

Issues in Contemporary Art: Ideology

Jessica Griggs – Dec 23, 2008

Ideology plays a significant role in our past and present society and cultures. The way our mind interprets things, all depend on the way we see or hear things. 'The way we see things is affected by what we know or what we believe' (Berger, 1972; 8). I believe ideology stems from preconceived ideas that were passed down from generations. Ideology is the status in life. How does ideology affect us? How is it used in propaganda and advertising? These questions and appropriate examples will be discussed and presented through this essay. A bibliography of diverse images is also arranged at the back of this essay to reinforce the concept of ideologies.

Ideology in our culture

Ideology can be seen almost everywhere, even though we may not notice or class it as such. Ideology enters into our lives everyday through television, films, music, artworks, advertisements, text, communication, the Internet, and other mundane actions. Sturken and Cartwright (2001; 21) discuss that most people think of ideology as propaganda which mainly uses false representations to entice people into new beliefs which can differentiate their thinking and interests about something or someone. Sturken and Cartwright (2001; 21) also discuss ideology as a term to subtly permeate our worldly performances or daily processes, even though we may or may not be aware of it. Ideologies are shared beliefs and values that relate to a range of social structures, cultures and everyday lifestyle.

Sturken & Cartwright (2001; 21) state that 'images are an important means through which ideologies are produced and onto which ideologies are projected'. Photography, text and visual images of any kind are distinct ways in which ideology enters into society. For example: world news, advertising, evident text, graffiti and iconic imagery. News reports of shameful imagery, accomplishments, scandals, obvious icons and disturbing, crucial illustrations or footage are ideologies that make people aware of the status in the world, showing and telling information that they will possibly remember. These vivid ideologies

could be further established in propaganda, rebellious activities, more advertising campaigns, art projects, changes in public realms and many other cultural incidents.

Ideology also enters into society through conspicuous images of graffiti intended for observation in public spaces. Although graffiti is sometimes classed as vandalism, it is often encouraged in artistic terms therefore making it an element to harness ideology in expressing subtle messages or visual language. Bradley Bartolomeo (2001) states that '... it is obvious that graffiti inherently promotes a message of rebellion and resistance, a type of resistance that promotes an anarchist ideology in many layers.' Prominent images or advertisements can, in a clever way, expose strong messages in order to eventually change ideas, rebel against authoritative decisions or situations in society. To 'sway the masses' as Sturken and Cartwright (2001; 131) eloquently define.

Iconic images, which are recognised, remembered and related to almost immediately, are ideologies that use images of truth, fiction, icons, religion or symbolism to signify a story or sentence. *Children Fleeing an American Napalm Strike Vietnam, 1972* and *Raising the Flag, 1945* (Fahey/Klein Gallery, images 1 & 2) are well-known iconic images of war that convey a message of truth, disaster, victory and fate. Iconic photos and drawings, such as celebrities, patriots, Hitler or U.S. Presidents, are still used as icons in propaganda advertising and artworks, to show convincing messages and a point of view.

Remollino discusses that cultures and artworks are impossible without ideology. Art is a conduct or aspect of life because it uses visual, textual and auditory devices that arouses our thoughts and appeals to our consciousness (Emanila, 1998-2008). Remollino also proclaims that there are artworks and artworks. 'There are artworks in which the expression of ideology is more apparent than in others. Such artworks can be described as *more obviously ideological than others*, but no artwork is more ideological than others since *all art is ideological*, and definitely no artwork is non-ideological' (Remollino, 2006). So in other words, art is a dominant way that ideologies enter into cultures and society, affecting us all in diverse ways.

How does ideology affect us?

Ideologies affect everyone in different ways, either for better or worse. It makes us aware of situations, tells or shows us different ways of thinking in order to change traditional ways or maybe to re-introduce forgotten methods. As mentioned before, ideology influences our lives through television, movies, music, artworks, advertisements, and the Internet, therefore, persuading masses in subtle ways, and luring them into coveting or changing. Advertisements are promoted in a way for people to be covetous, which can conclude in a financial crisis for many. Consequently, having the right accoutrements in life can assemble a personal image or identity in the world, as the saying goes, 'you are what you have' (Berger, 1972; 139).

Having the ideal body is a personal identity and our personal image can be an ideology to the world. For example one that has a so-called "perfect body" can have a huge impact on society. Supkis' (2006, fig.3) image of the ideal body shows a drawing of 2 women from different generations, portraying a message of change over time. Recently, the notion of a "perfect body" changed the thinking and affected the health of many; particularly some fashion models and fans with emaciated and unhealthy bodies, as sketched right in image 3. Nanci Hellmich (USA Today, 2008) states that Psychologists and eating-disorder experts '... say the fashion industry has gone too far in pushing a dangerously thin image that women, and even very young girls, may try to emulate'. The ideal perfect body is still promoted, but it is encouraged in a more substantial manner to keep healthy. Nobody is perfect or can be for that matter (Sturken & Cartwright, 2001; 214-215).

So ideologies can affect our health and financial situations but also can affect someone's mental state. Most artworks are aesthetically pleasing, making viewers peaceful or happy, while other art could be striking, unconventional or disturbing, upsetting someone's mental state. Art, advertising or propaganda notices can change or reinforce peoples' thoughts, past experiences, regards, feelings, life style, conscience or identity. It depends on our past experiences and like Berger (1972; 8) says, 'the way we see things is affected by what we know or what we believe'.

Advertising, Propaganda, and False Ideology

Alex Kataras (2006) discusses that the “archaic methods” of advertisement and fact or true notions are long gone, being replaced by advertisements that frequently over-rate commodities. Some advertisements lack integrity in many ways, giving misleading information and ideologies about certain products in our economic society. ‘The advertisements sell a way of life, not a product; in fact the ad itself becomes the object of aesthetisation’ (Kataras, 2006). Propaganda is shown in a circumstance to acquire people to think in a different way and show new perspectives rather than promote aesthetic advertising.

Advertising is like propaganda, because it makes its self-ubiquitous, while the message it carries is one that has been born out of ulterior motives by people who want to make money and maintain the status quo. Alongside the news, advertising is a tool that shapes public opinion. Advertising... plays a central role in society... to disseminate ideas and concepts. It's the tool that the dominant elite employs to promote agendas and maintain the status quo. To keep things how they want to (Kataras, 2006).

Ideology is a particular way of thinking to form assumptions or persuasions, therefore swaying masses with misleading information or false material to the economic, political and cultural cosmos could create a problem. Jonathan Gitlin (Ars Technica, 2008) stated that the truth is not always the case in correcting false ideologies. ‘Being uninformed... actively misinformed... presents problems when it comes to participating in the national debate, or the democratic process. If the findings of some political scientists are right, attempting to correct misinformation might do nothing more than reinforce the false belief.’ (Ars Technica, 2008). I believe that people who were persuaded by false ideologies have been brainwashed, henceforth the real truth will not be embraced or a believable fact.

False ideologies in advertising can have a huge impact on society. Most advertisements are sincere while other advertising's can have the appearance of truth but often trick or persuade people into something that is not absolute. Some advertisements are designed to bamboozle viewers into purchasing products, to confiscate their money through ideas or images that were transformed into a convincing ideology. Propaganda also uses ideologies for convincing purposes but more in a way to show a point of view and persuade people into

believing something that may have a derogatory statement to a particular system, belief or authoritative decision.

'Propaganda is a type of message aimed at influencing the opinions or behaviour of people. Instead of impartially providing information, propaganda is often deliberately misleading, using logical fallacies, that, while sometimes convincing, are not necessarily valid' (Oddee, 2008). Sturken and Cartwright (2001; 131) discuss that propaganda uses ideology in every aspect to challenge and convince the masses, this can lead people into believing certain concepts or connotations that reveal political messages. Signs, symbols or icons are frequently used in propaganda notices, because people recognise them immediately and refer to the meaning or history of them. Refer to image 4 for an example.

Conclusion

Ideologies are all around us and it is difficult to escape or be unaware of the impression it has on cultures and society. 'All images contain layers of meaning that include their formal aspects, their culture and socio-historical references... and the contexts in which they are displayed' (Sturken & Cartwright 2001; 41-42). It signifies to us fragments of the past, facts, truth and myth, this tends to affect us for better or worse, either way ideology is the status in life.

Bibliography of Images



Fig. 1
© Nick Ut, 'Children Fleeing an American Napalm Strike', Vietnam, 1972. Size: 16"x20". Fahey/Klein Gallery.



Fig. 2
© Associated Press. 'IWO JIMA, (Raising the Flag)', Circa 1945. Size: 20"x24". Fahey/Klein Gallery.

Fahey/Klein Gallery, n.d. *Photographs we know: Iconic images*. Retrieved: December 12, 2008, from http://www.faheykleingallery.com/featured_artists/icon2/icon2_frames.htm

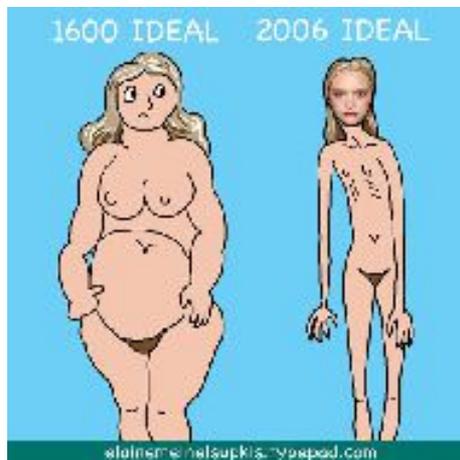


Fig. 3

Supkis, E 2006, *The Arts*. Retrieved: December 18, 2008, from http://elainemeinelsupkis.typepad.com/the_arts/2006/09/spanish_city_fo.html



Fig. 5
Schweitzer, H. *Long live Germany!* 1930's. Nazi Propaganda, 2003. Retrieved: December 20, 2008, from <http://rexcurry.net/socialism-posters/posters2.html>



Fig. 6
Howard Miller, J. *Rosie the Riveter*. 1943. *WWI and WWII Propaganda Posters*, 2007. Retrieved: December 20, 2008, from <http://www.propagandaposters.us/poster5.html>

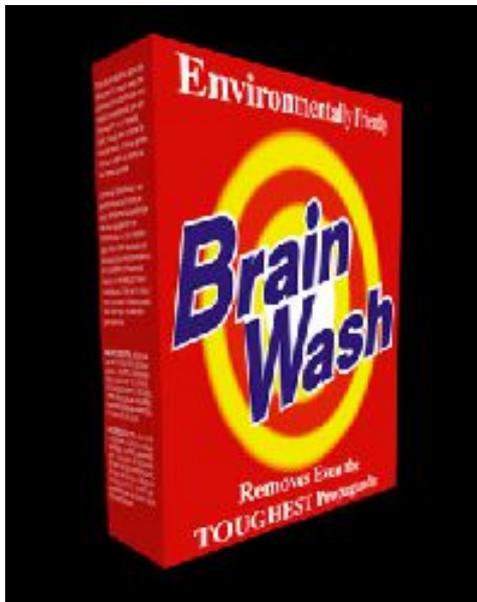


Fig. 7
Howard, M, 2007. Red Ice Creations: *Brainwash*. Retrieved: December 20, 2008, from <http://www.redicecreations.com/article.php?id=961>



Fig. 8
Organique, 1997-2003. *False advertising: a gallery of parody*. Retrieved: December 20, 2008, from <http://parody.organique.com>



Fig. 9
Goya, *Saturn devouring one of his children*, 1818-1823. 4' 9 1/8" x 2' 8 5/8". Museo del Prado, Madrid (Kleiner, 2005, p. 788).

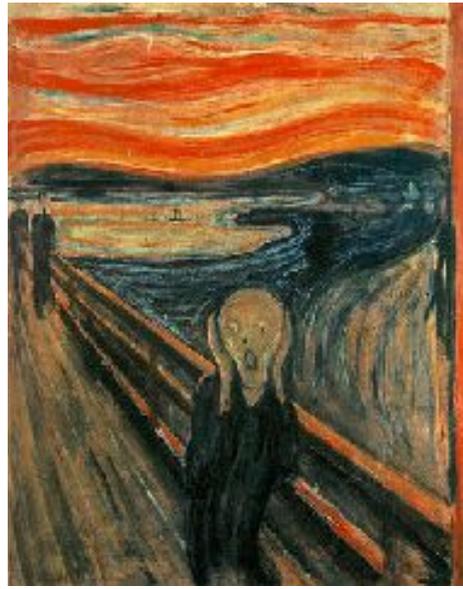


Fig. 10
Munch, E. *The Scream*, 1893. 2' 11 3/4" x 2' 5". National Gallery, Oslo (Kleiner, 2005, p. 841).

Kleiner, F 2005, *Art Through the ages: A global history*, Thomson Wadsworth, USA.

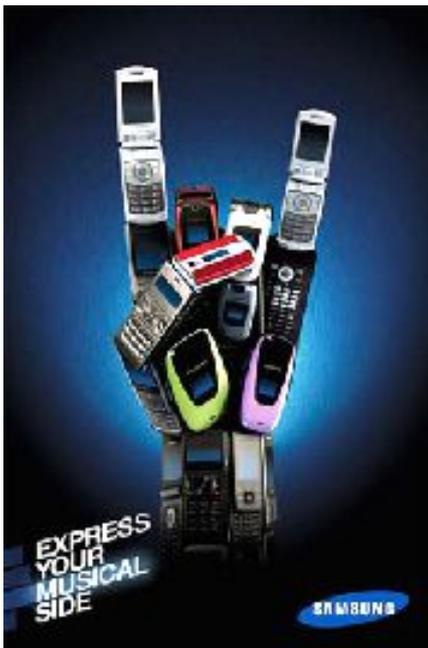


Fig. 11



Fig. 12
Please don't loose control over your drinking

Fig. 11-12

Just creative designs 2008, 192 creative, smart & clever advertisements. Retrieved: December 20, 2008, from <http://justcreativedesign.com/2008/07/30/192-of-the-best-smart-clever-creative-advertisements/>

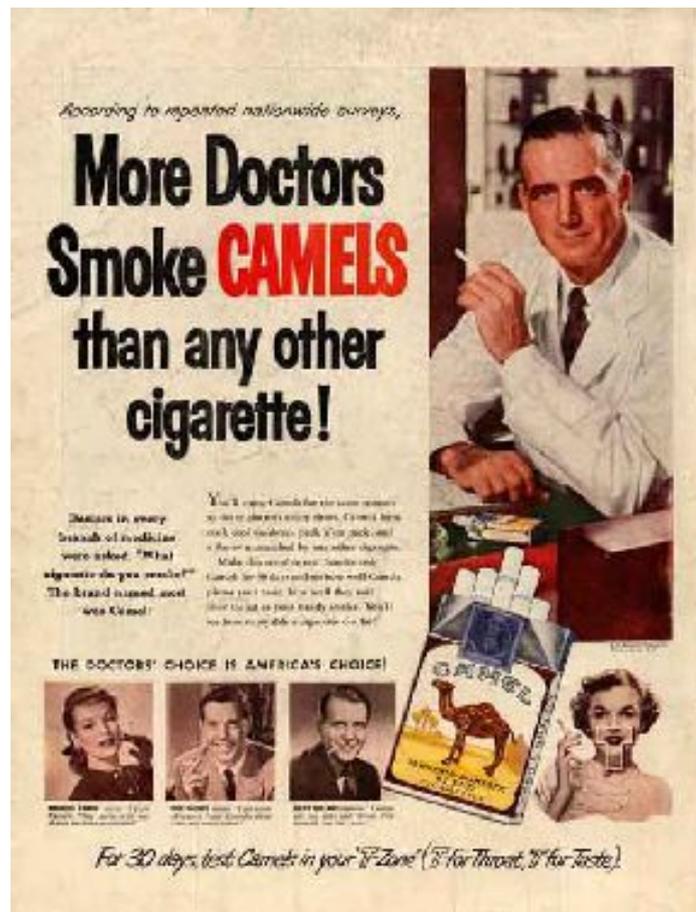


Fig. 13, promoting cigarettes

Unsought input 2007, *Amusing Old Fashioned Advertisements, Cigarette Ads.*
 Retrieved: December 20, 2008, from <http://www.unsoughtinput.com/index.php/2007/06/26/amusing-old-fashioned-advertisements-cigarette-ads/>



Fig. 14, anti-smoking advertisement

Crooked brains 2007, *Anti-smoking advertisements.*
 Retrieved: December 20, 2008, from <http://www.crookedbrains.net/2007/11/thought-provoking-anti-smoking-ads.html>

References

- Ars Technica 2008, *Does ideology trump facts?* Retrieved: December 12, 2008, from <http://arstechnica.com/news.ars/post/20080924-does-ideology-trump-facts-studies-say-it-often-does.html>
- Bartolomeo, B 2001. *Graffiti is part of us*. Retrieved: December 10, 2008, from http://www.graffiti.org/faq/graffiti-is-part-of-us.html#Group_Identity_And_the_Construction_of_the_Image
- Berger, J 1972, *Ways of Seeing*, Penguin Books, London.
- Emanila 1998-2008, *Ideology and Art*. Retrieved: December 14, 2008, from http://emanila.com/literary/essays.php?subaction=showfull&id=1146393562&archive=&start_from=&ucat=2&
- Sturken, M & Cartwright, L 2001, *practices of looking: an introduction to visual culture*, Oxford University Press, New York.
- Oddee 2008. *Amazing propaganda posters*. Retrieved: December 15, 2008, from http://www.oddee.com/item_66536.aspx
- USA Today 2008, *Do thin models warp girls' body image?* Retrieved: December 18, 2008, from http://www.usatoday.com/news/health/2006-09-25-thin-models_x.htm

Bibliography

- ABC News 2008, *Graffiti artists leave their mark on Athens*. Retrieved: December 11, 2008, from <http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2008/10/07/2383653.htm>
- Berger, J 1972, *Ways of Seeing*, Penguin Books, London.
- Blunden, A & Lucas R. n.d. Marx Myths and Legends: *Ideology and False Consciousness*. Retrieved: December 9 2008, from <http://marxmyths.org/joseph-mccarney/article.htm>
- Calvin, 2001, *German propaganda archive*. Retrieved: December 5, 2008, from <http://www.calvin.edu/academic/cas/gpa/posters2.htm>
- Duffy, M 2000-07. *First world war: Propaganda posters*. Retrieved: December 20, 2008, from <http://www.firstworldwar.com/posters/usa.htm>
- English, A 2008, *Issues in Contemporary Art: Study guide* (p. 1:1 – 3:10), Curtin University of Technology, Perth, W.A.
- Felluga, D 2003. *Introductory Guide to Critical Theory: Modules on Althusser*. Retrieved: December 6, 2008, from <http://www.cla.purdue.edu/academic/engl/theory/marxism/modules/althusserideologymainframe.html>
- Gramsci Links Archive 1999-2008. *Ideology*. Retrieved: December 7, 2008, from <http://www.victoryiscertain.com/gramsci/>
<http://www.cultsock.ndirect.co.uk/MUHome/cshtml/popups/ideology.html>
- Jost, J 2007, *Ideology is back*. Retrieved: December 10, 2008, from <http://thesituationist.wordpress.com/2007/09/10/ideology-is-back-and-the-divides-are-still-deep/>
- Kataras, A 2006, *Advertising, Propaganda, and Graffiti Art*. Retrieved: December 11, 2008, from <http://www.graffiti.org/faq/kataras/kataras.html>
- Kleiner, F 2005, *Art Through the ages: A global history*, Thomson Wadsworth, USA.
- O'Grady, K 1996-98. *Guardian of Language: An Interview with Hélène Cixous*. Retrieved: December 8, 2008, from <http://www.english.ucsb.edu/faculty/ayliu/research/grady-cixous.html>
- Pollock, G 1996, *Theory, ideology, politics: art history and its myths - Art History And Its Theories*. Retrieved: December 14, 2008, from http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0422/is_n1_v78/ai_18394853
- Sturken, M & Cartwright, L 2001, *practices of looking: an introduction to visual culture*, Oxford University Press, New York.
- Wolff, J. (1981) *The Social Production of Art* (pp. 7-8 & pp. 26-29), MacMillan Education Ltd, London