Media, Persuasion and Propaganda. *By Marshall Soules.* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015. 288 pp. ISBN 9780748644155.

Tactics of persuasion have become commonplace in a media environment shaped by promotional culture. Television shows visualizing crisis management experts, spectacular election campaigns, and partisan manoeuvring—such as *Scandal* and *House of Cards*—illuminate parallels between their fictional worlds and contemporary political reality that resonate with popular culture. Marshall Soules' *Media, Persuasion and Propaganda* is a timely contribution that offers a preliminary introduction to the key debates, concepts, and scholars theorizing strategies and techniques of influence as a continuously expanding topic of inquiry for media studies. *Media, Persuasion and Propaganda* stresses the need to situate scholarly and popular views of deception, publicity, and marketing within an interdisciplinary context in order to identify how such elements function across different media, such as orality, news media, advertising, political discourse, cinema, documentary, and performance art. Soules aims to highlight the political, cultural, and economic factors that influence how messages are constructed and circulated in public discourse.

Soules begins with a West African folklore tale featuring Eshu, a deity representing chance and disruption, who tricks two friends into an argument through an act of deception. The story of Eshu symbolizes Soules' emphasis on the significance of interpretation in communication for determining matters of truth and certainty. His reference to the folklore narrative introduces readers to his central argument that promotion, persuasion, and propaganda are cultural practices that are continuously evolving. What constitutes or defines an act of inducement, publicity, or propaganda varies according to the medium and how messages are perceived and interpreted by the public. Persuasive strategies aim to shift existing beliefs through the use of an anchoring value that resonates with audiences; persuasion transforms into propaganda when messages are constructed to deliberately mislead publics for political, economic, or cultural gain. Yet, as Soules details throughout his text, the boundaries that distinguish acts of persuasion from propaganda are highly political judgements veiled by rhetoric, which serves as the central framework structuring Soules' discussion on how convincing arguments are presented as truthful ideals. Soules positions acts of deception as "rhetorical performances involving playful, creative, and even devious communication," arguing that such enactments play a central role in shaping cultural politics (p. x). *Media, Persuasion and Propaganda* illuminates the ways in which deception, trickery, and marketing energize and simultaneously disrupt culture. By focusing on how persuasion is performed across the media landscape, Soules illuminates the ethical concerns and dilemmas that distort distinctions between promotion and propaganda.

Media, Persuasion and Propaganda is clearly designed and written to function as a course text for upper-level undergraduate seminar discussions, with Soules concluding each chapter with a set of questions and exercises for students. Soules supports

his analysis with an extensive breadth of theoretical frameworks from numerous disciplines, such as communication studies, cultural studies, political science, philosophy, psychology, economics, and marketing. He draws upon foundational scholarship on persuasion and propaganda, including philosophical theories of rhetoric, performance, and ethics; Kenneth Burke's framework of identification; and Walter Lippmann's contributions to journalism and the study of public opinion. His argument is further extended to areas not commonly addressed by media studies, such as the chapter devoted to the psychological and subliminal aspects of persuasion tactics and strategies, where he details Robert Cialdini's framework of the weapons of influence and how they are utilized to gain compliance. Soules also complements these existing frameworks by incorporating more recent literature on the core topics addressed by the text, such as Steven Heller's work on the role of branding in the visual management of totalitarian regimes. By referencing scholarship that explores the topics of persuasion, propaganda, and promotion through innovative approaches, Soules demonstrates that contemporary fascination with visual and rhetorical performances is not a recent phenomenon. The diverse selection of literature that Soules draws upon reinforces his main argument that one must situate such actions of persuasion, promotion, and propaganda within their larger historical trajectories in order to effectively understand their cultural influence.

Soules integrates numerous examples, textual readings, and case studies into his analysis to help contextualize the multiple theoretical frameworks addressed by the text. He incorporates topics relevant to current debates in public discourse, such as the role of public relations and astroturf lobbying in the management of the climate change debate, the ethical concerns digital culture poses in terms of extending markets for deception, and the pro-Israel lobby as an example to contextualize Noam Chomsky's propaganda model. Some of the examples Soules draws upon have become important case studies within media studies, such as his discussion on Abu Ghraib in the chapter concerning voyeurism, "compassion fatigue," and the visual power of images. Other case studies, such as Soules' juxtaposition of the dominance in visual culture of American billboards to Cuba's *murales*, enable intriguing discussions of how advertising as a form of persuasion both reflects and negotiates national identity and cultural values. Soules covers an impressive variety of fields in which strategies of influence and propaganda are regularly performed, including the rhetoric of political announcements and speeches, and the distinctions between film and documentary as cinematic rhetorical performances. He situates other cultural texts within their larger social, economic, historical, and cultural contexts: for instance, the parallels between contemporary dissent artists and Soviet agitprop theatre. While the breadth of topics, examples, and case studies Soules incorporates into his analysis is impressive, at times this extensive variety of material and his textual readings of particular cultural artefacts overwhelm the text and obscure his primary arguments.

Soules concludes his text by circulating his argument back to the vital role of the trickster in reviving cultural dynamics. Identifying that what epitomizes an act of persuasion or propaganda is a rather complex judgment, Soules asserts that the deception of the trickster is a fundamental process in symbolic communication that cannot be

eliminated, particularly since the trickster functions socially as a platform for negotiating ethics and principles. Soules ultimately argues that deception is an integral aspect of symbolic communication, and consequently can be employed and interpreted in numerous ways for differing reasons and intentions. *Media, Persuasion and Propaganda* is a valuable teaching resource that will help students identify and situate the complex politics embedded within persuasion as a highly dynamic cultural practice. Soules challenges his readers to recognize their potential to contribute to a more ethical media environment through creative and vibrant communication methods.

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