Notes de lecture et parutions
What do contemporary media representations tell us about the world we live in? How do the media representations call on us to imagine our lives and those of others in a world characterized by rapid processes of globalization? What ‘scripts’ are being produced by current representations, which, in turn, inform the way we imagine our and others’ lives in the world today? These are the very questions that Shani Orgad, Senior Lecturer in the Department of Media and Communications at the London School of Economics and Political Science addresses in this new book, *Media Representation and the Global Imagination* published by Polity Press. In order to answer these questions Orgad embarks her readers on a theoretically sophisticated but nonetheless exciting and original “journey” in which globalization and imagination are the key items of this media representation compass. We are supposed to rely on it, even to the point of becoming dependent on what we see, hear, read if we are to make sense of our lives and our world. According to the writer, these media representations “shape, inform and orient the way we see and judge the world, others and ourselves, and how we imagine real and possible lives.”

No one would dispute this powerful outcome mainly because in this mediated space of appearance the capacity of doubt becomes just a theoretical possibility. This is where *Media Representation and the Global Imagination* steps in promising to restore the balance by generating some doubts and providing the readers the tools to develop critical understanding of this ongoing flow of mediated images, narratives and information. The book explores this very “background” as Wittgenstein and Heidegger conceptualized it, the way media representations, as imaginary institutions, feed a global demand and cultivate an imaginary of the world as a common space for a symbolic interaction and the inevitability of self-projection in an ubiquitous mediated intimacy. The centrality of this mediated intimacy and its implications are the main concern of the author. She is keen to outline the potential of the process but its limits and dangers as well.

Orgad suggests that global imagination crystallizes around five specific sites: the other, the nation, possible lives, the world and the self, covering media representations of disaster, war, conflict, migration and celebration, every site of imagination being matched with a particular thematic focus. The reason behind this pairing is to “illustrate and elucidate a broader argument about the work of representation in nourishing the global imagination”. Actually the arguments deployed all along the book are based on a constructionist approach of the representation and inspired by
Foucault’s emphasis on discourse, power and knowledge. In doing so, while she didn’t adhere to a strict, dogmatic application of the Foucauldian paradigm, Orgad shows that she is not concerned if the representations reflect or fail to reflect the reality but how they create meaning. They have to be meaningful, especially in this age of new visibility and to construct and generate a certain reality, i.e. a mediated one, if the audiences are to be “spelt” in this magic ritual of representation. How audiences recognize, accept or reject this “spelling” as a medium to imagine the world, others, and selves, is not the object of the book but it is a current preoccupation of the writer and a definite outcome, while still in progress.

The strength of the book resides in a deep and contextualized analysis of the international media representations and backed by a theoretical framework in which the concepts of representation and globalization are very well defined and integrated in the main narrative of the study. The book is a compelling account about the omnipotent power of the media representation that uses imagination, now at global scale, to generate alternative narratives. The process of representation itself may possess a dangerous proclivity, namely that every narrative eventually become mythicized and mystified. This is why the narrative should remain ambivalent and not impose an authoritative representation of reality. In this matter, Media Representation and the Global Imagination is a brilliant exercise for inviting us to bring again doubt and ambivalence into imagination.

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The idea for the present volume originated in a conference held at the German Historical Institute London in March 2004. The conference was envisioned and organized by Willibald Steinmetz, Professor of Modern and Contemporary Political History, University of Bielefeld, the editor of this collection of essays. Twentieth-century political landscape suffered a traumatic transformation not only in the geo-political and ideological field but in the sphere of the political semantics as well. Both totalitarian and democratic regimes prompted an acute awareness for the verbal warfare, using words, narratives, images, symbols and sounds as effective weapons. The book explores the ways in which language served to create, preserve, undermine, or deflect political power in the Age of Extremes, as British historian Eric Hobsbawm has coined the period between 1914-1991. At the core of these essays are empirical
studies based on source materials of the political uses of the language during the twentieth-century. The authors have asserted that the political should no longer be limited to the realm of government and states only but perceived as a communicational space whose “boundaries are constantly redrawn”. In this understanding, the experience of production of meaning through sign systems was not limited only to the intellectuals but extended mostly to the ordinary people. They used the same code, morphology and semantics to generate or alter the meaning of the political language in that specific setting.

The theoretical framework of the volume is laid out in part I or introduction, by arguing for a new perspective on the study of language and power and viewing the politics as “linguistic performance” where the communicative practices has a special function. In part II the focus is concentrated on the “semantic of leadership” in the context of the rising of dictators, especially in the fascist and Stalinist cults, where religion and art were interpreted based on the new totalitarian hermeneutics. In part III, the “linguistic boundaries” are defined not only in the authoritarian regimes where even a whisper could endangers one’s life but in the liberal democracies too where the crafting of the enemy’s narrative was ritualized, especially by the excessive using of the visual and acoustic signs. The last part of the volume follows the developments of the “linguistic awareness” in the Cold War era, precisely in Germany, Britain and Austria.

The originality of this collective approach resides in the comparative treatment of the political landscape of the twentieth-century, readers being invited to analogize totalitarian and democratic regimes in the context of that aggressive ideological struggle. From a methodological viewpoint the book stands for a “situation-centered” approach to the analysis of language, an assumption shared by all the contributors of this collection. The aim is to explore more than isolated words and concepts but to focus on contexts produced by patterns of arguments, narratives, metaphors, visual, sounds, media and social practices. While most of the studies about the political uses of language in that era focused on propaganda and critical analysis of discourses the authors of this volume were led to extend the understanding of both concepts, political and language, beyond their conventional acceptance.

While the collection lacks a final conclusion and didn’t generate a "one size fits all" formula when approaching the political language, a sort of linguistic model that can be applied in any given circumstance, the book is a necessary resource for the scholars and students of history, political science, linguistics, media, and cultural studies, mainly for the deeper understanding of political and language spheres and for the contextualization of political semantics, not only in history but in ideology as well. This is why a sequel regarding the use of political language in the “Age of Crisis”, as
21st-century sadly debuted, should be of paramount importance.

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Parutions

