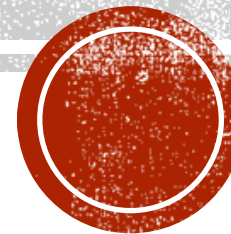


MARXISM

Week 4



QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

Consider this quote:

*"From each according to his ability,
to each according to his needs"*

- What are your needs?
- How are they determined?
- Do you control your fate or is your fate set?



THE APPEAL OF COMMUNISM AFTER WWII

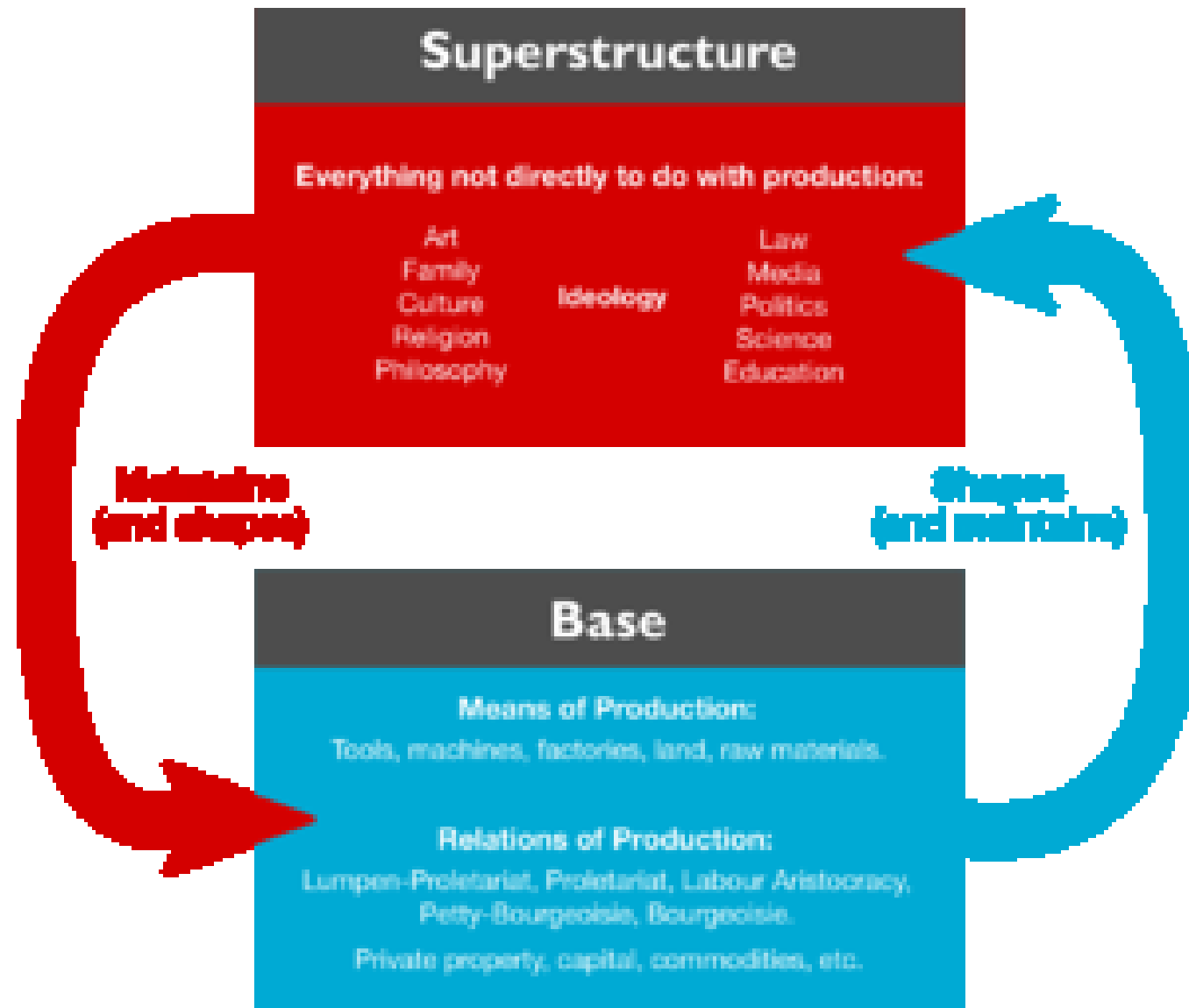
- For Eastern and Central Europeans, the war left their cities, governments, and economies in total ruin. For a region faced with destruction and loss at every corner, the idea of a communist society was immensely appealing.
- Karl Marx's writings in the late nineteenth century dreamed of a world where war, poverty, and **the selfish desires of humans would become obsolescent** through the development of a classless society.
 - Western promises broken (Munich; Plzen)
 - Soviet Military (sphere of influence)
- The officials leading the Soviet Union-backed communist parties throughout Eastern Europe, however, did not live up to the promise of full employment, protection of workers' rights, democracy and transparency.
 - Beginning in the 1950s and 1960s, many in the region attempted **to reform and recapture the promise of communist government** through demonstrations and workers' strikes



KARL MARX: A *CONTRIBUTION* *TO THE CRITIQUE OF* *POLITICAL ECONOMY* (1859)

- The ideas of the ruling (material) class are the ruling (intellectual) ideas of society
- The ruling ideas are the ideal expression of the dominant material relationships (grasped as ideas)
- The division of labor = division of ruling class labor (mental/material)
- Ideas of the ruling class are linked to historical conditions of production and represented as “common interests” (rational, universal)
- Base and Superstructure
 - Men (sic) enter into relations in the social production of their existence independent of their will
 - The totality of these relations = the economic structure of society (the base; foundation)
 - From this foundation, a legal/political superstructure arises which frames the consequent forms of social consciousness
- The mode of production of material life conditions the social, political, and intellectual life processes in general; social being thus **determines** social consciousness
 - A change in the base = a reflected change in the superstructure





**This moves in a spiral pattern.
The base is generally dominant.**



KARL MARX

- Karl Marx himself gave little attention to the concept and working of culture in his own writings. As a result of Marx's focus on economical and political factors, it granted culture only a secondary position (part of the superstructure)
- Culture = something which abstracts the truth and creates "false consciousness" and an incorrect perception of social, political and economic reality endorsed by the ruling class.
- Extended Tradition
 - Frankfurt School/Neo-Marxists = Culture as repressive/culture as subversive



MARXIST THEORETICAL TRADITION

- A body of revolutionary theory with a purpose of changing the world
- History = construction around a mode of production (base) → production of social relations/institutions (superstructure)
 - **“We make our own history but under very definite assumptions and conditions”**
 - Texts/practices can be active agents in change/stability; must be “read” in relation to the historical conditions that produced it
 - Subtle dialectic between structure and agency
- Frankfurt School – Discourse From Above (e.g. Arnold)(threat to cultural standards)
- Adorno: *Culture Industry as Repressive*
 - Culture **“reproduces”** social authority – standardization, depoliticization = stunned political imagination & apathy
 - Culture industry deprives CULTURE of its critical function to challenge thinking
 - Leisure time is an escape; dumbing down – avoid pursuit of challenging arts
- MEANING = Mode of Production → produced at the moment of consumption (framing “preferred readings” for the masses)
- Russia – 1917 – workers revolution



IDEAL/REAL SOCIALISM IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA

- Communists elected (→consolidation of power)
- Create a “Communist” State (cultural values)
 - Workers celebrated (materially; ideologically); elites disparaged
 - Repression as “defense” against capitalist ideology
 - The role of culture as ideology (socialist realism); resistance (humor; Jara Cimrman)
 - Prague Spring; Warsaw Pact invasion 1968
- Normalization
 - Repression, shortages,
 - passive resistance (two worlds; steal from the state; indifference tramping/travel); observing the “facts” in the empty rituals of “ideology”
 - Plastic People of the Universe - Charter 77 (Havel) - public intellectual
 - 1989: the absurd paradoxical world collapsed - what to believe in?
- **The appeal in the “freedom” of capitalism**
 - **Shiny, new, available goods; upstanding behavior**
- **The End of History**



BRIDGING THE MYTHICAL DIVIDE: POLITICAL ECONOMY AND CULTURAL STUDIES

- **Critical Political Economy** (CPE) = critique structural inequalities of production and the consequences for representation and access to consumption; *how the economic structure of society impacts civic society/democracy*
- **Cultural Studies** (CS) = analyses popular culture practices (over dominant/elite practices); *emphasizes social agency; capacity to resist social determinations and dominant cultural agendas*
 - CPE = **media** = dominant ideology/social stratification (justification/domination)
 - Production studies
 - CS = media = artifacts for empowerment/agency
 - Consumption studies
 - How to theorize culture and power



MEDIA ECONOMICS AND THE GLOBAL MARKETPLACE

- Corporation - entity structured on the production of profit
 - \$/influence of elites (CEOs)
 - Deregulation
- Market Choice: Monopoly, Oligopoly, Limited Competition
 - Economies of scale
 - Consolidation/Conglomerates/Outsourcing
 - Convergence/Synergies/Niche Marketing
 - A global process (hierarchies)
- Common Sense: Free Market = Democracy; Regulation = “Communism”
 - Consumer “choice”/control
 - Cultural Imperialism?
 - Cultural Inequities?



BRIDGING THE MYTHICAL DIVIDE: POLITICAL ECONOMY AND CULTURAL STUDIES

- Frankfurt School (1930s); “*culture industry*” – textual determinism
- CPE
 - role of private business/logics in cultural production
 - dynamics related to commodification (capitalism)
 - ownership; consolidation; control of the media; media filters/frameworks
 - Inculcate individuals with the values, beliefs and codes of behavior to integrate them into the institutional structures of society
 - **Advertising**
- Seeks to explain how economic dynamics structure public discourses; inhibits a fuller understanding of the complexities and ambiguities of our social conditions
- Examine how consumption is inextricably linked to production (and vice versa)
 - Agency limited by structures
- Today: *complexity, contestation, ambivalence* of cultural industries
 - **Stress the blurring or fusing of cultural/economic boundaries (mutual constitution of culture and economy)**



ADVERTISING AS CAPITALIST REALISM

- Advertising tends to promote attitudes and lifestyles which extol acquisition and consumption to the detriment of other values
- Ads are placeless and timeless utilizing abstract people (social types or demographic category), taking for granted the consumer's shopping skills. - it is a set of general reminders or reinforcers
- **Capitalist Realism:** a set of aesthetic conventions linked to the political economy whose values they celebrate and promote
 - 1) it simplifies and typifies reality as it should be, promoting specific values we should identify with and subsequently pursue; i.e. a template for our lives
 - 2) „Progress“ in advertising is always implicit, and optimism is always present
 - 3) Its representations are not of the real but rather the ideal
 - 4) It primarily focuses on the „new“



ADVERTISING AS CAPITALIST REALISM

- Similarity: advertising and socialist realism: both forms subordinate everything to a message that romanticizes the present or the potential of the present.
 - the aesthetic of capitalist realism - glorifies the pleasures and freedoms of consumer choice in defense of the virtues of private life and material ambitions.
- Ads offer a public portraiture of ideals and values consistent with the promotion of a social order in which people are encouraged to think of themselves and their private worlds in material terms
- The power of advertising is that it succeeds in creating attitudes and affiliations very subtly (singing jingles, linguistic adjustments, etc.)
 - commercials move into more and more spaces in our lives, informing the way we communicate and understand our world
 - *The Message - buy this to measure up*
- Advertising does not make people believe in capitalist institutions or even in consumer values, but so long as alternative articulations of values are relatively hard to locate in culture, capitalist realist art will have some power.
- *Global Media Corporations and commercial communications*

