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Looking Past the Images: Art and Film as Propaganda Apparatuses

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Abstract

This paper aims to show that art and film can operate as propaganda in subtle and unintentional ways. Jacques Ellul called such propaganda "sociological propaganda." Recent work in philosophy has relied on the notion of intention in defining how propaganda works to affect the beliefs and attitudes of its recipients. This paper argues that intention is not a necessary condition for messages to be propagandistic and works to decouple propaganda from intention. Because our current models rely on intention in defining propaganda, recent work in philosophy cannot account for sociological propaganda. Ellul's gestures toward defining propaganda explicitly feature intention as a component. Sheryl Tuttle Ross's "epistemic merit model" of propaganda relies on intention in its definition of propaganda. Similarly, Jason Stanley implicitly relies on the notion of intention in defining the two types of propaganda in his book *How Propaganda Works*. Decoupling propaganda from intention does not mean that any influential message counts a propaganda; instead, a systematic connection must hold between the message's production and its effects. Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky's political economic model of propaganda outlines one of the ways this systematic connection is instantiated, but there are many others. Additionally, this paper explores what phenomenon Jacques Ellul means to capture by the term "sociological propaganda" and offers a pointed definition of the term. Finally, this paper will draw from the work of Rae Langton and Caroline West to advance a mechanism for how sociological propaganda works. Sociological propaganda works through a process of accommodation whereby the audience adopts certain attitudes in order to understand the received image as a logically coherent message. Accommodation relies on authority to be successful. As long as they

take art and film to be authoritative, recipients risk adopting and reinforcing the attitudes

undergirding the piece.

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Introduction

In an episode of the sitcom *Just Shoot Me*, Maya Gallo, the series' protagonist, convinces her boyfriend that they should try and befriend a couple they recently met at a restaurant. "I want my life," she says, "to be like those beer commercials." (Gara, 2000) Gallo relays aspirations of groups of friends enjoying a campfire together. What sense can we make of Gallo's report of the origin of her desire? While it seems uncontroversial that a beer commercial can inculcate a desire for beer, can a beer commercial inculcate a desire for a particular lifestyle?

If we take Gallo's report seriously, we must answer yes. The art and film (including television commercials) that we consume can influence our ideas, beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors in subtle and unintentional ways. In his 1973 book *Propaganda: The Formation of Men's Attitudes*, Jacques Ellul names this phenomenon "sociological propaganda." Recent philosophical work on propaganda has neglected this phenomenon. Importantly, because recent propaganda models have the notion of intention built into them, the models cannot account for this unintentional propaganda. This paper will seek to decouple propaganda from intention in order to establish sociological propaganda as a phenomenon worthy of consideration.

Removing intention as a criterion for propaganda does not mean that any message that exerts influence counts as a piece of propaganda; rather, a systematic connection between the production of the message and the message's effects must exist. The message "operates" to produce changes in attitudes or behaviors. Edward S. Herman and

Noam Chomsky's (2002) political economic model of propaganda outlines one of the ways this operation occurs.

In order to understand the phenomenon of sociological propaganda, we must explain the mechanism by which a work of art or a film, such as a beer commercial, can inculcate such ideas without intending to do so. Here, the work of feminist philosopher Rae Langton will be particularly useful. By drawing together various threads from her work on explaining how pornography subordinates and silences women, I will articulate a mechanism for how sociological propaganda works. Whether as explosive as a Hollywood action picture or as benign as a commercial for a candy bar, art and film have the capacity to exert profound influence upon our ideals, beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors in subtle and unintentional ways.

In this paper, I will accomplish four things. First, I will challenge current models of propaganda by decoupling propaganda from intention. In other words, I will show that messages can be propagandistic unintentionally. Second, I will argue that removing intention from our propaganda models does not mean any influential message counts as propaganda; rather, a systematic connection must exist between a message's production and its effects. Herman and Chomsky's political economic model of propaganda outlines one of the ways this systematic connection might hold. Third, I will explain what phenomenon Ellul means to capture by the term "sociological propaganda," and I will define it as decentralized messages that unintentionally operate to affect the behavior or attitudes of an individual by irrational means. Fourth, I will draw together threads from Rae Langton's work on pornography in order to develop a model for how sociological propaganda works. In short, sociological propaganda works via a process of

accommodation whereby recipients adopt certain attitudes in order to make sense of the image. I will conclude the paper with a few remarks on the importance of media literacy and with some directions for future research.

I. Decoupling Propaganda from Intention

Philosophers have advanced many models of propaganda that rely on intention. This section examines three: Jacques Ellul's (1973) gestures toward a definition of propaganda, Sheryl Tuttle Ross's (2002) epistemic merit model of propaganda, and Jason Stanley's (2015) supporting-undermining propaganda dichotomy. I will examine each one in turn. Using pornographic images as an example, I will show that intention is not a necessary component for propagandistic messages.

In his 1973 book *Propaganda: The Formation of Men's Attitudes*, Ellul does not provide a pointed definition of propaganda, and in fact, he is critical of such an endeavor. "[Many writers]," he writes, "establish a certain image or definition of propaganda, and proceed to the study of whatever corresponds to their definition […]" (1973, xii) Ellul does gesture toward a definition of propaganda. He concerns himself with understanding propaganda as a method and a set of techniques. "In propaganda," he writes, "we find techniques of psychological influence combined with techniques of organization and the envelopment of people with the intention of sparking action." (xiii) He provides the following rudimentary definition:

> Propaganda is a set of methods employed by an organized group that wants to bring about the active or passive participation in its actions of a mass of individuals, psychologically unified through psychological manipulations and incorporated in an organization. (1973, 61)

Intention features prominently in both of these definitional gestures. In the first, Ellul says propaganda has "the intention of sparking action." In the second, a group employs the methods of propaganda with the intention of bringing about "active or passive participation." I hope to show in this paper that intention is not a necessary component of propaganda, i.e. that propaganda can be unintentional. If, as I suppose, intention is not necessary for messages to be propagandistic, Ellul's definitional gestures are incorrect.

Next, I turn to Sheryl Tuttle Ross's epistemic merit model of propaganda. According to Ross, propaganda occurs when the following four necessary and jointly sufficient conditions are met:

(1) an epistemically defective message

(2) used with the intention to persuade

(3) the beliefs, opinions, desires, and behaviors of a socially significant group of people

(4) on behalf of a political organization, institution, or cause. (2002, 25)

The second prong of Ross's framework relies on intention in order to capture the phenomenon of propaganda. But, according to Ross, the intentions behind the creation of a work of art are not what we should evaluate. "When we evaluate the artwork," she writes, "we need to evaluate not only the conditions of its making, but also the conditions of its use […] The intentions in a given use of art (or particular context) help determine whether or not it's propaganda." (2002, 25)

Consider, as a toy example, a particularly egregious racial caricature created with the intention of inciting violence against the group of people the caricature is said to represent. The caricature is clearly a piece of propaganda according to the epistemic

merit model. Now, imagine the victims of this caricature plaster their neighborhoods with it in order to incite the caricature's victims against the caricature's creators. Even though the caricature is being used in a way that contradicts its creators' intentions, the caricature still functions as a work of propaganda. We must look at the intention of a work of art's deployment in evaluating whether a work of art functions as propaganda.

Finally, let us look at the propaganda model advanced by Jason Stanley in his 2015 book *How Propaganda Works*. Stanley defines two types of propaganda which "together exhaust the category of propaganda":

> *Supporting Propaganda*: A contribution to public discourse that is presented as an embodiment of certain ideals, yet is of a kind that tends to increase the realization of those very ideals by either emotional or other nonrational means.

> *Undermining Propaganda*: A contribution to public discourse that is presented as an embodiment of certain ideals, yet is of a kind that tends to erode those very ideals. (2015, 53)

A couple examples may help clarify. Both of these examples come from Stanley.

As an example of supporting propaganda, consider a ministry of health that produces messages discouraging citizens from smoking cigarettes (Stanley, 2015, 59). A real example would be the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' "The Real Cost" anti-smoking campaign. One of their messages depicts an insect eating a radioactive-looking soup; then, it keels over. The following caption accompanies the image:

> Hydrogen Cyanide: Found in Insecticide and Cigarette Smoke (2018)

The message does not use facts and argumentation about the harms of smoking in order to convince it recipients to refrain from the activity; rather, the message relies on the intuitions of the audience to conclude that something that harms insects must be harmful to humans. This does not accord with our collective understanding of chemistry. Differences in physiology can lead to differences in toxicity. Take, for example, theobromine, a chemical in chocolate. Dogs and cats metabolize the compound about five times more slowly, thus accounting for chocolate's increased toxicity for those animals. In contrast, the average ten-year-old child would have to consume 16.3 pounds of dark chocolate to die from theobromine intake (Pomeroy, 2013). The anti-smoking message presents itself as embodying the ideals of public health, and if it is successful in getting people to stay away from cigarettes, the message increases the realization of the ideal of public health. As such, the message is supporting propaganda.

One of Stanley's examples of undermining propaganda is the U.S. Supreme Court's 2010 decision in *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission* (2015, 61). The Court presented its decision as an extension of free speech rights to corporations, but because of the large influx of money and moneyed-interests into political campaigns, the free speech of common citizens has been diluted. The net effect has been a reduction in the ability of common citizens to voice their political opinions. Thus, the decision undermined the ideal it purported to support.

Unlike Ellul's definitional gestures and Ross's epistemic merit model, Stanley's framework does not feature an explicit notion of intention, but an implicit notion of intention undergirds his definitions. According to Stanley, both supporting propaganda and undermining propaganda are contributions to public discourse that are "presented as

an embodiment of certain ideals." (2015, 53) The contributions either increase or erode

the realization of those ideals. Because the contribution to public discourse is presented

as embodying certain ideals, the contributor must intend to make a statement regarding

those ideals. This is not to say that the contributor intends to make a propagandistic

message; that the contributor's message is propagandistic could be unintentional. But, in

order for a message to be presented as the embodiment of a particular ideal, the

contributor must intend for that message to be statement about that ideal.

How can these three frameworks deal with the phenomenon of pornography?

Susan Brownmiller calls pornography "the undiluted essence of anti-female propaganda."

(1980, 32) Beverly LaBelle argues that pornography "functions as a type of propaganda

for male-supremacist attitudes." (1980, 174) Here, pornography is taken to be distinct

from erotica. Pornography is defined as graphic and sexually explicit subordination of

women through images or words, whereas erotica is any sexually explicit material

(Langton, 1990, 332). If we take Brownmiller and LaBelle at their words, can any of the

three frameworks help us understand how pornography functions as a type of

propaganda? I will examine each one in turn in order to see whether and how they can

accommodate pornography as a type of propaganda.

Under Ellul's framework, pornography does function as a type of propaganda.

Recall that two of the hallmarks of Ellul's definitional gestures are techniques of

psychological influence and the intention of sparking action. Pornography does exert

influence on its viewers in order to spark a particular action. Pornography employs

sexually explicit images in order to facilitate the orgasms of its viewers. But, this fails to

capture what Brownmiller and LaBelle mean when they say pornography is propaganda.

Their claim is not that pornography is propaganda in that it facilitates the sexual gratification of its viewers; they claim that pornography is propaganda because it inculcates anti-female ideas within its recipients. If the makers of pornography did not intend for these ideas to be spread by their work, Ellul's framework cannot account for it as a type of propaganda.

Can Ross's framework help us understand how pornography functions as a type of propaganda? If propaganda spreads male-supremacist attitudes, it must surely do so in an epistemically defective way. After all, pornography makes no arguments. Pornography, then, meets the first criterion of Ross's framework. The second criterion is the intention to persuade. Does pornography have the intention to persuade its viewers to change their attitudes? Does it intend to inculcate anti-female beliefs? The answers to these questions seem to be a resounding no. Pornography seeks to provide a means of sexual gratification. Any attitudes inculcated are merely unintended byproducts. We must remember, though, that the intention to be analyzed is not only the intention behind the work's creation but also the intention behind its use. Can this nuance help us characterize pornography as propaganda? If a pornographic work is used in a campaign espousing the submissiveness of women, that work of pornography, according to Ross's model, becomes a work of propaganda. The intent we should be concerned with in our evaluation is the intention of the work's use. But, this does not capture what Brownmiller and LaBelle mean when they say pornography is propaganda. Their claim is not that pornography is used to advance an anti-female agenda; rather, their claim is that pornography, in its common usage, works as anti-female propaganda. If

Brownmiller and LaBelle are right, Ross's framework cannot account for this

phenomenon.

Finally, let us examine how Stanley's framework might help us understand

pornography as a type of propaganda. The core of Stanley's notion of propaganda are

contributions to public discourse that are presented as the embodiment of certain ideals

and that affect, either positively or negatively, the realization of those ideals. We must

ask, then, of which ideals pornography is presented as the embodiment. In order for

pornography to be considered anti-female propaganda, as Brownmiller and LaBelle have

asserted, pornography, under Stanley's framework, would have be presented as the

embodiment of anti-female ideals and increase the realization of those ideals, or it would

have to be presented as the embodiment of pro-female ideals and erode the realization of

those ideals. Pornography is presented as the embodiment of neither ideal. In fact,

pornography is presented as sexual fantasy. Any effects it has on attitudes towards

women are unintended byproducts.

If pornography functions as anti-female propaganda and if, as I suppose, it does

so unintentionally, the propaganda models of Ellul, Ross, and Stanley cannot account for

pornography as a type of propaganda. Ellul's definitional gestures and Ross's epistemic

merit model explicitly cite intention as a necessary component of propaganda. Stanley's

dichotomy relies on an implicit notion of intention. We need a model of propaganda

divorced from intention. In the third section of this paper, I will advance a framework for

a type of propaganda that functions unintentionally. This "sociological propaganda" can

account for the subtle and unintentional ways art and films, including beer commercials

and pornography, can influence their audiences. In the next section, I examine one of the problems that arises in divorcing intention from propaganda.

II. The Systematic Connection between Production and Effects

If pornography unintentionally functions as propaganda, then our notion of propaganda must be divorced from intention, i.e. messages can be propaganda by accident. Divorcing intention from propaganda seems like a risky move. Does this mean that any message that causes us to change our behaviors or beliefs in an irrational way constitutes a propagandistic message? If this were the case, then almost any message could be propaganda, and this over-application of the term would quickly erode its meaning. To avoid this problem, I propose that for a message to be propaganda, a systematic connection between the message's production and its effects must hold. Herman and Chomsky's (2002) political economic model of propaganda highlights one of the ways this systematic connection can be instantiated.

In their 2002 book *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media*, Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky advance a political economic model of propaganda. Focusing on the U.S. news media, Herman and Chomsky outline five news filters:

(1) The size, concentrated ownership, owner wealth, and profit orientation of the dominant mass-media firms;

(2) advertising as the primary income source of the mass media;

(3) the reliance of the media on information provided by government, business, and "experts" funded and approved by these primary sources and agents of power;

(4) "flak" as a means of disciplining the media; and

(5) "anticommunism" as a national religion and control mechanism.

(2002, 2)

The size, concentrated ownership, and owner wealth crowd out smaller voices and disincentivize publishing information that upsets the current economic status quo. The media's reliance on advertising prevents the media from publishing stories that alienate advertisers. The media's reliance on government, business, and expert personnel for primary source information keeps the media in fear of being cut off from these information streams. The media must also be wary of upsetting large special interest groups who can exert their influence by instituting boycotts of media firms and, thereby, drive away advertising dollars. These filters limit what information gets distributed through the news media:

> The raw material of news must pass through successive filters, leaving only the cleansed residue fit to print. They fix the premises of discourse and interpretation, and the definition of what is newsworthy in the first place, and they explain the basis and operations of what amount to propaganda campaigns. (Herman & Chomsky, 2002, 2)

Unlike the models I outlined above, Herman and Chomsky's political economic model of propaganda does not rely on intention, but this is not surprising. Their enterprise is not to explain characteristics of propagandistic messages but to explain how structural realities of the media give rise to media biases.

Herman and Chomsky's filters give rise is unintentional propaganda. By marginalizing information, opinions, and stories that cannot make it past the five filters,

dissenting voices become silenced. This marginalization is not the result of the intentions

of one centralized force; rather, the marginalization results from multiple parties exerting

their influence on the dissemination of information. As a result, the consumers of news

media reach an irrational conclusion – they consider alternative views as non-existent or

non-viable simply due to their silence.

If Herman and Chomsky's political economic propaganda model is correct, they

have shown how structural features of the media industry can lead to the production of

messages that affect the attitudes of their recipients in subtle and unintentional ways.

What their model offers, then, is neither a taxonomy of propaganda types nor a

mechanism for how propaganda works; rather, their model provides a set of structural

features that cause propaganda in the news media.

The systematic connection between the production and the effects of propaganda

is not limited to the political economic model outlined by Herman and Chomsky. Let us

return to Maya Gallo's beer commercial, with which I started the paper. The beer

commercial clearly works as intentional propaganda; advertisers created the message

with the intention of selling beer. But, the message also has some unintentional effects:

the message inculcates the desire for a certain way of life, one which includes camping

trips with friends. The images included within the beer commercial are intended to

support the project of selling beer, and they do so by preying on the tastes, fears, desires,

and aspirations of the target demographic. As a result of including these images, the

ideas upon which they are built are reinforced and spread within the commercial's

recipients.

Let us return to the example of pornography. Pornography presents itself as sexual fantasy to aid in the sexual gratification of its viewers, but to be effective, it must be responsive to the attitudes and fantasies of its target audience. As a result, these fantasies and the attitudes that undergird them get inculcated and reinforced within the viewers. For example, a pornographic film that depicts a favorable rape depiction may simply seek to give a visual representation to a sexual fantasy, but it also operates to inculcate and reinforce problematic ideas about rape within its audience.

In summation, divorcing propaganda from intention does not mean that any message that exerts influence on its recipient constitutes a propagandistic message. A systematic connection must hold between the production of the message and that message's effects. Herman and Chomsky's political economic model of propaganda outlines one of the ways that systematic connection can be instantiated, but there are others. In projecting the tastes, desires, and aspirations of their target demographic, advertisements, including beer commercials, operate to inculcate these attitudes within their viewers. Similarly, by projecting the sexual fantasies of their audience, pornography operates to inculcate the problematic beliefs that undergird those fantasies. Having decoupled propaganda from intention and having posited a systematic connection between the production and the effects of propaganda messages, the paper will now turn to its third task: defining sociological propaganda.

III. Sociological Propaganda Defined

In the previous section, I argued that decoupling propaganda from intention does not necessarily lead to a notion of propaganda that is too broad to be useful. This section presents a model for a type of propaganda divorced from intention yet still limited in

scope through the necessity of a systematic connection between production and effects.

Despite the flaws in his definitional gestures, Ellul laid the groundwork for this type of

propaganda. Following Ellul, I will call it "sociological propaganda."

According to Ellul, sociological propaganda is "the penetration of an ideology by

means of its sociological context." (1973, 63) "The existing economic, political, and

sociological factors," Ellul continues, "progressively allow an ideology to penetrate

individuals or masses." (1973, 63-4) Sociological propaganda operates in a much more

subtle fashion than propaganda with an overt message, e.g. an advertisement saying "buy

Budweiser," a campaign leaflet reading "Trump is evil," or a bumper sticker reading

"guns don't kill, people do." Such instances of direct propaganda have clear goals that

they are intended to accomplish. On the other hand, sociological propaganda is

spontaneous and "not the result of deliberate propaganda action." (Ellul, 1973, 64)

Examples will help clarify. I will start with the example provided by Ellul and

then provide a few of my own. According to Ellul, much sociological propaganda gets

transmitted through film:

> When an American producer makes a film, he has certain definite ideas he
>
> wants to express, which are not intended to be propaganda. Rather, the
>
> propaganda element is in the American way of life with which he is
>
> permeated and which he expresses in his film without realizing it. (64)

Having been brought up within the American milieu, the producer could not help but to

have adopted a certain set of internal elements (attitudes) that reflect the social,

economic, and political realities in which he grew up. These internal elements include

value systems, stereotypes, beliefs about society, and even certain beliefs about what a

film should depict. This list is not exhaustive. Inevitably, the film will be permeated with the ideas and values of the producer in ways of which the producer is not fully conscious. This effectively reproduces the same internal elements within the minds of the filmgoers.

I suggest that sociological propaganda can operate in even more subtle ways to integrate the recipient into the social body. Instead of being inadvertently permeated with the value system of the creator, sociological propaganda can also work by reflecting the current social, economic, or political reality. This reflection leads to the inculcation of certain attitudes. Consider, for example, a romance film that depicts the blossoming relationship of a man and a woman. Obviously, the overt message of the film is one of entertainment, i.e. it seeks to entertain the audience. In this sense, the film is a piece of direct propaganda. The film, however, is saturated with certain ideals about romantic love. By consuming this film, filmgoers also consume those ideals about romance and love.

More propagandistic messages saturate the film. How does the couple travel to their date? Do they travel by public transportation, private car, Segway, or walking? Unless it is needed as a plot device, the transportation system will likely be whichever resonates most with the filmmaker, and this will be the product of the images he has seen and the experiences he has had. This choice has large stakes. Because of the film's large distribution, the couple's transportation choices will become contributions to the audience's milieu. As such, it will serve to habituate the audience to that form of transportation. Importantly, neither the propagation of the ideals of romantic love nor the habituation to certain forms of transportation is the intended goal of the film. The film

seeks to take the audience's money, leave them with a positive outlook to take to their friends, and, perhaps, lead the audience to a particular conclusion about a problem in the romantic sphere. But, these goals are built on assumptions and stereotypes about how romance, love, and even transportation occur in society.

One might argue that sociological propaganda, as I have described it, could not be an effective tool for integration. While the couple's transportation choices may have some effect on the attitudes of the audience, that effect would be so imperceptible as to be negligible. This line of argumentation fails to recognize the breadth of sociological propaganda. The romance film likely will not have a dramatic effect on the audience's attitudes towards transportation, but I argue, the repetition of the images will. That films, in general, are saturated with images of automobiles and that automobile and automotive advertisements dominate the media landscape operate to inculcate pro-automobile attitudes within the population. In this way, sociological propaganda becomes more effective when it accords with other propagandistic messages (both direct and sociological) that operate within a particular population.

The lack of intention is a key component to sociological propaganda. By this I mean the presenter of the image did not intend for attitudes at issue to be inculcated within the audience. In the case of my example, the filmmaker did not intend to spread certain ideas about transportation when making his film. Surely, the filmmaker intended to have his subjects take a particular form of transportation, but the effect of its inclusion is an unintended byproduct.

We find another element of sociological propaganda in Clifford G. Christians 1995 article "Propaganda and the Technological System," in which he discusses the

concept. "As its primary network," he writes, "propaganda uses a horizontal interaction between individuals through which to establish collective standards, peer pressure, and group norms." (162) The term "horizontal" comes from Ellul, who contrasts it with "vertical propaganda." According to Ellul, "vertical propaganda" is vertical in that "it is made by a leader, a technician, a political or religious head who acts from the superior position of his authority and seeks to influence the crowd below." (1973, 79-80) Horizontal propaganda, on the other hand, "is made *inside* the group (not from the top), where, in principle, all individuals are equal and there is no leader." (1973, 81) While direct, i.e. intentional, propaganda can be either horizontal or vertical, sociological propaganda is largely horizontal (Ellul, 1973, 81). This poses a problem. In what sense can we call a Hollywood film sociological propaganda when there is a clear difference in position between the filmmaker and the film's audience? It is more useful to think of sociological propaganda as horizontal in that it is decentralized. By decentralized I mean that sociological propaganda does not come from a unified source. Pro-automobile attitudes are spread via automobile and automotive advertisements seeking to sell automobiles and related products and via Hollywood films that glamorize cars through the chase and habituate audiences to their existence by the magnitude of the automobile's presence.

At this point, I will advance a definition of sociological propaganda.

Sociological propaganda: decentralized communicative acts that unintentionally operate to affect the behavior or attitudes of an individual by irrational means.

That irrationality is a component of sociological propaganda should come as no surprise. After all, sociological propaganda is unintentional; any semblance of rationality would indicate a clear attempt at influence and, therefore, intention. "Operate," here, captures the systematic connection between the messages' production and their effects.

In this section, I advanced a definition of sociological propaganda. Sociological propaganda is irrational, decentralized, and operates to affect the behavior and attitudes of an individual by irrational means. If sociological propaganda is a real phenomenon, how does it work? In the next section, I will draw together threads from Rae Langton's work on pornography and advance a model for how sociological propaganda works.

IV. How Sociological Propaganda Works

If sociological propaganda is a real phenomenon, then we need a model to explain how sociological propaganda affects the behaviors and attitudes of its recipients. This section looks at two possible candidates. First, the section will examine Jason Stanley's mechanism for how propaganda works. Second, this section will draw together threads from Rae Langton's model for how pornography silences and subordinates women (1993). As we shall see, Stanley's mechanism cannot account for propagandistic images. On the other hand, if Langton's model succeeds with pornography, then we can extend it to art and film.

Central to Stanley's mechanism for how propaganda works is the distinction between at-issue content and not-at-issue content. According to Stanley, the at-issue content is "what is at issue in the debate"; the at-issue content is "the information asserted by [an] utterance." (2015, 134) To assert at-issue content is "to propose to add it to the common ground" of information in a particular linguistic context (2015, 134). In

contrast, not-at-issue content is "not advanced as a proposal of a content to be added to the common ground"; rather, the not-at-issue content is "directly added to the common ground." (2015, 135) Consider one of Stanley's examples:

It was John who solved the problem (2015, 135).

The message asserts that John solved the problem. This is the at-issue content. The message presupposes that the problem has been solved. This is the not-at-issue content.

The at-issue/not-at-issue content distinction leads Stanley to propose two distinct models of how propaganda works:

Content model of propaganda: one kind of paradigmatic propaganda in a liberal democracy would have a normal at-issue content that seems reasonable, and would also have a not-at-issue content that is not reasonable.

Expressive model of propaganda: one kind of paradigmatic propaganda in a liberal democracy would have a normal at-issue content that seems reasonable, and would also have a not-at-issue effect that would decrease the empathy for a group. (2015, 140)

Stanley takes "reasonableness" to be one of the primary ideals of liberal democracies (2015, 81). This concludes my outline of Stanley's mechanism for how propaganda works. Leaving aside his two types of propaganda (supporting and undermining), his mechanism includes two types of content (at-issue and not-at-issue) and two possible models for how propaganda works (the content model and the expressive model). Can Stanley's framework account for sociological propaganda?

In a review of Stanley's book, Jonathan Wolff argues that Stanley's reliance on the at-issue/not-at-issue distinction comes with a cost: Stanley's analysis cannot be extended to images (2016, 558-9). Stanley does admit that his mechanisms are incapable of explaining how images work in propagandistic ways (2015, 127). Consider, for example, Hubert Lanzinger's 1935 painting *Der Bannerträger* ("The Standard Bearer"). It depicts Adolf Hitler wearing plate armor, riding a black horse, and holding the Nazi flag in his right hand. Imbued with set-pieces of a medieval knight, Lanzinger depicts Hitler as a heroic warrior and leader of the German people. The painting depicts the ideals of heroism and will either increase or erode the realization of that ideal. As such, Stanley's propaganda types can account for the painting as a propagandistic message. Our analysis breaks down when we try to ascertain the at-issue content and the not-at-issue content of the painting. What is the at-issue content of the painting? The painting shows Hitler as a hero, but it does not propose to add this "fact" to the common ground. Instead, the painting presupposes that Hitler is a hero. It seems, then, that the painting is purely not-at-issue content.

Having shown that Stanley's mechanisms explaining how propaganda works cannot account for images, can Stanley's types of propaganda account for sociological propaganda? Seemingly not. Sociological propaganda is unintentional and, therefore, does not present itself as embodying any ideal. Let us return to the example of pornography. Does pornography present itself as embodying a certain ideal? Perhaps, it claims to embody the ideals of sexiness. If so, does it support or undermine the realization of that ideal? This seems impossible to answer. Sexual tastes vary widely among individuals. Or, consider a film that takes place in the suburbs of a large city.

Everyone travels via car. Such a film works as propaganda in that it normalizes the car as a form of transportation, but it does not do so by presenting itself as the embodiment of an ideal. The film simply reflects selected aspects of reality; through that reflection, ideas, stereotypes, and expectations are inculcated and reinforced.

Let us now turn to the work of Rae Langton. Langton argues that certain kinds of pornography "work as a kind of propaganda" when they "help to form and propagate certain views about women and sexuality." (1990, 335) To explain how this works, Langton and Caroline West draw from the work of David Lewis and argue that a rule of accommodation operates in the context of pornography (1999, [8]). During normal conversations, the rule works in the following way:

> If at a given time something is said that requires a component of conversational score to be a certain way, in order for what is said to be true, or otherwise acceptable; and if that component is not that way beforehand (and if certain further conditions hold); then at that time, that score component changes in the required way, to make what is said true, or otherwise acceptable. (1999, [7])

This means that if in a conversation a statement that makes a presupposition goes unchallenged, the information that is presupposed gets added to the conversational score, i.e. the presuppositions get added to our pool of common knowledge. Langton and West extend the rule of accommodation to pornography:

> While it may not explicitly be said in pornography that women are inferior, or that sexual violence is normal or legitimate, it may be that propositions like these are presupposed by what pornography explicitly

says, because they are required for the hearer to make best sense of what is

said. (1999, [8-9])

Langton and West use a 'favorable' rape depiction as an example. Imagine a

pornographic scene in which a woman repeatedly refuses the sexual advances of a man.

During the rape the follows, the woman is overcome with ecstasy. Although the scene

never explicitly states that the woman wanted to be raped and that "no" meant "yes,"

"these presuppositions are required in order to make sense of what is explicitly said and

illustrated." (Langton & West, 1999, [9])

> Langton offers the following general scheme of accommodation:
>
> If – (1. *Utterance*) – at time *t* something is said […]; and
>
> (2. *Requirement*) – a score component is required to be a certain way […],
> in order for what is said to be correct play […]; and
>
> (3. *Counterfactual Dependence*) – the component would not otherwise be
> that way at *t*, though it was that way before; and
>
> (4. *Conditions*) – certain conditions hold […]; then
>
> (5. *Creation*) – at *t* the score component *is* that certain way […], enabling
> what is said to be correct play […] (2015, 15-6)

I argue that we adopt a similar framework for imagistic forms of communication. By

"correct play" Langton means a kind of success condition; this could be acceptability,

truth, or Austin's notion of "felicity" (2015, 5). In the case of images, we can use a

principle of coherence such that the elements of the image must hang together in a

logically connected way. Langton's *Counterfactual Dependence* offers a modal

alternative to Lewis's (1979) *Novelty* condition, i.e. that the component wasn't that way

before. Either one will work for our scheme. At times, sociological propaganda will create new components (*Novelty*); at others, it will strengthen or sustain existing ones (*Counterfactual Dependence*). The condition that must hold is authority. For accommodation to be successful, the speaker must have authority over the message's recipient (Langton, 2015, 4). With my proposed adjustments, the scheme for imagistic accommodation follows:

> If – (1. *Image Presentation*) – at time *t* an image is presented […]; and
>
> (2. *Requirement*) – a score component is required to be a certain way […], in order for what is depicted to be correct play […]; and
>
> (3.) – either *Novelty* or *Counterfactual Dependence* holds; and
>
>> [(3.1 *Novelty*) – the component wasn't that way before; or
>>
>> (3.2 *Counterfactual Dependence*) – the component would not
>>
>> otherwise be that way at *t*, though it was that way before]
>
> (4. *Conditions*) – certain conditions hold […]; then
>
> (5. *Creation*) – at *t* the score component *is* that certain way […], enabling what is depicted to be correct play […]

We can then model Langton and West's "favorable" rape depiction using my scheme:

> If – (1. *Image Presentation*) – at time *t* an image is presented [*a favorable rape depiction, i.e. a woman is shown enjoying being raped*]; and
>
> (2. *Requirement*) – a score component is required to be a certain way [*The woman wanted to be raped; her "no" really meant "yes"*], in order for what is depicted to be correct play [*a coherent image*]; and
>
> (3.) – either *Novelty* or *Counterfactual Dependence* holds; and

[(3.1 *Novelty*) – the component wasn't that way before; or

(3.2 *Counterfactual Dependence*) – the component would not

otherwise be that way at *t*, though it was that way before]

(4. *Conditions*) – certain conditions hold [*The image's presenter has*

authority]; then

(5. *Creation*) – at *t* the score component *is* that certain way [*The woman*

wanted to be raped; her "no" really meant "yes"], enabling what is

depicted to be correct play [*a coherent image*]

The model can also account for even more subtle forms of sociological propaganda –

propaganda that normalizes certain behaviors. Consider a film or television show in

which every scene depicts the consumption of cigarettes or other tobacco products.

Importantly, the characters pay no attention to their consumption. Our scheme may look

like the following:

If – (1. *Image Presentation*) – at time *t* an image is presented [*the*

unchallenged consumption of cigarettes is depicted]; and

(2. *Requirement*) – a score component is required to be a certain way [*the*

consumption of cigarettes is normal/uncontroversial], in order for what is

depicted to be correct play [*a coherent image*]; and

(3.) – either *Novelty* or *Counterfactual Dependence* holds; and

[(3.1 *Novelty*) – the component wasn't that way before; or

(3.2 *Counterfactual Dependence*) – the component would not

otherwise be that way at *t*, though it was that way before]

(4. *Conditions*) – certain conditions hold [*The image's presenter has authority*]; then

(5. *Creation*) – at *t* the score component *is* that certain way [*consuming cigarettes is normal and acceptable*], enabling what is depicted to be correct play [*a coherent image*]

Because the *Novelty* clause is not essential, the image does not need to create new attitudes. Instead, it can reinforce existing ones.

We must remember that this propagandistic message does not exist within a vacuum. How propagandistic messages play off each other is important. Imagine a brutal senate campaign in which each of the two major candidates accuses the other of being corrupt, of using their current office to benefit members of their family, and of failing to be representative of "the issues voters care about." A voter who receives both of these direct propaganda messages may conclude that neither candidate is "right for the job." If third-party candidates receive little to no media exposure, the voter may think he has only two bad options and may ultimately decide not to vote. Similarly, sociological propaganda messages play off each other. Consider a film with a stereotypical representation of a gay man. He is effeminate, flamboyant, and overtly sexual. If it exists in isolation, the film forces us to accommodate this representation by adopting a component like the following: at least one gay man is effeminate, flamboyant, and overtly sexual. The film, though, does not exist in isolation. Instead, the film exists within an array of messages in which gay men are depicted as effeminate, flamboyant, and overtly sexual. As a result, the component added via accommodation will look like

the following: all gay men are effeminate, flamboyant, and overtly sexual; or, gay men just are effeminate, flamboyant, and overtly sexual.

Thus far I have assumed that the images (or their presenters) have the authority to force these types of accommodations. Accommodation, for Langton, represents an illocutionary act of speech, i.e. accommodation is an act "a speaker performs 'in saying' something." (2015, 3) Without the right kind of authority, an illocutionary act cannot be performed. Without the right kind of authority, accommodation fails. Do art and film possess the authority to make illocutionary accommodations?

Langton and West provide a reason to be skeptical but offer a refutation (1999, [13]). If the accommodation is made by a fictional image, is not the resulting component fictional as well? If, during the course of a film, a person shoots a beam of light from a wooden rod, accommodation leads us to adopt the belief that magic is real. But, this new belief in magic does not extend to the real world; it remains isolated to the fictional world to which the film gives us access. This argument, however, understates our ability to learn from fiction. We tell fairy tales to our children to impart moral knowledge. We watch period dramas to see what life was like centuries ago. "If we can gain true beliefs from fiction," Langton and West write, "we can also gain false beliefs from fiction." (1999, [13]) This intuition seems correct. As they note, the majority of fiction is built on background conditions that are purported to be true in order to lend realism to the fictional representation. Langton and West call these "background propositions, propositions which (whether implicit or explicit) are true in the fiction, and true in the world as well." (1999, [14]) These background propositions lend credibility to a film or work of art that seeks to make commentary on some aspect of the real world. If the

audience takes the background propositions of a film or artwork to be true representations of reality, the audience accepts them as authoritative.

Problematic cases arise when the background propositions are false but purported to be true (background lies) or when distinguishing between the factual background propositions and the fictional elements is difficult (background blurring) (Langton & West, 1999, [14-15]). The myth that all black men are well endowed can be seen as stemming from either of the two situations. It could be the case the pornography with 'hung' black male characters presents the falsehood as a true background proposition. It also might be that such pornography blurs the distinction between the background propositions and the fictional elements. In such pornographic images it is unclear whether the 'hung' black male trope is a background proposition or a fictional element. Either way, such pornography results in the inculcation of sexual stereotypes about black men through the accommodation process.

Importantly, sociological propaganda is not limited to artworks and films in which background lies or background blurring occurs. Even when all of the background propositions are true, sociological propaganda works to integrate its recipients within their social, economic, and political realities. Let us return to the beer commercial described by Maya Gallo. The commercial depicts friends enjoying beer around a campfire. Such a scene has certainly happened in the real world. The process of accommodation might lead the recipient to adopt the belief that such behavior is normal or desirable. In this way, sociological propaganda, through the process of accommodation, can integrate its recipients within their social, economic, and political structures. The recipients adopt attitudes that hold those structures to be normal.

If images demand accommodations be made by their audiences and if accommodations require authority for their success, then sociological propaganda works only if its recipients give its constituent messages authority. How much authority (i.e. its strength and breadth) affects how sociological propaganda affects its recipients. Sociological propaganda messages exhibit epistemic authority. Speakers have this kind of authority based on their expertise and credibility (Langton, 2015, 18). If the audience believes an imagistic message is built on true background propositions, the audience will grant the message authority not only over the fictional world it depicts but also over the aspects of the real world covered by those background propositions. These could include human behaviors, defining characteristics of certain classes of people, and even how humans interact with each other. The effect can be normalizing activities, reinforcing attitudes, and sustaining stereotypes.

This section has offered a mechanism for how sociological propaganda works. If sociological propaganda is a real phenomenon, accommodation can explain how it works to inculcate and reinforce attitudes within its recipients. Imagistic accommodation occurs when certain components must be adopted in order for the elements within an image to cohere in a logically connected way. Accommodation only succeeds if the image is granted authority.

Conclusion

Sociological propaganda is a decentralized communication phenomenon that operates unintentionally to irrationally change the behaviors and attitudes of its recipient. The accumulation of messages that demand certain accommodations leads to the inculcation and strengthening of certain attitudes. In order for this accommodation to be

successful, the recipients of these messages must give the images authority over a real world. Without this authority, accommodation fails completely or succeeds only within the fictional world to which the messages give the audience access. If the accommodation model of sociological propaganda is true, it behooves us as a society to place a greater emphasis on media literacy. We must become active consumers of media and critically analyze the authority of the images in which we bathe. Furthermore, we must be aware of the more subtle ways in which art and film can influence our attitudes and behaviors.

This paper has worked to decouple propaganda from intention and has posited a new type of propaganda – sociological propaganda. Additionally, the paper has shown that because they rely on a notion of intention, the models of propaganda advanced by Jacques Ellul (1973), Sheryl Tuttle Ross (2002), and Jason Stanley (2015) cannot account for sociological propaganda. That propaganda can be unintentional does not mean that any irrational and influential message counts as propaganda; rather, a systematic connection must hold between the message's production and its effects. Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky's (2002) political economic model provides an explanation for the structural conditions that give rise to some sociological propaganda. They have highlighted one of the ways this systematic connection can be instantiated, but many more exist. Finally, the paper developed the accommodation model of sociological propaganda by extending Rae Langton's work on pornography to other types of imagistic communication.

The accommodation model of sociological propaganda represents a starting point. How sociological propaganda plays out through the internet must be explored if we want

to understand how the internet has changed our attitudes. The accommodation model of propaganda may also help explain how we have become so politically polarized. Media consumption patterns have fragmented. It is possible that, as a result, different groups of people have been the recipients of radically different sociological propaganda systems. These radically different sociological propaganda systems may have inculcated radically different attitudes within their recipients. I do not propose to provide answers for all of these questions, but I hope the accommodation model of sociological propaganda has been a step in the right direction.

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