

Review of "the propaganda of the saints in the middle ages."

[History](#), [Middle Ages](#)



The " Propoganda of Saints in the Middle Ages" article, written by Esther Cohen, goes over many of the methods the Catholic Church employed to gain power over the people in Europe. Cohen goes through the middle ages by describing how the Catholic Church was spreading its faith; mainly through the use of propaganda. An Age of Faith took place between the fall of the Roman Empire and the discovery of America. Cohen describes how the in the early years of the church, martyred Christians rapidly assumed a high position in the churches hierarchy of faith.

These saints where given to have special powers and gradually became central to the Catholic Church; as opposed to God. Cohen describes a clear attempt from the Church to portray a consistent propoganda campaign aimed at raising the level of sainthood in the public eye. This was not difficult to do as the church had three things with it that gave it absolute power. First thing the church had, was that its message it brought with it that could not be questioned in any way. The information they brought with them could not be voluntarily accepted or rejected, and the church had an obligation to spread that message.

Secondly, the churches message was absolute and its authority was unquestionable. The church had no competition in that there was no one who could match the propoganda they brought. Lastly, the church had a centrally organized, universal message, which meant that it could be easily tailored for the masses. Pilgrimages became common; this cemented the church even further as they build grand churches filled with " holy relics" of the

saints. These relics were given to have special powers when yielded by the saints of the church.

Many of the pilgrims believed this message and probably never questioned it. Many of them were filled with awe when they saw the grand magnificence of the church and the stained glass windows within them (peasants would never see such sights if it hadn't been for the church). The fact is that all of the church's teachings came from a central point, making the message more or less universal and uniform. The central church was able to put together its message, and then pass it along to other churches that administered it to the masses. The message was hammered in generation to generation.

The Catholic Church was a big influence in the lives of people in Europe. This essay by Cohen illustrates just how big an influence it actually was. From the very beginning, it brought a centralized message which was labelled indisputable. The reason it was followed was that since no one could actually challenge their message; they destroyed everything in their way to ensure it. Cohen really describes the transgression well as he describes it progress thru the ages and develop into what amounts to an international conglomerate. They opened up many different franchises, preaching the same message.

Of course the message had its deviations; much of the church's beliefs stemmed from the local saints. As saints were given more and more power; this was another good way of getting the locals to support their cause. It is remarkable at the amount of effective propaganda that came from the church in the earlier period of history; as there is not too much in the way of

intelligent, centralized, effective messages before that time period. The church truly did stand the test of time even until today. It has and had tremendous effects over people's lives as they try to come to terms with the world around them.

The reason it's so important is that even though God's message has always been around over time, no one was more able to use it to their advantage other than the Catholic Church. The message became centralized and faith was transferred from God to local Saints, which also took away from any truth that the church might have brought with it. Their reason for doing it may be obvious, in that they ended up controlling massive amounts of territory and even holding sway over Kings and Nobles; the ultimate aphrodisiac happens to be power.

The church had no boundaries so it could cross vast amounts of areas relatively untouched. Cohen's article really is a shocking look at some of the practises of the Clergy creating magnificent churches and housing "Holy Relics" in them to prove their point. This is the precursor to what we knew as propaganda as it seems the Catholic Church must have had people working for them who knew how to get the masses attention. Their organization stood the test of time; and possibly did everything they possibly could to maintain it.

Towards the end of the Church's iron grip over Europe, the organization was so engrained in the people's hearts and minds that it, even hundreds of years later, still holds tremendous sway over what kinds of decisions people

make in their lives. Even if there are not as many people who follow the Catholic Church as much as they would have done in the past, the Pope is regarded as an important symbol for peace the world over (even though the words peaceful and the Roman Catholic Church can hardly be used in the same sentence).

It appears that the Church values its image very highly, and tend to move with the times according to the general feeling what it would consider its subjects. In the past, the church would not hesitate to use force to establish themselves in a certain area; but in this politically charged world, they have given themselves more of a cleaner image by not physically attacking their opposition. It is shocking to read about how they Church went as far as to make fake relics filled with tears, etc.

Going to the lengths they went to, it is clear how they could have held so much power. The Catholic Church was known to be ruthless in their all encompassing network. They went to great lengths to preserve this power. This is evident from the very beginning of the church as its entire history is drenched with warfare and power grabbing. One of the tools church had at its disposal was the power of knowledge, which it did its best to hoard. Knowledge is power, and keeping the masses ignorant helped it keep its power structure.

The Catholic Church confiscated or destroyed everything that it considered against the church. This led to many works that may have criticised the power structure labelled as heresy; resulting in the torture and death of the

writer or anyone associated with it. The article delves into some important details about the manipulation of materials to grab people's attention. The strategies and tactics the church used were remarkable in that they built magnificent cathedrals just so they could bring in pilgrims to show them holy relics, which they were told had special powers.

Having the knowledge and expertise to build such churches at such a time shows a very large concerted effort to push an agenda forward. The Catholic Church has truly stood the test of time in many ways; they were able to successfully push their message across and labelled it undisputable, at the same time making an effort to expand and keep the people eating from their hands. Even today, there are very few in politics who would dare cross the line to admonish the church, as it would mean suicide in the world of politicians.

They would rather have the church as an ally, which does tend to give them a better image in the public's view. In the past and even now, top elected officials have to appear to be faithful, or otherwise the mentality of the voting public would hardly choose them. In "Critical Theory and TechnoCulture: Habermas and Baudrillard," Karl Marx's theories are reviewed by two big contributors to communication theory: Jurgen Habermas and Jean Baudrillard. Mark Poster writes about how these two theorists dove into the areas where Marx was ambiguous and tried to explain the situation in more detail.

Although they weren't completely successful in their quest to explain the behaviour of mankind, Habermas and Baudrillard did make a big leap forward in their respective contributions. One of the problems with Karl Marx's theories is that he tends to overlook or downplay the parts that are uncertain. Habermas and Baudrillard talked about how Marx failed to acknowledge basic communication theory, and the fact that he ignored technology as one of the biggest drivers of human civilization. Marx's only aim seemed to be was the wage labourer to free himself from the greedy capitalist.

Mark Poster attempts to ask about the theories of Karl Marx is that: did Marx give enough reasoning behind the relationships between technology and culture, labour and symbolism in work, and whether he really understood human consciousness? His argument is that Marx's vision was too easy, and that he did not pay attention anything that was too complicated to explain or did not fit as part of his predictions. Poster understands that Marx knew his history, and was very knowledgeable about his topics, but there were still gaps in his writings that needed further explanation: The critique of political economy explores every turn of the capitalist structure; the critique of cultural politics is general, vague, and undeveloped. "[1] Poster explains that when Marx was doing his analysis, he did not theorize enough about the nature of social communication and how technology becomes signified objects. Technology is peculiar as it seems to have a two pronged approach; one where it levels the playing field for general society, or one where it extends the gap between the haves and have not's.

Language is termed as one of the central tools of social interaction and that needed more explanation before the theory could be complete. Without this missing piece, Marx was way off in his predictions of what would happen to capitalism and the role of workers. The spread of bureaucracy also solidified the way language was used. Technology and the change it brought also included change in language structure. The essay goes on to explain the extensions that Jurgen Habermas and Jean Baudrillard make to the critical theory. One of Habermas's arguments is that Marx was unable to distinguish between emancipation and science.

Habermas came from a school of thought which was worried about the fact that the scientific movement became the reason for domination, instead of it being used as a tool for freedom. He believes that Marx had left out the communication and language aspect of individuals which is a major part of our behaviour. For Habermas, speech has an important aspect as it can be used to distort the truth and can be a means of domination. His argument is that any time a speech situation fails; it can be down to the class struggle which Marx talked about.

Of course, in practise, it is very difficult to find an ideal speech situation; making it difficult to analyse the truth. Jean Baudrillard criticizes Marxism's analysis of the mode of production as the driving force of society. Commodities become social signifiers rather than something useful. One of the problems Baudrillard sees with Marxist ideology is that he ignores culture. The problem with Marx is that he never saw the symbolic nature of

products and production. Baudrillard maintains that products become symbols whether by intention or not.

The word "hyper-reality" is used to describe the fact that products began to contain their own reality; that is, nothing becomes more than ownership of the product itself. There is much missing from Baudrillard's theories. He fails to describe what he meant by the "code," which is how he described the relationship between consumers and consumed. At some points, he failed to realize the real positive potential that the media brought with it. But what Baudrillard brought to critical theory was remarkable. The insights provided by him went beyond convention to explain these theories in more detail.

Mark Posters article brings a lot of interesting points about the missing pieces in Marx's theories. There were many missing pieces of Marx and some of them are pointed out from the writings of Baudrillard and Habermas. One feels that Marx did leave out many details of his work, because people do not necessarily think about working for the state in the way it was described. Marx did not realize the importance of technology and its place in society. But in his world, there would not be much room available for research and development.

When we put technology as a big part of human evolution, good things happen as the quality of life has improved. The idea behind everyone in society being equal sounds nice; but in practise, is rarely possible. The elements of language and technology were important to the framework of human interaction, this is one of the reasons why Marx's predictions didn't

go to plan. He did not envision the fact that politicians would use bureaucracy to further establish their control over society. This use of language was not present in earlier periods, which may be why it may have been overlooked.

New technology also changed the way language was used to further complicate the communication process. Technology also brought with it further divisions between those who have it and those who don't. New products or technology has a materialistic nature to it that is still unexplained with the critical theory of Marx. One of the reasons Marx may have failed to have predicted violent revolt from the masses is that they do not want violent rebellion. Marx failed to foresee the fact that people would try to work together by creating unions and similar institutions to protect themselves from undue distress from their work.

Marx was half right in that the powerful capitalists at the time were exploiting their workers for mostly the owner's benefit. The other half that Marx did not envision was that most people would not choose violence; given the circumstances force became the last possible option. Technology also helped the regular working class to live comfortably by at home. Habermas picks up where Marx left in the explanation of critical theory. There were many missing pieces that Marx did not talk about; some of these were about technology and communication theories.

Technology changes over time and can be very beneficial to us; failing to see its advantages and disadvantages is ignoring a big aspect of human

behaviour and actions. As technology improves, our lives improve as well and modes of production change as well. Of course the other aspect of technology is that it can be used to dominate. Marx should have explored this topic further and he would have understood the consequences better. Ignoring these ideas shows that Marx probably had his own agenda in place as he wrote his theories.

He may have deliberately left these things out in his argument to make it seem simpler than it first appeared. Maybe if he mentioned technology, it would have opened up a new world to mention and explain. The same can be said when it came to the communication aspect of Marx. Habermas also mentions how class struggle is borne out of a failure in communication. This statement has a lot of fact because it is ultimately the class we identify with as the class we understand. The aspirations and lives of those who are poor are different than those of the middle class or ultra-rich, and those 3 groups barely understand one another.

But these divisions will always exist - there will always be people who are well off and those who are not, even in an ideal communist society. Mark Poster also writes about how Habermas tries to fill in the gaps of communication theories left unexplained by Marx. Would the masses really want a violent revolution? People do not have a thirst for warfare; it is usually forced upon them by their leaders. Having endless war to bring about easier lives does not seem too economical; so they would prefer resistance by nonviolent means as it is understood that they are the drivers of the system.

Without their input, machinery could not move, so the "greedy capitalist" was somewhat marginalized by labour unions and laws. Marx failed to see this, even though the powder keg was definitely in place. Habermas's theories about the ideal speech situations are interesting. There would be very few times indeed that it would be true. It seems possibly one of the societies that come to mind that bear a place for the ideal speech would be the oral Greek tradition. A man who knows how to use speech could possibly get away with murder if he knows how to sway the audience.

Again, the ideal speech situation might not garner good things; it may present powerful people with bad intentions using it to dominate their society. Baudrillard's arguments about Marx have also shown gaps about critical theory. He feels that it can be dangerous for a society to be solely reliant on commodities for the state's benefit. Every society has some sort of culture that it brings. Marx, in Baudrillard's view, ignores culture as one of the major driving forces of society. Culture is ultimately what decides the direction society takes and the ideas it chooses to adopt.

An idea from one culture might not be acceptable in other cultures, so it becomes difficult to transmit ideas across nations. Marx does not mention these facts and pretty much ignores them. It is difficult to understand how Marx, who was well aware of history and its nuances, could ignore such an important factor. Baudrillard's analysis of products is an interesting one. It is remarkable that he could see that commodities become status symbols. This is exactly what happens to products; they become more for show than for the function they are supposed to carry.

This is evident is the advertising that is presented in the mass media. These status symbols can become part of who we are as people, and this has always been the case throughout history; whether it is gold and other precious metals and stones in the past, or Bentlys and Valentino suits today. These things cannot change under any kind of rule, so ignoring these facts means ignoring our general makeup. In missing this analysis, Marx ignores the true nature of products and production; to keep the masses quite and consumed. One of the pieces missing from Baudrillard is the proper explanation of what he meant by his " code. The reader gets a sense of what he meant by reading and analysing his work, but a good definition would go a long way in explaining just what he was talking about here. It is unclear whether he is talking about the materialistic nature of things or the guidelines by which they are advertised. It is remarkable that Baudrillard understood these facts; he would have witnessed firsthand, the world of advertising taking its current form. This new form stopped advertising things with simple functional messages, and started advertising them with relation to fantasies that play against our minds to capture our attention.

Early psychologists understood this and used their knowledge to help advertisers come up with these new messages. Mark Poster tries to explain the missing parts of Marx critical theory. The missing gaps were quite gapping and Jean Baudrillard and Jurgen Habermas exposed many of them. The essay delves into these gaps and tries to explain the missing pieces, as told by well known communication theorists. It seems that Marx, rather than a genuine interest in the freedom for man, has an agenda behind his

writings. There are so many important gaps that he just completely ignored, so this scenario seems likely to be true.

Technology and culture are important to us, without them, we can become aimless and self-destructive. Poster brought it together very well by indicating that there are many parts still to be explored, indicating the work on the complete analysis for critical theory is still incomplete. Bibliography Cohen, Esther. "The Propaganda of the Saints in the Middle Ages." *Journal of Communication*, 1981. Poster, Mark. "Critical Theory and TechnoCulture: Habermas and Baudrillard." In *The Second Media Age*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992. ----- [1] Poster, Mark "Critical Theory and Technoculture" pg. 97