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**SEPTEMBER 11, 2001: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF
IDEOLOGICAL REPRESENTATIONS ON TELEVISION NEWS**

by

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I declare that *September 11, 2001: a critical analysis of ideological representations on television news*, which I hereby submit for the degree Magister Artium (Visual Studies) at the University of Pretoria, is my own work, and has not previously been submitted by me for a degree at another university.

31 May 2004

Ms Julie Reid

"No event can withstand being beamed across the whole planet"

(Baudrillard 1994:2).

"...[s]ystems of thought ... discourses of power, ideological fictions - minded forg'd
manacles - are all too easily made, applied, and guarded"

(Said 1978:328).

SUMMARY

Title: September 11, 2001: a critical analysis of ideological representations on television news.

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Summary:

This dissertation analyses the extent to which dominant political ideologies generate meanings in television news texts. The working process of the television news system and the manner in which television news constructs news programmes are discussed. In light of the televisual mode of news production, the author demonstrates how ideologically inspired meanings can systematically enter the television news system and thus potentially manipulate the production of television news broadcasts, though making a semiotic analysis of the CNN representations of September 11.

This study is situated within the field of visual culture studies, and semiotic theory is employed to a great extent throughout. The author discusses the influence of dominant political ideologies on the television news production process, and how this contributes to the restriction of the polysemy of the television news sign. Television news representations may be mediated and manipulated in such a way to encourage viewers to produce readings that are favourable towards a certain dominant political ideology.

The many mechanisms that television news utilises to create meaning are discussed. The mechanisms that are identified by the author as being the most effective in the production of ideologically inspired meanings are paid particular attention. These semiotic mechanisms include the manipulation of iconic signs, the construction of arbitrary signs and the representation of myths.

The CNN representations of the September 11 events are analysed for their ideological content, and the author contends that these televisual representations were deliberately constructed to inspire readings that would be favourable to the ideology of Americanism. Therefore, Americanism, as an example of a dominant political ideology, is discussed. The visual mechanisms employed by CNN after September 11 are analysed. These include the editing of visually recorded footage, the treatment of the newsreader and the incorporation of the image of the American flag. The author offers a reading of the ideological motivation of these texts. The media myths that are constructed to naturalise Americanism, such as the myth of the hero and the myth of the tower, are discussed with regard to the manner in which they were represented by CNN after September 11. The iconic representations of key political figures involved with the September 11 events are also discussed and their ideological meanings uncovered.

The CNN television news broadcasts functioned both to inform an international audience of the terrorist attacks and reinforce an ideology in crisis: namely, Americanism. CNN repeatedly employed many visual mechanisms to encourage viewers to produce readings that were favourable to Americanism. While Americanism entered a period of crisis, it mobilised its Ideological State Apparatuses, including television news, to reinforce and justify its position of power in order to maintain its own dominance after a deliberate blow.

This study suggests that the CNN representations of September 11 are an accurate indication of how dominant political ideologies can effect the construction of television news texts. Where television news broadcasters reach large audiences while being ideologically aligned, and viewers are deliberately encouraged to produce certain ideologically inspired readings, television news becomes a medium through which widespread ideological domination can be achieved.

Key terms:

Americanism; American ideology; American monomyth; dominant political ideology; globalisation; Ideological State Apparatus; media imperialism; myth; September 11; television news.

Opsomming:

Hierdie studie ondersoek die invloed wat dominante politieke ideologieë op die skep van betekenis in televisienuus tekste het. Die werksproses van die nuusstelsel, sowel as die manier waarop televisienuus betekenis konstrueer, word bespreek. Deur 'n semiotiese analise van CNN se dekking van die gebeure op 11 September illustreer die outeur hoe ideologies-geïnspireerde betekenis die televisienuusstelsel infiltreer en sodoende die produksie van televisienuusuitsendings manipuleer.

Die studie is gesitueer in die veld van visuele kultuurstudie en daar word deurgans van semiotiese analise gebruik gemaak. Die outeur bespreek die invloed van dominante politieke ideologieë op die skep van televisienuus tekste, en hoe dit bydra tot die rigiditeit van 'n televisienuus teken. Die outeur ondersoek ook die moontlikheid dat manipulasie en mediasie die kykers aanmoedig om die tekste te interpreteer op 'n manier wat gunstig is vir die dominante ideologie.

Verskeie van die meganismes wat televisienuus aanwend om betekenis te skep word bespreek. Klem word geplaas op die meganismes wat volgens die outeur meer effektief is in die skep van ideologies geïnspireerde betekenis. Hierdie semiotiese meganismes sluit die manipulasie van ikoniese tekens, die konstruksie van arbitrêre tekens, en die uitbeelding van mites in.

Die CNN representasies van die 11^{de} September word geanaliseer en die outeur poog om te bewys dat hierdie representasies spesifiek gekonstrueer word om Amerikanisme te perpetueer. Vir hierdie rede word Amerikanisme bespreek as 'n voorbeeld van 'n dominante politieke ideologie. Die visuele meganismes wat deur CNN aangewend is rondom die 11^{de} September word geanaliseer. Laasgenoemde sluit die redigering van die visuele materiaal, die hantering van die veronderstelde nuuskyker, sowel as die inkorporasie van die Amerikaanse vlag in. Die outeur maak 'n moontlike analise van die ideologiese motivering vir hierdie tekste. Media-mites, byvoorbeeld die mite van die held en die mite van die toring, wat gekonstrueer word om Amerika te naturaliseer, word bespreek met verwysing na die wyse waarop dit aangewend is in CNN se uitbeelding van die gebeure op die 11de September. Die ikoniese representasie van

politieke sleutelfigure betrokke by die 11^{de} September, word ook bespreek en ‘n poging word aangewend om moontlike ideologiese betekenis te ontgin.

Aldus die outeur was die funksie van die CNN televisienuusuitsendings tweeledig. Eerstens het dit ten doel gehad om inligting oor die gebeure aan ‘n internasionale gehoor oor te dra. Tweedens moes dit Amerikanisme bevorder. CNN het die visuele meganismes op só ‘n manier aangewend dat dit ‘n interpretasie ten gunste van Amerikanisme bevorder het. Volgens die outeur het Amerika in die krisistydperk sy “Ideological State Apparatuses”, insluitend televisie, gemobiliseer om sy posisie te regverdig en sy eie dominansie te verseker.

Hierdie studie voer aan dat die CNN-uitbeeldings van die 11^{de} September ‘n aanduiding is van hoe dominante politieke ideologieë die konstruksie van televisienuusstekste kan beïnvloed. In ‘n geval waar televisienuus groot gehore bereik en terselfdertyd ideologies-geïnspireerde lesings aanmoedig, kan televisienuus ‘n medium wees waardeur ideologiese dominansie afgedwing kan word.

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