

COMMUNICATION AND CLASS STRUGGLE

703

1. Capitalism, Imperialism

An
Anthology
In 2 Volumes
Edited by
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And
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IG/IMMRC

\$14.95/£7.50
0-88477-011-7
COMMUNICATIONS
CULTURE
MARXISM
REFERENCE

COMMUNICATION AND CLASS STRUGGLE, a two-volume work, is the first general marxist anthology of writings on communications, information and culture. Its purpose is to analyse the relationship between the practice and theory of communication and their development within the context of class struggle. Armand Mattelart and Seth Siegelaub, the editors, have selected more than 120 essential marxist and progressive texts originating in over 50 countries and written since the mid-nineteenth century to explain three interrelated phenomena: (1) how basic social, economic and cultural processes condition communication; (2) how bourgeois communication practice and theory have developed as part of the capitalist mode of production; and (3) how in the struggle against exploitation and oppression, the popular and working classes have developed their own communication practice and theory, and a new, liberated mode of communication, culture and daily life.

This first volume, 1. CAPITALISM, IMPERIALISM, provides the basic marxist theory essential to an analysis of the communication process and studies the formation of the capitalist communication apparatus, ideology, and "mass" culture. Volume 1 contains 64 texts. More than one-third are published for the first time in English, and some texts appear for the first time in any language. Contents: A. Basic Analytic Concepts; B. The Bourgeois Ideology of Communication; C. The Formation of the Capitalist Mode of Communication (Bourgeois Hegemony, Colonialism, Industrialization, Fascism); D. Monopoly Capitalism/Imperialism and Global Ideological Control (Concentration and Standardization, New Technology, Imperialist System, Militarization of Culture). In addition, it includes an extensive bibliography of marxist books and reviews concerned with communication.

The second volume, 2. LIBERATION, SOCIALISM, will be published in 1980, and will analyse the development of popular and working-class communication practice and theory. Contents: A. The Development of a Marxist Communication Theory; B. Working Class Communication Practice; C. The Struggle Within the Capitalist Communication Industry; D. Cultural Resistance; E. The Struggle Against Colonialism and Imperialism; F. Communications in a Period of Rupture; G. Socialist Construction.

INTERNATIONAL GENERAL

pob 350, new york, ny 10013, USA.

IMMRC international mass media research center
173 av de la dhuys, 93170 bagnolet, FRANCE.

- The University 334 SCIENCE FOR THE PEOPLE (USA, 1972)
Science as Cultural Imperialism
- Tourism 339 LOUIS A. PEREZ, JR. (USA, 1975)
Underdevelopment and Dependency: The Colonial Construct
of Tourism
- "Free" Flow of Information 345 HERBERT I. SCHILLER (USA, 1975)
Genesis of the Free Flow of Information Principles
- Advertising 353 RAFAEL DRINOT SILVA (Peru, 1973)
Advertising: The Production and Consumption of Daily Life
- Film 359 THOMAS H. GUBACK (USA, 1973)
Film as International Business
- Educational TV 367 SAMUEL PEREZ BARRETO (Peru, 1973)
Plaza Sesamo in Peru
- 4. The Militarization
of Culture**
- The Cold War 374 JAMES ARONSON (USA, 1970)
The Making of Joe McCarthy
- Cultural Genocide 384 PHONG HIEN, LE VAN HAO, H.N. (Viet Nam, 1974)
Aspects of Neocolonialist Culture
- Social Science Warfare 394 CAROL BRIGHTMAN, MICHAEL KLARE (USA, 1970)
Social Research and Counterinsurgency
- National Security 402 ARMAND MATTELART (France, 1977)
Notes on the Ideology of the Military State

APPENDICES

- Selected Bibliography 431
- Notes on Contributors 442

Seth Siegelau

PREFACE: A COMMUNICATION ON COMMUNICATION

1. PRE-CAPITALIST COMMUNICATION (TRANSPORTATION)

The struggles of the oppressed classes are the living foundation upon which is built the communication process. The history of these struggles is long, difficult, contradictory, and especially, cumulative. In its genesis, this history begins with the individual and collective struggle to satisfy physical needs, and progresses to include the struggle for the satisfaction of intellectual and emotional needs as well. Throughout these struggles, first against nature, and then also between tribes, clans, nations, castes, and finally, between classes, the role of communication has always been central. The reason for this, in a word, is that communication is nothing more, nor nothing less, than the articulation of the social relations between people. In a profound sense, communication is one of the most unique products—and producers—of society's development. One could further say that along with human labor, communication's evolution is a characteristic unique to the human species.

Communication, as a bond between real people, taking place in real time and real space, however, can never be a general, abstract phenomenon. Just as, in the words of Marx, "In the social production of their existence men inevitably enter into definite relations which are independent of their will, namely relations of production appropriate to a given stage of development of their material forces of production,"¹ it can also be said that men and women enter into communication relations which are likewise independent of their individual will. How people communicate, where and when they communicate, with whom they communicate, and even to a certain degree what and why they communicate, in short, the way they communicate, i.e., their mode of communication, is in function of the historical process. Each different communication form produced by this age-old process has been closely tied to the conditions in which it first arose and was later elaborated and generalized.

Even the word "communication", with its present specialized connotation dictated by our form of society, severely limits our comprehension of this

1. Karl Marx, Preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (1859), reprinted in Section A of this volume.

2. The telegraph in 1844, to communicate between people beyond the range of the eye or ear (the telegraph, in fact, was a product of the needs of transportation, and grew out of the railway). Obviously, earlier, there were smoke signals, drums, bells, etc. On another level, writing on buildings and even, in a certain way, buildings themselves can be considered as a form of communication.

3. Or under certain conditions, the surrogates for certain people: courriers, messengers, etc., which later gave rise to the post office and the mails.

ongoing process, for it fails to communicate the great variety of human conditions which give rise to communication. By stressing and reflecting only the more advanced, developed aspects of the communication process—i.e., that concerning how people transmit *information* between themselves—this special definition tends to hide the equally important fact that from the dawn of civilization until the nineteenth century,² the transmission of information between people meant concretely the "transmission" of people themselves,³ that is, *transportation*. But even this additional facet does not convey all the different aspects of communication. For along with the physical movement of people on land, water and air, there is also the movement and exchange of goods by and between people, which in our epoch takes the form of commodities and the circulation of capital. It is only by considering these four moments—the movement of people, of goods, of information, and last, but certainly not least today, of capital—as simultaneous components of an overall communication process, can we even attempt to reconstruct and understand communication as it is really lived at a given moment by people: men and women, groups, and especially, classes.

Although this anthology concerns the specific communication forms which have unfolded and are unfolding within only two broad historical epochs—capitalism, and then, socialism—these modes of production include within them, other earlier modes of communication inherited from pre-capitalist social formations. The accumulation of these experiences is thus a world process which embraces not only the recent cultural experiences of North America and Europe, but equally the old, often unpublicized, cultural lives of Asia, Africa, Oceania, and Latin America.

In broad succession, these pre-capitalist formations are the Primitive Communal, Asiatic, Ancient, and Feudal societies, each with its own mode of material production (economic structure; the productive forces and relations of production) and corresponding legal, State, political and ideological production (superstructure). It is the interaction between these two instances in their multiformity, which molds the different communication and transportation forms characterizing each successive era of humanity. While these forms reproduce the social conditions from which they issued, they also can serve, along with other forces, to exacerbate the contradictions latent within these conditions and help to destroy them. Nevertheless, even in the rapid, revolutionary transition from one social formation to the next, earlier, "lower" cultural forms and ways of communicating and transporting are rarely destroyed, but rather are used in other ways, adapted, re-combined, and given new and different values and importance in light of the new dominant social relations which imprint each successive epoch.

These multiple ways of moving people, things and ideas—and especially, today, capital—ways which naturally envelop a type of content as well, could also be thought of as responses to certain needs generated by a given system of production at a certain stage of its evolution. These needs, usually well-broadcasted and circulated in society, however, should not hide the fact that they can also enclose other, unreported needs which correspond to the dif-

ferent fundamental interests of other classes. As we will see elsewhere, these needs create different responses in communication and transportation, as well as in other of society's practices.

Thus the growth of certain communication and transportation forms, not unlike parallel ones developing in other economic branches, could be understood as the dominant response at a given moment conditioned by two interrelated requirements:

1. The first need is economic and structural. It pertains to the specific communication and transportation tools or instruments required by a given mode of production to maintain itself and expand. The nature of these tools, however, in turn, is framed by the level of the existing means of production. (This dialectic takes us immediately to the vital production centers of each social formation. In our epoch: no radio without the electronics industry; no film without the electrical and chemical industries; no "mass" press without steam power and paper manufacturing; no publishing without advanced metalworking studios, etc.) These instruments, however, should not just be thought of as physical objects, as they equally "are" a connected level of human accomplishment, involving the practices, techniques, skills, information and knowledge needed to create, produce, operate and develop them further. This ensemble of tools/skills can be called the means of communication and transportation.

2. The second need is political and ideological, and thus, superstructural. It depends directly on the intensity of overall social antagonisms, articulated or not. These superstructural elements, including the State, are much more difficult to assess than the material level of production, but they certainly are no less important in determining how and why different forms of communication evolved and are evolving, as will be clearly seen in many of the texts in this anthology.

The rise of the "mass" press, for example, could be seen as being simultaneously a dominant response to the economic necessity to increase the movement of manufactured goods and also a response to the pressing political need to communicate with all those who are doing the manufacturing. This implies that the workers are already organized in production and in political struggle, too, and that they thus pose a political threat. This, in turn, indicates that there exists a certain level of industrial production, including steam and mechanical power, and also in this case, paper manufacturing which are prerequisites for the "mass" press. More recently, for example, TV satellites, in addition to being a dominant response to the economic need to increase the circulation of capital and information linked to it, could also be seen as a response to the political need to

4. Some researchers tend to see communication history as being essentially the history of the means of diffusion. Given the poverty of much of the current programming and how it is diffused, it is not by chance that certain interests want to avoid drawing too much critical attention to how this production process results in a specific type of cultural product. Another aspect of this emphasis on diffusion is McLuhan's "The medium is the message", which, in its way, serves to distract us almost as much as the television programs he rarely talks about.

contain the rise of the national liberation movements, which have become a greater threat to imperialism given the increasing interrelationship between different parts of the world based on the imperialist division of labor.

But these are only two random examples taken from the extraordinary multiplicity of communication forms produced throughout history. What interplay of forces, what accumulations, lead to the creation and generalization, for example, of speech, and the orator, the actor, the messenger, the bellman, the crier, the musician, the informer? Numbers, writing, the alphabet, paper, and the scribe, the author, the translator, the composer, the post office and the postman? The clerk and copyist? The wheel, the cart, the wheelbarrow, the stagecoach, the bicycle, the railway, the truck, the tractor, the automobile, the trolley, and bus? The canoe, the sampan, the dhow, the sailboat, the warship, the freighter? The book, the printer, the editor, the proofreader, the publisher, the bookseller, the librarian? The gazette, the daily press, and the journalist? The poster, the handbill, and the manifesto? The typewriter and typist, the secretary, the stenographer? The communication researcher? The cable, the telegraph, the telephone? The film? The phonograph? The airplane? The radio? The movie star? The television? Space travel? And in the U.S., the CB (Citizen Band) radio?

Obviously, there are more or less important achievements, some which characterize an epoch and others which are improvements of earlier forms. Nevertheless, in all cases, we should continue to look deeper and deeper into the social, political, ideological and psychological, as well as economic, realities which are usually obscured by the brilliance of "scientific" inventions and the skills that they call for. These forces are the real framework and "reason" for how and when certain means developed and were extended in the particular way that they were—or were not. Is it possible that a certain type of research can no longer pose questions concerning these realities, because in doing so it would have to admit to the existence of the struggle of these forces, of classes, and would have to reply in relation to them?

The development of communication forms today, moreover, should not just be conceived as being a one-way history of the quantitative increase in the means of diffusion and consumption, a concept itself which is well-diffused and thus well-consumed today under monopoly capitalism. Although certainly an integral part of the communication process—but, in a certain way, perhaps over-developed today—diffusion and consumption are preceded by an equally determinant element, that of production, a concept of which is not very well diffused nor consumed at all in our epoch⁴ (one which, moreover, is the basis for a popular communication strategy).

Thus while each social formation gives rise to its own dominant mode of communication, which can be characterized by the way it arranges and combines the existing forms and develops new ways of communicating in function of its ruling interests, it appears that certain formations have been the battleground for the rise of such qualitatively new ways of human intercourse that they have not just co-existed with other forms, but have profoundly dominated and altered them, as have the electronic radio and television forms in relation to other forms today

under monopoly capitalism.

Excluding here Feudalism (copying and the rise of printing), and the rise of capitalism and colonialism (which are treated extensively in Armand Mattelart's Introduction and the texts in Section C of this volume), there appear to be two earlier modes of production whose relationship to the development of communication deserve to be tentatively outlined here:⁵

—Early Primitive Communal Society, savagery, and the formation of the mouth and the rise of speech and language; and

—late Primitive Society-Ancient Society and the rise of numbers, writing and the alphabet

The social structure characterizing early primitive society is the natural, kinship family, and the sole form of ownership is family, tribal common ownership. At the outset, the primitive level of the productive forces means that all production is consumed by the family-tribe-clan in the reproduction of their community. The very earliest stage of this society, savagery, can be described as being the separation of the human species from other animals, and its physical formation in its struggle to survive against nature, first organized as nomads by gathering food, and then by hunting and fishing.⁶ As part of this struggle there arose the need to talk:

On the other hand, the development of labour necessarily helped to bring the members of society closer together by increasing cases of mutual support and joint activity, and by making clear the advantage of this joint activity to each individual. In short, men in the making arrived at the point where they had *something to say* to each other...

First labour, after it and then with it speech—these were the two most essential stimuli under the influence of which the brain of the ape gradually changed into that of man....⁷

With the formation of the mouth-speech-language,

5. I hardly feel qualified to undertake this. Despite the important work produced by a number of people, some of whom are cited below, the relative rarity of marxist historical analyses on communication, in its largest sense, is somewhat surprising, considering the very high level of marxist historiography in general. We would welcome hearing from people who have done, or are familiar with, such research; we would be very interested in working with them to contribute to such a series of studies. For basic historical periodization and background see Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The German Ideology*, London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1970, especially pp. 42-50; Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1972, which also includes his important unfinished essay "The Part Played by Labor in The Transition From Ape to Man", pp. 251-264, and an introduction by Eleanor Burke Leacock; Marx, *Grundrisse*, London: Penguin, 1973, especially pp 474ff; and a selection of Marx and Engels' texts, *Pre-Capitalist Economic Formations*, London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1964, edited with an important introduction by E.J. Hobsbawm. For more specific research on communication and transportation, in addition to the voluminous and important work of the French Communist Marcel Cohen, including, *Language: Its Structure and Evolution*, 1970, and *La Grande invention de l'écriture et son évolution*, 2 volumes, Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1958, see also the texts in Section C, Part I in the first volume of this anthology, especially that of Robin

we have the first and most elementary mode of human communication: a dialogue. It is oral, direct in space and immediate in time. It appears as the dominant mode of communication of this social formation, and the specific achievement of this culture.⁸ Its character is closely bound to the social conditions which engendered it: the limited small-scale natural community (limited both in population and geographically) where relations are face-to-face.⁹ Why would someone want to write or to telephone someone else, or to watch the chief on television, when they could just talk?

While the generalization of this mode, speech, under a variety of climatic, geographic and thus, social conditions, with its effect on the formation of sounds, language and ideas, has made speech the most concrete, expressive communication form of each cultural formation, because it is produced by virtually everyone, it has been subject to profound modification in the course of the rise of more complex social conditions. Today, speech, as dialogue, has been extended in space via the telephone, for example. However, with radio and television, speech also has been reduced to a one-way monologue. There are, furthermore, other constraints against speech, such as in the silence in the courtroom, before the Lord, or in the church, that is, the lack of speech caused by awe, by "respect", or perhaps, most important, by fear. Today, imperialism, in its particular way, is concerned with speech and language, that is, with destroying subaltern speech and languages, as in the United States where, for example; in the beginning of the twentieth century, the speech and languages of the new immigrant populations were destroyed by the ruling forces in favor of the dominant language, English.

But to return to primitive society. With the increase of population came the increase in physical needs, and the growing necessity to control nature

Murray and Tom Wengraf "Notes on Communications Systems"; the list of books in Section C, Part I in the bibliography published in the appendix to this volume; V. Gordon Childe, *Man Makes Himself*, N.Y.: New American Library, 1951; El Lissitsky, "The Future of the Book", *New Left Review* (London), 41, January-February 1967 (to be published in the second volume of this anthology); the unpublished manuscript of Olga Kozamara "The Neglected Potentialities of Television in the Development of Consciousness and Culture", Sarajevo, Yugoslavia, May 1971, 12pp mimeographed, and the collection of texts *Marx and Engels on the Means of Communication*, edited with an important introduction by Yves de la Haye (forthcoming, N.Y.: International General, 1979).

6. This initial biological formation of the primary human sensory organs—the hand/work, the mouth/eating and communication, the foot/transportation, and the eye, ear, and with them the brain and consciousness—and their physical extension in time and space is both the foundation and the fruit of all subsequent social development, in communication and transportation, as well as elsewhere.

7. Frederick Engels, "The Part Played....", *op. cit.*

8. There were probably other incipient forms: gestures, signals, impermanent markings, etc.

9. These are the social conditions towards which McLuhan thinks we are now advancing with the global or tribal village.