant resistance to commodification. They also oppose the idea that 'respectable' girls (i.e. those marriageable by equally respectable men) should be clean, neat, and well dressed. They offer at least a hint of meanings that oppose the ones preferred so assiduously by the rest of this page.

Elsewhere (Fiske 1989a) I report on an ethnographic study of the ideological practices involved in wearing jeans. It emerged that wearing them works to circulate three main sets or clusters of meanings. The

first is their association with hard work and hard leisure, with activity and with the dignity of labour, particularly of working for oneself. The second is a set of associations clustered around the American West– freedom, naturalness, ruggedness, informality, self-sufficiency, tradition. And finally there are meanings of Americanness and social consensus. Jeans are the US's unique contribution to the international fashion scene. They are consensual in that they can be worn by both genders, by all classes, races, and ages–they transcend all social categories and carry the myth that in America all are free, equal individuals. So, for those whose gender and age (not to mention race or class) tell them that they are not as free and equal as others and lead them to wish to contradict some of the dominant meanings of jeans, tearing them can be a sign of resistance to the dominant ideology. Of course, the industry reacts to this and attempts to incorporate such resistance by producing designer-torn (or faded) jeans, but such 'designer-wear' and 'genuine' wear are still different, and the differences are recognized by the wearers of each: some of the resistance always remains finally unincorporable.

The girl on the middle left of the magazine page wears a 'unisex', tomboyish set of jeans–which is appropriate in that she is the youngest of the women shown and is thus closest to pre-puberty, when gender difference is least marked. But she is still clearly a post-pubertal young woman, and so her signs of refusing gender differences may also contain hints of resistance to the ideologically restricted meanings of femininity that the rest of the page is promoting.

If this page is to be popular, if it is to hail its intended readers accurately, it must contain some signs of their oppositional social position as well as the voice of the dominant ideology. Without such contradictions many of its targeted readers might not recognize themselves as its addressees; they would thus refuse its interpellation and it would fail to communicate with them. The page must contradict itself in the same way that the social experience of the subordinate contradicts the meanings that the dominant ideology proposes for them. Hegemony theory argues that the ideological work of this page to win the consent of young women to patriarchal capitalism is not just an ideological practice but an ideological struggle, and that signs of the resistances it has to overcome can never be wiped out, that some always remain to fuel more resistance in the future. The consent of the subordinate to the dominant system is never finally won; always elements of grudgingness or resistance remain, and the degree of consent will vary considerably among the readers of this page. Hegemony theory allows for less traditional, more rebellious, meanings of young-womanhood to challenge, and possibly even modify,

the dominant ones. It is thus both more optimistic and more progressive than those theories that focus exclusively on the dominant ideology.

**Suggestions for further work**

1. Make a semiotic analysis of the advertisement in plate 17. Pay particular attention to the second order of signification: show how this order can be meaningful only within a particular ideology. You should discuss the ideology of the family, of masculinity, femininity, and gender roles, of nature *v.* the city, of leisure *v.* work, of



Plate 17 *'Go Native'*

consumption *v.* production, and of class dominance. This should produce a preferred reading according to the dominant code. Now produce a negotiated reading; one appropriate to, say, a dedicated hill-walker who loves nature in general and the Yorkshire Dales in particular, but would never use nature in the antiseptic, suburban manner of the family shown. Devise other negotiated readings and readers. Remember that a negotiated reading accepts and works within the dominant ideology, but negotiates a different stance towards, or a more privileged place for, certain topics, beliefs, or groups of people. Outline an ideology that would produce a radically opposed reading for this advertisement, or one that would render it meaningless (or almost). Discuss the role of semiotic analysis in discovering, or making visible, ideological practice. Does an awareness of the preference of certain readings over others and of the ideological system within which this preference works provide us with a defence against constant indoctrination by the dominant ideology? Does it make such an indoctrination impossible (in that it has to work below the threshold of awareness to be effective)? Or does it simply offer us the choice of accepting or rejecting the preferred reading? Does semiotic analysis necessarily have a political or moral dimension? Further reading: Dyer (1982), chapter 6; Hartley (1982), chapters 3 and 9; Williamson (1978), pp. 40–5, 122–37; Morley (1980), pp. 16–21, 134; Barthes (1977), pp. 32–51.

2. Take plates 1a and b, 11a and b, and 18. The photographs in plates 1a and 11a were published in the press (after considerable editorial treatment); the one in plate 18 was not. Why not? Using these five plates as your data discuss the topic 'Ideology and the representation of the police in the media'. You should use Barthes's theory of the second order of signification as the 'rhetoric of ideology', and you should compare and contrast the 'professional ideology' of the newsmen and news values with the 'dominant ideology' of the culture as a whole. Design a page layout and caption that would allow the use of plate 18 in a mass-circulation British paper. Give reasons for your editorial decisions and show how they take account of your understanding of ideology. Show also that you understand the interaction of words with visual image.

Plate 18 *Police and girl*

*(Photograph by Eve Arnold from the British Journal of Photography Annual 1973)*