

Ideology is everyday

John Kraniauskas's 'Globalization is Ordinary' (RP 90), on cultural studies and the recent *Media, Culture and Identity* series (OU course D318), provides a welcome synopsis of the trajectory of cultural studies, particularly in its emphasis on the problematic nature of a critical idea of culture. It is, however, difficult to understand why Kraniauskas places so much emphasis on the tradition of ideology critique: on concepts like misrecognition, 'epistemic violence', and ideology as passive superstructural reflection of the base. Whilst Althusser emphasized misrecognition as a category of ideology, he also saw the latter as everyday practice. In other words, ideology could be understood through what it did rather than what it said. Hence, everyday ideology was not so much a series of propositions or conventional truth claims as a way of doing things.

Interestingly, the general drift of this idea had already appeared in phenomenological sociology in the sixties. Everyday language had to be seen as contextual and indexical, only rendering up its epistemic claims via a hermeneutics of the situation. Natural language utterances were seen as self-referential, situating their agents rather than referring in a universally valid way to a reality 'out there'. The assumption, later evident in Dummett's semantics, was that such discourse was intersubjectively valid, that it articulated with other communicative practices, made sense. Senses were not, however, seen as the property of individual subjects but as imbricated dialogically within communicative traditions, as a state of intersubjective validity, and hence as a criterion of cultural critique.

Now whilst this view is reflected in some ways in Gramsci's treatment of common sense as unspoken ideology integral to the articulation of hegemony, it gets little or no mention in the recent *Culture, Media and Identity* series or in Kraniauskas's overview. For me, as a tutor on D318, the key weakness of this highly productive series is not the absence of epistemological critique, but rather the lack of an extended treatment of the everyday as a cluster of theoretical themes. The net effect is, as Kraniauskas notes, a tendency towards historical contingency, but also, conversely, emphasis on the determinist pessimism of discourse theory.

The everyday is an ontological category which as unspoken situation or context inscribes the limits within which our cultural practices make sense. For Merleau-Ponty, Lefebvre and others it characterizes the present as incomplete and open-ended; as situation, but also as contradictory, multi-accentual. If we are to understand ideology as a sphere in which we can intervene, then the everyday furnishes tropes we can get a purchase on. As Merleau-Ponty notes, situation combines necessity and contingency: situations are dynamic and at the same time we are inextricably linked to them; their generality is a sphere of immanence and yet we have our particular exits and entries with their own biographical baggage; the situation appears as a result of human action, but at the same time the action is suffused by and only makes sense within it. By contrast, the base–superstructure metaphor in its appropriation as ideology critique presents us with ideological and hence cultural closure: ideology is an accomplishment from elsewhere, it is an illusory entity which is, notoriously, 'real only in its effects' and so, paradoxically, has no causes either!

A way out of the problem of cultural critique posed by John Kraniauskas might be to judge communicative practices on the basis of their general situational validity – their ability to fuse with other horizons – rather than viewing them primarily as disembodied epistemic entities.

Howard Feather

Fractured community

Stella Sandford's review of the 'Going Australian' Conference (RP 90) provides interesting insights into many of the issues discussed at the conference, as well as into the sense of sociality, and the debate, that the conference generated. However, I found her comments on my paper on 'Fractured Community' perplexing.

I argued at the conference that the liberal and communitarian elaborations of community fail to acknowledge the extent of, and the productive significance of, disagreement and alterity within community. I suggested that agreement risks obliterating difference by enforcing a false consensus and commonality, and that disagreement is the process of engagement which allows ongoing renegotiation of culture, law and community in response to the alterity revealed in disagreement. My argument is that it is only in a community which tolerates disagreement that Aboriginal people have been able to disagree with the dominant legal lie of *terra nullius*, which created the legal fiction that Australia was an unoccupied country before European occupation and that therefore there was no need to recognize the rights of the Aboriginal inhabitants.

I also argue in the paper that there is a radical difference (rather than an absolute incommensurability, as Sandford claims) between the rights and culture of Aboriginals and the rights and culture of non-Aboriginals. I suggest that this radical difference may require the recognition of two laws within the nation – Aboriginal law and non-Aboriginal law. This is not a particularly new position. The coexistence of two laws has continued throughout the two hundred years of non-Aboriginal invasion and occupation of Aboriginal land. This has been recognized in limited ways by the dominant legal system when crimes by Aboriginal people are occasionally redressed, not by the non-Aboriginal legal system but by traditional Aboriginal law. More recently the Australian High Court has recognized the myth of *terra nullius* and of the right of Aboriginal people to claim access to their lands. This native title to land is, of course, not applicable to non-Aboriginal people: the High Court decision therefore recognizes that different types of land claim and land tenure are required for the different circumstances of different groups.

Having said all this, I also acknowledge the risks and difficulty inherent in the concept of fractured community which Sandford forcefully points to in her review. The concept of fractured community risks being read as justifying an intransigent insistence by the dominant group on their view of history against the different experiences of the minority. It also risks being read as a complacent acceptance of disagreement which would involve disengagement – 'we'll agree to disagree and go our different ways'. While I take this criticism seriously, such a reading assumes that disagreement leads to an absolute separatism and absolute non-communication. Instead, in my paper I argued that communication involves miscommunication but not absolute non-communication. Indeed, I would argue that disagreement creates a friction and agitation which compel engagement.

As Sandford indicates in her review, the conference was not only a forum for stimulating discussion and debate; it was also an opportunity for engagement and sociality. For the Australian participants, this conference provided an opportunity to make contacts and establish friendships with colleagues in Britain, and to gain insight into the theoretical concerns within British feminisms. It also enabled us to further our sense of working, arguing and conversing together within the Australian context where the issues of cultural and racial difference, community and sociality have become a significant focus within feminist thought.

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