Simulacrum

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[Page 54] despite appearances, television does not represent (re-present) a piece of reality, but rather produces or constructs it. Reality does not exist in the objectivity of empiricism... The television camera and microphone do not record reality, but encode it: the encoding produces a sense of reality that is ideological. What is re-presented, then, is not reality but ideology, and the effectivity of this ideology is enhanced by the iconicity of television by which the medium purports to situate its truth claim in the objectivity of the real, and thus to disguise the fact that any 'truth' that it produces is that of ideology, not reality. Television, therefore, works in the semiotic domain in the same way as the industrial system does in the economic. The industrial system does not merely produce and reproduce commodities: what it finally and inevitably reproduces is capitalism itself. So, television, in its production of televisual reality, reproduces not objective reality, but capitalism, even if ideologically rather than materially. (There is)... a belief that there is a 'reality', however problematic, that differs essentially from its photographic image... the camera is an agent of misrepresentation. (It)... oppose(s) the common sense apothegm that the camera cannot lie by arguing, on the contrary, that the camera does nothing but lie. [p.56]... ideology works to produce what we may call a 'false subconsciousness'. Subjectivity is the inscription of the social-ideological upon the individual; it is where ideology becomes practised or lived.

Subjectivity determines the position from which we make sense of ourselves, of our social relations and of our social experience. The dominant ideology works to reproduce itself in our subjectivities, so, regardless of our material social conditions, all of us who are subjects of capitalism have, to a greater or lesser degree, subjectivities inscribed with white, patriarchal bourgeois ideologies. More recent theories... focus on the way that dominant ideologies are reproduced in the subconsciousness of social subjects and... seek some form of 'grand narrative' to explain how ideology does not just re-present itself in its pictures of reality, but reproduces itself in the subjectivities upon and within which those representations work. Ideological reproduction and representation are part and parcel of the same process. Baudrillard, however, sidesteps the misrepresentation/reproduction problem by defining it as a non-issue. In his postmodernist theory images and reality... do not have different ontological statuses: there is no difference between image and reality. The consequence of this is that we now live in an age which Baudrillard (1983b) characterizes as one of the simulacrum. The simulacrum, however, is both the reproduction and the original, both the image and the referent imploded into a single concept.

In this account there can be no original reality whose image is reproduced on millions of screens. Margaret Thatcher smiling into the TV camera and making an off-the-cuff remark for the microphone as she walks between the helicopter and the waiting car is not a piece of reality whose image is transmitted to our television screen. She is her own image. Her hairstyle does not pre-exist its TV image and seeing it 'live' is no more authentic an experience than seeing it on the screen. The smile, the hairstyle and the comment would not be there if the TV cameras were not, if the viewers were not. The smile, the hairstyle and the comment exist simultaneously and similarly on the TV screen and on the helipad, there is no difference of. Each is as real or as unreal as the other.