# REFLECTIONS ON NEOLIBERAL DISCOURSE IN THE MEDIA: AN ENTANGLEMENT IN THE SERVICE OF AUSTERITY

*Thierry GUILBERT*[*]

**ABSTRACT:** This article engages in a fresh perspective on the relationship between neoliberal discourse and the dominant media. It first examines what the media are and do — the effects they have on our behaviour — before recalling how, historically, media propaganda and vertical democracy are intertwined. Drawing on specific theoretical and historical elements, it then demonstrates how neoliberal discourse is a discourse of reaction and counterattack against social progress: it is, fundamentally, a discourse of austerity. The mobilization of Foucauldian governmentality finally allows to show how neoliberal discourse uses and adapts to the dominant media to "manufacture" public opinion acceptability of austerity programs with the ultimate goal of "legally ensuring the sustainability of austerity policies." The media are thus, in a way, "specific apparatuses" of neoliberal governmentality.

**KEYWORDS:** Propaganda. Lippmann. Governmentality. Evidence. Manufacture Of Consent

> "The effect of narration or *writing* carries with it a certain quantum of action, which can be massively multiplied in the field" (Faye, 2003, p. 67, emphasis in original).

Given that the entanglement of neoliberal discourse in mass media has been documented for decades[1], I hypothesize in this chapter that this media entanglement is not accidental but constitutive of neoliberal discourse. This entanglement is strategic: it allows neoliberal discourse to benefit from the symbolic authority of the media and to exploit its capacity to shape public behavior.

[*] Senior Lecturer Emeritus. University of Picardy Jules Verne/CURAPP-ESS (UMR CNRS 7319). https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6806-4500. th.guilbert@wanadoo.fr.

[1] Many authors have demonstrated this (even if the term *neoliberal* is not always used), to take a few examples from works that will be used below: Pierre Bourdieu, Julien Duval, Gilles Dostaler, Jerry Mander, Pauline Perrenot, Loïc Wacquant, Shoshana Zuboff to take some works used below. I will also refer to my own works and among these, implicitly, to T. Guilbert, 2007 and to T. Guilbert, 2011, translated and published by UNICAMP: T. Guilbert, 2020a.

The terms *neoliberal discourse* and *(mass* or *mainstream) media* will be defined below. It is important to clarify beforehand that this hypothesis did not stem from a pre-existing opinion. On the contrary, it arose from my reading and work on neoliberal discourse. In the late 1990s, analyzing the refraction of neoliberal discourse in mass media seemed self-evident. The link between neoliberal discourse and the media appeared to me to be additional, that is to say, both opportunistic—the former using the latter's dissemination capabilities—and adventitious—as if added on, not "naturally" part of it. It is this additional character in its adventitious component—the opportunistic aspect being undeniable, as we shall see—that I question, because it constitutes a blind spot in my analyses of this discourse. Thus, the nature of this relationship no longer seems to me to be a simple coincidence; the hypothesis I am putting forward here is therefore that the omnipresence of neoliberal discourse in the mass media is not accidental but constitutive.

This hypothesis has a dual dimension, both historical and communicational: if this ideological discourse is so evidently effective[2], it is because it has been, from its origins, a discourse of communication—with a vertical conception of communication and democracy, as we shall see—and because, for decades, it has been disseminated in and by the majority of major media outlets—and from there, into all sectors of society—to such an extent that this very entanglement seems self-evident[3]. The discursive self-evidence of neoliberal ideological discourse, which presents itself as "common sense," is thus combined with a communicational self-evidence. This is the blind spot: this omnipresence—ubiquity and entanglement—this communication strategy in and by the *mainstream media* goes unnoticed; it presents itself as natural. However, if we accept that this entanglement of neoliberal discourse in *mainstream* media is not accidental or contingent, then it seems to be the sign of a "constitutive correlation" yet to be determined.

As this hypothesis is the subject of ongoing research, I will limit myself here to supporting it, that is, to offering some points for consideration and laying down some historical and theoretical groundwork showing how neoliberal discourse shapes public opinion in and through the media. I will begin by defining the terms that comprise this hypothesis.

## Discourse and media(s)

It is important to define the terms used in order to specify the referents to which they refer as well as their effects on our lives and our behavior.

[2] I am referring to Louis Althusser (1976). This is what I call discursive evidence in my own work, for example: T. Guilbert, 2007.

[3] These two obvious points combine with a third: "We have difficulty seeing the media for the simple reason that they are made not to be seen." (Citton, 2017, p. 25). I will return to this point later.

Discourse is a complex concept; its meaning here differs significantly from its everyday usage (speech, public speaking, etc.). Here, *discourse* has two meanings: it is both a verbal *action* (written or oral) producing effects of meaning in a given situation *and* a set of verbal productions sharing common characteristics. These characteristics can be overt when they originate from a specific institution or implicit when they reflect a more or less diffuse ideological stance. Thus, *media discourse* encompasses all verbal productions emanating from media institutions (press, audio-visual media, social media, digital media), and *neoliberal discourse* encompasses all positions sharing traits of neoliberal ideology—a term I will return to later.

The *media,* with its Latin typography (*medium* in the singular) and italics, are extensions of our senses and faculties, and intermediaries between the world and ourselves. As such, they are agents of change and are not neutral. Marshall McLuhan masterfully demonstrated this some sixty years ago: "The effects of a medium on the individual or on society depend *on the change of scale produced by each new technology,* each extension of ourselves, in our lives." (McLuhan, [1964] 1976, p. 25, emphasis in original). Thus, the effects of *media* do not depend on how they are used—according to a tired utilitarian refrain—it is the very existence of a *medium* that produces effects on our lives. As Jerry Mander notes, new technologies, for example, are media *that* have contributed to the neoliberal globalization of the 1990s:

> "All these technologies, all these processes are intrinsic aspects of the globalized economy. However, despite the evidence, we still hesitate to draw the necessary conclusions about the political drift of modern technologies. We cling to the idea that technologies are 'neutral,' just as we like to believe that science is 'objective' and that everything is a matter of access." (Mander, 2001, p. 99)

Among the series of questions that the author poses following this observation, I retain two: "How does [this technology] influence our way of learning, what we know and are able to know?" and "How does it reorganize power in society?" (*ibid.*, p. 100). These questions are essential in a world that produces so many technological objects and so many new *media.* About twenty years later, Shoshana Zuboff poses three similar questions about Google and Facebook: today "who knows?", "who decides?" and "who decides who decides?" (Zuboff, 2020, p. 249-250).

The *media,* using the usual terminology, refers to a subset, or rather a particular form, of *media.* While they also act as intermediaries between reality and ourselves, their very nature—unlike other *media* —is to transmit a representation of reality to us. Journalistic media, for example, select certain facts, transform them into "news," present them to the public, and their discourse has an impact on individuals and societies.

The utilitarian approach that defines the media as "*everything used* to record, transmit, and/or process information, speech, images, and sound" (Bardini, 2016, cited in Citton, *op. cit.*, p. 31, emphasis added) does not seem entirely satisfactory to me because it implies that media are technological objects. However, television and smartphones are not, in my view, media, but *tools,* technical and technological *devices* that "serve" as communication supports for the media. Smartphones, televisions, and radio receivers are media, extensions of ourselves, but not media: they are supports for the media. I define media not as devices but as technological *systems* enabling the dissemination of mass communication and the circulation of public information from a limited enunciative instance to a larger audience[4]. Thus, these media communication systems are much more than mere tools, as they have the particularity of becoming institutionalized over time: we have seen this with the press, cinema, radio, then television, and finally with digital platforms known as "social networks." Unlike the *media,* the media are institutions, which grants them a certain discursive authority in the eyes of audiences and users.

Having established this distinction, we can add that if the *media* are *extensions* of ourselves, they are also *environments* in the sense given to them by *mediality:*

> "The fact is that our relationship to the world, that is, all the activities and experiences that give us access to the world (and not only those that construct it), is profoundly conditioned by the possibilities for discernment offered by the media, as well as the limitations they impose" (Krämer, 1998, p. 15, *apud* Citton. *op. cit.*, p. 36).

From this perspective, "*the media condition our perceptions, our thoughts, and therefore our actions.*" (CITTON, *op. cit.*, p. 44, emphasis in original). They modify our social relations but also our relationship to time (immediacy), space (ubiquity), and agency (capacity to act[5]). According to Yves Citton, these are "environments of perception." It is therefore not an exaggeration to argue that the media discourse manipulates us in the sense that it influences our perceptions without our realizing it. The notion of media discourse is essential here, because in communicating, the media produce acts; they act upon us, as the semiologist Éric Landowski observed as early as 1989:

> "Media discourse, in its own way, 'informs' us. Not, of course, that what it presents to us to read or hear is necessarily and always 'true,' but in the sense that reading or listening to it generally shapes *the* way we conceive of, and even experience, our present" (Landowski, 1989, p. 155).

[4] I gave this definition in T. Guilbert, 2015, p. 83.

[5] For example, "the ability to act through discourse", see Marignier (2020).

## Advertising and the media

Since the very beginning of mass media in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the question of media influence on citizens was hotly debated in both the United States and Europe (Mattelart 1992; Charon 2003, p. 12). One of the first media propaganda campaigns targeting the general public was the "invention" of the Cuban War in 1898 by press magnate W.R. Hearst. In response to a message from one of his reporter-illustrators informing him that all was calm on the island of Cuba, he sent back the famous message: "Supply the illustrations, I'll supply the war." His press campaign resulted in the United States' military intervention in Cuba and the film *Fighting with Our Boys in Cuba.*

Another example, important for our discussion, is the creation by President Wilson in 1917, during the First World War, of the *Committee on Public Information* (or the Creel Committee). This government propaganda and censorship agency used hundreds of thousands of public speeches, as well as the press and film, the main mass media of the time, to persuade young men to volunteer for the war[6] (Mattelart, *op. cit.,* pp. 60-61; ZINN, 2002, pp. 413-414). Two intellectuals, Walter Lippmann and Edwards Bernays, joined the Creel Committee in 1917 and participated in the propaganda campaign.

A few years later, in 1922, the columnist Walter Lippmann, whose influence would prove decisive for neoliberalism (Milanese, 2021; XXXX 2023), coined the expression "the manufacture of consent" *in* his book *Public Opinion*. This refers to *manufacturing* public opinion like a consumer product, recognizing that it requires a specific skill, a kind of art: "The creation of consent is not a new art. It is a very old art, which is supposed to have disappeared with the advent of democracy" (Lippmann, [1922] 2009, p. 185). Lippmann's conception of democracy—which has evolved considerably since the 1910s, as Milanese demonstrates—is essential to our discussion. As early as 1922 with *Public Opinion* and then in *The Free City* (1938), he distinguished two types of citizens in modern democracies: the formless "mass," incapable of understanding global issues, and the *leaders,* those who "are at the helm," the only ones with the capacity to lead society[7] (*ibid.*, p. 166). Lippmann therefore advocates a vertical or "directed" democracy, that is to say a form of steering of the "masses" by expert *leaders.*

Creator of "public relations theory" and inspired by Lippmann, Bernays published *Crystallizing Public Opinion* in 1923, followed by *Propaganda: How to Manipulate Public Opinion in a Democracy* in 1928. Here are the opening lines:

[6] H. Zinn states on page 413: "This committee financed seventy-five thousand speakers who gave seven hundred and fifty thousand speeches in five thousand cities and towns across the United States."

[7] For another analysis of this thought, see Stiegler (2019) and Milanese, *op. cit*.

> "The conscious, intelligent manipulation of the organized opinions and habits of the masses plays an important role in a democratic society. Those who manipulate this imperceptible social mechanism form an invisible government that truly rules the country."
>
> We are largely governed by men about whom we know nothing, who shape our minds, forge our tastes, and whisper our ideas in our ear. This is a logical consequence of the organization of our democratic society. This form of cooperation among the majority is a necessity if we are to live together in a well-oiled society. (Bernays [1928] 2007, p. 44)

Bernays played a significant role in the rise of corporate communication, lending his services to corporate conglomerates[8]. His conception of public opinion was very close to Lippmann's: propaganda must "regiment public opinion exactly as the army regiments the bodies of its soldiers" (quoted by Oreskes & Conway, *op. cit.*, p. 121). The question of "invisible government" has given rise to various hypotheses, notably in the sociology of communication by Harold D. Lasswell and Paul Lazarsfeld[9] (RIUTORT, 2007; Mattelart, *op. cit.*). Space does not permit a detailed examination, but the important point is that they emphasize this particular conception of democracy in which "spin"—that is, the manipulation of information, the media, and public opinion—has become one of the tools of public policy. hence the emergence of *spin doctors* ("communication consultants"), *lobbies* ("influencers") and *think tanks* ("idea labs") in particular.

Mass propaganda was then considered useful and necessary for democracy, and it was at this time and in this context that neoliberalism and its discourse emerged.

## Neoliberalism and neoliberal discourse: an austerity counter-discourse

The term *neoliberal,* with this typography, was coined at the "Walter Lippmann" colloquium in August 1938 in Paris[10]. This doctrine arose from the desire to combat the social advances brought about by the New Deal in the United States and the Popular Front in France, following the 1929 crisis and its social con-

[8] In particular, companies that banded together in the 1920s and 1930s to resist social progress, such as the *National Electric Light Association* or the *American Liberty League*, see Oreskes & Conway, 2023, pp. 118-119. See also the description of his expertise with the *United Fruit Company* in the opening pages of Vargas Llosa's novel, *Wild Times,* 2021.

[9] As early as 1927, Harold D. Lasswell studied the effects of media on the public in *Propaganda Technique in the World War.*

[10] The question then became one of naming this new liberalism; the term *neo-liberalism* was proposed by Louis Marlio on August 30th. François Denord considers that the tenets of neo-liberalism were already present a few years earlier in certain writings (Denord, 2016 [2007]).

sequences. In the 1930s, liberals perceived these progressive governments and their social programs as a danger (Oreskes & Conway, *op. cit.*): they saw them as marking a retreat of liberalism[11] (Denord, 2016), a kind of "crisis of hegemony[12]". Michel Foucault also noted that danger is inherent to neoliberalism (Foucault, 2004b, p. 66 *ff.)*. It then became urgent to adapt the unbridled economic and financial liberalism of the 1920s by anchoring it to the State and putting the latter at the service of the market.

For the liberals of that era, the danger also came from the "masses," even if the elites' anxiety regarding the people was not new[13]. In 1895, in *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind,* Gustave Le Bon presented the peoples emancipated since the revolutions as "mad mobs," "dangerous classes": "mass society" produced "automatons whose will was no longer guided" and whom it was urgent to channel "as an engineer controls a torrent." (Chamayou, *op. cit.*, pp. 84-85). Gabriel Tarde, in *L'opinion et la foule* (1901), considered that the crowd-populace was subject to "criminal suggestion." (*ibid.*, p. 48).

After the First World War, this anxiety resurfaced in the discourse of Western elites. The people once again became the "mass" or "masses," and talk turned to "mass culture" and "mass media." Two distinct groups can nevertheless be identified within these composite movements that opposed the emancipation of the people. (Barbier & Bertho-Lavenir, 1996, pp. 222-223). A first set of criticisms focuses on the people who have access to industrial culture through new media. Here is an example from José Ortega y Gasset's famous 1926 book, *The Revolt of the Masses* (republished in 2010 by Les Belles Lettres), which was translated at the time into most European languages:

> "After endowing [the average man] with all this power, the 19th century abandoned him to his own devices; the average man, following his natural temperament, then withdrew into himself. So that we find ourselves in the presence of a mass stronger than that of any other era, but, unlike the traditional mass, hermetically sealed off from itself, incapable of paying attention to anything or anyone, and believing itself to be self-sufficient – in a word, *unruly*[14]" (Ortega, Gasset, 2010, p. 140, emphasis added by the author).

The second group consists of those who accept mass culture provided it is under the **control** of those in power. The works of Lippmann and Bernays clearly

[11] W. Lippmann is very clear on this subject in his work *La Cité libre* (2011 [1938]). For an analysis of his introduction, see T. Guilbert, 2023, *op. cit* .

[12] On the notion of "crisis of hegemony", see Chamayou, 2018, note 70, p. 287-288.

[13] In the Ancien Régime, the voice of the people was both feared and rendered invisible, that is to say minimized and rarely officially reported, see Guilhaumou (2008, pp. 55-77).

[14] This work is cited by W. Lippmann, 1938, *op. cit* ., p. 303.

show that they belong to this group. For them, as for Le Bon[15], the people must be guided by enlightened individuals, the *leaders*. It is this conception of vertical democracy that neoliberals like Walter Lippmann, as we have seen, will advocate. Leading the people is a way to safeguard economic liberalism and to guard against "social programs" (Lippmann, 1938, *op. cit.*, Introduction). These social advances are perceived as dangerous; Lippmann, like most of the participants in the Colloquium[16], conflates them with the fascist, Nazi, and Soviet programs of the time.

Since then, the perception of an existential danger by the conservative and neoliberal ruling classes in the United States and Europe has never disappeared. It was a chronic feature throughout the 20th century (Chamayou, *op. cit.*; Oreskes & Conway, *op. cit.*; Rancière, 2005): resignified in the 1930s, after the First World War and the 1929 Crash, it resurfaced in the 1960s-1980s (Chamayou, *op. cit.,* p. 84ff.; Zuboff, *op. cit.)*, and was then revived from the 1980s onward. It persists into the beginning of the 21st century after the 2007-2008 crisis. (Laurent, 2020; Chamayou, *op. cit.*, pp. 84-85; Guilbert, 2021) until today (Perrenot, 2023).

We would then benefit from considering neoliberalism not only as the "implementation of a utopia" (Bourdieu, 2001, p. 108) or a "social policy" (Foucault, *op. cit.*, p. 151), but also and above all as a project always ready to reinvent itself for fear of the emancipation of the "masses." In other words, neoliberal discourse would not be proactive and modern, as it likes to present itself; it would be a form of vigilant counter-discourse: a strategic discourse aimed both at *reacting to* and/or *to guard against* social progress. For example, at the Walter Lippmann colloquium[17], we see the new liberals developing, step by step, a genuine strategy for reconquest. This responsiveness would partly explain its metamorphoses and adaptability: they would result from the need to change, as often as necessary, if not the *rules* of the game, at least the playing field in order to put the adversary in difficulty.

Thus, since 2010, states, like businesses, have had to demonstrate their "*business-friendly*" approach. For states, this means, as Michel Feher writes, "subordinating the well-being of voters to the approval of the markets" (Feher, 2017, pp. 163-164). The conditions change, but the objective remains the same: to roll back social progress and rights—which is the very definition of austerity. Another lesson is that, in its dynamic, the neoliberal project is profoundly austere and austerity-driven for the state as well as for all populations—even if its ordoliberal version, born after the Second World War, claims to ensure minimal aid for the poorest (Foucault, *op. cit.*).

For German and Austrian ordoliberals and American neoliberals, as well as, after the Second World War, for the members of the Mont Pèlerin Society (who

[15] Le Bon is quoted by Lippmann in 1913 (*Human Nature in Politics*), see A. Milanese, *op. cit* ., p. 87.
[16] For example von Mises and Rougier, see XXXX, 2023, *op. cit* .
[17] As can be read in the proceedings of the Colloquium, see Audier (2021).

were often one and the same), the state, deemed incompetent in economic matters, must henceforth guarantee the conditions for the existence of the market economy, but while refraining from making economic decisions. Called upon to contribute, it must foster the emergence of this new society that relies on markets for its regulation (Foucault, *op. cit.*, p. 296; Dardot, 2013). The economy thus becomes the central field of knowledge of the society to come. The program of this doctrine is to "dethrone politics," in the words of Friedrich Hayek, "by the constitutional sanctification of the economy" (Chamayou, *op. cit.*, pp. 236 and 237). In other words, we must act on "the redefinition of the legal institution and the rules of law […] from and according to the competitive market economy" (Foucault, *op. cit.*, p. 166).

To dethrone politics, new collective and individual norms of behavior must be established: "The *homo economicus* we want to create […] is the man of enterprise and production"; the enterprise becomes the "informing force of society" and the model to follow in all areas; the "legal interventionism of the State" establishes the "formal structure of competition" as a general principle[18] (*ibid.*, pp. 152, 154, 167, 296). The State, reduced to a bare minimum, has the role of guaranteeing, through appropriate laws, the proper functioning of the economy.

Thus, in the United States since the 1960s, the "empty coffers policy" aims to:

> "To limit or reduce state revenues by capping or lowering taxes […] with the aim of increasing budget deficits. […] The objective of this strategy is to create what one American researcher calls 'a climate of austerity' and another 'a permanent lever for cutting social budgets'" (Guex, 2003, p. 54).

Reducing the size of the state through state action and legislation legally ensures the sustainability of austerity policies.

Neoliberalism is generally considered to have been implemented by the governments of Margaret Thatcher in England in 1979 and Ronald Reagan in the United States in 1980. Their policies of dismantling the state and social rights, as well as their ideological influences—Friedrich Hayek for the former and Milton Friedman for the latter, both members of the Mont Pèlerin Society—leave no doubt as to the nature of their policies. However, examples of policies inspired by a neoliberal approach can be found much earlier: in the 1970s, for example, the "structural adjustments" of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in developing countries (Toussain, 2004).

I call *neoliberal discourse* the sum of verbal productions that reiterate the doctrine of neoliberalism, but I believe that this ideological discourse is neither

[18] The term "legal interventionism of the State" is from Louis Rougier, organizer of the Walter Lippmann colloquium.

unique, nor uniform, nor coherent (Guilbert, 2011, 2020a, *op. cit.*). In the media, it takes the form of self-evidence by never presenting itself for what it is; it uses numerous discursive, enunciative, argumentative, and manipulative processes to present itself as something self-evident or common sense. (Guilbert, 2007, 2011, 2020a, *op. cit.*). Today, neoliberal discourse has spread to all spheres of society: mass media, private companies, public education and health services, social services, agriculture, arts, culture, natural resource management, sports, tourism, etc. Being ubiquitous, it appears natural and common, even efficient, particularly in the media.

## Neoliberal discourse and the media

### An example of how opinions are formed by the media

The media are producers, but also and especially receivers and disseminators of discourse. More precisely, they are *secondary discourses* that receive, then disseminate and transmit *primary discourses* originating from international financial organizations, governments and political figures, large globalized corporations, markets, academic economic specialists, and so on. Studying mass media, or mainstream media[19], therefore means studying how they receive, interpret, internalize, then disseminate and paraphrase these primary discourses; it is above all about analyzing the reception of these primary discourses and the effects they produce on the media themselves.

While it is virtually impossible to measure the impact of any given media discourse on the public, it is equally undeniable that neoliberal economic beliefs have gradually permeated the media and the public's perceptions. The term "growth" is a case in point. What was considered "good for growth" in the 1960s and 70s referred to dairy products intended for children. *Growth,* with its definite article "the," has taken on an exclusively economic meaning since the 1980s and 90s. The term is never questioned in the media and no longer needs to be qualified to be understood in its economic sense. Here is an example from the "windfall" episode under the Jospin government: media discourse at the time questioned what should be done with a budget surplus in public finances. *L'Expansion,* 14/09/2000, editorial: "Everyone wants a piece of the growth pie."

This example illustrates a fundamental characteristic of neoliberal discourse in the media: the columnist assumes, without any mandate, the role of spokesperson for public opinion ("everyone") and attributes a desire to it ("wants"). This ventril-

[19] There are of course non-neoliberal publications and media, but these are marginal compared to the "mainstream media" (see Duval, 2000 and Cagé, 2015).

oquism, and its repetition over several consecutive days[20] constitutes manipulation, that is, "the most complete possible reduction of the audience's freedom to discuss or resist what is being presented to them" (Breton, 1997, p. 24). By bombarding them with what they are supposed to already think—a pre-existing, pre-existing representation—the public is denied the capacity to form its own opinion. Delocutive forms like "everyone" allow, through the same discursive movement, the manipulation to be concealed while simultaneously sharing the responsibility for the message with the reader (Guilbert, 2007, 2011, 2020a, *op. cit.*).

## Neoliberal discourse in the media

Demonstrating how neoliberalism has systematically managed to present itself in the media remains to be done. Some elements, however, are well documented (Oreskes & Conway, *op. cit.*). Neoliberals after the Second World War, for example, seem to have aimed to dominate the media and influence public opinion with simple messages. Lippmann wrote a popular column, T&T (*Today and Tomorrow)*, from 1931 for about fifty years in the *New York Herald Tribune;* the novels of Ayn Rand, a neoliberal and libertarian figure, have enjoyed immense success in the United States; Milton Friedman, a leading figure of American neoliberalism, has:

> "He used popular science books, newspapers and periodicals, radio and television programs to spread his ideas […] it is above all an ideological and political crusade that Friedman has been waging since the beginning of his career" (Dostaler, 2004, p. 77).

As a student of Milton Friedman at the University of Chicago, and recounting a personal memory, S. Zuboff provides a crucial element regarding Friedman's conception of democracy: she describes him as "a tireless educator, convinced that legislative and legal action systematically reflects the public opinion of the previous generation." His project was to persuade the generation he was addressing, and more broadly, public opinion, "through a great deal of articles, books, and popular television programs" (Zuboff, *op. cit.*, pp. 688-689), and above all, to embed the neoliberal society he promoted within the legal system. The author adds a similar statement from Hayek in a 1978 interview: "I work on public opinion. I don't even believe that until it changes, legal reform can improve anything […], the essential thing is to change opinions[21]."

[20] For a series of almost identical examples from the same period: T. Guilbert, 2014.
[21] F. Hayek, interview by Robert Bork, Center for Oral History Research, University of California, Los Angeles, Nov. 4, 1978, cited in S. Zuboff, *op. cit.*, p. 689.

These examples confirm the role of public opinion in the media, already present in Lippmann's work: winning over public opinion is the first essential step towards the new society; it precedes legal changes, and therefore discourse is crucial in this ideological struggle. For these neoliberals, public opinion must be manufactured through discourse adapted to mass media. It is clear that for them, discourse does not merely accompany neoliberal policies: it must precede and shape them to make political and legal decisions acceptable. Discourse in mass media is the essential *acts* of this battle of ideas, in other words, they are conceived by these two leaders as acts capable of constituting a form of acceptability (Faye, *op. cit.,* p. 226)—that is, as capable of establishing the conditions for the population's acceptance of neoliberal doctrine. Neoliberal discourse, conceived from its inception as a reaction to the advance of social ideas, is therefore a vast communication campaign directed at the population: it relies essentially on mass media and uses the techniques of "manufacturing consent." One of these techniques is the narrative of this new society; a narrative that must be taken up, reformulated, and paraphrased by and within the media. The following observation by Jean-Pierre Faye seems particularly applicable to neoliberal discourse and its variants (its "narrative deviations"): "In the field where narrative deviations shift, what is then visible is that the narrative effect is a driver of action" (*ibid.,* p. 66). The narrative deviations of the neoliberal narrative construct an ideological image of the world[22], which in turn influences public perceptions. However, one point must be emphasized: as the examples of Friedman and Hayek demonstrate, manufacturing consent is not the ultimate goal of neoliberals but rather the essential means to ensure that neoliberal doctrine will *ultimately be enshrined* in a country's legal system.

The media, for their part, are conceived here as the vectors, the transmitting agents, the means of mass dissemination of these discourses. But there is more: if we accept that neoliberal discourse is conceived and produced, from Lippmann's writings onward, within the very framework of the media, we can deduce that it is constructed *in, for,* and *according to* the mass medium in which it appears. I will clarify this important point by drawing on Roland Barthes. If "to deliver a discourse" is "to take up a discourse that has been said and heard a thousand times (a hackneyed discourse), as if inventing it, with the conviction of the first time," it is also "to invest in a discourse" and "to be invested by a discourse," it is "to take orders from a phraseology" (Barthes, 2002, p. 196). Thus, the conditions of production of a given medium shape the discourse that is delivered within it. A neoliberal newspaper editorial is not the same as a neoliberal radio editorial, which itself is not the same as a neoliberal television broadcast. Nevertheless, all

[22] This is the case with the introduction to Lippmann's *La Cité libre*, which presents a narrative of the world through the floating referent "our time" (T. Guilbert, 2023, *op. cit.*).

three belong to the same discourse (the same discursive formation), to a set of verbal productions possessing common neoliberal characteristics, but reformulated according to the medium in which they are delivered. And in turn, the neoliberal discourse acts upon the media (and its staff) in which it takes shape by imposing, for example, programming constraints (economic columns and programs, number and duration of advertisements, selection and treatment of news, etc.). This mimicry, this homotypy—in the sense that this discourse would take its form directly within the media, that is, in the environment where it appears—and the progressive reciprocal influence of the neoliberal discourse on the media partly explain why it goes unnoticed: it constantly adapts to the media and adapts the "new" media of the 20th and 21st centuries to its own image.

Thus, to return to the origins of neoliberalism, we must consider the new opportunities for shaping public opinion that developed in the 1920s and 1930s. Just a few years before the Walter Lippmann Colloquium, there were two significant technological advances in mass media: radio broadcasting and then talking pictures. Both functioned as a new extension of our senses and relied on the voice, a new and particularly sensory and suggestive channel of dissemination[23].

To illustrate this homotypic relationship between media and neoliberal discourse, here are two examples from France and one from the United States. In the 1970s, the media coverage, via television, of Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, presented as the very embodiment of the "new art of governing" (Foucault, *op. cit.*, p. 151) and modernity—neoliberal *tropes* echoed in the coverage of his death in 2020—is not accidental at a time when it is obvious to everyone that "the small screen is gaining widespread popularity in French homes[24]." Similarly, the use of the figure of Yves Montand, a man known for his left-wing views, embracing neoliberal doctrine during the program "Vive la crise!" on February 22, 1984, broadcast live on the public television channel *Antenne 2,* is not a theoretical discourse: it perfectly suits the television format of the time[25].

In the United States, Edwin Feulner, one of the founders and president of the *Heritage Foundation* (1973-1977)—a highly influential *think tank* and *lobby* funded by press magnates Edward Noble and Richard Mellon—suggested to Reagan that he write "*brief-case tests*," simple, easily identifiable, and readily disseminated messages for the media (Dezalay & Garth, 1998, p. 11). In the introduction to *The*

[23] Radio, often controlled at the time by political power, is a mass medium particularly suited to suggestion: "Radio touches people in their intimacy. It is a person-to-person relationship, which opens a world of communication between the author-speaker and the listener. That is the direct side of radio. It is a private experience." (McLuhan, *op. cit.*, p. 345).

[24] https://www.europe1.fr/medias-tele/comment-valery-giscard-destaing-a-transforme-le-rapport-des-presidents-aux-medias-4009719, accessed on April 14, 2021.

[25] https://www.rtl.fr/actu/debats-societe/video-le-22-fevrier-1984-yves-montand-presentait-vive-la-crise-a-la-tele-7781997806, accessed on April 14, 2021.

*March of Freedom* in 1998—a title in dialogue with F. Hayek's *The Road to Serfdom* (1944)—he wrote:

> "It was a conscious goal of the *Heritage Foundation* – to be a permanent presence in Washington. We strove to make conservative ideas not only respectable, but also mainstream. To define the terms of the national political debate. To offer […] positive and practical free-market alternatives to the failed liberal policies of the old order[26]."

It therefore seems that neoliberal messages aimed at the population are designed *in, by* and *for* the media in which they appear.

## What neoliberalism does to the media

While neoliberal discourse influences media programming and discourse itself, it also alters the structure of the media landscape. Therefore, a relatively recent economic evolution of the media must be added to this picture. From the 1990s to the present day, the effects of neoliberal media discourse have become increasingly pronounced as large media groups owned by multinationals have been formed through monopolistic consolidations. One effect of these consolidations has been to reduce the number of field journalists and the diversity of perspectives within the mainstream media[27] (Cagé, *op. cit.*). These media more readily take up the original discourses of the bodies that Pierre Bourdieu designates, somewhat in the manner of Bernays, as the "true invisible world government", in other words "the large multinational firms and their international boards of directors, the large international organizations, WTO, IMF and World Bank with multiple subdivisions […], and all the corresponding realities, commissions, and committees of unelected technocrats" (Bourdieu, *op. cit.*, p. 88). This ongoing "restructuring" of the media places them under the domination of large international groups that have integrated the *primary neoliberal discourses* and, in fact, control the *secondary discourses* directed towards the public:

> "Through the almost absolute power they hold over the major communication groups […] these new masters of the world tend to concentrate all powers, economic, cultural and symbolic […] they are thus able to impose very broadly a vision of the world in accordance with their interests. […] Although they are

[26] *Heritage Foundation* website: https://www.heritage.org/staff/edwin-feulner, accessed on April 14, 2021.
[27] For a more recent example, see Halimi & Rimbert (2021).

> not strictly speaking the direct producers, […] the major communication groups contribute in decisive part to the almost universal circulation of the invasive and insinuating doxa of neoliberalism, whose *rhetoric should be analyzed in detail*" (*ibid.*, p. 89, italics in the original).

The constitutive role of mass media discourse in imposing "a worldview in accordance with their interests" is therefore central, as Lippmann, Bernays, Hayek and Friedman, among others, had already understood.

It therefore seems important to situate this manufacturing of consent within what Foucault calls "neoliberal governmentality." Admittedly, Foucault underestimated Lippmann's importance to neoliberalism by devoting only a few lines to him and by remarking, regarding *The Free City*:

> "A curious book, because it was a book which, on the one hand, does indeed take up, in the form of a pure and simple reactivation, the theories of classical liberalism, but also, in a number of ways, presents elements which are part of neoliberalism" (Foucault *op. cit.*, p. 138).

Lippmann's vertical conception of democracy and communication is not incompatible with Foucault's concept of governmentality; quite the contrary. According to Foucault, governmentality is a form of power that emerged at the end of the 18th century and developed more strongly after the Second World War (Foucault, 2004a). This form of power is close to Lippmann's conception in that it seeks to "guide the conduct" of the population, to direct behavior. Governmentality is a power that does not present itself as power; it relies on the normalization of conduct, that is, on the coercive force of the norm, notably by forcing deviation into conformity with the norm. This coercive force is all the more effective because it does not reveal itself as such; it rests on the self-evidence of the norm by relying on the normal: "The normal comes first, and the norm is deduced from it," as Foucault explains. in his lecture of January 25, 1978 (*ibid.)*. According to him, the "major form of knowledge" of governmentality is political economy, its "primary target" is the population. To guide conduct, it develops "a whole series of specific government apparatuses" (*ibid.*) that enact or promote norms and normative injunctions. I consider that the dominant media belong to this latter category; they are specific apparatuses of neoliberal governmentality (Guilbert, 2020b, pp. 179-204). The dominant media and journalistic discourse is both the receptacle of primary discourse (the major form of knowledge) and the producer-disseminator of secondary discourse directed at the population with the aim of influencing behavior. These media discourses, saturated with advertising (direct, indirect, and disguised) and various incentives (product placement in films

and series, *nudging*, and manipulation of "behavioral surplus[28]" on platforms), and these mass journalistic discourses that define normality, manage to establish this neoliberal and austerity-driven doctrinal discourse as a given, as a "normal" worldview, in Foucault's sense. If governmentality does not impose by force but relies on *what appears normal* in order to normalize behavior, then my hypothesis is that neoliberal and austerity-driven normality, presented in and by mass media and journalistic discourses, results in the production of normative injunctions "implicit and explicit acting, more or less directly, on the economic behavior of social actors." (Guilbert & Lebaron, 2017, p. 221), but also on their economic, political, social representations, and on the forms of subjectivation, particularly identity-related (Laurent, *op. cit.*).

## To conclude provisionally

The hypothesis developed in this chapter is that, since its origins, neoliberal governmentality has used mass media discourse as a "manufacturer of consent" for the population. Present in the works of Lippmann[29], and certainly in his *T&T columns,* and taken up after the war by proponents of neoliberalism such as Friedman and Hayek, this vertical conception of democracy assigns *leaders* the role of directing the masses. It involved implementing a communication strategy for (economic) power, born from an existential protective reaction to the emancipation of the "masses" and the decline of liberalism, and aimed at securing acceptance of the neoliberal agenda. Integrating mass media and profoundly altering them allowed neoliberal discourse to govern the population by linking its conception of democracy to its austerity-driven conception of the economy.

According to this hypothesis, there are two main types of neoliberal discourse: the *primary discourse* of major neoliberal organizations, directed at political and media powers, and the *secondary discourse* of mass media, which paraphrases the former and is directed at the general public. In addition to ensuring their widespread dissemination, the dominant media institutions—specific apparatuses of neoliberal governance—confer upon these secondary discourses a form of legitimacy and normality that facilitates their acceptance and internalization by the population.

[28] The term is from S. Zuboff, *op. cit* . It refers to all the information about ourselves that we leave behind during our searches and use of internet platforms, which are then collected, processed, and resold to advertisers who influence our behavior by offering us personalized products. Nudging *is* the technique of influencing user behavior by suggesting an action .

[29] *Public Opinion* (1922), *The Phantom Public* (1925) and *The Free City* (1938).

The entanglement of neoliberal discourse with media discourse directed at the public is therefore not accidental. Whether traditional or "social," mass media are its vectors, transmitting it in an almost medical or epidemiological sense. When we push the logic of this entanglement further, a new hypothesis emerges: that neoliberal discourse takes on the form of the medium in which it is presented; in other words, that it takes shape—different forms—in each medium and according to each medium. This adaptation to the environment of perception reinforces its media invisibility, its discursive obviousness, and its capacity to condition the public.

Neoliberal discourse thus gains a second level of self-evidence: discursive self-evidence is compounded by a communicational self-evidence specific to the media. The effects of symbolic imposition, the effects of meaning in neoliberal media discourse, are all the more effective because, like all self-evident truths, they are perceived without being noticed. (Guilbert, 2007, 2011, 2014, 2020a, *op. cit.*). With each "crisis," the austerity-driven media discourse presents itself as natural, normal, and self-evident; with each "crisis," it dramatizes the situation and presents itself as the only possible solution; with each "crisis," it aims to normalize behavior (Lignes, 2009). And each time, through a ratchet effect, it reinforces the perceived self-evidence of neoliberal representations and their institutionalization within legal systems.

## REFERENCES

ALTHUSSER Louis, « Idéologie et appareils idéologiques d'État. Notes pour une recherche ». In: ALTHUSSER Louis, **Positions**, Paris: éditions Sociales, 1976. p.67-125.

AUDIER Serge, **Le Colloque Walter Lippmann. Aux origines du « néo-libéralisme »**, Paris: Bord de l'eau 2009/Apple Books, 2021.

BARBIER Frédéric et BERTHO-LAVENIR Catherine, **Histoire des médias, de Diderot à Internet**. Paris: Armand Colin, 1996.

BARDINI Thierry, Entre archéologie et écologie. Une perspective sur la théorie médiatique. **Multitudes**, n.62, p.159-170, 2016.

BARTHES Roland, Tenir un discours, séance du 12 janvier 1977. In: BARTHES Roland, **Comment vivre ensemble. Cours et séminaires au Collège de France 1976-1977**, texte établi, annoté et présenté par C. Coste. Paris: Seuil IMEC, 2002, p.187-198.

BERNAYS Edward, **Propaganda. Comment manipuler l'opinion en démocratie**. Paris: La découverte, [1928], 2007.

BRETON Philippe, **La parole manipulée**. Paris: La Découverte, Poche essais, 1997.

CAGÉ Julia, **Sauver les médias. Capitalisme, financement participatif et démocratie.** Paris: Seuil, 2015.

CHAMAYOU Grégoire, **La société ingouvernable. Une généalogie du libéralisme autoritaire**. Paris: La fabrique, 2018.

BOURDIEU Pierre, **Contre-feux 2**. Paris: Liber-Raisons d'agir, 2001.

CHARON Jean-Marie, **Les médias en France**. Paris: La découverte, 2003.

CITTON Yves, **Médiarchie**. Paris: Seuil, 2017.

DARDOT Pierre, Le capitalisme à la lumière du néolibéralisme. **Raisons politiques**, n.52, p.13-22, 2013.

DENORD François, **Le néo-libéralisme à la française. Histoire d'une idéologie politique**. Réédition revue. Marseille: Agone, [2007], 2016.

DEZALAY Yves & GARTH Bryant, Le "Washington consensus". Contribution à une sociologie de l'hégémonie du néolibéralisme. **Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales**, n.121-122, p.3-22, 1998.

DOSTALER Gilles, **Alternatives économiques**, n.228, p.76-78, sept. 2004.

DUVAL Julien, Le journalisme à l'économie. **Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales**, n.131-132, p.56-75, 2000.

FAYE Jean-Pierre, **Introduction aux langages totalitaires. Théorie et transformation du récit**. Paris: Le livre de poche, 2003.

FEHER Michel, **Le temps des investis. Essai sur la nouvelle question sociale**. Paris: La découverte, 2017.

FOUCAULT Michel, **Sécurité, territoire, population. Cours au Collège de France. 1977-1978.** Paris: EHESS/Gallimard, Seuil, 2004a.

FOUCAULT Michel, **Naissance de la biopolitique. Cours au Collège de France. 1978-1979.** Paris: EHESS/Gallimard-Seuil, Leçons des 14 et 21/02/1979, 2004b.

GUEX Sébastien, La politique des caisses vides. **Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales**, n.146-147, p.51-61, 2003.

GUILBERT Thierry, **Le discours idéologique ou la force de l'évidence**. Paris: L'Harmattan, 2007.

GUILBERT Thierry, **L'« évidence » du discours néolibéral. Analyse dans la presse écrite**. Broissieux: Croquant, 2011.

GUILBERT Thierry, La “mise en évidence” du discours économique par la presse écrite, dans M. Temmar, J. Angermuller, F. Lebaron, **Les discours sur l’économie**, Paris: PUF, p.148-149, 2014.

GUILBERT Thierry, Leonarda, le Président et les médias. Communication politico-médiatique et représentations identitaires à propos des Roms. Dans F. Hailon, A. Richard, N. Guellil (éd.), **Discours politiques identitaires dans les médias**. Paris: L’Harmattan, p.77-108, 2015.

GUILBERT Thierry, **As evidências do discurso neoliberal na mídia.** Campinas: UNICAMP, (traduction de T. Guilbert 2007), 2020a.

GUILBERT Thierry, Foucault, le discours et la gouvernementalité néolibérale. Dans J. Guittard, É. Nicolas, C. Sintez (éd.), **Foucault face à la norme**. Paris: Mare & Martin, p.179-204, 2020b.

GUILBERT Thierry, Narrations croisées de la “crise grecque” : comment le rappel à la norme budgétaire a rétabli l’hégémonie néolibérale. Dans J. Guittard, É. Nicolas, C. Sintez (éd.), **Narrations de la norme**. Paris: Mare & Martin, p.171-200, 2021.

GUILBERT Thierry, L’articulation du récit idéologique et de l’éditorial dans l’introduction de *La Cité libre* de Walter Lippmann. **Langage et Société**, n°178, p.139-159, 2023.

GUILBERT Thierry & LEBARON Frédéric, L’économie des mots et les mots de l’économie, analyse sociodiscursive des discours des dirigeants de la Banque centrale européenne. **Langage et Société**, n°160-161, p.217-235, 2017.

GUILHAUMOU Jacques, Percevoir et traduire la violence verbale du peuple. De l’Ancien Régime au XIX$^{e}$ siècle. In: CLAUDINE M., NATHALIE A., FRACCHIOLLA B., SCHULTZ-

ROMAIN C. org.). **De l’impolitesse à la violence verbale**, t. 2, Paris: L’Harmattan, 2008.

HALIMI Serge et RIMBERT Pierre, Comment Donald Trump et les médias ont ravagé la vie publique. **Le Monde diplomatique**, mars 2021.

KRÄMER Sybille, Was haben die Medien, das Computer und die Realität miteinander zu tun? In: **Medien, Computer, Realität. Wirklichkeitvorstellungen und Neue Medien**, Francfort-sur-le-Main: Suhrkamp, 1998.

LANDOWSKI Éric, **La société réfléchie**. Paris: Seuil, 1989.

LAURENT Sylvie, **Pauvre petit blanc. Le mythe de la dépossession raciale**. Paris: éditions de la MSH, 2020.

**LIGNES**, De la crise comme méthode de gouvernement, n.30, 2009, http://www.cairn.info/revue-lignes-2009-3.htm

LIPPMANN Walter, **Public Opinion**. Classic Books America, [1922], 2009.

LIPPMANN Walter, **La Cité libre**. Paris: Les Belles Lettres, [1938], 2011.

MANDER Jerry, Les technologies au service de la mondialisation. In: GOLDSMITH E. &

MANDER J. (org.). **Le procès de la mondialisation**. Paris: Fayard, 2001, p.99-114.

MARIGNIER Noémie, Pour l'intégration du concept d'*agency* en analyse du discours. **Langage et Société**, n.170, p.15-37, 2020.

MATTELART Armand, **La communication-monde, Histoire des idées et des stratégies**. Paris: La Découverte, 1992.

MC LUHAN Marshall, Pour comprendre les média. Paris: Seuil, [1964], 1976.

MILANESE Arnaud, **Walter Lippmann, d'un néolibéralisme à l'autre. Changement social et leadership libéral**. Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2021.

ORESKES Naomi & CONWAY Erik M., **Le grand mythe. Comment les industriels nous ont appris à détester l'État et à vénérer le libre marché.** Paris: Les liens qui libèrent, 2023.

ORTEGA Y GASSET José, **La révolte des masses**. Paris: Les Belles Lettres, [1926], 2010.

PERRENOT Pauline, **Les médias contre la gauche**. Marseille: Agone, coll. Contre-feux, 2023.

RANCIERE Jacques, **La haine de la démocratie**. Paris: La Fabrique, 2005.

RIUTORT Philippe, **Sociologie de la communication politique**. Paris: La Découverte, 2007.

STIEGLER Barbara, **« Il faut s'adapter ». Sur un nouvel impératif politique**. Paris: Gallimard, NRF éditions, 2019.

TOUSSAIN Éric, Mondialisation des inégalités et offensive néolibérale. In: TOUSSAIN Éric, **La finance contre les peuples. La bourse ou la vie**. Paris: Syllepse-CETIM-CADTM, p.31-66, 2004.

VARGAS LLOSA Mario, **Temps sauvages**. Paris: Gallimard, 2021.

ZINN Howard, **Une histoire populaire des États-Unis**. Marseille: Agone, 2002.

ZUBOFF Shoshana, **L'Âge du capitalisme de surveillance**. Paris: Zulma, 2020.