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A Gateway to all Post Graduate Courses

Marxism, broadly, can be understood as a body of ‘socio-scientific’ theory that proposes to explain society, in terms of social inequities, and strives to transform it. Coinciding with the early stages of capitalism in the 19th c, Marxist philosophy originates in the writings of two German philosophers and social theorists: **Karl Marx** (1818-1883) and **Friedrich Engels** (1820-1895). Their writings provided a sharp critique of capitalism and an analysis of social world situated along the axis of economy and class relations. Central to its enterprise is the attempt to combine the theoretical accounts on society with the social practice of changing it, as expressed by Marx in the statement: ‘the philosophers have only *interpreted* the world in various ways. The point however is to *change* it.’

Marxism is described as a materialist critique as it insists on analyzing art, literature and other cultural forms and practices in relation to their historical conditions of

production. Such a position is based on the central assumption in Marxism, which states that the material conditions of existence determine our psychological being. As Marx says, 'It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but on the contrary their social being that determines their consciousness.' The historicity of Marxist approach emanates not merely in its reading of culture and its artifacts against its concomitant political and economic context but also from its radical understanding of history which it perceives as dialectical in nature (a point discussed under the section Classical Marxism).

In the backdrop of failed socialist dream, collapse of the soviet bloc, fall of Berlin Wall and overthrow of communist regimes in favour of democracies that are markedly capitalistic, the relevance of Marxism as a political alternative and socio-cultural critique is widely debated and discussed. However despite its questionable political relevance, Marxian insights are far from outdated and it is still a useful tool to read and interpret culture and society. Cultural Studies to a large extent is a derivative of Marxist ideology. Since its onset, Marxism, as a revolutionary prophetic theory of human society has undergone several transformations and taken new directions so much so that there is no longer a monolithic school of Marxism but a several forms of Marxisms.

CLASSICAL MARXISM:

Classical Marxism applies to a complex yet systematic set of political theories put forward by Marx and Engels in the mid-19th c. In its early days, Marxism was less scientific and more revolutionary in character, as evinced in its seminal document *The Communist Manifesto* (1848), which called for workers of the world to unite as a 'class' against the capitalist regime. The theoretical backbone of Marxism comes from German classical tradition of G W F Hegel (1770-1831), the 19th c British economics and French revolutionary thought.

Traditional Marxism rests on its twin conceptions of history and the social structure. Marx's radical view of history is derived from Hegel's conception of the same, though they fundamentally differ in their key propositions. Unlike historians prior to Hegel, who saw history as random sequence of events, he defined it as progressive in

nature, where each event exists in a causal relation to the preceding ones. This implies that historical occurrences cannot be understood in isolation but need to be perceived in its totality. Hegel, in keeping with Plato, argued that the only reality is that of the 'ideas'. These ideas are potent, crude and unrefined but capable of attaining perfection- the state of the Absolute. Thus history according to Hegel is the process of the Absolute 'unfolding itself'. This unfolding takes place in a **dialectical** fashion where each idea is a contradiction of or an improvement over the previous one. Theories and explanations change overtime and since the world, in Hegelian terms, is but a set of ideas, the history of the world is therefore the history of ideas.

Marx accepted Hegel's cumulative version of history but strongly disagreed with his 'mystical' view of the same. Unlike Hegel who perceived history as progress of the mind (hence 'idealist'), Marx had a more mechanical view, where he equated historical development with the economic one. Marx's view of history is linked with his principle theory of social organization. According to which the structure of the society and social relations are organized around the dominant **mode of production**. Thus in the feudal society, which was by and large agrarian, the social structure was hierarchical, where King was the supreme followed by lords and then the serfs. Under such a system the ruling class (the aristocrats) were those who controlled the arable land, where peasants and serfs were employed as mere laborers. It further claimed that the prevalent forces of production in the material life determine the social, political and cultural fabric of the society. Based on these premises Marx argued that the only reality is the material one, thus subverting the Hegelian conception of reality as a set of ideas.

History of society, Marx argued, is determined by the changing mode of production, which generates new class structures. These class structures, primarily comprises of two antagonistic groups- exploiter and the exploited, who are constantly engaged in a struggle for social, economic and political upper hand. Thus slavery gave way to feudalism, which was later replaced by the current capitalistic mode of production. Each of this system of production exposed the inherent contradictions in the former and replaced it as an alternative. Marx predicted that revolutionary socialism would similarly expose the inherent discrepancies in capitalism while retaining the positive aspects of it (like say technology), a prophecy that miserably failed to materialize.

Thus, unlike Hegel, in Marx dialectical struggle is material in nature. As history is seen as grounded in material reality and historical development is seen as product of class struggles, Marxism is also known as *historical materialism* or *dialectical materialism*. As Marx famously put it, ‘the history of the hitherto existing societies is the history of class struggle.’

Marxist model of society can be explained using the metaphor of ‘base’ and ‘superstructure’ as it helps to draw links between the economy and social structures. Accordingly, any society is founded on certain forces and relations of production. Marx terms this as the *base* of the society. The base ultimately determines the *superstructure*, which comprises of laws, customs, religion, education, government and other cultural institutions. Thus, the art and culture in the 16th c and 17th c England reflected the relations, norms and values that prevailed under its feudal structure. This one to one relation where economic factors are seen to determine the social, political and cultural factor, is known as *economic determinism*, a view that has been revised by later Marxists. Since the base determines the superstructure the latter often serves and protects the interests of the ruling class i.e. those who control the means of production, here the capitalists.

Another instrument that works alongside the superstructures is *ideology*. Ideology, a term studied more closely by Louis Althusser, refers to a set of ideas, beliefs, values that are validated as truths and determine the way we perceive and relate to the world. It’s an illusory representation of everyday reality that obfuscates the real conflicts and tensions of social life. Engel’s described it as ‘false consciousness.’

Drawing a direct relation between economy and the cultural terrain, Marx builds a strong critique against capitalism by exposing its inherent contradictions. Marx examines the process of production, the unequal and exploitative nature of class relations, distortion of labour and nature of human relations within such a system. His economic theory was primarily intended to raise the consciousness of the working class aka the Proletariats, who, he believed, in the light of these revelations would unite to overthrow the capitalist system and replace it with socialism. Marx’s *theory of alienation* works in this direction. According to Marx, commodities in any given

society are products of human skill and labour. These commodities are produced to fulfill certain ‘**use value**’ i.e. it is meant to fulfill certain human needs. So for instance, in the early agrarian or feudal society, a peasant would produce grains, which will be partially utilized by him with the rest appropriated by the owner of the land. Goods in these societies were produced mostly for direct consumption. But in a capitalist society the relation between the laborer and the produce is distorted. Under a capitalist system, the labourer produces objects not for the use-value but for the market, for its ‘**exchange value**’. So, a worker in a car factory participates in the production process of a car that he might never use. He produces it for the market, which is least concerned about the individual skill and hard work that goes into the production of the commodity. As a result the labourer becomes *alienated* not only from the product, which he might never use, but also from his labor, which serves the interest of the market. The labourer thus is dehumanized as he is reduced to mere ‘hands’ and is only a means to profit.

These commodities when they reach the market camouflage the real social conditions of their production and they acquire a value of their own. When we buy an Apple i6 from the market, we don’t see the actual labour that has gone into the making of the product, but assess the product in terms of its unique features as if it were inherent in them. The consumer thus misreads the value of the labour as value of the product. The commodity, is thus attributed a ‘mysterious’ power of its own. This attribution of social power to commodities, as if they had will of their own is known as *fetishism of commodities*. And the phenomenon where the material relation between people is confused or replaced with the social relation between things is known as *reification* (‘making into things’).

The Frankfurt school draws upon the Marx’s theory of alienation and commodity fetishism but distances itself from the idealism of Marxism.

FRANKFURT SCHOOL

The Frankfurt school refers to a loose group of German academicians and thinkers who were associated with the Institute of Social Research at the University of Frankfurt. The group comprised names like Theodore Adorno (1903-69), Max

Horkheimer (1895-1973), Herbert Marcuse (1898-1979), Walter Benjamin (1892-1940) and later Jürgen Habermas (1929-). Established in 1923, the school was dispersed a decade later when Nazis came to power in Germany. It was relocated to US in 1934 by Horkheimer but returned to Frankfurt during 1949-50. It grew as an interdisciplinary intellectual movement that drew on disciplines like philosophy, psychology, sociology and economics and their body of thought became known as *Critical Theory*.

The Frankfurt school emerged in the wake of Marxism's failed prediction of the working class revolution and its socialist dream and in its inability to reconcile the harsh realities of the 20th c. (like the rise of Stalinist Russia, its breed of **Vulgar Marxism**, Italy's fascism, Nazi Germany, holocaust and the Cold War) with traditional Marxist thought. Marx had predicted that when capitalism had exhausted itself, it would lead to the rise of the proletariat class who would ensue the Socialist revolution resulting in a classless society. But nothing of the sort happened and to the surprise of the onlookers capitalism turned out to be a resilient force.

The critical theorists are notable, in this regard, as a breed of 'revisionist' Marxists who questioned some of the central precepts of the traditional Marxism. Despite claiming allegiance to Marxism, they distanced themselves from some of its key doctrines like, crude economic determinism, the Hegelian theory of historical progress and relinquished the myth of revolutionary proletariat. While Marx's critique of capitalism revolved around the mode of production and immiseration of the working class, the critical theorists explored impact of capitalism in shaping the social and individual consciousness through such phenomena as mass culture and culture industry-- a notion faintly similar to Marx's concept of 'ideology'. In other words, critical theory eschewed the analysis 'class' and focused on rigorous study of culture. Critical theory is essentially, thus, a critique of modern culture that focuses on the sociology of mass society, on the increasing reliance of the society on technology and mass media and the threat it poses to the human psyche. Their approach was a combination of Marxism and Freud's psychoanalysis.

Theodore Adorno and Max Horkheimer- the founding members of Frankfurt School explains the process of cultural reproduction through their concept of *Culture*

Industry. According to Adorno, culture industry is a phenomenon of **late capitalism** that results from the excessive presence of media and technology in the socio-cultural realm. Under this, cultural production is akin to industrial process where culture is commodified and artifacts produced in mass numbers purport to fulfill the fetishes and desires of the population. The free flow of assorted material goods in the market with the promise of possessing them, join hands with the omnipresent popular media and entertainment seducing the masses into a passive submission. Thus a thinking discerning individual, within a capitalist system, is transformed into unthinking passive consumer. Culture industry thus depoliticizes the mass population and discourages them from exploring the harsh social realities. It responds to individual's instinctual and physical propensities towards pleasure and fun ignoring the spiritual and cognitive side. Products of culture industry are characterized by homogeneity and predictability. Commercialism results in cultural standardization erasing the differences within culture, so that all cultures become subsumed under a single mass culture. Thus culture industry leads to a 'democratization of culture' while paradoxically retains the power structures. It studies phenomena like popular culture to explain the manner in which it erodes, what they perceive as 'authentic' culture.

Contrary to the pessimistic view of culture in Adorno and Horkheimer, Walter Benjamin explains the workings of capitalism in a more positive light. Where Adorno sees consumers of mass culture as passive, Benjamin attributes them an active role. In his essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction", Benjamin examines the changes in culture brought about by mechanical reproduction. According to Benjamin, technology, by enabling the reproduction of cultural artifacts and practices has destroyed the 'aura' around them. By 'aura' he means the 'authenticity', 'authority' and 'autonomy' that gathers around a text by virtue of its being unique and 'irreplaceable'. Technological reproduction has led to the dissolution of this aura as any work of art can be replicated and made into as many copies. The presence of the copies of the text weakens the 'aura' around the original as it becomes increasingly difficult to distinguish between the two. The abatement of aura around the texts frees it from authority and tradition so that it can be appropriated and reinterpreted to suit a different context. Freed from the confines of tradition the meaning of the artifact becomes disputable and is determined by the consumer. Consumption thus becomes a political act in Benjamin.

STRUCTURALIST MARXISM

This strand of Marxism emerged in the 1960s under the influence of French Structuralism and was led by French philosopher Louis Althusser (1918-1990) along with others like Pierre Macherey (1938-) and Lucien Goldman (1913-1970). It struck at the very foundation of traditional Marxist thought by challenging Marx's teleological view of history and its concept of individual self, thereby a class, as autonomous and capable of action against the monopoly capitalism. Althusser attributed such views to the humanistic framework of western philosophy, which was challenged by theoretical movements like structuralism in the 1960s. His theory proposes to restore the scientific rigour of Marxism by ridding it of its humanistic, pragmatic, and historicist tendencies.

Althusser's theory of society does not concern itself with human action and consciousness, as they are perceived as being controlled by complex structures that society is made of which he describes as 'social formations'. Within such a system the individual lacks agency and merely function as 'subjects'. It is these structures rather than its subjects that dominate his theory of society. Structuralist Marxism defines history as 'a process without subjects' and Marxism as an approach that examines society as a structural system. Althusser breaks down Marx's crude theory of *economic determinism* that traced a direct one-to-one relation between base and superstructure. Society is composed of several layers of complex structures that enjoy *relative autonomy* and follows its own logic of development, says Althusser. Unlike classical Marxists who claimed that superstructure is merely a passive reflection of the base, structural Marxists argued that economy *determines* culture, but only 'in the last instance'. This allows role for political, religious, ideological and cultural factors and moves away from economic determinism. Borrowing a term from psychoanalysis, Althusser states that social phenomenon is *overdetermined* by several factors at play within the social system and economy acts as determinant only in the final stage. Thus in Althusser's conception of base-superstructure, the latter is *decentered* and is relatively autonomous.

Another key concept in structural Marxism is ideology, a term briefly mentioned under classical Marxism. Marx and Engels perceived ideology as negative by describing it as 'false consciousness'. In Gramsci, it takes on a political sheen in form of hegemony. In Althusser, ideology is a necessary feature of all social formations. It has a structural role as it equips people for social existence and since its integral to social life it is often unconscious or taken for granted. Ideology is a system of representations, which includes ideas, beliefs, images, myths, discourses etc. that generates an imaginary relationship between people and their real conditions of existence. It's a system that we internalize and which determines the way we perceive the world. Ideology serves as tool for domination as it *naturalizes* the unequal power relations and legitimizes the conditions of existence. It permeates all spheres of existence as Althusser says, 'There is no practice except by or in ideology'.

According to Althusser the state or the ruling section imposes its ideology through State Apparatuses namely: *Ideological State Apparatus* and *Repressive State Apparatus*. These state apparatus facilitate the reproduction of social formations. The Repressive State Apparatus are visible forms of control that include institutions like government, police, army, court, prison system etc. They function to maintain the social order through direct rule and force. As opposed to this, Ideological State Apparatus, functions covertly, and is more powerful and pervasive. This includes institutions like family, education, religion, various cultural bodies and political organizations that works via social indoctrination and conditions individuals into required social subjects.

Ideology constitutes individuals as subjects through *interpellation*. It refers to the process whereby individuals identify with a particular identity and think 'that me!' So, though it's unconscious, there is an element of recognition involved (for example refer to the case study). It's a social process whereby social structures (including both IRA and ISA) hail or interpellate individuals to occupy certain pre-established *subject positions*. Individuals are 'recruited' and transformed into subjects- self-conscious, responsible agents that serve the interest of the ruling state. Thus, individuals are subjects of ideological systems that are always already there. Its not individuals that act, it's the ideology that acts through them.

Hegemony:

The term Hegemony was used by Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci to explain the manner in which the State (capitalist ruling class) exercises its dominance over the subordinate sections (working class). Rejecting the economic determinism of classical Marxism, Gramsci attempted to explain the process of social change as emanating from realm of superstructure (culture) rather than the base (economy) and emphasized the role of human agency and voice.

According to Gramsci we perceive the world not objectively but through the naturalized lens of ideology. But ideology, unlike in Marx, enjoys a relative autonomy from the economic realm and has the potential for transformation. There are two decisive way in which the ruling class exerts its control over the population: (1) by using sheer physical force and (2) by using the more subtle means of ideology. Hegemony refers to the latter, manipulation of the social consciousness through control of its ideas. Under this, the interest of the few (namely the ruling class) is projected and circulated as the interest of the entire population. It presents a view of life and a system of values, in keeping with the interests of the ruling section, as natural and the only way of life, which then gets accepted by the rest. Hegemony thus works through the “spontaneous consent” of the masses who take the projected interest of the ruling class as the “commonsense”. This production, legitimization, and manipulation of attitudes and ideas largely take place in and through mass media. Once accepted en masse, use of physical force legitimizes minor dissensions within the structure.

The crucial factor in Gramsci's hegemony is that it allows space for contestation of the dominant ideology. Gramsci says that the status quo can be challenged with concerted efforts from the subordinate groups. Revolution demands a genuine alternative worldview in the absence of which hegemony will reassert self. Thus for Gramsci, culture is the arena for constant conflicts and struggle and not just a passive reflection of the economic base.

Cultural Capital:

Cultural Capital is a sociological concept that was introduced by Pierre Bourdieu, an erstwhile Structuralist and a prominent cultural theoretician, whose works engaged with the Marxist tradition of social theory. Both Marx and Bourdieu are in agreement with the fact that capital forms the basis of power and social status in the society. The more capital you have the higher you climb in the social ladder. Bourdieu however stretches the notion of capital beyond the economic to the symbolic realm of culture.

The term cultural capital refers to accrual of symbolic assets like taste, attire, qualifications, body language, accent, credentials etc. by virtue of being part of a particular social strata. Cultural capital acts both as unifying and divisive force. People sharing similar cultural capital like similar tastes in films, art, clothes or food can generate a sense of identification with a particular group or community and induces a sense of belongingness. Cultural capital can produce social inequality, as within a cultural realm certain forms of cultural capital are valued more than the others. Like economic credentials, absence of sufficient cultural capital can hinder one's upward social mobility.

Bourdieu identified three types of cultural capital:

1. **Embodied cultural capital** refers to the long-standing dispositions of mind and body. It's acquired through cultivation and presupposes a process of emodiment that involves labour and happens over a period of time. In other words it's not easily handed down from one person to the other (like say money, property etc.) but demands personal investment of time and effort. For instance, ones caste, religion etc. Thus being born into a Brahmin family in India brings with it a certain kind of cultural capital unlike those who belong to the lower castes
2. **Objectified cultural capital** operates through the acquisition of objects like say car, book, instruments, artifacts etc. These objects can be appropriated both materially (economic capital) and symbolically (cultural capital). Owning a limited edition pen or having a J K Rowling signed Harry Potter or owning a rare vintage car is an instance of objectified cultural capital.
3. **Institutionalized cultural capital** comes in the form of academic qualifications and credentials that become a sign of intellectual competency. Thus a student with a degree from IIT would be deemed as intellectually superior than a student

from an ordinary college. Or an MBBS or MD has a higher social standing than say an ayurvedic doctor.

Theory of Culture:

One of the prominent thinkers of the 'New Left' and cultural theory, Raymond Williams revolutionized the approach to the study of culture by broadening its contours. His theory of culture democratized culture by discrediting binaries like 'high' and 'low' culture and founded the discipline of cultural studies. As an academician and as an individual from the Britain's working class, Williams attached himself to the tradition of Marxism despite radically altering some of its key perceptions, especially its attitude towards culture.

Earlier theories of Marxism perceived culture as passive reflection of the economic structure and their study of culture focused upon establishing this. Raymond Williams's theory of culture was a response to this limiting vision.

Based on his study of English culture of the 1840s, Williams described theory of culture as 'a theory of relationships between elements in a whole way of life.' Culture to Williams was not merely a set of artifacts, but a lived experience of the quality of life at a time and place, what he calls 'the structure of feeling'. It expresses meanings and values and reflected the way people thought, felt and acted. Furthermore, culture at a particular moment, Williams said, is not fixed, static and unified but marked by tensions and conflicts among dominant, residual and emergent views. William's framework of culture based on the dominant, residual and emergent, helps us to understand the confrontations and subversions within culture that continuously attempt to maintain balance in the face of ever changing views.

1. ***Dominant Culture***: It refers to those aspects of culture that are most visible and embodied by the majority in the society, or those who wield the power, say the ruling class.
2. ***Residual Culture***: Within a culture at a given time, there are elements of the past at work. Such elements that were formed in the past but are active in the present cultural processes are referred to as *residual* culture. They belong to a

different social formation and continue to live long after the social formation itself has disappeared. They exist in an alternative or oppositional relation to the dominant.

3. ***Emergent Culture***: It refers to the new meanings, values, practices, and beliefs that are continuously being created and that present itself as a challenge to the dominant. This is different from the simply novel elements of the dominant. Both residual and emergent exist at the marginalized sphere of experience initially unacknowledged by the dominant. As society changes the emergent may eventually become the dominant.

To illustrate William's theory, prior to independence and national reform movements, caste system was the dominant social system in India along the lines of which social, political and economic spheres were structured. Though technically, caste system as a norm for social structuring has long become obsolete in contemporary India society, the residue of the system remains in the form untouchability and discrimination in certain pockets. This would therefore be a residue from the past that is still active in the present democratic setup. Along with the fight against caste based discrimination we also have now voices seeking equal rights for transgenders, homosexuals etc. who were in the margins earlier. These could therefore be termed as an emergent culture that exists in oppositional relation to the dominant heterosexual society.

Case Study

Fast Food and Culture Industry

Theodor Adorno and Marx Horkheimer identify contemporary culture with culture industry characterized by mass production and consumption. According to the duo, mass culture replaces the 'authentic culture' and the value system it embodies, with a new system of values that hinges on pleasure, entertainment, cheapness and excess. Popular music (punk rock, psychedelic, hip-hop etc.), popular fiction (Mills and

Boon, Sci-fi etc.), film industry (like Hollywood, Bollywood etc.), fashion, and fast food (McDonald's, KFC, Dominos, Pizza Hut etc.) are products of culture industry. Take the instance of fast food, a fall out of burgeoning industrialization in America in the 20th c., which soon spread across the world, so much so that it has become yet another symbol of globalization. McDonald's, KFC, Dominos, Pizza Hut, Burger King, Sub Way are just some of the popular and leading brands of chain restaurants that have joints in most of the urban pockets across the world.

Fast food typifies the 'fast paced' life of modern times and has changed the meaning of, the way we relate to and consume food. The value system it embodies is that of the culture industry as the goods produced are for and aimed at the market. Culture Industry does not emphasize so much on artistic freedom or creativity as it does about profits and exploiting the market. The sheer number of outlets of McDonald and KFC testifies this. The production process in such an industry is highly mechanized and controlled and it employs low-waged unskilled labour who are alienated from the production process. Employers do not make any constructive contribution except for managing the process- taking and delivering orders from the customers. Look at the McDonalds' ad 'Working Together' (Link 1), where it shows a group of workers happily going about their jobs but interestingly what they seem to be happy about is the controlled and efficient manner in which the work gets done, most of which is done by the machines. The workers make no creative contribution in the actual production of the food items. The system is akin to that of a factory where laborers have to work at the pace of machines, get things done very fast, without actually being involved. The focus, thus, is mostly on their hands and pace of delivery. Remember what Marx said about human labour being *reified*, as they are reduced to merely hands. The motto seems to be, the faster the better. In the Dominos ad (Link 3), this is precisely what is highlighted. You get what you want, wherever you are, at whatever time of the day.

The products of culture industry are uniform, formulaic and standardized in nature. No matter where you go you get the same kind of service from workforce that look similar in their brand uniforms. The uniformity and predictability gets translated to the familiarity and trust placed on the product. The uniformity can also be traced in the appearance and packaging of food items mostly through a set of colour codes:

McDonalds (mostly in red and yellow), KFC (red and white), Dominos (Blue), Subway (green and yellow) and also in the format of the menu for instance all items of McDonalds come prefixed with 'Mc', thus, McChicken, McAloo Tikki, McWrap etc. Thus products are churned out that have proven to be successful, with minimal innovation. The differences in products are not so much symptomatic of creativity but rather a method to ensure that no aspect of the market is left unexploited. In other words, 'something is provided for all so that none may escape' (Adorno). So, brands like McDonalds, KFC etc. might have adapted to different countries like Japan, India, Egypt, China, Philippines etc., but the message is still the same. For instance names like McAloo Tikki, Chicken Maharaja Mac, McSpicy, Meal etc. add an Indian touch to what is traditionally American diet like burger, sandwich etc.

The term fast food describes food that is quickly available at an affordable rate and is highly convenient (you could eat it while driving or walking towards your workplace). In other words, unlike in earlier times when food (in the form of breakfast, lunch, or dinner) exclusively occupied a certain amount of time during the day (cooking the meal and eating, which in itself was a ritual of sorts), now its reduced to a chore done alongside other 'more' important tasks. Also it's economical. You get a burger for just Rs. 20 or 25. In one of the KFC ads it says you get burger at 'canteen prices' (Link 5). This idea of getting things easily and cheaply gets superimposed on to our relationships as well. Look at the ad of McDonalds (Link 2) where it's suggested that it will only cost you a McAloo Tikki, priced Rs. 25, to win a girlfriend. In one of the Dominos ad (Link 7) you have the teacher trying to attract reluctant students using Dominos pizza. Relationships come as fast as a burger or a pizza. This notion of affordability is clubbed with that of excess. Culture industry capitalizes on appearance. The images of fast food carry the message of 'more'. The more you pile the happier you get. Look at the imposing images of McDonald's and KFC [Fig 1,2,3 & 5]. The tray and the food items are always 'fully loaded' [Fig 6], almost ready to spill over. The focus is invariably on the size and quantity. In fig 1, the caption says 'Big, Beefy, Bliss' and the names of burgers use words like 'bucket', 'double', 'deluxe' and 'pounder'. Fig 2, is provocative in its claim, 'But can you handle me', and invites the consumer to check out its 'dimensions'. The challenge in the last line of Fig 2 'Are you Mac enough?' is a dare to consumer more. A similar challenge appears in KFC ad 'Man up' to have a 'Double Decker' burger. Everything

is large and excessive, nothing comes 'small' and the message is you can have them 'non-stop'. They convey impression of being rich, more than sufficient. Expressions like 'meals', 'feast', 'combo' etc. add to this impression, changing the very definition of these words in the process. The ads invariably zoom in on the very act of consumption. It's irresistible both in terms of appearance and taste. Expressions like 'bliss', 'seductive', 'juicy', 'ignite your senses', 'tastes good, feels good', 'whopperlust' etc. suggest that consumption of fast food is a pleasurable experience. The food items are extremely colorful, sizzling, shiny, lustrous and dripping so much so that you cannot resist it. The images are unrealistic, promising to take you to a different world altogether. In fig 4, for instance, it says 'Tastes good. Feels good.' The ads show the woman consumed by the taste of the dominos pizza. KFC's byline says 'its finger licking good' (Link 6). McDonald's says 'I am loving it'. The continuous tense suggesting that you will never get tired of it and that every time you have it, it will entice you all the more. It plays on the 'newness' when in fact it's almost always the same. Fast Food like other products in the culture industry creates an illusion of choice. Expressions like 'I am loving it', or 'Have it your way' creates a semblance of free choice when in fact everything is predetermined.

Eating food that looks good or make you look good before others makes these fast food joints, especially in developing countries like India, a form of cultural capital. Fast food joints in India often have a relaxed, fun loving, leisurely environment where people belonging to a certain social position gather or spent time. To have a snack from KFC or Mcdonald's is an instance of objectified cultural capital as it allows you entry into a certain social group- urban, fun, entertainment, pleasant, young, and good. Through the process of interpellation youngsters identify it with 'being cool' and urban. Along with consumption there is also assimilation of the certain kind of identity that comes with it. Fast food joints thus come with a promise of offering all the fore stated luxuries but in the process obfuscate questions like its impact on health, or the production process itself.



AUDIO/ VISUAL QUADRANT

Figure 1





Figure 2

A Gateway to all Post Graduate Courses

**STOP STARING AT ME
LIKE I'M SOME
PIECE OF MEAT.**



You can look but you can't touch. Ok. You can touch. But can you handle me? Check out my dimensions. Two all-beef patties and juicy all over. **ARE YOU MAC ENOUGH?**

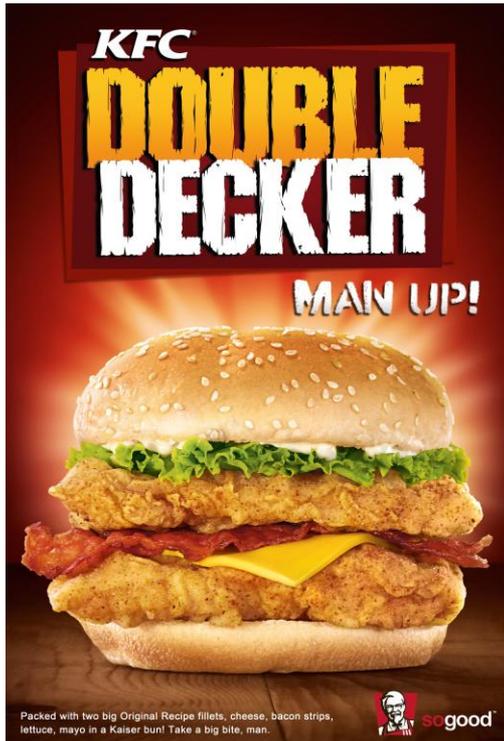


i'm lovin' it

A Gateway to all Post Graduate Courses

Figure3

[a]



[b]



Figure 4



Figure 5



Figure 6

A promotional banner for KFC's ΔΩPEAN (Greece) offers. The background is a vibrant red. At the top left, it says "HOME / CONTACT". In the center, a large white bucket of "NEW FRIED OFFERS" is the focal point, with the slogan "It's Finger Licking Good!" and "NEW JUICY" written on it. To the left is the "TWISTER BOX MEAL" for "only €7.95", featuring a Twister sandwich, fries, and 3 hot wings. To the right is the "FULLY LOADED MEAL" also for "only €7.95", featuring a sandwich, fries, and Kommati (fried chicken). The KFC logo and Colonel Sanders' head are visible in the top right. At the bottom, there's a "100% QUALITY GUARANTEED" seal, a "NEW YEAR" badge, and a "FUTURE OFFERS? CLICK TO BE UPDATED" button. The bottom of the banner lists two locations: "ΛΕΥΚΟΣΙΑ - ΛΕΜΕΙΟΣ" and "ΛΑΡΝΑΚΑ - ΦΟΙΝΙΚΟΥΔΕΣ" with the phone number "77 77 7 532".

Audio-Visual Links

1. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5_4O3jzW8L0
2. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jmNrvlQ73pU>
3. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t4p3q_a1bIk
4. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YtfruwTOPlg>
5. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M8rmKldVU1c>

6. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fY4x9wMl8E0>

7. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=prp3m-jC9-E>

Glossary

- 1. Dialectical:** A method of reasoning whereby opposing views or ideas are reconciled with each other in order to arrive at the truth. The original idea is called the *thesis*; the contradictory idea is described as *antithesis* and the reconciliation of the two is *synthesis*.
- 2. Mode of Production:** It refers to the way in which the production is organized in a social structure and is a combination of both the means of production (machines, raw materials, labour etc.) and the relations of production (the relations among people and their relation to the means of production)
- 3. Use Value and Exchange Value:** Use value of an object refers to purpose it serves for the buyer. A commodity in the market along with use value also has exchange value, i.e. the value it attains in relation to other commodities in the market, mostly defined in terms of a third factor, money.
- 4. Vulgar Marxism:** A derogatory expression used to describe the rigid and reductive nature of traditional Marxism that explained superstructure as solely determined by the base. Marxism under the Stalinist regime came to be described as 'vulgar'.
- 5. Late Capitalism:** A term introduced by Ernest Mandel and later adopted by Frederic Jameson, it refers to the form of capitalism after the Second World War, characterized by multinational corporates, culture industry, processes of globalization and free market. It follows the monopoly capitalism that dominated the first half of the 20th c.

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11. Tallack, Douglas. *Critical Theory: A Reader*. New York: Routledge. 2013. Print.