Checkpoint #4 – Theory/Method Component

When studying rhetorical text it is important to note the role of ideologies in it. In a very simple explanation, ideology can be understood as the worldview of the audience or of the media source that is portrayed in the artifact (Foss, 2009). According to Sonja Foss (2009), ideology is “a pattern of beliefs that determines a group’s interpretations of some aspect (s) of the world. These beliefs reflect a group’s ‘fundamental social, economic, political or cultural interests’” (p. 209). The beliefs held by media sources affect and influence almost everything surrounding the creation and reception of the artifact. The beliefs held by the media source will be reflected in the artifact. These beliefs (ideology) are communicated to an audience through the artifact, giving the audience insight into the world of the media source.

There are numerous factors that can affect the creation of an ideology. One significant factor is culture. Although many researchers define culture in different ways, V. William Balthrop (1984) uses Geertz’s description, saying that culture “denotes an historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life” (p. 340). Culture, in essence, is ideology. It is one window through which men and women view their world. It creates beliefs and opinions regarding what ideas are true or untrue and determines the ways in which people interact with the world. According to Balthrop (1984), culture, like ideology, does not simply exist; it is developed over time until it evolves into a “great perfection” that people view as the authority regarding the world (p. 341). Culture, therefore, has an incredible affect on the worldview of people and is a significant element in the creation of ideology and of cultural artifacts.

Culture, though influential, is not the only factor that affects the creation of an ideology. In order for ideology and culture to function – or even exist – Balthrop (1984) argues that myth must be present. Myth is the essential element that creates ideology and causes the culture to become a “great perfection.” In a culture, myths are the “ultimate patterns for attributing significance to human experience, are moralistic and provide guides for action” (p. 341). A culture’s myths help people understand how to interact with the world by giving them some sort of rationale for moral or good behavior. The myth provides an explanation of the world, giving human beings a new understanding of their environment. This understanding through myth creates culture. Once culture is created, an ideology forms.

The explanation of ideology presented here may make ideology appear to be an obvious characteristic of most artifacts. Although all artifacts contain some sort of ideology, it is important to realize that ideology is almost always hidden within the artifact (Foss, 2009). The beliefs or worldview of a specific group or culture will almost never be easily seen within a cultural artifact. In order to identify an ideology, researchers must study and examine the artifact through a careful process of observation and analysis (Foss, 2009). The first step is to identify the elements of the artifact that may reveal clues about the hidden ideology. These are basic characteristics of the artifact, known as presented elements (Foss, 2009). Once the presented elements have been identified, researchers will analyze them, looking for even more clues that provide a deeper understanding of the ideology. These deeper clues are known as suggested elements (Foss, 2009). After this step, researchers will categorize the suggested elements in order to identify the particular ideology that is presented in the artifact. Through this process, the researcher draws the hidden ideology from the artifact.

For this project, I will use Sonja Foss’s method of ideological analysis to study Capcom’s video game *Okami*. In my analysis, I will look specifically for certain themes and characteristics within the game that could express a certain view of the ancient Japanese Shinto religion. Some possible themes could include the relation of humanity to nature or the relation of humanity to the deities. Possible characteristics are the portrayal of deities as animals and the use of brush-like graphics in the game. In light of the points made by V. William Balthrop, I will also seek to understand how these themes and characteristics portray the myths used in the game and what messages that portrayal communicates regarding the culture created by Japanese Shinto.

Works Cited

Foss, S.K. (2009). Chapter 7: Ideological Criticism. In *Rhetorical Criticism: Exploration and Practice, 4th ed.* (209-220). Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, Inc.

Balthrop, V.W. (1984). Culture, Myth, and Ideology as Public Argument: An Interpretation of the Ascent and Demise of “Southern Culture.” *Communication Monographs, 51*, 339- 352. Retrieved February, 25, 2012, from http://ezproxy.dom.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db =ufh&AN=9212101&site=ehost-live&scope=site