

## ETS 142

### IDEOLOGY UNIT ESSAY ASSIGNMENT: IDEOLOGY CRITIQUE

The simplest explanation of this essay is that it is an analysis of what is taken for granted and invisible to a naked eye.

#### SOME ASSUMPTIONS:

In *The Theory Toolbox*, Nealon and Giroux describe how ideology works and what critiquing it entails:

- Ideology is the thing that entices you to forget that meaning always happens in a context (90).
- Ideology, understood as a kind of cultural common sense, doesn't need to be articulated, discussed, or justified. Anything that's *ideological* in this sense seems like it just *is...* (87).
- The task of literary and cultural theory...is *not* to *escape* ideology but to account for its workings in the seemingly disinterested and neutral presentations of culture, as well as in our interpretations of those cultural artifacts. There is no escape from ideology, but there is a kind of constant vigilance that ideology *critique* calls for: What unarticulated premises stand behind our "knowledge"? This is the first and last question of ideology critique, and it is necessarily an *ongoing* question (91).

In *Ideology and the Ideological State Apparatuses*, Althusser explains how the ISAs exert their power:

- ...the individual is interpellated as a (free) subject in order that he shall submit freely to the commandments of the Subject, i.e. in order that he shall (freely) accept his subjection, i.e., in order that he shall make the gestures and actions for his subjections 'all by himself.' (184)

In "Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight," Geertz describes how a ritual activity creates people's subjectivity:

- ...cultural forms can be treated as texts, as imaginative works built out of social materials (*WOR* 297).
- ...the cockfight, and especially the deep cockfight, is fundamentally a dramatization of status concerns... (289).
- [the cockfight, for the Balinese, is] a story they tell themselves about themselves (296).
- because...[one's] subjectivity does not properly exist until it is thus organized, art forms generate and regenerate the very subjectivity they pretend only to display (298).
- In the cockfight, then, the Balinese forms and discovers his temperament and his society's temper at the same time. Or, more exactly ...a particular face of them (299).

THE ASSIGNMENT: As the culminating essay for this unit, write a four to six page paper examining how these assumptions about ideology operate in and lend significance to your reading of a text. Be sure to use appropriate MLA documentation for quotations or ideas you use in your essay. A paper copy of the final draft must be submitted **by the end of the day on May 29.**

CLARIFICATIONS: Since ideology interpellates individuals as subjects, ideology and subjectivity are two sides of the same coin. As a result, you might be wondering how this essay will be different from that written for the first unit. The simplest answer is that the difference is the focus: metaphorically, though both deal with the forest and its trees, the subjectivity essay spent more time on one (or a few) trees; the ideology essay will be looking at the forest as a whole.

The longwinded answer:

- In your subjectivity essay you were closely examining one or a few characters to explore how they were interpellated as subjects and the nature of their agency. The majority of your essay was spent examining how characters struggled with their subjectivity, and you ended with a relatively brief discussion of the implications of the text.
- In your ideology critique, you are examining the text's narrative assumptions, what is taken for granted, what's never questioned within the text, what's presented as being natural but isn't necessarily so. While your subjectivity essay focused on the obvious struggle, your ideology critique will examine what seems invisible (to the characters in the text or to readers of that text). This may include:
  - the social/political/economic landscape in which characters are situated
  - the prevailing attitudes that characters betray
  - what is considered normal/appropriate and what is marginalized
  - what is prized and what is demonized
  - the nature of the hero and of the villain
  - what constitutes success and failure
  - how all of these affect the characters' actions.

An ideology critique is, therefore, ultimately an examination of how power is invisibly exerted.

SUGGESTED TEXTS:

- As a general principle, since an ideology critique investigates the common sense way that power is exerted, those texts that deal with some definition of normalcy or success will offer the most payoff. Consider the binaries through which these are defined: winners/losers, popular/outcast, enlightened/misguided, strong/weak, effective/ineffective, moral/immoral, prestigious/ordinary, etc.
- Reality TV shows often tap into many of the above. You may consider reading them in pairs, or suites, since there are many that feature different aspects of a single phenomenon (masculinity, femininity, consumption, success, etc.).
- Films include: *The Silkwork*, *My Brother's Keeper*, *Dead Poets' Society*, *The Great Gatsby*, *The Letter*, *Pleasantville*, *The Pianist*, *Charlotte Gray*, *Enemy of the State*, *Mr. Smith Goes To Washington*; *Miracle on 34th Street*; *Starship Troopers*; *You've Got Mail*; *The Iron Giant*; *Fight Club*; *Black Hawk Down*; *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*; *Brubaker*; *Rambo III*; *MASH*; *Band of Brothers*; *Glengarry Glen Ross*; *Father of the Bride*; *Legally Blond*; *Wall Street*; *Juno*; *All the President's Men*; *Dirty Harry*; *Animal House*; *Mean Girls*; *The Patriot*; *Brokeback Mountain*; *God Grew Tired of Us*; *Spellbound*.
- Advertisers often try to persuade you to purchase something by appealing to the notion that without a product, you are in some ways a failure. Choose a single ad, a campaign for one product, or several campaigns for different brands of the same product. For ads resources on the web, see <http://scriptorium.lib.duke.edu/adaccess/> or <http://www.americanhistory.si.edu/archives/Ivory/index.asp> or <http://www.commercialcloset.org/cgi-bin/iowa/index.html>

- Working Question one on page 92 of *TT*, as well as chapter eight on Space/Time, offer suggestions for reading the ideology of spaces and social structures.