

# **Propaganda and/or Ideology in Critical Discourse Studies**

**Historical, epistemological and ontological tensions  
and challenges for thinking politics and the political**

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# Propaganda and/or Ideology in Critical Discourse Studies

## Historical, epistemological and ontological tensions and challenges for thinking politics and the political

Jan Zienkowski

This paper asks whether and how the concept of propaganda can be understood and enriched for discourse studies (Oddo, 2018). The concept of propaganda has been seminal to media and communication studies and is regaining popularity in an age of social media where notions of ‘activism’ and ‘propaganda’ get problematized all over again (Benkler et al., 2018; Herman, 2000; Jowett & O’Donnell, 2015; Pedro-Carañana, Broudy, & Klaehn 2018). Traditionally, discourse scholars have preferred theories of ideology, hegemony and power over theories of ‘propaganda’ (Angermuller, Maingueneau, & Wodak, 2014; Wodak, 2013). In this paper I provide some historical, ideological, epistemological and ontological explanations for this situation. If the notion of propaganda is to be of added value to critical discourse studies, it has to be (re)conceptualized and (re)articulated with(in) existing discourse theories. Many discourse scholars have gone through great lengths to problematize intentional modes of communication and actor-centered approaches to meaning. If ‘propaganda’ is to make sense in CDS, its relation to discourse, reflexivity, ideology and/or hegemony therefore needs to be considered carefully. I will clarify this point by articulating the notion of propaganda with(in) Essex style discourse theory (Glynos and Howarth, 2007; Torfing, 1999). I argue for a notion of propaganda that refers to democratic and anti-democratic forms of discursive practice that aim to introduce, reproduce or change the articulatory practice(s) and discourse(s) of social groups or networks with some degree of reflexivity. I thus explore the challenges that ‘propaganda’ poses for thinking politics and the political in discourse studies.

*Keywords:* propaganda studies, ideology, hegemony, critical discourse studies, discourse theory, reflexivity, CDA

### Introduction: Looking for propaganda in Critical Discourse Studies

In recent years there seems to be a renewed interest in practices and concepts of propaganda in academia and in society at large, in response to anxieties resulting from new forms of large-scale manipulation by means of social media, big data and algorithms.

Propaganda practices have always evolved as propagandists of various kinds, orientations and professions have adapted themselves to changing societal and technological circumstances. This may explain why the term ‘propaganda’ has never completely disappeared, even if its popularity as a vernacular and academic term knows its ups and downs.

In a thorough historical analysis of over a century of debates and practices related to propaganda in the United States, J. Michael Sproule shows how the term disappeared and re-appeared in American debates among academics, muckraking journalists, left-wing and right-wing activists and politicians, as well as among people active in professions such as ‘public relations’, ‘advertising’, ‘political marketing’, ‘public diplomacy’ (Sproule, 1997). Sproule’s *Propaganda and democracy* is an exceptional historical record that takes us from the period before the second world war to the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

At the end of his book, Sproule points out that much American anti-propaganda literature – both in its progressive and conservative forms, remains rather atheoretical. While there was a revived academic and popular interest in questions of propaganda in response to the Vietnam War and the Watergate scandal in the US, the American line of progressive and conservative propaganda critique came to be challenged by neo-Marxist and postmodern analyses of culture, class, ideology and power in the eighties and nineties (Sproule, 1997, p. 267–268):

Just as vocabularies of class-oriented criticism could be found during the 1920s and 1930s alongside the dominant progressive parlance, so too did radical theoretical and practical movements grow up in the post-Watergate period to challenge the muckraker's assumption that overcoming specific propagandists and particular propagandas was key to democracy in a mass-mediated society. (Sproule, 1997, p. 267)

Even the propaganda model of Herman and Chomsky outlined in their *Manufacturing consent*, a critical analysis of the way intellectuals and media companies co-opted by power elites filter information in the interest of said elites, was very much grounded in muckraking-style analyses of the way American interventions abroad were covered in national media and in a critical political-economic analysis of the media system (Herman, 2000; Sproule, 1997, pp. 265–266). It is much less a theoretical reflection on the category of propaganda and its relationship to concepts of ideology, hegemony, subjectivity and discourse.

In itself, this lack of theoretical reflection in much propaganda literature is not necessarily problematic, if the goal is to uncover and problematize specific media practices and manipulations. Things become more problematic if we want to understand concepts and practices of propaganda from a discourse analytical vantage point, asking questions about interpretation, intentionality and ideology in mass communication. This brings us to an important observation.

If the concept of propaganda has had its ups and downs in the social sciences, it is virtually absent from discourse analytical literature developed since the nineties. With some noticeable exceptions, discourse analysts and theorists have shown a remarkable disinterest in the notion of propaganda, even if they often analyze propaganda material. Even when preparing this conference about *Discourse and Communication as Propaganda\**, several colleagues, well versed in critical discourse studies, wondered why they should turn to this seemingly outmoded term, if we have theoretically sophisticated concepts of ideology, hegemony and discourse available to us.

In this paper, I argue that a notion of propaganda, re-interpreted along discourse theoretical lines, may help us to

understand the ways in which ideological and hegemonic struggles are being waged with varying degrees of reflexivity. I argue that if 'propaganda' is to make sense in critical discourse studies, its relation to established notions of discourse, reflexivity, ideology and/or hegemony needs to be (re-)considered carefully. I will clarify this point by articulating the notion of propaganda with(in) Essex style discourse theory, a discourse theoretical approach with a post-Marxist and post-Structuralist account of ideology and hegemony.

Inspired by poststructuralist discourse theory, I argue for a notion of propaganda that comprises democratic *and* anti-democratic forms of discursive practice that introduce, reproduce or change the articulatory practice(s) and discourse(s) of social groups or networks with some degree of reflexivity. I will start with a brief introduction into some common understandings of propaganda. I will then move on to a tentative exploration of possible historical, ideological, epistemological and ontological explanations for the relative absence of 'propaganda' in critical discourse studies. After a brief discussion of two noticeable exceptions to this general rule, I will sketch the outlines of my own discourse theoretical take on the notion of propaganda and its relationship to terms such as ideology and hegemony.

## Propaganda or what's in a name

What do we talk about when we talk about propaganda? Edward Bernays, the 'publicist' who is said to have coined the term 'public relations' as a euphemism for 'propaganda', claimed that "the advocacy of what we believe in is education" and that "the advocacy of what we don't believe in is propaganda" (Bernays 1928 cited in Sproule, 1997, p. 57). Bernays' democratic relativism still resonates today, in the many debates between critics and proponents of conspiracy theories, 'alternative facts' and 'science' in an environment marked by filter bubbles and digitally amplified polarization processes and controversies about 'fake news' and 'liberal bias'. In this context, accusations of 'propaganda' fly back and forth.

Many introductions to propaganda acknowledge the fact that the term has acquired decidedly negative connotations over time, as it came to be associated with totalitarian regimes, war efforts, advertising and private interests (Wanless & Berk, 2020, p. 87). Traditionally, before the advent of the internet and social media, the communication process involved in propaganda was often conceptualised as a top-down process controlled by government and/or corporate interests. Propaganda is often understood as "the use of persuasive information to manipulate a target audience into a behaviour desired by the propagand-

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dist” (Wanless & Berk, 2020, p. 86). Some classic definitions of propaganda may be in order:

a consistent, enduring effort to create or shape events to influence the relations of a public to an enterprise, idea or group (Edward Bernays 1923: 25)

The strategy of propaganda, (...), can readily be described in the language of stimulus-response. (...), the prop-agandist (is) concerned with the multiplication of those stimuli which are best calculated to evoke the desired responses, and with the nullification of those stimuli which are likely to instigate the undesired responses (Lasswell, 1927, 630–631)

In contrast to the progressive propaganda critics of their time, Bernays, Lippman and Lasswell came to believe in the *necessity in propaganda*, sharing a similar stimulus-response model of communication grounded in psychoanalytic and behaviorist views of the human psyche and behavior. To them the problem does not lie with ‘propaganda’ itself, but rather with the ends to which it is put:

the conscious and intelligent manipulation of the organized habits and opinions of the masses is indispensable for democratic society (Bernays cited in Lewis 1998, p. 167)

The new anti-dote to willfulness is propaganda. If the mass will be free of chains of iron, it must accept its chains of silver. If it will not love, honor and obey, it must not expect to escape seduction. (Lasswell cited in Lewis 1996, p. 175)

Almost a century after Lippmann, Bernays, and Lasswell, many *critics* of propaganda espouse surprisingly similar definitions. For instance, Jowett and O’Donnell, authors of *Propaganda and persuasion*, one of the most popular contemporary academic anti-propaganda textbooks, currently in its 7<sup>th</sup> edition, define propaganda as follows:

Propaganda is the deliberate, systematic attempt to shape perceptions, manipulate cognitions, and direct behavior to achieve a response that furthers the desired intent of the propagandist. (Jowett & O’Donnell, 2015, p. 3)

The above definition comes extremely close to Lasswell who similarly understood propaganda as a linear, directed and systematic effort to trigger desired responses. However, Jowett and O’Donnell prefer to reserve the term propaganda for *misleading* and *manipulative* forms of communication. They distinguish between propaganda and persuasion. In contrast to propaganda, persuasion would be an interactional, not a top-down process, whereby audience members voluntarily change their perceptions, cognitions and behavior. Only when forms of deception are involved, when audience members are somehow misled, Jowett and O’Donnell label communication processes ‘propaganda’ (Jowett & O’Donnell, 2015, p. 44). They point out that propaganda can take many forms, including concealment of purpose, concealment of identity of the sender, selective distribution of communication through control of information flows (Jowett & O’Donnell, 2015, pp. 50–51).

Other authors with a similar normative concept of propaganda point out that in the digital age, other forms of manipulation have become at least as important. In itself this is unsurprising, as propaganda techniques have always been adapted to changing information techniques and environments, irrespective of whether one relies on a normative or relativist understanding of ‘propaganda’. Wanless and Berk write that in the age of digital and social media, the “static format of ‘sender-receiver’ communications is changing”. The so-called democratization of information implies an “increased ability of average users to produce, alter, disseminate and amplify the spread of persuasive messaging”. In turn, this has “blurred the previously apparent division between propagandist (sender) and target audience (receiver) (Wanless & Berk, 2020, p. 87). But even if the static sender-receive model is changing, Wanless and Berk stay close to the model of Jowett and O’Donnell. In the end, they merely add we are now witnessing an intensification of ‘participatory propaganda’ online, a form of propaganda that can be defined as follows:

The deliberate, and systematic attempt to shape perceptions, manipulate cognitions and direct behaviour of a target audience while seeking to co-opt its members to actively engage in the spread of persuasive communications, to achieve a response that furthers the intent of the propagandist. (Wanless & Berk, 2020, p. 92)

They point out that “the combined application of various ICT’s and behavioural analysis to segment, obfuscate and amplify persuasive messaging will make it extremely difficult for an average user to recognize propagandistic messaging or factual information and make informed decision based on it”. Moreover, “such pollution of the information environment will have important consequences for political behaviour of Western electorates and may lead to increasing polarization of societies due to propagation of narrow-interest or antagonistic messaging by individuals consuming content in echo-chambers (Wanless & Berk, 2020, p. 92).

It becomes increasingly clear that the goals of propagandists are not, and may never have been, restricted to mere persuasion and behavioral change. This point is made most convincingly in a recent publication of the journalist and former TV-maker Peter Pomerantsev.

The author of *Nothing is true and everything is possible* (Pomerantsev, 2014), writes in *This is not propaganda: adventures in the War against Reality* (Pomerantsev, 2019) that propaganda now operates online as a “censorship through noise”. Information abundance, not scarcity, has become a key weapon of disinformation (Pomerantsev, 2019, p. 44): “it is not the case that one online account changes someone’s mind; it’s that *en masse* they create an *ersatz normality*” (Pomerantsev, 2019, p. 44). Moreover:

Today bots, trolls, and cyborgs could create the simulation of a climate of opinion, of support or hate, which was more insidious, more all-enveloping than the old broadcast media. And this simulation would then be-

come reinforced as people modified their behaviour to fall in line with what they thought was reality. In their analysis of the role of bots, researchers at the University of Oxford called this process ‘manufacturing consensus’. (Pomerantsev, 2019, p. 81)

By massively producing and distributing disinformation, combining, alternative narratives, pseudo-realities, duplicitous rhetoric and particles of truth, human, non-human and hybrid actors such as trolls, bots, sock-puppets, cyborgs, algorithms and AI’s, systematically create noise, confusion and doubt, for purposes as varied as division, unification, legitimization and de-legitimation. Distrust in targeted actors, groups and institutions, division, doubt, and mere acquiescence are at least as important goals for contemporary propagandists as persuasion, behavioural change or censorship (O’Shaughnessy, z.d., pp. 58–64).

We have come a far way, not only from the classic, democratic relativist definitions of propaganda offered by the likes of Lippmann, Bernays and Laswell, but also from the way propaganda was conceptualized by authors such as Chomsky and Hermann who consider propaganda in terms of institutional filters that permit a top-down engineering of consent in the interest of established elites in a capitalist society (Robinson, 2018, pp. 55–59).

There is considerable proof that propaganda is picking up interest as a topic of discussion and research among communication and media scholars, among students of the digital world and anyone concerned with contemporary forms of influence and persuasion. At the same time, scholars of discourse and propaganda have largely ignored each other. There is almost no mentioning of the term ‘propaganda’ in the field of Critical Discourse Studies, but likewise, students of propaganda hardly make use of insights developed in the fields of discourse analysis and theory. I will now suggest some possible reasons for this situation.

### **Why there is (almost) no propaganda in Critical Discourse Studies (and no discourse analysis in propaganda studies either)**

In order to find out why there is almost no propaganda in discourse studies – and no discourse analysis in propaganda studies either – it is useful to start with two observations.

1. Most propaganda studies do not engage with theoretically sophisticated notions of ideology, hegemony and discourse. They tend to avoid constructivist, neo-Marxist and poststructuralist frameworks for thinking about reality, truth, manipulation, interests, discourse and power. Even though the epistemological and ontological positions of propaganda scholars are often left implicit, most of them seem to work on the basis of positivist and ‘realist’ assumptions.
2. Most authors working within the transdisciplinary field of critical discourse studies do not engage with

the concept of propaganda at all. Even if they frequently focus on data and communication processes that perform propaganda functions, they tend to frame their analyses in terms of ideology and hegemony instead, proceeding on the basis of constructivist, critical realist or poststructuralist assumptions.

Discourse scholars and students of propaganda tend to move in parallel universes in which different paradigms dominate. Even though one could argue that one should not muddy the waters by bringing discourse theory into propaganda studies and vice versa, I believe a confrontation of both approaches to mass communication could expose some interesting blind spots in both research traditions.

Discourse studies developed at least in part in response to naïve container concepts of meaning and transmission models of communication. This goes especially for critical discourse studies that draw on neo-Marxist, post-Marxist, post-structuralist or post-foundational concepts of ideology and hegemony. From such CDS perspectives, classic propaganda studies not only come across as naïve or simplistic in their intentional conception of meaning and in their linear notion of influence, they also seem to omit the way ideologies can develop organically, and how discursive possibilities are historically and structurally overdetermined. Post-Marxist and postmodern concepts of ideology and hegemony pose radical challenges to container and transmission concepts of information, communication and meaning prevalent in many approaches to propaganda.

Propaganda studies also pose challenges for discourse scholars. The CDS tendency to think about ideology and/or hegemony as a Gramscian common sense that allows us to leave the political nature of our reality in the background, as a kind of *ersatz normality* of which we are mostly unaware, makes it difficult to analyze the communication practices of highly reflexive social actors. A great deal of ideological discourse that has become hegemonic in our day and age, was at some point developed and distributed by actors with relatively high degrees of awareness of what they were doing.

The highly reflexive discursive practices of propagandists, both in the past and today, can destabilize the CDS notion of meaning, as something that can only come about in open-ended but structured processes of enunciation and articulation that usually transcend conscious thought and action. From a CDS perspective meaning cannot originate or be determined by any single propagandist or interlocutor. And even if this may be true, it is equally true that societal discourses are also shaped by actors who are at least to some degree aware of what they are doing when they attempt to re-shape the discursive practices and communication environments that constitute our societies.

If propaganda studies fail to move beyond container notions of meaning and transmission models of communication, critical discourse studies rarely discuss the way propagandists of various professions reflexively attempt to



install, challenge or re-shape existing ideological patterns and hegemonies. I believe a *rapprochement* between propaganda and discourse studies is possible, on the condition that propaganda scholars will take a step back from naïve container notions of meaning and transmission models of communication on the one hand, and on condition that critical discourse scholars start to take the reflexive properties and capacities of social actors and discourses more seriously.

Thus far the mutual disinterest between both groups of scholars has almost been complete. In order to deal with the abovementioned tensions, most propaganda-oriented authors have opted not to engage with concepts of ideology and hegemony at all, to the extent that they are familiar with such notions in the first place. Critical discourse scholars have returned the favor by dismissing propaganda as an irrelevant object of inquiry already covered by their own concepts and methods. In order to understand this situation of mutual lack of interest, it is useful to take a look at two of the rare examples of CDS authors who *did* make use of the category of ‘propaganda’.

## Propaganda in CDS – two rare exceptions in CDA and Discourse Theory

In the field of *Critical Discourse Analysis* (CDA) we can refer to the work of John Oddo, author of *The Discourse of Propaganda* (Oddo, 2018). Oddo explicitly problematizes the classic sender-receiver model of communication and the issue of intentionality in classic approaches to propaganda. Instead, he proposes to see propaganda as “a distributed activity – a dialogical process” (Oddo, 2018, p. 19) that is “never solely the work of a centralized actor disseminating content in every direction” (Oddo, 2018, p. 20). He points out that “propaganda only truly succeeds if it changes hands; it must travel from one source and one context to another, shifting its meanings along the way”. For this reason, he prefers “terms such as ‘recontextualization’ and ‘mass-recontextualization’ which better capture how propaganda is borrowed, reused and recycled” (Oddo, 2018, p. 20). He argues that successful propaganda is marked by high degrees of intertextuality.

Oddo is a rare example of a critical discourse analyst who actively reflects on and uses the term ‘propaganda’. At the same time, like many classic and new propaganda scholars, he drops almost all references to notions of ideology and hegemony. For Oddo, and for many propaganda scholars, propaganda is about manipulation. He develops a normative interpretation of the term ‘propaganda’: “I don’t think we can, or should, purge the word of its negative associations” (Oddo, 2018, p. 26). He continues as follows:

With this in mind, I extend my definition of ‘propaganda’ to include not just discourse that succeeds in inducing mass-recontextualization but discourse that also manipulates people. Before going further, I should

make several points. First, it is useful to imagine manipulative discourse on a spectrum. On the one end is open, democratic dialogue that welcomes different perspectives and champions the will to truth. On the other hand is autocratic monologue that conceals opposing points of view (or declares them worthless), practices deceit and censorship and respects only the will to power. Across the middle is everything from a slight overstatement to the self-interested framing of a controversy or misleading arguments that nudge audiences towards prechosen conclusions. Insofar as widely circulated discourse tends towards egregious manipulation, we can confidently call it propaganda, but there are borderline cases.

Oddo goes as far as to claim that the word propaganda should not even be used for democratically acceptable communication: “rather than calling it propaganda, which has such negative connotations, I prefer Stanley’s other term for such discourse, ‘civic rhetoric’ (Oddo, 2018, p. 33).

While this distinction between propaganda and ‘civic rhetoric’ can be defended on normative ideological grounds, this distinction can only make sense because Oddo does not integrate any explicit notion of ideology or hegemony – let alone hegemonic strategy – into his framework. It almost seems as if merely using the concept of ‘propaganda’, even a discourse analytical concept of propaganda, goes at the expense of any developed notion of ideology or hegemony.

In the field of poststructuralist discourse theory, Dimitar Vatsov is a rare example of an author that *does* take the notion of propaganda seriously without abandoning his Essex-inspired assumptions (Vatsov, 2018b, 2018a). In contrast to many other discourse theorists he believes that “the old, and as if outdated today, term ‘propaganda’ is appropriate today”. While siding with Ellul’s take on propaganda as “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”, he rejects Ellul’s “mentalistic vocabulary of ‘intentions’ and ‘interpretations’ (Vatsov, 2018b, pp. 75–76). Instead, he adopts and adapts Laclau’s take on discourse and populism to make sense of ‘propaganda’.

The focus of Vatsov lies on the global “emergence of a common populist-propaganda discursive front – that is, the emergence of a specific language whose resources are utilized by different political actors (from Vladimir Putin, Jaroslaw Kaczynski, Victor Orban, Marine le Pen, Recep Tayyip Erdogan and the Brexiteers to Donald Trump), but also by different locally institutionalized or entirely non-institutional everyday speakers”. He proposes the new term ‘populist-propaganda discursive front’ in order to articulate a notion of propaganda as an articulatory practice that creates a “populism from above” via “strategically reinforced bullshitting” that blurs the meanings of statements that makes signifiers and statements utterly exchangeable and arbitrary.

Vatsov argues that successful propaganda creates a discursive horizon where “it is always possible to say one thing instead of another, without any requirement for strict coherence”, “as if the two are one and the same thing in a particular respect, that is, as if the one ‘stands for’ (represents) the other” (Vatsov, 2018b, p. 81). It is a horizon in which Lacanian empty signifiers multiply. All sorts of signifiers come to stand in for each other, as can be exemplified with reference to the fact that in contemporary conspiracy controversies, it hardly matters if the puppeteers are “reptilians, the Freemasons, the Jews, Soros, the US, NATO, Putin, or somebody else. It could be any or all of them” (Vatsov, 2018b, p. 81).

To put it in Pomerantsev’s words, this type of propaganda creates the impression that “nothing is true and everything’s possible” (Pomerantsev, 2014). For Vatsov, ideology functions as a performative language game where the meanings of signifiers are “arbitrarily layered upon one another, thereby creating the illusion of coherence, but above all an illusion of totality of the final message” (Vatsov, 2018b, p. 85).

### **A proposal for a discourse theoretical approach to Propaganda**

Even though I do not fully agree that Vatsov’s take on propaganda covers all possible forms of propaganda, his overall attempt to articulate a discourse theoretical notion of propaganda, is the most impressive effort I have found to date. Contrary to Vatsov’s proposal, my own discourse theoretical notion of propaganda is not reserved exclusively for elite attempts to usurp the popular or populist will. Instead, I would like to take on board a broader, less normative, notion of propaganda that can encompass reflexive attempts to discursively (dis-)articulate democratic *and* anti-democratic ideologies and hegemonic projects.

Like Jonas Staal, I consider propaganda to be a “performance of power”, as something that has to be thought in the plural, as propagandas. Staal argues that “propaganda is aimed not only at communicating a message, but at constructing reality itself”. He argues that successful propaganda comes to operate at a microscale, as it becomes an integral part of our daily practices and conversations. Practiced at a macrolevel, it may enable large-scale transformations, “from toppling governments to establishing mass surveillance and instigating global warfare”. Staal distinguishes between elite and popular propaganda but argues that both are involved in the propaganda art of “world-making” (Staal, 2019, pp. 1–9). At the same time, he argues that every form of propaganda comes with its own form of power.

Staal writes about “conflicting propaganda’s” or ‘propaganda struggle’ (Staal, 2019, p. 45). He makes his point as follows:

... how might we interpret the efforts of the manifold popular mass movements gaining momentum across the world, many of which propose alternative or competing state ideas, which reject the idea of fighting the fictional enemies in the War on Terror and instead focus on political alternatives to combat real existential threats (from economic inequality to racism, global warfare, and impeding ecological disaster)? Do they not also represent a form of power, or at the very least aim to gain power to make their alternatives a reality? Should we then understand their efforts as a form of counter-propaganda, or do they aim for a world without propaganda altogether? (Staal, 2019, pp. 45–46)

In my proposal for a discourse theoretical concept of propaganda, I retain Staal’s refusal to reserve the term ‘propaganda’ for the machinations that benefit elites. At the same time, I am wary of his implicit suggestion that popular propaganda is necessarily a democratic force that demands “democratization as a means to re-distribute power” (Staal, 2019, p. 141), especially in a context where the distinction between popular and elite forms of ‘populism’ and ‘propaganda’ becomes increasingly blurred. Moreover, it should be noted that Staal’s articulation of the term ‘propaganda’ with a Foucaultian notion of ‘power’ leads him to wholly ignore the concepts of ‘ideology’ and ‘hegemony’. As was the case with Oddo, Staal pays the price of not writing about ‘ideology’ or ‘hegemony’, for his use of the term ‘propaganda’.

This price does not need to be paid though. Inspired by poststructuralist discourse theory, I argue for the following notion of propaganda:

The term propaganda refers to those multimodal language games where social groups, organizations and networks perform discursive practices that introduce, reproduce, change and/or disarticulate articulatory practice(s) and discourses with varying degrees of reflexivity.

This non-normative definition of propaganda, grounded in a concept of discourse as a practice of articulation, does not force us to drop the notions of ideology and hegemony. We can retain the idea that discursive propaganda practices can be informed by or aim to reinforce particular ideologies, in the context of struggles for hegemony. Propagandas then remain forms of power, but forms of power that are not necessarily democratic or undemocratic. Neither is propaganda a communication process requiring that all actors involved have to be aware of it to the same degree. The proposed definition allows for the abovementioned *rapprochement* between propaganda and discourse studies, as it does not involve container concepts of meaning, transmission models of communication, and requires us to take the reflexive properties and capacities of social actors seriously, while avoiding the traps of both individualism and structuralism.



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